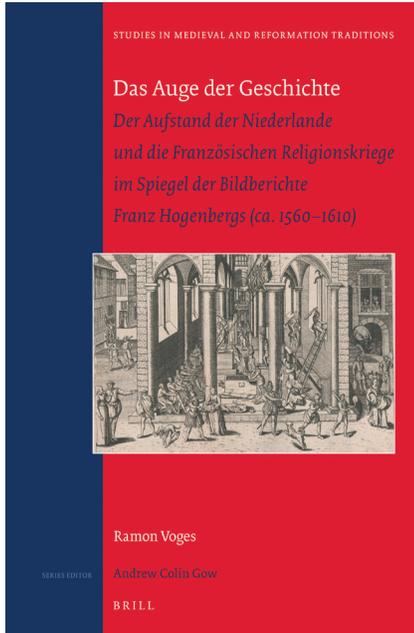


Review

Ramon Voges, *Das Auge der Geschichte. Der Aufstand der Niederlande und die Französischen Religionskriege im Spiegel der Bildberichte Franz Hogenbergs (ca. 1560-1610)*, Leiden, Brill, 2019, 422 pp. ISBN 9789004392540.



There is hardly any book on the Dutch Revolt that does not feature a print by the famous sixteenth-century engraver Frans Hogenberg. It is all the more remarkable, therefore, that hitherto no thorough analyses existed of Hogenberg's work. Some studies have dealt with smaller sections of his oeuvre, but a general overview was long overdue. Ramon Voges's book on Hogenberg, therefore, has been eagerly awaited by historians of the Dutch Revolt. Voges, currently deputy head of the Museum of Books and Writing of the German National Library, obtained his PhD in 2017. The book now published by Brill is based on his dissertation. Hopefully, after reading this book, early modern historians will never again use Hogenberg as mere illustrative material, but will instead be aware of the depths, meanings, and contexts of his prints.

In his introduction, Voges clearly states the purpose of his book: studying the way Hogenberg's broadsheets told the history of the

French Wars of Religion and the Dutch Revolt. Through these prints, he argues, Hogenberg contributed to the historiography and the canonical images of the Dutch Revolt. Although this book deals mainly with broadsheets, Voges emphatically stresses that he has not aimed at writing an art historical book; instead he proposes to use the prints as historical sources that need to be questioned. Voges aims to discuss the way they intended to influence their audiences. The book features sixty-two illustrations, and they are printed at a size large enough to see minor details in the prints. Even the legends underneath the prints are legible, although some readers might need a magnifying glass. The ability to read

the legends is important, as the largest part of the book consists of in-depth discussions of the depicted broadsheets in combination with their legends.

Frans Hogenberg (1538-1590) was born in Mechelen, son of the artist and engraver Nikolaus Hogenberg and Jeanne Verstraeten. His father died shortly before or after Frans's birth and in 1548 his mother married the map-maker Hendrik Terbruggen, or Pontanus. His stepfather supposedly taught Hogenberg the art of engraving. In the 1560s, Hogenberg and his wife Katharina von Bönen left Flanders and moved to the Free Imperial City of Cologne. According to the nineteenth-century historian Charles Rahlenbeck, Hogenberg had to escape persecution by the Duke of Alba's Council of Troubles. Voges disputes this statement, not having found any source material that supports this claim. After some initial troubles, Hogenberg managed to set up a workshop in Cologne that soon became very successful, producing 250 prints during Hogenberg's life, and another 165 by his heirs after his death in 1590. Hogenberg's broadsheets became known for the prevalence of the image, which dominated the page, with some small legend in verse beneath, in the German vernacular. Moreover, they did not refer to biblical or classical themes or made use of allegories, as was usual at the time. They also differed from contemporary pamphlets in their choice of subjects: they omitted any depictions of those popular subjects such as monstrosities, heavenly signs, or prophecies. Instead, they showed the political and religious conflicts of their age. Their most important feature, Voges argues, was their supposed neutrality, credibility, and dependence on eyewitness reports. Buyers had to obtain an impression that the images were a reliable representation of what had really happened. This characteristic feature of Hogenberg's prints – the supposed neutrality of his style, which contemporaries and later historians have always repeated – is the main theme Voges discusses in his book. He argues that Hogenberg did choose sides in the confessional conflicts, and used subtle ways in his prints to express his opinion.

In the first chapter Voges introduces Hogenberg and his work. His first major works, before he began publishing his broadsheets on the Dutch Revolt and other news events, consisted of copies of famous prints by others. One series depicted the famous military campaign of Emperor Charles V in Tunis in 1535. The other series consisted of broadsheets depicting scenes from the French Wars of Religion by the Genevan-based engravers Jacques Tortorel and Jean Perrissin, called the *Quarante Tableaux* (see also the seminal work on Tortorel and Perrissin by Philip Benedict, *Graphic History*). As Voges argues, Hogenberg managed to be considered as neutral by publishing two series that pleased both Catholics and Protestants.

The second chapter discusses the stimulating climate of the city of Cologne for the practice of the 'black art' of engraving, and Hogenberg's fruitful cooperations with colleagues. Voges analyses the medium of the broadsheet and the way Hogenberg targeted the 'news market' with his claims of the credibility and neutrality of his prints. Voges again stresses that Hogenberg strove to publish prints without reference to confession or adherence to any party, to maintain an 'Anschein von Objektivität' (appearance of objectivity). He goes further in suggesting that Hogenberg invited his buyers to form their own opinions on the events (81). At the same time, in my opinion Voges underestimates Hogenberg's contemporaries when he argues that 'Andererseits liess sich bisweilen kaum zwischen einem blossen Gerücht und einer verlässlichen Nachricht unterscheiden' (79). Research into the

diary of the famous French diarist Pierre de L'Estoile has demonstrated that L'Estoile clearly distinguished between *bruits* and *nouvelles* (see the publications by Tom Hamilton and Mark Greengrass). Fortunately, Voges has an exceptionally rich source for the reception of Hogenberg's prints: the *Buch Weinsberg*, an extensive diary written by the Cologne councillor Hermann Weinsberg, who was a loyal customer of Hogenberg's workshop. Weinsberg's critical use of newsprints will indeed be discussed in Chapter 8, the chapter on the reception of Hogenberg's prints.

The third chapter deals with both the topics of Hogenberg's broadsheets and the positioning of Hogenberg within the political and religious arena. After an overview of the political and religious troubles that plagued France and the Netherlands, Voges shows himself to be a follower of the late Juliaan Woltjer, as he stresses the importance of Hogenberg for the 'moderates' in the conflicts. Voges argues that, despite Hogenberg's claims to neutrality, his choice of topics and the ways he depicts them reveal an abhorrence of the Catholic hawks, sympathy for the Netherlandish rebels, and a general aversion to violence. Thus, Hogenberg did not only depict the battle to gain the support of the moderates, but also took part in the media campaign himself, via his prints. Given the importance of the category for the way in which Voges characterises his engraver, I would have welcomed a more thorough discussion of the position and meaning of the 'moderates' or *politiques* within the context of the war.

Chapter four deals with the stories the broadsheets tell – the way the choice of scenes depict the erosion of the political order during the wars in France and the Netherlands. Voges provides valuable tables with overviews of the topics, the several editions of Hogenberg's *Quarante Tableaux*, and his first series with scenes from the Dutch Revolt. His meticulous analysis of the famous print of the Iconoclastic Fury in 1566 again concludes, *pace* Woltjer, that it expresses the 'irenisch-humanistische Sichtweise der moderaten Mitte' (173). Yet the target audiences of the *Quarante Tableaux* and the Dutch Revolt series differ: while the first is aimed at a Calvinist audience, the second aims to cater to a more general public.

The fifth chapter, discussing the heroes and antagonists of the newsprints published between 1570 and 1610, reveals more about the political positioning of the Hogenberg workshop. The broadsheets clearly choose sides in depicting the tyrants, patriots, and martyrs of the conflict. The legends underneath the prints repeatedly blame the Duke of Alba for his 'venom'. Instead of treating the conflict as a civil or religious war, the prints play with nationalities and the Spanish Black Legend. Germans fight together with the inhabitants of the Netherlands against the Spaniards (188). The prints depict William of Orange's departure from the Netherlands to Dillenburg after the arrival of Alba as a strategic and wise retreat. Louis of Nassau is a courageous hero. After this chapter, it is hard to still reason for the neutrality of Hogenberg's prints. Catholic pro-Spanish audiences must at this time have quit buying the broadsheets on the Dutch Revolt. Yet Voges convincingly argues that the themes of these prints, stressing the 'selbstbewussten Stadtrepublikanismus der Niederländer', appealed to the confident city inhabitants of Cologne and other cities, the most important buyers of these prints (214-216).

Chapter six reveals even clearer Hogenberg's point of view, as Voges analyses a print of a tournament on the *Grand Place* of Brussels in 1569. This print contains an intriguing

detail: while the Spanish are fighting their contest, a small procession of a drummer, a flutist, two large birds, a figure in a hooded cloak, and Death holding the scythe enter the scene. Voges rightly poses the question how this metaphorical element in the newsprint can be reconciled with Hogenberg's claim of neutrally depicting what had happened. He cleverly – and rather philosophically – argues that we must understand this print as a *mis en abyme*: Hogenberg states that the chivalry of the Spaniards is a farce, as it takes place on the square where they had beheaded Egmont and Hoorne the year before. Why did the Hogenberg workshop suddenly break with the principle of not depicting allegories? According to Voges, it was a matter of the *Wirklichkeitsanspruch* of the print: the allegorical in this case came closer to the truth than the real visible event. While this might be a bit too philosophical for some, it does again demonstrate the tension between neutrality and choosing sides in Hogenberg's work.

The seventh chapter also deals with the matter of reality and credibility. It discusses the depiction of cities and landscapes in the prints, and shows that Hogenberg made use of real identifying marks of famous buildings. The Atlas of Hogenberg's acquaintance Ortelius, and the *Civitates Orbis Terrarum* Hogenberg made together with Georg Braun, were used as a basis to reconstruct the events. Voges argues that the composition of the prints made the viewer both protagonist and spectator. He philosophically links the prints to the sixteenth-century *Mnemotechnik*, which contemporaries used to place memories in a certain space to better remember them.

The book's last chapter is concerned with the reception of the prints. This is an exciting topic, as we still know very little about the way early modern people reacted to newsprints. Admittedly, Voges has access to an exceptional source: the *Buch Weinsberg*. Hermann Weinsberg was a critical news consumer and an enthusiastic buyer of Hogenberg prints, who, most importantly, obsessively recorded all his doings and purchases. The chapter first offers a section on censorship in Cologne, in which Voges demonstrates that Hogenberg never could have published the same broadsheets in the Netherlands as he could in the Free Imperial City. Then Voges discusses the critical consumer Weinsberg, who recorded his comments on buying Hogenberg's broadsheets, obtaining them for education and to decorate his rooms. On a broadsheet depicting the Duke of Alba crossing the river Scheldt on a floating bridge, he commented that Netherlandish eyewitnesses had told him that things had gone quite differently than depicted. Finally, Voges broaches the subject of the canonisation of Hogenberg's broadsheets, and the way he has influenced Aitzinger, Van Meteren, Baudartius, and other early modern history writers. This is a fascinating topic, one which Jasper van der Steen has also briefly discussed in his *Memory Wars in the Low Countries*. Voges indeed recognises the historiographical importance of the broadsheets throughout the book, which is called 'The Eye of History' for a reason.

Ramon Voges has written a rich and rewarding study. He takes the *Bildberichte* of Hogenberg and gives them a central place in his argument. Although he offers some biographical information, this is not a biography of Frans Hogenberg and his workshop. Yet their choices and sympathies become visible through a meticulous study of their prints. He successfully portrays Hogenberg as a moderate, a *politique* who depicted the Dutch Revolt as a war of peaceful and self-assured Netherlandish city-dwellers against the aggressive Spaniards. Voges' choice to organise his chapters thematically offered him the chance to

draw interesting comparisons between prints. Yet in some places I would have preferred a more chronological storyline. Especially the matter of Hogenberg's supposed neutrality, a theme central to the book, would have merited more background information. Did Hogenberg's stance change over the years? Was this his own political choice or was it inspired by commercial interests? Voges's close reading of the prints is absorbing, and the way he switches between detailed source criticism and philosophical reflections is fascinating. Yet in some places his interpretation and theory on the uses of imagery could do with more explanation – especially for readers not familiar with visual cultural studies and the iconic turn. All in all, the book is impressive: Voges has really mastered his print material, and combines it successfully with other sources and a wide range of German, English, French, and Dutch secondary literature. Students of the Dutch Revolt, who have used Hogenberg's prints for years, might reconsider how the supposedly neutral engraver subtly has influenced the way they have looked at the conflict.

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For more on Hogenberg, see Judith Pollmann's review article: DOI 10.18352/emlc.131.