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Hidden beneath the waves: Commemorating and forgetting the military inundations during the Siege of Leiden

Robert Tiegs

This article analyzes the process of commemoration relating to the relief of Leiden. The siege and subsequent rescue of the city were pivotal moments in early years of the Dutch Revolt. As the Prince of Orange and the rebel forces could not save the city with traditional military maneuvers, they employed military inundations, or the intentional flooding of land, for tactical purposes. Over the course of two months the rebels flooded roughly half of southern Holland through dike breaches and the opening of sluices. This man-made flood only carried the rebels so far, and it took a rain storm and a change in the direction of the wind to finally allow them to save the city. This article focuses on a print produced shortly after the city was saved on October 3, 1574. The image highlights the traditional narrative of how the siege was portrayed and commemorated in sixteenth century Holland, focusing on the famine and distress of the city while also showcasing how it was saved through what the rebels interpreted as divine intervention. As a point of departure, this article explores how the military inundations were remembered and memorialized in the image and more broadly in other contemporary accounts. The print, and many other commemorations, interpreted these natural changes in the weather as a sign of God's blessing. Framing the relief of Leiden as providential served a number of important functions for contemporaries. Most importantly, it allowed the rebels to avoid addressing issues of reparations and compensation resulting from the military inundations. This paper argues that the providential interpretation of the rescue of Leiden helped to hide the uncomfortable truth that the conquest of nature and the domination of humans are intimately connected.

Key terms: Dutch Revolt; Siege of Leiden; memory studies; environmental history; military history.

Introduction

The anonymous untitled print seen in Figure 1 provides a fairly standard account of the traditional highlights of the siege of Leiden in 1574.¹ On the left-hand side of the image the female personification of the city of Leiden is beset by the familiar travails of early modern siege warfare: disease, famine, and death. On the right-hand side, the Spanish soldier stands poised, ready to deliver the final blow. Fortunately for distraught Leiden, the city is spared ultimate defeat by God. In the foreground He is seen to hold back the Spaniard's sword thrust, while in the background He is understood to have delivered the waters which allowed the rebel navy passage, bringing with it food and supplies to the beleaguered burghers. From an environmental history perspective, what is most interesting about the theme of divine intervention in this print is that it obscures the role which the rebel military played in flooding large tracts of southern Holland. This is not to say that the Dutch people were not genuine in their belief of heavenly intervention, but framing this increasingly common military tactic as providential had important ramifications (Klinkert 2007). While this sort of inversed scorched earth policy had obvious military advantages, it was a contested practice. As the landscape is a site of collective memory, the interpretation of the relief of Leiden as divinely guided helped to wash away the human elements of the story (Walsham 2011, 6-7). In other words, the providential interpretation of the rescue of Leiden served to silence the contested aspects of the siege; it served to help hide the uncomfortable truth that the conquest of nature and the domination of humans are intimately connected.

Not a great deal is known regarding the production of the untitled print. It is relatively small (24 cm x 24 cm) and is currently housed in the *Rijksmuseum* (National Museum) in Amsterdam. In the bibliographic data section the museum officially lists the artist as anonymous, even though the name Isaac Nicolai is written in the lower left-hand corner immediately above the poem. The museum does, however, list two possible artists: Zacharias Dolendo and Isaac Claesz van Swanenburg, both of whom had connections to the city. Dolendo's older brother was born in Leiden so he clearly had family ties to the area. Swanenburg, however, appears as the more likely artist since the name Isaac Nicolai was an alias (Rijksmuseum 2001; Horst 2003, 151, 334). Furthermore, Swanenburg actually lived in Leiden prior to the siege and returned only a few months

¹ I have numerous people to acknowledge for their help with this article. Adam Sundberg and my advisor Christine Kooi both read drafts of this work and provided excellent feedback. In terms of the language issues, Kristopher Fletcher helped with the Latin transcriptions and Wijnie de Groot assisted with the Dutch poem translation. The editors of this journal deserve mention as well, as they patiently worked with me to bring this article to fruition. I offer my sincere thanks to all of these individuals. If there are any errors or issues with the article they are my own.

afterwards, later serving as its *Burgemeester* ('mayor'). He also produced several other works on the siege of Leiden such as the glasswork titled *Het ontzet der stad Leyden, door de Spanjaarden belegerd* ('The relief of the city of Leiden, besieged by the Spaniards') (Van der Aa 1874). The anonymous artist never titled the print, but the museum aptly lists it as an *Allegorie op de nood en het ontzet van Leiden* ('Allegory on the peril and deliverance of Leiden', hereafter referred to as the *Allegorie*). Additionally, the museum dates the print as being produced in 1574. As the image depicts events related to the end of the siege on October 3, this provides a fairly small three month window in which the print could have been created. Overall, it appears likely that the artist knew the city well and produced the print almost immediately after the siege ended.



Figure 1. Allegorie op de nood en het ontzet van Leiden, 1574 ('Allegory on the peril and deliverance of Leiden, 1574'). Rijksmuseum. Reproduced with permission.

<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/collectie/RP-P-2001-149>.

Even if the Spaniard, O Leiden full of devotion
 With fire and sword threatened you with a bitter death,
 Even if the raging plague and famine,
 O praiseworthy citizens, were going to cut your throat,
 And you ended up in the utmost distress
 Yet, leaning on accord and firm ground,
 The heavenly host, stood at your right
 Upon which you received God's help
 While the wind and rain stood at your service
 Driving back the enemy in dishonor
 And bringing food and supplies to the distressed,
 [It was] Neptune's work, but through God's blessing²

The print itself blends a number of different themes both Christian and classical. The left side of the image shows the personification of Leiden sitting in great peril. In her left hand, Lady Leiden holds a bundle of arrows to symbolize the unity of burghers, while in her right she holds a book, presumably the bible. She looks to have tripped over a circular container which held foodstuffs that got strewn about on the floor. The star shaped caption above her head is the Tetragrammaton, the four Hebrew letters which signify Yahweh or God. Immediately behind her, from left to right, are the figures of disease, death, and famine. Disease appears to be sucking the life out of her, while the skeletal figure of death wields a spear, and famine is poised to flail her with a stick and a scourge, or some other type of whip. At the feet of Lady Leiden is situated one of the city's burghers, weak from lack of food with his ribs clearly visible. The right side of the image shows a Spanish soldier's attack being thwarted. In the upper right-hand corner God's hand is shown emerging from the clouds to halt the Spaniard's sword thrust. The background on the left side depicts a litany of classical gods working to save the city. Immediately underneath the hand of God, Aeolus can be seen blowing the rebel ships safely toward the city. To the left of this an Okeanid, or oceanic nymph, is seen perched in the clouds, pouring water from her vase in order to extinguish the Spaniard's torch, while at the bottom of the image Neptune rises from the waters to grab the Spaniard's foot while simultaneously striking him with his trident. The central portion of the right side also portrays a Naiad, or water nymph, blowing on a seashell. Its role in the scene is not entirely clear. The poem serves to highlight the central message of the image, namely that Neptune, and by association all the other classical figures, are working under the direction of God.

² The English translation of the original Dutch text in the print is given here. For a transcription of the original Latin and Dutch text as it appears on the print see Appendix 1.

The blending of classical imagery with biblical purpose in the *Allegorie* is interesting, but not necessarily unique to this print. The famous Lakenhal tapestry (discussed below) also included classical elements in its depiction of the siege of Leiden. Dutch artists often took episodes from their own history and repackaged them within a classical or biblical framework (Westermann 2005, 102). For instance, Simon Schama's examination of a seventeenth century engraving titled *Nederlantsche gedenck-Clanck* ('Dutch Anthem of Commemoration') depicted "images that are simultaneously classical and pious, humanist and Calvinist" (Schama 1987, 99-100). In sixteenth and seventeenth century Holland allegorical works of art similar to the one examined here were a popular medium for moralizing tales. As such, the instructional meaning of the image seems to have taken precedent over any stylistic loyalty to a singular theme.

While the allegorical message of the print is clear – God intervened on Leiden's behalf – the image also obscures and purposefully evades a lot of the more complex and contentious issues relating to the great siege and the flooding of a large portion of southern Holland. The rest of this paper takes a closer look at the unstated messages of the print. It begins with a discussion of the background of the siege, placing it in the context of the larger events of the Dutch Revolt. The focus then shifts towards rebel attempts to turn sections of Holland into a militarized landscape, examining issues of agency and how the endeavors to direct the flooding were both partial and incomplete. Attention then shifts to an examination of the memorialization and commemoration of the siege in the *Allegorie*, demonstrating how attempts to avoid or forget the human causes of the flooding were already underway. The final section addresses the relationship between the conquest of nature and conquest of people, arguing that framing the relief of Leiden in terms of a providentially sanctioned event helped reduce discord in the already fractured Dutch society.

Contextualizing the Siege of Leiden

The early years of the Dutch Revolt (1572-1648) were a chaotic and tumultuous period. A litany of economic, social, political, and religious motivations drove several provinces in the Low Countries to resist Spanish Habsburg rule. The Revolt spread rapidly once the privateer fleet known as the Sea Beggars (*Watergeuzen*) captured Brielle (Den Briel) on April 1, 1572 in the name of Prince William of Orange. The provinces of Holland and Zeeland formed the core of the Revolt, but the opposition was by no means unanimous. The early phases of fighting bore the characteristics of a civil war as many cities in the two provinces only reluctantly joined the Revolt, with Amsterdam holding out the longest until 1578. A prime example of such reluctant support is the town of Gouda, which was the first to support the Revolt after Brielle, but often came into open conflict

with the Prince over a number of issues. As C.C. Hibben aptly noted, the early support for the Revolt was clearly a “protest vote” against Spanish rule, rather than a proactive call for some new revolutionary government by the Prince (Hibben 1983, 55).

Several events during this first stage of the conflict served to polarize the populations in Holland and Zeeland and increase the tenacity of the struggle. Prior to the Revolt, a number of influential Protestants had fled Spanish persecution and taken up residency in nearby Emden, but the capture of Brielle signaled an opportunity for them to return home to Holland and Zeeland and establish Reformed churches. They achieved a lot during their time away, establishing a printing operation for Reformed theology and forming the first synod of the Netherlands in 1571 (Pettegree 1992). After suffering in exile, however, those who returned were better organized and ready for a fight. Additionally, the Sea Beggar leader, Count Guillaume Lumey de la Marck, fueled the flames with his harsh treatment of Catholic priests, torturing and executing seventeen of them after his capture of Brielle.

The Spanish, for their part, were no less aggressive with their style and were not willing to lose the provinces without a fight. For decades, the Low Countries had been economically vital to the Spanish Habsburgs, acting as a veritable gold mine for their wars throughout Europe (Tracy 1990). Philip II’s placement of Fernando Alvarez de Toledo, the Duke of Alva, as governor general of the Low Countries in 1567 speaks volumes about his attitude toward rule. The so-called “Iron Duke” set about constructing citadels to cow local inhabitants into submission, while he simultaneously established the Council of Troubles (*Raad van Beroerten*), more popularly known as the Council of Blood (*Bloedraad*). The goal of this organization was to aggressively root out what he deemed heretical practices and find those responsible for the Iconoclast Riots (*Beeldenstorm*) of the previous year. This council investigated and prosecuted nearly 9,000 cases of heresy and treason, executing over 1,000 of the accused (Israel 1995, 156-157). He remained steadfast with his approach after fighting erupted in 1572. As the citadels had failed to bring the Dutch to heel, brutal massacres took their place. When Zutphen failed to surrender as quickly as Alva had wished the town was summarily sacked by the Spanish with numerous residents brutally murdered. He followed up this “victory” with mass executions at Naarden a few weeks later (Parker 1977, 141-142).

In this atmosphere the fighting took on apocalyptic dimensions and bore the characteristics of a millennial confrontation between good and evil. Aside from the economic incentives of retaining the Low Countries, Philip II had sincere religious motivations as well. As Defender of the Faith, it was his responsibility to uphold Catholicism. This meant maintaining Catholicism within his empire and

expanding it when opportunities arose. Philip and his advisors viewed rebellion and rioting as one of the seven deadly sins (pride), and thus needed elimination (Baeana 2011, 36). It appears as though Philip and his advisors viewed the Low Countries as the first piece in a series of dominos, that if their control fell there, many other places were sure to follow. Conversely, Alva's actions in Naarden and Zutphen confirmed what many of the militant Protestants already believed, and convinced many others of the fact that the end was indeed drawing near. The millennial character of the fighting came to epitomize the siege of Leiden, as both sides viewed the city as the key to ultimate victory. The apocalypse approached, but which side would God choose?

Militarization of the Landscape

The essential goal of the inundation to secure the relief of Leiden was to turn Holland into a militarized landscape, defined here as a "material and cultural site mobilized for military purposes" (Coates et al. 2011, 458). In other words, the rebels attempted to control nature and harness its powers for strategic ends. The landscape, however, was not so easily manipulated, and a large amount of collateral damage ensued. C.S. Lewis once noted that "[w]hat we call Man's power over nature turns out to be a power exercised by some men over other men with Nature as its instrument" (Worster 1985, 50; Lewis 1996).³ This quote provides an apt characterization of the human toll of the inundations. Even with centuries of experience in flood prevention and other water management activities the Dutch struggled to make the environment conform to their particular need (TeBrake 1985; Van de Ven 2004; Van Dam 2012). This is hardly surprising; however, as many scholars have discovered, the militarization of a landscape is rarely comprehensive or lasting (Vierling 1920; Mitchell 2002; Pearson, Coates, and Cole 2010, 5). The brief description of the siege and relief of Leiden that follows demonstrates the difficulties inherent in attempts to control nature for military purposes.

The first instance of purposefully flooding the land for tactical reasons occurred at Brielle, but it would become commonplace over the next several years. Interestingly, the use of military inundations was almost entirely a rebel tactic, with the Spanish forces rarely engaging in such maneuvers. That is not to say that the Spanish did not consider the use of flooding. In fact, the Spanish developed plans to breach some of the more important sea dikes and

³ Donald Worster uses this quote to encapsulate the argument in his work *Rivers of Empire* (1985), in which he demonstrates how access to water rights became an important source of political power when the United States began its westward expansion in the 19th and 20th centuries.

systematically flood the entire province of Holland. Alva had gone so far as to have a surveyor produce a detailed map to carry out the plan. Philip never authorized it, however, for two reasons. First, he believed that Holland essentially served as a massive barrier which protected some of the further inland provinces from flooding. Second, and somewhat ironically, he believed the act would give the Spanish a poor reputation throughout Europe (Parker 1997). In the place of water as a weapon, the Spanish preferred fire, and they used it often.

Two years after the fall of Naarden and Zutphen, and a few short months after Haarlem surrendered, Alva turned his attention to Leiden. The city lay in the center of southern Holland and was considered the key to unlocking the entire province (see map in Figure 2). The siege of Leiden highlights the tenacity of the war as the success of the fledgling Revolt still hung in the balance. As the well-known historian Jonathan Israel commented, “[t]he siege of Leiden, if not quite the longest – that of Middelburg was longer – was the costliest, hardest fought, and most decisive, as well as the most epic of the great sieges of the Revolt” (Israel 1995, 181). If Leiden fell, then most likely all of southern Holland could have been easily retaken by Alva and the Spanish crown.

The Prince and the rebels could not match the Spanish forces in terms of numbers or organization. After the Iconoclast Riots in 1566 Alva raised an army of 13,000 soldiers which formed the core of the Army of Flanders. Once Brielle fell, this number swelled to 67,000, the largest in the western world at the time (Parker 2004, 21-23). The Prince and the States of Holland and Zeeland could never have supported such a force at the outset of the Revolt. Only a few years earlier Orange had had to flee Strasbourg/Straatsburg under cover in order to avoid his creditors. The States of Holland attempted to fund the war as best they could, but had to resort to devaluing its currency, confiscating property, and borrowing money from its own military commanders (Fritschy 2003). Unable to muster an equivalent army, the Prince and the rebels began employing military inundations more frequently.



Figure 2. The attacks of the Spanish troops under the Duke of Alva, 1572 (Klinkert 2007, 456).

By the time the rebels saved Leiden in October 1574, the city had been besieged for a year with only a brief respite in April, but the situation became especially dire in the final months. The Spanish had done well, successfully isolating the city with the construction of a wide arc of sconces and other defenses. As traditional military maneuvers had proven ineffective, the rebels resorted to more desperate tactics. Faced with the idea that the city might be starved into submission, the rebels, under the command of the Prince, decided on the unthinkable: flooding the land and saving the city with its navy. Jan Fruytiers, an eye witness of the siege, noted that the common consensus for the rebels was *beter bedorven dan verlooren landt* ('better broken/spoiled land than lost land') (Fruytiers 1577, 16). In a similar vein, the Prince argued that if Leiden was saved, then Holland for the time being would be spared as well (Fruytiers 18). The rebel forces were quite willing to employ destructive tactics to help ensure this victory. The States of Holland was clear in its resolution on July 30, 1574, that it intended to put the water board regions of Rijnland, Delfland, and Schieland under water (Den Heijer 2010, 5-6). There was no way of misinterpreting their designs for southern Holland.

The first dike breaches occurred on August 3, and the early phases of the flooding were uncharacteristically orderly and systematic. The great Dutch historian S.J. Fockema Andreae noted that the inundation was "well controlled" (Fockema 1953). The dikes along the Hollandse IJssel and Maas were cut in at least sixteen different locations with Orange personally present at the first breach near Capelle. In order to carry out the task the rebels assembled a veritable army of *dijkgravers* ('dike diggers/breachers') with decades of experience in water management. Individuals such as Pieter van der Does, the dike warden (*dijkgraaf*) of Delfland, and Paulus Buys, the future Lands Advocate and member of the water board of Rijnland, helped instruct the various labourers and supervised the cuts (Den Heijer 2010, 8). Even the young Johan van Oldenbarnevelt helped with these early inundations. Although his exact role is not clear, it was presumably to coordinate financial and jurisdictional issues with different polder governments and help limit the amount of collateral damage (Den Tex 1980, 24). Unfortunately this is one aspect of the great statesman's career that has not been studied in depth.

While the goal of the flooding was apparent, practical issues proved more problematic, and the rebels encountered increasing difficulties directing the flood waters toward the city (Gottschalk 1975, 730-1; Den Heijer 2010). As the siege wore on and the situation in Leiden became more desperate, panic and disorder came to characterize the whole operation. The rebels were prevented any initial success because of Spanish sconces and defenses they held around the city. This situation forced the rebels to take an alternative flood route towards

the city, which was less direct and required additional dike breaches. Throughout September they continued to break dikes and open sluices in order to gain access to the city by water.



Figure 3. The relief of Leiden and the concurrent inundations, 1574. (Klinkert 2007, 462).

In the end, Orange and the rebels succeeded because of a fair bit of good luck. A surprise attack intended to cut the important *landscheiding* dike, which separated the various water boards, actually ended up at the wrong dike after the soldiers got lost at night. Fortunately for the rebels, this botched operation was still enough to scare the Spanish into withdrawing their forces (Den Heijer 2010, 24-5). By this point, the water boards of Schieland and Delfland were nearly completely inundated, but the water levels in Rijnland remained too shallow to allow the barges waiting in nearby cities to sail to Leiden (Andreae 1953).

The greatest bit of luck came in the form of natural forces as rains and Northwest winds provided enough water for ships to reach the city. As Fruytiers declared, God “sent the wind out of the Northwest with his powerful hands” (“*juyst met den springvloet heft zijn crachtighe hant den wint eerst stromende uit den Noortwesten ghesonden*”) and “spread the water out wonderfully” (“*de wateren verspreyden hun wonderbaerlijkerwijse*”) (Fruytiers 1577, 27). This allowed the estimated seventy galleys and 250 flat bottomed ships to set out towards Leiden (Heijer 2010, 16). While the heavenly sent wind and rain provided the final “drops” needed to relieve the city, in truth the container that was southern Holland was nearly full to the brim because of the rebel army’s activities. Even if the land immediately surrounding Leiden initially remained too dry for ships to sail, large areas of land had been taking on water for two months. James Tracy, who has done considerable research on the military inundations, estimates that between 1572 and 1576 roughly half of Holland’s farm land was under water at one period or another, largely as a result of the relief of Leiden (Tracy 2008, 120).

Memorializing and commemorating the Siege

This account adds further proof to the idea that the environment is not a passive canvas awaiting human agency (Nash 2005, Mitchell 2002). It took both human and natural forces to save the city, but in terms of commemoration in the *Allegorie* the human elements are ignored. The portrayal of the flooding in the background of the image displays none of the desperate events of the actual fighting. There are no broken dikes, open sluices, or botched night raids to denote any worldly responsibility for the inundations. The poem notes that the wind and rain stood ready in the city’s service to drive back the enemy, but the underlying implication was that God was directing the events. This idea is highlighted in the image of the Greek god Aeolus blowing the rebel ships along their course while another deity pours out the rain to extinguish the Spanish soldier’s torch. Neptune himself reaches up out of the water to arrest the Spaniards’ progress. Although the classical gods are performing the actions, they

are doing so at God's bidding. The message is clear: the city was saved through divine intervention and not by the rebels' actions.

The relief of Leiden served as a prime example of the ordeal (*beproeving*), or the trial of faith by adversity, as described by Simon Schama. He notes how trials by water could serve as a "determinate of moral authority" (1987, 25). This idea fit perfectly with the Reformed theology which spread throughout Holland and the Low Countries. The central belief of the new doctrine was that salvation was predestined by an omnipotent God that elected which individuals to save and which to condemn. The followers thought of themselves as children of Israel setting up a new Zion that was under God's protection as long as they lived a pious life. Members of the Reformed community were constantly on the lookout for signs that they were part of the elect and were being sufficiently devout. They believed that failure to live up to the exacting moral codes could result in any number of punishments, but unanticipated natural disasters such as flooding were most often interpreted as Godly wrath. Similarly, the ability to prevent flooding could also be put in a divine context. For centuries the Dutch had carried out land reclamation which they interpreted as a clear sign of Godly favor. Andries Vierlingh, the famous sixteenth-century hydraulic engineer, noted that only God can make land, but He also gives some people the intelligence and ingenuity to reclaim land. As Schama pointed out, the fact that the land remained dry helped create the idea of communal identity, likening themselves to survivors of the deluge or flood. By the time of the Revolt, this belief was firmly entrenched as the Dutch had been surviving inundations for centuries.

In other words, the landscape provided a sort of moral geography, or spiritual compass, whereby the Reformed community could determine their piety through the lack or abundance of environmental disasters (Schama 1987, 35, 94). Divine intervention and the corresponding proof that the rebels were part of God's elect came to be one of the central elements in subsequent tales and commemorations of the siege of Leiden. The people demonstrated their faith through their suffering and starvation, and God showed his favor by sending out the wind and rain to save the city. Ironically, this interpretation turns the notion of divine favor through flood protection on its head. In this regard, it probably represents one of the only instances when flooding indicated divine favor, but it showed Godly approval nonetheless.

The communal process of memory, commemoration, and forgetting has already been thoroughly studied in connection with the siege of Leiden in terms of the starvation and divine deliverance. As was usually the case in siege warfare, the Spanish tactic was not to capture Leiden by force, but instead starve it into submission. The *Allegorie* clearly alludes to this tactic in the figure of the frail Leiden burgher situated just behind the personification of the city at her feet. He

feebly clings to the carrot on the ground while the other foodstuffs are strewn about, just out of reach. The focus on starvation present in so many accounts of the siege, which has traditionally been taken for granted, has recently been reexamined by some historians, demonstrating that food shortages may have actually been exaggerated (Wijsenbeek-Olthuis 2006). More importantly for the purposes of this paper, Judith Pollmann revealed that the focus on starvation served as a unifying element in terms of memory and commemoration in the century following the relief. Depicting the difficulties which the burghers withstood in terms of famine allowed the city to demonstrate its mettle and fortitude while simultaneously allowing commentators to avoid discussion of divisive religious issues which remained even after the siege, especially in terms of the treatment of religious minorities (Pollmann 2008, 7-12).

The *Allegorie* clearly fits within the tropes of memorialization and commemoration discussed by Pollmann. It served to promote unity by making no distinction between the different segments of the Leiden population, and treated them as a bloc, ignoring any divisions within the city, which were already present. Even during the siege itself, when the city should have been completely united, there were divisive debates over something as innocuous as the motto on newly printed paper money in the city. The magistrates had chosen "*Haec libertatis ergo*" ('This for the sake of liberty'), which one of the Reformed Church's Calvinist preachers lambasted as too Libertine, instead calling for the motto to have been "*Haec religionis ergo*" ('This for the sake of religion'). Despite their unified opposition to the Spanish, church and state still had differing priorities regarding the meaning of the Revolt (Kooi 2000, 30). The *Allegorie*, however, makes no distinction between the various populations of Leiden and dissenting viewpoints. In this instance, God's salvation from the terrible siege is for all those in Leiden, and by extension, the entire Revolt. Additionally, the *Allegorie* demonstrates the city's mettle through steadfast devotion and unflinching piousness in face of a Spanish assault. The Dutch had survived their ordeal.

The religiosity and unity of enduring a flood (and a siege) are also clear themes of the *Allegorie* and the attached poem. The piety of the city is demonstrated in the fact that despite having her soul literally sucked out of her by the figure of disease, she determinedly clings to her bible (presumably) in her right hand. The unity of the city is shown with the bundle of arrows clutched in her left hand. The focus on the flood is shown in the last lines of the poem noting that Neptune worked through God's blessing. In this case, Neptune had performed admirably, as all of the fields in the background were completely inundated, allowing the ships a sheltered voyage towards Leiden, safely out of the range of the Spanish soldiers stranded on one of the sconces.

The *Allegorie* also helped to promote unity by intentionally ignoring certain aspects of the siege, specifically the rebels' role in the inundation. The background of the image shows the military inundation to rescue the city, but its depiction is not meant to catch the viewer's attention. In total the flood waters cover roughly one-eighth of the print, being obscured by the wall on the left-hand side of the image, the Spanish soldier, Neptune, and a water nymph riding on a wave on the right-hand side. The flood waters that are visible appear serene. Barely a ripple breaks its calm surface. In this portrayal there are no allusions or references to any role which the rebels played in the flood. There are no images of water flowing through broken dikes or open sluices to mark rebel responsibility for the inundations. The only part of the image that depicts any flooding is the nymph pouring water from his perch in the clouds. Even this, however, is directed more towards extinguishing the Spaniard's torch than inundating the land. The human sources of the inundation, although responsible for the majority of the flooded lands, are washed away by the focus on the providential.

This sort of purposeful elision is not singular to the *Allegorie*, but appears in other commemorations of the siege as well. It represents one of a myriad of different works of art which commemorated the relief of Leiden that chose to minimize the human causes of the flooding. Two of the more well-known pieces, by Frans Hogenberg and Joost Jansz Lanckaert, demonstrate this point (see Figure 4 and Figure 5). Both provide a sort of cartographic representation that includes a more detailed (and less allegorical) account of the siege, focusing not so much on symbolism but on the various military maneuvers. Hogenberg produced his print several decades after the siege of Leiden. It shows a small section of southern Holland flooded, from Delft to Leiden, with the main focus on the flotilla of barges making their way to the beleaguered city.⁴ Lanckaert produced a high quality wall tapestry providing a detailed visual account of the relief of Leiden. Although he produced the tapestry roughly fifteen years after the event, it was evidently based on designs which the cartographer Hans Liefrinck developed during the actual siege (Andreae 1953). Lanckaert's production includes a much more expansive view of southern Holland, stretching from the North Sea in the west to the Rotte River in the east, and from Leiden in the north to the Merwe in the south. The main focus in the tapestry is again the fleet of barges sailing towards Leiden which occupy the central area of the work.

⁴ Latin Transcription in Figure 3: Aggeribus scissis, et sublato obijce Ponti, / Auriacus Batavis immittit flumina campis, / Oceani moriens undam magni haurit Iberus, / Solvit et obsidione gravi pia moenia LEIDAE. English translation: With dikes torn apart and the barrier of the sea taken away, / Auriacus sends floods into Batavian fields; / While dying, the Spanish drink the water of the great Ocean, And frees the pious walls of Leiden from heavy siege.

The attentive viewer can see several of the dike breaches near Rotterdam with the water flowing into southern Holland. Lanckaert also attempts to provide a scope of the flooding with portions of the tapestry colored in light blue to denote the flooded section of Holland, in contrast to the pastel green showing the unflooded sections of land. A large portion of Schieland which was also flooded did not, however, make it onto the tapestry.

It is noteworthy that in both of these other commemorations and accounts of the relief of Leiden the human causes of the flooding are again ignored. Both chose to focus on the fleet of barges sailing towards Leiden. The fact that this moment was the climax of the whole siege is undoubtedly part of the reason behind this omission, but the artists could have just as easily incorporated events from the earlier stages of the siege as well. There are numerous examples of art that collapse multiple events with different dates into a single image. Lanckaert filled the edges of his tapestry with eight smaller images depicting classical deities that are again conspiring to help save the city. From this evidence, it is clear that the artists willfully omitted some of the more divisive elements of the story.

Controlling people by controlling nature

The idea that the environment itself chooses sides in war is a common trope in commemoration, and it had important ramifications for depictions of the relief of Leiden (Keller 2009; Pearson 2009, 150-170). In this case, nature inevitably implied the divine as well, since God was understood to have control over the environment and directed the flood waters as well. In terms of an environmental history of war in the early modern period, this idea is extremely important.⁵ As David Blackbourn noted regarding militarism in Germany, the conquest of nature often implies the conquest of people, which is clearly the case here, as the assault on the landscape with military inundations had the intended goal of conquering the Spanish forces (Blackbourn 2006). This line of thinking is clear in the *Allegorie* as well, demonstrated in the horizontal organization of the image. On the left side of the image the situation is all but decided as the life of the city hangs in the balance. The right side of the image provides the resolution, as God halts the Spaniard and directs the flooding while the ships sail smoothly to their destination. This providential interpretation served to legitimize the rebels' actions, or at the very least, avoid contentious discussions regarding remunerations and repayment for damages.

⁵ Most works on early modern environmental history of war focus on resources management. See Kjærgaard (1994) Warde (2006), Hupy (2008), McNeil (2004), and Appuhn (2009).



Figure 4. Ontzet van Leiden, 1574 ('Relief of Leiden, 1574'). Rijksmuseum. Reproduced with permission. <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.453700>.

This type of forgetting, or intentional elision, is clear in many written accounts of the siege as well. Jan Fruytiers, Emmanuel van Meteren, and Pieter Bor all provided relatively contemporary accounts of the siege and all of them side-stepped discussing the lasting destruction of the inundation. For the most part they provide a detailed account of rebel activities and dike breaches as they worked their way to the city from August to October. Additionally, most of them noted the rebel motto, “better broken land than lost land”, with van Meteren stating it would have been better to do 600,000 guilders worth of damage than surrender the land to the Spanish (Van Meteren 1608, 235). When it came time to actually give an account of the degree to which the land was broken, however, they were all relatively silent. Once the city was saved, Fruytiers discussed how the rebel Admiral Louis de Boissot went straight to the church and prayed with the other “children of Israel”. They gave thanks to God for He “so wonderfully made a sea over dry land and brought and held it in the desired place” (“soo wonderlijk een Zee over draech lant ghemackt end behouden ter ghewenschter plaetse gebracht hadden”) (Fruytiers 1577, 31). The chroniclers

also mention, almost in passing, that the day after the city was saved the wind shifted again to help dry the land. Fruytiers, Bor, and van Meteren all used the exact same phrasing to describe how the water obediently retreated from the land, *als nu zijn officie ende dienst ghedaen hebbende* ('as if now its office and service had been done') (Fruytiers 1577, 32; Van Meteren 1608, 102; Bor 1617, 560).

In actuality, the water withdrew more slowly, and not surprisingly, the flooding of a large portion of southern Holland created numerous problems and conflicts. By the time the Prince and the rebels saved the city the water boards of Schieland and Delfland were almost completely flooded, with the streets of Delft and Rotterdam standing underwater (Groenveld 2001, 18-19). Fruytiers estimated that the flooding incurred 300,000 gold crowns worth of damage, with most of it occurring in Schieland and Delfland (Fruytiers 1577, 16-19). Many of the watermills in the area were damaged during the flooding as well, and some people worried that salt water might make the land unusable for years to come (Den Heijer 2010, 7; De Kraker 2015). According to one historian's estimation, by 21 February 1576, 93 percent of the area around Alphen to the east of Leiden was still *desolaet end ongebruyct* ('desolate and unused') (Groenveld 2001, 14-22). The Alblasserwaard region lying southeast of Rotterdam fared even worse, as it experienced only short dry periods for seven years. It had been flooded during the All Saints Day Flood in 1570 and was again inundated with the relief of Leiden to prevent a Spanish attack from the rear (Gottschalk 1975, 731-739). In short, saving Leiden incurred a tremendous amount of long lasting collateral damage.

Undoubtedly, part of the problem of repair and reparations was administrative, since the war had disrupted many of the traditional forms of governance (Van Nierop 2009). Resistance to Spanish authority provided the largest motivation for open revolt, but agreeing upon a new political system to replace the Habsburg monarchy proved more problematic. The organization and financial apparatus of the rebellious provinces were still fluid as they attempted to stabilize their position. It was several years before the States General established a quota system to ensure the regular payment of troops, while a concrete political organization remained an open question until at least 1588 (Rowen 1988; Van Gelderen 1992; Israel 1995, 179-220). On a more local scale, the inundated areas were largely self-contained water districts, each with its own organization responsible for policing and maintaining the water conditions in the area. These organizations encountered their own difficulties as many were divided among themselves in their loyalties. Numerous members of the water boards of Delfland, Schieland, and Rijnland remained loyal to the Spanish Monarchy rather than join the rebellion, creating administrative vacuums that

were difficult to fill ('t Hart 1974, 16; Postma 1989, 390-393). Immediately after the relief, the Prince ordered the repair of several dikes, but the progress was rather slow. There were numerous attempts to raise taxes for repair but the issues always stalled; it appears as though the individuals least able to pay for the repairs were forced to bear the largest burden ('t Hart 1974, 28; Groenveld 2001; 't Hart 2014, 101-122).

Gouda's role in the relief and subsequent repairs highlights some of the important issues which the *Allegorie* ignores. The city had initially protested against cutting the dikes for obvious reasons. Afterwards they estimated that the relief and subsequent repairs cost the city roughly 12,000 guilders (Hibben 1983, 81). In 1577, three years after the initial inundation, one visitor to the city observed that it still appeared as a seaside town with waters continuing to flow through the ruined dikes (Jacobsz 2008, 274). In addition to the expenses which the city had to muster for the repairs the dike breaches also affected the city's income. The city became infuriated because this new passage created for the relief of Leiden in the Leidschendam ultimately diverted ship traffic and its toll revenue to nearby Delft. Both sides of the city ledger were affected by the military inundation. The prince had assured Gouda that following the relief the new passage would be quickly removed, but his promise proved hollow. Gouda openly protested the situation, leaving no doubt as to its opposition to the passage. The Prince urged the city to remain quiet, as he believed the Spanish would interpret internal disputes as a sign of weakness (*Resolutiën van de Staten van Holland 1575*, 9-10). The dispute was one of the most vociferous and long lasting disputes from the inundations. After three years of heated debate, with Gouda abstaining from sending representatives to the States of Holland for several months, the city finally took matters into its own hands. Two days before Christmas 1577 it sent out its militia to destroy the passage (Hibben 1983, 143-152).



Figure 5. Het Ontzet van Leiden, tussen 1587-1589 ('The Relief of Leiden, between 1587-1589'). Museum de Lakenhal. Reproduced with permission. <http://www.lakenhal.nl/en/collection/3358>.

Conclusion

A recent article in this journal by Kirk W. Goodlet (2013) can help highlight the broader significance of the commemoration of military inundations. His article discusses the Allied “liberation” of Walcheren during World War II, secured through bombing operations that targeted the sea dikes of the island. It is ironic that these bombings began on October 3, 1944, exactly 370 years to the day after the relief of Leiden. Goodlet’s article similarly deals with the topic of commemoration, calling into question the “wartime love affair” that exists between the Dutch and Anglo-Canadian soldiers. While most Dutch men and women fondly remember the Canadian forces that liberated them from the Nazis, the people of Walcheren view the events differently. Goodlet shows how

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the Allied “liberation” of the island devastated the local population and the environment. With no Allied or Canadian assistance for reconstruction, it was up to the local population to begin the arduous task of rebuilding the damaged water management infrastructure. In terms of memory and commemoration in Zeeland, the event is remembered more for its toll on the environment than for the liberation from the Nazis. Over the course of a few short weeks the Allied bombings and inundations wrought more ecological destruction than the four previous years under Nazi control.

It is odd that a military practice which brings with it such ecological and human devastation is so often portrayed in a positive light. The Allies “liberated” Zeeland while God “saved” the people of Holland from Spanish tyranny. Couching these military maneuvers in such idealized terms helped to silence many of the dissenters and avoid the complicated issues that followed. In the euphoria that followed such dramatic events it could prove difficult for someone to complain about something as trivial as flooded fields and lost crops.

Is the providential framework depicted in the *Allegorie* an echo of Orange’s pleas for solidarity during his talks with Gouda? An image filled with portrayals of rebel dike breaches would imply that cities and rural residents have a secular recourse to recover their damages. In other words, if the *Allegorie* showcased the role which the rebels played in the military inundation, then people could direct their request for reimbursement to the rebel forces, which many initially tried but ultimately failed (’t Hart 2014, 106). As it was, the relief of Leiden was interpreted as providential. How does one argue with God for compensation? In any case it appears as though the act of forgetting was largely successful. The well-known historian of the Dutch Republic James Tracy noted that he could find no indication that the rural population in Holland ever received any compensation relating to the damage from the relief of Leiden in all of his archival research (Tracy 2009, 41-54). As one historian astutely observed, the inundations which should have been liberating, in fact had the opposite effect (Groenveld 2001, 33). Remembering the relief of Leiden in providential terms permitted a sort of communal catharsis which allowed contemporaries to forget the difficulties which they had just endured and focus on the righteousness of their ongoing struggle.

Appendix 1: Transcription of the Latin and Dutch text on the *Allegorie*

Latin

Districto jugulum frustra petit ense Maranus
 Incassumque furit per mille cadavera stragem
 Det licet ingentem, Stygia concita palude

Atra fames, letho comitat aqua lurida Pestis:
 Dum tibi Lugdunum, figenti ad sidera vultus,
 Nitentique super diae fundamina Petrae,
 Dextra dei prono vindex succurrit Olympo
 Aeolias acies fugienteis armat in hosteis,
 Neptunumque jubet per inhospita capita ferre
 Civibus obsessis inopina classe salutem
 Hinc Paeana canens Tritonis buccina, clangit
 Leida Batavorum unanimi virtute triumphat

Dutch

Al was 't dat u de Spaignaert, o Leyden vol trouwen
 Met swaert en vlam dreijchde de bitterlijcke doot
 Al was 't dat u de vierich pest end 'hongers noot
 O loftlijke borgers de keele toe ginck houwen
 Also geraerct sijnd in het uiterste benouwen
 Nochtans u steunende op accoort en vaste gront
 Den hemelschen hoestee, heb dy ter rechter stont
 De hulpe godts daer op ghij u verliet vercregen
 De wijl tuwen dienste bereijst stont wint en regen
 Te rugh drijvende met oneer uwen vijant
 Maer den benauden brengeden spijs en proviant
 Wel Neptuni werc maer wesende doch godts segen

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Caché sous les vagues: commémoration et oubli des inondations militaires pendant le siège de Leyde

Le présent article analyse le processus de commémoration de la délivrance de Leyde. Le siège et la délivrance qui suivit constituèrent des moments critiques dans les premières années de la Révolte néerlandaise. Le prince d'Orange et les forces rebelles, ne pouvant pas sauver la ville par des manœuvres militaires traditionnelles, employèrent l'inondation délibérée de la terre à des fins tactiques. Au cours de deux mois, ils inondèrent environ la moitié du sud du pays en perçant des digues et en ouvrant des écluses. Cette inondation artificielle ne fut pourtant pas suffisante, et il fallut un gros orage et un vent favorable pour leur permettre enfin de délivrer la ville. L'article se concentre sur une gravure produite peu après la délivrance de la ville, le 3 octobre 1574. L'image souligne le récit traditionnel du siège et sa commémoration en Hollande au 16e siècle, en insistant sur la famine et la misère dans la ville, tout en

affirmant qu'elle avait été sauvée par une intervention divine. Nous partons de la manière dont cette image, et plus généralement d'autres récits contemporains, rappelèrent et commémorèrent les inondations militaires. La gravure, comme maintes autres commémorations, interprétèrent les changements naturels météorologiques comme signe de la bénédiction de Dieu. Cette interprétation remplit plusieurs fonctions importantes pour les contemporains - notamment, elle permit aux révoltés de ne pas réparer ou compenser les dégâts causés par les inondations militaires. En somme, nous avançons que l'intervention divine de la délivrance de Leyde cacha la vérité inconvenue que la conquête de la nature et la domination humaine sont liées de manière intime.

Verborgen onder de golven: Het herdenken en vergeten van de militaire inundaties tijdens het beleg van Leiden

Deze bijdrage presenteert een analyse van het herdenkingsproces rond het ontzet van Leiden in 1574. Het beleg en het eropvolgende ontzet van de stad waren cruciale momenten in de vroege jaren van de Tachtigjarige Oorlog, tegenwoordig ook wel bekend als de Nederlandse Opstand. Toen het duidelijk werd dat de Prins van Oranje en de opstandelingen de stad niet konden redden met traditionele militaire manoeuvres, werd besloten tot het inzetten van militaire inundaties, oftewel het opzettelijk onderwaterzetten van het land voor tactische doeleinden. Gedurende een periode van twee maanden zetten de opstandelingen ongeveer de helft van de zuidelijke provincie Holland onder water door het doorsteken van dijken en het openen van sluizen. Deze kunstmatige overstroming bereikte echter niet genoeg, en er moesten een storm en een verandering van windrichting aan te pas komen voordat ze eindelijk in staat waren de stad te ontzetten. Het onderwerp van dit artikel is een prent die gedrukt werd kort na het ontzet van de stad op 3 oktober 1574. De prent verbeeldt de gangbare zestiende-eeuwse interpretatie van het beleg, waarbij de nadruk valt op de hongersnood en chaos in de stad en het ontzet wordt voorgesteld als goddelijke ingrijpen. Dit artikel gaat in op de manier waarop militaire inundaties worden herdacht en in beeld gebracht op deze prent en in andere bronnen uit dezelfde tijd. Net als vele andere herdenkingsstukken interpreteerde de prent de veranderende weersomstandigheden als aan teken van God's zegen. De weergave van het ontzet van Leiden als veroorzaakt door goddelijke hand had een aantal voordelen. Het belangrijkste daarvan was dat het de rebellen ontsloeg van verantwoordelijkheid voor herstel en compensatie voor de schade die veroorzaakt was door de overstromingen. Ik betoog dat deze interpretatie van het ontzet van Leiden uiteindelijk bijdroeg aan het verbloemen van de

pijnlijke waarheid dat heerschappij over natuur en mensen niet los van elkaar gezien kunnen worden.