

# The Diffusion of Illustrated Religious Texts and Ideological Restraints

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## Introduction

In this article, I depart from the fact that a text needs to be mediated (vocalized, written or printed) in order to be transmitted to, and received by, an audience. The choice of a vocal, visual, or textual medium for the transfer of a text to a readership can be affected by ideological motives that, as I will argue, become visible by studying the form in which texts are published.<sup>1</sup> In the case I discuss here, content dictated form, resulting in the rejection of religious imagery as a means of conveying a religious message.

After the Reformation, reservations with regard to the application of religious imagery in the transfer of religious knowledge were widespread in Western Europe. An abundance of visual media is evident in medieval, pre-Reformation religious literature to convey the biblical text to readers (especially those with a low or no level of literacy). In the early modern era, however, theological debates on the hierarchy between word and image, in which the Reformed position was diametrically opposed to the Catholic view, ended the popularity of this visual practice. While personal devotion in the Pre-Reformation and Catholic Church was enhanced by texts illustrated with images – of Christ, Mary and the saints, for instance – with the purpose of clarifying the religious doctrine as well as facilitating its memorization, internalization and meditative exercises, the use of religious imagery in literature presented a problem to Protestant authors and publishers.<sup>2</sup> Central to the Reformed and Catholic debate was the interpretation of the second of the Ten Commandments, in Exodus 20: 4–5 (in the King James version): “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above. (...) Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them.” In the

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1 I rely here on the definition of “text” given in Ricoeur (1981), in the sense that I use the word “text” to refer to an autonomous work which is given an interpretation once it is being mediated (by a producer of texts) or received (by readers).

2 See on this issue for instance Besançon (2000).

Christian faith, this was traditionally interpreted as the prohibition of incorrect usage of religious imagery.<sup>3</sup> The Catholic Church based numerous visual practices and rituals on this interpretation, which were condemned as abuse by Reformers. In the sixteenth century, tensions over the issue culminated in the iconoclastic destruction of images in large parts of Western Europe.<sup>4</sup> Theology, ideology, politics and the arts became inseparable in these clashes.<sup>5</sup>

The newly established Dutch Republic did not escape from the Protestant breaking of images at the end of the sixteenth century. Soon after 1600, however, the Dutch Republic developed into a society internationally renowned for its religious tolerance. The relative freedom in which different denominations coexisted in the Dutch Republic after 1600, generated a climate in which – according to our current knowledge – cultural encounters between confessions could easily occur and people from different denominations developed and participated in a common culture. Pre-Reformation visual culture was, for instance, retained and transformed by Protestant artists (as Mia Mochizuki argues in her study on the development of visual culture in Protestant churches): art and architectural additions were incorporated in Protestant Netherlandish church interiors in the first century after iconoclasm, on a large scale and with a growing repertoire of objects and themes.<sup>6</sup> Rembrandt van Rijn's etching *The Death of the Virgin* has often been presented as an exemplary case of this fusion process. The topic of this etching was taken from Jacobus de Voragine's medieval *Legenda Aurea* [Golden Legends], and reworked by Rembrandt into an interconfessional mixture of traditions.<sup>7</sup> The mixture of Protestant and Catholic features detected in this etching has recently led Mary Christine Barker to conclude that "Rembrandt transcends the religious categories of his own times and those that our time has attempted to impose on him."<sup>8</sup>

The very existence of cultural encounters like these has imposed the idea that religious identities in the Republic should not be perceived as confessional identities: people with a clear sense of their confessional identity were able to cross confessional boundaries to mingle the literary and artistic traditions which constituted these boundaries. In general, this evidence of the Republic's cultural participation has led scholars to appreciate the porosity of early modern confessional boundaries in the confessionalization processes, in contrast

3 In the Jewish faith, this second Commandment is interpreted differently, namely as a complete prohibition on the fabrication of religious images. See van Asselt et al. (2007).

4 See for a case study of the diffusion of iconoclasm Wandel (1995).

5 As Peter Arnade has argued, such a connection between theology, ideology and politics could also be found in the breaking of images during the Dutch Revolt, see Arnade (2008).

6 Mochizuki (2008).

7 See, for instance, Perlove and Silver (2009) 45–48, 73 and 114.

8 Barker (2010) 138.

to what was initially ascertained in the so-called “confessionalization thesis,” which stated that in the search for distinct Catholic and Protestant identities in early modern Northern Europe, confessional boundaries were fixed.<sup>9</sup> Cultural encounters – often cast in terms of hybrid – appear to have been at the heart of the Dutch Republic’s religious culture.<sup>10</sup> This cultural hybrid has often been referred to as a central premise for the interconfessional dialogue and practices which helped to resolve and prevent religious conflicts in Dutch society.<sup>11</sup>

Evidence in support of the thesis that confessional boundaries could be ignored in cultural encounters have been found in the visual arts and also in the reading culture of the Republic: as many have argued, religious texts produced in one confessional circle were owned and read by readers from another confessional circle. Catholic religious works were found in libraries and inventories of Dutch Reformed readers, and vice versa.<sup>12</sup> Also, religious literature produced by various denominations was kept in the homes of the faithful and read during their informal gatherings.<sup>13</sup> The *Stichtelijcke rijmen* [Edifying Rhymes], for instance, by the popular Remonstrant minister Dirck R. Camphuysen were sung by Remonstrants as well as Counter-Remonstrants. The fact that his poetry had total sanctification as its central issue was apparently more important than the dogmatic differences, which were however not marginal. The Remonstrant Camphuysen perceived sanctification as the condition for salvation, while the Counter-Remonstrants were convinced that sanctification was the consequence of salvation. These differences, however, played no part in the interconfessional use of the volume.<sup>14</sup>

Yet in one respect, Dutch literary spaces were strikingly demarcated and patrolled: recent research has revealed that between 1560 and 1680, religious literature produced in the Republic contained far fewer illustrations than it did in neighbouring countries. The controversial cross-fertilization of Pre-Reformation and Catholic visual practices, and Protestant literary traditions proved unexpectedly complicated in the Republic’s literature, whereas the intermin-

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9 See Schilling and Tóth (2006).

10 See for a critical analysis of the use of the concept “cultural hybridity” – on which my definition is based – del Mar Rosa-Rodriguez (2010).

11 This is ascertained by Burke (2009) 73–74. While not all of the existing studies into the nature of the Dutch Republic’s culture employ the concept of “cultural hybridity,” the case of the Dutch Republic has been presented thus in, for instance, Kaplan (2007) 240 and 8, Nederveen Pieterse (2009) and DeWulf (2008).

12 See for instance Kaplan (2007) 243.

13 See for instance Frijhoff (2006) 62–65, esp. 62.

14 See Schenkeveld (1991) 51.

gling of word and image started in the religious literature of other Northern European countries while iconoclastic acts were still being staged.<sup>15</sup> Full Bible translations made by Dutch Protestants were never illustrated, the development of the Protestant religious emblem was problematic, and the majority of spiritual song books also remained unillustrated.<sup>16</sup> Even Dutch Catholics were reluctant to use religious illustrations in their literary works.<sup>17</sup>

### The Case of the Dutch State Bible

Focusing on the subordinate role assigned to Bible illustrations in Dutch religious literature, this article explores the difference between practices in the Republic and its neighbouring countries in order to advance the tentative hypothesis that these practices were motivated by theological and ideological considerations rather than by commerce. Dutch authors, publishers, engravers, and buyers rejected visual images that were readily available in many religiously contested areas outside the Republic, and this enabled them to form a new national identity untroubled by all of the disputes surrounding the use of word and image between Protestants and Catholics. In essence, the process of cultural hybridity that scholars have seen as instrumental in leading to greater shared understanding and tolerance was put on hold to avoid potential conflicts.

The restrictive mechanisms in the printing practices of the Dutch Republic were discussed in detail in my monograph *Negotiating Differences: Word, Image and Religion in the Dutch Republic*. This article offers an international perspective on these practices. It concentrates on the illustrations that were added to the most prestigious Bible translation published in the Republic, the Dutch Reformed States Bible of 1637. It was published as an initiative of the Synod of Dordrecht (1618–1619) that requested the States-General of the Netherlands to commission a translation of a Dutch Bible based on the Greek *Textus Receptus* text, as was the English King James Bible (1611). Since the first edition of the States Bible contained Bible illustrations – as was first noted by Peter van der Coelen – it was the one of the very rare exceptions to the rule that Protestant

15 On the early stages of this contrast, see Pettegree (2005) 106. For more on this contrast, see Dietz, Morton, Roggen, Stronks and Van Vaecck (2014).

16 On the absence of illustrated Bibles, see van der Coelen (1998) passim; Rosier (1997) vol. I, 35; Melion (2009a) 42–45. On the unillustrated hymn books, see Veldhorst (2009) 217–86, esp. 259–60.

17 See Porteman and Smits-Veldt (2008) 477.

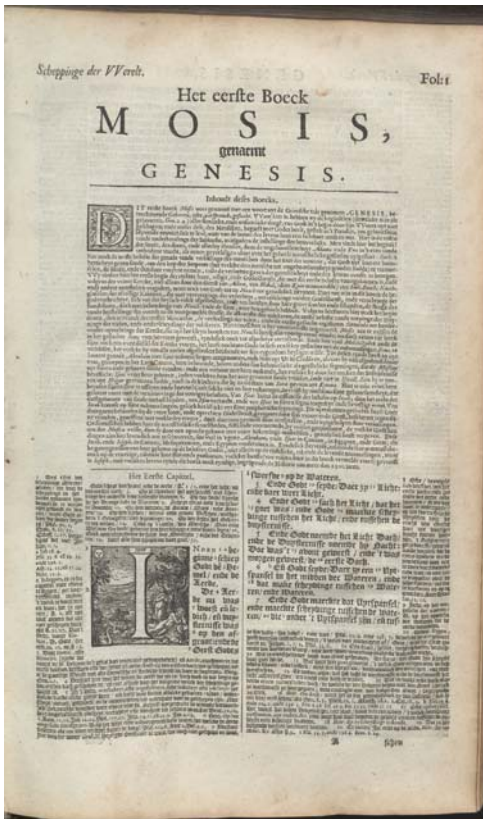


FIGURE 10.1–2 Ornamented initial Genesis 1, Biblia, dat is, De gantsche H. Schrifture. Leiden: Paulus Aertsz. van Ravensteyn, for the widow of Hillebrant Jacobsz. van Wouw, 1637, fol. 1. COURTESY LIBRARY OF THE UTRECHT UNIVERSITY.

Bibles printed in the Republic in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries were unillustrated. The first edition published in 1637, and printed in 1636, was issued with an illustrated title page and twelve ornamented initials that represented biblical stories: the title page as well as the initials would not be ignored. This initial was the first thing that a reader would see at the start of the first folio, at the opening of Genesis 1:1 (Figures 10.1 and 10.2).<sup>18</sup>

From the first glance, this initial introduces a significant aspect of the nature of these and other Bible illustrations used in the early modern setting. Because their primary function was to explain biblical stories to inform and

18 See van der Coelen (1997) 6. A copy of this issue is kept in the library of the Utrecht University, shelf number Rariora fol. 26. On folio 166, the year 1636 is given as the year it was printed.

educate the reader, they had no specific confessional connotation. Bible illustrations were used by all confessions, unlike religious emblematic imagery, which started to prosper after 1600 when Catholics adopted the emblematic image as a tool for enhancing the communication between God and believer, and developed a special iconography to this end.<sup>19</sup>

The opening initial alludes to a number of passages from Genesis. It depicts Adam and Eve in Paradise before their expulsion and refers to the creation of the world, showing the sun, the moon and the stars, the separation of the waters above from those below, and the existence of plants and animals (Genesis 1:1–37). An inscription of the word “Yahweh” indicates God’s presence. Adam’s eyes are half-open, as if he is about to discover that God has made a woman from one of his ribs (Genesis 2:22). Eve appears to be looking at the animals peacefully gathered around the couple. Both Adam and Eve are naked, a symbol of their state of purity and innocence. The advent of disaster is, perhaps, indicated only by the two peacocks, symbols of human vanity, depicted directly behind Eve.

This single print represented a number of events described in Genesis 1 and 2 merged them into one frame. This was common practice at the time as prints could vary as to which aspects of a story they would choose to depict and in what ways they represented those stories. It is difficult, if not impossible, to identify a confessional position on the basis of these variations, because prints were freely shared (and produced) between Catholics and Protestants throughout Northern Europe.<sup>20</sup> The underlying consensus was that these Bible illustrations could be perceived as literal representations of the historical interpretation of biblical scenes. A variety of sources testify to the existence of this consensus in the Republic. The titles of the picture Bibles discussed in this article maintained that the plates were genuine and true depictions of biblical stories and were meant to impart factual knowledge.<sup>21</sup> In the recurrent discussions among painters, engravers and authors, it was assumed that such literalness could be achieved provided that certain considerations were taken into account.<sup>22</sup> Leiden professor of rhetoric and history Gerardus Vossius narrowed down the problems surrounding the issue with these guidelines: “One should reproduce

19 The characteristics of this iconography were recently analyzed and emphasized in Dekoninck (2005); and Melion (2009b).

20 Argued in Melion (2009a) 15–83, esp. 21–5. Protestants, for instance, used plates often based on the Vulgate, as argued in Tümpel (1991) 8–23, esp. 22.

21 Also concluded in van der Coelen (1998) 177 and 195.

22 See, for instance, a treatise by the Dutch Reformed Philips Angel, written in support of the painters in Leiden in 1642, in Miedema (1996) 227–58, esp. 246–47.

whatever God's book says, use sparingly what is not mentioned in His Word, and under no circumstances contradict it."<sup>23</sup>

A late representation on the literalness found in the preface to the *Sleutel, dewelke verklaard de bybelse figuren oover de vier evangelisten, Handelingen der Apostelen en Openbaaringe Johannis* ["Key, which explains the Biblical Figures concerning the Four Gospels, Acts of the Apostles and the Book of Revelation"], published in 1682 by the Dutch Reformed minister Johannes Möller. In this illustrated volume, with fold-out biblical prints made by one of the most skilled engravers of the time, Romeyn de Hooghe, Möller offered a mix of biblical texts and explanatory comments. Möller explained in the preface to this volume that illustrations of biblical scenes were "easy to depict" [*ligtelijk kunnen afgebeeld werden*], especially when these scenes were selected from parts of the Bible which focused on stories and parables. Allegorical emblematic images, on the other hand, were meant to represent complex and abstract concepts such as "meekness" or "labour" or "laziness," and their creation and analysis demanded much more effort.<sup>24</sup> Möller presented the first category of images, the biblical illustrations, as superior because they showed "no unfamiliar, or far-fetched [*vergesogte*]" images, no hieroglyphs or emblems; no such images as first have to be invented, and then learned, before they can be applied to the subject, and thus also require a great deal of effort, care and diligence."<sup>25</sup>

In the following section I will outline the developments in various applications of Bible illustrations in the Republic. In order to determine the specifics of the Dutch situation I will focus on what was produced during which period and compare this with the production in neighbouring countries.

23 "t Geen Gods boek zeit noodzakelijk, 't geen het niet zeit spaarzaam, 't geen hiertegen strijdt geenszins te zeggen." Quoted in Smits-Veldt (1991) 59. Vossius delivered these guidelines as an aid to authors who aimed to rework biblical stories into stage plays, but his advice was *mutatis mutandis* – also applicable to engravings and paintings.

24 The "*saake/sinnebeelden*" [matters/emblems] demanded much more work from both the engraver and the viewer because they "*tot de saake, waar toe mense wil gebruiken, gepast [moeten] warden*" [they need to be fitted to the subject for which one wishes to use them]. "*Berigt, Aangaande dit Werk*," in Möller (1682) 22–24.

25 "*geen vreemde nog vergesogte Beelden, geen Hyeroglyphica ofte Sinnebeelden, geen soodanige, de welke, gelijk sy eerst moeten uitgevonden, en daar na geleerd werden, eer sy op de saak kunnen gepast werden, soo ook grooten arbeid, moeiten, en neerstigheid vereissen.*" Möller (1682) 30–31.



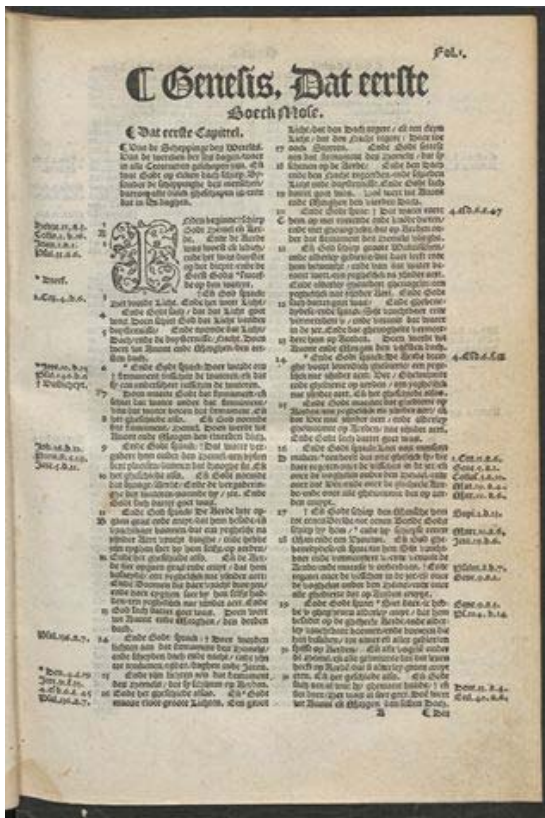
FIGURE 10.3-4 Dat Oude ende dat Nieuwe Testament [*The Old and New Testament*]. Antwerp: Jacob van Liesveldt, 1526, fol. Uiiiv. COURTESY OF THE UTRECHT UNIVERSITY LIBRARY.

### The Development of Separate Religious Printing Cultures between 1550 and 1590

Separate religious printing cultures developed in the Dutch Republic and its surrounding countries after 1550, when Northern Netherlandish publishers abstained from producing illustrated Bibles. This refusal was a radical departure from existing traditions: the first illustrated Catholic Dutch Bible, Jacob van Maerlant's so-called *Rijmbijbel*, was never reprinted,<sup>26</sup> nor were the Dutch Protestant illustrated Bibles produced in Antwerp before 1550, such as Jacob

26 An illustrated manuscript of the *Rijmbijbel* was completed in Utrecht in 1332, and contained ornamental initials and miniatures by the painter Michiel van der Borch, see Chavannes (2008).





FIGURES 10.5–6 Ornamental initial with non-figurative elements in Den Bibel, inhoudende dat Oude en Nieuwe Testament. [Emden]: Nicolaes Biestkens van Diest, 1560, fol. 1. COURTESY OF THE UTRECHT UNIVERSITY LIBRARY.

Liesveldt's 1526 edition which was based largely on Luther's translation of the New and Old Testaments and included woodcuts that illustrated biblical scenes (Figures 10.3 and 10.4).<sup>27</sup>

When Protestant printers fled from Antwerp in the middle of the sixteenth century to produce Bibles for the Dutch market in Emden, these illustrations were replaced by ornamental initials with non-figurative elements, as in the case of this Biestkens Bible (Figures 10.5 and 10.6).

When more and more Dutch cities chose the side of Protestantism and Protestant Bibles began to be produced in the Republic itself, the tradition of not illustrating Bibles continued. Only a dozen of the more than one hundred editions of the so-called Deux-Aes Bible printed between 1581 and 1633 contained

27 As Rosier concluded in Rosier (1997) vol. I, 3.

pictorial material. This material did not include the usual illustrations of biblical stories, however, but maps or explanatory illustrations of the Temple.<sup>28</sup> They were not inserted at different points throughout the text, but were optional and could be bound together as a separate section in the back of the book at the individual buyer's request.<sup>29</sup>

At the same time that the Dutch refrained from using Bible illustrations, important innovations in the application of this type of pictorial material were taking place in the Southern Netherlands. In Antwerp after 1550, more and more picture Bibles were produced – collections of biblical prints with versifications or paraphrases of biblical texts.<sup>30</sup> Gerard de Jode's *Thesaurus veteris et novi testamenti* (first printed in 1579), with engravings after designs by Maarten van Heemskerck and Maarten Vos, became very popular.<sup>31</sup> In the 1590s the genre was advanced when the Antwerp publisher Christophe Plantin used emblematic plates in his production of the Jesuit Jerome Nadal's *Evangelicae historiae imagines*.<sup>32</sup> He also used plates by Pieter van der Borcht in the trilingual *Imagines et Figurae Bibliorum* [Biblical Images and Illustrations] by the Anabaptist Hendrik Jansen Barrefeldt (also known as Hiël) who was an advocate of the spiritual approach to faith.<sup>33</sup> These publications extended the use of Bible illustrations: it was possible to organize spiritual and meditational exercises around these prints.<sup>34</sup>

### Partial Exchange: 1590–1617

These Southern Netherlandish innovations appear to have triggered Dutch publishers' sense of entrepreneurship; they may also have been encouraged by the growing popularity of single-sheet biblical prints in the Republic.<sup>35</sup>

28 See Rosier (1997) vol. I, 37.

29 On the buyers' habits, see Veldman (2006).

30 Van der Coelen (2006) 192.

31 The actual engraving itself was done by the Wierix brothers, among others, as discussed in Van der Coelen (1998) 120 and 125.

32 These prints (probably printed around 1593) accompanied texts which were published in a separate volume, titled *Adnotationes et Meditationes in Evangelia* [Annotations and Meditations on the Gospels], originally printed in Antwerp in c. 1595 at Plantin's workshop. For detailed analyses, see Melion (2007) 1–73.

33 See on Christophe Plantin's pioneering role Bowen and Imhof (2008). On Hiël's affiliation, see De la Fontaine Verweij (1976).

34 Melion (2009) 44–45.

35 On the popularity of biblical prints and single sheets with Bible illustrations, see Veldman (1989).

Between 1592 and 1617, nine picture Bibles were produced in the Republic. The illustrated Bible was still taboo, but judging by this increase in production, the concept of the picture Bible was no longer unwelcome. In 1604, Karel van Mander expressed praise for Holbein's *Historiarum Vetrus Testamenti Icones* – describing it as a “*Bybel Figuer-boecxken in houte print*” [a little book of biblical figures in woodcut], in his popular and influential *Schilder-boeck* [Book on Painting], a fact which further illustrates more favourable attitudes to the picture Bible.<sup>36</sup>

When introducing the picture Bible in the Republic, publishers re-used existing copperplates and texts that had been created in neighbouring countries. In doing so, they reconnected to ongoing developments outside the Republic. Franciscus van Raphelingen, Plantin's son-in-law, was the first to get involved. In 1592 and 1593 he published two volumes in Leiden: the *Emblemata Sacra* and the *Bibelsche Figuren*, based on plates made by Pieter van der Borcht. When van der Borcht's plates were re-used again by the Dutch Reformed printer and publisher Cornelis Claesz in Amsterdam between 1594 and 1609, they were published under a title – *Biblicae Historiae* – that had already been used in some German sixteenth-century publications.<sup>37</sup> Even when the Anabaptist Crispijn De Passe made new copper engravings for his *Liber Genesis* in 1612, the foreign models continued to dominate: De Passe's engravings had largely been based on existing foreign illustrations.<sup>38</sup>

In this transfer of foreign models, confessional orientations were ignored: the Remonstrant publisher Michiel Colijn produced four picture Bibles between 1613 and 1617, two of which were based on van der Borcht's plates,<sup>39</sup> while another was based on a series of etchings after the frescoes by Raphael in the Vatican Loggia (the so-called Raphael's Bible), first published in 1607 in the volume *Historia del testamento vecchio*, produced by Giovanni Orlandi in Rome.<sup>40</sup>

The possibilities of appropriation, however, were not unlimited. First, the meditational or spiritual use of these illustrations was avoided. Hiël's original preface, with its spiritual message, was either radically abridged or removed by Dutch publishers. Nadal's emblematic prints for meditational use were never reproduced in the Republic. Second, some alterations were made in the prints' iconography. In accordance perhaps with Calvin's injunction that all anthropo-

36 As noted in Van der Coelen (1998) 135.

37 As is also suggested in Hamilton (1981) 284.

38 For an analysis of De Passe's re-use of existing prints, see Veldman (2001) 66.

39 The volumes were titled *Emblemata Sacra* and *Figures de Toutes les Plus Remarquables Histoires et Aultres Evenements du Vieil et Nouveau Testament*. On Colijn's confessional background, see Hamilton (1981) 286.

40 Engamarre (1994) 575.

morphic representations of God or Jesus should be prohibited, depictions of God were sometimes – but not always – removed from the original plates.<sup>41</sup> Colijn conserved the anthropomorphic depictions of God in the etchings based on Raphael's Bible, but van Raphelingen used a second series of plates made by van der Borcht in which the figure representing God in the old series of plates was almost always replaced by a cloud or by the word "God."<sup>42</sup>

### Withdrawal: 1617–1637

Dutch publishers no longer completely ignored developments taking place outside the Republic between 1592 and 1617, but the advance of the picture Bible faltered after 1617. Between 1617 and 1637, only one smaller publication, the illustrated children's book *De historie van den konincklijcken prophete David* [The History of the Royal Prophet David] appeared on the Dutch market.<sup>43</sup> This renewed resistance to the visual appears to have been related to the fierce theological controversies of this period. These controversies surrounded the meaning and role of God's Word in establishing the contours of the new faith and were based on the conviction that God's Word could have only a single meaning.<sup>44</sup>

It was precisely on this point that toleration was hard to find around the time of the Synod of Dordt in 1618. The Protestants not only opposed the Catholics, but were internally divided as a result of the disputes between the Counter-Remonstrants and Remonstrants. The Counter-Remonstrants believed that the correct interpretation of the Word ought to form the foundation of the Dutch Reformed Church and the Republic. Accuracy, credibility and authority were the preoccupations of the Counter-Remonstrants in their struggle to ground the new nation and its politics in what they saw as the correct interpretation the Bible.<sup>45</sup> This explains the decision taken at the Synod of Dordt to have the Bible translated into Dutch from the original Hebrew and Greek (the

41 Dutch sixteenth-century disputes on iconoclastic issues had been dominated by Calvinist theology, as argued in Veldman (1991) 421. As has been well established, Calvin was not opposed to all visual art. His views were most recently discussed in Joby (2007), and Zachman (2007).

42 On both sets, see Mielke (2005). One of these plates retained an anthropomorphic representation of God, as argued in Hamilton (1991) 282.

43 Printed by Jan van Waesberge from Rotterdam in 1622, and based on a Southern Netherlandish original, as Waesberge's *De historie van Ioseph den vromen ende godtvruchtighen ionghelinc* [Joseph the Pious and Devout Youngster] had been in 1617.

44 Also suggested in Dekoninck (2004) 57.

45 The political implications of these debates are discussed in Prak (2006).



FIGURE 10.7 *Zacharias Heyns, Wercken by W.S. heere van Bartas. Zwolle: Zacharias Heyns, 1621, facing fol. 1. COURTESY OF LEIDEN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY.*

States Bible) and to enrich it with notes, paraphrases and cross-references directing the reader to a variety of related biblical texts. It was briefly but explicitly stated that this new Bible was not to include imagery which could give “*erghernisse*” [offence].<sup>46</sup>

This struggle left its mark on Dutch religious literature, as becomes apparent in the printing history of Zacharias Heyns’ Dutch translation of Du Bartas’ *La Sepmaine* (1579), a biblical poem on the creation of the world. When Heyns’ first published his translation in 1616, the engravings depicted anthropomorphic representations of God. These were replaced by figural elements in the second edition of Heyns’ translation published in 1621 (Figure 10.7).<sup>47</sup>

46 *Acta* (1621) 28.

47 First noted in Meeus (1990) 245. See also Stronks (2011b).



FIGURE 10.8 *Annotated proofs of the Biblia, dat is, De gantsche H. Schrifture. Leiden: Paulus Aertsz. van Ravensteyn, 1635–1637. Archieven van de commissie op nationaal niveau, 1816, nr. 143. COURTESY OF THE NATIONAAL ARCHIEF.*

This adaptation was brought about, it appears, by a decision made between 1616 and 1621 at the Synod of Dordt. Even in its new form, the religious image would no longer be tolerated in the decennia after 1618. Until 1637, no more picture Bibles or illustrated biblical poems like Heyns' translation of Du Bartas' *La Sepmaine* were published in the Republic.

**The Limits: Beyond 1637**

Under these restrictive circumstances, publishing an illustrated edition of the States Bible in 1637 was a bold enterprise. As testified by proofs of the first



FIGURE 10.9 *Ornamented initial in the preface of Biblia, dat is, De gantsche H. Schrifture. Leiden: Paulus Aertsz. van Ravensteyn, for the widow of Hillebrant Jacobsz. van Wouw, 1637, fol. \*2r. COURTESY OF THE UTRECHT UNIVERSITY LIBRARY.*

edition, the correctors and translators of the States Bibles were perhaps unaware of van Ravensteyn's plans to add the ornamented initials (Figure 10.8). These proofs carried non-figurative initials, much like the initials found in other Dutch Bibles at the time.<sup>48</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the reader of the Dutch States Bible was confronted with an ornamented figurative initial at the opening of the biblical text, in Genesis 1:1. Even before that, however, a figurative initial is used in the preface to the actual biblical text, written by the States General. The letter A is embellished with a scene depicting Christ (with halo) and his disciples. Central to this scene is a candle, located in the upper triangular part of the A, that is shining its light on those present at the scene (Figure 10.9).

It is as if Jesus and his disciples are listening in to the States-General's voice declaring that:

All of those who shall see this or hear this read aloud [...] need to know that we – from the very beginning of the Reformation – have strived with great care and diligence to spread and foster the true, Christian Reformed Religion: part of our efforts was the intention to facilitate the explanation, education and preaching of God's Word.<sup>49</sup>

48 These proofs are kept in the Nationaal Archief, Staten van Holland and West-Friesland, 1572–1795, *toegangnummer* 3.01.04.01. They were printed from April 1635 onward, see Nauta (1937) 27.

49 “Allen den genen die desen sullen sien ofte hooren lessen, [...] *DOEN TE WETEN*: dat wy van den aen-beginne der reformatie af in dese Landen ter herten genomen, ende met alle vlijt ende sorghvuldigheydt ghetracht hebben te besorghen alles wat tot goeden welstant ende voortplantige vande Oprechte, Ware, Christelicke Gereformeerde Religie, en den suyveren Gods-dienst heeft mogen strecken ende noodigh was: ende onder anderen mede dat Godts Heiligh Woort [...] mochte worden uytgeleyt, geleert, ende gepredickt,” *Biblia, dat is, De gantsche H. Schrifture*. Leiden: Paulus Aertsz. van Ravensteyn, for the widow of Hillebrant Jacobsz, van Wouw, 1637, fol. \*2r.

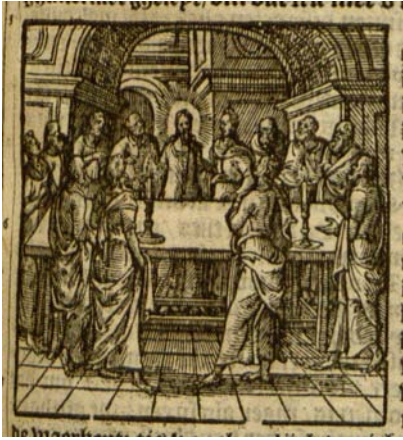


FIGURE 10.10 Het Nieuwe Testament Ons Heeren Jesu Christi. Met ghetalen aen de canten gestelt, waer door de veersen bescheeden worden, tot de aenwijsinge der heyliger Schriftueren dienende. *Christoffel Plantijn, 1577, fol. T3r*, COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF THE VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT AMSTERDAM.

This is the only time this particular initial is used in the first editions of the States Bible printed by van Ravensteyn, and it seems likely that the depicted scene was meant to give readers a representation of the way in which they should picture themselves while listening to God's Word. A very similar illustration was incorporated into a Dutch Bible printed by Plantijn in 1577 (Figure 10.10): Here, the strategic placement of this image in the opening "A" of the Dutch States Bible gives an added emphasis to the depicted scene.

Only the first folio edition van Ravensteyn produced carried these ornamented initials. The small-sized editions van Ravensteyn also sold shortly after 1637 lack any form of illustration,<sup>50</sup> and the same holds true for the folio editions that van Ravensteyn's company produced in the 1650's. In the 1657 edition, for instance, the figurative initial at the opening of Genesis 1:1 has been replaced by a non-figurative one (Figures 10.11 and 10.12).

Other printers who started producing editions of the Dutch States Bibles shortly after 1637 also refrained from designing or incorporating ornamented initials.<sup>51</sup>

Given the unfriendly attitude towards the use of religious imagery in Dutch Bibles, the decision not to follow van Ravensteyn's example was not a surprise.

50 For instance an edition in 12°, dating from 1638, see Library of the Leiden University, UB: 228 F 58:1. With special thanks to Peter van der Coelen, who noted this in his lecture at the conference *Illustrated Religious Texts in the North of Europe, 1550–1800* (to be published in a conference volume by Ashgate in 2013).

51 See for instance the 1639 edition by Jan Marcusz, and Theunis Lootsman, kept in the Royal Library The Hague, shelf mark KB: 345 G 6.



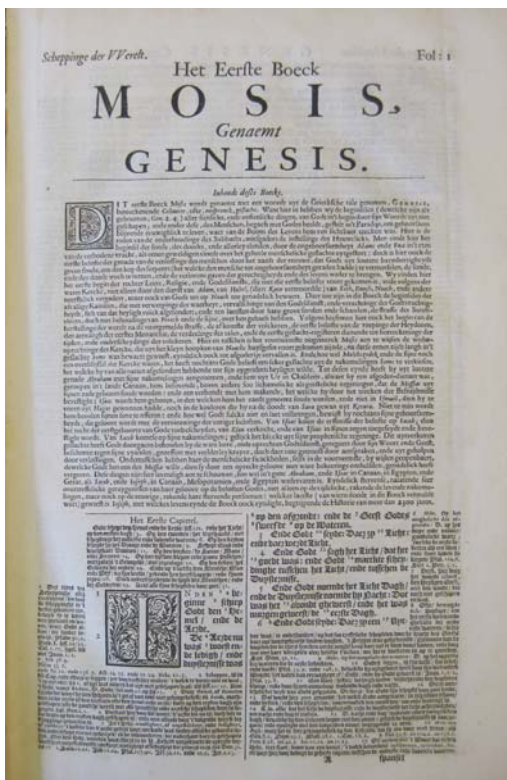


FIGURE 10.11–12 *Non-figurative initial Genesis 1*, Biblia, dat is, De gantsche H. Schrifture. Leiden: Paulus Aertsz. van Ravensteyn, for the widow of Hillebrant Jacobsz. van Wouw, 1657, fol. 1. COURTESY LIBRARY OF THE LEIDEN UNIVERSITY.

Also not surprising was the fact that van Ravensteyn's illustrated edition stirred up animosity. The Acts of the regional synods of South-Holland record the criticism of the illustrated title page that was expressed by the Dutch Reformed Church. The tetragram depicted on this title page, and more particularly the surrounding triangle – a symbol of God's Trinity – was the main reason for this hostility. In 1649, during a Synod in Leiden, the Synod's secretary recorded seven problems that had arisen after the publication of the Dutch States Bible; the presence of this triangle is listed as the fourth problem.<sup>52</sup> As a result, the

52 "Of niet van de tytelplaat behoort weghgenomen te werden die beeltenis of dat hieroglyphicum S.S. Trinitatis, dat aldaer met een triangel uitgedrukt staet?" [Should the triangle on the title page, symbol of the Holy Trinity, not be removed from the title page?], Knuttel (1908–1916) 141.



FIGURE 10.13 Biblia, dat is, De gantsche H. Schrifture. *Leiden: Paulus Aertsz. van Ravensteyn, for the widow of Hillebrant Jacobsz. van Wouw, 1637, fol. 82.* COURTESY OF THE UTRECHT UNIVERSITY LIBRARY.

tetragram as well as the triangle were removed from the title page from 1657 onward.<sup>53</sup>

Even though no such commotion is registered regarding the initials, they were not warmly welcomed either. The choice of subject for the initials cannot have been the problem. The twelve initials which were made especially for this edition and which were used at the beginning of almost every Bible book depicted non-controversial and frequently represented scenes from the Old and the New Testaments; more particularly, van Ravensteyn appears to have based them on some sixteenth-century Catholic series of images.<sup>54</sup> Nor could the specifics of their iconography have been the cause of the controversies, since this iconography was based on widespread and accepted conventions. This can be seen in the initial at the beginning of the book of Judges, where David is portrayed partially facing the reader with his gaze turned upwards to God, who is represented by the symbolic rays of light (Figure 10.13).

An almost identical initial was used in an anonymous sermon book produced by Van der Hellen in 1631 (Figure 10.14).

Paulus Aertsz. van Ravensteyn, the printer of the first edition of the States Bible, must not have anticipated any problems in the use of these initials since he stayed well within existing conventions. He had employed similar, somewhat smaller initials and printer devices when depicting the same scenes in his earlier publications without any negative repercussions, for instance in the 1620 edition of Coornhert's *Recht ghebruyck ende misbruyck van tydlicke have*

53 See Stronks (2010) for more details.

54 Scenes frequently mentioned in Van der Coelen (1998): Adam and Eve in Paradise (Genesis 1), Abraham offering Isaac (Genesis 22), Noah and the animals entering the ark (Genesis 7), Moses and the burning bush (Exodus 3), Gideon at the waterfront (Judges 7, 4–6), Samson killing the lion (Judges 14), the crowning of David (1 Samuel 16), David playing the harp, Elijah fed by ravens (1 Kings 17), Esther touching the top of Ahasuerus' sceptre (Esther 5:2), the conversion of Saulus during his trip to Damascus (Acts 9), and Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples (Matthew 26, Mark 14 and Luke 22). The argument about the Catholic sources for the initial was made by Van der Coelen in his paper for the conference *Illustrated Religious Texts in the North of Europe, 1550–1800*.



FIGURE 10.14 Keeten-slachs-ghedenck-teecken ende baniere. By een dienaer des goddelijcken woordts. *Middelburg: Hans van der Hellen, 1631, 382.* COURTESY OF ZEEUWSE BIBLIOTHEEK.



FIGURE 10.15 *Dirck V. Coornhert, Recht ghebruyck ende misbruyck van tydlicke have. Amsterdam: Dirck Pietersz. Pers, 1620, printed by Paulus Aertsz. van Ravensteyn, fol. M4v.* COURTESY OF UTRECHT UNIVERSITY LIBRARY.



FIGURE 10.16 *Biblia dat is, De gantsche H. Schrifture. Leiden: Paulus Aertsz. van Ravensteyn, for the widow of Hillebrant Jacobsz. van Wouw, 1637, fol. 47.* COURTESY OF THE UTRECHT UNIVERSITY LIBRARY.

[The Right Use and Abuse of Temporarily Goods], in which he used the initial which depicts Elijah being fed by ravens (Figures 10.15 and 10.16).<sup>55</sup>

The controversy was caused not by the initials themselves, but by the fact that they had now been integrated into the Bible itself. The biblical text, written by God's Spirit, could, as the only road to genuine faith, simply not include imagery.

It is very likely that the inspiration to introduce these ornamented initials came from German and Southern Netherlandish traditions, of which van

55 Dijstelberge (2007) 35.

Ravensteyn was certainly aware.<sup>56</sup> In 1635, he produced a Dutch translation of a devotional treatise by the German Pietist Jacob Böhme, illustrating it in a manner reminiscent of German visual literary traditions.<sup>57</sup> Van Ravesteyn appears to have been of the opinion that the controversies surrounding the Synod of Dordt had subsided to such an extent that foreign traditions could again be taken into consideration.

A second wave of success for the picture Bible after 1637 suggests that Ravesteyn's instinct was not far off the mark. In 1637, following an impasse which had lasted twenty years, the Dutch Reformed Claes Jansz. Visscher took steps to produce a picture Bible, probably in an attempt to conquer financial uncertainties. Publishers were undeniably dreading the effect the States Bible would have on their business, especially since the States General planned to grant the privileges of printing the States Bible to only one publisher.<sup>58</sup> The first proofs of the States Bible were completed in December 1636, and Visscher may have known about the illustrations that had been added to the States Bible in advance.<sup>59</sup> In 1637, he resorted to publishing an adult version of van Waesberge's *De historie van den koninclijsken prophete David* and also reprinted the picture Bible: *David, hoc est virtutis exercitatissimae probatum deo spectaculum* [David, or the Spectacle of Well-Exercised Virtue Pleasing to God], first produced in Antwerp in 1575 by Plantin with engravings by Philip Galle. Each plate depicted a scene from David's life, with an explanation of its moral implications in four lines of Latin verse by Benedictus Arias Montanus, a Catholic monk.<sup>60</sup> This first production was soon followed by three more, all thanks to the fact that Visscher was able to buy part of Colijn's commercial assets at auction.<sup>61</sup> In 1638, he launched a reprint of the *Historia del testamento vecchio*, based on the etching used in Colijn's 1607 edition. The original etchings had depicted anthropomorphic representations of God which were excluded in the new ones.<sup>62</sup> God is personified in the 1607 edition as a bearded man in flowing robes touching the sun and the moon and thereby creating them, but in 1638, he is replaced by a textual element, a tetragram of the word Yahweh. In

56 On the German applications of these ornamented initials in Protestant Bibles, see Dijkstra (2007) 30. On the English production of illustrated Bibles, see Aston (2010) 24–42.

57 Titled *Sleutel-bloem, vergadert (tot een hand-boeckken) uyt de schriften van Jacob Böhme*, see also Geissmar (1993) 168.

58 Despite the States General's intentions, the States Bible was soon produced by more than one publisher.

59 On the printing history of the Dutch States Bible, see de Bruin (1993) 236.

60 See Melion (2005) 74–90.

61 Van der Coelen (1998) 215.

62 Van der Coelen (1998) 226.

Visscher's next production, the *Theatrum Biblicum* of 1639, the representation of God from a copperplate originally made by Maarten van Heemskerck in the sixteenth century was also replaced with an inscription of the word Yahweh.<sup>63</sup> Two other publications based on van de Borch's plates, the *Biblia, hoc est vetus et novum testamentum iconibus expressum* and the *Emblemata sacra*, also dating from 1639, also removed the anthropomorphic depictions of God from the plates of the oldest series.<sup>64</sup>

Conventions regarding the representation of God became more restrictive, since residual Catholic elements were now being rigorously removed. But in other ways, practices became even more interconfessional than they had been between 1592 and 1617. The Visscher family produced nine picture Bibles in the following decades, as well as producing a large-format volume called the *Royaal Bijbel*, which contained engravings of Old Testament scenes based on paintings by Rubens.<sup>65</sup> Even Catholic publishers such as Cornelis Danckertz and Jacob Saverij followed the new trend.<sup>66</sup> Picture Bibles flooded the Dutch market, targeting the largest possible audience of Protestants and Catholics.<sup>67</sup> The Bible illustration had now become fully accepted when featured in a picture Bible, in accordance with fixed conventions.

Protestants also began to employ Bible illustrations outside the genre of the picture Bible. A single example will have to suffice here. Several poems on the passion of Christ, first published in 1651 in an anthology entitled *Verscheyde Nederduytsche gedichten* [Various Dutch Poems], remained unillustrated in seventeenth-century reprints, but illustrations were added to eighteenth-century editions.

The illustrated Bible remained forbidden territory for Protestants. It was the Catholic publisher Pieter Jabobsz Paets who produced the first lavishly illustrated Bible in the Republic, the *Biblia sacra dat is De geheelee Heylighe Schrifture* [Biblia Sacra, that is the Entire Holy Scripture] in 1657. In these volumes, biblical texts were accompanied by woodcuts made by the van Sichem family, based on engravings by Boetius à Bolswert, among others. Paets' edition was based on the Moerentorf Bible dating from 1599. Another Dutch reprint of this Bible – without illustrations – had already been published in 1653, by Joachim

63 Veldman (1999) 418–19.

64 Van der Coelen (1998) 166–67.

65 By 1620 Rubens' paintings were known in the Republic, following his work with Dutch engravers to have his paintings reproduced as prints, see also Van der Coelen (2006) 45.

66 For details on this printing history, see Van der Coelen (1998) 169–72.

67 On the use and re-use of these prints by Catholics and Protestants, see Van der Waals (2006) 72–111.

van Metelen in Amsterdam, indicating the growing opportunities for the production of Catholic Bibles in the Republic. Illustrated editions of the Moerentorf Bible were again produced in the 1740s, also by a Catholic publisher.<sup>68</sup>

### Conclusions

What does this brief overview of the application of the Bible illustration by the Dutch tell us about the Republic's culture? The difference between the religious literature of the Republic and its neighbouring countries appears to have been the result of a widespread, interconfessional and silent agreement – supported by all Protestant denominations and even by Dutch Catholics – that pre-Reformational traditions and hybrid traditions from countries where Catholic and Protestant traditions naturally mixed, were to be abandoned when it came to the Bible. The unillustrated Bible was used to construe a more or less clean break with the Catholic past as well as with contemporary hybrid developments in neighbouring countries. Images were not to be deployed to continue to spread the Word in the Republic, not even among Catholics, until the 1660s. This agreement was not enforced by law or by official censorship and was not contentious enough to be discussed in pamphlets. Direct mention of it occurred only incidentally in the minutes of Dutch Reformed Synods.<sup>69</sup>

The hybridization of Dutch literary religious practices, which eventually occurred, as picture Bibles began to be produced, turned a clean break with the past into a negotiated and restricted encounter, which did not develop without interference from the surrounding countries. It is telling that the first Dutch publisher to produce picture Bibles, van Raphelingen, was connected to Plantin and the Southern Netherlands through family ties. Innovations in the genre based on foreign developments were kept under close watch and often encountered resistance from the Dutch Reformed Church. The printing history of Möller's *Sleutel*, the 1682 volume referred to in the introduction of this article, demonstrates this mechanism in a nutshell. Möller was German by origin and based his *Sleutel* on the German tradition of the *ars memorativa*, specifically

68 The publisher was the widow of Joannes Stichter in Amsterdam.

69 This was confirmed following consultation of the main collection of early modern Dutch pamphlets, known as the Knuttel-catalogue, which does not contain any pamphlets on the issue. The absence of public commotion and the relative silence surrounding the issue are a remarkable feature of the Dutch situation, in light of studies such as McWilliams (2004), which reveal much more aggression and discussion in similar situations where a nation's cultural memory was negotiated.

on Johannes Buno's *Bilder-Bibel*, first published in 1674, in which visualization techniques and emblematic images were propagated to enhance the study and memorization of the Bible.<sup>70</sup> In line with Buno's imagery, Möller's *Sleutel* contained Bible illustrations with emblematic representations of the mysteries of faith (such as the Holy Spirit represented as a dove). The regional Synod of South Holland levelled harsh criticism against these "*aenstootelijcke, ergerlijcke en onstichtelijcke figuren*" [offensive, detestable and unedifying images]. The allegorical elements Möller introduced were obviously unwanted additions in Bible illustrations deployed in the Dutch context. A copy of the *Sleutel* kept in the library of the University of Amsterdam reveals that those pictorial elements were specifically removed by at least one of the book's owners.<sup>71</sup> Over the course of the seventeenth century, Bible illustrations became accepted as long as they were not incorporated into the biblical texts themselves and only illustrated the texts they accompanied. Allegorical or meditative applications developed abroad could not be incorporated into Dutch Protestant traditions and were not deployed by Catholics until the 1660s.

The application of Bible illustrations became less controversial as time passed, but it remained an ideological act well into the nineteenth century. When a new controversy split the Dutch Reformed Church into an orthodox and a more liberal faction around 1830, resulting in what is known as the *Afscheiding* [Schism], the picture Bible – which by then seemed fully accepted – again became the target of virulent attacks. At a moment when literacy was increasing and more and more Bibles were being sold to Protestants through the Dutch Bible Society, founded in 1814, and through organizations that sold Bibles door to door, picture Bibles, which had long been accepted by Protestants, became a hotly contested issue.<sup>72</sup> At the height of the controversy an elder of the orthodox (*gereformeerde*) faction, Frederik Kon, wrote that he had used the picture Bibles of the more liberal (*hervormde*) minister and school head master Reddingius to light his stove, because such works had "a ruinous effect on human souls." Once again the difference between Catholic and Protestant literary traditions – the visual versus the verbal – was used to identify and reinforce ideological differences. The impact of the seventeenth century imageless religious literature should perhaps not be underestimated. While nowadays illustrated Bibles for adults are published in almost every European

70 On Buno's mnemonic and emblematic techniques, see Strasser (2007) 211–12. Möller was born in Frankfurt am Main in 1641, married a Dutch woman named Wilhelmina de Hulter in 1678, worked as a minister in Leiden from 1679 and died there in 1710.

71 Leeflang (2008) 144–45.

72 Molendijk (2003) 107–28.

country (including for instance an illustrated King James Version), such publications are lacking in the Netherlands. Even editions illustrated by Gustave Doré, once a success in the Netherlands and still frequently reprinted in other European countries, are absent; the last Dutch edition was printed in 1996.

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