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Material Memories of the Dutch Revolt

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Part 2

Stakeholders

In 1577 the magistrate of Leiden commissioned Cornelis Stam to remove an altar stone from its original location in the Pieterschurch and use it for an inscription commemorating the relief of the city from the Habsburg army in 1574. The inscription, written by city secretary Jan van Hout, was subsequently placed on the façade of the town hall.¹ The magistrate of Leiden made a symbolic gesture by violating the altar stone and showcasing it in the physical heart of their power in the town hall. The message which was inscribed on the stone, however, did not reveal the religious implications of removing it from the Pieterschurch. Instead it referred to the starvation Leiden's people had endured and to the subsequent feeding of the population after the relief of the city on 3 October 1574.² This was the magistrate's take on what had happened three years earlier during the siege. Why did it choose to promote this specific memory of the Revolt?

As recent research on Leiden has demonstrated, the story about starvation stands out in the vivid memory culture that emerged after the siege in 1574. Not only was the magistrate very active in propagating this aspect of the siege but they were joined by other stakeholders within the community to promote the same theme. The starvation theme was particularly convenient for the magistrate because it had to deal with several unpleasant memories of the siege which were more difficult to explain. During the siege most casualties had died of a variety of diseases, described as plague, but these were considered a punishment from God. Furthermore, religious and political tensions within the city had driven the population apart. Therefore, when it came to the commemoration of the Revolt, it was much more convenient to remember that every inhabitant had been struck by hunger, whether Catholic or Protestant, or rich or poor, but since the population had withstood the enemy, they had all been redeemed. The hunger story therefore served to demonstrate a collective struggle which had been won.³

After 1574 the relief of Leiden became part of a memory culture about starvation and the subsequent feeding of the population. This theme was initiated and propagated most actively by the magistrate. It placed inscriptions on the town hall as well as on the *Vlietbrug*, the place where the Beggar army entered the city in 1574.⁴ It drew parallels with the two Assyrian sieges of Jerusalem and Samaria in the Old Testament, which featured respectively on the medal to commemorate the siege of Leiden after 1574 and on a window the magistrate

¹ Marike Hoogduin-Berkhout, 'Op de geluckige regeeringe van Leiden' geschilderde voorstellingen in het Leidse stadhuis 1575-1700', *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 22 (Hilversum 2006) 59–105, there 77; Frans van Mieris and Daniel van Alphen, *Beschryving der Stad Leyden II* (Leiden 1770) 364.

² Inscription façade town hall Leiden.

³ Judith Pollmann, 'Een 'blij-eindend' treurspel. Leiden, 1574', in: Herman Amersfoort et al. (eds.), *Belaagd en belegerd* (Amsterdam 2011) 118–145, there 128; see also Judith Pollmann *Herdenken, herinneren, vergeten. Het beleg en ontzet van Leiden in de Gouden Eeuw* (Leiden 2008).

⁴ Hoogduin-Berkhout, 'Op de geluckige regeeringe van Leiden', 81.

commissioned for the Janschurch in Gouda in 1601 (fig.33).⁵



Fig.33 Gerard van Bylaer, medal on the relief of Leiden in 1574, this particular medal was minted in brass but others were in gold, silver, copper and bronze (Museum De Lakenhal Leiden).

The parallel between Leiden and the two cities was clear because Jerusalem had withstood the enemy and Samaria had suffered from starvation.⁶ Moreover, the magistrate decorated the burgomaster's room in the town hall with paintings that commemorated the siege and relief of the city. One of them had been commissioned from Isaac Claesz van Swanenburg in 1612; the other had been a gift in 1615 from Pieter van Veen, pensionary of Leiden as well as a painter. Both paintings remained on site until the 1660s when the burgomaster's room was redecorated and they were moved to the aldermen's room.⁷

The magistrate of Leiden was thus very active in propagating the starvation theme, but this did not mean that the magistrate was the only stakeholder in the urban community involved in commemorating the relief of Leiden. First of all, the population joined in the annual celebrations of the siege that included a fair and festivities such as a parade by the militia and performances by rhetoricians sponsored by the magistrate. In these celebrations God was omnipresent, but it was the commemoration itself was not 'confessional'. In other words, a general service of thanksgiving was held annually, but the relief was not presented as a triumph of Reformed faith.⁸ This did not mean that the religious aspect was suppressed, but it is evident that it was less prominent in Leiden's community than the starvation theme.

Along with the general celebrations organized by the magistrate, the theme also caught on amongst groups within Leiden's community as well as with individual citizens and their

⁵ Gerard van Bylaer, Vergulde triomfpenning op het beleg en ontzet van Leiden, 1574, gilded silver, Museum De Lakenhal Leiden, inv nr 1381; the same medal also in brass, Museum De Lakenhal Leiden, inv nr 3342.2; Zsuzsanna Ruyven-Zeman, *Stained glass in the Netherlands before 1795 II: the South* (Amsterdam 2011) 532–534.

⁶ Hoogduin-Berkhout, 'Op de geluckige regeeringe van Leiden', 78; Pollmann, 'Een "blij-eindend" treurspel', 126–127.

⁷ Orlers, *Beschrijvinge der stad Leyden*, 163–164; Hoogduin-Berkhout, 'Op de geluckige regeeringe van Leiden', 78–87, 98; Marloes Huiskamp, 'De Tachtigjarige Oorlog en de Vrede van Munster in de decoratie van zestiende- en zeventiende-eeuwse stadhuisen. Een verkenning', *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 13 (1997) 335–346, there 335.

⁸ Ingrid W.L. Moerman and R.C.J. van Maanen (eds.), *Leiden. Eeuwig feest* (Leiden 1986) 19–21; Judith Pollmann, *Het oorlogsverleden van de Gouden Eeuw* (Leiden 2008) 7, Pollmann, *Herdenken, herinneren, vergeten*, 20.

families. Rhetoricians joined in the celebrations and performed plays. Immigrants, such as exile Jacob Duym from the Southern Netherlands, also commemorated the siege. He published books and plays about the siege of Leiden and the suffering of the population.⁹ Alumni of Leiden's university, which was founded in 1575, celebrated the day of the relief, took these memories to their home towns after they graduated and incorporated them in sermons throughout the seventeenth century.¹⁰ Individual citizens also contributed to the stories about starvation. A local hero such as Willem Cornelisz Speelman, for example, took pride in using his pigeons to communicate with William of Orange in Delft instead of eating them, for which he was generously rewarded by the magistrate during the annual celebration of the relief in 1578. He received a gold medal, the name *Van Duivenbode*, or pigeon messenger, and had his new coat of arms placed on the façade of his home on the Rapenburg.¹¹ Other stories about suffering were included in the history of the siege by Jan Fruytiers in 1574 and 1577 as well as in Leiden's chorography by Jan Orlers which was published in 1614 and 1641.¹²

As the Leiden example demonstrates, an urban memory landscape was built on a dynamic interaction between different stakeholders. Not only the magistrate, and to a lesser degree the church, but also rhetoricians, immigrants, authors and individual citizens contributed to the urban memory culture of Leiden after its relief in 1574. Although the magistrate clearly set the agenda for the memory practices in the city, other stakeholders joined in, shared their memories of the siege, and contributed details and new angles to the general story. Moreover, as we have already seen in the previous chapters, stakeholders preserved their memories through all sorts of material media such as inscriptions, paintings, cooking pots and gable stones. These objects were not only material memories for their owners, however, but also served as symbols within urban memory cultures. Still this did not mean that other memories were not present in Leiden. The Reformed Church had its own story about the siege, and as we have already seen in chapter three, the Remonstrant community shared their memories in family circles after 1618 as well. The aim of the second part of this study is therefore to discuss the different stakeholders that emerged in urban communities during and after the Revolt and to analyze their motives for their involvement in the urban memory culture.

⁹ Pollmann *Herdenken, herinneren, vergeten*, 15; Cobi Bordewijk, '*Lof zij den helden!*' Vier eeuwen Leidse stedentrots op het toneel (the Hague 2005) 10.

¹⁰ Judith Pollmann, 'Een 'blij-eindend' treurspel', 131; Judith Pollmann, *Early modern memory. Practicing the past in Europe, 1500-1800* (forthcoming), chapter four.

¹¹ Pollmann *Herdenken, herinneren, vergeten*, 16; Moerman and Van Maanen, *Leiden*, 20.

¹² J. Fruytiers, *Corte beschrijvinghe vande strenghe belegeringhe ende wonderbaerlicke verlossinghe der stadt Leyden* (Delft 1574); J. Fruytiers, *Corte beschrijvinghe vande strenghe belegeringhe ende wonderbaerlicke verlossinghe der stadt Leyden in Hollandt* (2nd edition; Delft 1577); J.J. Orlers, *Beschrijvinge der stadt Leyden* (Leiden 1614); J.J. Orlers, *Beschrijvinge der stadt Leyden* (Leiden 1641).