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'THE BIRDS WERE IN THE NET': REACTIONS IN THE NETHERLANDS TO NEWS OF THE ST BARTHOLOMEW'S DAY MASSACRE, 1572

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Abstract:—This article analyses reactions in the Netherlands to news of the St Bartholomew's Day massacre in 1572. Although historians have previously studied international reactions to the massacre, they have largely neglected the Netherlands due to the paucity of printed responses to the event in the Low Countries. Through the study of a great number of diaries and chronicles, this article demonstrates how news about the massacre spread rapidly throughout the Netherlands. Chroniclers in the Low Countries reflected on the content and credibility of the horrible news reports from France while writing them down. The ongoing religious wars had made them aware of manipulative strategies that influenced news and its media, including false reports that were spread deliberately by the enemy. This article argues that the study of transnational news reports illuminates contemporary questions on authority and trustworthiness in a rapidly polarizing religious climate.

In the early morning of 29 August 1572, a group of French soldiers, naked and covered with dust, arrived at the city gates of Mons. The men were prisoners of war, who had been sent by Spanish officials to inform Louis of Nassau and his troops about the St Bartholomew's Day massacre, which had been carried out in Paris. A few months earlier, Louis had occupied the city in the Netherlandish province of Hainault as the commander of an invading French Huguenot army. With the Duke of Alva's royal troops closing in, the occupiers were now hoping for more Huguenot forces from France to arrive and relieve them. Nobody believed the horrific story because the news seemed to have come from an enemy source. The Secretary Michel de la Huguerye, who was staying in the military camp of his patron Louis of Nassau, noted: 'We did not believe a word of it, as the message came from the Spaniards, although we suspected something was the matter'.[1] Eager to know more about the story, Louis's men interrogated a

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[1] M. de la Huguerye, *Mémoires inédits de Michel de La Huguerye (1570–1602), publiés d'après les manuscrits autographes pour la Société de l'Histoire de France*, ed. A. de Ruble, 4 vols (Paris, 1877–80), i. 128.

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captured Spanish soldier who told them the news had come from the Duke of Alva himself. He had arrived in the royal camp the day before. Yet Louis of Nassau and his entourage were willing to believe the news only when two French Protestant ministers, who had been sent by the French ambassador Claude de Mondoucet, turned up in Mons and confirmed the gruesome story.[2]

This article analyses reactions in the Netherlands to the news of the St Bartholomew's Day massacre and studies the larger problem of international news credibility in times of religious trouble.[3] Whose authority was deemed credible in confirming rumours? And, as the example above shows, how was the news from France instrumentalized to demoralize the rebels in the Low Countries? Over the past fifteen years, the study of early modern news has developed into a flourishing field of historical scholarship, while recent interest in transnational research has produced a wave of studies that map the exchange of news across borders.[4] These studies have greatly added to our knowledge of the production and dissemination of news, as news was almost never restricted to a single country and commonly crossed borders. However, the reception of news still remains the most elusive element of this research. With historians stressing the pertinence of early modern news dissemination by word of mouth, they have found it particularly hard to study its reception. Yet, as I will demonstrate in this article, the study of contemporary chronicles provides a way to fill this gap.

It is important to note the St Bartholomew's Day massacre's considerable impact on the course of the Dutch Revolt.[5] In the summer of 1572, the rebels in the Netherlands anticipated military support from France, support which never materialized due to the massacre. Conversely, French politics in these months centred on the question of whether to intervene in the Netherlands. In the spring of 1572, numerous French Huguenots had departed to the north. Coligny had stayed in Paris to plead with the French king for money and troops to support William of Orange. It did not take much for concerned contemporaries to assume the existence of a secret link between events in the Netherlands and the massacre. Some claimed that 'the plans for the wars in the Netherlands were designed to entice Protestant leaders to come to Paris and their deaths'.[6]

Yet historians who have previously studied international reactions to reports of the St Bartholomew's Day massacre have largely neglected the Netherlands.

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[2] Ibid., i. 127–9.

[3] In 1572, the Netherlands roughly encompassed present-day Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, plus a strip of what is now northern France.

[4] A. Pettegree, *The Invention of News: How the World Came to Know about Itself* (New Haven, 2014); J. Raymond and N. Moxham (eds), *News Networks in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden, 2016).

[5] Nicola Sutherland in particular has stressed the international dimensions of the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre: N. Sutherland, *The Massacre of St. Bartholomew and the European Conflict* (London, 1973); G. Parker, *The Dutch Revolt* (London, 1977), 138.

[6] R. Kingdon, *Myths about the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacres, 1572–1576* (Cambridge, MA, 1988), 43; C. Zwierlein, 'Security politics and conspiracy theories in the emerging European state system (15th/16th c.)', *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, 38 (2013), 65–95, 82–8.

This lack of interest may be explained by the paucity of printed responses to the event in the Low Countries. Scholars have instead focused on public celebrations of the massacre in Rome and Spain, or considered printed Protestant reactions in England, Geneva and cities in the German Empire.[7] All the same, news about the massacre spread quickly in the Netherlands, too. The fact itself is hardly surprising. There were well-established news networks between both countries—for trade, political and strategic reasons, but also because of the nobilities' transnational networks. It is notable, however, that several chroniclers in major cities in the Low Countries commented at length on reports of the massacre, and these chroniclers, mostly men of the elites, reveal the significance of the exchange of oral news in sixteenth-century daily life.[8] They reflected on the content and credibility of the horrible news reports from France while writing them down. The ongoing religious war had made them aware of manipulative strategies that influenced news and its media, including false reports that were spread deliberately by the enemy.[9]

This article explores various aspects of the Netherlandish reactions to the St Bartholomew's Day massacre. First, it demonstrates how much inhabitants of the Netherlands already knew about the wars in France before the massacre took place. The next section focuses on the links between the massacre and the siege of Mons to illustrate the Habsburg tactic of demoralizing the enemy with news about the massacre. The discussion then turns to reactions to the massacre among inhabitants of large cities in the Netherlands, and shows how well informed they were about the situation in France, suggesting their fear of a similar massacre happening in the Netherlands. The article concludes by suggesting the meticulous care contemporaries took to verify news from abroad.

I

The St Bartholomew's Day massacre shocked Protestant Europe. Historians have argued that part of the shock was caused by disbelief: contemporaries were stunned by the scale of the violence. It was an event without precedent, one that did not fit within their frames of reference.[10] Contemporaries, used to making allusions to the classical world and the Bible, found it hard to find a similar example in these ancient times, let alone in the recent past. Yet, people in the Netherlands were used to hearing news about the wars of religion—many sources had stressed the violence of the conflict in their neighbouring country. Could one say that the chroniclers in the Netherlands were attuned—by what had happened in France in the 1560s—to expect a massacre?

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[7] Arlette Jouanna provides an excellent overview of both historiography and events: A. Jouanna, *La Saint-Barthélemy: les mystères d'un crime d'état, 24 août 1572* (Paris, 2007). 202–27; D. Crouzet, *La Nuit de la Saint-Barthélemy: un rêve perdu de la Renaissance* (Paris, 1994); C. Buchanan, 'The Massacre of St Bartholomew's (24–27 August 1572) and the Sack of Antwerp (4–7 November 1576): Print and Political Responses in Elizabethan England' (PhD, London School of Economics, 2011); R. Kingdon, 'Quelques réactions à la Saint-Barthélemy à l'extérieur de la France', in *Amiral de Coligny et son temps,* ed. J.-P. Babelon et al. (Paris, 1974), 191–204; P. Hurtubise, O. M. I., 'Comment Rome apprit la nouvelle du massacre de la Saint-Barthélemy: contribution à une histoire de l'information au XVI^{e} siècle', *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae*, 10 (1972), 188–209.

[8] On the act of chronicling: J. Pollmann, 'Archiving the present and chronicling for the future', *Past & Present* Suppl, 11 (2016), 231–52.

[9] R. Baars, *Rumours of Revolt: Civil War and the Emergence of a Transnational News Culture in France and the Netherlands, 1561–1598* (Leiden, 2021); H. van Nierop, '"And Ye Shall Hear of Wars and Rumours of Wars": rumour and the revolt of the Netherlands', in *Public Opinion and Changing Identities in the Early Modern Netherlands: Essays in Honour of Alastair Duke*, ed. J. Pollmann and A. Spicer (Leiden, 2007), 69–86.

In 1567, Netherlandish chronicles abounded with news from France. In cities such as Antwerp, Brussels and Ghent, reports on the French troubles appeared on an almost weekly basis. While France went through two religious wars in three years, Netherlandish chroniclers noted down French news in often astonishing detail, showing how well informed they were about French politics. Louis de Bourbon, Prince of Condé (1530–1569), King Charles IX, for Charles IX, and Gaspard de Coligny (1519–1572), Admiral of France, commonly called 'the Admiral', featured most often in Netherlandish news reports from France. But tidings also included less prominent figures such as the young Henry of Lorraine, Duke of Guise, the Duke of Anjou, the younger brother of the French king (who would later become Henry III), Catherine de' Medici and Coligny's brother François d'Andelot. News also reached the smaller towns in the Netherlands. Chronicler Augustijn of Hernighem in Ypres, for instance, mentioned having heard news about the outbreak of the Second War of Religion in October 1567, when he laconically stated: 'that rumour has it that things are not going well in France'.[11] He wrote how some said that Condé, whom he invariably called 'Condeit', had gone to Picardy, where many nobles had rallied around him, but that others said that they were in Lorraine, 'but nobody knows for certain the truth'.[12]

It is small wonder that Condé's movements featured so much in news reports from France. As the official leader of the Huguenots throughout the second and third wars of religion, he was a particularly prominent figure, but how Netherlandish chroniclers described and judged him depended on their religious preferences. The Ghent Catholic chronicler Marcus van Vaernewijck was less enthusiastic about this 'captain and head of the heretics in France' than was the chronicler Godevaert van Haecht, a Lutheran artist living in Antwerp.[13] Catholic opponents vigorously questioned Condé's religious motives, suspecting him of having his eye on the crown of France. In November 1567, for example, rumours reached Ghent that he had minted his own coins, depicting him as King of France. Van Vaernewijck expressed his doubt about a rumour claiming that Gleijn Temmerman, provost of St Peter's Abbey in Ghent, owned one of these coins.[14]

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[10] M. Greengrass, 'Hidden transcripts: secret histories and personal testimonies of religious violence in the French wars of religion', in *The Massacre in History*, ed. M. Levene and P. Roberts (Oxford, 1999), 69–88, 81–4.

[11] A. van Hernighem, *Eerste bouck van beschryfvinghe van alle gheschiedenesse (1562–1572)*, ed. A. L. E. Verheyden (Brussels, 1978), 55.

[12] Ibid.

[13] M. van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden in die Nederlanden en voornamelick in Ghendt, 1566–1568*, ed. F. Vanderhaeghen 5 vols (Ghent, 1872–81), iii. 85–7; G. van Haecht, *De kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht over de troebelen van 1565 tot 1574 te Antwerpen en elders*, ed. Rob. Van Roosbroeck, 2 vols (Antwerp, 1929–30).

Chroniclers frequently recorded false news items featuring Condé. Most of them concerned his death. In November 1568, the Antwerp Van Wesenbeke chronicle, probably written by the Lutheran lawyer Jan van Wesenbeke or one of his family members, noted how inhabitants of Antwerp said that Condé was captured and 1500 of his troops were defeated. This turned out to be a lie, he added.[15] On 22 March 1569, news arrived in Antwerp about the battle of Jarnac (13 March), in which Condé was killed, but this time many refused to believe the news. Condé's death was controversial: a Catholic soldier had shot him from behind after he had surrendered, and German Protestant pamphlets complained that it was 'contrary to all of the laws of war'.[16] Godevaert van Haecht recorded how his contemporaries speculated whether Condé was alive or dead, and some of them refused to believe that the prince had actually died for a long time.[17]

The detail in these reports is remarkable. The Antwerp and Ghent chroniclers recorded troop movements and numbers along with the backgrounds of noblemen, and could place battles geographically without difficulty. Godevaert van Haecht described a battle between the Protestant troops of the German Duke of Zweibrücken and William of Orange on one side, and French royal troops on the other in late April 1569. The Protestant princes, who were, according to Van Haecht, eager to avenge the death of the 'highly noble' prince of Condé, spared no one and attacked without restraint.[18] A significant Netherlandish connection informed this interest as William of Orange and Louis of Nassau had joined the French Protestants, while Netherlandish Catholic noblemen had joined the royal troops. This must have contributed to the number of detailed reports they received about the Netherlandish noblemen. Van Vaernewijck even recorded that the horses belonging to the Catholic Duke of Aremberg, who had been sent to France by Alva to assist King Charles against the Huguenots, had died from drinking water that was too cold.[19]

Chroniclers also frequently noted how they received news from France. Van Vaernewijck, for example, often saw letters from other officials. He described how he had first heard about the battle of St Denis, a clash between royal and Reformed troops in the vicinity of Paris, on 10 November 1567: 'On 25 November the bishop of Tournai had sent a letter to the Dean in Ghent, which I have seen, in the presence of Jan Damman, esquire, and other Ghent notables'.[20] In Antwerp, Jan van Wesenbeke's chronicle specifically mentioned the post from France bringing important tidings. After the battle of Jarnac, this post reported only the first few facts on the death of Condé, the demise of many of his troops and of other noblemen, but more detailed reports on the battle reached Antwerp later.[21] However, as the use of phrases such as 'people strongly said' or 'others told us' suggests most of the reports that chroniclers noted had been transmitted orally. Contemporaries also questioned travellers from France: Van Vaernewijck recorded how a Frenchman arrived in Ghent in March 1568 and was asked 'how matters stood' in France. Van Vaernewijck, however, did not set much store by his report, as the man was clearly biased, claiming that the whole of France now sided with the Prince of Condé.[22] Occasionally, these chroniclers saw news in print and copied pamphlets or edicts into their chronicles.

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[14] Van Vaernewijck, *Beroerlicke tijden*, iii. 128–9.

[15] Felix Archief, Antwerp, 'Kronijk van Jan van Wesenbeke', 1567–80 ms PK 108, 37.

[16] P. Benedict, *Graphic History: The Wars, Massacres and Troubles of Tortorel and Perrissin* (Geneva, 2007), 348.

[17] Van Haecht, *Kroniek*, ii. 83–4.

[18] Ibid., ii. 86.

[19] Van Vaernewijck, *Beroerlicke tijden*, iii. 208.

[20] Ibid., iii., 241.

The Habsburg government and the urban magistrates in the Netherlands, in their turn, actively tried to control the news. On 28 April 1568, Godevaert van Haecht noted how it was now prohibited to 'repeat new tidings or inquire after them, on pain of being flogged'.[23] In June 1569, Antwerp's magistrates even specifically forbade the passing on of tidings from France. The Habsburg government did not prohibit the dissemination of all news from France. Catholic victories were celebrated publicly, and Alva was keen to make these triumphs widely known with thanksgiving masses and processions throughout the Netherlands.[24] Various diarists mention processions after the battles of Saint-Denis (1567), Jarnac (1569) and Moncontour (1569).[25] The victory of Jarnac, in which Condé was killed, was particularly well received by Alva and his court. In a report to the king, the French ambassador Ferrals described Alva's reaction to the news: the duke had embraced him joyfully and exclaimed that he had never been happier than at that moment.[26] Alva ordered a *Te Deum* to be sung in the chapel of the Miracle of the Blessed Sacrament in Brussels, which he attended with his entire court, the Privy Council and the Council of Finances.[27] In turn, the duke usually sent reports about his military victories in the Netherlands to the King of France.

Thus, the inhabitants of the Netherlands had become accustomed to receiving more or less disturbing news from France. In the summer of 1572, however, they heard news about an event that was unprecedented in its violence: the St Bartholomew's Day massacre. While many Huguenot noblemen had assembled in Paris to attend the wedding of Henry of Navarre and Marguerite of Valois, Gaspard de Coligny was wounded by a gunman. The king ordered a pre-emptive strike against the Huguenots, and a group of men, possibly led by the Duke of Guise, murdered Coligny, while at the same time, royal guards hunted French Protestant noblemen. The populace of Paris took this as permission to start killing their Protestant fellow citizens on the nights of 23–24 August. An estimated 2000–3000 Protestants perished.[28] In the following weeks, news about the massacre reached other French cities and sparked massacres in Orléans, Rouen, Bordeaux, Troyes and eight other towns.[29]

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[21] 'Kroniek van Jan van Wesenbeke', 52.

[22] Van Vaernewijck, *Beroerlicke tijden,* iii. 292–3.

[23] Van Haecht, *Kroniek*, i. 21.

[24] M. Stensland, *Habsburg Communication in the Dutch Revolt* (Amsterdam, 2012).

[25] Van Haecht, *Kroniek*, ii. 106.

[26] L. P. Gachard, *La Bibliothèque Nationale à Paris. Notices et extraits qui concernent l'histoire de Belgique* (Brussels, 1877), ii. 472.

[27] E. Poullet and M. C. Piot (eds), *Correspondance du Cardinal de Granvelle*, 12 vols (Brussels, 1877–96), iii. 522.

News about the massacres spread quickly through Europe, with official reactions mirroring the continent's religious divisions. Catholic countries celebrated the event triumphantly. Philip II reportedly laughed with joy and danced around the room, while Pope Gregory and his cardinals ordered the performance of a solemn *Te Deum*.[30] In contrast, Protestants in Swiss cities and Elizabethan England were in shock. Some scholars have claimed that the massacres were followed by silence. According to Mark Greengrass, there were few oral reports: 'Huguenot survivors were too traumatized to speak or unable to recall what had occurred'.[31] He also found few testimonies among Catholics, who did not take pride in their co-religionists' actions. Others just did not want to hear about the bloodshed. In these chaotic times, it was dangerous to know too much: some locked themselves in their rooms with their ears closed.[32] Yet travellers, Protestant refugees and correspondents in Paris, spread the news about the massacre rapidly throughout the rest of Europe.

II

One way in which the news of the St Bartholomew's Day massacre was used was to demoralize the besieged of Mons. The siege of Mons in the summer of 1572 caused the conflicts in both France and Netherlands to interconnect more than ever. Well aware of the importance of the event, contemporaries, in both France and the Netherlands, closely followed the siege. In Paris, the chronicling priest Jehan de la Fosse noted several details about the siege, even quoting alleged conversations between Alva and the French military commander Genlis.[33] Meanwhile, word of the siege's progress reached Antwerp and Amsterdam every few days, and both cities' inhabitants even heard reports of the circulation of (false) news about the siege in France. In Antwerp, for example, in early September, Godevaert van Haecht heard that rumours were circulating in Paris and Rouen that William of Orange had been beaten.[34]

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[28] Jouanna, *La Saint-Barthélemy*, 9–10; S. Carroll, *Blood and Violence in Early Modern France* (Oxford, 2006), 277.

[29] P. Benedict, 'The Saint Bartholomew's massacres in the provinces', *Hist J*, 21 (1978), 205–25.

[30] Parker, *Dutch Revolt*, 138; Kingdon, *Myths*, 45–6.

[31] Greengrass, 'Hidden transcripts', 81.

[32] Ibid., 81–2; S. Broomhall, 'Disturbing memories: narrating experiences and emotions of distressing events in the French wars of religion' in *Memory before Modernity: Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe*, eds. E. Kuijpers, J. Pollmann, J. Müller and J. van der Steen (Leiden, 2013), 254.

[33] J. de la Fosse, *Les 'Mémoires' d'un curé de Paris au temps des guerres de religion (1557–1590)*, ed. Marc Venard (Geneva, 2004), 109–11.

Louis of Nassau's attacks on Valenciennes and Mons in the spring and summer of 1572 had a significant impact on French politics. Coligny sought to obtain permission from Charles IX to send support troops to the Protestants in the Netherlands. The king, however, remained indecisive. On the one hand, he feared war with Spain should he decide to take sides with Louis and William of Orange; on the other, an intervention in the Netherlands might enable the French crown to regain parts of the Southern provinces, which had once belonged to France. Moreover, a military expedition might relieve tensions in France itself, thus transferring the wars of religion from French soil.[35] Alva was aware of Charles' doubts and exerted intense pressure on him to prevent his subjects from joining rebel forces. Some historians have accused Charles of ambiguity, while others have pointed out that his conduct was, in fact, consistent in its inconsistency.[36] During the summer of 1572, Charles expediently waited to see how matters would turn out, secretly supporting both parties. In letters to Catholic rulers he claimed to disapprove of French Huguenots fighting in Mons, while at the same time providing the French Protestant forces with money.

Because of the volatile state of relations between Spain and France, Alva sought to keep his campaigns against Huguenot troops secret. In a letter to Philip II in June 1572, Alva wrote about the capture of a group of Huguenots: 'some members [of which] were quietly hanged and others taken away and secretly drowned because he [Alva] and Medinaceli were agreed—despite his ultimatum—that they must avoid any open risk of rupture with France'.[37] Despite these precautionary measures, Alva could not hide the killings. The Van Wesenbeke chronicle demonstrates that detailed reports of the murders reached Antwerp the following day. It also described the treacherous role of a local farmer. He had pretended to show the Huguenots the way to Louis, but instead had led them straight into Alva's arms. Louis was said to have taken immediate revenge, burning the village where the farmer lived. The author of the Van Wesenbeke chronicle obtained proof of the Huguenots' clandestine execution some weeks later when the corpses of hanged Frenchmen washed ashore in a shipyard in Antwerp.[38]

On 27 August, the first reports about the St Bartholomew's Day massacre reached Alva in Antwerp. He immediately left the city to join his army at the siege of Mons. The Van Wesenbeke chronicle notes that Alva marched from Antwerp dressed completely in blue, with his entire retinue dressed in the

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[34] Van Haecht, *Kroniek*, ii. 211.

[35] H. Daussy, *Le Parti huguenot: chronique d'une désillusion (1557–1572)* (Geneva, 2014), 750–7.

[36] Crouzet, *La Nuit de la Saint-Barthélemy*, 315–55; Daussy, *Le Parti Huguenot*, 754–5.

[37] Sutherland, *Massacre and the European Conflict*, 245–6.

[38] Felix Archief, Antwerp, 'Kronijk van Jan van Wesenbeke', 1567–1580 ms PK 108, 14 June 1572, 128–9. I would like to thank professor Guido Marnef for sharing his notes on the Van Wesenbeke family with me.

same colour, in an apparent attempt to impress the citizens and signal unity.[39] The duke lost no time in informing Louis of the news from Paris. He anticipated that the gruesome story would have a destructive impact on morale in the besieged city. After all, Louis had placed his hopes on Coligny and his French supporters. The Parisian murders meant that these support troops would never turn up. Michel de la Huguerye witnessed the devastating effect of the news of the massacre in Paris on the Protestant nobles in Mons:

> Seigneur Comte [Louis of Nassau], who experienced such grief over what had happened in Paris that he fell ill for more than three months, nevertheless demonstrated such courage, being everywhere where he was needed, day and night, and encouraged everyone with his example.[40]

Another French nobleman, Colonel Rouvroy, also reportedly became 'very ill, due to working day and night in this siege, and because of the news of the death of his master, the said sr. Admiral, and all his friends'.[41] Godevaert van Haecht expected the news to provide a strong psychological boost to the Duke of Alva, who now 'probably advanced more daringly'.[42]

The besieged held out for three more weeks, eventually surrendering the city to Alva on 19 September 1572. Louis' illness became news in itself. Godevaert van Haecht and provost Morillon, agent for the Cardinal de Granvelle in the Southern Netherlands, both mentioned Louis 'being sick with sadness when he left the city'.[43] Michel de la Huguerye indeed wrote how, in a village six miles from Mons, 'when we helped him [Louis] descend from his carriage, to bring him to his chamber, he was so weak that he fainted in our arms, and then, with some help, he revived, and we put him to bed'.[44] Many of Louis' French friends, who had been with him during the siege, were slaughtered when they crossed the border with France. Historians contend that this was done by order of Charles, who feared that the Huguenots would seek revenge for their murdered relatives and friends.[45] Louis had tried to persuade his French comrades to stay with his army instead of returning to a France that was 'still red with blood'.[46] Yet many nobles declined the offer, anxious to return to their estates and families. According to chronicler Jan de Pottre, a Catholic merchant from Brussels, this was one of the reasons Mons had surrendered quickly after the news about the St Bartholomew events. As he wrote: ‘the French longed to be home, because of the death of the Admiral’.[47]

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[39] 'Kronijk van Jan van Wesenbeke', 27 Aug. 1572, 136; cf. U. Rublack, 'Renaissance dress, cultures of making, and the period eye', *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History and Material Culture*, 23 (2016), 6–34, 18–20.

[40] De la Huguerye, *Mémoires*, i. 130.

[41] Ibid., i. 134.

[42] Van Haecht, *Kroniek*, ii. 207.

[43] Ibid., ii. 216; Poullet and Piot (eds), *Correspondance de Granvelle*, iv. 438.

[44] De la Huguerye, *Mémoires*, i. 143.

[45] Daussy, *Le Parti Huguenot*, 765; Jouanna, *St.-Barthélemy*, 156–9; Sutherland, *Massacre and the European Conflict,* 344.

[46] De la Huguerye, *Mémoires*, i. 141.

III

After the St Bartholomew’s Day massacre, the French king was keen to control the spread of information, and employed a complex strategy to do so. First, he sent his ambassadors to the major courts in Europe, equipped with individually tailored stories. Catholic rulers were told that the French king had sought to restore religious unity in his kingdom while Protestant rulers, by contrast, heard that the king just wanted to punish a few rebels among the nobility. Moreover, Charles found it important to distinguish between the ‘royal execution’ of Coligny and his lieutenants, and the popular killings that had followed, and which had risen spontaneously.[48] This official royal version of the story of the massacre was disseminated throughout France through a pamphlet, *Discours sur les causes de l’execution faicte es personnes de ceux qui avoyent conjuré contre le roy et son estat.* Christopher Plantin in Antwerp also issued a version of the text.[49] In short, it blamed Coligny and other Protestant nobles for conspiring against their princes and the State. Coligny and his entourage had ‘aimed to hide their pernicious intentions under the cloak of religion’ and had used ‘false rumours’ to turn French subjects against their ruler.[50] Charles had been forced—out of self-defence—to order a ‘prompt and sovereign execution’.[51] As for the massacre of the two thousand other Protestants, Parisian Catholics had been so outraged about Coligny’s plan to murder their king that they had spontaneously attacked his coreligionists.

William of Orange, too, received a full oral account from the diplomat Gian Galeazzo Fregoso, who was sent by the French ambassador Mondoucet. It is striking that Charles—through Mondoucet—took pains to explain his motivations for the killings to Orange. William received a report that was virtually identical to the one sent to Elizabeth in England, which suggests that the French king still thought him someone to be reckoned with and did not want to estrange Orange completely.[52] According to a letter from Mondoucet to Charles, the man who brought William the news ‘had elaborately recounted the great reasons that have caused Your Majesty to permit and let the execution take place’.[53] The ambassador consciously used the word ‘permit’ and not a term such as 'ordain' or 'decree', thereby denying the king's role in initiating the massacre. Nevertheless, William was as devastated as his brother Louis. In a letter to his brother Jan in Germany, he confessed: 'with regard to human means, my only hope was pinned on France'.[54]

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[47] J. de Pottre, *Dagboek van Jan de Pottre, 1549–1602*, ed. J. L. D. de Saint-Genois (Ghent, 1861), 48.

[48] Jouanna, *La Saint-Barthélemy*, 201–27; Zwierlein, ‘Security politics’, 86.

[49] *Discours sur les causes de l’execution faicte es personnes de ceux qui avoyent conjuré contre le roy et son estat* (Antwerp, 1572); Pettegree, ‘France and the Netherlands’, 330.

[50] *Discours sur les causes*, 3.

[51] Ibid., 34.

[52] A. Jouanna, ‘Le discours royal sur la Saint-Barthélemy’, in J. Foa and P.-A. Mellet, *Le bruit des armes: mises en formes et désinformations en Europe pendant les Guerres de Religion (1560–1610)* (Paris, 2012), 201–14.

[53] Gachard, *La Bibliothèque Nationale,* ii. 527.

The first reports of a massacre in Paris arrived in Antwerp on 26 August, even before they reached most parts of France.[55] By 3 September, the news had also spread to Amsterdam. Wouter Jacobsz, former prior of the convent of Stein in the city of Gouda, had fled the wars that plagued his city and had escaped to Amsterdam. Still firmly Catholic, Amsterdam had become an asylum for refugee priests, nuns and lay Catholics from throughout Holland. In his diary, Wouter rejoiced over the 'very happy tidings' from Paris, taking them as a sign that God still watched over the faithful.[56] In Brussels, Jan de Pottre's account of events followed the official story of Charles' pamphlet, and he recorded that 'here, it was generally said' that Coligny and the other Huguenot nobles were killed as a precautionary measure to prevent them from attacking the king and his brothers.[57] The diarists from Antwerp were best informed. Godevaert van Haecht and the Van Wesenbeke chronicle recounted many details of the massacre, especially concerning its gruesome violence. They also stressed that many foreigners, including Netherlandish emigrants, were amongst the victims of the massacre.[58]

Historians have found it difficult to estimate how many died during the massacre. The consensus is that between 2000–3000 men and women were killed in Paris, and at least 7000–8000 in the provinces. This is partially based on records of money paid to Parisian gravediggers.[59] The contemporary reports that reached the Netherlands confirm these numbers. In Antwerp, Plantin's daughter, Martine, heard from her brother-in-law Gilles in Paris that 2000 men and women had died. However, when he had finished his letter on 26 August, the killings had not yet ended.[60] Wouter Jacobsz and Jan de Pottre noted that 3000 persons had died during the massacre in Paris, and Wouter later added another 6000.[61] The chronicle of Jan van Wesenbeke claimed to have heard of 4000 deaths; Godevaert van Haecht mentioned 5000–6000 killings.[62] In Cologne,

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[54] G. Groen van Prinsterer (ed.), *Archives ou correspondance inédite de la Maison d'Orange-Nassau*. Première série, 8 vols (Leiden, 1835–47), iii. 511–14.

[55] Benedict, 'Saint-Bartholomew's massacres in the provinces'.

[56] W. Jacobsz, *Dagboek van broeder Wouter Jacobsz (Gualtherus Jacobi Masius) prior van Stein, Amsterdam 1572-1578 en Montfoort 1578-1579*, ed. I. H. van Eeghen, 2 vols (Groningen, 1959–60) i. 2.

[57] De Pottre, *Dagboek*, 46. This has been noted in L. van Tilborg 'Alzoo sprack elck alzoo hij ghesint was: Nieuws uit Frankrijk in de Nederlanden, ca. 1562–1572', (Master thesis, Universiteit Leiden, 2010), 68–70.

[58] Van Haecht, *Kroniek*, ii. 209; Van Wesenbeke, *Kronijk*, 138.

[59] Jouanna, *La Saint-Barthélemy*, 9–10; for sixteenth-century estimates, compare Crouzet, *La Nuit de la Saint-Barthélemy*, 30–2.

[60] S. Langereis, *The woordenaar: Christoffel Plantijn, 's werelds grootste drukker en uitgever, 1520-1589* (Amsterdam, 2014), 289–91.

[61] Jacobsz, *Dagboek*, i. 7; De Pottre, *Dagboek*, 46.

[62] Van Wesenbeke, *Kronijk*, 137–8; Van Haecht, *Kroniek*, ii. 209.

Hermann Weinsberg, city councillor and wine merchant, and one of the most prolific diarists of sixteenth-century Europe, registered 6000 Huguenot deaths in Paris alone.[63] The Spanish agent in London, Antonio Guaras, wrote a newsletter to the Duke of Alva on 30 August describing how refugees from Paris had told stories about the killing of more than 8000 Huguenots.[64]

Indeed, refugee centres such as London and Geneva, where the first traumatized eyewitnesses arrived shortly after the massacre, abounded with wild rumours. Some claimed that not only Coligny, but also the young Louis de Bourbon, the Prince of Condé and Henry of Navarre had been killed.[65] Few Huguenots fled to the Netherlands. Contemporaries in the Low Countries therefore probably heard more restrained stories from Paris than the English, Germans or Swiss. Reports that were completely unfounded were rare however. On 13 October 1572, a rumour ran in Antwerp that Charles IX had been murdered, but that soon proved false. The author of the Van Wesenbeke chronicle duly added 'postea falsum' to the entry stating this news. Unfortunately, it is impossible to say when the author made this addition.[66]

In England, Elizabeth I received a full explanation from the French ambassador, who denied that the massacre had anything to do with religion: the French Huguenot nobles had been executed as rebellious subjects. The Pope, by contrast, was informed that the French king had finally taken decisive measures against the religious divisions in his kingdom. Paradoxically, Catholic diarists in the Netherlands accepted the story told to appease the Protestant rulers, while Protestants believed in a premediated murder of religious dissenters. The Lutheran diarist Godevaert van Haecht thought that the Huguenots were lured to Paris under false pretences to be slaughtered: the 'birds were now in the net, which had been spread and knitted long before'.[67]

Coligny's murder seems to have made a stronger impression on Netherlandish contemporaries than the popular killings that followed it. Catholics in particular were preoccupied with the death of the Protestant nobleman. A nun from 's-Hertogenbosch noted among her chronicle entries of 1573 that 'last year, the Admiral was killed in France during a wedding' but failed to write anything about the ensuing massacres.[68] Wouter Jacobsz, too, was more fascinated with the murder of 'the Admiral and his adherents' than with the wider massacre.[69] Jan de Pottre recorded a detailed story about the first murder attempt on Coligny on 22 August, and the actual assassination that followed two days later, mentioning the 3000 other killings only briefly.[70] Coligny had become an important Protestant figurehead during the 1560s, well known to Netherlandish contemporaries. Many simply referred to him as 'the Admiral', and he featured in a number of Beggars' Songs and in several pamphlets in the 1560s and 70s.

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[63] H. von Weinsberg, *Die autobiographischen Aufzeichnungen Hermann Weinsbergs. Digitale Gesamtausgabe* <http://www.weinsberg.uni-bonn.de> 24 Aug. 1572, accessed 7 April 2020.

[64] J. M. B. C. Kervyn de Lettenhove, *Relations politiques des Pays-Bas et de l'Angleterre sous le règne de Philippe II* (Brussels, 1888), vi. 500–2.

[65] Pettegree, *Invention of News*, 146–7; Greengrass, 'Hidden transcripts'; Kingdon, *Myths.*

[66] Van Wesenbeke, *Kronijk*, 13 Oct. 1572, 145.

[67] Van Haecht, *Kroniek*, ii. 207.

[68] *Kroniek eener kloosterzuster van het voormalig Bossche klooster "Mariënburg" over de troebelen te 's-Hertogenbosch e.e. in de jaren 1566–1575*, ed. H. van Alfen ('s-Hertogenbosch, 1931), 45.

[69] Jacobsz, *Dagboek*, i. 7.

In contrast to the Catholic focus on Coligny, the Lutheran Godevaert van Haecht devoted a great deal of attention to the wider massacres. He wrote an extensive and moving account of the popular killings:

> Some were mashed like hotchpotch, others received thousands of wounds after their death. Tongues cannot tell, pens cannot describe the horror. But the laughter and happiness of the citizens, who were mostly papish, was so loud that the crying was not heard.[71]

Van Haecht made no distinction between the 'execution' of Coligny and the massacre; they were all part of the same plan to exterminate the Huguenots. He also described in detail the killings throughout France in the months after, from Amiens to Rouen and from Orléans to Lyon and Bordeaux, complaining that the Lord tolerated a great deal of misery.[72] However, van Haecht's attitude was not millenarian or submissive: he did not view it as God's punishment for his faithful or as a sign of God's coming judgment on the world. On the contrary, he expected God's imminent revenge on the Catholics and kept watching for signs of the Lord's wrath in the months after the massacre. That December, he recorded reports of a sword seen in the Parisian sky—'as if God threatens the murderers'—and his chronicle repeatedly insisted that God would punish the killers in the months and years that followed.[73]

IV

In a seminal article, Philip Benedict has shown how news about the massacre in Paris spurred similar incidents in cities throughout France. News of the events in the capital catalysed this violence, as had been the case with iconoclasm in the Netherlands, as massacres took place in La Charité, Meaux, Bourges, Saumur, Angers, Lyon, Troyes, Rouen, Bordeaux, Toulouse and Gaillac.[74] Here, too, inconsistent communication caused confusion. Benedict has argued that the Catholics who started the killings thought they did so at the king's command. Charles' first letter to the provincial governors directly after St Bartholomew's Day stated that the carnage was an outburst of the vendetta between de Guise and de Coligny. In his second letter of 28 August, he claimed responsibility for having the Protestant nobles killed, but stated that

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[70] De Pottre, *Dagboek,* 46–8.

[71] Van Haecht, *Kroniek*, ii. 209.

[72] Ibid., ii. 207–11.

[73] Ibid., ii. 203, 244, 254.

[74] Benedict, 'Saint-Bartholomew's massacres in the provinces', 206.

popular violence had broken out against his orders.[75] However, several radical Catholic noblemen acted faster than Charles, and had their own reports sent to the provinces with orders to spread the news that the king wished the annihilation of all Huguenots in the kingdom. In the Netherlands, too, many contemporaries wondered whether the violence in the rest of France was spontaneous or on the government's orders. When the slaying spread through the kingdom, Godevaert van Haecht wrote that 'some said that [the Catholics] had received the order [to do so]'.[76]

In the weeks following the St Bartholomew's Day massacre, the inhabitants of Antwerp feared a similar massacre in their own city. Godevaert van Haecht described how tensions rose that September: on 2 September 1572, inhabitants worried that 'the soldiers and Spaniards and Italians might easily commit a murder like the one in Paris'. He tried to put these fears into perspective: 'in Paris, the citizens have turned on each other, and although the people here, too, were diverse in religion, they trusted that nothing like that would happen, unless it was done by the foreigners'.[77] Nevertheless, the actions of the Spanish army commander Cristóbal de Mondragón caused concern among the citizens of Antwerp: he had closed the water gates, and his wife had fled the city. On 8 September, fresh anxieties arose when Walloon soldiers entered the city. Citizens feared that they would join forces with the Spanish and Italian merchant nations, 'committing a Parisian murder', or at least forcing all non-Catholics to leave Antwerp. The governor intervened and ordered the Spanish and Italian merchants to disarm.[78]

On 20 September, a new injunction from the city government provoked general alarm. No citizen was to enter the streets at night, whatever noise or alarm they might hear. Citizens again saw this development as an indication that a 'Parisian murder' was afoot and feared that the edict would prevent citizens from coming to each other's rescue. Many stayed awake that night, keeping the lights on and guarding their houses, while others stood chatting in front of their houses until after midnight. Van Haecht interpreted this response as a strong signal to the authorities, showing that the citizens of Antwerp remained vigilant.[79] An English newsletter from Flushing on 30 September 1572 even reported that a massacre had actually been committed in Antwerp:

> Here is talk of an other new murder that should have been done in Fraunce and how certain englisshe merchants should be slayne at Rouen. They say also their was the lik practice at Andwerp for the murdering of the protestants as was in Fraunce.[80]

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[75] Ibid., 209, 215–16.

[76] Van Haecht, *Kroniek*, ii. 210.

[77] Ibid., ii. 212; J. Pollmann, 'Countering the Reformation in France and the Netherlands: clerical leadership and Catholic violence, 1560–1585', *Past & Present*, 190 (2006), 83–120, 83.

[78] Van Haecht, *Kroniek*, ii. 212–13.

[79] Ibid., 213–14.

[80] Kervyn de Lettenhove, *Relations politiques*, vi. 534.

In October, Godevaert van Haecht wrote indignantly how Bishop Franciscus Sonnius of Antwerp dared to preach publicly that the situation in the Netherlands would improve only after the occurrence of a 'similar wedding' there.[81] Judith Pollmann has posed the question as to why popular Catholic violence on the scale of the St Bartholomew Day's massacre has never occurred in the Netherlands, and points to the role and behaviour of the Netherlandish clergy.[82] Van Haecht also wrote about another 'wide-spread rumour' that the Pope would have planned to murder all the Electors of the Holy Roman Empire during an Imperial Diet, in imitation of the 'Parisian wedding'.[83]

The years after the massacre saw the publication of Protestant resistance treatises reacting to the slaughter.[84] These texts, that have long been the subject of scholarship, included the famous *Reveille-Matin*, the *Franco-Gallica* and the *De Furoribus Gallicis* and originated chiefly from Geneva, Basel, England and Scotland. The Netherlands, particularly the presses of the Protestant exile community in Emden, produced their own pamphlets such as the *Treurliet van Jaspar van Chatillon,* 'lament of the Admiral of France' (1573).[85] The massacre in France remained an important point of reference and a fearsome spectre in the Netherlands for many years.[86] Netherlandish pamphlets in the 1570s kept warning their readers for a 'Parisian wedding'. Protestant pamphleteers, spreading the idea of an international Catholic conspiracy, used the event as a caution against the perfidy of Catholics in general, linking it to Spanish crimes in the Netherlands, the Inquisition and the cruelty of the Duke of Alva. One pamphlet even stated that the Duke of Alva had been involved in the Parisian massacre.[87] The memory of the 'horrible and unprecedented massacre' served as a strong argument against peace negotiations. During the (failed) peace talks in Cologne in 1579, a pamphlet warned that 'if the ministers of the King would command the Netherlands again, what could one could expect but new Parisian weddings'. Another pamphlet from 1579, a warning to the citizens of Antwerp, complained about the demoralizing effects of the memory of the massacre of Paris, and stated that it should not be used as a threat to enforce peace in the Netherlands.[88]

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[81] Van Haecht, *Kroniek*, ii. 221.

[82] Pollmann, 'Countering the Reformation', 96–120.

[83] Van Haecht, *Kroniek,* ii. 220.

[84] Kingdon, *Myths*, 22–4; J. R. Smither, 'The St. Bartholomew's Day massacre and images of kingship in France: 1572–1574', *Sixteenth Century J*, 22 (1991), 27–46.

[85] *Het treurliet des vorstes Jaspar van Chastilion amirael van Vranckrijck. Die binnen Parijs door een ongheboorde verraderije ende tyrannije ghemoordet is* (Emden, 1573); F. Walsingham, *Copije eenes seyndtbriefs aen coninghinne Elizabeth, vervatende int corte de moort die binnen Parijs in de Navareesche bruyloft is gheschiet* (Delft, 1572).

[86] P. A. M. Geurts, *De Nederlandse Opstand in pamfletten, 1566–1584* (Nijmegen and Utrecht, 1956), 174–5.

[87] *Pandorae sive veniae Hispanicae Belgicis exvlibus, M.D.LXXIIII. mense Ivlio editae. item, bullae Greg. XIII. sive papalis veniae anatomia* (s.n., s.l., 1574) C2 r, D r.

[88] *Schriftelick bewijs des doorluchtighen [...] Iohan Casimiri, palsgrauen opden Rhijn [...]. Daerin cortelick verhaelt eñ wtgeleyt werden, die oorsaecken waer door zijne vorstelicke genaden beweeght zijn worden, tot bevrijdinge der benauder Nederlanden, volck te maken*

The messages of these pamphlets can also be found in contemporary chronicles in the 1570s. Godevaert van Haecht's notes echo the Protestant conspiracy theories prevalent in the cautionary pamphlets, and songs expressed similar sentiments. One song warned against the 'character of Judas of the Catholic Church' that could be seen in the 'murder of Paris', where men, women and children had been invited as friends, and were then brutally murdered.[89] Historians have stressed that sixteenth-century people lived in a multimedia world, where oral news, letters, pamphlets, songs, poems, ceremonial, plays and sermons together made up their daily news consumption. The St Bartholomew's Day massacre shows the interplay of these various media as newsletters and oral news spurred the publication of pamphlets, the content of which in turn fuelled further rumours, songs and more pamphlets.

The massacre in France remained an important point of reference and a fearsome spectre in the Netherlands for many years.[90] In July 1575, in a letter to Granvelle, Morillon again mentioned fear amongst the inhabitants of Antwerp, who expected 'a massacre, like the one in Paris.'[91] The Jan van Wesenbeke chronicle, too, recorded in June 1575 how a 'bad rumour persisted strongly among the people [of Antwerp] that the citizens would be murdered as they had been murdered in France.'[92] The arrival of the Duke of Anjou in the Netherlands in 1581, as lord of the Netherlands, again spurred the publication of pamphlets and songs recalling the massacre of 1572.[93] An important point of reference, the events of the St Bartholomew's Day massacre were again often used in the seventeenth century as a warning against the 'untrustworthiness' of the French. While contemporaries had estimated the massacre's victims at from 2000 to 8000, the death toll rose to tens of thousands in seventeenth-century accounts.[94]

V

As the case of the St Bartholomew's Day massacre demonstrates, chroniclers did not simply transcribe the content of foreign news reports; they also recorded

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(Emden, 1578) 19; *Wachtgheschrey. Allen liefhebbers der eeren Gods, des Vaderlandts, ende der priuilegien ende Vryheden des seluen, tot waer schouwinghe ghestelt* (s.n.,s.l., 1578) C v; *Brief discovrs svr la negotiation de la paix qui se traicte presentement à Cologne, entre le roy d'Espaigne, &les Estats du Pays Bas* (Antwerp, 1579) C4 v; *Een goede vvaerschouwinghe voor den borgheren, ende besonder dien vanden leden van Antwerpen, dat sy hen niet en souden laten verlocken met het soet aengheven vande bedriechlijcke artijkelen van peyse, onlancx ghecomen van Cuelen* (s.n.,s.l., 1579), 19 r.

[89] E. T. Kuiper (ed.), *Het Geuzenliedboek*, 2 vols (Zutphen, 1924–1925), i. 302; Geurts, *Nederlandse Opstand in pamfletten*, 175.

[90] Geurts, *Nederlandse Opstand in pamfletten,* 174–5.

[91] Poullet and Piot (eds), *Correspondance de Granvelle*, v. 328.

[92] Van Wesenbeke, *Kronijk*, end of June 1575, 225.

[93] Geurts, *Nederlandse Opstand in pamfletten,* 175, 223.

[94] H. Duits, *Van Bartholomeusnacht tot Bataafse Opstand: Studies over de relatie tussen politiek en toneel in het midden van de zeventiende eeuw* (Hilversum, 1990), 43–50.

the trouble they took in their search for reliable facts. Their diaries show an impressive degree of media literacy: they would check facts elaborately, muse over rumours and compare sources. Sixteenth-century chroniclers demonstrated a determination to find out what had really happened. This article has demonstrated the care with which chroniclers such as Wouter Jacobsz, Godevaert van Haecht and Marcus van Vaernewijck dealt with oral news and rumours.[95] Their contemporaries displayed very similar methods in France, although those living in remote regions had fewer sources at their disposal than their colleagues in commercial urban centres. Chroniclers in Castres or Millau, for example, had fewer opportunities to compare reports; they received their news from a single (Protestant) source and simply recorded the reports as they had heard them. Chroniclers in a big city such as Paris, however, used the same techniques of checking facts, as did their colleagues in Antwerp, Ghent or Brussels.

Remarkably, even if chroniclers edited or copied their notes years later, they often included reports that had proved to be untrue. In those cases, they added remarks such as 'idque falso', 'falso' or simply 'this proved to be a lie' to the news report. This was not only common practice among Netherlandish chroniclers. Modifying his journals in retrospect, the famous late sixteenth-century Parisian chronicler Pierre de L'Estoile distinguished between *bruits* and *nouvelles*—rumours and news. Recordings of events that had turned out to be true he called *nouvelles*, while those that had proved false he called *bruits* (Figure 1).[96]

How did a diarist living in a city buzzing with rumours acquire reliable information? Chroniclers distinguished various rankings in trustworthiness. Several among them were legally trained and had consequently learned to deal with contradictory testimonies in court. Contemporary legal scholarship stressed the importance of numbers in certifying the truth: the more reliable (male) witnesses the better. As Joos (or Josse) de Damhouder insisted—in a lawbook that was published and reissued many times in both the Netherlands and France—regarding the number of witnesses: 'some say ten reliable men, others say 20 or 25'. They had to be able to mention the names of their sources and found their testimonies on a solid basis.[97]

Official correspondence, such as letters from a stadtholder to the king, or from a general to the city magistrates, was considered the most trustworthy source available. Not only did high officials maintain wide international correspondence networks, they were also often the first to be officially notified when a major event had taken place.[98] When word of the death of Condé during the Battle of Jarnac reached Antwerp on 20 March 1569, Provost Morillon found it hard to believe, as seven days later no official reports had yet arrived. As he wrote to his patron Cardinal Granvelle:

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[95] Cf. Van Nierop, 'And Ye Shall Hear of Wars', 86.

[96] M. Greengrass, 'Outspoken opinions as collectable items? Engagement and divertissement in the French civil wars', *Renaissance S*, 30 (2016), 57–72, 59–60; T. Hamilton, 'Recording the wars of religion: The "Drolleries of the League" from ephemeral print to scrapbook history', *Past and Present Suppl. 11* (2016), 288–310; idem, *Pierre de L'Estoile and his World in the Wars of Religion* (Oxford, 2017).

[97] J. de Damhouder, *Practycke ende handbouck in criminele zaeken* (Leuven, 1555); idem, *Practique judiciaire es causes criminelles* (Paris, 1555).

[98] Van Nierop, 'And Ye Shall Hear of Wars', 74–6.

> A merchant has arrived in Antwerp, who has left Paris on the 18th and claims that the Prince of Condé has been killed in battle (…), but I do not believe a word of it, because this supposedly has happened on the 13th, and up till now the French ambassador, who is here, has not received any reports on the matter.[99]

The arrival of newsletters in a town usually caused a great stir and constituted an event that was important enough to write down in a chronicle. Wouter Jacobsz first heard the news about the St Bartholomew's massacre when, as he wrote, 'it was said that the stadtholder almost certainly has received a letter that says how the Admiral in France was killed by the King.'[100] The stadtholder, Maximilien de Hénin-Liétard, Count of Boussu, had indeed received a letter from Alva, who had written on 29 August, almost immediately after he had heard the news himself.[101]

Right below official letters came letters written by eyewitnesses of the event. These were preferably family members, or the family members of neighbours and friends. Contemporaries shared the news they received with friends and neighbours freely, and the reading of letters remained a social event well into the nineteenth century.[102] The brother of chronicler Hermann Weinsberg, present at the siege of Mons, wrote about the progress of the war and the exploits of William of Orange to his family in Cologne.[103] In Antwerp, Plantin's daughter, Martine, received a letter from her brother-in-law Gilles in Paris about the St Bartholomew's Day massacre. The Ghent chronicler Marcus van Vaernewijck at some point complained about being unable to verify a rumour because he had 'no access to the services of a trusted friend or relative (…) who could inform him about current events'.[104]

Chroniclers often noted the arrival of travellers in their town reporting the latest news. In these cases, the social status of the messenger contributed to the trustworthiness of a report. Generals would indeed send highly placed nobles to report a victory or defeat, to lend style to their news report. Chroniclers also described how local noblemen having participated in a fight returned to their hometown with their retinue, regaling their community with

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[99] *Correspondance de Granvelle*, iii. 521–2.

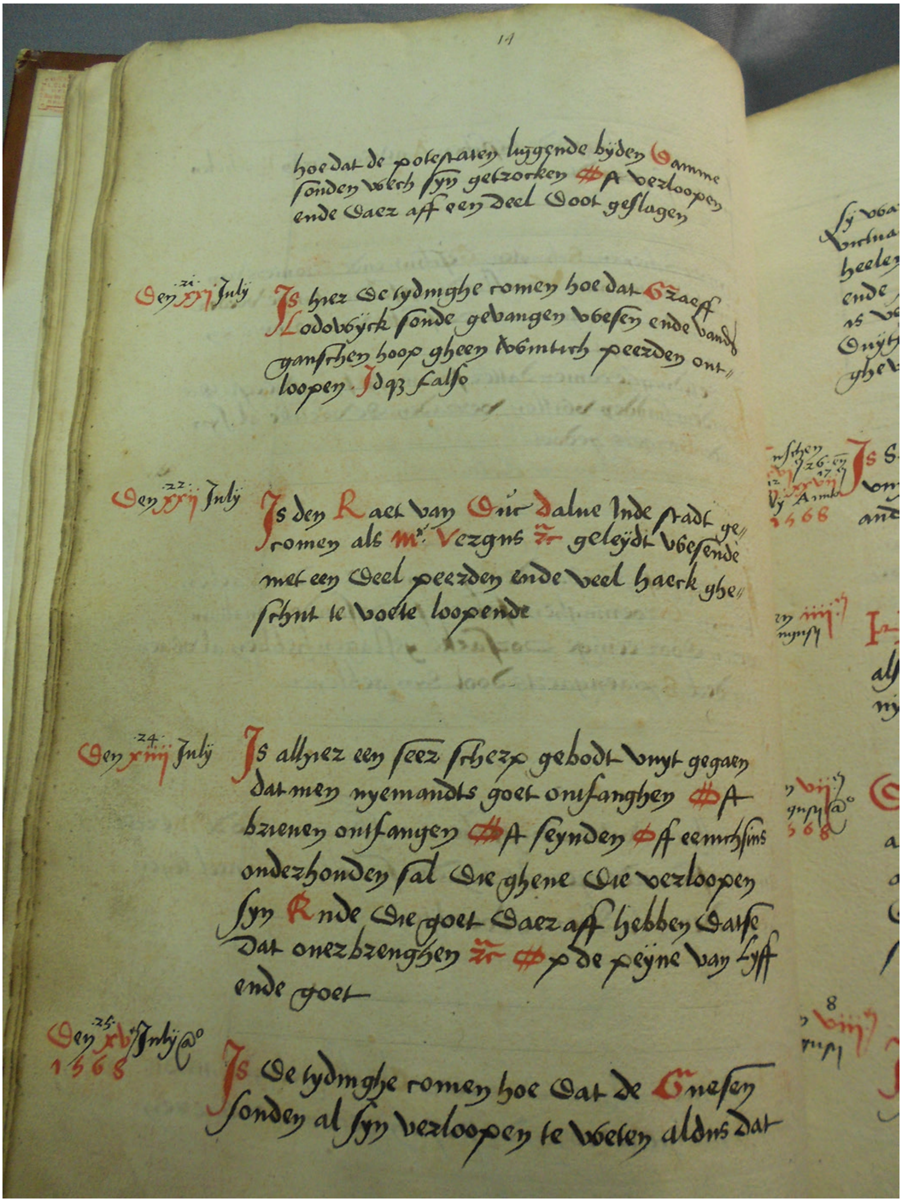
[100] Jacobsz, *Dagboek*, i. 2.

[101] Buchanan, *The Massacre of St Bartholomew's,* 118. On handwritten newsletters: Z. Barbarics-Hermanik, 'The coexistence of manuscript and print: handwritten newsletters, in the second century of print, 1540–1640', in *The Book Triumphant: Print in Transition in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. G. Kemp and M. Walsby (Leiden, 2011), 347–68; A. Stolp, *De eerste couranten in Holland* (Haarlem, 1938), 11–21.

[102] G. H. Janssen, *The Dutch Revolt and Catholic Exile in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, 2014), 107–8.

[103] Weinsberg, 1 Sept. 1572.

[104] Van Vaernewijck, *Beroerlicke tijden*, ii. 43–4, cited in Van Nierop, 'And Ye Shall Hear of Wars', 75.



14

hoe dat de potestaten liggende byden Damme
sonden wech syn getrocken oft verloopen
ende daer aff een deel doot geslagen

Den .21. xxi July
Is hier de tydinghe comen hoe dat Graeff
Lodowyck sonde gevangen wesen ende vande
ganschen hoop gheen twintich peerden ont-
loopen. Idqꝫ falso

Den .22. xxii July
Is den Raet van Our dalne inde stadt ge-
comen als Mr. Vergus &c geleydt wesende
met een deel peerden ende veel haerk ghe-
schut te voete loopende

Den .24. xxiiii July
Is allhier een seer scherp gebodt uyt gegaen
dat men nyemandts goet ontfanghen oft
brenen ontfangen oft seynden oft eenichsins
onderhouden sal die ghene die verloopen
syn ende die goet daer aff hebben datse
dat overbrenghen &c op de peyne van lyff
ende goet

Den .25. xv July Ao
1568
Is de tydinghe comen hoe dat de Gnesen
sonden al syn verloopen te weten aldus dat

Figure 1. 'Tidings have come that Count Lodowijck [Louis] would have been taken prisoner and that of his whole troop barely twenty horses managed to escape. Idque falso', 'Kronijk van Jan van Wesenbeke, 1567–1580', 14. 21 July 1568. *Felix Archief, Antwerp.*

tales about the battle. Were nobles deemed more trustworthy in general? In the case of Elizabethan England, David Randall suggests that gentlemen were considered more credible than commoners because their honour as a gentleman was at stake if they lied.[105] It is small wonder that chronicles in the urbanized Low Countries mention considerably fewer noble news messengers than their French colleagues. Instead, Netherlandish chroniclers referred to merchants, wandering preachers or soldiers arriving with news. In the process of assessing the truth of a report, much depended upon the background of the chronicler himself: clergymen, for example, were generally more disposed to believe the reports of fellow clergymen.

When no official or personal letters were available, one could always assess the veracity of oral news using other ways. An approved method involved simply waiting to see how long a rumour would persist: the longer it circulated, the greater the chance of its being true. Sometimes tidings arrived in rapid succession. Early in the morning of 3 September 1572, Wouter Jacobsz heard a report about the definite capture of Mons by the Spanish troops, one that was already contested in the afternoon.[106] Another approach involved comparing oral sources to see if they would corroborate one another's story.

Especially during the first decades of the wars, news pamphlets did not play such a prominent role in contemporaries' daily media consumption as historians have frequently assumed. Chronicles from the 1560s and 1570s abound with oral reports and letters, yet they mention very few pamphlets. This changed from the late 1570s onwards when chroniclers began to display a more varied media intake and started to mention the occasional pamphlet. These years also saw the emergence of some highly committed information gatherers such as Pierre de L'Estoile or Hermann Weinsberg. From their diaries we perceive how, after receiving the first oral reports, chroniclers used pamphlets to become familiar with the background of an event, learn the reasons for a certain act or, in a dispute, acquaint themselves with the arguments of the other side. Many pamphlets commenting on current events, such as the French king's *Discours*, assumed that the reader was already familiar with the particulars.

News could remain uncertain for weeks, sometimes months, and even key information masters of the period—such as Cardinal Granvelle or Elizabeth's 'spymaster' Francis Walsingham—would spend long periods groping in the dark. Their letters often show frustration about receiving contradictory reports from their many correspondents. When did sixteenth-century people experience closure—the feeling that they had finally found out what had really happened? Chroniclers in the 1560s and 1570s, in both France and the Netherlands, stress the importance of thanksgiving ceremonies for the establishment of the veracity of an event. When on 29 September 1572, after weeks of uncertain rumours, a lackey arrived in Amsterdam with the final news of Mons' surrender

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[105] D. Randall, *Credibility in Elizabethan and Early Stuart Military News* (London, 2008) 49, 97–8.

[106] Jacobsz, *Dagboek*, i. 2.

to Alva, this news was 'validated', as Wouter Jacobsz termed it, through the ringing of church bells all over Amsterdam, processions, and the singing of the *Te Deum Laudamus* during High Mass.[107] While celebrations in Rome of the St Bartholomew's Day massacre provoked indignation among Protestants, the fact that the authorities took the trouble to organize elaborate festivities served as confirmation that the news was true.

VI

Louis of Nassau and his men in Mons wanted trustworthy men—Protestant preachers—to confirm the news about the massacre. Throughout the 1560s, inhabitants of France and the Netherlands had become familiar with propaganda, having learned to deal with misinformation being used as a weapon in the wars. Recent research into early modern news has greatly increased our knowledge of the production and dissemination of news and information. Yet much research remains to be done to understand the reception of news in the early modern period. As I have argued, the study of contemporary chronicles helps to uncover the ways in which people in the sixteenth century dealt with the credibility and verification of reports. The case of the news about the St Bartholomew's Day massacre shows that oral reports, which historians have often thought too elusive to study, turn out not to be wholly intangible.

The scarcity of printed responses to the massacre in the Netherlands makes it hard to gauge reactions among the populace. From the chronicles, however, a picture of a well-informed audience emerges: within a few days, inhabitants of major cities in the Netherlands had heard about killings that happened in Paris. Three specific aspects of these reports stand out. First, they were remarkably accurate despite some historians' stress on the spread of wild rumours. Secondly, different Catholic and Protestant versions can already be detected among the earliest oral reports. And finally, many followed the narrative of the French king, which clearly distinguished between the assassination of Coligny and the popular killings.

Yet the precise relationship between production and reception remains open to question. To what extent did political stakeholders exert influence upon the broadcasting of news events? We know about the significance of sermons for transmitting and interpreting local news.[108] What role did priests and Protestant ministers play in framing the news in a certain way in their sermons? How did censorship and pamphleteering determine what items chroniclers recorded in their diaries, and what they left out? As this article has shown, the official French royal story of the massacre, which focused on the 'execution' of Coligny, was disseminated through a pamphlet, *Discours*

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[107] Ibid., i. 19.

[108] J. van Eijnatten, 'Getting the message: towards a cultural history of the sermon', in idem (ed.), *Preaching, Sermon and Cultural Change in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Leiden, 2009), 343–88.

sur les causes de l'execution, and this text was reprinted in Antwerp. Some Netherlandish chroniclers seem to have accepted this explanation and completely ignored the larger massacre that followed, only jotting down the murder of Coligny. However, others consulted their own (oral) sources and expressed their personal opinions on the massacre's causes and consequences. Chroniclers tended to write about the events that (local) governments branded as important by ringing church bells, processions and celebrations. The intricate interplay between official edicts, pamphlets, letters, oral stories and censorship constituted a complex early modern multimedia landscape that remains to be explored. The credibility of news is one of the major issues in our modern society. The concerns of sixteenth-century chroniclers, eagerly searching for trustworthy sources to tell them what had happened in Paris in August 1572, do feel strikingly familiar.