



Rescued From Oblivion

Re-inventing the cults of St. Rombout and Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk, Mechelen 1580-1802.

Renée Schilling



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Introduction

On 26 May 1793 the local newspaper of Mechelen, *'t Wekelycks Bericht*, included a police report that was filed two months earlier. In this report Bernardus Smets, canon of the St.

Romboutskathedraal, Joannes Franciscus de Haes, chaplain of the same church and Petrus Josephus Gooris, gravedigger, confessed that earlier that year they had stolen the relics of St. Rombout. It was canon Smets who had come up with the idea. Because the French soldiers, who had occupied the city in November 1792, had started to confiscate church property he feared that the relics of St. Rombout would be next. Smets went to archbishop Joannes Henricus de Franckenberg to ask for permission to steal the relics of St. Rombout to keep them safe from the greed of the French. On February 12 Smets confided his plans to Franciscus de Haes and Petrus Gooris. The next day the three men met in the St. Romboutskathedraal. Chaplain de Haes opened the doors of the altar and Smets and Gooris climbed inside. For half an hour they attempted to open the reliquary, but they were not able to lift the heavy silver lid. The following day they returned, this time equipped with more tools. While they combined their strength to lift the lid of the reliquary Smets and Gooris saw through a small opening between the doors of the altar French soldiers passing by. Eventually they were able to lift the lid of the reliquary and when they saw the relics of the saint, lying in a simple box, they were 'moved in their hearts'. They left one relic of the saint in the reliquary so as to ensure that the altar could still be used for services. When Chaplain de Haes had freed them from the altar, canon Smets inspected the relics to make sure they were in a good condition and complete. Gooris hid the box with the relics in his room in the cathedral.

It was, however, soon decided that the relics could not stay there, for the French soldiers often searched the cathedral in the hope of finding more valuable objects they could confiscate. Getting the box out of the cathedral proved a new challenge. The cathedral was always protected by soldiers and it was forbidden to carry packages in the city during the evening and the night. Moreover, only one entrance of the cathedral was open during the night, which was guarded by a soldier. It was Gooris' job to distribute coals and candles to the soldiers in the cathedral. He confided in his colleague Meyer and told him about the plan to smuggle the relics outside the cathedral and asked him if he could distract the soldiers while he was distributing the coals to them. In the meantime Gooris, overcome by fear, prayed in his room for strength. Then he took the box with the relics and hurried out of the cathedral. Outside he met with De Haes and together they went to the house of Smets where the box stayed for the night. The following day the relics were moved to the house of the nephew of Gooris, called Josephus Smets. The relics were moved once more on

23 March and buried in a leaden box in the garden of Gooris.¹

This was not the first time the relics of the saint were rescued. Citizens had also saved the bones of St. Rombout when Calvinist troops attacked the city in 1580. When Smets, De Haes and Gooris gave their statement about their rescue in 1793, they even referred to the heroic actions of their ancestors:

This reliquary contains among other things precious parts of the holy remains of St. Rombout [...] whose holy remains our ancestors were able to protect for so many centuries with the utmost care and perils during the most terrible fires of war and prosecutions. This was a fine example to take precautions during these most sad times of war and prosecution against God, His laws and His servants and protect and save the aforementioned holy remains against all the disgrace and disdain to which they were exposed under the power of the French Nation.²

When this story was published in the local newspaper in 1793, the French troops had just left the city. The newsitem reassured readers that the relics of the saint were still safe and praised the three men for having followed in the footsteps of their ancestors. The story about the rescue of the relics in 1580 had apparently become part of the collective memory of the citizens of Mechelen, for the newspaper treated it as common knowledge that needed no further explanation. The account also suggests that the cult of St. Rombout was still of utmost importance in the eighteenth century. Yet is that impression correct? Were the citizens of Mechelen just as invested in the local cults as they had been two centuries earlier during the heydays of the Catholic revival? Or was this account a success story meant to promote the victory of the Counter-reformation and the tenacious civic identity of Mechelen now that both were attacked by the French invaders? To see how the devotional cults continued to evolve in the years after the initial success of the Catholic revival and were able to survive attacks on their legitimacy in the eighteenth century this thesis will study the development of two cults in the city of Mechelen from 1585 until 1802: the cult of St. Rombout and the cult of the Miraculous Statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk.

¹ 'Autentieke Stukken ofte Processen-Verbael van alles het gene geschied is voor, ten tyde ende naer de Verberginge, Begraevinge ende Ontgraevinge der HH. Reliquien van den H. Rumoldus, Martelaer ende Patroon der Stad Mechelen, ten tyde dat de Fransche Krygsmagt de zelve Stad bekleed heeft', *Het Wekelycks Bericht Voor de Stad en de Provincie van Mechelen voor 't jaer 1793* (Mechelen) 321-343.

² 'Deze Kasse behelst onder andere notabele deelen van de HH. Gebeenderen van den H. Rumodus [...] welke HH. Overblyfzels onse voor-Ouders zoo vele eeuwen met de meeste zorg en perykelen tusschen het schrikkelykste oorlogsvuer en vervolgingen hebben weten te beschermen. Dit was een schoon voorbeeld om in deeze alderbedroefste tyden van oorlog en vervolging tegen Godt, syne wetten ende syne bedienaers alle voorzorgen in te nemen om ook in zekereyd te stellen ende te bevryden de voornoemde HH. overblyfzels tegen alle onteeringen en versmaedingen aen de welke zy bloot gestelt waeren onder de magt van die Fransche Natie.' 'Processen-Verbael', 322-323.

Historiography

Just as many other parts of Europe, the Southern Netherlands experienced a tumultuous sixteenth century. At the beginning of the century a new religious movement arose in response to the general call for reform of the Church. Support for these dissidents grew increasingly in the following decades. During the Dutch Revolt in 1566 many local churches were ransacked in iconoclastic raids all over the Netherlands and from 1578 a number of cities were officially governed by the Calvinists. The earlier part of the century had seen the popularity of relics, public devotions and confraternities strongly diminishing. Yet after 1580, when the Duke of Parma Alexander Farnese managed to make peace with the rebellious cities, the Southern Netherlands experienced a Catholic revival. The streets were once again filled with religious images and processions, churches were rebuilt, new devotional cults arose, many confraternities were (re)erected, accounts of miracles abounded and many investments to religious institutions were made.³

A question that has led to fervent debates among historians is how the Counter-reformation could be so successful in Europe so soon after a period of strong support of Protestant reform. In the eighteenth century German Protestant historians coined the term Counter-reformation. They explained the Catholic revival in the Southern parts of Europe as the result of repressive actions and indoctrination by the Catholic Church. Research on the Counter-reformation focused in this period mainly on military, political and diplomatic events. From the nineteenth century the devotional aspects of Catholicism were also discussed.⁴ Yet until the end of the twentieth century the Catholic revival was explained as a result of the successful initiatives of the Church and local governments. Studies from this period emphasized above all the powerful influence of the decrees of the Council of Trent and showed how local rulers enforced these decrees onto their subjects, which eventually led to a new church hierarchy and a stronger clergy.⁵

In the last decades historiography on the Counter-reformation has focused on the question how local communities responded to the Catholic ideas and decrees and how they were received by the laity.⁶ From these studies it becomes clear that even though the Council of Trent was important for the development of the Catholic Church, its effect on local Catholic communities should not be

³ J.S. Pollmann, *Catholic Identity and the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1520-1635* (Oxford 2011) 4.

⁴ M. Laven, 'Encountering the Counter-Reformation', *Renaissance Quarterly* 59:3 (2006) 707.

⁵ M. Laven, 'Introduction', in: A. Bamji, G.H. Janssen, M. Laven (eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Counter-Reformation* (London 2013).

⁶ For an overview of recent research on the Counter-reformation see: Bamji, Janssen, Laven (eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Counter-Reformation*.

overestimated.⁷ The success of a local Counter-reformation was usually the result of negotiations and agreements between rulers, the local clergy and the laity. Only through negotiation and adaptation could a top-down Counter-reformation catch on.⁸ Historians have also realized that people from all social backgrounds possessed the agency to make the re-catholicizing campaign successful. One of the ways to do so was by supporting the arriving or expanding of religious orders and confraternities in local communities. The establishment of a religious institution in a city was initiated and financed by local elites and priests and not by the Church hierarchy alone. These institutions bound the laity and the clergy together by combining local needs with religious interests. The relatively new Society of Jesus became the most popular order in the Southern Netherlands, especially because the Jesuits were also responsible for providing education and catechetical instructions and fitted the needs of local communities.⁹ The religious orders and confraternities had a strong influence in the promotion of local cults and the organization of public rituals such as processions.¹⁰ Yet citizens possessed the agency to choose which confraternity they joined, which devotional cults they supported, which relics they venerated and in which procession they participated.¹¹ The Catholic revival was not solely imposed top down or initiated from the bottom, it happened from 'the middle'.¹²

Recent studies of the Counter-reformation have addressed the question how a Catholic revival could occur so soon after a period of criticism and dissent by pointing to role of stakeholders in local communities who worked towards the same goal as rulers and the church. These studies, however, do not give insight in the development of Catholicism in the decades that followed the Catholic revival in the Southern Netherlands.¹³ What happened to the initiatives of the local rulers, the elite and the clergy once the threat of the Protestants subsided? Were they continuously reinforced or did they prove strong enough to continue without additional investments? To answer these questions I believe that it is fruitful to look more closely at the role of particular cults in the development of Catholicism in the Southern Netherlands. One of factors that strongly influenced

⁷ S. Ditchfield, 'Tridentine Catholicism', in: Bamji, Janssen, Laven (eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Counter-Reformation*, 15.

⁸ Pollmann, *Catholic Identity*, 8.

⁹ Pollmann, *Catholic Identity*, 138-147. For more information on the role of the Jesuits in the eighteenth century see: T. Johnson, 'Blood, tears and Xavierwater: Jesuit missionaries and popular religion in the eighteenth-century Upper Palatinate', in B. Scribner and T. Johnson (red.), *Popular religion in Germany and central Europe, 1400-1800* (Basingstoke, 1996) 183-202.

¹⁰ R.F.E. Weissman, *Ritual Brotherhood in Renaissance Florence* (New York 1982) 54-55 and 84 and C. F. Black, *Italian Confraternities in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge 1989) 110-111.

¹¹ S. Laqua-O'Donnell, 'Catholic Piety and Community' in: Bamji, Janssen, Laven (eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Counter-Reformation*, 287.

¹² Pollmann, *Catholic Identity*, 6.

¹³ For a study on the development of the Catholic revival in southwest Germany see: M.R. Forster, *Catholic revival in the age of the Baroque: religious identity in southwest Germany, 1550-1750* (Cambridge, 2001).

the success of cults was their materiality. In the sixteenth century, the popularity of relics, public cults and confraternities declined. Baroque art, altars, decorated churches, devotional objects, images and relics had been attacked by the Protestants but came back even stronger at the beginning of the seventeenth century.¹⁴ In 1563, the participants of the twenty-fifth session of the Council of Trent discussed the cult of saints and the veneration of relics.¹⁵ They prescribed not only that saints should be venerated by the faithful, but also that the cults and the procedure of authenticating the saints had to be regulated much more strictly to prevent superstitious practices and to make sure that local devotional cults were not used to make profit.¹⁶ After the Council of Trent, relics began to fulfill an important role in the promotion of Catholic faith. They became the material evidence of the continuing power of the Catholic Church from antiquity to the present.¹⁷

Since material objects were rehabilitated and proved important in the seventeenth century and because they were seen as a continuous and unchangeable part of Catholicism the new role of devotional objects deserve extra attention in historical research on the effects of the Counter-reformation in the century that followed the Catholic revival.¹⁸ By studying the cult of St. Rombout and Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk I hope to see how the Counter-reformation developed in Mechelen and answer the following questions: who were the stakeholders of the cults in the long run? Were the devotional cults adapted to fit the needs of the time? Did the devotional cults need additional investments, economic, religious or otherwise, once they regained their popularity in the seventeenth century? And how did the devotional cults respond to new threats from inside and outside the community at the end of the eighteenth century? Could they survive these new challenges?

¹⁴ For the role of art and architecture in the Counter-reformation see: E.D. Nagelsmit, *Venite & Videte : art and architecture in Brussels as agents of change during the Counter Reformation, c. 1609-1659* (Dissertation Leiden 2014).

¹⁵ There are many ways to define a relic, which changes from culture to culture and from time to time. Within Christianity there are two types of relics: the first type is a material remain, how small this may be, of the body of a holy person. This could be a piece of bone, dust of the bones, a tooth, blood or even pieces of flesh. The second type is a material object that has touched a holy person or a relic of a holy person such as a piece of cloth that was worn by a saint, the sand on which a saint had walked or the reliquary that had hold a relic of a saint, but no longer did. These relics are called contact-relics. It was moreover believed that relics could heal the sick, bring fortune and give blessing. For more information on relics: A. Walsham, 'Introduction: Relics and Remains', in: A. Walsham (ed.), *Relics and Remains* (Oxford 2010).

¹⁶ S. Ditchfield, 'Martyrs on the Move: Relics as Vindicators of Local Diversity in the Tridentine Church', in: D. Wood (ed.), *Martyrs and Martyrologies, Studies in Church History* 30 (Oxford 1993) 283. See also: P. Burke, 'How to be a Counter-reformation saint', in: P. Burke, *The historical anthropology of early modern Italy: essays on perception and communication* (Cambridge 1987).

¹⁷ S. Evangelisti, 'Material Culture', in: Bamji, Janssen, Laven (eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Counter-Reformation*, 398. For recent studies on relics see: A. Walsham (ed.), *Relics and Remains*.

¹⁸ See for the role of cults in the Counter-reformation propaganda: H. Louthan, *Converting Bohemia: Force and Persuasion in the Catholic Reformation* (Cambridge, 2009). On the role of relics see: T. Johnson, 'Holy Fabrications: The Catacomb Saints and the Counter-Reformation in Bavaria', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 47 (1996), 274–297.

Mechelen as a case-study

Mechelen became the seat of an archbishopric in 1559 and was heavily affected by the religious conflict at the end of the sixteenth century. During the iconoclastic raids in 1566, the city was able to hold off the iconoclasts, contrary to most of the nearby cities.¹⁹ The support of the Spanish Rule, however, diminished strongly in Mechelen when the Grand Duke of Alba was governing the Netherlands.²⁰ In the night of 29 and 30 August 1572 a few supporters of William of Orange opened the city gates for his troops. When the troops left after a month Mechelen was plundered by the Spanish troops in reprisal. This so-called Spanish Fury was meant to serve as an example for the other rebelling cities.²¹ Four years later Mechelen signed the Pacification of Gent, an alliance between the provinces of the Spanish Netherlands in the hopes of driving out the Spanish troops that had taken to mutinying and plundering several cities when they were no longer paid by the Duke of Alba.²² In the following years the city council of Mechelen was divided amongst itself about supporting the States General or the Spanish crown. When the city officially reconciled with the Spanish king in 1579 the Calvinists felt betrayed. On 9 April 1580 Calvinist troops conquered Mechelen and installed a Calvinist government. Because these Calvinist troops consisted of a significant number of Scottish and English soldiers this event came to be known as the English Fury.²³ This English Fury led to five years of Calvinist rule in Mechelen until the city reconciled with governor of the Spanish Netherlands Alexander Farnese in 1585.²⁴ In the following decades the city was able to revive the Catholic faith.²⁵ Mechelen, however, kept experiencing religious conflicts. Even though the inhabitants of the Southern Netherlands regarded themselves as Catholics, the clergy was still debating what 'being Catholic' meant. A major discussion that arose during the seventeenth century concerned the doctrine of grace of Augustine, as interpreted by Cornelius Jansenius which led to another religious crisis with political consequences.²⁶ New intellectual movements associated with the Enlightenment led to a re-evaluation of the role of sacred materiality. In 1780 Joseph II became the new emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Inspired

¹⁹ D. De Boer, *Picking Up the Pieces: Catholic Perceptions of Iconoclasm in the Netherlands, 1566-1672* (Thesis RMA Modern History (1500-2000) Utrecht) 4.

²⁰ G. Marnef, 'Een plutocratie bedreigd door religieuze twisten en centralisatiepolitiek', in: R. Uytven, *De Geschiedenis van Mechelen: van Heerlijkheid tot Stadsgewest* (Houten 1995) 126.

²¹ A. Van der Lem, *De Opstand in de Nederlanden 1568-1648: De Tachtigjarige Oorlog in woord en beeld* (Nijmegen 2014) 82.

²² Van der Lem, *De Opstand in de Nederlanden 1568-1648*, 105.

²³ G. Marnef, *Het Calvinistische Bewind te Mechelen 1580-1585* (Kortrijk 1987) 117-144.

²⁴ Marnef, 'Een plutocratie bedreigd door religieuze twisten en centralisatiepolitiek', 128.

²⁵ See for the Catholic revival in Mechelen from the perspective of the clergy: C. Harline and E. Put, *A Bishop's Tale: Mathias Hovius Among His Flock in Seventeenth-century Flanders* (Yale 2002).

²⁶ T. Quaghebeur, 'Katholicisme op kruissnelheid (1648-1689)', in: J. De Maeyer, E. Put, J. Roegiers, A. Tihon and G. Vanden Bosch (eds.), *Het Aartsbisdom Mechelen-Brussel; 450 jaar geschiedenis Deel I: 1559-1802*, 161-165.

by the Enlightenment and political motives he tried to reform and purify the Catholic Church by removing all 'unnecessary' elements. Many convents and confraternities were abolished and many church properties were confiscated.²⁷ Twelve years later the Southern Netherlands was conquered by the French. Once again the properties of the churches were confiscated and the few nuns and monks that still lived in the cities were banished. This study shall end in the year 1802 when Mechelen became once more a the seat of a Catholic archbishopric.²⁸

Even though Mechelen had many popular devotional cults, this study shall focus exclusively on the cult of St. Rombout and that of Our Lady of Hanswijk. The cult of St. Rombout is of interest because he was (and still is) the patron saint of Mechelen. According to legend, Rombout, bishop of Dublin, passed Mechelen on his way back from Rome and tried to convert the people of the city to Christianity. He was murdered by two men, whom he confronted with their moral misbehavior and extra-marital affairs, and his body was thrown into the water. Miraculously the spot where the body of Rombout was thrown in the water lit up so his remains could be salvaged. Rombout was buried in the church he had built himself and when many miracles occurred on this spot a cult for the saint took root. Throughout the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period, the cult of St. Rombout, which mainly focused on the relics of the saint that are kept at the St. Romboutskathedraal, remained important for the city.

The Miraculous Statue of Our Lady of Hanswijk enjoyed a different type of devotion. In the Southern Netherlands many local cults surrounded a miraculous statue of the Virgin. The statue in Mechelen was placed at the bank of the river the Dijle where it was reported to have saved a ship during a storm and was associated with many other miracles. In 1578 the church was destroyed and a new one was erected within the city gates in 1663. Just as the relics of St. Rombout the statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk was rescued by citizens in the sixteenth century and in the eighteenth century.²⁹

To investigate the development and deployment of the two cults during the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries and to discover who the stakeholders and other interested participants of these cults were, I will make use of a variety of sources from the city archive and the archiepiscopal archive of Mechelen. These sources include devotional books, chronicles, city histories and archives of confraternities. The most important sources studied are devotional texts about the cult of

²⁷ J. Roegiers, 'Routine, reorganisatie en revolutie (1759-1802)', in: De Maeyer, Put, Roegiers, Tihon and Vanden Bosch (eds.), *Het Aartsbisdom Mechelen-Brussel*, 254-269.

²⁸ A. Tihon, 'De restauratie (1802-1830)', in: J. De Maeyer, E. Put, J. Roegiers, A. Tihon and G. Vanden Bosch (eds.), *Het Aartsbisdom Mechelen-Brussel; 450 jaar geschiedenis Deel II: 1802-2009*, 12.

²⁹ B.J.F.C. Gijseleers-Thijs, *Kort Begrijp der geschiedenis van het mirakuleus beeld van O.L.Vrouw van Hanswijk binnen Mechelen* (Mechelen 1838) 37-38.

St. Rombout and Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk, that provide information about the stories and miracles surrounding the cults. Most devotional texts discuss the origin of the cult, the religious institutions that evolved, how the holy days and processions were celebrated, which tributes had been made to the saint or the statue and material details of the objects such as reliquaries, fabrics and altarpieces. The devotional texts offer a good insight into the current state of the cult during the time it was written. They reveal who invested in the cults, who protected them, which narratives were seen as important and interesting and how the cult was remembered in the past. Moreover, the writers of these works can be seen as stakeholders themselves and will therefore be subjects of research as well. Chronicles and city histories written in the period under investigation offer an inside perspective that secondary literature cannot offer. By looking at sources from four centuries, it becomes clear how the past was remembered by the citizens of Mechelen and which episodes were considered most important. The authors of these texts were probably less invested in actively promoting the cults than the devotional texts and can therefore offer a different perspective on the cults. The city archive and the archiepiscopal archive of Mechelen also preserve multiple sources such as journals, accounts, transcripts of devotional plays, books of worship and newspaper clippings about both devotional cults, which are all included in the research of this thesis.

I will also make use of the insights and methods of the study of material culture and the study of memory. The study of material culture has gained popularity in recent years and combines knowledge and methods from disciplines such as anthropology, archeology, art history and history.³⁰ The relatively new approach 'reads' objects as a historical source. Researchers of material culture take as starting point that objects can carry meaning over space and time.³¹ The way objects are presented, kept and adorned shows how people related to them and how they wanted to remember certain events. The attention that is given to an object tells us something about the people that are giving the attention. It shows what they believe and what they think is important.³² This holds true for objects of devotion, some of which have been venerated for multiple centuries and possess layers of remembrance that can be analyzed and interpreted to see which symbolic and emotional value was attributed to them.³³ The cults of St. Rombout and the Miraculous Statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk are heavily influenced by their material culture as well. The third chapter of this thesis will be dedicated to the materiality of both cults. The study of memory has

³⁰ See for an in depth examination of material culture studies: A. Gerritsen and G. Riello, *Writing Material Culture History* (London 2014); L. Auslander, 'Beyond Words', *The American Historical Review* 10:4 (2005) 1015-1045 and K. Harvey, *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources* (London 2009).

³¹ Walsham, 'Introduction: Relics and Remains', 11.

³² Evangelisti, 'Material Culture', 399.

³³ Walsham, 'Introduction: Relics and Remains', 13.

also been of interest to historians. Even though most research focuses on memory practices after 1800, historians realize that the study of Early Modern memory can contribute to an understanding of the creation of (national) identities in the Early Modern period.³⁴ The study of memory also makes use of material sources. Because most people in the Early Modern period were unable to read or write, their memories were transferred and influenced by non-written media such as rituals, oral transmission, images, performances, prints and sermons.³⁵ One of the theories that is explored within the study of memory is that of premediation. This theory states that existing images and narratives pre-form the events that will later be remembered.³⁶ This is particularly visible in narratives about violence and loss where many similar elements re-occur, making it easier for people to cope with their grief or trauma.³⁷ It will be interesting to see whether the same coping motifs was applicable to the narratives of the rescue of St. Rombout and the statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk in the eighteenth century.

To answer the question of how the cults of St. Rombout and Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk regained their importance during the Counter-reformation and how and by whom these cults have been developed and deployed until the end of the eighteenth century, I will analyse four factors that have contributed to their success. Each factor will be the subject of a chapter. The first chapter looks at the use of the objects of devotion in narratives about the iconoclastic raids at the end of the sixteenth century. I will show how by omitting certain aspects of the past and emphasizing other aspects certain narratives were created that changed the collective memory of the Dutch Revolt in Mechelen and rid it of painful and uncomfortable elements. The rescue of the relics of St. Rombout and the Miraculous Statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk played a major role in these stories. The second chapter will discuss the importance of miracles for the success of the cults. The Miraculous Statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk was known, as the name suggests, for her association with miracles. This was in contrast to the relics of St. Rombout, of whom no miracles were known. This chapter will discuss the differences between the two cults and show how St. Rombout performed an important function in the city as patron and protector. I will study the accounts of miracles that were recorded in the devotional works on Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk and the processions that were held

³⁴ See for recent studies on Early Modern memory: J.S. Pollmann, *Memory in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1800* (Oxford 2017); E. Kuijpers, J.S. Pollmann, J. Müller, J. Van der Steen (eds.), *Memory before Modernity: Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden 2013) and M.F.D. Eekhout, *Material Memories of the Dutch Revolt: the urban memory landscape in the Low Countries, 1566-1700* (Dissertation, Leiden 2014).

³⁵ Pollmann, *Memory in Early Modern Europe*, 1.

³⁶ A. Erll and A. Rigney, 'Introduction: Cultural Memory and its Dynamics', in: A. Erll, A. Rigney (eds.), *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory* (Berlin 2009) 8. See also: R.A. Grusin, 'Premediation', *Criticism* 46:1 (2004) 17-39.

³⁷ J.S. Pollmann, E. Kuijpers, 'Introduction to the Early Modernity of Modern Memory', in: Kuijpers, Pollmann, Müller, Van der Steen (eds.), *Memory before Modernity*, 11-12.

in honor of both cults. In the third chapter I will discuss the materiality of the cults. As I have mentioned above, the study of materiality can provide us with new insights on the symbolical and emotional value of the objects and the remembrance of the past. This chapter will study the reliquaries in which the relics of St. Rombout were kept during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By analysing the materials and quality of these reliquaries more insight can be obtained about the popularity of the cult and the messages that these objects conveyed. I will also study the gifts and clothes that were donated to the statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk to show how the devotion given to the Virgin fluctuated over time. The fourth chapter discusses the stakeholders of the cults. By studying the influence of the clergy, the local and the central government, the religious orders, the confraternities, the authors of devotional works, the guilds, the crafts and the citizens I will show the complex interaction between these groups in their joined and sometimes contradictory efforts to strengthen the cults and their own position in the city. I will analyse why precisely the cults of St. Rombout and Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk fitted the needs of the stakeholders. The last chapter describes new threats to the Catholic Southern Netherlands in the eighteenth century. Rulers tried to eliminate many aspects of the Counter-reformation; convents and religious orders were abolished and the relics of St. Rombout and the statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk were confiscated. Moreover the clergy was divided amongst themselves and quarreled continuously. This final chapter will show that both cults proved to be flexible and adaptable to the new changes: they survived the attacks and re-emerged after the French period.

Chapter 1: Re-imagining the past

After having been subjected to Calvinist rule for five years, the city of Mechelen reconciled with the Spanish crown in July 1585. On 27 October in that same year, Archbishop Hauchinus ordered all parish churches in Mechelen to convey the message to their members that anyone who had taken one or more relics of St. Rombout or another saint, should return them within three days.

Archdeacon Mathias Hovius, canon Melchior Huys and notary Joannes Goossens were appointed to recollect the relics and to take statements. These statements are described in Joseph-Jacques de Munck's (1740-1792) devotional book *Gedenck-schriften dienende tot ophelderinge van het leven, lyden, wonderheden, ende duysent-jaerige eer-bewysinghe van den heyligen bisschop ende martelaar Rumoldus, apostel ende patroon van Mechelen* (first published in 1775).³⁸ De Munck wrote that each collector had to declare how he or she had been able to take one or more bones of the saint and in what condition they had found the relics when they arrived in the church on 9 or 10 April 1580, the day when Mechelen was taken by the Calvinists. More than thirty people answered to this call and gave their statement. Some of them declared that as soon as they heard that the city was being attacked by the Calvinists, they hurried to the church. One witness, Joannes van Elsen, who was twenty-six at the time, was taken captive by a soldier on the morning of 9 April and brought to the church. He recounted how he was cuffed and left standing close to the choir where he saw a wooden box which, he believed, was the reliquary of St. Rombout. Van Elsen emphasized in his statement that he wanted to take as many bones of the saint as he could, but was afraid that the soldiers would notice the theft. He only took a small rib and managed to keep it safe for the next five years.

The most spectacular statement came from a beguine named Anna van Roy. Together with the choirboy Guilielmus de Lannoy she had taken a golden cloak of a statue of the Virgin and on top of that the skull of St. Rombout and hid them in her skirt. Even though soldiers searched her outside the church on the market square, only the cloak was taken from her. Amazed by the fact that she was able to keep the skull safe, she showed it at home to some close friends and members of her household. To protect the precious relic of the saint, a glass shrine was made. On the holy day of St. Ursula, Anna lent the skull to a group of beguines to perform Mass. When she got her reliquary back, however, she discovered that a piece of the skull was missing. She therefore decided that she

³⁸ J.J. De Munck, *Gedenck-schriften dienende tot ophelderinge van het leven, lyden, wonderheden, ende duysent-jaerige eer-bewysinghe van den heyligen bisschop ende martelaar Rumoldus, apostel ende patroon van Mechelen* (Mechelen 1777).

would never lend it out again. The city council awarded Anna six guilders for her bravery. Luckily, the missing piece of the skull was returned in that same year as well. When all the missing relics were believed to have been returned, Archbishop Hauchinus examined the bones and drew up a new attestation. On Sunday 3 November 1585 he read this attestation out loud in the chapel of St. Martin in the presence of many members of the clergy, the city council, the city magistrate, the governor, notary Goossens and some prominent citizens. Afterwards he enclosed the relics in a new reliquary and declared that 3 November would be a holy day from now on, to celebrate the recovery of the relics of St. Rombout. The ceremony ended with a procession with the relics to the St. Romboutskathedraal. St. Rombout was finally home again.³⁹

As we have seen in the introduction of this thesis, this was not the only time that the relics of St. Rombout were saved by citizens of Mechelen who feared for the safety of the bones. From the reference to the events of 1580 in the newsitem of 1793 it became clear that the story of the rescuing of the relics of St. Rombout during the English Fury was still known by the citizens in 1793. To understand why this story was still so popular in the eighteenth century, it is important to know how it originated. Why had some citizens of Mechelen decided to save the relics of St. Rombout and the statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk in 1580? And why were they attacked in the first place? This chapter will study how the events that took place at the end of the sixteenth century in Mechelen were remembered in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Reading the statements of the people who rescued some of the bones of St. Rombout, drawn up by De Munck in 1775, it would appear that the citizens of Mechelen did everything in their power to protect their precious relics and Catholic heritage from the Calvinist looters. The account even suggests that the citizens of Mechelen stayed true to their Catholic faith and never really became Calvinists. How much of this had actually happened? The book of De Munck appeared almost two centuries after the events had taken place. By then the rescuing of the relics had become a narrative. In the following I will show that this narrative was very important for the way people coped with feelings of loss, failure and insecurity and how it influenced the way the cults could become successful again in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I will start this chapter with a brief summary of the events at the end of the sixteenth century that had the biggest impact on Mechelen; the iconoclastic raids of 1566 (the so called *Beeldenstorm*), the Second Revolt and the Spanish Fury of 1572 and the English Fury in 1580. Secondly I will analyze city chronicles and books on the cults of St. Rombout and Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk to see how these events were remembered in the subsequent two centuries in Mechelen. Finally I will compare my findings with other studies on the reception of

³⁹ De Munck, *Gedenck-schriften*, 234-243.

iconoclasm in the Southern Netherlands.

A turbulent end of the sixteenth century

Even though the importance of the veneration of material objects, saints, their remains and their statues was reaffirmed during the Council of Trent, the objects remained subject to criticism. From August 10 1566 until October of the same year, adversaries of the veneration of religious objects decided to take matters into their own hands and started to attack churches to rid them of their holy images and statues. Local authorities were overwhelmed by the new developments and could do little to stop the violence. On 23 October 1566 iconoclastic raiders arrived in Mechelen. Antwerp had already experienced iconoclasm three days earlier, so Mechelen knew what to expect and was prepared. The city magistrate led the raiders outside of the city walls where they looted a few cloisters.⁴⁰ No churches inside the city walls were harmed.

All in all the Iconoclastic Fury -as this event later became known- in the Southern Netherlands was short-lived. When the Catholic high nobility withdrew their support from the attacks and nullified the Compromise of Nobles, order was soon restored.⁴¹ In 1567 the Duke of Alba established the 'Council of Troubles' to prosecute the iconoclasts, their accomplices and those who had failed to intervene when they had the opportunity. Most of them had, however, already gone into exile.⁴² Even though the effects of the Iconoclastic Fury were minor in Mechelen, compared to other cities, eighty-three people were nonetheless banished from the city and sixteen people were tried by the Council. The extreme consequences of the Fury, the stationing of Spanish troops in the city and the newly installed tenth and twentieth penny by the Duke of Alba contributed to a general resentment of the Spanish rule in Mechelen. In the night of 30 August 1572 some citizens opened the gates of the city to the troops of William of Orange to help him to take over the city.⁴³ The troops, however, did not stay long and already left the city after a month. The Duke of Alba was furious that there had been a second revolt and ordered his troops to plunder the city as a punishment and to set an example for other rebelling cities. During this so-called Spanish Fury many people were robbed and killed. Still Mechelen agreed in 1576 to sign the Pacification of Gent; an alliance with the rebels of the North in the hopes of driving the mutinying Spanish troops from

⁴⁰ Marnef, *Het Calvinistische Bewind te Mechelen 1580-1585*, 77.

⁴¹ Van der Lem, *De Opstand in de Nederlanden 1568-1648*, 59.

⁴² E. Kuijpers and J. Pollmann, 'Turning Sacrilege into Victory: Catholic memories of Calvinist iconoclasm in the Low Countries, 1566-1700', in: E. Guillorel, D. Hopkin, W.G. Pooley (eds.), *Rhythms of Revolt: European Traditions and Memories of Social Conflict in Oral Culture* (London 2017) 154.

⁴³ Marnef, *Het Calvinistische Bewind te Mechelen*, 79.

the Southern Netherlands.⁴⁴ The members of the city council of Mechelen were divided amongst themselves about supporting the States General or the Spanish governor Don Juan. Yet in 1579 the city council officially reconciled with the Spanish king. The Calvinists felt betrayed by their former ally and attacked and took over the city. For over a month Mechelen was plundered and raided. This time they did experience iconoclastic raids; images were stolen, statues were smashed, relics were scattered through the churches and many people were killed. Until 1585 Mechelen would be under Calvinist rule.⁴⁵ Because of the many English soldiers who had contributed to this attack, this event was later called the English Fury.

Iconoclasm had put its stamp on the last decades of the sixteenth century. The motives of the attackers could differ. Alastair Duke, who was one of the first to study the mentality of the image-breakers, stated in 1996 in his article 'Calvinists and 'Papist Idolatry': The Mentality of the Image-breakers in 1566' (2009) that the motives of the raiders to plunder the churches were either to create places of worship that were appropriate for the Calvinists, to offend and attack the Catholic church institution or to prove the impotence of statues and images to work miracles, not only to their opponents, but also to themselves.⁴⁶ Looting and plundering was also often done by soldiers, especially when they attacked a city as a reprisal, to punish the citizens for their disobedience by hurting them where it hurts the most. It was this type of iconoclasm that Mechelen had experienced during the Spanish Fury. During the English Fury the churches of Mechelen were also plundered since the attacks of the Calvinist troops were not only politically but also religiously motivated. Whatever the motives of the iconoclasts were, truth remains that the attacks had a strong impact on the communities in which they happened. Not only was their faith physically attacked and was their property stolen or broken, mentally it had been a shock as well. Where had these attacks come from? Who were responsible? What did this say about the saints and statues that were supposed to have a protective function? And most importantly, why had God done nothing to stop the attacks on His institutions?

Memories of the sixteenth century

When Mechelen had reconciled with governor Alexander Farnese in 1585 it was celebrated with a big feast on 19 June.⁴⁷ Still many people must have experienced a sense of insecurity. Citizens of Mechelen must have wondered why St. Rombout or Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk had not protected

⁴⁴ Ibidem, 83/

⁴⁵ Marnef, 'Een plutocratie bedreigd door religieuze twisten en centralisatiepolitiek', 128.

⁴⁶ A. Duke, 'Calvinists and 'Papist Idolatry': The Mentality of the Image-breakers in 1566', in: A. Duke, J. Pollmann, A. Spicer (eds), *Dissident Identities in the Early Modern Countries* (Cornwall 2009) 183 en 190.

⁴⁷ E. van Autenboer, *Volksfeesten en Rederijkers te Mechelen 1400-1600* (Gent 1962) 66.

them against the attacks of the iconoclasts. Moreover, they had to live with the fact that they had not unconditionally supported the Spanish king during the second half of the sixteenth century. A significant number of citizens had been Calvinist or had Calvinist sympathies, the city had supported William of Orange and they had shown a deep resentment for the Spanish troops that had disrupted the city for decades. When we look at the chronicles and devotional books that were written in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we see that these shameful episodes were not always described in detail. This part of the chapter will study multiple books and accounts written about the events between the iconoclastic raids and the English Fury to give insight in the way this period was remembered and how this remembrance changed overtime. I will focus specifically on the way these events are remembered in historical sources on the cult of St. Rombout and Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk. I will show that these two cults, and especially the stories about the rescue of relics became a symbol of the continuity of Catholic faith and the civic identity of the city.

The city chronicles, written in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, describe the political events of the end of the sixteenth century more elaborately than the devotional books on St. Rombout and Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk. Yet a chronicle written by Remmerus Valerius in 1680, a pastor of the St. Lambert church in Muizen, is an exception to this general rule.⁴⁸ Valerius hardly spends a word on the furies. This is perhaps not very surprising given that he has written a book of only 191 pages covering more than 1300 years. Both the iconoclastic raids of 1566 and the English Fury are described in just one sentence and are stated as a matter of fact, without emotional evaluation. The Spanish Fury is not even mentioned. A possible explanation for his succinct treatment is that the writer wanted to ignore that Mechelen once turned its back against the Spanish rulers and only wanted to remember their good relationship. Henricus vanden Coelput who wrote a chronicle of Mechelen in 1754 does describe all three furies and is slightly more elaborate.⁴⁹ Here we can read an emotional evaluation in his description. He writes that during the Spanish Fury many people were murdered, tortured, hanged, burned and beaten. He ends his description by saying ‘Yes it would be a disgrace to describe all the cruelty and the inhumanity that had occurred.’⁵⁰ Vanden Coelput fails to inform the reader, however, that Mechelen collaborated with the invaders and led the troops of William of Orange inside the city gates. He claims that the

⁴⁸ R. Valerius, *Chronycke van Mechelen 1680* (Mechelen 1766).

⁴⁹ Stadsarchief Mechelen (SAM), H. vanden Coelput, *De beschryvinghe der gheboorte linie oft geslachts afcomst van de Edele Heeren Berthouders, met hunlieden stam-huys vooghden. Oock de naemen vande Heeren bisschoppen van Luyck, 't saemen regeerders met de Heeren Berthouders der stadt, jurisdictie ende 's lants van Mechelen, met veele waerachtighe geschiedenissen binnen de voorn. stadt als elders, vergaederdt door Henricus vanden Coelput* (1754) inv.nr. DD 11.

⁵⁰ ‘Jae dat schande waer om de wreetheyt ende onmenschelyckheid te schrijven’. Vanden Coelput, *De beschryvinghe*, 112v – 113r.

citizens knew nothing of the arrival of these troops: 'on 30 August the people of the Prince of Orange arrived in Mechelen, and that without the knowledge of the citizens.'⁵¹ When Vanden Coelput describes the Spanish Fury he presents it as an unjust attack on the city, not as a retribution for the betrayal of the citizens who collaborated with the Calvinists.

The early modern books on the cult of St. Rombout and Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk mention one or more furies when the author believed that the event had had an effect on the devotional cults. They describe the event in relation to the cults. An exception is the *vita* of St. Rombout published in 1680 by Augustinus Casimirus Redelius to celebrate the 900th anniversary of the cult of the saint. The *vita* itself is solely dedicated to the life of St. Rombout and therefore does not describe the events in the sixteenth century. The introduction, however, is written for the city magistrate and reveals the author's view of the city's past. Redelius ignores the fact that Mechelen once chose the side of the Calvinists and even claims that the people of Mechelen have always stayed true to the Catholic faith: 'The city still holds the faith, that Rombout had installed. And for nine-hundredth years it has maintained.'⁵² This quote implies that even though Mechelen was ruled by a Calvinist regime, its citizens were all still true to the Catholic faith. Redelius does not acknowledge that a significant number of citizens must have been Calvinist or at least must have had Calvinist sympathies.

A miracle book written ten years earlier about the Miraculous Statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk by Petrus Croon (1670) does not mention the iconoclastic raids, the Second Revolt or the Spanish Fury. Croon only tells his readers how the *Geuzen* (as the rebels from the North were often called) burned down the convent of Hanswijk in 1580, forcing its members to flee to the city and to take the statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk with them. The statue survived the five years of Calvinist rule, just as the relics of St. Rombout. Some of citizens of Mechelen, 'faithful and pious citizens', carried the statue into a cellar under the Leuvense poort, one of the city gates.⁵³ Croon does not discuss what happened during these five years of Calvinist rule, but directly moves on to the reconciliation. Croon is a good example of an author who only discusses a bad part in the past when it is necessary to explain the current condition of the cult. His book is meant to show the success of the cult, the piousness of the devotees and the miracles that have occurred because of the statue. Other events that happened in Mechelen are not of his concern.

⁵¹ 'den 30 augusti quam binnen Mechelen het volck vanden Prince van Orangien, ende dat sonder weten van de Borgers'. Ibidem 112v.

⁵² 'Het G'loof heeft sy noch vast, dat Rombaut heeft geplant. En negen-hondert jaer ghebleven is in stant.' . A.C. Redelius, *Het leven van den H. Rumoldus bisschop, martelaer, apostel, ende patroon van de provincie, jurisdictie, ende graefschap Mechelen* (Mechelen 1680) 4.

⁵³ 'getrauwe en Godt-vruchtige Borgers'. P. Croon, *Historie van Onse Lieve Vrouwe van Hanswyck door haer audt ende Mirakuleus Beeldt eertydts buyten nu binnen Mechelen Besonderlijck Vermaert* (Mechelen 1670) 43.

In 1738 Petrus Siré wrote another miracle book on the Statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk. Siré devotes an entire chapter to the destruction of the old convent of Hanswijk and the misfortunes that befell the statue. He begins his chapter with a reference to the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem and to other periods in history when holy images and buildings were attacked and destroyed. He then continues his chapter with the iconoclastic raids of 1566. The convent of Hanswijk was situated outside of the city gates and was therefore an easy prey for the rebels. Siré claims that the citizens of Mechelen defended their property tooth and nail against the rebels. He quotes Michaël van Isselt, a Catholic exile in Cologne, who wrote in his account in 1566 that 'During these times Mechelen had very zealous citizens for the Catholic faith'.⁵⁴ Siré also ignores the fact that some citizens of Mechelen opened the city gates for the troops of William of Orange. He also describes the English Revolt emotionless and factual. The purpose of Siré's chapter on the furies was probably to show how the statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk survived all its attacks and misfortunes. Siré aims to give a historical overview and compares the destructions to other famous destructions in order to show the reader that attempts to destroy the statue did not make it less powerful. He also takes away the blame of the citizens of Mechelen. He claims that it were outsiders who had attacked the convent, not the pious citizens. By telling the events in this way Siré tries to show his readers how the cult survived and became even stronger in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The devotional book of De Munck, written in 1775, with which I began this chapter, is the most elaborate source on the cult of St. Rombout. De Munck does not offer a general description of the city's history, but refers to certain events when treating other subjects. In his chapter about the church of St. Rombout he mentions the raids that occurred during the Spanish Fury which damaged the church significantly. He does not, however, describe why the church was attacked. He just mentions that it was done by the troops of the Duke of Alba.⁵⁵ Because the church was not attacked during the iconoclastic raids, this event is not described in his book. What De Munck wrote about the English Fury has been discussed at the beginning of this chapter. It suggests that Mechelen always stayed true to the Spanish king and the Catholic faith, even during the Calvinist Rule. De Munck paints a story of success, but between the lines we can read that the rescue of the saint was not entirely successful. In one of the accounts of a citizen who brought back a relic of the saint, it becomes clear that it was not only the pious believers who took some pieces with them. Cornelis

⁵⁴ 'In dese tyden heeft Mechelen seer ieverige Borgers voor de Catholycke Godts-dienstigheyt gehadt'. P. Siré, *Hanswyck ende het wonderdadigh beeldt van de alder-heylichste Maget ende Moeder Godts Maria. Eertydts buyten, nu binnen Mechelen* (Dendermonde 1738) 91.

⁵⁵ De Munck, *Gedenck-schriften*, 118.

Vervoert, a witness whose testimony De Munck quoted, stated that he had some Englishmen staying in his house during the attacks. During their stay he saw them selling church property such as crosses and silver objects. Afterwards Vervoert's wife found a broken piece of crystal and a bone in one of the rooms when she was cleaning. A piece of paper was attached to the bone on which something was written in Latin. Not being able to read it she showed it to a *minderbroeder* who told her that the bone must be a rib of St. Rombout and that she should try to keep it safe.⁵⁶ The rib was brought back to the church in 1585. Was this the only bone that was taken by an English soldier? Or is it possible that more bones were taken? Did all of the bones return undamaged to the church, and did all of the returned bones belong to what was believed to be the body of Rombout? Probably not. The narrative that is told, however, only focuses on the successful returns. It is clear that many parts of the actual historical past are either ignored, changed or exaggerated in the devotional books on St. Rombout and Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk. The new narrative that had come into existence was one of bravery, piety and continuation of Catholicism. The attacks on the churches and their property was blamed on outsiders. According to the authors discussed above the citizens of Mechelen had stayed true to their faith and had even heroically taken matters into their own hands to protect their saint.

Coping with the past

Mechelen was not the only city that struggled with the aftermath of the sixteenth. Every city in the Southern Netherlands that had experienced iconoclasm and had supported the Revolt and the Reformation had their own way of coping. Other studies on the memory of iconoclasm show that forgetting or emphasizing certain events of the past were common elements in the narratives that originated in the seventeenth century. One of the reasons that these new narratives arose in this century was because the Habsburgs had promised the rebel cities in their peace agreements to forget the uncomfortable past. It was therefore necessary to ignore the memory of the attackers. By anonymizing the raiders, just as we have seen in the chronicles about Mechelen, people could forget that it had been members from their own communities that had attacked their churches. Instead people started to believe that it had been outsiders who had ransacked their churches; either rebels from the Northern Netherlands or Calvinists from England and Scotland.⁵⁷ The only local people that were given attention in these stories were those who had demonstrated their loyalty to the Catholic church and who could be remembered as heroes.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ibidem 236.

⁵⁷ Kuijpers and Pollmann, 'Turning Sacrilege into Victory', 156.

⁵⁸ Ibidem 161.

Judith Pollmann and Erika Kuijpers give examples of how cities in the Southern Netherlands remembered Calvinist iconoclasm in their article 'Turning Sacrilege into Victory' (2017). They show how people actively chose to remember a specific narrative of the iconoclastic raids, and only recalled the successful and positive events. People forgot about the images that had been mutilated and destroyed by the iconoclasts yet remembered the images and statues that had survived. Especially stories about images that, allegedly, worked miracles and thus proved that they were indeed powerful were very popular in the decades after 1566. People loved to hear about iconoclasts who died when statues fell on them or when other tragic incidents punished them for their deeds.⁵⁹ The Jesuit Franciscus Costerus wrote, for example, in 1595 how the torches of the iconoclasts who tried to break a crucifix in the church of St. Quentin in Hasselt suddenly went out.⁶⁰ In Vilvoorde the story went that iconoclasts were thrown off their ladders by the Virgin when they had set the roof of a convent on fire.⁶¹ A similar type of divine punishment was recalled by an anonymous nun in Mechelen. A couple of brewers who had tried to burn the images of the twelve apostles in their brew kettle, saw that God had turned their beer into blood.⁶²

Pollmann and Kuijpers emphasize in their article that from a theological perspective iconoclasm had not much impact on the credibility of the Church and its teachings. The Council of Trent had explicitly stated that there was no divinity or virtue in images themselves, but that the honor that was shown to them referred to the saint that they represented.⁶³ Therefore the destruction of the images did not contradict the power of God. The people who did associate images with miracles performed by God and believed that they had intrinsic powers themselves, were, however, shocked by the destructions. From their perspective images that had not fought back or performed other miracles were much more a test of their faith. It is no surprise that the memories about statues that were stolen, damaged or destroyed were soon forgotten.⁶⁴ Stories about images that had fought back were used as evidence in the seventeenth century to prove the efficacy of the saints. These stories were especially convincing when they could be illustrated by material remains of the images.⁶⁵ In Mechelen the relics of St. Rombout and the Miraculous Statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk also performed this function. They had been re-invented as a symbol of the city that

⁵⁹ Ibidem 161-165.

⁶⁰ Ibidem 162-163.

⁶¹ Ibidem 164.

⁶² D. de Boer, *Picking Up the Pieces. Catholic Perceptions of Iconoclasm in the Netherlands, 1566–1672* (Thesis RMA Modern History, Utrecht University 2013) 65.

⁶³ J. Waterworth, *The Council of Trent: The canons and decrees of the sacred and oecumenical Council of Trent* (London 1848), 234-235.

⁶⁴ Kuijpers and Pollmann, 'Turning Sacrilege into Victory', 168.

⁶⁵ Ibidem 153.

showed the piety and endurance of the citizens. The survival of these two objects overcame the fact that many other statues and images had been broken or stolen.

David de Boer, who has also studied the Catholic perception of iconoclasm shows in his article 'Picking up the Pieces: Catholic Material Culture and Iconoclasm in the Low Countries' (2016) how Catholics interacted and renegotiated with objects that had either been destroyed by or had survived iconoclasm. In the decades prior to the iconoclastic raids it had been common to dispose damaged religious objects. De Boer shows, however, that the objects that had been damaged by the iconoclasts were often given a second life because they became a symbol of the attack against the Catholic religion. This also happened in Mechelen where the damaged statues, that had stood along a pilgrimage road between Mechelen and Battel, were placed on the city walls to show every passenger that the city was encapsulated by saints. Instead of accepting the loss of the objects and the prestige of the pilgrimage road the citizens made a strong Catholic statement with the damaged objects.⁶⁶

De Boer furthermore stresses the importance of the multiple meanings that were bestowed on religious objects. Relics and statues were sacred because of their relationship with God, but they were also part of the community. Sometimes they were commissioned by an organization such as a guild or an individual. These ties made that the attacks on these objects could also be seen as an attack on the community and their memories.⁶⁷ By interpreting iconoclasm as an attack on property, people could distance themselves from the events.⁶⁸ De Boer mentions, for example, that the monks of St. Peter in Gent had estimated their loss at 11.000 pounds.⁶⁹ People found it easier to deal with violence and greed than with religious dissent.⁷⁰ By regarding it as stolen property the loss became manageable. These type of stories secularized the losses and criminalized the iconoclasts. By downplaying the religious aspects of the Fury the attacks were easier to bear.⁷¹

66 D. de Boer, 'Picking up the Pieces: Catholic Material Culture and Iconoclasm in the Low Countries', in: *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 131 (2016) 68.

67 De Boer, *Picking up the Pieces* (Thesis), 13.

68 De Boer, 'Picking up the Pieces', 75-80.

69 *Ibidem* 75.

70 *Ibidem* 79.

71 De Boer, *Picking up the Pieces* (Thesis), 38.

Conclusion

In 1585 Mechelen was reconciled with the Spanish King. Yet even with the relics of St. Rombout back in the church and the statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk safely inside a chapel, the city was in chaos. Not only had the city suffered ransacking, which had damaged churches, chapels and houses, there was also a sense of general shame. How was it possible that a former pious Catholic city was ruled by Calvinists for five years, without much opposition? To deal with this shame people had to construct an interpretation of the past that fitted with the image they had of themselves. Mechelen needed a new civic identity to be able to process the losses, distrust and chaos of the previous years.

As this chapter has shown, one of the ways that people from the Southern Netherlands tried to overcome their disruptive past was to create a narrative of success. This narrative could be created by eliminating negative elements of the past, focusing on stories about powerful images that fought back, or that had survived the attacks, and by forgetting their own agency in the events. The attackers were anonymized and local involvement was ignored. The same elements are visible in the city chronicles of Mechelen and the devotional studies on St. Rombout and Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk. None of the books acknowledge the fact that Mechelen had often collaborated with the Calvinists before they were conquered by them in 1580. In most of the sources the Spanish Fury is not described or the author presents it as an arbitrary attack and fails to mention the opening of the city gates for the troops of William of Orange. In this narrative the citizens could not be subjected to new rulers, but were presented as being pious, zealous and brave. All these studies emphasize the rescue of the relics of St. Rombout and the statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk. The rescue is presented as a victory of the Catholic faith. The years after the Calvinist rule are not presented as a new beginning or a reconciliation with Catholicism, but as a continuation. The cults of St. Rombout and Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk were re-invented and testified to this victory, which can also explain why they became so important in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Both objects of devotions were invested with new meaning; even though they had failed to protect the city they were re-branded as the protectors and became the symbol of survival. In the following chapters it will become clear that this narrative was constantly re-inforced during the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. It was remembered during processions, *Ommegangen*, in public plays, used by the stakeholders and it even inspired citizens in the eighteenth century to follow in the footsteps of their ancestors and put the narrative into practice. The cults were re-invented a symbol of success and

resistance. They stood in evidence not only of the Catholic faith, but also of the identity of the citizens of Mechelen.

Chapter 2: Miracles

The iconoclastic raids of 1566 did not have a major impact on the city of Mechelen. The raiders were, however, able to attack and plunder a few convents outside the city gates. Barbara van Gysele, born in Waveren, but living as a beguine in Mechelen, was one of the people who was heavily affected. In the miracle book of Croon (1670) we can read how she, when her convent was under attack, fled to Antwerp where she took refuge with other beguines. Yet soon after her flight, Barbara fell very ill. For twenty-five years she was unable to stand, walk or sit and no doctor managed to cure her. At last the beguine remembered the stories of the miracles that were associated with the Miraculous Statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk and in 1592 she made a vow that she would go on a pilgrimage to Mechelen. Immediately after Barbara had made her promise, she felt her body get stronger. She was now able to sit, which made it easier for her to leave her bed. She was carried to a ship that took her to Mechelen. There she was brought to the hospital of the beguines, who had moved inside of the city walls after their beguinage burned down in 1578. Here she stayed for a couple of days. On 15 September Barbara was carried to the chapel of Hanswijk where the statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk was. Her caretakers feared that she would not reach the chapel alive, because she was losing her strength again. Yet she did make it. During Mass she fell out of her chair, being so weak and fragile that she was no longer able to sit. When Mass was finished, however, Barbara felt a miraculous strength entering her body. She was able to stand up, without any pain, and walk around the altar three times, as was a customary practice for people who sought the help from the Virgin. The miraculous healing of the beguine Barbara reached the ears of vicar general and soon-to-be archbishop Mathias Hovius. He ordered an investigation into the miracle and was convinced when he learned the results. Hovius sent an attestation and a certificate to the convent of Hanswijk in which he acknowledged the miracle's authenticity. To commemorate this event a little painting was made that was eventually hung on the wall next to the altar in the Hanswijkkerk.⁷² The healing of Barbara was the last miracle associated with the Miraculous Statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk that was officially recognized by the Catholic Church. This did not mean, however, that no one claimed to be miraculously healed in the following centuries.

Miracles were very important for the success of cults in the Early Modern Period. For theologians and clerics it was clear that when miracles occurred they came directly from God and that the saint had only interceded for the worshiper. Miracles were, however, not always interpreted

⁷² Croon, *Historie*, 169-172.

as such by lay people who often attributed them to the relics or the statue and preferred some saints over others.⁷³ Believers chose their saints based on efficacy, location and popularity.⁷⁴ Consequently a popular and effective shrine of worship also led to economic prosperity of a community. Local initiatives such as the publication of devotional books could help to stimulate the attraction of pilgrims by writing about the miracles that had occurred at a certain shrine.⁷⁵ It can be expected that both the cult of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk and the cult of St. Rombout were so successful partly because of the miracles that were associated with them. The purpose of this chapter is, however, to show the major difference between the two cults with regards to their miraculous efficacy. The Miraculous Statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk was known, as the name also suggests, for her miracles. Yet there are almost no stories about miracles associated with the relics of St. Rombout. This raises the question how important the efficacy of an object of devotion was for the success of a cult. I will start this chapter with an analysis of the miracles that occurred in association with the statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk. By analysing the many stories that were recorded in the miracle books by Petrus Croon (1670) and Petrus Siré (1738) I can detect patterns in the type of miracles, the type of devotees and the periods in which the most miracles occurred. The stories from the miracle books show that it was not only individuals who stated that they were helped by Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk, but that she was also known to intercede with God to protect the city from bad weather and the plague. The collective pleas that were made to the Virgin were usually accompanied by a procession in which the Miraculous Statue was carried around the city. The way these processions were staged and interpreted will also be discussed in this part of the chapter. Secondly I will explore the cult of St. Rombout. Why was this cult still popular when people did not, or did but without success, ask the saint to intercede for them? Which needs did this cult met? Just like the statue of the Virgin, the reliquary of St. Rombout was carried around in a procession at least two times a year. What was the purpose of these processions if not to ask the saint for intercession?

A Miraculous Statue

The attraction of the cult of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk can possibly be attributed to the miracles that have occurred in association with her statue. The first miracle that was known of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk concerned the way she chose her place of worship. According to legend, a ship

⁷³ W. Giraldo, *Duizend jaar mirakels in Vlaanderen: een volkskundige benadering* (Brugge 1995) 131.

⁷⁴ C. Harline, *Miracles at the Jesus Oak: Histories of the Supernatural in Reformation Europe* (Yale 2011) 14, 57 and 97.

⁷⁵ Giraldo, *Duizend jaar mirakels in Vlaanderen*, 5.

full of cargo passed the city of Mechelen in 988 and suddenly could not sail any further than the hamlet of Hanswijk. The crew of the ship tried everything, but it would not move. Only when the cargo of the ship was searched, people found a statue of the Virgin. The statue was put on the riverbanks and immediately the ship was able to continue its journey. People believed that the Virgin had shown with this miracle that she wanted to be worshipped in Hanswijk. The small hamlet soon became a place of pilgrimage when people heard of more miracles that happened in Hanswijk.⁷⁶ These miracles continued to occur, not only during the Middle Ages, but also in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Many of them were, however, not officially recognized by religious authorities. Only two miracles were confirmed after 1585, the above-mentioned miracle of the healing of Barbara van Gysele, confirmed in 1595, and the healing of another Barbara, Barbara van den Berge in 1594. This Barbara suffered from oedema, but was cured twice when she prayed to the statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk.⁷⁷

According to the miracle books of Petrus Croon and Petrus Siré there were at least twenty-three other miracles that occurred in association with the statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk from 1585 until the end of the eighteenth century. Croon offers the disclaimer in his book that even though he only discusses a handful of miracles, he knew there were many more. Some of them were, however, not physical, but spiritual: 'how many (I say) of such generousities were dealt and donated to the soul! Beyond doubt much more than to the body: because God Almighty first and rather grants spiritual and eternal gifts than physical and perishable ones.'⁷⁸ Yet Croon admits that he did not include some accounts 'either because the people themselves have not spoken about it, or because they who did tell such [stories], looked strange and suspicious because of their appearance and not too trustworthy.'⁷⁹ From these twenty-five miracles, eighteen concerned women or children. In just seven cases the miracle concerned a man who was asking for help of the Virgin. This can be explained by the general reputation of the Virgin. She was the most famous female saint within Christianity, known for her sinlessness, fertility and motherhood. Who else was better suited to hear

⁷⁶ Croon, *Historie*, 10-14. Croon has based his account on J.B. Gramaye, *Historiae et Antiquitatum urbis et Provinciae Mechliniensis*, translated by P. de Nielis (Mechelen 1667) 70 and A. Wichmans, *Brabantia Mariana* 3 (Antwerp 1632) chapter 69. All three sources do not mention the year the statue arrived in Mechelen. Later sources such as Siré and Delfaille, set the year at 988 and base this on a written account that Willem Cool gave to archbishop Creusen. See P.Siré, *Hanswyck* (Dendermonde 1738) 13 and F.E. Delafaille, *Geschiedenis van Hanswyck te Mechelen* (Mechelen 1861) 23.

⁷⁷ Siré, *Hanswyck*, 248-251.

⁷⁸ 'hoe veele (segg' ick) dus-danige weldaden naer de ziele, syn hier ut-gedeelt ende geschonken geweest! Buyten twyffel, veel meer, dan naer den lighaem: om dat Godt Almachtigh eer ende liever geestelijcke ende eeuwige, dan lighaemelijcke en verganckelijckke jonsten is verleende.' Croon, *Historie*, 155.

⁷⁹ 'tsy omdat de Persoonen selve die niet en hebben te kennen gegeven, oft om dat de gene, die sulcke vertelden, vrent ende, door het ut-wendigh gelaet verdacht, ende niet al te gelooff-weirdigh en schenen te syn.' Ibidem 206.

the prayers of infertile women or mothers whose children were suffering?⁸⁰ Another interesting issue that can be deduced from the accounts of the miracles is that at least eight of the people who experienced a miracle lived in Mechelen. In eleven cases it is unknown where the person lived, but the stories give the impressions that they were locals. From five people it was known that they came from outside of the city. The cult of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk was mostly a local cult, yet her miracles were also known in other places of the Southern and Northern Netherlands.

Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk not only interceded with God for individual believers who came to the Hanswijkchurch to donate ex-votos, attended Mass or prayed to her, she was also believed to do so for the whole community. People went to the statue of the Virgin when the city was tormented by bad weather and diseases. Especially when crops were threatened to be spoiled by the weather or when the houses in the city flooded because of rain, the Miraculous Statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk was carried in procession from the Hanswijkkerk to the St. Romboutkathedraal. The statue stayed there for several days during which many Masses were held and people could donate offerings. Croon writes that in the seventeenth century these processions were initiated by different people: 'These processions often occurred at the request of the Archbishop and the chapter of the St. Rombouts, yet even more often at the demand of the magistrate, and the general wish of the citizens.'⁸¹

From another source, a city chronicle written by notary Wendricx from the Ravenbergstraat (ca. 1776) we learn that this type of procession was also held at the beginning of the eighteenth century. On the twenty-sixth of April 1739 Wendricx writes:

'The 26th of April Because of the abundant rain and cold weather, which had more than spoiled the crops, the Miraculous Statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk was carried in procession by the great chapter of the cathedral and the clergy and the five guilds from the Hanswijk to the St. Romboutskathedraal at half past five in the evening to ask for the intercession of the Holy Mother to ask her son that the everlasting rain might be made to cease.'⁸²

⁸⁰ Harline, *Miracles at the Jesus Oak*, 57.

⁸¹ 'Dese processien geschieden dickmaels ten versoeke vanden Arts-bischop ende het Capittel van S. Rombauts, maer noch meer-maels door het aenhouden vande Heeren van het Magistraet, ende de algemeene begeirte der Borgerye'. Croon, *Historie*, 79-80.

⁸² 'Den 26 april door de abundante regens ende coudt weder soo dat de vrucht der aerde meer als bedorven waren, is het Miraculeus Beldt van onse L.V. Van hanswyck door het groot capittel van de Metropolitaen ende de clerigien ende de vijf gilden processie gewijs van hanswyck gedragen naer middagh ten half ure sesse naer St. Rombouts Kercke; om alsoo door de voorspraeke van de h. Moeder haeren sone te versoecen dat de continuele regens soude komen op te houden.' SAM, Kopie naar de geschreven Cronijcke van notaris Wendrickx, uit de Ravenbergstraat (ca. 1796) inv.nr. V 360, fol. 10.

The chronicle of notary Wendricx mentions three occasions between 1733 and 1750 on which one or more processions went out with the Miraculous Statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk, in the hope of changing the weather. From these three occasions, the month of May 1740 is described in most details. On the second day of this month it had been raining and snowing ‘as much as the sky was able to give.’⁸³ The following day the city suffered from hailstorm and rain, as if it were December or January. The bad weather had spoiled the crops which immediately led to higher prices for basic foods. Everything cost more than half as much as usual. It was therefore decided to hold a procession with the Miraculous Statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk to the St. Romboutskathedraal on 4 May. The five religious orders, the five guilds and many citizens participated in this procession. When the procession arrived in the cathedral it was so crowded that nobody could either enter or leave the building. The statue stayed in the cathedral until 26 May. On each day a service was held to honor the Virgin.⁸⁴ On 10 May the magistrate was asked to held a service by the chapter of the St. Romboutskathedraal. The chapter had also invited the students of the seminary and the school for girls to be present. Yet the weather still did not change. Each day from 11 until 23 of May there was a procession made by a different religious order to the cathedral. Each order held a Mass, but without avail; there was now so much water in the city ‘that many streets, houses, cellars, floors and rooms were flooded, making it impossible for people to enter or leave their houses.’⁸⁵ On 24 May the weather was finally getting better. To thank the Virgin for her help, one last Mass was held on the twenty-fifth. The next day the Miraculous Statue of Our Dear Lady was brought back in procession to the Hanswijkchurch by the five guilds.⁸⁶

The above-mentioned processions were held often during the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth century, yet after 1750 there is no mention of them. Why did they stop? The second half of the eighteenth century still had many periods of bad weather and high prices. In January 1776 it was so cold that some people froze to death.⁸⁷ Yet there was no procession. Could it be that people no longer believed that the Virgin could intercede with God in the hopes of changing weather? Or was it just the elite that tried to rid the cult of the Virgin from superstitious elements? The end of the eighteenth century, as the last chapter of this thesis will show, saw the rising of a new skepticism with regards to the efficacy of holy objects. This might explain why people, or at

⁸³ 'al wat den hemel conde geven'. SAM, Wendricx, fol. 13.

⁸⁴ Ibidem fol. 13.

⁸⁵ 'datter vele straeten, huijsen, kelders, vloeren ende camers van het water onder stonden dat de menschen in ofte uijt hunne huise conde gaen'. Ibidem fol. 17.

⁸⁶ Ibidem fol. 19.

⁸⁷ Ibidem fol. 78.

least the members of the elite who usually initiated the processions, were less inclined to ask the Virgin to intercede with God during periods of bad weather. The popularity of the Miraculous Statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk can therefore not only be explained by the miracles that occurred in association with her statue. Just as the cult of St. Rombout, her popularity also depended on other needs she served, processions being one of them.

In the Late Middle Ages it was believed that religious rituals were crucial for a good relationship between God and a person. This relationship was a precondition for God to help people in their life on earth and in their afterlife.⁸⁸ This was not only applicable to the relationship between God and an individual, but also between God and the community. For the prosperity and the spiritual health of a city, this relationship had to be constantly reinforced by public rituals. These rituals were often performed by lay people, especially the elite. Processions are a perfect example of these type of public rituals. As we have seen above, they were often organized by the city government, who also played a major role during the ceremonies. Guilds, crafts, the magistrate and various religious orders all participated in processions, each fulfilling their own important function.⁸⁹ Mervyn James describes in his article 'Ritual, Drama and the Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town' (1983) how the different roles that are played within a procession represent the social hierarchy of the city. Studying the Corpus Christi procession in the fifteenth century he notices a parallel between the way the community acts as a social body and an actual physical body. Just as a physical body, the social body was made out of different parts that each fulfilled their own function. The different parts interacted with each other and even while some parts are more important than other parts, it was only possible to be completely healthy when all parts were functioning well. Just as an actual body the social body could get sick, for example when the sins of its members led to plagues that tormented the whole city.⁹⁰ In a procession the whole social body of the city participated. It reaffirmed the strength of the body and also the social hierarchy within the city. The order in which the different participants proceeded, was determined by their status. Humbler crafts walked in front of the wealthier ones, followed by the least important religious orders, the most important ones, the governmental representatives and the archbishop. They symbolized the 'head' of the body; its most important part. The more important a group or person was, the closer he could walk next to the sacrament, statue or relics.⁹¹ Processions were primarily performed to the in-crowd of the city: men of high status, the middle class and the clergy. Yet

⁸⁸ A. van Bruaene, *Om beters wille: Rederijkerskamers en stedelijke cultuur in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden 1400-1650* (Amsterdam 2008) 202.

⁸⁹ Bruaene, *Om beters wille*, 206.

⁹⁰ M. James, 'Ritual, Drama and the Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town', *Past & Present* 98 (1983) 7.

⁹¹ James, 'Ritual, Drama and the Social Body', 5.

women, children, the poor and even people from outside of the city came to watch the spectacle. It was common for the city government to invite other important (clerical) guests or royalty to their processions; demonstrating and reinforcing the relationships within the city and between cities.⁹² Processions not only (re)established the relationship between the city and God, but also enhanced the civic identity of the city. Miri Rubin, who also studied the Corpus Christi procession, puts more emphasis on the fact that the 'story' that was told during these processions were just one of the many interpretations of the city's identity.⁹³ Precisely because there were many interpretations, these processions were important. Moreover, Rubin disagrees with Mervyn's claim that a procession was a mirror of the society. The hierarchy that was portrayed between the different groups of the city was not as clear as it was presented. In daily life the lines between these groups were fluid. Secondly she points out that many people in the city were not represented during a procession such as women, children, the working class and servants.⁹⁴

Even though there were no processions held with the statue of the Virgin to control the weather in the second half of the eighteenth century, there was still one procession that was held each year, even until this day. This procession is held on the third day of Pentecost by the *Dalscholieren* and the citizens of Mechelen. According to Croon this procession was first held in 1272 when the statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk was still in the chapel in the hamlet of Hanswijk. At that time three major crises were tormenting the city. There was a war, a very high murder rate and a plague of rabies that infected many citizens. To ask the Virgin for help people carried the statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk to the gates of the city. They were singing and praising the Virgin and more and more people joined the procession. The guards of the gates feared that the crowd would cause chaos in the city and decided to keep the city gates closed. The procession came to stop in front of the Brusselpoort where the crowd began singing the song *Ave Maris Stella*. When they came to the verse *Monstra te esse Matrem* [show us that you are our Mother] the gate miraculously opened without the help of the guards. The procession was able to continue and the war, murders and the spread of the disease immediately stopped.⁹⁵ In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries this event was still remembered during the annual procession. On the Monday before Pentecost the statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk was carried into the middle of the Hanswijkkerk, dressed in her most beautiful robes and adorned with precious gifts. During the rest of the day people were encouraged to bring more gifts to the statue such as flowers,

⁹² Bruaene, *Om beters wille*, 208-209.

⁹³ M. Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge 1991) 248.

⁹⁴ Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 265-266.

⁹⁵ Croon, *Historie*, 74.

fruit and other ex-votos.⁹⁶ The following day started with Mass at ten in the morning. During this service the guild of the *Oude Boog* made their offerings. The same guild was responsible for carrying the statue and the holy sacrament during the procession. They were followed by the other guilds in order of importance. Each person that walked in the procession wore a vane with the image of the Virgin on it. The processions walked from the Hanswijkkerk along the city walls to the Brusselpoort to the church of Our Dear Lady of Dijle where the statue was placed in the middle of the church and hymns were sung.⁹⁷ After this the Miraculous statue was brought back to the Hanswijkkerk where another vesper was held, attracting, according to Croon, many spectators who wanted to honor the Virgin. An indulgence was awarded to everyone who had confessed, taken the sacrament, visited the Hanswijkkerk and had prayed for the ‘the unity of the Christian princes, the extermination of the heresies and the elevation of our Mother the Holy Church.’⁹⁸ The statue would stay in the middle of the church for five more days before it was placed back.

In 1738 a new tradition was started in Mechelen. This was the year in which the veneration of the Miraculous Statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk existed for 750 years. To celebrate this anniversary a special *ommegang* was organized; many wagons on which historical plays, biblical stories and mythical creatures were portrayed and performed, followed the religious procession. From this year on, every twenty-five year this cavalcade went out, the most recent one was celebrated in 2013. The procession of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk was not the only procession that was combined with this secular addition, the annual processions of St. Rombout was often combined with an *ommegang* as well.

An Inefficacious Saint?

The relics of St. Rombout were very important for many people in Mechelen. Yet there are hardly any miracles known that are associated with his relics. This part of the chapter will explore why the cult was still regarded as powerful and important, even without the miracles. According to the legend of St. Rombout, as it was recorded in the *Vita S. Rumoldi* written by Sollerius in 1718, the saint did perform some miracles during his life. When Rombout was just a child, he proved to be a very religious boy. His parents, king David of Ireland and queen Cecilia, were very pious people, for many years they prayed to have a child, and at last they had Rombout.⁹⁹ Rombout fasted three

⁹⁶ Ibidem 70.

⁹⁷ Ibidem 71.

⁹⁸ 'eendrachtigheydt der Christene Princen, uut-roeyinge der ketteryen, ende verheffinge van onse Moeder de H. Kercke'. Ibidem 72.

⁹⁹ J.B. Sollerius, *Acta S. Rumoldi episcopi et martyris apostoli et patroni Mecheliniensium* (Antwerpen 1718) 154.

days a week and followed lessons with the archbishop of Dublin since he was five years old. When he was older he succeeded bishop Walaferus and went on a pilgrimage to Rome. During this pilgrimage Rombout met many people who asked him for his help. By praying to God, Rombout was able to do so. Returning from Rome to Dublin, the bishop passed the city of Mechelen, where he met count Ado and his wife Elisa. The couple invited Rombout to stay with them. Because Elisa was unable to bear children, Rombout prayed to God for help.¹⁰⁰ His prayers were soon heard and Elisa bore a son named Libertus. Just like Rombout, Libertus proved to be a very religious child. Yet one day, when he was playing on the riverbanks of the Dijle, he slipped and fell into the water and drowned. Devastated about the loss of their only child Ado and Elisa begged Rombout to bring the boy back to life. Miraculously Libertus walked out of the river, completely dry and healthy when Rombout was praying.¹⁰¹ Ado and Elisa offered Rombout many gifts to thank him, but he declined them all. He only asked for a piece of land on which he could build a chapel in honor of St. Stephanus. Libertus was from then on his apprentice.¹⁰² Twenty years later, when this building was almost finished, Rombout learned that two of his builders were adulterers. Rombout reprimanded them, with the result that the builders decide to take revenge and kill Rombout by smashing his head with a pickax.¹⁰³ They tried to hide the body by throwing it into the water and covering it up with leaves. Yet that night some local fishermen saw a heavenly light shining from the water. When they came closer they found the body of Rombout. To honor Rombout and all he had done for Mechelen, Ado and Elisa buried him in the chapel of St. Stephanus.¹⁰⁴ In 930, almost two centuries after his death, Rombout was canonized as a saint.¹⁰⁵ The chapel of St. Stephanus was now called the chapel of St. Rombout.

There are a couple of miracles associated with St. Rombout from the first centuries after his death. There was for example a nun who was kidnapped from the chapel of St. Rombout by Vikings and held captive on their ship. The nun prayed to St. Rombout to not be taken away and miraculously the ship was unable to sail any further as long as she was held in captivity.¹⁰⁶ Another miracle happened to huntsman Herlinardus, who died after he fell of his horse during a hunt. When he was carried to the chapel of St. Rombout he miraculously came back to life. Still it is striking that there are no known miracles from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that were attributed to St. Rombout. From the legend of St. Rombout one might expect that he would become a patron

¹⁰⁰ Sollerius, *Acta S. Rumoldi*, 159.

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem* 160-161.

¹⁰² *Ibidem* 162.

¹⁰³ De Munck, *Gedenck-schriften*, 80.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem* 82.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem* 87.

¹⁰⁶ Sollerius, *Acta S. Rumoldi*, 164.

saint for infertile people, because his parents and Ado and Elisa had trouble getting children. Yet, as we have seen above, the Virgin already met this need. There are some sources that claim that the water from the well next to St. Rombouts-kathedraal was able to heal people from the flu.¹⁰⁷ I have, however, not found any stories of people who used this water or said they were healed by it.

Even though St. Rombout was not venerated because of his association with miracles, he was still very popular. This was in particular visible during the two annual processions that were held in the city. One of the processions was held on the third Sunday after Easter, and derived from a vow made by the city in 1301. In this year Mechelen was surrounded by troops of the Duke of Brabant who threatened to conquer the city because they had refused to accept him as their new lord.¹⁰⁸ To ask the saint for help, the relics of St. Rombout were brought to the Grote Markt where the citizens prayed for a good outcome of the war. The English knight and captain of the army of Mechelen Peter Dondelair asked to wear a relic of St. Rombout on his shield before he would try to defeat the troops of the enemy. He was given an rib of the saint and managed to win the battle. To thank St. Rombout for his help, the citizens of Mechelen promised to hold an annual procession in his name.¹⁰⁹ Each year, on the day before the procession, the reliquary of St. Rombout was taken from the altar and placed in the middle of the choir. At two in the afternoon a vesper was held by the archbishop while the members of the magistrate were seated on the choir, dressed in a tabard. After the vesper the reliquary of St. Rombout was carried in procession to the middle of the cathedral by the pastors and canons of the other churches in the city, followed by the archbishop and the magistrate, while psalms were sung. The following day, the day of the procession, the ceremonies started at a quarter to six in the morning with the liturgy of hours. At half past seven the magistrate took their place on the choir while Mass was held. Afterwards the archbishop had breakfast at his palace and the magistrate at the city hall.¹¹⁰ At nine o'clock the five crafts, the five guilds and the religious orders came to the cathedral. Outside the cathedral, on the graveyard, the oldest secretary of the city and the oldest boy of the treasurer called out the order of the crafts and guilds for the procession. As I have discussed above, this order was a representation of the hierarchy of the crafts and guilds in the city. The religious orders, who all participated in the procession of St. Rombout, also walked in an established order. At ten o'clock the procession started; while songs were sung the religious orders walked out of the cathedral. First came the canons of the church of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk, followed by the chapter of Our Dear Lady of the Dijle, the chapter of the cathedral,

¹⁰⁷ E. van Autenboer, H. Verstrepen, H. Vlieghe, 'Een grondige katholieke restauratie', in: R. Uytven (ed.), *De Geschiedenis van Mechelen: van Heerlijkheid tot Stadsgewest* (Houten 1995) 166.

¹⁰⁸ De Munck, *Gedenck-schriften*, 168.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem* 171-173.

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem* 194.

the reliquary of St Rombout, the archbishop and finally the magistrate. According to the hierarchy analysis of Mervyn the magistrate was walking in the most important place, giving the message that were the most important participants of the procession. Outside of the cathedral they joined the procession of the crafts and guilds.¹¹¹ The reliquary was carried by the chaplains of the cathedral, pastors of the other churches, confessors of the Great Beguinage, three members of the oratory and four members of the seminary. During the procession, which proceeded from the cathedral to the city walls and covered it all around, the corporations that carried the reliquary constantly changed, according to an established order; first the Franciscans, followed by the Augustinians, the cantors, eleven other combinations of members of different crafts, the chapter of Our Dear Lady of the Dijle, the Capuchins and the Dominicans. Finally the first group who carried the reliquary took over the precious object and carried it back to the cathedral. Each group that carried the reliquary was obliged to hold a white staff.¹¹² By walking the entire route of the city walls, the procession symbolically claimed the whole space that lay within it, showing everyone that St. Rombout was the protector of the city. The passing of the reliquary, moreover, showed how everyone wanted to be connected to the saint. Interestingly the members of the convent of Hanswijk did not carry the reliquary once. Could this be because they already had their own annual procession? Another group of who we would expect that they participated in the procession was the confraternity of St. Rombout. Most studies on processions show that confraternities played an important role during these events.¹¹³ They are, however, not mentioned in the accounts on the processions of St. Rombout.

The procession of St. Rombout ended around one o'clock. Three hours later there was one final vesper during which the magistrate sat in the choir. Afterwards the reliquary was carried to the choir. The following day there was a special Mass to honor the people who had died in 1580 when the city was conquered by the Calvinists.¹¹⁴ This made the procession not only a remembrance of the siege of 1301, but also one that kept the memory of the Calvinist past alive. By remembering this period it showed the spectators their local identity; who they were, what they stood for, who the enemy was, and how Catholicism had survived. The bond between St. Rombout and the city was also reinforced. He had saved them twice. Every year this message was emphasized and reinforced.

Commemorative processions were held all over Europe. To underline the importance of the events in the past the processions were usually accompanied by sermons, plays and publications

¹¹¹ Ibidem 195.

¹¹² Ibidem 196-197.

¹¹³ See for example : Weissman, *Ritual Brotherhood in Renaissance Florence* , 54-55 and 84 and Black, *Italian Confraternities in the Sixteenth Century*, 110-111.

¹¹⁴ De Muck, *Gedenck-schriften*, 98.

that retold the events so as to remind people of their significance.¹¹⁵ During the millennial anniversary of St. Rombout these types of media were also part of the celebrations. In one of the *Ommegangen* the wagon that depicted a scene called 'The Triumph of the Church' displayed heretics that were crushed by Catholic church.¹¹⁶ Another one showed how St. Rombout converted heathens in Mechelen.¹¹⁷ Both examples added to the narrative that was conveyed during the procession; the Catholic faith will triumph. This was a message that appealed to more people. Stakeholders saw the possibility to participate in the processions and profit from the message it conveyed.¹¹⁸ In 1680, for example, during the nine-hundredth anniversary of St. Rombout multiple arches were erected to commemorate certain aspects of St. Rombouts life. On the Korenmarkt there was an arch that depicted Rombout saving the city in 1301, putting emphasis on this important event. The arch that was erected on the main square, de Grote Markt, depicted Rombout promising Ado and Elisa their son. This was a well-known part of the legend of St. Rombout. According to this arch, however, Rombout also promised Ado a legacy of strong lords of Mechelen who would all exalt in piety and military strength.¹¹⁹ In this way the rulers of Mechelen were connected to the local legend of St. Rombout and simultaneously their power was presented as being installed and supported by God.

Another procession that was held every year to honor St. Rombout is even older than the one described above. It is unknown when this procession originated, but according to De Munck it was already an established tradition in 1377.¹²⁰ The reliquary of St. Rombout was not the only holy object that was carried around in this procession, the Sacrament was part of it as well. This procession was held on the first Sunday of July. It followed the same route as the procession of the third Sunday after Easter yet instead of white staffs the carriers of the reliquary held a red staff with yellow stripes. The day after the procession a special Mass was dedicated to the members of the confraternity of St. Rombout who had passed away during the last year.¹²¹ This procession was therefore slightly less important for the collective civic identity of Mechelen. It was, however, an important ceremony for the confraternity. The fourth chapter of this thesis shall discuss the importance of these types of religious groups for the success of the cults.

¹¹⁵ Pollmann, *Memory in Early Modern Europe 1500-1800*, 97.

¹¹⁶ Stevaert, *Ommeganck van 1714: zeer stichtende bemerkningen uitgegeven door den Eerw. Heer Stevaert, pastoor op 't Groot Begghynhof te Mechelen* (Mechelen 1714).

¹¹⁷ *Negen-hondert-jaerigh Jubilé-vreught bewegen in de stadt Mechelen ter oorsaecke van de feest van den H. Rumoldus bisschop, martelaer, grooten apostel ende patroon der selve stadt* (Mechelen 1680) 3.

¹¹⁸ Pollmann, *Memory in Early Modern Europe 1500-1800*, 96.

¹¹⁹ *Negen-hondert-jaerigh Jubilé-vreught*, 5.

¹²⁰ De Munck, *Gedenck-schriften*, 208.

¹²¹ *Ibidem* 212.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the success of the cult of St. Rombout can not be explained by his association with miracles. The cult was, however, very important for the civic identity of Mechelen. St. Rombout was seen as the founder and protector of the city. This image was continuously affirmed and reinforced during his annual processions. They were a means of showing the city what the social hierarchy was and which stories were important to remember. The secular *Ommegang* that followed the procession also played a major part in this. Processions also evolved with time, for example by ending the annual procession with a remembrance of the people who had died during the English Fury in 1580. This also made the procession highly political. The cult of St. Rombout helped the citizens of Mechelen to feel connected with their ancestors and their ideals and legitimated the political and social hierarchy in the city. The fact that the cult of St. Rombout was so different from the cult of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk with regard to their association with miracles helps to explain why there was no competition between the two cults. The cults performed a different role in society. They had different rituals, met different needs and had a different audience of devotees. Even though the cult of St. Rombout had more civic elements this did not mean that the cult of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk was not important for the construction of a civic identity in Mechelen. The procession with the statue of the Virgin in times of bad weather was often an initiative from the citizens of Mechelen and was joined by many religious orders. It brought everyone together. Moreover, the statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk was carried to the St. Romboutskathedraal during these type of processions, connecting the two places and acknowledging the importance of the Virgin for the city. Both cults were very important for the functioning of the city, which explains why they were both successful.

Chapter 3: Materiality

When provost Martinus Raso fled from the convent of Hanswijk in 1580 with the other members of the order and the Miraculous Statue of the Virgin inside the city walls of Mechelen, they took refuge in a small home that belonged to the convent. After the five years of Calvinist rule the city granted the order a small church to house the statue of the Virgin.¹²² This church was, however, in a very bad condition and it did not take long until the members of the order started dreaming of a new church, one that was worthy of the magnificence of the statue that it had to protect.¹²³ More than fifty years later, provost Guilielmus Cool finally had the opportunity to start the building of a new church. His predecessor Prosper Revieren had already acquired the land and paid off the convent's last debts.¹²⁴ Yet the convent still did not have enough money to buy the materials and pay for the laborers to start the actual building process. That is why, the story goes in the devotional work of Croon, provost Cool prayed to God and the Virgin that the inhabitants of Mechelen would find the desire in their hearts to contribute to the building of the church. Miraculously more than one hundred thousand people started donating to the convent. Not only the nobles and the rich, but also the poor and even people from outside Mechelen donated large amounts of money. Especially the women of Mechelen showed their piety and devotion by selling their precious jewels, a gesture that is praised in all the devotional works on Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk.¹²⁵ Soon there was enough money to start building the church. On 10 May 1663 Archbishop Andreas Creusen laid the first stone.

The building of the Hanswijkkerk was the beginning of a new phase for the cult of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk. Almost a century after the flight of the members from the convent in Hanswijk to Mechelen the cult started to bloom again. The fact that the citizens of Mechelen played such a major role in reviving the cult is striking. The next chapter will discuss the stakeholders of both cults to see who these people were and why they wanted to support the cult of the Virgin. This chapter will discuss another important element for the success of a cult, namely that of materiality. Materiality affected the success of cults in many ways. Without a church the statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk did not have the proper setting for people to perform their rituals. Without a reliquary the relics of St. Rombout could not be carried around during processions. The fact that

¹²² Croon, *Historie*, 41.

¹²³ *Ibidem* 89.

¹²⁴ *Ibidem* 104.

¹²⁵ *Ibidem* 126-132.

both objects of devotion were actual objects and not just systems of belief makes an analysis of their material necessary to understand the complexity of the cults.

I will start this chapter with an examination of the reliquaries in which the remains of St. Rombout were housed since the fourteenth century. I will analyze the symbolic ways in which these materials communicated with the believers about the bones they contained. Moreover, I will show that the believe in the authenticity of the remains of the saint was crucial for the success of the cult. The second part of this chapter will study the gifts that were given to the statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk. As we have seen above, the willingness of people to invest in this cult was crucial for its success. Without the support of the citizens of Mechelen the construction of a new church for Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk would not have been possible. I will look at the different types of materials that were gifted and the reasons behind this practice. I will furthermore discuss the importance of efficacy within this cult. Unlike the cult of St. Rombout, the cult of the Miraculous Statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk was not dependent on the question of whether she was real, but whether the Virgin was working through the statue. The statue was only a representation of the historical Mary. The efficacy of the statue was, however, as this chapter will show, also communicated through its material, especially in the way the statue was dressed. Finally I will reflect on the complexity of the veneration of (holy) material within Christianity. The introduction of this thesis has already shown that this was a topic that was heavily discussed during the Counter-Reformation. By analyzing the devotional works of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk and St. Rombout, written in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, I will show how the veneration of these material objects was described and how this changed overtime. This will give insight in the development of material veneration throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

St. Rombout and the matter of authenticity

Just as in the Middle Ages, people in the seventeenth century only associated the actual remains of a saint with miracles.¹²⁶ Venerating profane objects was considered idolatrous. It was therefore crucial for the success of a cult that people believed that the venerated object was authentic. The question of whether an object was truly authentic was not only answered through its efficacy to work miracles, but also through its materiality. The authenticity of relics was for example judged by the reliquaries in which the relics were kept. Not only were reliquaries the most visible part of a relic, they were often also the only visible part for the public.¹²⁷ The actual remains of the saints were

¹²⁶ People also considered objects that had touched a relic, so-called contact relics, as authentic. See: Walsham, 'Introduction: Relics and Remains', 11.

¹²⁷ C. Hahn, 'What Do Reliquaries Do for Relics?', *Numen* 57 (2010) 3/4, 287.

usually mere dust and bones and could on their own even be regarded as repulsive or null and void.¹²⁸ In the article 'What do reliquaries do for relics?' (2010) Cynthia Hahn explains how the reliquary speaks to the public through its materiality and design and how it conveys a message about the significance, authenticity and the meaning of the relics it contains.¹²⁹ According to Hahn, reliquaries mediate between relics and the audience. They teach the audience how the relics are supposed to be perceived and treated.¹³⁰ Examining the reliquaries in which the relics of St. Rombout have been kept since the fourteenth century can therefore give us insight in the significance and meaning of the cult for the inhabitants of Mechelen.

To structure this examination I will analyze the reliquaries of St. Rombout on two levels. First I will look at the material of which the reliquaries are made. The type of material that is used says something about the prestige of an object. The more precious the material, the more honor and veneration it elicits.¹³¹ Moreover, some type of material had a specific symbolic meaning. Gold, gems and crystal, for example, were used for their biblical associations with heaven. Gems and stones reflected light which made it look as if there was a heavenly light inside the reliquary. Gold was seen as a pure material that was unchangeable and not prone to contamination, which was meant to remind the viewer of heaven's freedom of sin and God's unchangeable nature. In iconography everything that belonged to God was depicted in gold.¹³² A reliquary studded with gems, stones and golden pieces conveyed the message that the contents of the reliquary were holy and belonged to the heavenly realm. Secondly I will look at the material elements of the reliquaries that provide the object with a narrative and context. The depictions on a reliquary can refer to many elements of the cult. A reliquary can depict the life of the saint, the miracles the saint had worked, the way the saint had died or even the way the saint was now living in heaven. These stories were easy to read for the public and could arouse their interest in the cult.¹³³ By depicting only certain elements, the way a cult was perceived could change with each different reliquary.

The relics of St Rombout were kept in a reliquary since the beginning of the fourteenth century. There are no details known about the earliest reliquary except for the fact that it was probably not very luxurious. In 1366 the weaver-gilds donated a large amount of gold and silver to be able to enhance the quality of this reliquary.¹³⁴ According to historian Remmerus Valerius, the

¹²⁸ Hahn, 'What Do Reliquaries Do for Relics?', 307.

¹²⁹ Ibidem 291.

¹³⁰ Ibidem.

¹³¹ Ibidem.

¹³² /www.heiligen.net/wb/symboolgoud.php (November 2017) and BijbelArchief, 'Goud, wierook en mirre' (version unknown), <http://www.bijbelarchief.nl/default.asp?id=1472> (November 2017).

¹³³ Hahn, 'What do Reliquaries do for Relics?' 301.

¹³⁴ Valerius, *Chronycke van Mechelen*, 18.

weavers had also enhanced the worth of the reliquary to 66.000 guilders.¹³⁵ This reliquary became in use in 1369.¹³⁶ Jesuit Joannes Baptista Sollerius (1669-1740), who wrote a hagiography of St. Rombout in 1718 added a drawing of this reliquary in his book.¹³⁷

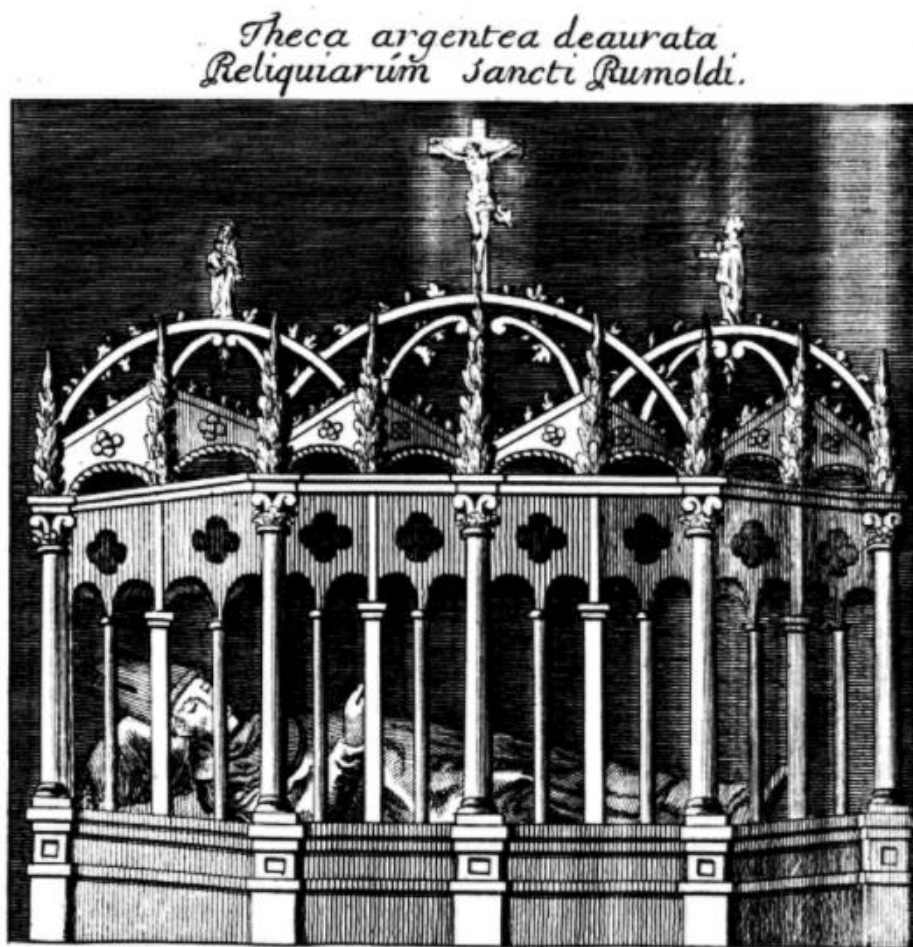


Figure 1: Reliquary of St. Rombout in 1369, according to J.B. Sollerius

From this drawing it is impossible to tell what type of materials were used. From the accounts of the city council we only know that silver and gold were used, so it must have been a valuable object. The reliquary depicts St. Rombout lying in a crown-shaped tomb. On top of the crown are three small statues that depict the Virgin holding baby Jesus, Christ on the cross and an unknown figure holding out its arms. Could this be St. Rombout as well? The drawing is not detailed enough to be

¹³⁵ Valerius, *Chronycke van Mechelen*, 18.

¹³⁶ Sint Romboutskathedraal, 'Het Reliekschrijn van Sint-Rumoldus' (version unknown), <https://www.kathedraalmechelen.be/gemeenschap/de-gilde-der-schrijndragers/het-reliekschrijn-van-sint-rumoldus> (November 2017).

¹³⁷ Sollerius, *Acta S. Rumoldi*, 42. Sollerius was most likely inspired by one of the 25 paintings by Colijn de Coter from c. 1500 that hung in the St. Romboutskathedraal and depicted the life of St. Rombout. Five of these paintings depict a similar reliquary. See for these paintings: www.regionalebeeldbank.be and search for 'De Coter'.

certain. We can see, however, that this reliquary emphasizes the death of St. Rombout. By shaping his tomb like a crown, the viewer knows that even though the saint died, he is now living in the kingdom of God, just like the Virgin and Christ himself. In 1578 this reliquary was melted and sold to improve the fortification of the city and to pay off its debts.¹³⁸ Two years before the city had signed the The Pacification of Gent. This alliance with the States General, had committed the city to contribute to the cost of the rebellion. The relics were moved to a simple wooden reliquary with gilded frames.¹³⁹ The decision to sell the reliquary of St. Rombout is striking and tells us something about the popularity of the cult at the time. The new alliance was more important than the local cult of St. Rombout. The saint's remains had to make do with a simple wooden box. Half a century later, archbishop Johannes Wachtendonck (1592-1668) wrote about this event with shame 'The same reliquary was, in the following troubling times, oh how unfortunate!, sold with great devastation of the citizens: and it taught them publicly how void religious virtues are in times of war.'¹⁴⁰ When the Calvinist troops raided Mechelen in 1580 it was this sober reliquary that they destroyed. In 1585, when the relics were recollected from the people that had hidden them in their homes, they were once again sealed by the archbishop and put in a reliquary. There are no accounts about the design and material of this reliquary, but it can be expected that it was a sober reliquary as well. Mechelen, recovering from decades of disruption, needed money to repair all the destroyed buildings and sanctuaries. To make up for this poor reliquary the city magistrate bought a golden blanket in 1591 to cover the reliquary during processions.¹⁴¹

It was only in 1616 that plans were made to create a new reliquary. De Munck writes that the people of Mechelen wanted to follow the example of their ancestors by donating money to create a beautiful silver reliquary.¹⁴² One year later the city magistrate officially asked the archdukes Albert and Isabella to donate money to support this wish. Archbishop Hovius also contributed three-thousand guilders on the condition that only clerics should carry the reliquary during processions.¹⁴³ This is an indication that previously also lay people had carried the reliquary. As we will see, they continued to do so in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries.

¹³⁸ De Munck, *Gedenck-schriften*, 219.

¹³⁹ Ibidem 224.

¹⁴⁰ 'De selve kasse werde in de naer-volghende troebele tijden, eylaes! Verkocht met groote droefheydt vande Borghers: ende leerde openbaerlijck hoe luttel saligheydts in't oorloghen ghelegghen is'. J.V. van Wachtendonck, *Het Leven, 't Lyden ende Mirakelen vanden H. Romboudt, Artsch-Bisschop van Dublin, Apostel ende Martelaer van Mechelen*, translated by Francois vanden Bossche (Mechelen 1639) 76.

¹⁴¹ De Munck, *Gedenck-schriften*, 224.

¹⁴² Ibidem 225.

¹⁴³ Ibidem 227.



Figure 2: Reliquary of St. Rombout in 1616, according to J.B. Sollerius

The aforementioned Sollerius has also added a drawing of this reliquary in his hagiography of St. Rombout (1718).¹⁴⁴ The reliquary, that was made mainly out of silver, was shaped like an altar. It was visible in one glance that this structure had holy contents. The panels on the reliquary depicted scenes from the life and death of St. Rombout. In the center we can see the saint depicted as a bishop with a halo. The top of the reliquary is ornamented with angels, cornucopias and a laurel crown. Just as the reliquary from the fourteenth century, this reliquary conveyed the message that

¹⁴⁴ Sollerius, *Acta S. Rumoldi*, 47.

St. Rombout was truly a saint, living in heaven. This reliquary, however, put more emphasis on the life of the saint than on his afterlife. The growing popularity of the lives of saints in the seventeenth century is confirmed by the increasing number of studies that were published on saints lives in this period. The next chapter will discuss this phenomenon in more depth.

This reliquary was used until the end of the eighteenth century. There were, however, two extra reliquaries made for processions on two special occasions. In 1631 archbishop Boonen was gifted a part of the skull of St. Libertus, a student of St. Rombout, from the abbot Hubertus Uytendael of the abbey of St. Truiden. To celebrate the acquisition of this relic, Boonen commissioned two reliquaries shaped as a head from silver and gilded copper, one was designed to keep the relic of St. Libertus and the other for some relics of St. Rombout. The bust of St. Libertus depicted him as a knight and the other bust depicted St. Rombout as a bishop.¹⁴⁵ On holy days they were displayed together on the altar and they were carried around in multiple processions throughout the year. As we have seen above, the reliquaries that were used to house the relics of St. Rombout were box-shaped and adorned with precious materials and symbolic elements like crowns and angels. These bust reliquaries, however, looked very different. They depicted a specific body part and represented the saints in their earthly functions. Yet Libertus had never been a knight during his lifetime, so what could be the reason to depict him in this way?¹⁴⁶ Cynthia Hahn maintains in her article 'The Voices of Saints' (1997) that reliquaries shaped as certain body parts usually did not contain that specific body part. Each type of body-part-shaped reliquary did, however, convey a specific meaning. The arm, for example, represented the blessing function of a saint. With this in mind, I believe that the purpose of these busts of St. Libertus and St. Rombout was to underline the hierarchy between the two saints, depicting the one as a bishop and the other as a knight. St. Rombout had been the teacher and protector of St. Libertus and therefore deserved more veneration. Moreover, since it was a common practice to reinforce relationships between cities by exchanging relics, the hierarchy between the cities was underlined as well.¹⁴⁷ Mechelen honored the gift of St. Truiden by carrying the relics in processions and by stimulation the cult of St. Libertus, yet it also put the city in its place; the local cult of Mechelen was more important.

In 1775, when the millennial anniversary of St. Rombout was celebrated, another special reliquary was created for the saint, specifically for his skull. Interestingly, this reliquary was not covering the skull, but showcasing it. The reliquary was shaped as a lantern and was placed on top

¹⁴⁵ De Munk, *Gedenck-schriften*, 157.

¹⁴⁶ A. Van den Akker, 'Libertus van Vlaanderen met Goswin van St.-Truiden' (November 2014), <http://www.heiligen.net/heiligen/07/14/07-14-0783-libertus.php> (November 2017).

¹⁴⁷ C. Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe*, (Cambridge 2011), 193.

of the other reliquary, under the laurel crown.¹⁴⁸ People could now actually see the remains of St. Rombout and they were encouraged to do so. De Munck mentions that people were first complaining about not being able to see the skull because it was placed too high and was partly covered with a silken ribbon.¹⁴⁹ Halfway the festivities, the lantern was opened again so the skull could be examined by doctors to verify that it really belonged to the saint. Painter Willem Jacob Herreyns was asked to make a sketch of the skull which was later sent out in print.¹⁵⁰ Afterwards the skull was put back in the lantern, but this time the clerics made sure the ribbon was not covering the skull. This proves that it was really the intention of the clerics that people could see the skull of St. Rombout; a striking break with previous traditions.¹⁵¹ It is clear that authenticity of the cult was now the main concern of the promoters of the cult. The cult of St. Rombout was no longer justified by awe inspiring reliquaries, studded with gems and symbolic elements, but by visible proof. In 1794 Mechelen was once again forced to sell its beloved reliquary. The French army had taken a group of citizens hostage and demanded 1.500.000 silver pounds for their release. Only by selling church property was the city able to meet these demands.¹⁵²

The act of giving

The object of devotion within the cult of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk was quite different from the relics of St. Rombout. The statue was a representation of the historical Mary, but it was not believed that she was the statue. Yet since there were no real remains of her body, because of her assumption into heaven, it was believed that the Virgin could work through statues to intercede on behalf of the venerator with God, just like other saints could through their relics.¹⁵³ This raises the question why some statues received more devotion than others if they were all representations of the same Virgin. Efficacy was in this case just as important as within relic veneration which was also conveyed through its material.

Wilhelm Gumpfenberg (1609-1675), a Jesuit who wrote an overview about statues of the Virgin that were associated with miracles, elaborated broadly on the materiality of these statues in his work. He even claimed that statues of the Virgin distinguished themselves from pagan statues through their materiality. Unlike pagan statues made of gold and bronze, statues of the Virgin were

¹⁴⁸ De Munck, *Gedenck-schriften*, 264.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibidem* 268.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵¹ *Ibidem* 277.

¹⁵² *Ibidem*.

¹⁵³ An exception to this were the contact relics of the Virgin such as pieces of her clothes and her breastmilk. See: Walsham, 'Introduction: Relics and Remains', 21.

usually made out of more humble material such as wood. This type of material symbolized the Virgin's virtue of humility.¹⁵⁴ Yet even though the statues of the Virgin were usually made out of relatively cheap material, they were adorned with so many precious ornaments that it seems to contradict this concept of humility. People justified this practice by saying that the adornments were acts of piety to honor the Virgin. Just like reliquaries were made out of precious materials to honor simple bones, the clothes and jewels of the statue of the Virgin honored the simple wood. The ornaments demonstrated the power of the statues, but did not rely on them to be powerful.¹⁵⁵ Paradoxically, it seems like the more adorned a statue was, the more people believed in its power.

In the Southern Netherlands, the most popular way to adorn a statue of the Virgin was by dressing her in clothes of precious material. This practice had been introduced by the Spanish rulers who started dressing their statues of the Virgin in the fourteenth century. By dressing the statue, people wanted to honor the Virgin. She was the queen of heaven and should therefore look like a real queen. Even though the statues usually depicted the Virgin in a blue cloak and garm, the clothes in which the statue was dressed were made out of more luxurious material and looked like royal gowns.¹⁵⁶ The cloak of the Virgin also had another symbolic meaning; that of protection. In iconography the Virgin was often depicted wearing a cloak under which a group of people were standing. This group of people, usually nobles and clerics, were protected by the Virgin's cloak. Symbolically this meant that the Virgin was protecting the community.¹⁵⁷ By dressing the statue of the Virgin with a cloak the statue was not only visually referring to this tradition, it also transformed the status and function of the statue to that of protector. Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk fits in with the tradition of dressed statues of the Virgin. The statue is made from wood and depicts the Virgin sitting on a throne with baby Jesus on her lap. The throne itself is not visible because she is always dressed in cone garm and cloak. Baby Jesus, who is dressed in matching clothes, holds an apple in his right hand. Both statues are painted with a light skin and red cheeks which gives them an innocent complexion. The statue is standing on a structure made of four pillars, decorated with angels in gold and bronze.

¹⁵⁴ R. Dekoninck, 'Between denial and exaltation. The materials of the miraculous images of the Virgin in the Southern Netherlands during the seventeenth century', *Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art* 62 (2013) 152.

¹⁵⁵ Dekoninck, 'Between denial and exaltation', 160 – 162.

¹⁵⁶ J.A.F. Kronenburg, *Maria's heerlijkheid in Nederland : geschiedkundige schets van de vereering der H. Maagd in ons vaderland, van de eerste tijden tot op onze dagen: deel 6* (Amsterdam 1903-1931) 23.

¹⁵⁷ I. van Zanten, *De vereering en iconografie van Maria's mantel in de Nederlanden, het ontstaan van Nederlandse Mantelmadonna's* (Scriptie Kunstgeschiedenis, Amsterdam 1999) 6-7.



Figure 3: The Statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk

Petrus Croon (1634-1682) writes in his miracle book that he has contemplated the statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk many times. He states that the Virgin has a ‘very sweet, smooth, shining and friendly blushing face’ which not only encapsulates the art of the craftsman, but also shows a heavenly power which comforts him in his heart. According to Croon it is impossible to look at the statue without feeling an extreme longing for heaven.¹⁵⁸ The materiality of the statue, especially the way the face of the Virgin is shaped by the sculptor, evokes an emotional response in Croon. Yet he believes that this emotional response is triggered by the heavenly power that is inside the statue.

¹⁵⁸ 'seer soete, glatte, blinkende ende vrindelyck-blosende tronie'. Croon, *Historie*, 16.

Material and power are for him very closely connected.

The statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk was both the object of devotion and conveyor of its efficacy. Unlike the reliquaries of St. Rombout, the statue of the Virgin was not changed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with the possible exception of some retouches with paint. The statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk fitted in with the tradition of miraculous statues because it was made out of the same material as other statues, yet the statue was distinguished from other statues through her clothes. The type of material showed the popularity of the Virgin and demonstrated how the people, who paid for these precious dresses and clothes interpreted her function and purpose. In the next part of this chapter I will discuss just how important gifts were for the popularity of cults.

Gifts that were donated to the Virgin came in all shapes and sizes. Besides the dresses, other material donated to the statue consisted of money, silver, gold, jewels, grain, paintings, candles and figures made out of wax. Each type of material had its own symbolic meaning; their gift was related to specific circumstances. Yet all the gifts had in common that they were meant to honor the Virgin. Some people made votive offerings as a gesture of gratefulness when they had recovered from an illness or when they had received a miracle, others wished for mediation between the saint and God. Moreover, the practice of making votive offerings also had a social component. It was a sign of wealth and piety. The more a person gave to the church, the more he was regarded by the community as pious person.¹⁵⁹

Offering bundles of grain and wax candles or figures were the most popular types of votive gifts. These gifts were not only cheap, they were also practical because they could be used during Mass. The way these gifts were presented often had a symbolic meaning. Wax was not only offered in the form of a candle, but could also be molded in the shape of various figures such as a feet, a head or an arm. When someone offered a certain body part in wax it was often because he hoped that this affected body part would be healed. Sometimes people did the same with figures made out of gold or silver.¹⁶⁰ In the stories about the miracles of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk the practice of using a wax body part as a votive offering is also mentioned. In 1662 a mother of a child born with a malformed arm promised to offer a waxen arm to Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk if the arm of her child would heal. Her prayers were heard and she fulfilled her promise to the Virgin.¹⁶¹ Another symbolic way of offering relatively cheap material was the offering of grain in a person's own body

¹⁵⁹ Giraldo, *Duizend jaar mirakels in Vlaanderen*, 113.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibidem* 114.

¹⁶¹ Croon, *Historie*, 180-182 and Sire, *Hanswyck*, 280-282.

weight, or to donate the corresponding amount of money.¹⁶² According to Augustin Wichmans, who wrote a book on cults of the Virgin in Brabant, this practice originated in the idea that God was the true owner of a person's body. Whenever someone offered his or her body weight in grain, he symbolically offered himself to God. In this way God's ownership of the body was acknowledged and the prayers of the donor were hopefully heard.¹⁶³

Next to a symbolic meaning, the offerings in wax, grain, money, silver and gold had a practical function. They were used by the church and were only visible for a short time. Gifts like paintings, clothes and jewels on the other hand were meant to adorn the statue or image and to stay in the public view. Paintings were usually donated to the church by people who had received a miraculous cure for an illness. The miracle was depicted on the painting and accompanied by a written testimony.¹⁶⁴ According to Croon (1670) and Siré (1738) there were three paintings like this hanging in the church of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk, each depicting a miracle that was believed to be caused by the intercession of the Virgin. All the accounts of miracles from these devotional books mention some type of votive offering in return for a miracle. There is one miracle account that shows just how crucial a votive offering could be. Croon and Siré both describe how a mother promised to offer a silver figure of a child to Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk if her own child would be cured from oedema. Miraculously the child was cured, but the mother forgot to offer the silver figure to the statue of the Virgin. Only when the child got sick again did she remember her promise. She quickly went to the church of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk to offer the figure, but to no avail; her child died.¹⁶⁵ This story illustrates the importance of material transactions between the public and the object of devotion, next to the importance of keeping promises. The Virgin was not only honored by the gifts she received, even her willingness to intercede with God depended on them.

Materiality in devotional books

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the view on the importance of materiality within religion changed continuously. This view also affected the way the materiality of cults was interpreted, approached and described. The manner in which people wrote about the materiality of the cults in different books throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, can give insight in this change. It is important to realize, however, that these texts, that gave their own interpretation of a local cult, not only described veneration practices, but also influenced the practices of the readers.

¹⁶² The amount of money that corresponded with the worth of a person's body weight in grain.

¹⁶³ Kronenburg, *Maria's Heerlijkheid in Nederland, deel 6*, 23-24.

¹⁶⁴ Giraldo, *Duizend jaar mirakels in Vlaanderen*, 123-124.

¹⁶⁵ Croon, *Historie*, 198-200 and Siré, *Hanswyck*, 297-301.

Maarten Delbeke, professor of architecture at the university of Gent, has written multiple articles on the importance of miracle books for the interpretation and veneration of local cults. He states that miracle books provided historical accounts to justify the existence and veneration of a certain cult.¹⁶⁶ As an example Delbeke uses the work of Petrus Croon (1670) about the cult of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk to show how this work legitimated the building of the new church and can explain its architecture. Delbeke's analysis gives, however, also insight in the way Croon interpreted and conveyed his view on materiality. Delbeke emphasizes Croon's statement that the spiritual agency of the statue is connected to its material surroundings. Even though the statue itself is regarded as artless, it inspires its devotees to donate gifts to her, as we have seen above.¹⁶⁷ The most striking example of this are the donations made by the people of Mechelen for the building of the new church. Croon puts even more emphasis on this event by referring to the biblical story of the Golden Calve in exodus 32.4. This time the people did not melt their jewelry to create a false idol, but to honor the Miraculous Statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk. In a poem at the end of chapter about the generousities of the citizens of Mechelen Croon writes 'Once people donated to provoke God's anger, now people donate to receive His mercy.'¹⁶⁸ For Croon materiality is inseparably connected to the efficacy of the statue. The statue inspires donations to her cult which becomes proof of her efficacy and of the piety of her devotees.

In Delbeke's analysis the miracle book of Siré (1738), written almost half a century later he emphasizes a change in the way materiality is discussed. Not only does Siré dissolve the thematic structure of Croon, he also separates the discussion of the image itself from the material surroundings of the statue such as the gifts and the church-building. The statue is no longer described as an animated entity, but 'as a representation of a higher and a remote power.'¹⁶⁹ With this last statement of Delbeke I disagree. If Siré would have believed that the statue was just a representation of a higher and a remote power, he would also have believed that every statue of the Virgin was as powerful and efficient as the one in Mechelen. Yet he devotes a 300 page book just to this specific statue, of which 180 describe miraculous events. Siré must have believed that Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk was different from other statues and deserved special attention, just as Croon believed. It is true, however, that Siré writes differently on materiality than Croon. Siré must have felt the need to defend the cult against the critique that had arisen in society once again, this time

¹⁶⁶ M. Delbeke, 'Miracle books and religious architecture in the Southern Netherlands. The case of Our Lady of Hanswijk in Mechelen', in: W. Melion, K. Enenkel and C. Brusati (eds.), *The Authority of the Word, Intersections* (Leiden 2011) 562.

¹⁶⁷ Delbeke, 'Miracle books and religious architecture in the Southern Netherlands', 571.

¹⁶⁸ 'Daer gaf men om daer mee Godts toren te verwecken: Hier geeft men, om den Heer, tot deernis te trecken.' Croon, *Historie*, 131-132.

¹⁶⁹ Delbeke, 'Miracle books and religious architecture in the Southern Netherlands', 577.

not only by Protestants, but also by enlightened thinkers. He often mentions the position of the Church with regard to the veneration of saints and their relics and statues as formulated during the Council of Trent, and starts each chapter with quotes of and references to Christian authorities to defend and reinforce his statements. Chapter four in his book is dedicated to the statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk itself and starts with a reference to the biblical passage in which it is described that Peter's shadow was able to heal the people (Acts 5, 15-16). Secondly he describes the many books that have been written on the veneration of the Virgin.¹⁷⁰ When Siré describes the statue, he does so very factually and without emotion, contrary to Croon. He furthermore mentions that the gifts that have been donated to the statue will be discussed in the sixth chapter of the second part of the book.¹⁷¹ This part is dedicated to all the practices of devotion regarding the miraculous statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk. In the first chapter of this part Siré tells his readers that the following chapters will convince the descendants of the diligence of their ancestors and will serve as an example.¹⁷² Siré is not trying to ignore the practice of donating gifts in his miracle work by discussing it in a different part of the book, he even states that he wants to convince people in the future to keep these practices of devotion alive. In the chapter that discusses the practice of donating gifts, Siré defends the practice by giving examples of offerings that are described in the Old Testament and those that are recorded in church histories.¹⁷³

When we look at the different books on the cult of St. Rombout from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the same difference in writing style and argumentation can be seen. Most of the books do, however, solely describe the life of St. Rombout and not the events that happened after his death. The book of Johannes Wachtendonck (1592-1668), published in Latin in 1637 and translated and published in Dutch a year later, is an exception. Translator Franciscus van den Bossche has added a poem to the translated publication. In this poem we can see how important materiality is in his view. He writes for example: 'The bones and dust of the saints are the trestles, supporting the prosperity of the city'.¹⁷⁴ He furthermore states that the dead bones of St. Rombout are 'the life of the city'. It seems that for Van den Bossche the actual bones of the saint were much more important than the reliquary in which they were kept. The rest of the book, written by Wachtendonck, is less specific about the bones or the reliquaries. It was probably written for a different audience. Wachtendonck had been the bishop of Namen when he wrote his book which

¹⁷⁰ Siré, *Hanswyck*, 25.

¹⁷¹ *Ibidem* 27.

¹⁷² 'sullen de naerkomelingen overtuygen, van den iever van hunne Voor-ouders ende hun tot exempel dienen'. *Ibidem* 131.

¹⁷³ *Ibidem* 172.

¹⁷⁴ 'De beenderen en 't stof der Heylighen zijn schraghen, Waer op de welvaerd wordt der steden schier gedragen'. Van Wachtendonck, *Het Leven, 't Lyden ende Mirakelen* translated by Vanden Bossche, viii.

makes it likely that he wrote for the clergy. It was therefore also written in Latin. Van den Bossche saw the need of a Dutch translation and talks directly to the non-clerical people in his poem. His style of writing is comparable with that of Croon.

In 1775 De Munck publishes his book on the cult of St. Rombout. This book is much more elaborate than all the previous books on the saint. Not only does De Munck discuss more topics in his book, he also adds many footnotes and 97 pages of 'exhibits' in which he has copied original texts on which he has based his own text. De Munck has dedicated the seventh chapter to the honors (material and immaterial) that have been paid to St. Rombout. He mentions the confraternity, the reliquaries, the medals, clocks, seals and paintings that have all been dedicated to the saint. Unlike Siré, De Munck does not defend these devotional dedications by referring to biblical passages or quoting Christian authorities. Yet in the introduction of the book he does go into more detail about his intentions for his study. He states that for centuries the Church has put much effort in drawing up the lives and deeds of the holy martyrs. He furthermore mentions all the books that have been written on the life and deeds of St. Rombout. The end of the book contains quotes from and/or copies of the sources that the Munck has used for his study in the original language so that the 'true' historians can read the texts without De Munck's interpretation.¹⁷⁵ De Munck's memorial to St. Rombout is just as much a reaction to the new enlightened critiques as Siré's miracle book on Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk. They both try to convince the reader of the legitimacy of the cult by referring to the old traditions of the Church and giving the reader the possibility to check their presented facts in others books.

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the way materiality influenced the success of the cults of St. Rombout and Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I have tried to show how materiality influenced the way the objects of both cults were presented, interpreted and criticized. Within the cult of St. Rombout, the actual material remains of the saint were presented in a luxurious reliquary which gave the relics more prestige and honor. The analysis of the different reliquaries has shown how the containers communicated with the public, especially about the authenticity of its contents. Moreover, each reliquary has given insight into the popularity of the cult. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the relics of St. Rombout were housed in four reliquaries. We see multiple shifts in the design of the reliquaries overtime. In the beginning of the seventeenth century, it was the city's main aim to provide an awe inspiring reliquary to honor their

¹⁷⁵ De Munck, *Gedenck-schriften*, Introduction.

saint, following the example of their ancestors. A century later, however, new reliquaries were made to convey a different message, that of social hierarchy and scientific proof. Each type of reliquary showed the public that the relics of St. Rombout were authentic and that the cult of the saint was legitimate. The way this message was conveyed through its material did, however, change continuously.

The cult of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk relied in many ways on the donations of gifts that were made to her statue. Not only was the Virgin honored by her gifts, they also served as a proof of the piety of the donors and the efficacy of the statue. Most offerings to the statue were made by individuals and for individual needs. An exception to this practice were the financial contributions that were made by the citizens of Mechelen during the building of the Hanswijk church. Unlike the reliquaries of St. Rombout, the statue the Virgin was not changed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It therefore seems as if the importance and interpretation of materiality was less a subject of change than the cult of St. Rombout. It is, however, striking that there are no stories of collective donations to Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk from the eighteenth century. It seems as if the importance of material within the cult of the Virgin was also at its peak in the seventeenth century.

From the comparison of the miracle books written in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries we have seen that the way materiality was discussed, changed drastically. In the seventeenth century materiality was described as being an intrinsic part of the cult. The material was inseparably connected to the saint. The authors of these devotional books wrote very emotionally about the cults. Yet in the eighteenth century this changed; material surroundings of the objects of devotion were now described in separate chapters and embedded between quotes and references from Christian authorities such as the Bible, church histories and theologians. The emotional undertone of the stories are almost completely gone. This shift in the view on materiality is striking yet also understandable. As we will see in the last chapter more clearly, the end of the eighteenth century saw an intense growth of critique on the Catholic Church and its rituals. The clergy felt obliged to react to these critiques by responding with arguments and visible proof. This also explains the development in the presentation and interpretation of the cult of St. Rombout and Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk. At the beginning of the sixteenth century the bones of St. Rombout were hidden from view in a closed reliquary, at the end of the eighteenth century the skull of the saint was publicly on display and even examined by doctors to determine its age. The books that were written in this time play into the same need of scientific proof. It is important to realize that this did not mean that materiality was no longer important within the cults or that the cults were slowly losing its popularity. If the devotees believed that the critique was fair they would not have put so much effort in a counteroffensive. The citizens of Mechelen continued the cults by attending

processions, donating gifts, celebrating holy days and publishing devotional books. They stayed true to their old saints, even when the prospect of iconoclasm threatened the city once again in 1783.

Chapter four: Stakeholders

In the morning of 26 June 1775 the bells of the St Romboutskathedraal were chiming. While the carillon was playing, the members of the regiment of Clairfait stood outside of the cathedral, holding their banners and musical instruments. At noon a carriage arrived on the Grote Markt. The musicians started playing when they saw the honored guest arrive: prince Carolus-Alexander, Duke of Lorraine and governor of the Habsburg Netherlands. Descending from the carriage, he was welcomed by the Archbishop who led him to the choir of the cathedral where a kneeling bench, made out of red velvet, was placed on which he could attend Mass. Afterwards he was blessed with the relics of St. Rombout. He was not the only important guest on this day. Three bishops from Ieper, Gent and Brugge had also come to celebrate a special occasion in Mechelen: the millennial anniversary of the cult of St. Rombout.¹⁷⁶ When Mass had ended the governor of the Habsburg Netherlands got back into his carriage, and rode the procession route to see all the beautiful decorations and arches that were put there because of the celebration. He also visited the Veemarkt where the wagons of the *Ommegang* were placed. These were made and paid for by the crafts of Mechelen.¹⁷⁷ Two days later, in the afternoon of 28 June, there was a shooting competition for the guilds of Mechelen and nearby cities. The magistrate of Mechelen had created medals to reward guilds of other towns to stimulate their participation in this competition. The medal depicted the bust of Carolus-Alexander, and on the reverse side the coat of arms of Mechelen and the coats of arms of the five guilds of the city. Over the course of fifteen days many other festivities were held in Mechelen.¹⁷⁸ A procession went out three times with the relics of St Rombout and each day Mass was said by different bishops. The archbishop granted an indulgence for forty days to everyone who visited the cathedral in the period between St. John's eve and the thirty days after that.¹⁷⁹ The ninth of July was the last day that the citizens of Mechelen could see the relics of St. Rombout. It was so crowded in the cathedral that the choir had to be protected by a military guard. Usually the relics of the saint were kept in a reliquary, but because of this special celebration the skull of St. Rombout was put in a silver lantern so people were able to actually see the relic. When the relics were put back in the reliquary each member of the magistrate was given a small piece of the velvet cushion on which the relics of the saint had rested for many years.¹⁸⁰

During the many festivities, no expenses were spared. All different kinds of people and

¹⁷⁶ De Munck, *Gedenck-schriften*, 263.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibidem* 270.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibidem* 272.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibidem* 262.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibidem* 280-283.

institutions influenced the celebrations and contributed to them. The magistrate, the guilds and the crafts paid for many of the ceremonies and participated in them. Important guests from outside the city such as the governor and the bishops from Gent, Brugge and Ieper confirmed the importance of the celebration by their attendance. The archbishop and the pope stimulated people to join the ceremonies by granting indulgences as a reward. Chambers of rhetoric joined in to perform plays and many authors seized this opportunity to publish a book about the life and deeds of the saint. Even though the main purpose of the celebration was to honor St. Rombout, many festivities during this celebration were not very religious. It is obvious that there was more at stake. Chapter two has already shown that the same was true for processions. They did not only honor the saint, but also showed the hierarchy and social relationships within the city. Each participant of the millennial anniversary of the cult of St. Rombout benefited from the celebrations in its own way. This was also true for all the other rituals and ceremonies that were held throughout the year and which, all together, constructed the cult of the saint. The people who organized these public festivities decided how they were celebrated and which elements were emphasized. Their support was therefore crucial for the success of the cult, and the cult was also crucial to their own success. This chapter will study these 'stakeholders' to see how they contributed to the success of the cult of St. Rombout and the cult of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk. What did they gain from their efforts? How was their position in the city influenced by the success of the cults? And why did they choose to emphasize certain elements while ignoring others? Looking at the role of stakeholders, as the introduction of this thesis also has shown, has been highlighted in recent studies on the success of the Counter-reformation in the Southern Netherlands. Judith Pollmann has for example shown in her book *Catholic Identity* (2011) that the people from 'the middle' contributed most to the success.¹⁸¹ Marianne Eekhout, who wrote her thesis on the materiality of the remembrance of the Dutch Revolt has also proven how important the local stakeholders of a community were to determine the success of a cult.¹⁸² By studying the stakeholders of the cult of St. Rombout and Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries I will not only study how these stakeholders contributed to the success of these cults, but also explore how their role developed in the two centuries after the counter-reformation. Did they continue to be as important as they had been in the sixteenth century? And was it the same group of people who were stakeholders for local cults? For the scope of this research I have decided to look at four groups of stakeholders in this chapter; the authors who published books about the cults, the confraternities of both cults, the high officials of the Habsburg Netherlands, and the groups in Mechelen such as the clergy, the magistrate, the guilds

¹⁸¹ Pollmann, *Catholic Identity*.

¹⁸² Eekhout, *Material Memories of the Dutch Revolt*.

and the crafts.

Authors

Even though all the rituals and ceremonies of a cult were important for the success of the cult, they were all temporary. Once a procession or a festival had ended, life in the city returned to normal. Books and other published media are an exception to this. These commemorative works could be read years after an important event and keep the memory of them alive. In this paragraph I will analyse the books that were published about St. Rombout and Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk and focus primarily on the authors and their background. Why did they decide to write a book about one of the cults and what was the general message of these publications? How did they contribute to the success of the cult?

From the beginning of the seventeenth century publications about the cult of St. Rombout spiked. In 1638, 1639, 1662 and 1667 five works about the life of the saint were published. The authors of these books were all members of the clergy. The first book that was published in the seventeenth century was a *vita* written in Latin by Joannes Wachtendonck (1638), a deacon from the cathedral of Namur.¹⁸³ A year later a Dutch translation of this work was published by pastor Franciscus van den Bossche of Mechelen.¹⁸⁴ In 1667 this book was reprinted, with an addition of the translation of J.B. Gramaye's *Historiae et Antiquitatum urbis et Provinciae Mechliniensis* by P. de Nielis 'to enlighten and clarify the life and the miracles of St. Rombout, patron of this city'.¹⁸⁵ That the *vita* of Wachtendonck was reprinted twice is a clear sign that this book enjoyed much popularity. The 900th anniversary of St. Rombout, which was celebrated five years later in 1680, because the real anniversary collided with the Dutch War (1672-1679), proved to be an incentive for authors to publish more books on the life of St. Rombout. A theologian from the seminary of Mechelen, Augustinus Casimirus Redelius, published the book *Het leven van H. Rumoldus ende Martelaer*, a *vita* written in Dutch and dedicated it to the magistrate of Mechelen.¹⁸⁶ During the same anniversary a play was performed by the chamber of rhetoric *De Peoene* which was written by Philippus Claudius Basuel. This play was also published.¹⁸⁷ In 1718 priest and Bollandist Joannes

¹⁸³ J.V. van Wachtendonck, *Vita, passio et miracula S. Rumoldi, archiepiscopi Dublinensis, apostoli Mechliniensis, & martyris* (Mechelen 1638).

¹⁸⁴ Van Wachtendonck, *Het Leven, 't Lyden ende Mirakelen* translated by Vanden Bossche. The book was admissiomed by Alexander vander Laen, overseer of publications, see Van Wachtendonck, *Het leven*, 80.

¹⁸⁵ 'tot verlichtinge ende beter verstaenbaerheyt van het Leven ende Mirakelen van den H. Rumoldus, Patroon der selver Stadt' Gramaye, *Historiae*, translated by De Nielis. The book was admissiomed by G. Pafferode, see Gramaye, *Historiae*, translated by De Nielis, 2.

¹⁸⁶ Redelius, *Het leven van den H. Rumoldus*.

¹⁸⁷ P.C. Basuel, *Bly-eyndende-treurspel van het leven ende wondere daeden van den H. Rombout, Arts-bisschop van Dublin, Bekeerder, Martelaer, ende Voor-spreker der stadt ende provincie van Mechelen* (Mechelen 1680).

Baptista du Sollier (Sollerius) wrote as part of the *Acta Sanctorum* the book *Acta Sancti Rumoldi*, which was published individually.¹⁸⁸ The Bollandists, a group of Jesuits from the Southern Netherlands, were writing the *Acta Sanctorum* since 1643. This survey contained many hagiographies based on academic research.¹⁸⁹

The millennial anniversary of St. Rombout was another stimulation for authors to publish about the saint of Mechelen. The book *Kort Begryp van het Leven, Leyden, ende de Mirakelen van den H. Rumoldus* written in 1763 by priest and canon of the Our Dear Lady of the Dijlekerk Gerardus Dominicus de Azevedo Courtinho y Bernal, was reprinted for this occasion.¹⁹⁰ Moreover, historian and notary Joseph-Jacques de Munck (1740-1789) published *Gedenck-schriften dienende tot ophelderinge van het leven, lyden, wonderheden, ende duysent-iarige eerbewysinghe van den heyligen bisschop ende martelaer Rumoldus, apostel ende patroon van Mechelen*¹⁹¹ and I.A.F. Pauwels wrote *Fama Belgica, carmine panegyrico ebuccinans Mechliniensium gaudia, sive annum millesimum gloriosæ mortis Divi Rumoldi, etc.*¹⁹² in the same year. Of the three books two were written in Dutch, probably in the hopes of stimulating lay people and nuns to read their works as well.

The book written by De Munck is a combination of a *vita*, an account of the development of the cult and a description of the festivities during the thousand-year anniversary of the saint. This makes the book unique. Other authors were more inclined to only describe the life of the saint, but not the centuries after his death. De Munck begins his book with a passage from the Bible (Ecclesiasticus 39:13) 'The memory of him shall not depart away, and his name shall be sought from generation to generation.'¹⁹³ This quote encapsulates the purpose of the book; by describing how the cult of St. Rombout came to Mechelen and how each generation had made the cult successful and honored the saint De Munck connected the citizens of Mechelen to their ancestors. Reading how the saint had been carried around in processions since 1301, the reader is stimulated to continue this tradition. The book is part of the propaganda that stimulated the cult.

Publications on the cult of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk started later than that of St. Rombout. Petrus Croon was the first author who dedicated a complete book to the cult of the Virgin

¹⁸⁸ Sollerius, *Acta S. Rumoldi*.

¹⁸⁹ Société des Bollandistes, 'History', (version unknown), <http://www.bollandistes.org> (February 2018).

¹⁹⁰ G.D. de Azevedo Courtinho y Bernal, *Kort Begryp van het Leven, Leyden, ende de Mirakelen van den H. Rumoldus* (Mechelen 1763). Azevedo was born in Mechelen in 1712. He was the son of captain of the regiment of Zoutelande Joannes Baptista de Azevedo and Johanna Maria Corten. See for more information: SAM, J. van Balberghe, *Mechelen tijdens de regering van Jozef den tweede en in den patriottentijd. 1780-1791*, (1939) fol.32-33.

¹⁹¹ De Munck, *Gedenck-schriften*.

¹⁹² I.A.F. Pauwel, *Fama Belgica, carmine panegyrico ebuccinans Mechliniensium gaudia, sive annum millesimum gloriosæ mortis Divi Rumoldi, etc* (Mechelen 1775).

¹⁹³ 'Non recedet Memoria Eius & Nomen eius requiretur a generatione in generationem'. De Munck, *Gedenck-schriften*, ii.

of Mechelen. In *De historie van Onze Lieve Vrouw van Hanswijk* (1670) Croon described how the cult of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk originated in Mechelen and which miracles had occurred since the thirteenth century.¹⁹⁴ Priest and theologian Petrus Siré (1702-1765), who wrote his miracle book *Hanswijk ende het wonderdadigh beeldt van de alder-heylichste maget ende moeder Godts Maria, eertydts buyten, nu binnen Mechelen* in 1738, was the second author to write a book about Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk.¹⁹⁵ He diligently refers to his sources from which we learn that there were no publications on Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk that solely describe her cult before the seventeenth century.¹⁹⁶

Unlike the cult of St. Rombout, the publications about Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk did not spike during special anniversary years such as the 750th anniversary in 1738. The book of Siré was the only book that was published in this year. Siré writes that the purpose of his work was to obtain his 'reward' 'which the generous God gives abundantly to the authors who write to honor his Mother.'¹⁹⁷ Yet from the eight chapter of the second part we learn that the confraternity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (the confraternity which was connected to the Hanswijkkerk) had lost its popularity and needed a new impulse. Could it be that this work was meant to spark the popularity of the cult?

Even though the authors of many of the books discussed above give small hints of why they wrote the books, it would take too much time to describe all of them in the scope of this research. Moreover, in most cases the information about the authors themselves is too scarce to make a thorough analysis. In the following I will therefore only discuss the life and publications of one author specifically and analyse his intentions; Petrus Croon. Being the first author who wrote a complete book on the cult of Our Dear lady of Hanswijk, Petrus Croon can definitely be seen as an important stakeholder for the cult of the Virgin of Mechelen. He was born on 25 February 1643 in Mechelen. His father, Petrus Croon senior, was a notary and president of the St. Jansgilde, the largest chamber of rhetoric of Mechelen, often called the *Peoene*. Croon junior was educated at the college of the Jesuits in Mechelen and became a member of the St. Martenklooster in Leuven in 1657. This convent belonged to the order of St. Augustine and was connected to the convent of St. Trudo in Bruges. Croon worked alternately in both convents until 1674. In that year he became

¹⁹⁴ Croon dedicated his book to the magistrate. See: Croon, *Historie*, opdracht.

¹⁹⁵ Siré, *Hanswyck*.

¹⁹⁶ Siré has used different types of sources for his study such as chronicles, the archive of the Hanswijkkerk and general studies on the Virgin in the Netherlands such as Wichmans, *Brabantia Mariana* book 3, Chapter 65-69 and Philippus Berlaymont, *Het Paradys der Kinderen* (Leuven 1618), H5.

¹⁹⁷ 'den welcken de mildadigheyt Godts, aen de schryvers voor de Eere van syne Moeder, ryckelijck verleent' Siré, *Hanswyck*, xii.

prior in the St. Martenklooster. He died in 1682.¹⁹⁸

Besides living and working in a convent, Croon also wrote several books during his life. These books had a didactic function. Croon wrote in Dutch to target his audience that consisted of literate laypeople and nuns. Moreover, he often added poems in his books, in which he used metaphors as a didactic tool. In his first book *Cocus Bonus* (1663) Croon educates his readers on how to live as a good Christian by using metaphors from the household.¹⁹⁹ He compares, for example, a Christian with a bucket. Sometimes it must be used to carry dirt and other times it contains clean water. Yet whatever the bucket contains, it is a necessary object in the kitchen. Just like a bucket a Christian will face hardship and prosperity, but he should always work hard for the greater good and make himself useful.²⁰⁰ Another comparison used by Croon in this book is that of napkins and the seven sacraments. Just like the napkins, the sacraments can clean a person, no matter how greasy the meal was.²⁰¹ By using this type of recognizable metaphors, Croon's books were easy and fun to read. In the booklet *Moy-al oft vermaeckelycke Bedenckingen of verscheyde oeffeningen* (1666) Croon gives us an insight in how he sees his readers and how he hopes that they read his books: 'Because it is not always possible to be at home to crouch over smoldering ashes (this is the place where I hope that people will read my poems, to study the lessons they contain)'.²⁰² From this quote it becomes clear that Croon intended not to write for the elite, but for the common people who wished to read a book after a long day of work with the last light from the fire and educate themselves. The miracle book *Historie van Onse Lieve Vrouwe van Hanswijk* (1670) contains many elements of the other books of Croon, but it has a more specific subject and was written for a broader audience. Croon dedicated this book to the government of Mechelen. He maintained that they were responsible for the cult of the people to Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk.²⁰³ Just as in *Cocus Bonus* Croon aimed to educate his reader about the right way to live as a Christian. Croon gives three reasons for writing this book about the cult of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk. Firstly he argues that he noticed in Mechelen a cult for Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk, but could not find a devotional book dedicated to her that explained the origins of the cult. Secondly he said he wanted to honor the Virgin with this work to thank her for his own healing. When Croon was a child he had suffered from a fracture which was healed after his mother had urged him to light a candle in

¹⁹⁸ J. Muijldermans, *Pieter Croon, een Mechelse schrijver uit de XVIIe eeuw* (Gent 1906), 6-7.

¹⁹⁹ P. Croon, *Cocus Bonus*, (Mechelen 1663).

²⁰⁰ Muijldermans, *Pieter Croon*, 13.

²⁰¹ *Ibidem* 17.

²⁰² 'Maer aengesien dat het niet gelegen is altydt in huys over den aschhoop te sitten hucken (want desen is de plaetse waer ick mijne Rympjes begeire gelesen te worden, om 't sijnen tyde de onderwysinghen daer van te be-oeffenen)'. *Ibidem* 37.

²⁰³ Croon, *Historie*, 'opdracht'.

the Hanswijkkerk and pray to the statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk. Finally he hoped that the book would stimulate the Virgin to stop the plague that was threatening Mechelen.²⁰⁴ From the contents of the book itself it appears that Croon had another motive for writing the book. Two chapters focus on the life of prior Prosper van Revieren who, according to Croon, brought the convent back to its high status. Croon writes:

Now Hanswijk has a reason to say that all will be wel. Because its hardships will finally end. It will soon look very different when prosperity is coming. Now that Prosper lives here, everything will flourish.²⁰⁵

According to Croon Revieren was the prior who brought the convent and the church prosperity again. Croon's high praise for the prior can be explained by the fact that both clergymen had been members from the same convents, that of St. Martens and St. Trudo's. Could it be that Revieren was actually the one who had commissioned this work?

Croon was definitely a stakeholder for the cult of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk. Not only did he tell his readers how to honor the Virgin, he also gave a description of the history of the cult. By doing so he influenced the way people interpreted the cult and remembered it. As we have seen in the third chapter, Croon gave a very detailed description of the building of the new church. He wrote down who donated money or gifts to the builders and emphasized the piety of these donors. He stimulated readers to follow in the footsteps of these pious citizens and to continue donating to the cult. By describing the miracles that had occurred in association with the statue, even the one that he experienced himself, Croon showed how the Virgin as intercessor could help the people. Moreover, by telling the stories of how Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk chose Mechelen, first by demanding to be worshipped in Hanswijk, secondly by opening the gates in 1272 when the people of Mechelen wanted to carry the statue inside the city and third by leaving Hanswijk and receiving a new church within the city walls, Croon showed how important Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk was for the identity of the city.

All authors who wrote about the cult of St. Rombout or Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk were important stakeholders because they influenced the interpretation of the readers, not only of the current cult, but also about the history of the cult. As chapter one has already shown, what people

²⁰⁴ Ibidem 'tot den leser'.

²⁰⁵ 'Nu heeft Hanswyck emmers reden van te seggen: 'tsal wel gaen: want syn swaere swaerigheden sullen worden afgedaen, 'tsal haest ander aen-sicht toonen als den voorspoet eens begint met dat Prosper daer sal woonen, salder alles gaen voor windt' Ibidem 101.

remembered was just as important as what people forgot. Authors played an active role in the remembrance and oblivion of the past.

Confraternities

A second group of important stakeholders were the confraternities. A confraternity consisted of members who were connected by their social status or occupation. They shared a corporate identity which collectively contributed to the urban identity. Usually the members were male and part of the elite and the middle class. These organizations brought them in contact with each other and stimulated collaborations which benefited the city.²⁰⁶ Each confraternity was dedicated to a saint which gave the organizations a religious component and an influential position within a local cult. Members of a confraternity prayed for each other and helped each other out in difficult periods.²⁰⁷ They formed a close social group in which people shared an identity and felt a sense of belonging.

The confraternity of St. Rombout was set up in 1301.²⁰⁸ It derived from the same promise that was made to hold a annual procession with the relics of the saint when Mechelen was at war and surrounded by troops of the Duke of Brabant.²⁰⁹ Chapter two has shown that this event was very important for the collective identity of the city. It was part of the narrative that showed how Mechelen was protected by its saint against enemies, not only the Duke of Brabant, but also the Calvinists and other adversaries. In the first years of the confraternity of St. Rombout, both men and women could become members. Each member paid 20 *schellingen* and a pound of wax. Whenever a member was ill he got 8 *schellingen* a week. A confraternity thus also provided social security for its members. Twice a year the brothers and sisters gathered in the chapel of St. Rombout to attend Mass. On the feast day of St. Rombout the confraternity donated two torches of wax, weighing sixteen pounds each, to the chapel.²¹⁰ There are no sources that describe the development of the confraternity in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In 1618, however, the confraternity still existed or was renewed, because in that year pope Paul V granted multiple indulgences to this confraternity. Another sign that the confraternity of St. Rombout gained importance in the beginning of the seventeenth century can be derived from the fact that in 1657 archbishop Andreas Creusen became a member. His example made other important canons and members of the community follow. De Munck writes that in the eighteenth century a service was held for the members of the confraternity on the first Wednesday of the month in the St. Romboutskathedraal.

²⁰⁶ Eekhout, *Material Memories of the Dutch Revolt*, 7.

²⁰⁷ Black, *Italian Confraternities in the Sixteenth Century*, 14.

²⁰⁸ De Munck, *Gedenck-schriften*, 154.

²⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, xxv.

²¹⁰ *Ibidem* 155.

During this service the Holy Sacrament was displayed and the doors of the altar were opened so that the reliquary of St. Rombout was visible. After the service the members of the confraternity were able to kiss the reliquary.²¹¹ There are not many sources that have survived about the confraternity of St. Rombout in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The archiepiscopal archive in Mechelen contains one book in which the names of some of the members of the confraternity were recorded between 1653 and 1726.²¹² The book contains only male names so showing that at this time only men could become a member. From the number of names that are written in the book each year and the fact that none of the names reoccur, it can be concluded that only the names of new members were recorded. It is therefore impossible to make an estimation about the exact members of the confraternity of St. Rombout in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. According to historian Robert Swanson it was very common for medieval confraternities to have a cyclic pattern. They were set up in times of need, but eventually lost popularity when these needs were fulfilled. This usually happened because of the popularity of other competing confraternities. After a couple of decades the confraternity could be re-erected, sometimes with completely new rules.²¹³ This could explain why St. Rombout had a different type of members in the fourteenth century. Still it is striking that almost no sources have survived about the confraternity of St. Rombout. In chapter two we also saw that the confraternity did not participate in the annual processions of the saint. Perhaps the confraternity of St. Rombout did not play a very prominent public role in Mechelen in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This did not apply to the confraternity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the confraternity that was connected to the Hanswijkkerk. I have found no records about this confraternity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Mechelen, but fortunately the miracle books of Croon and Siré both devote some chapters about the confraternity.

Croon writes that there had been a confraternity dedicated to the Virgin in the old Hanswijkkerk. Because of the destruction of this old building all the information about the confraternity was lost. In 1631 it was therefore decided to erect another confraternity, that of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.²¹⁴ The confraternity was acknowledged and

²¹¹ Ibidem.

²¹² Aartsbisschoppelijk Archief Mechelen (AAM), Register broederschap St. Rombout, inv. Nr. MR, IV, 13. Between 1653 and 1723 the confraternity welcomed 527 new members. With an average of eight new members a year the confraternity can still be considered quite popular during this period.

²¹³ R.N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe c.1215-c.1515* (Cambridge 1995) 119.

²¹⁴ The question of whether the Virgin was immaculately conceived dominated theological debates from the fourteenth century onwards. Especially the religious order of the Dominicans criticized the issue. Other religious orders supported the idea that the Virgin was immaculately conceived. See for more information: H.A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Harvard 1963) 283-286.

stimulated by Pope Urbanus VIII who granted indulgences to stimulate this organization.²¹⁵ This confraternity had fewer local elements. In 1070 the archbishop of Cologne had already erected a confraternity for the Immaculate Conception in multiple cities in Europe. The confraternity of the Immaculate Conception in Mechelen gathered on the first Saturday of each month to hold a service.²¹⁶ Whenever a member of this confraternity had died, he was remembered during a special Mass that was held a few days after the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin. According to Croon the confraternity was very popular: 'Countless members of the clergy and lay people, noble and common; who have written down single-handedly their names in the book of this blessed sodality'.²¹⁷ Amongst them were the archduchess Isabella, archbishops Jacobus Boonen (1573-1655) Andreas Creusen (1591-1666) and Johannes van Wachtendonck (1592-1668). These important members stimulated other people to follow in their footsteps. It is also a sign that the confraternity was regarded as very important for the city. Since it was connected to the Hanswijkchurch, and therefore also to the Virgin of Hanswijk, the popularity of the confraternity coincided with the popularity of the cult of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk. Other ways in which the members of the confraternities contributed to the success of the cult was by donating money or gifts to the statue. We have already seen in the previous chapter how important these gifts were. Croon mentions a few of these donors in his miracle book. For example Margarita de Horne, wife of Cosmas van Prant who was the president of the confraternity in 1633. She left 900 guilders in her inheritance to Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk. Joanna Isabella Huwens, widow of Urbanus de Mayere, who was the president of the confraternity in 1631 and 1644, donated 133 guilders and six *stuivers* each year. Siré writes in his miracle book how the confraternity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary was renewed in 1718. Apparently the sodality had lost its popularity 'because of the misfortunes of the past.'²¹⁸ To celebrate the renewal of the confraternity a Mass was held on the 21 August by bishop Joannes Baptista de Smet of Ieperen. Afterwards there was a procession with the sacrament and the statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk.²¹⁹ The statue stayed in the middle of the Hanswijkkerk for eight days. The festivities had their desired effect. Archbishop Thomas Philippus de Alsace became a member and his example was followed by governess Maria Elisabeth, archduchess of Austria and many other important members of the clergy.²²⁰ That

²¹⁵ Croon, *Historie*, 58.

²¹⁶ *Ibidem* 65.

²¹⁷ 'ontallijcke geestelijcke ende wereltlijcke, edele ende on-edele: de welcke met hun eyghen handt hunlieder naemen hebben aen-geschreven inden Boeck van dese salighe vergaderinghe' *Ibidem* 62.

²¹⁸ 'door het ongelijck der tyden.' Siré possibly refers to the conflict on the influence of Jansenism in Mechelen, see next chapter.

²¹⁹ Siré, *Hanswyck*, 216-217.

²²⁰ *Ibidem* 218.

archbishop Alsace was personally invested in the revival of the confraternity becomes even more apparent from the introduction of the devotional book of Siré, where we can read that Alsace had commissioned this book.²²¹

It is interesting to see that the confraternity of the Immaculate Conception of Our Blessed Virgin Mary still had female members in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, contrary to the confraternity of St. Rombout. As we have already seen in chapter two, the cult of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk also had more female devotees. It is therefore not surprising that the confraternity was also open to women.

A couple of years later the confraternity played an important role during the 750th anniversary of the cult of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk in 1738. In the *Ommegang* that followed the procession four wagons depicted four elements of the cult of the Virgin of Mechelen. The first wagon was called 'Faith' and showed how Christianity was brought to the city. The second thematic wagon was called 'Hope' on which all the miracles that had occurred in association with the statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk were depicted. The third theme was 'Love' and showed the importance of the confraternity of the Immaculate Conception of Our Blessed Virgin Mary. Two people walked in front of the wagon and carried an emblem of the confraternity. The first was a depiction of a balsam tree with a viper wrapped around it. Vipers are known for giving their poison to these type of strong smelling trees. The emblem referred to the way a member of the confraternity could give his sins to the sweet smell of the Virgin. The other person carried an emblem of a fountain that sprayed water over the plants at its base, referring to the way the Virgin spiritually feeds the members of the confraternity. Behind the two people who carried the emblems a parade of people dressed as angels depicted various stages in the life of the Virgin. On the wagon itself the Virgin was depicted as sitting on a throne in heaven. This wagon was pulled by six white horses with riders dressed as angels. The first two riders wore the coat of arms of pope Clement XII and archbishop Thomas Alsace, showing their connection to the confraternity. By contributing to the procession of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk the confraternity of the Immaculate Conception of Our Blessed Virgin Mary was not only able to honor Virgin, but also to showcase the piety of its members, the position of the confraternity in the city and recruit new members.

Imposed from above

Even though recent historiography has shown that the Catholic revival of the sixteenth century was not solely initiated from above, higher clergy and high ranking officials, such as the archdukes,

²²¹ Ibidem *2-*4.

should still be seen as important stakeholders. Moreover, their role remained important during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As we have seen above, the clergy played an important role within confraternities. Even though most members of confraternities were lay people who were looking for a group of like-minded people, the clergy saw the importance of these type of groups and therefore wanted to connect themselves to them. It was the archbishops who erected the confraternities in the first place or renewed them when they saw that they lost popularity. The participation of the clergy in confraternities could also stimulate lay people to become a member.

Archdukes Albert (1559-1621) and Isabella (1566-1633) played a major role in stimulating local cults in the early seventeenth century in the Southern Netherlands. The couple was famous for their piety and for stimulating the Catholic faith amongst their people. By leading the people by example of how a good Catholic should act and by binding the people in one faith, the archdukes aimed to diminish the chance of another revolt in the Southern Netherlands. Luc Duerloo has argued in his article 'Pietas Albertina: Dynastieke vroomheid en herbouw van het vorstelijk gezag' (1997) that the archdukes also used their piety to strengthen their own power, their dynastic legitimacy and religious uniformity.²²² The piety expressed by the rules implied that they were chosen by God to rule, which legitimized their power.²²³ Moreover, Albert and Isabella stimulated the cults that were specifically linked to the Habsburg dynasty. The importance they attributed to the cult of the Virgin is an example of this.²²⁴ The Habsburgs had been ascribing their power to the Virgin since the battle of Lepanto. During the religious wars against the Protestants the use of the Virgin as a protector of the Habsburgs intensified.²²⁵ Most famously they stimulated the cult of the Virgin of Scherpenheuvel in Zichem. The archdukes ordered to build a basilica on the spot on which an oak used to stand from where a statue of the Virgin was suspended. From the wood of the oak (and from the wood of the oak in Foy-Notre-Dame, where another miraculous statue of the Virgin was found) they created little Virgin-statues and small relics to distribute to Catholic rulers and supporters in Europe. By building the basilica, going on regular pilgrimages and distributing the relics, Albert and Isabella created a permanent memory of their rule in Scherpenheuvel and simultaneously showed their support of the cult and helped spreading it.²²⁶ In Mechelen the Archdukes showed an interest in the cult of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk. It was Isabella who had

²²² L. Duerloo, 'Pietas Albertina. Dynastieke vroomheid en herbouw van het vorstelijk gezag', *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 152 (1997) 3.

²²³ Duerloo, 'Pietas Albertina', 11.

²²⁴ *Ibidem* 5.

²²⁵ L. Duerloo, 'Archducal Piety and Habsburg Power', in: W. Thomas and L. Duerloo (eds.), *Albert & Isabella 1598-1621* (Leuven 1998) 271.

²²⁶ P. Lombaerde, 'Dominating Space and Landscape: Ostend and Scherpenheuvel', in: W. Thomas and L. Duerloo (eds.), *Albert & Isabella 1598-1621* (Leuven 1998) 182.

renewed the confraternity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin in 1631 and she also donated a skirt to the statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk made out of gold fabric and an altar cover.²²⁷ In the following centuries the role of archdukes and governors remained important. They were invited for important religious feasts, as we have seen above during the millennial anniversary of the cult of St. Rombout, because their presence showed the importance of Catholic rituals and local cults. They were supposed to lead others in the example of being a good Catholic.

Members of the clergy were of course also important stakeholders for cults. They were the true 'owners' of the objects of devotion because these objects were kept in their institutions.²²⁸ Moreover, the clergy was responsible for the religious interpretation of cults by regulating the rituals, acknowledging or dismissing accounts of miracles and stimulating active participation of lay people by distributing indulgences or other spiritual rewards. Another example of how the clergy stimulated local cults was the production of medals. Archbishop Jacobus Boonen (1573-1655) had distributed medals of St. Rombout in 1650 and increased their importance by granting indulgences to people who wore them. In 1680 and 1775, the two most important anniversary years for the cult of St. Rombout, more medals were made. The medals from 1680 were all touched with the relics of St. Rombout and were therefore even more valuable.²²⁹ In 1775 all the children who had participated in the *Ommegang* were given a medal with on the one side a depiction of St. Rombout and on the other side Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk.²³⁰ In this way the two cults were connected. The distribution of medals and the stimulation to wear them was a clear visible form of devotion.

The magistrate, the guilds and the crafts

Cooperations were very important in cities in the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. People organized themselves in groups based on their neighborhood or occupation and could become a member of voluntary groups such as guilds, chambers of rhetorics and confraternities.²³¹ Not only did these groups play a major role in city life, they also participated in many public events. As we have seen in the previous chapters many of the events that were held to celebrate the cults were paid for and organized by the magistrate, the guilds and the crafts. They had a decisive say in the actual organization of the rituals. All three groups profited from a successful local cult. The

²²⁷ Croon, *Historie*, 17.

²²⁸ Sometimes the clergy of a local community could compete with the clergy of another community about the ownership of certain cults. See for example: Harline, *Miracles at the Jesus Oak*.

²²⁹ De Munck, *Gedenck-schriften*, 158.

²³⁰ *Ibidem* 384.

²³¹ P. Trio, *Volksreligie als spiegel van een stedelijke samenleving: De broederschappen te Gent in de late middeleeuwen* (Leuven 1993) 39.

magistrate could show the power of their leadership during the public events that were organized for the cults. By connecting themselves to the cults they also legitimated their own power. On the feast of St. Rombout they sat on the choir during Mass, walked very close to the reliquary in the procession and had a strong voice in the organization. By claiming the religious space during these events, they showed the public how they were part of it. As we have seen in chapter two, processions were not only a ritual to honor a saint or the sacrament, but also an event that reaffirmed the social hierarchy within the community. Moreover, these were also the occasions where many plays about the cult and the history of the city were held. A chamber of rhetoric performed these plays during the *Ommegangen* that followed the processions. Mechelen had multiple official chambers of rhetoric. They cooperated with the magistrate to which they were accountable.²³² The plays that a chamber of rhetorics performed had even more impact on the interpretation of the past than the books that were written about the cults because they were accessible to all people, not only the ones that could read. Since the chambers of rhetorics were accountable to the magistrate, the message of the plays was often in line with their political ideas and ambitions. The magistrate profited from a strong local identity that was reinforced during the processions because it led to cohesion in the city and loyalty to its government.

Guilds also played an important role in the public celebrations of the cults. Even though guilds were secular, they had some religious elements.²³³ The first shooting guilds had been erected in the fourteenth century as voluntary militia groups that could protect the city. It took not long, however, before these organizations lost their military purpose and became an elite group that provided entertainment.²³⁴ Mechelen had five guilds; the *Oude Voetboog*, the *Jonge Voetboog*, the *Handboog*, the *Kolveniers* and the *Schermers*. They had a high status in the city because they had existed for many centuries and the members were usually very wealthy.²³⁵ It was very hard to become a member which only contributed to the prestige of the groups.²³⁶ As we have seen above it was also a common practice to hold a shooting competition during a celebration of a cult. Not only local shooting guilds participated in this competition, but also guilds from nearby cities. By inviting other guilds to these celebrations the relationship between cities was reinforced. Winning a shooting competition was also a way to defend the honor of the city.²³⁷ The guilds in Mechelen could walk in the processions to protect the objects of devotion. Yet there was more at stake. Members of the

²³² Van Autenboer, *Volksfeesten en Rederijkers te Mechelen*, 95.

²³³ Trio, *Volksreligie als spiegel van een stedelijke samenleving*, 43-44.

²³⁴ *Ibidem* 47.

²³⁵ E. van Autenboer, M. Vlieghe, M. Eeman., 'Het geestesleven rond Sint-Romboutstoren', in: R. Uytven (ed.), *De Geschiedenis van Mechelen: van Heerlijkheid tot Stadsgewest* (Houten 1995) 71.

²³⁶ Trio, *Volksreligie als spiegel van een stedelijke samenleving*, 50.

²³⁷ Van Autenboer, *Volksfeesten en Rederijkers te Mechelen*, 80-85.

crafts could also walk in the processions, even though they did not have a protecting role. Yet because the members of these organizations were all from the middle class and the elite, they were very important for the prosperity of the city. During these public events they wanted to show this power and importance, not only to the spectators, but also to each other. Hierarchy was a very important element during these events.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how important stakeholders were for the popularity of the cults of St. Rombout and Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk. Each stakeholder had his own reason to propagate a cult and to stimulate its popularity. The authors of the devotional books were able to influence the interpretation of the cult of their readers. They could decide which events they emphasized and which ones they left out. It is not always clear why an author decided to write a certain book on a cult. The first part of this chapter has, however, shown that it was often because an author was commissioned to do so by the magistrate, a confraternity or a member of the clergy. Special anniversary years were, of course, also an important incentive for authors to write a book. It was likely that many people wanted to learn more about the cults during these years.

The members of the confraternities of St. Rombout and of the Immaculate Conception of Our Blessed Virgin Mary benefitted from their organizations because they brought them social security, network opportunities and status. The devotion to the saint or the Virgin connected the members and gave their sodality a religious purpose. Yet the stimulation of the cults was also a way to propagate their own importance. This was also true for the clergy, the magistrate, rulers, the guilds and the crafts. As chapter two has already pointed out, it was believed that the prosperity of a city and the afterlife of its citizens was dependent on a good relationship with God. Stimulating a certain cult was simultaneously a perfect way to show the hierarchy in the city.

Even though the stakeholders all tried to influence the cult, the success of the cult was the product of their joined efforts. There was not one stakeholder who dominated the interpretation of the cult. Processions, history books, confraternities and memorabilia such as medals were all equally important. The cults of St. Rombout and Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk were a mirror of the hierarchy in the city and a major part of the urban culture and civic identity of Mechelen.

Chapter 5: New Threats

In 1714 pastor Stevaert of the Great Beguinage in Mechelen recorded some remarks about the last *Ommegang* where something terrible had happened, that had made pastor Stevaert very angry.²³⁸ The *Ommegang* of 1714 had been the first one in thirty years. Many people had come to view the spectacle, especially the beautifully decorated wagons that depicted religious and profane scenes. The Society of Jesus in Mechelen also participated in the *Ommegang* with their own wagon. Pastor Stevaert was not surprised by their attendance. He writes that these 'honorable' men always tried to stick their noses into other people's businesses and tried to present themselves as the most ingenious, wise and competent members of the Church. Of course they wanted to excel during this *Ommegang*, just as they always did.²³⁹ On their wagon the Jesuits had depicted 'The Victorious Church' yet while doing so they had managed to humiliate the secular clergy. Their wagon depicted a pile of heretics that were trampled by the clergy. The secular clergy, however, was also depicted amongst the heretics wearing a sign with the text 'They will not support the blessed teaching'.²⁴⁰ This sent out the message that the Jesuits believed that the secular clergy was just as bad as the other heretics and enemies of the Church. Stevaert was furious: How could they do this on the holy day of St. Rombout, who had been a secular bishop as well?! He wrote that if there had not been a prohibition issued by the Church to harm the Jesuits, he was sure that there would have been a major uproar amongst the spectators. When Ludovicus Malo, canon of the St. Romboutskathedraal, saw the wagon pass his house he could not bear to see the humiliating depiction. He jumped onto the wagon and tried to throw the statue off the cart. Even though he failed, people were cheering and especially members of the clergy were thanking him. Stevaert believed that eventually God showed his rightful judgment; when the wagon arrived at the Grote Markt it collapsed.

In the middle of the seventeenth century it had seemed very unlikely that the highly respected Jesuits would become the center of religious disputes in the Southern Netherlands only a couple of decades later. For years their organizations had been regarded as one of the major successes of the Counter-reformation and they were responsible for many of the thriving cults in the Austrian Netherlands. The success of the Society of Jesus was, however, just as much subject to change and critique as the success of the Counter-reformation itself. In the eighteenth century new movements arose that promoted secularization and a less prominent role for cults, which pitted

²³⁸ Stevaert, *Ommeganck van 1714*.

²³⁹ Freely translated from this quote: 'Deze eerw. Mannen de welcken in alle dingen hunnen neus steken en geirne van bestier syn, sigh latende voorstaen, dat sy de vernufste, geleerste en habilste personen syn van gansch 't Christendom, hebben in den Mechelschen Ommeganck oock willen uitmunten ende uytsteken; gelyckerwijs sy t'alle kanten, in alle voorvallende occasien, gewoon zijn te doen' in: Stevaert, *Ommeganck van 1714*, 1.

²⁴⁰ 'Sanam doctrinam non sustinebunt', Stevaert, *Ommeganck van 1714*.

church and state against each other.²⁴¹ Catholicism was once again under attack. Not only from the outside, when the new emperor Joseph II shut down many convents or when the French conquered the Austrian Netherlands and subjected them to their new rules, but also from within. New ideas about religion took root and different religious groups came to face one another.

In the first chapter of this thesis I have shown that the cult of St. Rombout and Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk was deployed for the political agenda of the sixteenth century against the Protestants. To cope with the fact that the citizens of Mechelen had collaborated with the Calvinists a new narrative was created that focused on the heroic actions of some citizens, ignored the involvement of other citizens and blamed the furies on the Protestants. St. Rombout and Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk were re-invented as the symbol of endurance against heretics, the Counter-reformation and the local identity of Mechelen. The cults were, as the other chapters in this thesis have shown, continuously reinforced through processions, holy days, devotional books, public plays and beautifully decorated reliquaries and gifts. In this way the memory of the sixteenth century and the importance of these two cults for the city of Mechelen were also reinforced. Even though the cults were able to adapt to the needs of their time, the eighteenth century brought drastic changes. Cults became part of a new discussion amongst lay people and the clergy and at the end of the eighteenth century they were even attacked by new rulers. This chapter will study the new threats that affected the religious life in Mechelen in this period. I will look specifically at the way the cults of St. Rombout and Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk adapted to these threats and new ideas and how the citizens of Mechelen responded to these changes. By looking at contemporary accounts of eyewitnesses I will be able to see how these changes were interpreted at the time. I will also look at sources who described the eighteenth century in retrospect. How did they look back at the end of the century while knowing that the cults would survive? In other words, what was the new narrative that was created about this period?

The first threat that I will describe is that of the movement commonly known as Jansenism, which divided the clergy amongst themselves and led to exile, censorship and suspicion. What did these Jansenists proclaim? How did their views affect city life and what was their perspective on the current state of cults? Secondly I will go into further detail about the Society of Jesus. How did the Jesuits go from being one of the strongest religious organizations in the Austrian Netherlands to being abolished in 1773? Third I will discuss the rule of emperor Joseph II of the Austrian Netherlands from 1780 to 1790; the period in which he implemented many religious changes with the aim to purify the Catholic Church. How did people react to these changes and how were the

²⁴¹ E. Put, H. Installé, H. Verstrepen, E. van Autenboer, H. Vlieghe, 'Van barokke vroomheid tot classicisme en rationalisme', in: R. Uytven (ed.), *De Geschiedenis van Mechelen: van Heerlijkheid tot Stadsgewest* (Houten 1995) 201.

cults of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk and St. Rombout affected? Finally I will study the invasion of the French Republic. The new regime eventually prohibited Catholicism altogether which made some citizens decide that it was better if the relics of St. Rombout and the Miraculous Statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk were hidden in a safe place.

Jansenism

One of the issues that was dealt with during the Council of Trent (1545 - 1563) was the study and reinterpretation of religious texts that had been used by reformers such as Calvin and Luther to confirm their religious view. Especially the texts written by church father Augustine about the doctrine of grace had been used by the reformers to prove their view on predestination. At the Council of Trent this text was also re-evaluated. It was concluded that salvation was a product of free will, but the council did not take a stand about predestination. In the following years Catholic religious scholars continued to study these texts and came up with their own interpretation.²⁴² Two people who interpreted Augustine's doctrine of grace anew were the Jesuit Luis de Molina (1535-1600) and the theologian Cornelius Jansenius (1585-1638). Molina and his followers believed that God grants salvation to everyone, but that people have the choice to accept or reject it. When people choose to accept the grace of salvation and work along with this grace, the soul of the believer will be saved. Molinism acknowledges the free will of people and believes it to be crucial for salvation.²⁴³

When Molina published his view on the doctrine of grace in 1588 his statement was rejected by some universities. As a response pope Clement VIII erected the *Congregationes de auxiliis* in 1597, a commission to settle this religious controversy. Yet ten years later there was still no outcome. Pope Paul V prohibited any new publications on the subject as long as there was no outcome from the congregation. During this time Jansenius was already working on his publication about the doctrine of grace in which he positioned himself against Molina. He accused Molina of Pelagianism; the belief that people could achieve their own salvation without divine aid. Jansenius stated that the salvation of a person was determined by God before the individual acted. Despite the prohibition Jansenius hoped that he could publish his book with the permission of the pope. Yet before he could ask for this permission Jansenius died and his work was published posthumously in 1640. This led to critique from the Jesuits who adhered to the doctrine of Molina and accused Jansenius of Calvinism and proclaiming predestination.²⁴⁴ It should be noted that the prohibition to

²⁴² M.G. Spiertz, 'Jansenisme in en rond de Nederlanden 1640-1690', *Trajecta* 1 (1992) 145.

²⁴³ Spiertz, 'Jansenisme in en rond de Nederlanden 1640-1690', 146.

²⁴⁴ E. Put, 'Het elan van de katholieke hervorming (1596-1648)', in: De Maeyer, Put, Roegiers, Tihon and Vanden Bosch

publish about the doctrine of grace was not carried out in the Southern Netherlands, making Jansenius' work not illegal.²⁴⁵

Tensions ran ever higher when in 1642 Francesco Albizzi, assessor of the Holy See, banned the publication of Jansenius in a bull. Jacobus Boonen (1573-1655), archbishop of Mechelen from 1621 until 1655, refused to publish this bull in the Southern Netherlands with the excuse that the 'placet' (a validation of a papal document by the government) was missing. The refusal of Boonen showed that even though the Vatican had banned the work of Jansenius, he himself did not see any harm in Jansenism. This is not surprising because Jansenius and Boonen had been friends and Boonen also disagreed on many topics with the Jesuits. Boonen was condemned for ignoring the instructions from the Vatican.²⁴⁶ Alphonse de Berghes, archbishop of Mechelen from 1671 until 1689, also sympathized with Jansenism, but not all archbishops did. Archbishop Humbert Guilielmus de Precipano (1690-1711) believed that the archbishopric was drenched with Jansenism. He wanted to cleanse the University of Leuven of Jansenist influences and stop them from intervening with the doctrines of the theologians and the nomination of new professors.²⁴⁷ Thomas Philippe d'Alsace (archbishop from 1716 until 1759) forced all Jansenists to take an oath against Jansenism or leave the Austrian Netherlands. In 1713 the papal bull *Unigenitus* was promulgated by pope Clement XI in which a recent publication by theologian Pasquier Quesnel was condemned.²⁴⁸ This book contained the four Gospels in French with explanatory notes and some 'Jansenist' remarks.²⁴⁹ Because not everyone accepted the papal bull several of its adversaries were also condemned from 1718 onwards.²⁵⁰ In 1730 the Academic Council of the university of Leuven decided that everyone who was nominated for a professional position or students who obtained their bachelor or masters degree had to sign an anti-Jansenist form.²⁵¹

Even though the term 'Jansenism' was used often, it was not a religious movement. Most people who were called a Jansenist did not even consider themselves to be one. It was a term that was only used by adversaries of the doctrine that Jansenius had proclaimed to accuse others of similar thoughts. It could differ from context to context what the person who was being called a Jansenist actually believed.²⁵² There were roughly two dominating views on religious life in the

(eds.), *Het Aartsbisdom Mechelen-Brussel*, 102.

²⁴⁵ Spiertz, 'Jansenisme in en rond de Nederlanden 1640-1690', 149.

²⁴⁶ Put, 'Het elan van de katholieke hervorming (1596-1648)', 102-103.

²⁴⁷ Quaghebeur and Roegiers, 'Onvrede en onrust in eigen rangen (1690-1759)', in: De Maeyer, Put, Roegiers, Tihon and Vanden Bosch (eds.), *Het Aartsbisdom Mechelen-Brussel*, 208.

²⁴⁸ Quaghebeur and Roegiers, 'Onvrede en onrust in eigen rangen (1690-1759)', 206.

²⁴⁹ Quesnel, *Abrégé de la morale de l'Évangile* (1671).

²⁵⁰ Quaghebeur and Roegiers, 'Onvrede en onrust in eigen rangen (1690-1759)', 207.

²⁵¹ *Ibidem* 210.

²⁵² Spiertz, 'Jansenisme in en rond de Nederlanden 1640-1690', 156.

seventeenth century. People who followed the doctrine as proclaimed by Augustine in his later works, who were called Jansenists by their adversaries, believed that they had to follow strict rules of life and that sinning had deep implications for the salvation of the believer. They often confessed and took communion frequently. Moreover, they believed that religion had to be experienced individually and should not be paraded in eccentric processions with statues of saints. This was contrary to what the Jesuits tried to stimulate. They were part of a second group of people who had a positive outlook on life and believed that people had to live righteously, but could also be forgiven for their sins. Outward signs of devotion were regarded highly. The two groups had widely divergent views on the role of cults in society. In the eighteenth century criticism on the way processions were held increased. Archbishop Frankenberg (1726-1804) who was a Jansenist sympathizer, tried to cleanse processions and kept them solely religious. He banned musicians and people who were dressed up in costumes and he even wanted to prohibit the carrying of relics and statues.²⁵³ As we have seen in the previous chapters, both the cults of St. Rombout and Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk relied heavily on their material aspects and public rituals. Yet it seems as if these religious conflicts did not affect these cults directly. The *Ommegangen* that usually followed the processions of the cults were scarcer, but they were still held once in a while. The processions themselves were still part of the holy year and there are no other signs that the cults suffered from the conflicts. Yet the support and sympathies for Jansenism in Mechelen implied that the clergy was no longer in agreement about the role of the cults in the public space. The diminishing popularity of the Society of Jesus in the Southern Netherlands was another sign that the high days for cults was coming to an end.

Jesuits

The Society of Jesus was founded in the high days of the Counter-reformation by nobleman Ignatius of Loyola in 1534 and some of his close friends in Spain. The order was recognized by the pope in 1540. Members of the society focused on preaching, missionary work and education. The Jesuits established their congregation in Mechelen in 1611. According to Egidius van Luffen (1766-1840), who wrote a chronicle about the last decades of the eighteenth century, neither the magistrate nor the chapter of the St. Romboutskathedraal knew about their arrival beforehand. Archdukes Albert and Isabella, whose religious views were in line with that of the Jesuits, provided them with housing in the city.²⁵⁴ The Jesuits immediately started to promote the veneration of the Virgin and

²⁵³ Quaghebeur and Roegiers, 'Onvrede en onrust in eigen rangen (1690-1759)', 246.

²⁵⁴ SAM, E. van Luffen, *Mechelen op het einde van de 18e eeuw*, copy by H. Coninckx, inv.nr. V 122, fol.18.

erected seven confraternities in her name. Of the approximately 21.000 citizens that Mechelen had in the middle of the seventeenth century 1300 were a member of one of these confraternities.²⁵⁵ It was also the Society of Jesus who had organized the 750th anniversary of the cult of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk in 1738.²⁵⁶ They moreover provided education in the city. They opened a college which, because of their reputation, attracted many good students, which provoked the archbishop who saw the best students leave his seminary.²⁵⁷ They also played a significant role during public spectacles, staging many plays during celebrations.²⁵⁸

Even though the Jesuits enjoyed much support amongst Catholics, others did not share their views. The Jesuits, for example, did not answer to the authority of bishops, but to that of the pope. Local governments had a hard time dealing with them and saw them as a threat to their power. During the Jansenist crisis the position of the Jesuits was criticized even further. Their view on the world differed strongly from that of the Jansenist movement.

The beginning of this chapter has already illustrated how strongly some people felt about the position of the Jesuits in the first decades of the eighteenth century. Pastor Stevaerts, who was clearly very much against the influence of the Jesuits in the public devotion of St. Rombout, described the Jesuits as being noisy and pretentious. In his account Stevaert cites other critics to show that he is supported in his opinion by important authorities such as Spanish theologian Melchior Canus (1509?-1560), who had participated in the Council of Trent. Canus stated that the Jesuits were the precursors, messengers and spies of the Antichrist. He claimed to see all the signs in them that apostle Paul had written about in his second letter to Timotheus²⁵⁹:

For of these sort are they who creep into houses and lead captive silly women laden with sins, who are led away with divers desires: Ever learning, and never attaining to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Mambres resisted Moses, so these also resist the truth, men corrupted in mind, reprobate concerning the faith. But they shall proceed no farther: for their folly shall be manifest to all men, as theirs also was.²⁶⁰

I have not found a reference to the *Ommegang* of 1714 in other sources. The opinion of pastor

²⁵⁵ Van Autenboer, Verstrepen, Vlieghe, 'Een grondige katholieke restauratie', 167. Op ongeveer 21.000 inwoners. Is dat noemenswaardig veel?

²⁵⁶ Put, Installé, Verstrepen, Van Autenboer, Vlieghe, 'Van barokke vroomheid tot classicisme en rationalisme', 215.

²⁵⁷ Ibidem 169.

²⁵⁸ Ibidem 172.

²⁵⁹ Stevaert, *Ommeganck van 1714*, 3.

²⁶⁰ Vulgate.org, 2 Timothy 3 6-9. (The Latin Vulgate Bible with Douay-Rheims English Translation), http://vulgate.org/nt/epistle/2timothy_3.htm (May 2018).

Stevaert of the Jesuits must, however, been shared by others. Otherwise his account would not have been published. We can also see the discrepancy of this conflict in the way Stevaert describes the wrongdoings of the Jesuits. He is offended by the role the Jesuits play in the city and how they claim the cult of St. Rombout, on the other hand he want to claim the cult just as much himself.

The conflict with the Jesuits reached a climax in the Austrian Netherlands in 1773. On 21 July 1773 Pope Clement XIV ordered the abolishment of the Society of Jesus in a papal bull. Each ruler had to implement this decree in their country.²⁶¹ At that time there were 1013 Jesuits in the Austrian Netherlands. In some countries the suppression of the Jesuits had occurred even earlier. In 1759 they were suppressed in Portugal, in 1764 in France and in 1767 in the Spanish Empire.²⁶² Egidius van Luffen spends many pages in his chronicle to describe the suppression of the Jesuits in Mechelen and the rest of Europe. It should be noted that even though there is no biographical information available about Van Luffen other than his name and the city and date of his birth, it seems reasonable to assume that he was a Jesuit himself or at least a strong supporter of them. Van Luffen's chronicle was kept by the Bollandists in Brussel, a Jesuit research society which applies itself to the study on hagiography and the cult of saints. A copy of the chronicle was made in the nineteenth century that was partly published in print because of the importance of its contents for the history of Mechelen.²⁶³ Van Luffen starts his description of the abolishment of the Jesuits by saying: 'In the centuries to come our descendants will look at the year 1773 with astonishment.' After stating that pope Clement XIV had sent out his papal bull to abolish the society, Van Luffen adds that he believes that the pope cannot have done this voluntarily and that he only signed the bull under violent threats. For how could this pope be against the Jesuits after he had sent out a papal bull in support of the Society of Jesus only a few years earlier?²⁶⁴ Van Luffen referred to the bull *Apostolicum Pascendi Minis* that was issued in 1765. In it, Pope Clement XIV stated that even though the Society had been under attack, he approved of the society, its methods of work and the institutions it had founded. Van Luffen believed that the only possible explanation for this apparent contradiction was that the pope was put under pressure by kings, who were 'led by a blind and burning hate, ignited by unfaithful, godless and hateful ministers and councilors.' They must have forced the pope to sign the document threatening him that this was the only way to prevent a potential schism of the Church.²⁶⁵

²⁶¹ Quaghebeur and Roegiers, 'Onvrede en onrust in eigen rangen (1690-1759)', 251.

²⁶² J.H. Pollen, 'The Suppression of the Jesuits (1750-1773)' (version 2017), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14096a.htm> (June 2018).

²⁶³ H. Coninckx, *Mechelen onder 't Schrikbewind: Dagboek van een Tijdgenoot der Fransche Omwenteling*, (date and publisher unknown).

²⁶⁴ Onse nakomelingen zullen in de volgende eeuwen met verwonderinge aannemen het jaar 1773'SAM, Luffen, fol.1.

²⁶⁵'gedreven door een blinden en brandende haet, ontsteken door ontrouwe, goddeloze en haatwesende ministers en

On 20 September 1773 at seven o'clock in the morning the highest canon of the St. Romboutskathedraal came to the church of the Jesuits in Mechelen together with the official of the archbishopric and members of the city council to read the letter of the archbishop and the accompanied ordinances of Archduchess Maria Theresia aloud to the Jesuits. Afterwards the members of the council closed and sealed all the doors of the church. According to Van Luffen the citizens of Mechelen were met 'overcome with sadness' and came to see the closed church, unable to believe what happened until they saw it with their own eyes.²⁶⁶ The property of the Jesuits was confiscated and sold. The money from the sale went to the local rulers who paid an annual pension to the Jesuits.²⁶⁷

In remembrance of the abolishment of the Society of Jesus several commemorative medals were made. Van Luffen, who owned one himself, wondered whether the medals had been made by the followers or the adversaries of the Jesuits. The medal in his possession was made of silver and had on the one side a depiction of pope Clement XIV in his papal robes. 'How can people abuse the name and image of this pope in this manner', he wondered.²⁶⁸ The flip side of the medal depicted a barefoot Virgin, sitting in front of a church with her head turned to the Holy Spirit who was depicted above her. In her right hand she carried a big cross and in her left hand an olive branch which she offered the viewer. On the medal was written 'Salus Generis Humani' which according to Van Luffen meant 'for the salvation and prosperity of humankind'. After reading this inscription Van Luffen was certain that the medal was made by adversaries of the Jesuits because according to him 'the salvation of humankind' was exactly what the Jesuits proclaimed.²⁶⁹ I have not found an exact copy of this medal, but the Teylers Museum in Haarlem has a similar one in its collection. (See figure 4).

raadsmannen' Ibidem fol.8.

²⁶⁶ Ibidem fol.3.

²⁶⁷ Ibidem fol.4.

²⁶⁸ 'Hoe sal men de naem en beeldtenisse van dien paus soo misbruiken' Ibidem fol.14.

²⁶⁹ 'tot heil en welvaren van het menselijk geslacht' Ibidem fol.16-17.



Figure 4: Commemorative Medal of the Abolishment of the Society of Jesus

Even though Van Luffen was very upset about the abolishment of the Jesuits, not everyone was as emotionally invested as he. Contemporary chronicler notary Wendrickx for example just wrote down the facts about the abolishment of the Jesuits in his chronicle.²⁷⁰ His neutrality in the matter, however, had nothing to do with an aim to be objective. As the next part will show he was highly opinionated about the changes that Joseph II introduced.

The abolishment of the Society of Jesus did not affect the cults of St. Rombout and Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk directly. The abolishment was, however, a sign that cults in general started to become a subject of criticism. The Jesuits had promoted local cults, especially in public ceremonies. The cults of St. Rombout and Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk profited from these ceremonies (see chapter 4). Their existence was evidently threatened by the new events. Mechelen, together with the other cities in Austrian Netherlands turned to a more conservative, Jansenist way of religious life. And there were even more changes to come.

Joseph II

In 1780 Archduchess Maria Theresia of Austria died. Her son Joseph II, who had already been Emperor since 1765, succeeded her as the first ruler of the Austrian dominions in 1780.²⁷¹ On 20 June 1781 Joseph visited Mechelen for the first time. He tried to do it anonymously by calling himself Count of Falkenstein.²⁷² The citizens of Mechelen knew, however, that he was their new sovereign and they wanted to give him a warm welcome by standing and cheering along the roads. Joseph was not pleased by this welcome. According to Jan Baptiste David (1801-1866) canon and

²⁷⁰ SAM, Wendrickx, fol.70 and fol.77.

²⁷¹ Roegiers, 'Routine, reorganisatie en revolutie', 233.

²⁷² SAM, Balberghe, *Mechelen tijdens de regering van Jozef den tweede en in den patriottentijd*, fol. 19.

professor at the university of Leuven, the citizens of Mechelen were confused by Joseph's response: 'they did not know what to do, to prove their love.'²⁷³ It was the first time since the arrival of Albert and Isabella that Mechelen had seen a sovereign in person so it was not surprising that they were very excited. Yet their excitement was only short-lived. Within a year, David writes dramatically, it would become clear what this new ruler intended for his country, especially with regards to religion.²⁷⁴ David's account of the rule of Joseph II was written in the aftermath of the tumultuous eighteenth century. He had not even been born during the rule of Joseph II. His account is therefore obviously tainted by his knowledge on the ending which makes it useful to see how the rule of Joseph II was interpreted in the nineteenth century.

The end of the eighteenth century saw many changes: the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment and strong secular rulers whose ties with the Catholic Church became significantly weaker. These rulers saw the Church as their enemy because it put the authority of the pope above that of secular rulers. Joseph II was one such ruler. He regarded it as his divine mission to reform the Catholic Church through a Catholic Enlightenment.²⁷⁵ On the thirteenth of October Joseph II issued the Edict of Toleration. This edict was the first one that had implications for the religious life in the Austrian Netherlands. It equated other faiths with Catholicism.²⁷⁶ Two months later in December it was issued that bishops had to annul marriages themselves and could no longer leave this task to the pope, making it easier for married couples to get a divorce. Moreover, in May 1782 all bishops had to officiate marriages between Catholics and non-Catholics.

The most influential edict was issued at 22 May 1783. In this edict Joseph II ordered the dissolution of all 'unnecessary' convents, meaning all the convents that did not provide education or health care. Not only were the convents closed, their property was also confiscated and sold.²⁷⁷ The members of the convents were given the option to either leave the country, enter a different convent or move into a guest house. To ease the transition each member was offered a small amount of money.²⁷⁸ In 1785 the abolished convents were sold which provided Joseph II with a sum of 25.000 guilders. To prevent the old convents from being torn down most convents were re-purposed as warehouses and barracks.²⁷⁹

On 10 April 1782 the convent of Hanswijk was dissolved. Four days later the officials of

²⁷³ 'zy wist niet wat te doen hem wel te ontvangen, om hare liefde te betuigen'. J.B. David, *Geschiedenis van de stad en de heerlijkheid van Mechelen* (Leuven 1854) 414.

²⁷⁴ David, *Geschiedenis van de stad en de heerlijkheid van Mechelen*, 416.

²⁷⁵ D. Beales, *Enlightenment and Reform in Eighteenth-century Europe* (New York 2005) 4.

²⁷⁶ David, *Geschiedenis van de stad en de heerlijkheid van Mechelen*, 417.

²⁷⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁷⁸ SAM, Balberghe, fol.42.

²⁷⁹ *Ibidem* fol.44.

Joseph II went to the Hanswijkchurch to make an inventory of the property. They confiscated all the silver and golden ornaments and the jewels of the Miraculous Statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk. They left a small crown to adorn her head, but this was only allowed after many pleas and a payment of a large deposit by the clergy. According to Joseph Balberghe (1913-2000), who wrote a chronicle in retrospect on the history of Mechelen from 1780 until 1791 based on older chronicles, the local newspaper (*Het Wekelijks Bericht*) and other sources from the city archive, the confiscation of the belongings of the Virgin led to more bitterness amongst the citizens than the abolishment of the convent itself. People had believed that the Hanswijkkerk would be spared from the reforms of Joseph II because it was not a convent, but a church. When the officials started to confiscate the property of the church Balberghe writes that this was probably because ‘The Josephists tended fully to Protestantism and could not bear the services to the Virgin.’²⁸⁰ In the end the Hanswijkkerk was spared because it was pointed out that the church was still connected to the parish of Muizen and not to the convent.²⁸¹ To commemorate the saving of the Hanswijkkerk, a poem was placed above the gate of the seminary of Mechelen in the nineteenth century. The poem refers to the reign of Joseph and recounts the role of the Virgin in the saving of the church: ‘The heavenly fire ignites in the heart of the Virgin, to behold her throne and her consecrated altars’ thanks to the Virgin of Mechelen, their sanctuary was saved.²⁸²

In the following years Joseph II also abolished several holy days, public processions, confraternities and pilgrimages.²⁸³ David writes:

In short, he meddled with everything, regulated everything, decided everything, up to the religious ceremonies, the number of Masses and that there had [to be] wax candles on the altars, the garbs of the canons, and more things like that, to which he was neither qualified.²⁸⁴

In 1786 the procession of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk had to be held without the Miraculous statue and without music.²⁸⁵ In the same year all the confraternities were abolished and their processions

²⁸⁰ 'De Josephisten neigden gansch over naar het protestantisme en konden den eeredienst van Maria niet dulde'. Ibidem fol.69.

²⁸¹ Ibidem fol.70.

²⁸² 'Het hemelsch vuur ontronckt in 't hert der maegts inroeren, voor 't b'hoeden van haer troon, haer in gewijid altaeren.' Ibidem fol.74.

²⁸³ David, *Geschiedenis van de stad en de heerlykheid van Mechelen*, 417.

²⁸⁴ 'Kortom hy bemoeide zich met alles, regelde alles, bepaelde alles, tot zelf de godsdienst-plegtigheden, het getal der Missen en dat der waskeersen op de outaers, de kleedy der kanoniken, en meer andere zulke dingen, waer hy even min toe bevoegd was'. Ibidem 418.

²⁸⁵ SAM, Wendrickx, fol. 110.

forbidden. Notary Wendrickx sentimentally wrote ‘which were founded by Pope Agapet in the year 536.’²⁸⁶ After the confraternities were abolished, there was a new sodality erected that was solely dedicated to charity. On 16 October 1786 the seminary of Mechelen was abolished. All students had to transfer to Leuven to the newly erected General Seminary. When the seminary was vacated, some citizens rioted by throwing stones at the officers.²⁸⁷ During this year even more people had to turn in their property; the regular and the secular clergy, the rectors, the pastors and the monks and nuns whose convents had not been abolished.²⁸⁸ Even the guilds were no longer allowed to make money or debts without permission of the city government.²⁸⁹ On 1 January 1787 Joseph II installed a new government and judicial system and abolished all the courts and councils.²⁹⁰ On 12 May he issued moreover that the individual rights, duties and privileges of the cities, which were affirmed in the *Blijde Inkomst* (Joyous Entry), were annulled.²⁹¹ This new measure led to protests in multiple cities. Citizens from Brussels had hung notices on the walls of buildings in Mechelen in the night of the fourteenth of May 1787. On these notices it was written that if the Great Council would not be restored, they would go to the Veemarkt with 400 people to scare the new government away. It did not come to that.²⁹² Sixteen days later these decrees were annulled by the States General who stated in a letter that the decrees were in contradiction with the constitution.²⁹³ By way of protest the local rulers refused to pay taxes to the governess of the Austrian Netherlands Maria Christina as long as these decrees were held up.²⁹⁴ In the summer of 1787 Joseph II summoned the local rulers to Vienna to answer for their refusal. He told them that he would only withdraw his decrees if they agreed to certain conditions.²⁹⁵ These conditions included the payment of the overdue taxes to Maria Christina, the abolition of the local voluntary militia groups and the closing of the last convents.²⁹⁶ Yet as long as the privileges of the Joyous Entry were still violated the representatives refused. Eventually Joseph II had to succumb and he withdrew all the decrees that had been issued from January 1787.

Even though the decrees were withdrawn it was too late to restore the popularity of the emperor. Polemical pamphlets were published and rumors spread that Joseph II wanted to impose

²⁸⁶ ‘welke nogtans sijn ingestelt door den Paus Agapitus in t’jaer 536’. Ibidem.

²⁸⁷ SAM, Balberghe, fol.125.

²⁸⁸ SAM, Wendrickx, fol.111

²⁸⁹ SAM, Balberghe, fol.30.

²⁹⁰ David, *Geschiedenis van de stad en de heerlykheid van Mechelen*, 419.

²⁹¹ Ibidem 420.

²⁹² SAM, Balberghe, fol.33.

²⁹³ David, *Geschiedenis van de stad en de heerlykheid van Mechelen*, 421.

²⁹⁴ SAM, Wendrickx, fol. 113.

²⁹⁵ David, *Geschiedenis van de stad en de heerlykheid van Mechelen*, 422.

²⁹⁶ Ibidem 423.

protestantism in the Austrian Netherlands.²⁹⁷ That these type of rumors took root in the opinion of the citizens becomes clear from one of the entries in the chronicle from notary Wendricx who blames the changes in his city to the ‘German and devilish slavery of the new protestants.’²⁹⁸ Is it possible that the fear of the influence of (new) Protestants was a result of the collective memory of the citizens of Mechelen of Calvinist period? This was not the only occasion when Wendricx hinted at the events of the last decades of the sixteenth century. In 1787 he wrote happily that a new minister was dismissed from the government. Wendricx believed that if he was not dismissed ‘all the churches in every city would be closed so they could be plundered from all silver and ornaments and to smash all the altars and statues into pieces.’²⁹⁹ Even though none of the other sources hinted that iconoclasm was a viable threat, the English Fury and the Calvinist period were still a frame of reference to interpret the changes in the eighteenth century.

During the reign of Joseph II multiple voluntary militia groups had been founded, with the alleged purpose of keeping order in the cities. Its members, however, secretly engaged in military training in case there would be need of an army in the future. When in October 1789 the privileges of the Joyous Entry were abolished again, these militia groups came together in the city of Breda and formed an army of 3700 men. This patriot army was led by Hendrik van der Noot (1731-1827) and Jan Frans Vonck (1743-1792). During the same month this army conquered the city of Turnhout.³⁰⁰ This conquest inspired many more people to join the patriot army. Before the year was over Flandres and Brabant were conquered by the patriots. On 14 December the patriot army arrived in Mechelen. They were welcomed with enthusiasm; the five guilds performed shooting competitions, the bells of the St. Romboutskathedraal were chiming and a special Mass was held in the Hanswijkkerk to thank God for the presence of the patriots.³⁰¹ On the twentieth of 1790 Joseph II died. His brother Leopold II succeeded him and continued the negotiations with the former Austrian Netherlands. Even though the patriots did not want to accept his conditions they had to come around when they were defeated on 22 September and the provinces were once again annexed by the Austrian Empire.³⁰² Even though the independence of Flandres and Brabant was short-lived, the so-called *Brabantsche Omwenteling* (Brabant Revolution) was experienced as an important event in which members of all classes came together for one purpose.³⁰³

²⁹⁷ Roegiers, 'Routine, reorganisatie en revolutie, 273-274.

²⁹⁸ 'de Duytsche ende Duyvelsche slavernye der nieuwen protestanten'. SAM, Wendrickx, fol. 118.

²⁹⁹ 'allen den kerken soude gesloten worden van allen de steede omme die uyte plunderen van alle silver werk en de ornamenten alle de altaeren ende beelden in stukken te kappen'. Ibidem fol.116.

³⁰⁰ SAM, Balberghe, fol.50.

³⁰¹ SAM, Wendrickx, fol.133-134.

³⁰² SAM, Balberghe, fol.187.

³⁰³ Ibidem fol.190.

French Period

Just when people started to believe that the terrible conflicts with the Habsburgs were over, the Austrian Netherlands were subjected to a new power; the French Republic. In the printed edition of the chronicle of Van Luffen we find an added section that recounts the first invasion of the French army.³⁰⁴ When general Charles Francois Dumouriez won the Battle of Jemappes on 7 November 1792 the other cities of the Dutch provinces were soon conquered. Before the armies of the French Republic arrived in Mechelen the Great Council fled to Roermond as a precaution and took all their archives with them. The Austrian officials followed their example and also fled the city.³⁰⁵ The magistrate, according to the added section in Van Luffen's chronicle, realized that a conquest was inevitable and tried to talk Dumouriez into a peaceful transition of power. It was agreed that if the magistrate would promise that the Austrian troops would collaborate willingly with the French that they would take over the city without any violence. Yet when the troops of the French arrived at the city gates of Mechelen, Van Luffen's chronicle tells us that the Austrian soldiers started to fire their canons. Offended by the treason the French no longer accepted a surrender and took the city with force on 16 November 1792.³⁰⁶ The local newspaper gave a different account of the events, no doubt in response to pressure from the French victors. On 18 November the newspaper wrote: 'When the commandant had finally allowed to surrender the city, we saw our saviors entering at six 'o clock, while all the citizens were cheering, and instantly the entire city was lighted during the whole night.'³⁰⁷ The French declared that the citizens of the Dutch provinces were now free and no longer slaves to the House of Austria. They also gave out a warning, however, that if people would not work along with them they would burn the cities to ashes and would demand contributions that were so high that everyone would remember their passing for a long time.³⁰⁸ After the conquest of the Austrian Netherlands most of the properties of convents and churches were confiscated just as the public funds.³⁰⁹ The churches were guarded day and night so no-one could try to steal the property. Yet people still managed to save the relics of St. Rombout (see introduction). In March

³⁰⁴ SAM, Luffen, 3.

³⁰⁵ Ibidem.

³⁰⁶ Ibidem 4.

³⁰⁷ 'Eyndelijk den Commandant toegestaen hebbende de stad over te geven, zagen wij om zes uren onze Verlossers binnen dezelve komen onder toejuygingen van alle haere Inwoonders, ende aenstonds was geheel de Stad verligt geduerende de den nagt.' Newspaper clipping from 't Wekelijks Berigt' from 18th of November 1792 in: SAM, handgeschreven kopieën van dokumenten in verband met de eerste inval van de Franse bezetting op 16 november 1792, V 19, f.9v. Author and date unknown.

³⁰⁸ SAM, V19, fol.24v.

³⁰⁹ H. Installé, H. de Nijn, 'De opeenvolging van politieke regimes', in: R. Uytven, *De Geschiedenis van Mechelen: van Heerlijkheid tot Stadsgewest* (Houten 1995) 195.

1793 the French army was defeated and surrendered. As soon as the French troops had left Mechelen, the altar on the Grote Markt and the pole of liberty, both erected by the French, were demolished. The government that had been replaced by the French was reinstalled and the Austrian troops retook their stations. Yet because the Austrian Empire did not have sufficient funds to finance a war and since their former lands had been plundered time and again over the past decades, they lost many battles.³¹⁰

On 12 July 1794 the French armies conquered Mechelen for the second time. Immediately after their second arrival the French demanded the city to pay a sum of 1.500.000 silver pounds within twenty-four hours. The following day when the magistrate confessed that they were unable to meet this demand the French took citizens hostage and told the magistrate that they would release them when the money was paid. Only by selling church property that had not been confiscated yet, including the reliquary of St. Rombout, and by selling the properties of emigrated citizens the magistrate eventually managed to collect enough money to meet the French demands.³¹¹ Van Luffen devotes page after page to write about the paintings, silverware and other precious objects that were taken.³¹² According to Brecht Deseure this was a common element in chronicles written at the end of the eighteenth century. By writing about the loss of buildings, altars, glass windows and other types of cultural heritage at least the memory of those objects was kept alive.³¹³ Van Luffen even mentions the worth of the art that was stolen. As we have seen in the first chapter assessing the loss of property was also a way people tried to cope with iconoclasm in the sixteenth century.³¹⁴

The French installed new organizations to replace the ones they abolished. The *Comité de Subsistance* provided people with provisions, the *Comite de Secours* provided charity and the *Comité de Surveillance* replaced the police.³¹⁵ The few convents that had remained were abolished and the churches were closed.³¹⁶ They even tried to replace catholicism with the Cult of Reason³¹⁷. In Mechelen the former Jesuit church was renamed as the Temple of Reason in 1798.³¹⁸ Van Luffen wrote in his chronicle about the renaming: ‘not to perform the previous religion, but sadly to molest

³¹⁰ SAM, Luffen, 3.

³¹¹ Installé, De Nijn, 'De opeenvolging van politieke regimes', 195.

³¹² SAM, Luffen, 3-5.

³¹³ B. Deseure, 'Den ouden lujster is verdwenen' *Geschiedenis, herinnering en verlies bij Jan Baptist Van der Straelen (1792-1817)*, *Belgisch tijdschrift voor nieuwste geschiedenis* (2014, 4), 531-534.

³¹⁴ De Boer, 'Picking up the Pieces', 73-80.

³¹⁵ Installé, De Nijn, 'De opeenvolging van politieke regimes', 195.

³¹⁶ Put, Installé, Verstrepen, Van Autenboer, Vlieghe, 'Van barokke vroomheid tot classicisme en rationalisme', 201.

³¹⁷ The Cult of Reason was the predecessor and rival religion of the Cult of the Supreme Being that was introduced by Robespierre in 1794. See: G. Fremont-Barnes (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Age of Political Revolutions and New Ideologies, 1760-1815* (Conneticut 2007) 119 and 237.

³¹⁸ Put, Installé, Verstrepen, Van Autenboer, Vlieghe, 'Van barokke vroomheid tot classicisme en rationalisme', 203.

that beautiful temple of God as a secular temple of the law.³¹⁹ In November 1796 a decree was issued to abolish every convent. Each monk was given 15000 *livres* in vouchers and every nun received vouchers with the total worth of 1000 *livres*. With this money they could buy the property from their own convents that had been confiscated by the French or sell the vouchers to other people. Van Luffen writes: 'who would have believed that so many people were willing to soil their hands and conscience with those unjustified goods.' It was clear to him, 'how weak the religion was in the hearts of the majority of the Christians.'³²⁰ It proved to be hard to sell the vouchers and most of the buyers did not pay the right price. Moreover, many nuns and monks had not even accepted the vouchers, according to Van Luffen because they did not want to give the impression that they accepted the abolishment. After the dissolution they had twenty days to leave their convents.³²¹ Many of the members knew, however, that they would break their vows if they left. That was why they secretly stayed to hold services and tried to steal and hide church property to protect them from the French. On 13 December 1796 some members of the magistrate and the French officers forced the monks and nuns from their convents and threatened to kill them if they would ever be seen in religious clothes. From now on it was also forbidden to carry the sacrament in public except for a procession or the visiting of a sick person. Religious signs or signs of the nobility had to be removed from public places. Even the crowns and sceptres had to be removed from the statues because of their association with kingship. People could still go to the church to pray and to attend services from secular clergy. In the villages outside the city, however, the new decrees had less effect. Here the services continued with a pastor. That is why many people from the cities traveled to the countryside to attend services. It could be so crowded that people had to stand outside on the churchyards to listen.³²² As a precaution the Miraculous Statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk was taken from the Hanswijkkerk and hidden at the home of a citizen who lived at Hanswijkstraat 7.³²³ From June 1797 it was no longer forbidden for regular clergy to hold services. Yet from September each member of the clergy had to take an oath of hate against the king and promise to support the Republic. When almost no one took the oath it was decided that not only all the services were forbidden, but also the taking of confessions, the offertory, the sermons and the communion. The

³¹⁹ 'niet om den voorigen godsdienst daer in te verichten, maer eylaes om dien schoonen tempel gods te misbruyken tot een weirelijken tempel van de wet'. SAM, Luffen, fragment of one folium.

³²⁰ 'Wie had het geloofd dat er zoo vele personen te vinden waren die hunne handen en consciencie wilden besmeuren met dat onrechtveerdig goed' and 'hoe flauw de religie was in de harten van 't meerendeel der christenen'. Ibidem fol.10.

³²¹ Ibidem fol.6.

³²² Ibidem fol.7.

³²³ SAM, Gedenkenisse aengaende de kerke van Hanswijck met verscheyde memorieën van de verkooping van de gezeyde kerke, V171, fol.4r. (Author and date unknown). For location see Quaghebeur and Roegiers, 'Onvrede en onrust in eigen rangen (1690-1759), 293.

only part of the liturgy that was still allowed was the canticle, provided that it was done by a member of the secular clergy. These canticles still proved popular amongst the citizens of Mechelen, possibly also because, as Van Luffen suggests, they could secretly venerate the sacrament when they were in a church.³²⁴ People also gathered at the churchyard of the church of Our Dear Lady of the Dijle to pray to the statue of Jesus on the cross, even in mid-winter. On 15 September the statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk was moved again to another house, this time at the Oude Brusselstraat.³²⁵ When priest Benedictus Drioné, who had just taken the oath of hate, demanded that the statue was brought back to the church and when he threatened to imprison the person who held it, it was decided to move the statue once more, this time to the house of a certain person with the last name of De Jong who lived at the Geitestraat.³²⁶ The statue stayed here until the death of De Jong on 5 July 1799. Then the statue was taken to the house of Jacobus de Marré at Hanswijkstraat 43 until 18 May.³²⁷

On 19 October 1797 all the churches had to turn in their keys, take out the sacrament and make an inventory of their property.³²⁸ Van Luffen writes:

The godless shameless French people went so far in that time against our religion, that some soldiers were so resentful that they ripped the small crosses, decorated with the depiction of the Saviour, of the throats of the women and trampled them under their feet [...] O God, how many of these pieces of devotion and art have been destroyed by the hands of these *Beeldstormers* [iconoclasts], who we have known in this city.³²⁹

It is striking that Van Luffen uses the word *Beeldstormers* to identify the iconoclasts, the exact term that was used to describe the iconoclasts of the sixteenth century. He must have been reminded to the iconoclastic raids of 1566 and the English Fury of 1580.

In the summer of 1798 new congregations were organized with the purpose of driving out the French just as they had done with the Austrian troops during the *Brabantse Omwenteling* in 1789. This time it was the farmers who started a riot on 22 October to protest the newly introduced conscription for every man between the age of twenty and twenty-five. In Mechelen the protesters

³²⁴ SAM, Gedenkenisse aengaende de kerke van Hanswijck, V171, fol.4v.

³²⁵ Quaghebeur and Roegiers, 'Onvrede en onrust in eigen rangen (1690-1759) 293.

³²⁶ Ibidem.

³²⁷ Ibidem.

³²⁸ SAM, Gedenkenisse aengaende de kerke van Hanswijck, V171, fol.6r.

³²⁹ 'De goddeloze onbeschaamdheid der Fransche ging in dien tijd zoo verre tegen onze religie, dat eenige soldaten zoo verbitterd waren, dat ze de kleine kruisen met het beeld van den zaligmaker versierd van den vrouwlieden hals afrukten en onder hunne voeten omverre traptten [...] O God, hoe vele stukken van devotie en kunst zijn door de handen van deze beeldstormers vernietigd, die wij in deze stad hebben gekend' SAM, Luffen, 9.

demolished the liberty pole, freed the prisoners, burned the registers in the city hall, and chimed the bells of the St. Romboutstower.³³⁰ The riot lasted only one day; the following evening forty-one rebels were executed.³³¹ In other cities the riots also failed. The rebels had hoped that other countries such as England and Austria would have joined them or would have sent help. The protests were, however, too chaotic, uncontrolled and too small-scaled. In the aftermath of the rebellion many members of the clergy were arrested and banned from the country because the French believed that they had been responsible for the protests.³³² On 9 November 1799 Napoleon Bonaparte (1769 – 1821) came to power; he overthrew the Directory and installed a new government. This change of power had a major effect on the status of the Catholic Church. The oath of hate was abolished and gradually some churches reopened. In 1801 the French Republic and the Vatican came to an agreement to install new dioceses for the bishops. It still took another thirteen years before Mechelen was no longer under control of the French.³³³

Conclusion

The end of the eighteenth century brought profound changes for Mechelen. There was a rapid succession of power and religious life in the city came under attack. Joseph II tried to reform the Catholic Church by abolishing convents he considered unnecessary, prohibiting outward signs of devotion in the public space and confiscating the property of religious institutions. During the French period religious life suffered a lot. All convents and churches were closed and the services of the regular clergy were forbidden. Looking at contemporary and retrospective sources it becomes clear that the narrative that was created to interpret and cope with the threats and attacks of the sixteenth century was adapted to explain the events of the eighteenth century. After two centuries of reinforcing this narrative we see that contemporary chroniclers use these premediated memories in their work. Van Luffen gives an one-sided account on the abolishment of the Jesuits in which he ignores the various opinions that the citizens of Mechelen had. He presents the abolishment as a conspiracy of secular rulers even though we have seen from the account of Stevaert that there was already critique on the organization in the beginning of the eighteenth century. While discussing the French period Van Luffen uses the same coping mechanism that was discussed in the first chapter; assessing and archiving the memory of the lost properties of the churches. Moreover Van Luffen

³³⁰ Installé, De Nijn, 'De opeenvolging van politieke regimes', 197.

³³¹ Hof van Busleyden, 'Gefusilleerden van Mechelen tijdens de Boerenkrijg (version unknown), <https://www.hofvanbusleyden.be/gefusilleerden-van-mechelen-tijdens-de-boerenkrijg> (April 2018).

³³² Quaghebeur and Roegiers, 'Onvrede en onrust in eigen rangen (1690-1759)', 292.

³³³ Installé, De Nijn, 'De opeenvolging van politieke regimes', 199.

calls the iconoclasts *Beeldstormers*, the exact same word that was used to describe the iconoclasts of the sixteenth century. Notary Wendricx was also reminded of the sixteenth century and even called Joseph II and his followers 'new Protestants'. The saving of the relics of St. Rombout and the statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk is perhaps the best proof of the effect of the narrative of the sixteenth century. Citizens followed in the footsteps of their ancestors in the hope of saving the objects of devotion. In the nineteenth century we see that the comparisons between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries are even more explicit. David describes Joseph II as a tyrant who abuses the citizens of Mechelen even though they had welcomed him so warmly. Van Balberghe is not only reminded of the Protestants when he describes the followers of Joseph II, he actually writes that they 'tended fully to Protestantism', even though Joseph II and his followers were Catholic. Material memories such as the poem to honor Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk above the gate of the seminary also shows that in the nineteenth century the narrative on the last decades of the eighteenth century was still reinforced.

Conclusion

On 30 July 1876 the clergy of the Hanswijkkerk gathered with the leaders of the seminary, the chapter of the St. Romboutskathedraal, the archbishop of Mechelen, the archbishop of Nicea, the nuntius of Brussels and the bishops of Belgium at half past nine in the Hanswijkkerk. Later that afternoon they carried the Miraculous Statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk in procession to the Raghenolein. There she was placed on a platform. When the procession arrived the citizens of Mechelen, who had come to see the spectacle, started singing hymns until Archbishop Dechamps began his speech. This was the day he would crown the Miraculous Statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk. Dechamps had received a bull from pope Pius IX that gave him permission to perform the canonical coronation, which was the highest honor that could be given to a Catholic image. According to pope Pius IX the statue had proven to be of utmost importance because of the extraordinary tradition of devotion to the statue since the tenth century, the many healings that had occurred in association with the statue and the conversions that had stemmed from these and other extraordinary blessings. Goldsmith Bourdon from Gent had produced two crowns for this occasion, one for the Virgin and one for the baby Jesus. The crowns were financed with the proceeds of a fundraiser, which had been held amongst the citizens of Mechelen. The citizens had not only donated money, but also rubies, emeralds, amethysts and other precious stones. Pastor Van Hammée of the Hanswijkkerk had insisted that the ceremony should take place on the Raghenolein, for this had been the exact spot where once the Leuvensepoort, one of the city gates of Mechelen, stood. When the Calvinists conquered the city in 1580 the Miraculous Statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk had been hidden in the cellar of this gate. After the speech of Archbishop Deschamps in which he honored the Virgin and spoke about her history, the cult and her blessings, the spectators were hardly able to hold their cheers. According to a description of this event ‘all hearts were beating, tears of emotion flowed from the eyes and thousands of mouths called with zeal: Long live Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk! Long live the Pope Pius IX! Long live the Cardinal! Long live the Bishops!’. After the ceremony the statue was carried in procession to the St. Romboutskathedraal. Nearly all houses that stood on this route were decorated with flags and banners and people cheered along the roads. In the St. Romboutskathedraal a service was held and afterwards the statue was carried to the Hanswijkkerk. At night the clocks of the St. Romboutskathedraal chimed and the Miraculous Statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk, the Hanswijkkerk, the religious institutions and the

houses of the city were lit.³³⁴

The coronation of the statue in 1876 signifies that the cult of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk was still very important for the citizens of Mechelen at the end of the nineteenth century. The cult had survived the French period and was blooming once again. The confraternities of St. Rombout and Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk were re-installed and attracted new members.³³⁵ Still the memory of the hardships of the previous centuries must have been present in the minds of the citizens. It was not a coincidence that the Miraculous Statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk was crowned in the exact same place where the statue had been hidden in 1580. This thesis tried to answer the question how these two devotional cults regained their importance during the Counter-reformation and how and by whom these cults had been developed and deployed until the end of the eighteenth century. The first four chapters each described one specific element or medium that had contributed to the successful development of the cults.

Chapter one showed how local objects of devotion that had survived the iconoclastic raids of the end of the sixteenth century were used in narratives as a way of coping with their violent and disruptive past. Mechelen had played an active role during these events, just as other cities in the Southern Netherlands. The city had collaborated with Calvinists on multiple occasions, had suffered the retribution for these deeds by the Spanish soldiers and were eventually conquered by the Calvinists in 1580. During these years many holy objects were stolen, broken or damaged. By creating a narrative that ignored the collaboration with the rebels the Calvinists and by emphasizing the heroic deeds of the citizens who had saved the relics of St. Rombout and the Miraculous Statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk, the two cults were given a new meaning. Technically speaking, the two patrons had failed to protect the city, yet they were honoured as the protectors of Mechelen and became the symbol of the survival of Catholicism. They stood in evidence not only of the tenacity of the Catholic faith, but also of the solidarity of the citizens of Mechelen. It was this narrative of the past and interpretation of history that was continuously reinforced during the following two centuries.

The second chapter dealt with another factor of success for the cults, namely the

³³⁴ 'klopten alle harten, tranen van aandoening vloeiden uit de ogen en duizenden monden riepen met geestdrift: Leve O.L.V. Van Hanswijk! Leve de Paus Pius IX! Leve de Kardinaal! Leven de Bisschoppen!' J. Naulaerts, *Beknopte Geschiedenis van het Mirakuleus Beeld van Onze Lieve Vrouw van Hanswijk binnen Mechelen* (1949) 13-19.

³³⁵ The confraternity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary was renewed in 1844. See: *Broederschap van het Allerheyligste en Onbevlekt Hert van Maria, opgerecht in de kerk van O.-L.-V. Van Hanswyck*, (Mechelen 1846) 5. The confraternity of St. Rombout was renewed on March 17 1833. See: *Broederschap van den H. Rumoldus, martelaer, apostel en patroon der stad Mechelen, vernieuwd en hersteld op den 17 meert 1833, in de metropolitane kerk van denzelfden heilige* (Dessain, Mechelen) 4.

association of the objects of devotion with miracles. Each cult fulfilled a certain need amongst the citizens of Mechelen. Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk was known since the late tenth century to intercede with God for the people who venerated her. Especially women and children were believed to be healed, or even brought back from the dead, when they came to this statue, prayed to her and brought her ex-votos. Although the relics of St. Rombout were not associated with any miracles in the Early Modern period, the cult was very important for the civic identity of Mechelen, because of Rombout's role as founder and protector of the city. This image was affirmed and reinforced during annual processions. The commemorative elements of the processions put even more emphasis on the stories that were told during these public rituals. The procession stemmed from a promise the citizens of Mechelen made in 1301 when, as the story goes, St. Rombout protected the city against the troops of the Duke of Brabant. By ending the procession with a service in honor of the people who had died during the English Fury the two stories of St. Rombout as protector of the city were connected. Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk also had a annual procession. Both processions were a means of showing the social hierarchy of the city. Every important organization or person wanted to be seen during the processions and show their connection to both cults.

The third chapter showed how the materiality of the two cults contributed to their success in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Whereas the seventeenth century witnessed an increase of the importance of religious objects, the eighteenth century saw drastic changes in their interpretation and use. In the first decades after the Catholic reconciliation the relics of St. Rombout were kept in beautifully decorated reliquaries and the Statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk was adorned with many precious gifts. Even the new Hanswijkkerk was partly financed by the generous donations made by the citizens of Mechelen. At the end of the eighteenth century, however, people were more reluctant to honor objects of devotion. This shift is also visible in devotional books on the cults and the way the objects of devotion were presented. At the end of the eighteenth century, when the material aspects of religion was again the subject of discussion, the relics of St. Rombout were no longer hidden from view in a closed reliquary, but shown through glass. People could thus view the remains of their saint with their own eyes. The clergy felt obliged to respond to criticism with theological arguments and visible proof. Materiality remained an important aspect of the cults. The citizens of Mechelen remained dedicated to the cults by attending processions, donating gifts, celebrating holy days and publishing devotional books in which they defended the cults against the new waves of criticism.

The fourth factor of success that I have discussed in this thesis were the contributions

that were made to the cults by the stakeholders. People wanted to connect themselves to the cults because of their importance for the citizens of Mechelen, their highly visible role in public rituals and the message they conveyed, and hoped to profit from their popularity. Local historians took the opportunity to write devotional books during anniversary years of the cults and the members of the confraternities of St. Rombout and of the Immaculate Conception of Our Blessed Virgin Mary profited from their organizations because it brought them social security, network opportunities and status. Other organizations and institutions such as the guilds and crafts, the clergy and the magistrate competed to play an important role during public rituals such as processions. Their social status was partly determined by such rituals. The popularity of the cults was strengthened by the efforts of the stakeholders. Their involvement led to an almost constant influx of money and attention and made the cults indispensable. The cults of St. Rombout and Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk became a mirror of the hierarchy in the city and a major part of the urban culture and civic identity of Mechelen.

Finally I showed how both cults were challenged by new waves of criticism in the last decades of the eighteenth century. Joseph II had tried to reform the Catholic Church by abolishing 'unnecessary' convents, prohibiting outward signs of devotion in the public space and confiscating the property of religious institutions. During the French period all the remaining convents and churches were closed and the services of the regular clergy were forbidden. Contemporary sources and sources that reflected on the end of the eighteenth century in retrospect show that the narrative that was created to cope with the religious attacks of the sixteenth century was adapted to do the same for the new threats. Similar elements such as ignoring the agency of the citizens of Mechelen, the assessment of lost property and references to Joseph II as a 'new Protestant' were present in the accounts of contemporary writers. Not only were the same historical parallels emphasized, exactly the same cults were used to show the fortitude of the citizens of Mechelen when they decided to put their lives at risk to save the objects of devotion from destruction. The sources from the nineteenth century gave even more explicit comparisons between the sixteenth and the eighteenth century. In retrospect the narrative of the sixteenth century was used to interpret the events and shape the narrative of the eighteenth century.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the cults of St. Rombout and Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk were endorsed with new meaning and functions. Even though the two patrons had not protected the city from the rule of the Calvinists and later the French, they remained a symbol of hope and survival. The association of the cults with the earliest days of the city connected the citizens with their ancestors and encouraged them to believe that their

traditions and values had been continuous as well. The cults helped the citizens of Mechelen to create, hold and reinforce a civic identity, especially during public rituals. They fulfilled many needs: they provided a narrative of the past that stimulated the pride of the citizens in the present, they reinforced local traditions that strengthened the cohesion in the city, and offered spiritual help in times of crises, power for the local stakeholders and hope during times of war and dissent. The fact that both cults were unique for the city -no other city on the European continent knew a cult of St. Rombout and there was no other statue of Our Dear Lady of Hanswijk- made them particularly well suited as representatives of Mechelen. They are an example of how cults could be adapted to the changing political and religious views of a city. These two cults developed from a symbol against Protestantism, to a symbol against the House of Habsburg and lastly to a symbol against the French.

The findings of this case-study of the development of two local cults contribute to the general historiography of the Counter-reformation in various ways. Studies on the Counter-reformation have already emphasized that Counter-reformation Catholicism was not simply a continuation of Catholic practices before the Reformation. This study has shown that the Counter-reformation was not (only) a reactionary movement, but gave an impulse to many changes. The factors that have helped to explain the success of local cults such as the role of stakeholders, public rituals and narratives continued to play an important role in the late seventeenth century and the eighteenth century. Each stakeholder and each public ritual could change the interpretation and development of the cults and coincidentally steer the course of the Counter-reformation. Secondly this thesis has shown that new disciplines such as the study of material culture and the study of memory can give new insights in the development of the Counter-reformation. Studying the materiality of the cults, especially the way they were presented, kept and adorned, sheds light on how these cults were interpreted and valued. Analyzing the narratives of the past in a local community leads to more insight in the use of memories in constructing identity and overcoming experiences of violence and destruction. This research has shown how two local cults developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Mechelen. Did other cities in the Southern Netherlands respond in the same way to the disruptive events of the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, and were their cults equally tenacious and adaptive? It would be fruitful to study cults in other cities in the Southern Netherlands to see if the results from this case-study on Mechelen are typical for the local and historical circumstances of this particular city and its cults, or represent a more general development that is also attested elsewhere.

Sources and Bibliography

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