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Material Memories of the Dutch Revolt

Eekhout, M.F.D.

Citation
Eekhout, M. F. D. (2014, November 12). *Material Memories of the Dutch Revolt*. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/29686

Version:	Corrected Publisher's Version
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Cover Page

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Author: Eekhout, Maria Francisca Davina
Title: Material memories of the Dutch Revolt : the urban memory landscape in the Low Countries, 1566 – 1700
Issue Date: 2014-11-12

Material memories of the Dutch Revolt

The urban memory landscape in the Low Countries, 1566 – 1700

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van
de graad van Doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,
op gezag van Rector Magnificus prof.mr. C.J.J.M. Stolker,
volgens besluit van het College voor Promoties
te verdedigen op woensdag 12 november 2014
klokke 15.00 uur

door

Maria Francisca Davina Eekhout
Geboren op 21 juli 1984
te Alkmaar

Promotiecommissie

Promotor

Prof. dr. J.S. Pollmann (Universiteit Leiden)

Overige leden

Prof. dr. R. Esser (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen)

Prof. dr. F. Grijzenhout (Universiteit van Amsterdam)

Prof. dr. M.P.C. van der Heijden (Universiteit Leiden)

Prof. dr. G. Marnef (Universiteit Antwerpen)

Dit proefschrift werd mogelijk gemaakt door financiële steun van de Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek.

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Preface

To keep, collect or commission an object related to the Dutch Revolt is not always evident. For its survival the object depends on different choices made across several generations. In this process the connection between an object and its original story could easily be changed or get lost since each generation makes its own decisions about what to keep to remember the past. Only recently I experienced this process of memory making first hand, when my grandfather Arie Eekhout passed away. One of the things he left behind was a cigar box filled with his private World War II memorabilia. This not only reflected his memories of the war, but could be considered as a Pandora's box. Everyone knew about its existence, but the box had not been opened for decades. Yet, while the contents were unknown, it was clear that whatever the box contained it brought back painful memories.

In World War II my grandfather fought in the Dutch army until its surrender to Germany. As the army demobilized Arie returned to his home town Delft where he planned to escape to England across neutral territory. With a friend he took the train to Switzerland, but in Southern Germany they decided they could not cross the Alps and would return to the Netherlands. On their journey home both men were arrested by the Germans and sentenced to labor, Arie finally ended up in concentration camp Dachau and suffering from diphtheria. Until one day the local baker in Dachau was looking for a helper, a job my grandfather had experience in. He could now leave the camp during the day. Sometimes he would smuggle some bread back in. After the liberation of the camp, my grandfather returned home to Delft.

During his life Arie only told his stories to his wife Truus whom he married after the war. His memories he kept in an old cigar box. It was only after his death in 2010 that his children sat down, opened the box, and shared the stories he had told each of them individually. This reconstruction is all that is left, except of course the cigar box. In the box he had kept his Dachau card, and several documents he received upon his return in the Netherlands. This collection of documents shows his disappointment in the care he received in the Netherlands which resulted in a general sense of distrust throughout the rest of his life. Yet, instead of throwing these documents away, my grandfather kept and cherished them.

So what will happen to these documents now? Will they be kept in the family as a connection to my grandfather and his memories of World War II? Will they disappear as time passes? Will they become part of a museum collection? And will this be a conscious decision or not? At the moment the cigar box has ended up in a bigger box with other material memories of my grandparents. But what will happen next? And what about the story? Will it survive for future generations? Of course, I realize that by integrating my grandfather’s story here it may live a longer life. It may even survive without its accompanying object, as have many of the objects that are included in this study.

While studying objects as material memories I have benefitted from the help of many people, some of whom I would like to mention here. First of all, my supervisor Judith Pollmann whose NWO VICI project *Tales of the Revolt. Memory, oblivion and identity in the Low Countries, 1566-1700* enabled me to undertake this research for almost five and a half years. During this time Judith has continuously supported me to study material memories, even though the subject was relatively new. Moreover, I greatly appreciate her ability to offer a stimulating (research) environment as part of the *Tales* team while simultaneously providing necessary individual feedback. Second, I thank the other members of the research team. Erika Kuijpers provided critical comments to many of my chapters and shared an interest in information technology. My fellow PhD candidates Jasper van der Steen and Johannes Müller were a sounding board for new ideas, and both used their specific expertise to comment on my work. Student assistant Frank de Hoog was invaluable in the organization of the illustrations for this dissertation.

In general I would like thank all my colleagues at the Institute for History in Leiden for their input during meetings, lunches and conversations. The advisory board of the *Tales of the Revolt* project also provided me with useful suggestions and comments. The staff at museums, archives and libraries I visited in the last few years has been helpful. More specifically I would like to thank scholars Raingard Esser, Andrew Spicer, Guido Marnef, Frans Grijzenhout, Peter Sigmond, Jori Zijlmans and Hester Dibbits for their advice, comments, and for sharing their work and expertise. Finally, I thank my fellow PhD candidates at the Huizinga Institute for Cultural History, especially the ‘early modern group’, for the opportunity to discuss my research.

Last, but certainly not least, I thank my friends and family. My friends offered the necessary distractions over the last six years. My parents continuously showed their interest in my research, accompanied me on research trips and attended several public lectures. Most of all, however, I want to thank Jaap and Louisa. To them I dedicate this book.

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