Protagonists of War
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General conclusion
Episodic war narratives in comparison

Chronicles, pamphlets and relaciones

In the preceding chapters on the episodic narratives related to four Spanish commanders, use has been made of a wide spectrum of different sources that sometimes agree, but often do not. In this general conclusion some comparisons regarding these different war narratives will be drawn, and the descriptions of the individual commanders will be placed in a broader perspective.

As was to be expected, there are differences to be found in the treatment of the events of the war between Spanish and Dutch chronicles. Spanish chroniclers often tried to conceal errors committed by the Spanish commanders, going so far as to convert an obvious defeat into a victory. Antonio Trillo, in particular, has a preference for this technique, as in the case of Julián’s famous naval defeat at Reimerswaal in 1574, or when he turned Sancho’s defeat near Maastricht in that same year into a victory.\(^1\)

Our sources have also proved that not all stories existed in both cultures. The famous Dutch story of the dog saving William of Orange’s life during the *camisada* by Julián never made it into the Spanish chronicles. This absence also seems to indicate that the Spaniards were never aware of the fact that they had nearly captured – or killed – the rebel leader. The same can be said about commander Gaspar de Robles, who possessed – and still possesses – a very particular fame in the Low Countries as the protagonist of positive stories that are not at all known in Spain.\(^2\)

More in general, something similar can also be argued with regard to famous battles and sieges.\(^3\) The Battle of Heiligerlee (May 1568), won by the rebels, figures prominently in Dutch history books, counting as the beginning of the Eighty Years’ War, while Spanish authors pay much more attention to the subsequent Battle of Jemmingen (July 1568), won by the royal army.\(^4\) The same process is visible regarding sieges, as

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\(^{1}\) For a comparable example see Thomas, ‘How a defeat became a victory’.

\(^{2}\) Fagel, ‘Imagen’.


\(^{4}\) Fagel, Santiago Belmonte and Álvarez Francés, ‘Eer en schuld’.
the sieges of Alkmaar and Leiden – both rebel victories – hardly figure in Spanish sources, while the siege of Haarlem appears prominently in Spanish historiographical works but has received much less attention in the history of the Low Countries. Interestingly, this focus on certain events can be found both in early modern chronicles and in more recent history works. It reveals one of the main weapons of historians: to decide what to include and what stories to omit, or occlude, contributing in this manner to the continuation of certain narratives. It also means that even the most factual descriptions possess a subjective character that is often overlooked, as is the case with the Spanish relaciones of the sixteenth century.

Another example that illustrates this dynamic is the story of the betrayal around the cruel punishment of Naarden. In Spanish sources there is no discussion of a possible false oath by Julián, while most of the local Dutch sources speak of a deceitful Spanish commander. However, all the first-hand texts by the Dutch were written by authors directly or indirectly involved in the negotiations. It would be very hard for a ‘truth commission’ to decide on the ‘real facts’.

Historian P.C. Hooft, who made ample use of Bernardino de Mendoza’s chronicle, more than once quoted the Spanish author more or less literally, but tended to alter Mendoza’s line of argument, excluding or adding part of the story, for example around Julián’s defeat at Reimerswaal. Where Mendoza described the mutual respect between the commander and the Governor-general, Hooft used the quotation to turn Romero into a typically arrogant Spaniard. However, to complicate matters, we also have a Spanish letter written on the capture of the Count of Egmont that perfectly coincides with the description given by Hooft.

Differences in episodic narratives do not involve just the different national traditions, since there were also clear differences between the individual Spanish and Dutch chronicles. Stories in Van Meteren often do not coincide with Hooft’s descriptions, and we also encounter different anecdotes in the chronicles of Mendoza and Trillo, although both authors published in the same year and came from the same city. More interesting and less predictable is the evidence that a simple dichotomy between Spanish authors praising Spaniards and Dutch authors praising Dutchmen did not exist. Mendoza openly praised the rebel commanders during the Battle of Mookerheyde, completely unlike the image we receive from Trillo’s text.
Spanish chronicles describe Sancho Dávila’s participation in a series of battles in 1568 in various ways, connecting him with a specific battle or omitting him from the story of another. It is remarkable that Sancho is praised much more in letters and newsletters of the period itself, written directly at the time. This means that there is a clear difference in his protagonism between contemporary unpublished sources and the narrative sources by Trillo and Mendoza published much later. This difference is most certainly connected to the fact that, as an Albista, Sancho was greatly praised in texts written in the vicinity of the Duke.

A story about Dávila’s burned hands and face could be found only in a Spanish manuscript chronicle and not in the published ones. It is possible that these kinds of stories may have been cut at the moment of publication by either the author or the editor as not being sufficiently heroic. Though we have letters from Mondragón describing his imprisonment by the mutineers in Zierikzee, in the Spanish chronicles we are told that he had just managed to flee in time, saving his honour.

The Spanish chronicles also differ again in dealing with Sancho’s attack on Middelburg. In the letters and relaciones Sancho was described as a much more cunning and intelligent commander than in the chronicles that were meant for publication, such as the one by Trillo, where he is depicted as much more brutal. In this case Trillo seems badly informed on the events, decorating his text with stereotypical elements. However, at other moments we have a martial letter by Sancho that is perfectly reflected in Trillo’s chronicle, as can be seen just before the Battle of Mookerheyde. A similar difference can be found in descriptions of the encounter between Mondragón and William of Orange in Breda (1575). The letter that survives is much more rational – even explaining Orange’s point of view without any judgement – than the aggressive tone in Trillo’s chronicle which turns Orange into a vile and mean enemy.

Different stories can also be found about the subsequent attack on Arnemuiden. While in English sources it is said that children and women were also killed, there are Spanish sources that explicitly state that women and children were spared. This may imply that the Spanish text served as a defence against the accusation of Spanish violence towards the innocent that was circulating publicly. Also the French ambassador wrote to his King using newsletters and other sources, clearly trying to offer a negative view of the Spanish commanders.

These examples confirm that it is important to compare the episodic narratives directly created after a battle and sent as relaciones and letters, and almost immediately turned into pamphlets. On the Battle
of Mookerheyde there are three different narratives to be found in the pamphlets: a military story, a religious one and one defending the rebels. This implies that a pamphlet written in Brussels on 17 April could have a completely different narrative from another written in Antwerp a day later, though both authors clearly belonged to the royal camp.

The same narrative variations can be found around the Battle of Jemmingen. Even before the end of the actual battle, the Duke of Alba had already sent his version to the King, while in another parallel Spanish version the Duke’s importance was largely downplayed. The chronicle by Alonso de Ulloa, published in Venice in 1569, describes in detail how the Duke spread his version around, sending letters with the news of his victory to the Emperor, to the Spanish ambassador in Rome, the viceroys of Naples and Sicily, and the Spanish consul at Venice, who used Alba’s letter to inform the Venetian Senate. Alba created his own fame as a military hero, and he knew Italy was the centre of all international news. However, Cees Reijner has recently proven that seventeenth-century Italian historiography on the Revolt in the Low Countries was greatly influenced by both the Farnese family and the desire to differentiate between the Spanish and the Italians in the royal army, leading in both cases to a negative view of the Duke of Alba.

Chronicles, newsletters and relaciones seem factual at first, but when one compares them and reads them against the backdrop of the contemporary situation, they reveal how some figures are singled out and turned into protagonists while others are not. No single Spanish national story exists as different groups were trying to shape the narratives to influence opinions, ranging from the royal court to a much more general public. Ulloa, for example, always puts emphasis on the heroism of the Duke of Alba, his family and his followers, like Sancho Dávila.

After his famous crossing to Goes in 1572, Mondragón took care to inform everybody about the outcome of the expedition, and he even sent a painting of the story to the Duke of Alba, who was so impressed by this heroic deed that he wanted to order a larger painting of it. The Duke considered Mondragón to be ‘his’ man, and thus the victory was almost his own.

5 Idem.
6 Ulloa, Comentarios, 34r; Rodríguez-Salgado, ‘Do not reveal…’, 18-19.
7 His letters were read out in public in Ypres. Stensland, Habsburg communication, 35; Lamal, News; Lamal, ‘Orecchie’; Lamal, ‘Internationale berichtgeving’.
8 Reijner, Italiaanse geschiedschrijvers, 244; Stensland, Habsburg communication, 159.
The Spanish Fury of Antwerp in 1576 is another famous moment that can be followed through time. This episode is particularly relevant because, by tracing the different narratives, we can illustrate how one of them would become the canonical interpretation. At first it seems that both Dutch and Spanish stories agreed on the fact that it was a military confrontation that subsequently led to the brutal sack of the city. Even the local pamphlet written in 1576 against the Spanish military mostly dealt with the military facts and even praised their military worth, but over time international historiography directed the description towards the sack, converting it more and more into the result of the mutiny of the Spanish soldiers, and therefore gradually omitting the military confrontation from the stories. In this way this narrative gradually became the historical episode par excellence that illustrated the stereotypical Spanish cruelty of the Black Legend.

Friends and foes

This research has also exposed how fruitful the use of merchants’ letters can be in the study of the Revolt and, more generally, in discovering narratives on war written by civilians who were not directly involved in the conflict. We have seen that Sancho, Valdés and Mondragón maintained contact with Spanish merchants from Bruges and Antwerp. In the case of Sancho these were also close friendships, but these contacts were also needed to send money home, as in the cases of Valdés and Mondragón. The fact that Mondragón originally came from the Castilian merchant town of Medina del Campo made it much easier for him to connect to the commercial world.

For Sancho these contacts were of vital importance. As one of the commanders who had little previous knowledge of the Low Countries, it was easier to get in contact with fellow Spaniards. As governor of Antwerp citadel, he was also in a very good position to maintain these contacts with the Spanish merchant community. His friends are mentioned in his letters in opposition to his enemies, and accordingly described as ‘amigos’. He is the only commander often using the word ‘heretics’ (herejes) to label the enemy, while others like Valdés tended to employ much more general terminology. This could partly be motivated by Sancho’s more religious outlook, but it also illustrates the black-and-white manner in

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9 The expression ‘Luteranos’ for all Protestants is not found in the correspondence of the four commanders, though in general it is considered to be the normal word used by Spaniards to refer to all Protestants. Van Campene, Dagboek, I, 132.
which he divided the world into friends and foes. One could image him as being a very good friend, but he surely was a terrible enemy to have. His descendants in later centuries continued propagating this image of a Catholic crusader against Protestantism.

It has also become clear that the image of the commanders could vary greatly, even within the reports of the same author. Morillon, Cardinal Granvelle’s confidant, had faith in the Spanish military commanders during the first period around 1568, but after 1572 his image of them completely changed, and they became the worst enemies of the country. By that time his beloved Mechelen had been plundered by the royal army. At first he spoke positively about both Sancho Dávila and Julián, but he ended up especially loathing Sancho Dávila, and almost to the same degree the generally less outspoken and less criticised Mondragón. Targeting the Spanish commanders and the Spanish soldiers may have been a much more generalised way for Catholics and royalists in the Low Countries to position themselves during the conflict.\textsuperscript{10} This shows that it was not only Protestant rebels who made use of anti-Hispanic propaganda, but that royalist Netherlanders did the same as a strategy to distance themselves from the Spaniards present in the Low Countries. However, they mostly refrained from expressing this criticism in print.

These war narratives also demonstrate that the commanders were hated and feared by both the enemy and their own soldiers. The image of Julián, Valdés and Mondragón as commanders loved by their men, as projected in later texts, is clearly not valid, though it can even be found in Hooft’s work. The common soldiers’ interests and opinions certainly were not the same as those of their commanders. There is evidence enough to state that all these three commanders were at some point hated by their own soldiers. Romero seems to have been both feared and ridiculed by his own men, at least if we are to believe Requesens’s words. Julián was a real war hero, but with an apparently complicated character. We can also detect this element in the writings of Trillo, who sided with the common soldier much more than did his learned colleague, Mendoza. For example, when discussing the mutiny in Haarlem, Trillo described the events from the viewpoint of the mutineers, praising the organised and pacific behaviour of the Spanish troops.\textsuperscript{11}

Some of the Spanish commanders were also really hated by the high nobility from the Low Countries, not only by political opponents, but also by those on the same royal side. The Lord of Champagney hated

\textsuperscript{10} Stensland, \textit{Habsburg communication}, 69.

\textsuperscript{11} Trillo, \textit{Historia}, 207-211. See also Martínez, ‘Narrating mutiny’.
Sancho Dávila, Fernando de Lannoy despised Valdés and even wanted to kill him, while Mondragón violently attacked government official Jacques de la Torre at Breda. The policy makers at Brussels and Madrid had to cope with these personal conflicts between their commanders, as in the case of the very different letters Requesens received describing the violence at Utrecht in 1574. Valdés was himself well aware of the hatred the ‘Burgundians’ felt towards the Spanish commanders. Around 1576 this mutual distrust became the leading idea among both the Spanish commanders and the nobility from the Low Countries, creating a completely chaotic situation there. Though in Belgium this French-speaking nobility has been amply studied, its role in the conflict deserves more attention from Dutch scholars.\(^\text{12}\)

Friction was also to be found among the Spaniards: Romero (not an Albista) did not like Fernando de Toledo (the Maestre de campo) or Sancho Dávila (both Albistas). Sancho seems to have been very attached to Prior Fernando de Toledo, Alba’s natural son, and though there is not enough evidence yet, there are indications that this meant he did not belong to the camp of Alba’s heir, Don Fadrique de Toledo.\(^\text{13}\) Though Mondragón seemed to have been considered the friendliest Spaniard and Sancho Dávila as maybe the most aggressive one, which at first might be seen as clear opposites, the sources describe them in general as very good colleagues and friends, showing that even among Albistas there were differences in opinion on the policy towards the inhabitants. There is even a letter from Albista Valdés openly criticising Don Fadrique.

**Before the outbreak of the Revolt**

The early careers of these commanders were mostly fabricated after they had reached certain fame. As there are hardly any reliable data for their early careers, the room for free invention is ample. It was especially rewarding for eulogists and biographers to place them at the scene of important battles and victories, such as the attack on Tunis in 1535, the Battle of Mühlberg in 1547 or the Battle of Saint-Quentin in 1557. There is even a document stating that the Duke of Alba himself was present at Saint-Quentin, while historical documents prove he was at the time residing in Italy.\(^\text{14}\) Also Philip II’s journey to England in 1554 in order to marry Mary Tudor holds special interest, for example in the

\(^{12}\) The loyal nobility has been recently studied by Soen, *Vredehandel*.
\(^{13}\) Kamen, *Duke*, 77.
case of the play on Julián Romero attributed to Lope de Vega, and in the life story of Sancho Dávila. The most revealing example, however, is the fact that Sancho Dávila’s and Mondragón’s heroism at Mühlberg (swimming across the river with their swords in their mouths) seems to be a story fabricated a posteriori. It is telling that a modern writer such as Pérez-Reverte uses precisely this anecdote in his work. Modern historical novels also have the ability to choose between turning Julián into a hero at Saint-Quentin or – on the contrary – downplaying him and his historical contribution completely.

The stories of this earlier period are particularly indicative since they make tangible the fact that many facets of the revolt were already present during the earlier wars against the French, the Duke of Guelders and the Scots. For example, the harsh punishment of Düren during the earlier wars, the punishment of towns in the war between England and Scotland in which Julián was active, and the life of the Spanish soldiers in the north during the wars with the French already offer an image of cruel sieges, overdue wages, mutinies and plundering. This proves that the events during the early phase of the Revolt were in part a continuation of earlier practices, albeit perhaps with less intensity and not directed against the subjects of the same prince. Julián Romero and William of Orange agreed that the Revolt was much crueler compared to the ‘bonne guerre’ of earlier times in which they had fought together on the same side.

The narratives also reveal that the last experience of many of the commanders immediately before the Revolt was related to the famous Ottoman siege of Malta in 1565. Commanders like Julián also worked as governors of fortresses in the Mediterranean, organising the defence against the Ottoman threat. Many of the Spanish troops that came to the Low Countries under the Duke of Alba in 1567 had been involved in this war against the Ottomans. King Philip II also had to shift his attention directly after Malta to the chaotic situation in the Low Countries. The history of the war in the Mediterranean is closely connected to the beginning of the Revolt in the Low Countries.

Also worth mentioning is the fact that there was a direct link between William of Orange and several of the Spanish commanders. Both Julián and Mondragón had had a prior relationship as comrades-in-arms that was used during the Revolt: think of the letters between Orange and Julián during Marnix of Sint-Aldegonde’s captivity in 1573, the letters and agreement between Orange and Mondragón after the siege of Middelburg in 1574, and the meetings between the two men around the peace negotiations at Breda in 1575. Valdés and Sancho Dávila did
not have such a shared past with the high nobility of the Low Countries, and this certainly influenced their outlook on the events.

A life in letters

There was a tradition in the Low Countries to describe the Spanish commanders condescendingly as people of very low birth, such as basket makers, chimney sweeps and drummers. The story seems most strongly related to former drummer Sancho Dávila, who was, however, probably the commander of highest birth among the four examples in this book. Also interesting is the story of how a Dutch nobleman derogatorily described Valdés as somebody who had not been more than a lackey. On the other hand, a Spanish play on Romero framed his humble starting point in life as a drummer’s helper as a telling example of how you could start from scratch and end up a general. This narrative of professional self-made men could be used in the seventeenth century to criticise the members of the high nobility.

These illustrious and famous ancestors could prove of great relevance for the commanders’ descendants, since the descendants could draw on their forebears’ records to improve their own progress in life. The most remarkable example is that of Sancho Dávila, as already in the seventeenth century his direct descendants were using his fame and figure by publishing memorials and history works, quoting letters Sancho had received from the royal government and even from King Philip II himself, preserved in the family archive. For one of those descendants it meant obtaining high office in America, while for another it was a means of attracting the favour of the new Bourbon King in the early eighteenth century.

The fact that Sancho and Mondragón did not succeed in receiving the habit of one of the religious military orders in Spain – because of possible Jewish ancestors – did not stop their descendants from continuously attempting to secure a habit using the fame of their ancestors. In the end, perhaps simply because the passing of time, both commanders were successfully used to obtain the much-desired honours.

This news would certainly have given much joy and pride to these commanders, as the letters written by all four commanders show the importance they gave to the future of their offspring. They always pointed out that they themselves were willing to die poor, but that they needed to be rewarded to help out their children. Of course, this continuous lament of not being rewarded enough seems to have been part of a narrative style

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as a sort of topos, since at least Mondragón and Sancho Dávila earned a large income during their lifetimes. In Julián's case, it was clearly after his death that his wife and daughter were rewarded. The royal secretary understood that this was necessary as evidence of the King's goodwill towards all other men at arms.

The commanders' letters offer a complete range of tone, from very polite letters to the King and the high nobility when they had to thank them for rewards given, up to very unfriendly letters when they had to complain about the complete lack of attention. Especially when writing to Alba's secretary, Albornoz, the commanders were not afraid to use a harsh tone in their letters. Often, when they wrote a letter the same day to the Duke of Alba you can distinguish the difference in tone between the two letters. Requesens was very polite when writing about Julián Romero's capabilities to the King or other high officials, but in a letter to his brother – in cipher – he insulted him as a worthless commander.

But all of the commanders had their critical moments when they no longer took no for an answer. Accordingly, Mondragón and Romero even threatened the royal government with leaving the Low Countries without royal permission in order to get things moving, whereas Sancho could not accept the fact that the King was not capable of procuring for him his promised Spanish knighthood. Such a moment of anger can also be found with the Duke of Alba when he discovered in 1570 that he was not returning to Spain with the future Queen Anne. Valdés was maybe a little less outspoken in the expression of his feelings, but he used the word 'banishment' to describe his difficult and boring stay in the Low Countries.

Valdés seemed to have felt that way during the quiet years from 1569 up to 1 April 1572. We have only a very few letters concerning this period, and this means we cannot use them to fill the void during these years to be found in the chronicles, which tend to go almost directly from 1568 to 1572. The fact that letters in this period are also scarce may be caused by the fact that the commanders had more personal encounters with their frequent correspondents, like the Duke of Alba, but also that during this period there was simply less to write about. Commanders tended to write when a problem needed to be solved, which implies that we are still not well equipped to reconstruct the lives of the commanders during those quiet years. Nonetheless, Sancho's letters in particular show how his life could be filled with his own glorious wedding (including tournaments)

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and with parties, gambling and other forms of entertainment. On the other hand, commanders like Valdés and Londoño spent their free time writing military treatises.

Often the commanders’ negative tone was related to the omnipresent problem of communication. They lived far from court and had difficulty in making their needs known to the King. They asked permission to go to Spain for several months, but often this permission was not given. It was obvious that they could not be spared from the war, and Philip II preferred to read memorials to meeting these commanders in person. The idea of Philip II as a paper king is perfectly reflected in their letters.\(^{17}\) Mondragón was explicitly prohibited from visiting the King during his stay in Spain and the commander – grumbling – had to continue sending memorials to try to obtain his rewards.

Another major communication problem was the fact that Alba often did not respond to their letters after his return to Spain at the end of 1573. Sancho, Valdés and Mondragón were true Albistas and they always turned to the Duke for their advancement and rewards, signing their letters as ‘creatures’ of the Duke. The fact that he often did not answer them was not understood at all. They saw him as their defender at court, their alarm clock. It must have been difficult for them to understand that the Duke had fallen into disgrace with the King. Then they had to switch and look for support from the new Governor-general, Requesens, but he was much less inclined to support these Albistas. It also became clear that their heroic deeds under Alba had lost much of their brilliance. They felt completely lost in a war that was no longer theirs.

When they wanted to please their patron, they sent information on the war to the Duke of Alba in Spain, but during one of the cooler moments in their relationship, Mondragón even refused to continue this practice. If his patron did not help him out, then the client would not comply with his implicit part of the deal. In the same way, we have letters from Romero to Alba only when he needed personal favours, directly offering information on the war in return.

Sometimes we also find sadness in their letters, but generally the commanders were sparing with words. After losing his wife and shortly afterwards his father-in-law, Sancho strongly desired to return home, revealing his emotions by adding three small words: ‘y ahora mas’: and now more than ever. Julián, too, after the death of his natural son, simply described his son as somebody he had vested his hopes in,

\(^{17}\) Parker, *Felipe II*, 167.
showing implicitly the sadness of the mourning father. Mondragón had a melancholic moment after the death of a fellow commander whom he could not honour by attending his funeral. He then also reflected on his own mortality.

Completely at the other end of the spectrum we find Valdés’ letters after arriving at The Hague, where he probably met the Dutch woman he would marry years later. These letters are in a much more positive tone than his normal letters, also using words in French, something he had not done before. Especially telling is his constructive idea of forming ‘a petit ejército’ with the loyal farmers.

We cannot omit the fact that in their letters the commanders used all the rhetoric they could handle to defend their actions. Valdés tried to cover critical situations with a small joke, as when he suggested the successful enemy attackers must have possessed wings, or the pitiful image he offered when he thought himself to be without men and left behind alone between the banners, or when he compared the poor soldiers to souls leaving purgatory. His most famous description compares the floodwater around Leiden to an ocean. For his part, the Duke of Alba in his own letters often made use of his image as an old grey-haired man.\textsuperscript{18} Julián Romero, of course, was greatly praised by Brantôme for his eloquent soldiers’ rhetoric.

The commanders and the chroniclers were also well aware of the hatred of some of the inhabitants towards the Spaniards as a group, as in Valdés’s letters where he even used the word ‘yoke’ which stems directly from anti-Hispanic rebel propaganda and their much exploited image of the so-called Spanish yoke. In his letters to the mutineers Valdés tried to stop the mutineers from further blackening the image of the Spanish nation. Interestingly, the word nation, implicitly connected to the Spaniards, is also used by the noble opponents of the Spanish commanders with a clearly negative connotation. Chroniclers like Pedro Cornejo and Alonso de Ulloa were well informed about the Spaniards’ negative image among the inhabitants of the Low Countries.\textsuperscript{19} Others, like Romero, mostly hinted at the very negative image of the Duke of Alba, again revealing that he could not be seen as an Albista.

Regarding their vision of the conflict in general, we find the commanders expressing the idea that the rebels could be beaten, often even in a short time, if only they would be given the means to continue the war. However,

\textsuperscript{18} Fagel, ‘Duke of Alba’, 278.
\textsuperscript{19} Rodríguez Pérez, Sánchez Jiménez and Den Boer, España; Cornejo, Sumario, 224, 263; Ulloa, Comentarios, 18v.
we also find the voice of defeat when Valdés wrote that he continued struggling against all odds, and we see how even the martial Sancho was at some point considering the possibility that the rebels were going to win the war. The Catholic war hero was imagining defeat by the heretics. Opinion could clearly change over time. Valdés, and also Requesens, started off as rather optimistic about the possibility of coming to an agreement with the Dutch, but both men in the end were so infuriated by the stubborn resistance from the inhabitants of the Low Countries that they advocated the flooding of the whole of Holland. These harsh views on the war were not the result of a previously negative view of the inhabitants or of an innately cruel Spanish nature, but much more the result of their destroyed confidence in the inhabitants of the Low Countries and their lost hope in a good end for their cause.

Both in eighteenth-century Dutch plays and in the texts by modern author Arturo Pérez-Reverte the commanders were turned into much more Spanish heroes than they actually were. In fictional re-elaborations of the events, Mondragón was granted a Spanish wife despite the facts of his life, and his Walloon soldiers were turned into Spanish tercios. Some literary sources reveal a tendency to create clear-cut opposites that do not fit the complicated lives of these commanders and the multinational – or pre-national – character of early modern society. Figures like Mondragón had been in the north for such a long period that he was unable to write letters in correct Spanish. He was indeed born a Spaniard, but with possessions and family in the border region between France, the Roman Empire and the Low Countries.

When modern Dutch authors converted Mondragón into a positive hero in the Low Countries, his negative image was completely overshadowed. All elements that did not fit the description were left out of the narrative. In this way we have forgotten about his violent activities at Dendermonde and Deventer, and we do not remember the – hopefully fictitious – story of Mondragón’s soldiers eating children during his harsh defence of Middelburg. As early as in the seventeenth century his descendants knew that Mondragón had a positive press among the foreign chroniclers, and this would be continued by eighteenth-century Dutchmen.

The same happened regarding Valdés’s narrative; he would be turned from a normal Spanish commander into a good man through the story of Magdalena Moons. However, unlike Mondragón, Valdés did not possess a good reputation with the inhabitants of the Low Countries in

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his lifetime. His positive image is purely a later fabrication as the husband of a Dutch national heroine.

This last aspect addresses the importance of local memory cultures. Without the stories from Zeeland (Middelburg and Zierikzee) Mondragón would not have become such an outstanding figure; without the Leiden stories Valdés would hardly have been known; and Gaspar de Robles owes his positive fame mostly to authors from Frisia. The stories of these men now overshadow Julián’s great deeds and the swift actions taken by Sancho, the two commanders who have a strong foothold in Spanish collective memory. Perhaps only Mondragón has the honour of being remembered as a relevant war hero in both cultures.

Warrior Julián, Catholic crusader Sancho, the good Mondragón and the exemplary Valdés are all part of the shared past between Spain and the Low Countries. More than war heroes or war criminals, they were professional soldiers involved in a very intricate conflict in which they had to survive for years. I hope this study of these protagonists of war and the related episodic narratives can serve as a bridge between Dutch and Spanish historiography.

\[21\] On the complexities of the conflict see: Van Nierop, Verraad.