

NEW EVIDENCE ABOUT NICHOLAS OUDART (1614-1681)

In the absence of any documentary evidence, accounts of Nicholas Oudart (buried at Westminster Abbey on 21 December 1681), who acted as an official in the employ of Charles I, Mary of Orange (1631-1660) and Charles II, have necessarily remained silent about his birthdate and parentage. Little has been added to the information provided by Anthony Wood, who correctly reported that Oudart ‘was born at Mechlin in Brabant, and brought from beyond the seas by sir Henry Wotton’, but went on to speculate that he may have been the son or nephew of one ‘Nich. Oudart of Brussels, who was official of Mechlin, [and] died 1608.’¹ Even the most recent account of Oudart, although making use of a fairly wide range of sources, has given little consideration to his origins.² Some of the gaps in our knowledge can now be bridged thanks to the extensive collection of 16th-, 17th- and 18th-century parish registers that have been made available online by the Belgian State Archives in recent years.

The baptismal register of the parish of St. Peter’s, Mechlin, records the christening on 18 May 1614 of ‘Nicolaus Ouddaert’, the son of ‘Christoffel and Barbara Symons’.³ As children were as a rule christened immediately after birth, 17 or 18 May would have been Nicholas’ birthdate. Apart from the occasional prefix ‘Jonkheer’ or ‘Juffrouw’, denoting an

¹ Anthony A Wood, *Fasti Oxonienses, or Annals of the University of Oxford. A New Edition, with Additions, and a Continuation*, ed. Philip Bliss (London, 1815), I, col. 491-2; *The Marriage, Baptismal, and Burial Registers of the Collegiate Church or Abbey of St. Peter, Westminster*, ed. J. L. Chester (London, 1876), 204; *Nieuw Nederlands Biografisch Woordenboek*, ed. P. J. Blok and P. C. Molhuizen (Leiden, 1911), II, 1041-2.

² W. W. Wroth, ‘Oudart, Nicholas (d. 1681)’, rev. S. A. Baron, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/20946>, accessed 23 Nov 2017]. Hereafter Baron.

³ *Mechelen, parochie Sint-Pieters. Parochieregisters. Doopakten 15/08/1585- 13/07/1622*, 233. Nicholas’ oldest daughter was named Barbara, after her grandmother. See his will, dated 5 March 1672, in PRO, PROB 11/370.

untitled nobleman or noblewoman, the sparse entries in the baptismal register—a sequence of ‘pater’, ‘mater’, ‘susceptores’ or godparents, and ‘nomen infantis’[the child’s name]—as a rule do not provide any details as to the parents’ social status or their origin. Although a Nicholas Oddaert (or Oudart) served on the city council from 1519 to 1522 as an alderman and *juré des bourgeois*, I have found no trace of Christopher’s or Barbara’s date of birth or baptism in the pre-1600 Mechlin registers.⁴ But the marriage register of the parish of St. Peter’s does provide an interesting piece of information dated 23 May 1614: ‘Iuncti sunt matrimonio nullis factis proclamationibus dñs Christoforius Oudaert et Barbara Symons...cum dispensatione illustrissimi Dñi [Archiepiscopi]’.⁵ Dispensation from all three banns, granted by the Archbishop himself, usually implied that there were compelling reasons for the marriage to be urgently concluded. One of these was a heavily pregnant bride. This appears to have been the case here but even so their son’s (premature?) birth, five or six days before the wedding ceremony, may have taken the Oudarts by surprise.

Conventional as the entry for 18 May 1614 may be, it does offer incontrovertible evidence that the Nicholas Oudart (b. 1541?) *Bruxellensis* [of Brussels], secretary of the archdiocese of Mechlin and respectable classical scholar, who was given a lavish burial ceremony at St. Rombout’s Cathedral on 4 July 1608, was not the father of Mechlin-born Nicholas.⁶ Wood’s surmise that the Mechlin official may have been Nicholas’ uncle deserves

⁴ Victor Hermans, ‘Le Magistrat de Malines. Listes Annuelles des Membres (xiii^e-xviii^e siècles)’, *Bulletin du Cercle Archéologique, Littéraire et Artistique de Malines*, 18-19 (1909), 27-194 (120-1). A *juré des bourgeois* or *policyemeester* was an alderman chosen from the middle-classes, who was responsible for enforcing the compliance with all regulations governing the city’s economy. (I owe thanks to my colleague René Vermeir, Early Modern History Department, for enlightening me on this point.)

⁵ *Mechelen, parochie Sint-Pieters. Parochieregisters. Huwelijksakten 18/07/1585 – 28/12/1630*, 90. [‘Sir Christopher Oudaert and Barbara Symons are joined in matrimony, none of the banns having been published, with dispensation from the most illustrious Lord (Archbishop)’.]

⁶ *Mechelen, parochie Sint-Rombouts. Parochieregisters. Overlijdens- en begrafenisakten 02/01/1603 – 28/12/1632*, 182. This Oudart was the co-editor (with Jan Bernaerts) of Boethius’ *De consolazione philosophiae* (Antwerp, 1607), the editor of letters by Justus Lipsius (Antwerp, 1607), and the author of *Ephemerides ecclesiasticae* (Antwerp, 1601).

some brief consideration. Two extensive Latin epitaphs on his tombstone at St. Rombout's reveals that the elder Nicholas had a (twin?) brother named Christopher, who died nine years after his sibling, on 26 August 1617, and was interred with him—like Castor and Pollux buried in one urn, as his self-authored commemorative poem put it.⁷ If he was also born in 1541 or even later, this Christopher would have been some seventy years old in 1614, which makes it unlikely that he was the individual mentioned in the baptismal register of St. Peter's quoted earlier. The most conclusive piece of evidence, however, proving that the younger Nicholas' father did not die in 1617 and was indeed still alive in 1655 is Nicholas' own reference to 'Papa' in one of the letters mentioned below (see note 19). The notable Oudaert brothers memorialized in the St. Rombout's epitaphs, then, may have been relations (near or distant) of the Stuarts' versatile confidant but through what ramifications of the family tree cannot be determined.

It is useless to speculate about when, under what circumstances, or indeed through whose intermediary, young Nicholas was 'brought from beyond the seas' by the diplomatist and poet Sir Henry Wotton (1568-1639), who set the path for Oudart's distinguished career in England.⁸ However, a valuable clue as to his family background, more specifically his father's occupation, may be contained in a manuscript preserved at Ghent University Library and entitled 'Recueil des receptes contenant plusieurs remedes pour guarir plusieurs maux

⁷ Joannes Baptista Sollerius S. J., *Acta S. Rumoldi Episcopi et Martyris Apostoli et Patroni Mechliniensium* (Antwerp, 1718), 143. This Christopher Oudaert was buried on 29 August 1617: see *Mechelen, parochie Sint-Rombouts. Parochieregisters. Overlijdens- en begrafenisakten 02/01/1603 – 28/12/1632*, 233. In the burial register he is described as 'Jonckr Christoffel Oudaert', the predicate suggesting that he was a member of the untitled nobility.

⁸ In a letter probably addressed to Balthazar Gerbier in August 1638, Wotton reminded his correspondent that Nicholas Oudart had served him 'from a little page'. In late September of the same year, not having heard for several weeks from Oudart, Wotton expressed 'great perplexity' about his servant 'whom I have trained from a child.' If Wotton himself made the boy a member of his retinue, this may have been upon his return to England from his third ambassadorship in Venice in November 1623, when he travelled by way of Cologne, Liège and Antwerp, where he was 'forced to refresh [his] provision'. Oudart was nine years old at this time. [See L. P. Smith, *The Life and Letters of Sir Henry Wotton* (Oxford, 1907), II, 280-1; 388-9, 391.]

qui peuvent advenir a l'homme commenceant au chef puis consecutivement par toutes les parties de la personne' (MS 2371).⁹ Attributed to 'Christophorus Oudaert' in the catalogue, this is a 74-leaf small-size manuscript, containing scores of brief medical recipes for the treatment of a wide range of ailments ranging from hair loss to the quartan ague and a blocked spleen. There can be little doubt that this multilingual document originated in a South-Netherlandish context. Most of the recipes are in French, with occasional marginal notes providing the Dutch and Latin equivalents of plant names. The added first page preceding 1r has a Dutch/Flemish poem of eight naughty rhyming lines, signed by one 'Dr Sottekens' ['Littlefool']. And pages 71v to 74r list recipes in Latin and Dutch, one of which is credited to 'Dr Bontius' of Leiden, possibly Jacob de Bondt (1592-1631), the Dutch botanist and authority on tropical diseases.¹⁰ The first 71 pages, up to the conclusion of the work, are all in the same, fair hand; the entries on pages 71v to 74r are in different hands, probably those of later owners of the manuscript. The ascription in the library catalogue is based on the information concluding the 'Recueil': 'finis, copiae huic sumptae a Domino Xpophoro [sic] Oudaert. Impositus fuit 13a Junii anno 1608' (71r). The compilation ('copiae'), then, completed on 13 June 1608, was derived from the work or practice of Christopher Oudart, rather than that he himself actually wrote the manuscript. Presumably the compiler/copyist was the 'C. E.' who signed several recipes with his initials (2r, 6r, 7r, 10r, 19r, 29v, 30r, etc.), thus distinguishing his own recipes from Oudart's original ones.

Whether the collection was intended for the writer's own use or compiled at someone else's request is unclear but the honesty evinced by the subscription—'sumptae

⁹ 'A collection of recipes containing several remedies for healing various illnesses which may befall man, starting from the head and on through all parts of the body.'

¹⁰ Harold J. Cook, *Matters of Exchange. Commerce, Medicine, and Science in the Dutch Golden Age* (New Haven, 2007), 191-225. Jacob's *De medicina Indorum* was not published until 1642; his father Geraerdt and his brother Reinier were also professor of medicine at the University of Leiden.

a'—leaves little doubt that the medical information contained in this work was recognized as Oudart's intellectual property. The predicate 'Dominus', sometimes used to denote a man of means, sometimes as a mark of respect, would have added to the authority of the 'Recueil'; the demonstrative pronoun 'hic' [in its dative form 'huic'] emphasized the copyist's closeness to Oudart. Although I have found no trace of a Christopher Oudart who was an apothecary, a herbalist, or a physician with *printed* publications to his name, his writings may well have circulated in manuscript copies which have not survived or, if extant, have never been identified as his. The dating June 1608 leaves open the possibility that this Oudart was Nicholas' father—or his namesake who died on 26 August 1617. If the former, the fact that Nicholas himself in 1639 was 'licensed to practise medicine from St Catharine's College, Cambridge'¹¹ might suggest that long after leaving his hometown he followed in the footsteps of a father whose medical interests he had inherited.

Whereas the various phases of Oudart's professional career in the 1640 and 1650s have all been highlighted, information about his private life has remained notoriously sparse. It was established long ago that Oudart on 19 April 1656 married a wealthy heiress, Eva de Tortarolis of Leiden (c. 1630- ?), daughter of the Italian-born banker Jean François de Tortarolis (c. 1600-26 May 1653).¹² As Joseph Jane (1595-1658), writing to Sir Edward Nicholas on 28 September 1655 from The Hague, noted: '[h]e [i.e. Oudart] is to have a very rich match, tenne thousand pounds deepe, and, being made of the Princess [i.e. Mary of Orange's] Councell, the dignitie wilbe suitable'.¹³ When, sixteen years into their marriage and ten years before his death, Oudart drafted his will (see note 3), its provisions testified to

¹¹ Baron.

¹² W. J. J. C. Bijleveld, 'De boedel van Jean François Tortarolis te Leiden', *Oud Holland*, 44 (1927), 183-8. The publication of the banns was dated 29 March 1656: see *Erfgoed Leiden, Nederlands Hervormd Ondertrouw (1575-1795)*, archief 1004, inv. 15, f. 246. Baron mistakenly gives the year as 1655.

¹³ *The Nicholas Papers. Correspondence of Sir Edward Nicholas, Secretary of State*, ed. George F. Warner, III: July, 1655-Dec., 1656 (London, 1897), 62-3. Hereafter Warner.

his great affection for his ‘beloved dear’ and ‘virtuous’ wife, to whom he left most of his real estate and many other possessions. Hackneyed as such terms may seem in the context of a last will, they were evidently of a piece with the adulatory tone of the seven autograph love-letters in Dutch which Oudart sent to Eva shortly before their marriage. Put up for auction in 1860 and now preserved at the Royal Library, The Hague, these letters—some nineteen pages in all—have hitherto gone completely unnoticed.¹⁴ The first six were written within the space of three weeks, between 29 September and 19 October 1655; the seventh is dated 19 March 1656. Evidently part of a more extensive correspondence which has been lost (or is yet to emerge), they contain particulars about one of Oudart’s assignments as a member of Princess Mary’s council. First and foremost, however, they are ego-documents affording a unique glimpse into the writer’s mind-set at the time of his courtship. Space constraints do not permit a transcription-cum-translation or a detailed discussion of these documents but a brief summary should make clear their purport.

Oudart’s ‘principall errand’, about which Joseph Jane claimed to be in the dark in his communication with Edward Nicholas, was evidently that of preparing for the Princess’s return to Cologne, where earlier in September she had joined her brothers Charles and Henry, Duke of Gloucester, on their journey to Frankfort Fair.¹⁵ Setting out on 29 September from Grave (Noord-Brabant), Oudart travelled by way of Kleve and Xanten, along the Rhine, and reached Cologne on 4 October—with a one or two-day delay occasioned, as he put it in his letter of 5 October, by the ‘festivities and courtesies’ (my trsl.) which greeted him along the way. Although he does not reveal the exact nature of his task, Oudart was determined to

¹⁴ Catalogue raisonné de la précieuse collection de manuscrits et d’autographes des MM. Dirk Cornelis van Voorst et Jan Jacob van Voorst (Amsterdam, 1859), item 1558. The lot was, strangely enough, advertised as ‘Cinq lettres autographes signées en Français’. My thanks are due to the Royal Library for making copies available (sign. KW 133C5).

¹⁵ Warner, 63; Eva Scott, The Travels of the King. Charles II in Germany and Flanders 1654-1660 (London, 1907), 106-13. Hereafter Scott.

work with all possible ‘power and speed’, anxious as he was to return to Eva and ‘sweet Holland’ (6 October). But he obviously had plenty of spare time on his hands, doing some sight-seeing both in and around the city, mainly in order to ‘shorten his stay in these quarters’ (12 and 15 October). To his great relief a planned journey to Luxemburg, along dangerous roads in a ‘devastated country’, was cancelled—holding out the prospect of a speedy return home. But his royal mistress and her fellow-travellers did not show up at Cologne as expected, on October 6. Instead they decided to while away their time at Mainz, having accepted the gracious invitation of the Archbishop-Elector Johan-Philipp von Schönborn (1605-1673) to visit his city.¹⁶ Not until 15 October was the court finally reunited at Cologne. On 19 October an impatient Oudart informed his fiancée that he had been ordered back to The Hague and planned to begin his return journey down the Rhine on 21 October, intending to spend some time at Rixtel, near Grave.¹⁷

The factual information in Oudart’s letters is of course less eye-catching than the many exuberant expressions of his tender feelings for Eva. We do not know how long before 29 September they had become engaged but the pains of separation, at least on Nicholas’ part, were very sharp. The first six letters are marked by the emotional rhetoric, no less sincere for being partly stereotyped, that has been deemed characteristic of contemporary love letters¹⁸. The hyperbolic subscriptions (‘your sweetness’s most steadfast servant’, 15 October); the terms of endearment; Nicholas’ anxious longing to be reunited with Eva; the

¹⁶ Oudart also reports on a second invitation extended the royals by Charles Louis of the Rhine (1617-1680), Elector-Palatine and eldest living son of Elizabeth of Bohemia (1596-1662)—an invitation turned down by Charles II, who had good reason to dislike his cousin. See Scott, 111-2.

¹⁷ The seignury of (Aarle-)Rixtel had been the property of several generations of Oudarts since the late 15th century. In the early 17th century, one Johan Oudart donated the ‘Golden House’ of Rixtel, with all its appurtenances, to Nicholas, who was enfeoffed with the possessions on 21 September 1655 [see A. van Sasse van Ysselt, ‘Het Gulden Huis te Rixtel en de Heerlijkheid Rixtel, Aarle, Beek en Stiphout’, *Taxandria. Tijdschrift voor Noordbrabantse Geschiedenis en Volkskunde*, 19 (1912), 266-78]. It is not clear what the exact family relationship was between the donor and the beneficiary.

¹⁸ Fay Bound, ‘Writing the Self? Love and the Letter in England, c. 1660-c. 1760’, *Literature & History*, 11 (2002), 1-19.

thinly veiled suspicion that her friendships in Delft might endanger their relationship; and the repeated imploration that she deign to alleviate his suffering with a thought of 'the poor wretch' (5 October)—all of these evoke an uncommon sense of poignancy. More matter-of-fact, the seventh letter (19 March 1656) is concerned with the preparations for their nuptials, which Oudart suggested might take place on the Wednesday before Easter.

Binding all these ingredients is an intensely moralizing tone, which casts the whining, middle-aged lover Oudart in the additional role of a spiritual guide for his young bride. On one occasion he admonishes her, at the insistence of 'Papa', not to fall prey to the 'black, heavy phantasies' (5 October) of melancholy;¹⁹ on another, he urges her to continue to practise the 'Christian duties which have been planted in you so early and efficiently' (6 October). And in his letter of 19 March 1656, he explicitly styles himself both her 'faithful shepherd and most devoted servant to death'. The most persuasive of Oudart's efforts to impress upon Eva the need for unwavering fidelity is the letter in which he recounts the dream he had, following a visit to the Basilica of St. Ursula in Cologne (12 October). This church allegedly held the relics of 11,000 young maidens, who according to legend were slaughtered there in the 4th or 5th century.²⁰ Upon inquiring with the martyrs whether the youngest two would be willing to become his fiancée's companions in Holland, Oudart was courteously told that they had rested here for twelve hundred years and would be too drowsy to go. But in recognition of the honour done them by his request, they gave him one of the crowns they wore, inscribed with the words 'Leave us in peace, and haste thee home down the Rhine,/ The Virgin will bring forth a bride, so faithful and fine.' Professedly unable

¹⁹ The reference must be to Nicholas' father Christopher, as Eva's father had died more than two years earlier. The warning that 'Papa', 'upon his return', would call Eva to account about her 'well-being' may suggest a medical interest on his part.

²⁰ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15225d.htm>.

to explain the full meaning of his dream, which he considered 'pretence and deceit', Oudart nevertheless thought it held one enlightening message. The martyrs' verses began with the words 'Met Vreen' ['with (or in) peace'], which happened to spell out the name of one 'Cavalier Metvreen' whom Eva had befriended during Nicholas' absence. The invitation to leave or ignore this 'unknown' person could not have been more explicit. As if to confirm Eva in the status of his betrothed, in his next letter Oudart bestowed upon her the title of 'The Virgin of Leiden' (15 October).²¹

Oudart's account of his dream, real or invented, betrays the sense of mistrust underlying the exhortations to virtue elsewhere in his letters but here he cleverly bolsters his love rhetoric with elements from the Catholic *dulia*, making them serve his immediate purpose.²² How perceptive Joseph Jane was in describing Oudart as one who 'gettes his desires' through 'obsequious eye service', we do not know.²³ But the love-letters to Eva Tortarolis allow us to catch a fleeting but revelatory glimpse of a character momentarily emerging from the shadows of mid-17th century culture.

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²¹ The allusion may have been to 'De Maagd van Leiden' (1651), an allegorical painting by Abraham van den Tempel (c. 1622-1672).

²² In his letter dated 19 October, he called Eva's attention to the amazing coincidence that he would leave Cologne on Thursday 21 October, Saint Ursula's feast day, which made him wonder whether 'this Patroness of Virgins really wanted to be part and parcel of my Courtship.'

²³ Letter to Sir Edward Nicholas of 29 October 1655: see Warner, 100.