



*Beeldenstorm: Iconoclasm in the Low Countries*

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- ◀ A man on a ladder has placed a noose around the neck of a statue of a saint, while below three men stand ready to topple it from its socle. At the right a statue has been brutally hacked in half. In August 1566 fanatic Protestants destroyed altarpieces, statues and sacred vessels used for the Catholic Mass in countless churches throughout the Netherlands. Dirck van Delen, *Iconoclasm in a church* (1630). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam



## From the Editors – Redactioneel

In 2015 the destruction by IS of Roman heritage, and the violent death of the Syrian archeologist Khaled al-Asaad in Palmyra shocked the world. In our present global society images of gods or people are still vulnerable to iconoclasts. The events in the Afghan valley of Bamiyan in 2001, when the Taliban blew up the huge Buddha statues that had survived Mongolian and Arabic conquests, are another well-known example of the consequences of fear of the image. The condemnation of the Muhammad cartoons that tragically culminated in the Charlie Hebdo killings in early 2015 have learnt that such fears also live strongly in Western Europe.

450 years ago the Netherlands were also subject to a turbulent period of iconoclasm. In the European context the Protestant *Beeldenstorm* (Iconoclastic Fury) in 1566 was a relatively late phenomenon, but was of unknown aggressiveness and dimension. Led by BMGN-Low Countries Historical Review-editor Anne-Laure Van Bruaene and her colleagues from Ghent, Koenraad Jonckheere and Ruben Suykerbuyk, Flemish, Dutch and German historians re-examine the months of destruction that took place in the autumn of 1566. It appears that the *Beeldenstorm* is not a simple story: plundering by furious men and women alternated with what was often systematic 'stripping' of churches to make them suitable for Protestant services. The authors of this special theme issue pay attention to the iconoclasts, but also consider the point of view of the victims by taking seriously the emotional reactions of Catholics who saw the destruction of centuries of their heritage. Visual and material sources – from paintings to church furnishings and relics – play an important role in this special issue because they embody the essence of sixteenth century devotional practices and the controversies these provoked. The *Beeldenstorm* is not just the tale of a single conflagration – it shows how cultural codes came under pressure on the eve of the Dutch Revolt. 1566 therefore is a real watershed in the history of the Low Countries. In short, this is an issue that provides much food for thought for historians and non-historians of today who see a world of confusion surrounding them and are looking for answers.

On behalf of the editors,

CATRIEN SANTING

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# Introduction

## *Beeldenstorm*: Iconoclasm in the Sixteenth-Century Low Countries<sup>1</sup>

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AND RUBEN SUYKERBUYK

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After 450 years the *Beeldenstorm* of 1566 still deserves our careful historical analysis because it was unquestionably a game changer in Netherlandish politics and culture. More generally, we believe that iconoclasm breaks open cultural codes and thereby helps us to understand past societies. While we must thank the previous generations of historians for taking the iconoclasts seriously, the historians and art historians in this issue go a step further by also taking seriously the targets of iconoclasts – lay Catholic devotion and religious material culture. This theme number analyses the dialectics between iconoclasts and the material objects they targeted, between those who attacked and those who actively or passively defended the traditional community, between those who destroyed and those who restored or reinvented the religious patrimony, and in doing so reveals what was at stake in the sixteenth-century Low Countries.

*Inleiding. Beeldenstorm. Iconoclasmie in de zestiende-eeuwse Lage Landen*

Na 450 jaar verdient de *Beeldenstorm* van 1566 nog steeds een grondige historische analyse, aangezien er weinig twijfel kan bestaan over de enorme impact op de politiek en cultuur van de Nederlanden. Meer algemeen beschouwen wij iconoclasmie als een kraker van culturele codes die ons helpt samenlevingen uit het verleden te begrijpen. Vorige generaties historici hebben zich vooral verdiept in de motieven van de iconoclasten, deze groep historici en kunsthistorici gaat verder door ook de doelwitten van de iconoclasten – de katholieke leken devotie en de religieuze materiële cultuur – tot object van studie te maken. Dit themanummer ontrafelt de dialectiek tussen iconoclasten en de materiële cultuur die ze viseerden, tussen mannen en vrouwen die de traditionele gemeenschap aanvielen en deze die haar actief of passief verdedigden, tussen zij die het religieuze patrimonium vernielden en zij die het herstelden of herijkten. Op die manier wordt duidelijk waar het om draaide in de zestiende-eeuwse Nederlanden.

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