



Laura Manzano Baena, ***Conflicting Words: The Peace Treaty of Münster (1648) and the Political Culture of the Dutch Republic and the Spanish Monarchy*** (Avisos de Flandes 13; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2011, 282 pp., ISBN 978 90 8728 122 9).

The early modern era was one of compromises. To the extent that political life is always about accommodation, this is nothing new. But the hardened confessional divisions of the sixteenth century, the growing authority of the monarchical state, the sharpness of religious conflict, and the expanding international dimension of European sovereignty in the Atlantic and Pacific made politics brighter, louder, and more polarized – the ability to strike agreements with adversaries and enemies harder as a consequence. As Benjamin Kaplan proved in his *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (2007), practical, ad hoc arrangements for religious co-existence, nevertheless, became the coin of the realm in multi-confessional pockets of Europe. How great political conflicts stemming in part from religious strife like the Dutch Revolt were resolved, however, was a different matter. Of all the early modern wars, that between Spain and the Low Countries famously lingered, fought bitterly in the second half of the sixteenth century, and sputtering, reviving, settling down, and reviving again in the first half of the seventeenth century. Scholars have spent considerable time explaining why the Dutch Revolt lasted a full eighty years. Laura Manzano Baena's deeply researched and smart book puts the question a different way: how was the conflicted ended officially in 1648, and why, if the template of a peace arrangement was realized already in 1609, did it take so long? She also poses a related question: how did those holding inflexible theological and political positions, Spanish Catholics and Dutch Calvinists, reach a deal in 1648 – how that is, did intransigent position holders traffic with the enemy?

A simple answer to Baena's well posed questions is that politics is a messy, contingent affair, that the political landscape in both territories (the nascent United Provinces especially) was hardly stable, and that since the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, confessional hatreds did not preclude striking accords in which pragmatism mattered more than intransigence. As historians have pointed out, the Dutch in particular were famously practical, trading with the enemy while engaged in Revolt, ultimately more interested in commercial affairs than in the theological purity counseled by the good Calvinist predikanten. In a famous letter penned after the fall of Antwerp in 1585, Marnix

van St. Aldegonde admitted as much, bemoaning the loss of theological and political ideals by merchant citizens who just wanted to get on with their daily lives. But for Baena, pragmatism isn't a good explanation for the compromises the Spanish and Dutch reached because it elides over deeply held political and religious positions that mattered to people, and to rulers and theologians in particular.

Baena takes words and language seriously, and thinks historians of the Dutch Revolt should too. Her work is based on an impressive immersion in pamphlets, treatises, literary texts and manuscript sources in Iberian and Dutch archives and libraries. In this sense, Baena is indebted to the literary turn post-structuralism encouraged in its heyday, but without its theoretical fussiness. Instead, she wants to zero in on essential, major categories by which political life was organized conceptually: the contours of authority, the meaning of hot-button terms like tyranny and rebellion, the boundaries of political sovereignty and of religious toleration. Her book is organized conceptually into chapters that explore what these terms meant both for the Spanish crown and for the United Provinces, and how irreconcilable positions on them were eventually revised to reach a durable peace. She doesn't so much offer a new narrative of the Revolt from 1609-1648 as she does read deeply in the popular sources – pamphlets above all – to trace two contrary sets of positions. Differences in political and cultural make up of the Spanish and Dutch territories explain why sources vary between them. Spanish manuscript and textual material, while diverse, is more uniform than the Dutch, whose territories famously had no single political center, and where debates, tensions, and differences were the bread of daily political life. One of the most important aspects to emerge in Baena's sensitive readings of these major political categories is not surprising but nonetheless important: the distinction between the dynastic-leanings of the Orange stadholders, willing to consider some type of overlordship of the Spanish crown, and the towns and regents whose civic republicanism burned brighter. Her larger point is that the intractability of deeply held positions on the both sides, religious ones especially, are the key to understanding why the Dutch Revolt was not so easily resolved, and why it took the time that it did. In a sense, the argument is a traditional one, but in another sense it's entirely different. Authority, sovereignty, toleration – these are not clichéd terms in Baena's readings, but deeply complex ones whose shifting terrain she charts in very sensitive readings of Spanish and Dutch religious and political writings.

For its fresh readings of the burgeoning vernacular sources and for its comparative framework that juxtaposes Spain and the Netherlands, Baena's work merits close attention. It's also notable that the author is a Spanish historian who, much like Yolanda Rodríguez Pérez in her *The Dutch Revolt through Spanish Eyes* (2008), brings a welcomed comparative approach to the Dutch Revolt that has more traditionally been the specialty of northern Europeanists, and Belgian and Dutch scholars especially. Her contribution is part of what one can only hope will be a wider set of Spanish contributions to the study of an upheaval whose complicated storyline still invites more research. While her subject covers well trodden terrain, her reading of the material is original. Finally, Baena's book is

written in English, part of a growing trend of younger European scholars to write in the global lingua franca. It's easy to understand why this should be the case, and it's impressive to this native English speaker that Spanish, Belgian, Dutch and other European historians write so capably and willingly in a language not their own. One can only hope, however, that international academic English does not displace the stylistic richness of local and national European languages.

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