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Panel: Death During the Wars of Religion in Early Modern Europe

Organizers: Violet Soen, Louise Deschryver and Isabel Casteels, Early Modern History, KU Leuven, within the framework of the FWO-project *Rest in Peace? Death during the Dutch Revolt*

Death and Religion in German Towns during the Thirty Years War

Dr. Martin Christ, Universität Erfurt

Dying, death and commemoration were central aspects of early modernity. It was crucial to die the right way, as is attested by the numerous medieval and early modern *ars moriendi* and other instructions on a proper death. Religious reformers, scholars and politicians all engaged constantly with questions revolving around how to die the right way. During times of crisis, like famines or outbreaks of plague, rituals of death could be adapted and altered. Another point of crisis, when such changes can be traced, were major European wars. This paper focuses on towns in the Holy Roman Empire and how men and women died there during and immediately after the Thirty Years War. It argues that during wars, rituals could be altered and had to be changed owing to the circumstances, which could be exceptional. But in other instances, responses to wars included rituals which emphasised a sense of continuity during tumultuous times. By continuing to perform central funerary rituals, inhabitants of early modern towns sought to stabilise the urban community, even when wars were raging around them. The destruction brought by wars could also mean changes in the urban infrastructure and architecture, for example when it came to the rebuilding or movement of graveyards. Finally, it was also during times of war that some funerals or rituals surrounding death had to be abandoned altogether because of an immediate threat to those performing the rituals. All these aspects linked to death in German towns in the first half of the seventeenth century illustrate the ways in which dying, death and commemoration were always connected to broader religious, political and cultural changes. Never is this more apparent than during times of war.

The Ritual of the Execution. Politics, Religion, and Polarization during the Dutch Revolt (1560-1590)

Isabel Casteels, KU Leuven

As still widely present in Belgian and Dutch collective memory, the staging of executions formed an integrative part of the revolt and religious war in the sixteenth-century Low Countries. While the historiography of the Dutch Revolt traditionally focused on the executions carried out by the central and Catholic authorities in Brussels or Antwerp, more recently Henk van Nierop convincingly showed that executions also were part of the early regime of terror installed by the Orangist and Calvinist factions in rebel Holland and Zeeland. Whereas the former strand of studies argued that executions were a part of state building, by contrast Van Nierop interpreted these as a guarantee for civil and religious conflict. This reflects the broader divide between early modern political and religious history, with the former focusing on state formation and the latter on religious persecution. In order to solve this deadlock in

historiography, it is necessary to break away from the current North/South and Protestant/Catholic prism and conduct a cross-regional and cross-confessional analysis instead. Taking the legacy of Foucault as important starting point, a reading of executions as rituals with performative power has already been proposed, for early modern Italy and France, yet this perspective is lacking for the early modern Low Countries. This project will also innovate by matching judicial sources with narrative and visual sources, in order to dress up a typology of executions. Ultimately, the aim is to analyze how, when, where and why executions were carried out, and the tumultuous events and the executions in the Low Countries provide the context to test politics, polarization and the power of rituals during the Wars of Religion.

The weight of traditions: liturgical and charitable commemoration before, during and after the Calvinistic Republic in Bruges, 1400-1600

Hannelore Franck, KU Leuven

Traditionally, historians define the Reformation as the decisive moment when the Middle Ages came to an end and the Early Modern Period began. This especially holds through for the historiography concerning death and commemoration as the protestants developed radically different ideas regarding the Last Judgement. More recently, however, historians tend to emphasize the continuities between these two time periods, mostly in terms of socioeconomic developments. This raises the question whether continuities existed in other areas as well, such as the socioreligious field. This paper studies the personal liturgical and charitable endowments for the benefit of the soul between 1400 and 1600. The city of Bruges provides an excellent case study due to its rich archives on charity and its turbulent history during the sixteenth century. By focusing on long-term evolutions, I will be able to distinguish similarities from differences and offer an explanation for the changes that did occur. I argue that people in the sixteenth century tried to hold on to tradition and only changed their behaviour when forced to. The provided evidence, moreover, suggests that the sixteenth century changes were foremost the consequence of socioeconomic evolutions and not so much because of changed religious concepts or sentiments.

You Only Die Once: Death, the Reformation and stressing choices in sixteenth-century Lille and Tournai

Louise Deschryver, KU Leuven

Though many valuable historical studies have been published on how Lutheran and Calvinist teachings about death, salvation and the Last Judgement differed from those of the Catholic tradition, cultural historians of death in the Reformation have not yet particularly addressed how knowledge of these diverging dying paradigms affected early modern individuals and their managing of death. Furthermore, the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Low Countries have rather been overlooked in most historiographical contributions to the impact of the Reformation on the understanding and experience of death. This paper therefore aims to shed new light on the unfolding of the Reformation in the Low Countries, arguing that the theological disputes on death and dying in these regions obtained a very topical status already before, but especially during and after the Iconoclastic Fury in 1566. In this paper, I will argue that early modern individuals facing or being confronted with death were put before the overawing choice which confessional death to die in order to avoid the eternal tortures of hellfire. So, while death could be a source of social ecumenism in multi-confessional societies, it must also be considered as an element of confessional divergence and community formation in early modern towns and cities.



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