

Book Review

Experiencing Exile: Huguenot Refugees in the Dutch Republic, 1680–1700. By David van der Linden. Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing. 2015. xix + 289 pp. £75.00. ISBN: 978 1 4724 2927 8.

At a time when newspapers are filled with stories of the travails of emigrants fleeing civil and religious unrest, this study of the experience of Huguenots who fled to the Dutch Republic after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685 is particularly welcome. In contrast to previous studies of the Huguenots' flight, which have tended to focus on the persecutions that drove them to seek refuge abroad or to analyse their dispersion among the countries that received them, David van der Linden is interested in the social experience of the émigrés. He seeks to move us beyond the heroic narrative of suffering and brave escape that earlier generations crafted to claim the rightful place in history that they thought the Huguenot refugees had been denied. Rather than focusing selectively on the contributions that famous émigrés made to the letters, science and technology of the places where they made their new homes, so as to show that France's loss was others' gain, van der Linden seeks to assess the experience of the refugees more broadly and to uncover the difficulties they experienced as they sought to integrate themselves into their new surroundings.

He dismisses any notion that those who left were the true believers, abandoning their homes to preserve their faith, while those who converted and stayed were weaker in courage and belief. Because only ministers could legally emigrate, flight was complicated and often costly. Geographical and socio-economic considerations made departure impossible for many who might otherwise have left. Circumstances favoured those who lived near borders or were engaged in maritime activities or trade. They favoured those with relatively liquid assets, with desirable professional skills, and with contacts abroad. These observations are not entirely new, but van der Linden goes well beyond previous scholars' suggestion that a variety of factors, and not just religious fervour, played into the decision to emigrate with his analysis of how socio-economic possibilities influenced the decision to leave France. A close study of Huguenot refugees from Dieppe to Rotterdam provides the heart of his evidence. Archival records richly document this important migration route and allow him to establish a viable statistical profile of which occupational groups most frequently fled. Perhaps not surprisingly, a disproportionate number of skilled artisans, retailers, merchants, and sea captains and sailors absented themselves, though many did not leave immediately after the Revocation. Deciding to leave and planning for exile took time.

Van der Linden next examines the experience of four socio-economic groups once in Rotterdam. Members of the first three—textile entrepreneurs, printers and ministers—are often cited to tout the success of the *Refuge*, and yet, as van der Linden shows, these cases were exceptional. Most refugees, even in these seemingly favourable fields, had difficulty making ends meet. Having left everything behind, they had little capital to begin anew. They also discovered that their professional skills were less portable

than they might have thought. Textile entrepreneurs and printers found themselves in a highly competitive situation; even initial successes faded as the economy changed. Refugee ministers also overcrowded the market; there were far too few open pulpits to go around. The fourth socio-economic group, refugees without money or particular skills, fared even worse and quickly exhausted available poor relief. Huguenot emigrés to the Dutch Republic did not suffer the religious and ethnic prejudices many current refugees face, but they had the same problems starting anew with few resources.

Three chapters on 'Faith in Exile' explore the message in sermons, as ministers wrestled with such difficult questions as why God had allowed the destruction of the true church in France and combated the temptation to return home, even at the price of apostasy. They also fought an 'ongoing battle against heterodoxy'. As van der Linden shows, Protestant ministers pleaded for religious tolerance in France but remained close-minded where Catholicism was concerned. Preaching and prophecy nurtured hopes for return—even fantasies of a Protestant triumph—that were finally dashed when the 1697 Peace of Ryswick showed that William III would not carry the Huguenots' battles back into France. A significant number of discouraged refugees negotiated a return to France in the wake of this peace. The story of these returnees, as they faced repeated tests to weed out false conversions and fought for the return of confiscated properties, offers a good reminder that the persecution 'new Catholics' endured well into the eighteenth century.

The book's final section, 'Memories in Exile', deals with the creation of a Huguenot identity by refugees trying to make sense of their experience. Reading memoirs of the *Refuge* as 'constructed memories', van der Linden draws on recent writings on historical memory to explain how memories of persecution and coexistence could go hand in hand in the memoirs of emigrés who unconsciously fitted their personal stories to 'master narratives' of providence or biblical tales of fall and redemption. 'Memory brokers' drew selectively on these 'social memories' in constructing the mainstream account, or 'collective memory', of the Huguenot past. Emphasizing stories of persecution and suffering, they ignored the complexities of cross-confessional friendship to craft a 'heroic past' that reinforced confessional boundaries through a grand narrative of Huguenot victimhood and Catholic villainy.

The narrative has proved an enduring one, and this effort to deconstruct it makes a welcome contribution to transnational and emigration history, but also to our understanding of the impact of Europe's religious divisions on those who endured them. The experience of Huguenot refugees from Dieppe to Rotterdam cannot stand in for the experience of all French Protestant emigrés, much less for that of members of other faiths forced into exile in the early modern period. David van der Linden does, however, raise important questions as he seeks both to refute the heroic legend of the Huguenot *Refuge* and to explain how this stubborn legend was formed in the first place. We can use more such studies of the experience of exile.

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