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Material Memories of the Dutch Revolt

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Material memories of the Dutch Revolt

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

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Contents

<i>Preface</i>	iv
<i>List of illustrations and maps</i>	vi
Introduction Material Memories of the Dutch Revolt	1
Part 1: Material Memories	27
Chapter 1: Changing the urban memory landscape	29
Chapter 2: Relics of war	69
Chapter 3: Between public and private. Cherishing commemorative objects at home	97
Part 2: Stakeholders	133
Chapter 4: Stakeholders in urban memory cultures	137
Chapter 5: Beyond the city. Propagating the Revolt in an urban network	183
Chapter 6: Reshaping the legacy of the Revolt	207
Conclusion	241
Sources and bibliography	255
Index	285
Summary (in Dutch)	287
Curriculum Vitae	297

Material Memories of the Dutch Revolt

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.

List of illustrations and maps

- Cover Medal depicting Iconoclasm in 1566, collectie De Nederlandsche Bank; Spanish House in Naarden, Turfpoortstraat 27, photo R. Akemann.
- Fig.1 (p.2) Jan van Diepenbeek, Het Schermersoproer te 's-Hertogenbosch in 1579, 1600, oil on canvas, Collectie Het Noordbrabants Museum, inv nr 00852.
- Fig.2 (p.16) Anonymous, Bronzen kookpot of hutspot, before 1574, bronze © Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden, inv nr 3346.
- Fig.3 (p.35) Frans Hogenberg, de Beeldenstorm, 1566, 1566-1570, etching, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv nr RP-P-OB-77.720.
- Fig.4 (p.36) Medal depicting Iconoclasm in 1566, collectie De Nederlandsche Bank
- Fig.5 (p.37) Dirck van Delen, Beeldenstorm in een kerk, 1630, oil on panel, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv nr SK-A-4992.
- Fig.6 (p.40) S. van Baseroy, drawing of Our Lady of Succor in Heiloo, 1650-1699, Museum Catharijneconvent Utrecht, inv nr BMH te00015.
- Fig.7 (p.41) Gerrit Pietersz. de Jong, Catholic family at Our Lady of Succor in Heiloo, Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht / foto Ruben de Heer.
- Fig.8 (p.45) Joost Cornelisz. Droochsloot, Het beleg van het Kasteel Vredenburg te Utrecht in 1577, 1646, oil on panel, Centraal Museum, Utrecht, inv nr 2525.
- Fig.9 (p.47) Anonymous, Spotrent op het standbeeld van Alva, ca. 1572, etching, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv nr RP-P-OB-79.166.
- Fig.10 (p.48) Anonymous, Spanjaardkasteel te Antwerpen gesloopt 1577, ca 1600, oil on panel, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen Antwerp, inv nr 670 © Lukas - Art in Flanders vzw, foto Hugo Maertens.
- Fig.11 (p.49) Frans Hogenberg, Afbraak van de citadel van Antwerpen, 1577, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv nr RP-P-OB-78.784-161.
- Fig.12 (p.51) Simon Frisius, Standbeeld van de hertog van Alva, 1613-1615, etching, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv nr RP-P-OB-79.161.
- Fig.13 (p.52) Anonymous, De duim van het standbeeld van de hertog van Alva, 1717-1719, engraving, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, RP-P-OB-79.162.
- Fig.14 (p.55) Column of Culemborg, Algemeen Rijksarchief (ARA) Brussels, Kaarten en plannen in handschrift, nr 2.810.
- Fig.15 (p.58) Spanish House in Naarden, Turfpoortstraat 27, photo R. Akemann.
- Fig.16 (p.60) The so-called 'Bossuhuizen' on the corner of Grote Oost and Slapershaven in Hoorn, photo Rijksdienst Cultureel Erfgoed.
- Fig.17 (p.61) Bruges, Wollestraat 28, photo Rijksdienst Cultureel Erfgoed.
- Fig.18 (p.73) Collection of cannonballs from 1489 and 1580 St Martinusbasiliek in Halle, photo Brecht Deseure.
- Fig.19 (p.80) Nicolaas van Rooswijk, 'Notitie met aantekeningen betreffende bijzondere gebeurtenissen, alsmede het aantal per maand afgeschoten kanonskogels, tijdens het beleg van Haarlem door N. van Rooswijk', NoordHollands Archief (NHA), depot 44-001402 M, photo author.
- Fig.20 (p.82) House with the cannonball in Alkmaar, Appelsteeg 2, photo Louis Sicking
- Fig.21 (p.88) Heilige Geestkapel, St Bavo church, Haarlem, photo author.
- Fig.22 (p.91) Pieter Saenredam, interior of the Pieterskerk in Utrecht displaying the cannonball that hit the church in 1577 above the organ, 1636, Het Utrechts Archief, catalogue number 28643.
- Fig.23 (p.91) Herman Saftleven, interior of the Pieterskerk in Utrecht displaying the cannonball after the storm of 1674, 1674, Het Utrechts Archief, catalogue number 28596.
- Fig.24 (p.92) Erycius Puteanus, *Eryci Pvteani Historiae Belgiae liber singlaris, de obsidione Lovaniensi anni M.DC.XXXV Novi sub Ferdinando Principe belli auspicial*, Antwerp 1636, University Library Leiden (UBL), Special Collections, 188 F 32:3.

- Fig.25 (p.97) Samuel Vercoigne, Samuel Vercoigne, Beker met panorama van de Rijn van Keulen tot Rees, 1628, silver, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, NG-NM-589.
- Fig.26 (p.104) Anonymous, Specerijenbus in de vorm van de toren van de Sint Jan in Den Bosch, 1629, silver, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv nr NG-NM-5321.
- Fig.27 (p.109) Medal representing the attack with the peat barge on Breda in 1590, presented to all participants during the attack, Collectie Het Noordbrabants Museum.
- Fig.28 (p.116) Anonymous, Portrait of Josephus Justus Scaliger (1540-1609), 1604, University Library Leiden (UBL), Special Collections, Icones 29.
- Fig.29 (p.117) Anonymous, Kinderportret van Rochus Rees, 1622, oil on panel, Dordrechts Museum, Huis van Gijn, inv nr 1401.
- Fig.30 (p.119) Anonymous, Drinkschaal met de gevangenschap van Willem Courten in 1567, ca. 1567, silver, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv nr BK-NM-3220.
- Fig.31 (p.122) Cornelis de Visscher (II), Portret van Magdalena Moons, met op de achtergrond een gezicht op Den Haag, 1649, University Library Leiden (UBL), inv nr PK-P-109.861.
- Fig.32 (p.129) Rombout Verhulst, monument for Pieter van der Werf, Hooglandse Kerk Leiden, 1663, photo author.
- Fig.33 (p.135) Gerard van Bylaer, medal on the relief of Leiden in 1574, brass © Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden, inv nr 3342.2.
- Fig.34 (p.146) Nicolaes I van Eijck, the capture of Mechelen (or English fury) by the beggars under the command of Oliver Temple and John Norrits, 9 april 1580, after 1648, Stedelijke Musea Mechelen (inv. S/225); photo © Dries van den Brande.
- Fig.35 (p.148) Pieter van Veen, De spijzeling van de verloste Leidenaren op 3 oktober 1574, before 1615, © Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden, inv nr S443.
- Fig.36 (p.149) Frans Everts, the siege of Venlo in 1597 paired with the biblical story of Esther, 1613, Rijksdienst Cultureel Erfgoed, inv nr 16.322.
- Fig.37 (p.151) Dirk Stoop, massacre at Oudewater in 1575, 1650, Raadhuis Oudewater, photo C.J.H. Meijerink.
- Fig.38 (p.155) Bonaventura Peeters, the dock of Antwerp with St Norbert arriving in 1121, 1614-1652, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen © Lukas – Art in Flanders vzw, photo Dominique Provost.
- Fig.39 (p.158) Jan Verhoeven, portrait of Rombout Heyns, alias Smets, as standard bearer of the Kolverniersguild carrying the banner he saved from the English troops in 1580, 1642-1669, Stedelijke Musea Mechelen (inv. S/65); photo © Dries van den Brande.
- Fig.40 (p.160) Anonymous, Het beleg van Alkmaar in 1573 door de Spanjaarden, 1603, oil on panel, Collectie Stedelijk Museum Alkmaar, inv nr 020600.
- Fig.41 (p.162) Jan Ghuens, Het ontzet van Lier, 1595, ca. 1595, oil on canvas, Hof van Busleyden Mechelen, inv nr S0054 © KIK-IRPA, Brussel.
- Fig.42 (p.164) Antony Hoefting, print of church panel 'the siege of Haarlem' in St Bavo church in Haarlem, 1865, Noordhollands Archief Haarlem, inv nr KNA006004846.
- Fig.43 (p.166) Joseph Thienpont, the siege of Damietta, design by Cornelis Claesz van Wieringen, 1629, town hall Haarlem, photo's Ron Brand, photo-editor Anja Brand-Heemskerk.
- Fig.44 (p.173) Abraham de Verwer, Battle of the Zuiderzee, 1621, oil on canvas, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, SK-A-603.
- Fig.45 (p.187) Hans Vredeman de Vries, allegory on the recapitulation of Antwerp, 1586, Collectie Antwerpen, inv nr AV.2009.009.001 © foto Bart Huysmans.
- Fig.46 (p.191) Adam van Vianen, schaal met veld- en zeeslagen uit de Tachtigjarige Oorlog, 1614, silver, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv nr BK-AM-17-A/B.
- Fig.47 (p.195) Stained glass window 'the siege of Samaria', Janskerk Gouda, 1601, photo Stichting Goudse Glazen Sint-Jan, Gouda.

- Fig.48 (p.203) Pieter Isaacsz, Klavecimbeldesk met allegorie op Amsterdam als centrum van de wereldhandel, 1606, oil on panel, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv nr SK-A-4947.
- Fig.49 (p.204) Claes Jansz Visscher, Profiel van Amsterdam vanuit het IJ genomen, 1611, engraving, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv nr RP-P-OB-103.723.
- Fig.50 (p.208) Cornelis Beelt, De Grote Markt van Haarlem tijdens een feestelijke gebeurtenis, ca 1670-1690, oil on canvas, Amsterdam Museum Amsterdam, inv nr SA 7449.
- Fig.51 (p.210) Hendrik Cornelisz. Pot, Slag op Zuiderzee tegen de graaf van Bossu, 1573, 1647-1676, engraving, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv nr RP-P-OB-79.536.
- Fig.52 (p.219) Johan von Reckingen, medal on the centenary of the reduction of Groningen, 1694, Teylers Museum Haarlem Nederland, inv nr TMNK 01262.
- Fig.53 (p.225) Hendrik van Minderhout, la procesión de Cristo Redentor en Amberes, 27 de agosto de 1685, 1687-1688 © Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado, inv nr PO3339.
- Fig.54 (p.232) Pieter van Abeele sr, Ontzet van Bergen op Zoom door Maurits (1622), medal, 1654-1658, silver, Teylers Museum Haarlem Nederland, inv nr 00406.
- Fig.55 (p.237) Abraham Delfos, De Spaanse kookpot van Leiden, 1574, 1741-1820, engraving, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, inv nr RP-P-OB-79.597.
- Fig.56 (p.248) Anonymous, Turf gevatt in een zilveren beugel met een koperen noodduntje aan een ketting, ca. 1574 © Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden, inv nr 3350.

Maps

- Map 1 (p.24) Map of the Low Countries (adapted from Wikimedia Commons)
- Map 2 (p.33) Places of memory in the Low Countries (adapted from Wikimedia Commons)

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