

BOOK REVIEW

Experiencing Exile: Huguenot Refugees in the Dutch Republic, 1680–1700, by David van der Linden (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015; pp. xvi + 289. £75).

In October 1985, French President François Mitterrand made a public apology to descendants of the world-wide Huguenot diaspora. The occasion was the tercentenary of the Edict of Fontainebleau, which revoked the religious freedoms afforded to French Protestants by the Edict of Nantes in 1598, prompting around 150,000 (20 per cent) of them to go into exile rather than swear 'to want to live and die in the Holy Roman Catholic Religion'. They ventured to Britain, Brandenburg-Prussia, Denmark, Switzerland and the New World, though nowhere was their experience more visible or vivid than in the United Provinces. The Netherlands' pre-existing network of French-speaking Walloon churches ensured their popularity, yet from the outset of his book David van der Linden questions the settled historiographical narrative of 'zealous Protestants who abandoned their homes for the sake of religion' (p. 16). Instead, he emphasises the socio-economic factors behind the *Refuge*, drawing on archival material from Dieppe and Rotterdam to provide illuminating quantitative evidence of migration patterns. Reconnaissance registers in Rotterdam's Walloon churches, for instance, reveal a disproportionate number of exiles from specific professions, especially the textile industry, suggesting that the decision to leave France was 'not taken in a fit of religious enthusiasm' (p. 33) so much as upon careful consideration of economic opportunity. In this analysis, Huguenots were religious refugees and economic migrants simultaneously. Correspondingly, those who stayed behind in France and abjured their religion were, he argues, not necessarily backsliding Protestants—rather, they pragmatically envisaged less propitious material prospects for themselves in exile than those who absconded.

In a further challenge to orthodox views, the author disputes the notion that the Huguenots in the Dutch Republic were uniformly successful in their new work environment. Again displaying impressive archival research, he focuses on four key groups: textile businessmen, booksellers and publishers, ministers of religion and the poor. Many transitioned seamlessly into the local economy; most did not. Ostensibly generous loans given to Huguenot textile entrepreneurs by town magistrates proved inadequate in the face of the prohibitive cost of setting up new workshops from scratch, coupled with the diminishing demand for high-end textile products such as silk. A majority of refugee booksellers and publishers, hitherto held to have made the Netherlands, particularly Amsterdam, the warehouse of the early Enlightenment, fell victim to the stiff competition of the Dutch marketplace. Notable exceptions, principally through their specialisation in French titles for the Dutch elite, were the thriving firms of Henri Desbordes, George Gallet and the Huguetan brothers. Huguenot clerics were stymied by over-supply: since almost half of the Protestant ministers in France in 1685 relocated to the Netherlands, there were too few pulpits to accommodate them all. This was despite an initial upsurge in appointments immediately after 1685, bankrolled by the Dutch

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authorities, when the Walloon church congregations were newly swelled with refugees. Army chaplaincy was an alternative means of employment, made more viable by the Nine Years' War with France. The author's laudable aim to produce a book which 're-inserts the vast masses of refugees into the history of exile' (p. 8) is perhaps most fully realised in his study of the run-of-the-mill refugee poor, who relied on the increasingly limited relief offered by the Walloon churches. Here, as throughout the book, poignant vignettes emerge from the high-level data analysis. In Rotterdam, for example, one Marthe du Hamel receives four loaves of bread for looking after her young grandson; less edifyingly, the Dutch Reformed and Walloon churches quibble over responsibility for rendering relief to François Vallier and his Dutch wife, the former unable to support his family after losing his left hand in a sea battle.

Happily, Van der Linden's stress on the economic exigencies of exile by no means precludes detailed consideration of religious matters. Over twenty French Protestant sermons are examined, yielding important insights into doctrinal explanations for Huguenot displacement. Unsurprisingly, the workings of divine providence loom large: the Revocation is attributed by refugee ministers not to God's abandoning his Huguenot flock, but to punishing it for its sins—on this view, Catholic persecution of Huguenots is the channel through which He vents his wrath, not the root cause of the refugees' adversity. It is a paradoxically comforting message iterated in other early modern exile faith communities: because God has seen fit to punish us, we are not forsaken, but rather tested as part of His wider plan. And it was prone, of course, to embellishment with supernatural reports from back home, such as one claiming that angels had been heard singing from the skies directly above the sites of ravaged Huguenot churches (p. 125). Conversely, those who stood condemned (at least from the refugee pulpits) were the Protestants who remained in France, even those among the *nouveaux convertis* who practised Nicodemism, hiding their true religious leanings behind a cloak of Catholic conformity.

There is much else of interest here, including chapters on the reception of sermons, the two-way movement of Protestant exiles between France and the Netherlands, and refugee storytelling networks. With his persuasive methodology and, above all, his empathy with (but not sentimentality over) their plight, van der Linden has produced a compelling account of the Huguenot experience in the Dutch Republic and, in the process, made a major contribution to the flourishing genre of early modern exile studies.

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