

„Zu Rettung unserer Ehren und Reputation“. William of Orange’s Reputation and his Armed Intervention in the Netherlands in 1568

Erik Swart

1. Introduction

In 1984 my namesake Koenraad Swart published an influential article on what motivated Prince William of Orange (1533–1584) to resort to armed violence in 1568. He posited that Orange had been compelled to do so above all „zu rettung unserer ehren und reputation“.¹ Swart’s claim was based on the Prince’s publications and correspondence of 1567–1568 and the budding realisation at the time that he was a nobleman like any other and not the ideal national hero nineteenth-century Dutch historiography had mostly declared him to be. Swart, however, was less clear on how this played out in practice in 1568. Moreover, in stating that Orange had been more concerned with his reputation than with his honour, he seems to suggest they are two very different things. Scholars today find it self-evident to study Orange as a nobleman. They also hold that honour and reputation are not wholly different things, but closely linked. Reputation is often regarded as an aspect of honour.² Therefore, there is room for a new look at Orange’s honour and reputation as primary motivation for using armed intervention.

Another question that needs to be addressed is how the Prince’s honour and reputation are linked to the other reasons he provided for his intervention in the Netherlands: the tyranny of the Duke of Alba with his violation of liberties and privileges, and the need to protect the „oppressed

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- 1 Swart, *Wat bewoog Willem van Oranje, 568–572*. The quote from Orange’s *Printzische Entschuldigung* of 1568 in *Klink*, *Opstand, politiek en religie*, 337. On Swart’s interpretation of Orange also see *Duke*, Van „trouwe dienaar“ tot „onverzoenlijke tegenstander“.
 - 2 Swart, *Wat bewoog Willem van Oranje, 568*; *Tischer*, *Kriegsbegründungen*, 152; *Zunkel*, Art. „Ehre, Reputation“; *Filin*, *Die Ehre des Fürsten*, 101 f.; *Isenmann*, *Die Ehre und die Stadt*, 21 f., 37 f.; *Sandberg*, *Warrior Pursuits*, 164–167; *Gietman*, *Republiek van eer*, 39 f., 45 f., 67, 75, 77; *Balancy*, *L’honneur militaire*, 30 f.

Christians“. Swart explicitly and implicitly played down the other reasons Orange provided. He saw his religious arguments, for instance, as an attempt to entice German, French, and English Protestants into supporting him.³ Orange wooed the German Lutheran princes in particular to garner the support he so desperately needed to make his enterprise a success. For his German audience the Prince legitimised taking up arms as „Defension und Notwehr“. Swart recognised this as appertaining to feudal law, as the right of a vassal to resist his liege lord if that lord had wronged him. He believed this right had been discredited by 1568. Martin van Gelderen in his study of the political thought of the Dutch Revolt glossed over „Defension und Notwehr“, presumably because this notion played a minor role in Dutch rebel thinking after 1568.⁴ But Orange used it widely in 1568, because resistance legitimised as „Notwehr“ was a fundamental idea in the Holy Roman Empire. German historians have made great strides in the last two decades in analysing the development of the Lutheran justification of resistance against the Emperor Charles V.⁵ It is within this framework that Orange’s use of „Notwehr“ will be considered here.

I have chosen to view Orange’s armed invasion of the Netherlands in 1568 as an intervention. Usually scholars use this term to denote interference in an alien commonwealth,⁶ which the Netherlands were not for the Prince. But in 1568 he was an exile, accused of rebellion against his sovereign, banished for life and stripped of all his Netherlandish possessions. In other words, Orange had been expelled from the commonwealth, he had become an outsider. The Prince’s armed invasion has much in common with other Early Modern interventions. Analysing it as such will make, I believe, a useful contribution to the discussion on these, notably on just how imperative the role of reputation was in the decision to

3 Swart, *Wat bewoog Willem van Oranje, 564–568*; cf. for France *Nassiet, La violence*, 272 f. For the „oppressed Christians“ see for instance the *Printzische Entschuldigung* in *Klink, Opstand, politiek en religie*, 337, 350. Also the instruction for John of Nassau in dealing with Elector August of Saxony, 17 June 1568, WvO 3715. On Orange’s connections with France see *Van Tol, William of Orange in France*.

4 Swart, *Wat bewoog Willem van Oranje, 564*; *Van Gelderen, The political thought*, 121; *Van Gelderen, Antwerpen, Emden, London 1567*.

5 For instance *Von Friedeburg, Magdeburger Argumentationen*; *Haug-Moritz, Widerstand als „Gegenwehr“*; *Idem, „Ob wir uns mit Gott“*; *Carl, Landfriedenseinung und Ungehorsam*; *Von Friedeburg, Widerstandsrecht und Konfessionskonflikt*.

6 *Tischer, Grenzen*, 43; *Trim, „If a prince use tyrannie“*; *Kampmann, Kein Schutz fremder Untertanen*; *Idem, Von Schutz fremder Untertanen*; *Haug-Moritz, Schutz fremder Glaubensverwandter?*; *Tischer, Protektion als Schlüsselbegriff*; *Babel, Garde et protection*, 207–241, 261–271.

intervene. Related to this is the role of securitisation processes. What was deemed to be (existentially) threatened: the reputation of the protagonist, in this case Orange, or the security of the „foreign“ subjects, in this case those of the Netherlands?

I intend to answer the questions in three steps. In the first paragraph I will analyse Orange's honour and reputation in conjunction with the other reasons he provided for intervening in the Netherlands. The next step is to scrutinise his use of „Defension und Notwehr“ to legitimise his armed intervention, in the context of the Holy Roman Empire. The third paragraph deals with the consequences of the failure of the armed enterprise of 1568 for the Prince's honour and reputation. The primary sources for the analysis are Orange's propagandistic publications of 1568, written by ghost writers for the most part, and his correspondence which is available in an online database. Many of the publications are available in the database as well; all can be found on *Dutch Pamphlets Online*.⁷ A final point to make here is that I focus mainly on Orange's personal honour and reputation, and less so on that of his family.

2. Honour, tyranny and oppressed Christians

All scholars agree that honour was of central importance in Early Modern European society; it was one of the glues that kept society together. At the same time, they find it hard to capture honour in a general definition. Honour is an open concept, and its meaning in the sixteenth century depended on context and a broad spectrum of related, similar concepts. Honour was an important, integral part of a number of other closely related concepts, of which reputation was one, of course. Others, for instance, were „praise“, „fame“, „virtue“, and „quality“. Honour was personal but individuals, certainly noblemen like Orange, belonged to families/dynasties whose honour also had to be nourished and protected. Hence the Prince's motto: „Je maintiendray Nassau“. Finally, the nobility as a whole had honour, which involved maintaining a certain lifestyle and code of conduct. This served to distinguish the nobility from other social groups.⁸

7 The correspondence at <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/wvo> (WvO); the pamphlets can be found at <https://primarysources.brillonline.com/browse/dutch-pamphlets-online>. Many of the texts from 1568 were published by *Schenk* in: Prins Willem van Oranje. *Cellarius*, Die Propagandatätigkeit Wilhelms von Oranien.

8 *Izenmann*, Die Ehre und die Stadt, 7 f., 11–18; *Deutsch*, Hierarchien der Ehre, 38 f.; *Schuster*, Ehre und Recht, 48 f.; *Swart*, Wat bewoog Willem van Oranje, 568 f.;

There was also a strong link between honour and the law, in the sense that harming someone's legal rights was considered an attack on their honour. Many conflicts began because an individual's rights were violated, and therefore their honour as well. And if the slighted party could not achieve redress via the courts of law, then violence – including feuds or war – was an alternative.⁹

For people wielding power, honour and reputation were necessary requirements to be taken seriously and accepted by their peers; they were needed to be capable of acting and communicating. Someone's reputation can be described as that person's honour as it was circulating in society and evaluated by it. Safeguarding one's reputation depended on different factors, but the decisive ones were credibility and reliability in relation to the obligations attributed to a certain rank and status. A person with power who rejected or did not fulfil their duty to act and intervene that came with their rank and status, put their own reputation on the line. A loss of reputation led to a loss of credibility and the ability to act.¹⁰

Looking at Orange's behaviour in 1567–1568 with this in mind, it is striking that he first remained inactive upon his arrival in the Empire. In September 1567 the Prince had even written to the Duke of Alba welcoming him to the Netherlands and assuring the Duke he knew no one better suited to restore calm and prosperity. Swart had already pointed out in 1984 that Orange was driven into action by the confiscation of his possessions, the public charges levelled against him and the public summons to return to the Netherlands to stand trial for lese-majesty, news of which reached him late in January 1568. Only in these circumstances did he resolve to lead the armed resistance. On top of the summons, in February 1568 Alba ordered the Prince's son and heir, Philip William, who was studying at Louvain university, to be taken into custody, which violated the university's privileges. Orange would never see him again.¹¹

Gietman, *Republiek van eer*, 86; *Nassiet*, *La violence*, 178–192, 209, 214 ff.; *Press*, *Oranien und die Reichsstände*, 684 f.; *Sandberg*, *Warrior Pursuits*, 37–46, 151–172; *Glawischnig*, *Niederlande*, 81 ff.

- 9 *Filin*, *Die Ehre des Fürsten*, 101 f.; *Isenmann*, *Die Ehre und die Stadt*, 9, 24 f., 35, 37; *Tischer*, *Offizielle Kriegsbegründungen*, 155; *Schuster*, *Ehre und Recht*, 45, 56–66; *Zmora*, *The Feud*.
- 10 *Tischer*, *Offizielle Kriegsbegründungen*, 151–156; *Rohrschneider*, *Reputation als Leitfaktor*; *Weber*, *Art. „Ehre“*; *Filin*, *Die Ehre des Fürsten*, 101, 105; *Isenmann*, *Die Ehre und die Stadt*, 9, 37 f.; *Deutsch*, *Hierarchien der Ehre*, 20; *Bettoni*, *Die Diffamation*, 42. Cf. also *Mercer*, *Reputation and International Politics*, 6–10.
- 11 *Swart*, *Wat bewoog Willem van Oranje*, 560 ff.; *Mörke*, *Wilhelm von Oranien*, 137 f.; *Stensland*, *Habsburg Communication*, 39 f. The summons in: *Prins Willem*

The public accusations and summons defamed the Prince and as such were a direct attack on his honour and reputation. Orange called the summons a „schmelige ehrenruhrige Citation“. He also called the capture of his son an insult („beleidigung“). Defending oneself against such attacks was a social and political imperative; if Orange did not defend himself he would be acknowledging indirectly that the accusations were justified. The most powerful men in the Empire, Emperor Maximilian II, Elector August of Saxony, and Landgrave William of Hesse, expected the Prince to defend himself. Nevertheless, he refused to stand trial before the Habsburg tribunal in the Netherlands, claiming his legal rights had been violated. As a result Orange was sentenced as a rebel and banned for life. This sentence effectively meant he had forfeited his honour (and reputation) and it cast him out of the commonwealth.¹²

Orange's defence on paper began quickly with his reply to the procurator general of 3 March 1568. There followed a series of pamphlets, the first of which was the *Verantwoordinge*, written in March–April and printed in French, Dutch, German and English. In these pamphlets the Prince continued to claim that the accusations against him were mere slanders and insults.¹³ He did not criticise the Habsburg King Philip II and presented himself as a loyal vassal who had merely done his duty for his overlord. Instead the Prince attacked the Duke of Alba, an „Ehrendieb unnd mörder“, and his supporters. Another target was royal minister Cardinal Granvelle, who had left the Netherlands in 1564 as a result of the vigorous opposition of the nobility. Both were depicted by the Prince as jealous slanderers and bad, corrupt councillors of the King. Moreover, Alba's administration was destroying Netherlandish liberties and in doing so had usurped the King's prerogatives. The Duke was therefore a tyrant and a rebel. Orange was the protector of the Netherlandish constitution and the King against Alba.

van Oranje, 82–88. Orange's reply to the procurator general of 3 March 1568, *Ibidem*, 89–96 (WvO 1193).

12 *Bettoni*, Die Diffamation, 42 f.; *Filin*, Die Ehre des Fürsten, 101; *Isenmann*, Die Ehre und die Stadt, 9, 36; *Mörke*, Wilhelm von Oranien, 137 f.; *Rachfabl*, Wilhelm von Oranien, 262, 370; *Mout*, Het intellectuele milieu, 615 f.; *Graf*, Die Fehde, 26 f. Quotes from the *Printzische Entschuldigung: Klink*, Opstand, politiek en religie, 336 f., 342. Cf. the defence of Orange's brother Louis of Nassau against the charges against him. Louis spoke of „rettung unszerer ehren“: Apologie, 168.

13 Orange's reply to the procurator general of 3 March 1568: Prins Willem van Oranje, 89–96 (WvO 1193); *Mörke*, Wilhelm von Oranien, 138; *Rachfabl*, Wilhelm von Oranien, 263–274. *Die Verantwoordinge* in: Prins Willem van Oranje, 23–99 (Knuttel 160). Orange's brother Louis said the same, calling the charges „ehrenruhrig“, and spoke of „ehrennotturft“: Apologie, 164 f.

Orange also began using „liberty“ as a more abstract notion, no longer the collective term for the traditional liberties, but the supreme political norm with its own particular nature.¹⁴ This way Orange was trying to destroy the Duke's reputation, and to say he was the one who had no honour.

It should be noted here that the public slandering of opponents, was a common part of conflicts. The aim was to undermine the opponent's reputation and brand him unjust and unfaithful; besmirching an opponent's honour was simply deemed advantageous.¹⁵ Alba, however, did not respond publicly to Orange's writings. The Prince, officially sentenced, was a rebel deprived of his honour and thus not worthy of such. Both Alba and Philip II did, however, correspond with the German princes Orange meted out, trying to win over, justifying their policies and the punishments meted out, and admonishing the princes not to give any credence to a rebel.¹⁶

The crucial role of honour in driving Orange to act seems therefore clear. But what of the other matters raised by him? Were the „tyranny of Alba“ and the „oppressed Christians“ merely pretexts to win support? It is highly unlikely that they were just a cynical ploy to achieve this. On the one hand, Orange's concern with the liberties and Protestants of the Netherlands, ties in with his opposition to royal policies before 1567; he had always opposed Philip II's move towards more administrative centralisation and the strict persecution of Protestants.¹⁷ On the other hand, the Prince certainly adapted his discourse to the intended audience. This is shown by a lesser-known pamphlet from 1568 directed at the Netherlandish officers and ordinary soldiers in the Habsburg army. It implores them to join him and fight against „tyranny“, but makes no mention of the religious matter whatsoever. In another appeal to Walloon soldiers inside Groningen, the message is tailored even more specifically to the audience. Orange praised the „vertu et prouesse“ of the Netherlandish soldiers in general; they had won great victories against the French in the past. But nowadays they went without reward and suffered poverty because of the

14 *Mörke*, Wilhelm von Oranien, 138, 140 f.; *Printzische Entschuldigung: Klink*, Opstand, politiek en religie, 336, 337 ff., 341 f., 350; *Geurts*, De Nederlandse Opstand, 27–30; *Van Gelderen*, The Political Thought, 120 ff.; *Arnade*, Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots, 169; *Van Gelderen*, De Nederlandse Opstand, 28–33.

15 *Isenmann*, Die Ehre und die Stadt, 44, 46; *Filin*, Die Ehre des Fürsten, 106 f.

16 *Stensland*, Habsburg Communication, 37 f., 44; *Légitimer la répression des troubles*, 136–149, 154 f., 158–169, 173 f.; *Weis*, Les Pays-Bas espagnols, 303–306; *Arndt*, Das Heilige Römische Reich, 101; *Rachfabl*, Wilhelm von Oranien, 363–375.

17 *Geevers*, Gevallen vazallen, passim; *Mörke*, Wilhelm von Oranien, 60–121; *Mout*, Van arm vaderland, 353; *Mout*, Het intellectuele milieu, 605–610.

„estrangers“, i.e. the Spaniards, who were taking over. If only they joined the Prince, then they could win eternal glory by liberating their fatherland.¹⁸ So, Orange is mainly appealing to their honour while the religious point is again entirely absent.

It is also evident that Orange was keen to show that his agenda regarding the Netherlands was not merely about, in his own words, „privat sachen“, or „Particular Interesse“.¹⁹ He needed to demonstrate to the Emperor and the German princes that he was fighting for a greater cause than just himself and his honour and reputation. The way Orange went about this actually corresponds nicely with, for instance, Elizabeth I's justification for intervening in France in 1562. The queen stated she intervened for the sake of the underage King and for the laws and liberties of France that needed to be saved and protected from the violence and tyranny of the Guises. Elizabeth, like Orange, stressed the unprecedented and irreparable damage that was being done by evil councillors, making armed intervention necessary. She also meant to help the Protestant churches against oppression from those who were conspiring to ruin Christendom. Protecting and defending people in an intolerable situation expressed and enhanced princely honour, because you committed yourself to defending the weak, here an underage King, without any material benefit.²⁰ In Orange's case, the King was misled rather than underage, but the basic ideas are undoubtedly the same. A final important difference is that Orange, in 1568, did not argue his case as a sovereign, like Elizabeth I, but as a vassal.

Another indication that it was above all honour and the loss of all his Netherlandish possessions that drove Orange in 1568, are the sheer odds against the success of his enterprise. The Prince himself acknowledged more than once at the time that what he was undertaking was enormous and against all odds. Honour made it impossible for him to make a rational, pragmatic decision, resign himself to his fate and aim for a settlement of sorts.²¹ The Elector of Saxony and Landgrave of Hesse, who were the

18 *Allen ende elckerlicken capiteynen*; there is also a French version *A tous capitaines*. Appeal to Walloon soldiers in Groningen, July 1568, WvO 8937. *Pollmann*, Eine natürliche Feindschaft, 77.

19 „[P]rivat sachen“ in Orange to Landgrave of Hesse, 18 February 1568, WvO 1295; „Particular Interesse“ in Orange to NN, 13 July 1568, WvO 3722.

20 *Haug-Moritz*, Schutz fremder Glaubensverwandter?, 170, 177, 179, 182, 184 f. Also see for the French Kings as protectors of foreign subjects *Tischer*, Protektion als Schlüsselbegriff, 50, 52 ff., 56, 59 f., 63, and *Babel*, Garde et protection, 207–241, 261–271.

21 *Filin*, Die Ehre des Fürsten, 104; *Jouanna*, Le devoir de révolte, 46–60; *Graf*, Die Fehde, 26 f. On the recognition of the enormity of the task for instance Orange's

principal Lutheran princes and the guardians of the Prince's wife Anna of Saxony, deemed his plans hopeless as early as April–May. They wanted Orange to rely on the intercession by the Habsburg Emperor, in which the Prince had no faith whatsoever. Eventually, both German Princes, who also feared that the Orange's military intervention would endanger the still tender peace of Augsburg of 1555, declined to support him actively. That the Protestants in the Netherlands were mostly Calvinist rather than Lutheran, undoubtedly also played a role. In their replies to Orange the princes completely ignored his claims regarding „tyranny“ and „oppressed Christians“ in the Netherlands, but merely referred to his people and lands which he should attempt to save with the Emperor's help without going to war. In doing so, both princes laid bare what lay at the heart of the conflict. In the words of the Elector, it was the preservation of Orange's „princely honour, lands and people“.²²

Although a sixteenth-century nobleman typically showed no emotion in his writings, Orange must have been deeply affected by his condemnation and the confiscation of his Netherlandish possessions, not to mention the loss of his son and heir who was taken to Spain. From being one of the wealthiest and most powerful nobles in the Netherlands, a man accustomed to operating on an international stage, with close ties to the powerful Spanish Habsburg King, he was turned into a dishonoured outcast. Orange's self-respect, his self-image, and the related claims to respect and esteem must have been severely hurt. At the same time it is clear that the loss of honour and reputation had its limits, as Orange continued to function within the Empire, although he was expected to defend himself. The Elector and Landgrave declined to support him, but they also took no action against him. The imperial disgrace with which the Emperor threatened Orange in May 1568 for breaking the peace (*Landfrieden*) never materialised.²³ Families related to the Nassau dynasty by marriage –

instruction for his brother John of Nassau, 17 June 1568, WvO 3715. Also see Orange to Hesse, 29 July 1568, WvO 1221 and the agreement with ten Protestant Antwerp merchants of 24 April 1568, WvO 11006.

- 22 Johann Meixner to Orange, 27 April 1568, WvO 4802; Landgrave of Hesse to Orange, 2 August 1568, WvO 1227. „fürstlichen ehren, länden und leutten“ in: Elector of Saxony to Orange, 21 May 1568, WvO 215. *Weis*, La peur du grand complot, 27; *Press*, Oranien und die Reichsstände, 687; *Mout*, Core and periphery, 211; *Rachfahl*, Wilhelm von Oranien, 400; *Glawischnig*, Niederlande, 82.
- 23 Emperor Maximilian II to Orange, 12 May 1568, WvO 493; Orange to the Emperor, 6 August 1568, WvO 487. *Fichtner*, Emperor Maximilian II, 166–172; *Weis*, La peur du grand complot, 22–28; *Arndt*, Das Heilige Römische Reich, 100 ff., 156 f.; *Press*, Oranien und die Reichsstände, 680, 684–691; *Mout*, Core and Periphery,

like Hohenlohe, Schwarzburg, and Neuenahr – continued to support the Prince. The Calvinists, although suspicious of him, also supported Orange. The Prince even managed to mobilise old comrades-in-arms from the wars against the French in the 1550s in the form of colonels Claus von Hattstatt and Georg von Holle, who both raised a regiment of infantry for him. Hattstatt led it himself, Holle thought it too risky and sent his creature Balthasar von Wulffen.²⁴ Orange also looked for support in France and found it. In August 1568 he concluded a draft treaty with the Huguenot leaders Condé and Coligny. Several thousand French soldiers joined the Prince's forces.²⁵ In other words Orange's dishonour was limited in practice by geography, confession and the extent of Spanish Habsburg influence. So when Maximilien Morillon, Vicar General of Malines, wrote to his archbishop Granvelle in November 1568 that Orange's „crédit“, another concept linked to honour, was lost forever, this was true for them, but certainly not for everyone in Europe.²⁶

Finally, it is worth noting that Orange's ideas were not just disseminated via his publications. They were, almost certainly, reaching a wider audience via songs and word of mouth. Even the contracts for Orange's colonels and captains contained references to the „tyranny of Alba“ that they were going to fight. It is very likely that this tapped into existing anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic sentiments amongst both the officers and rank and file.²⁷ These same contracts also always refer to Orange's imminent intervention as „Defension und Notwehr“.

210 f., 214; *Glawischnig*, Niederlande, 82 ff.; *Rachfahl*, Wilhelm von Oranien, 363, 363, 378–400.

- 24 *Angermann*, Der Oberst Georg von Holle, 113–134, 176, 204 f.; *Leben im 16. Jahrhundert*, 103 f., 108, 110; *Swart*, Beproofde vriendschap; *Press*, Oranien und die Reichsstände, 682; *Sandberg*, Warrior Pursuits, 34–37, 46–51; *Glawischnig*, Niederlande, 86. Orange to Louis of Nassau, July 1568, WvO 5289; Orange to Claus von Hattstatt, 3 July 1568, WvO 3800; *Bestelbrief* for Hattstatt, circa 1 July 1568, WvO 11182; *Bestelbrief* for Balthasar von Wulffen, 26 June 1568, WvO 10854 and WvO 11071.
- 25 *Van Tol*, William of Orange in France; *Klink*, Opstand, politiek en religie, 307. Draft of letter from Orange to Charles IX of France, 1568, WvO 1656. Draft of treaty August 1568 in: *Archives*, 282–286.
- 26 Morillon to Granvelle, 18 November 1568, *Granvelle*, Correspondance, 408. On the French reinforcements: Orange to Louis of Nassau, July 1568, WvO 5289; Orange to Landgrave of Hesse, 29 July 1568, WvO 1221; Orange to commanders, 30 July 1568, WvO 3731. *Jouanna*, Le devoir de révolte, 65–90; *Sandberg*, Warrior Pursuits, 53, 64 ff., 182.
- 27 Orange to his commanders, 30 July 1568, WvO 3731; *Bestelbrief* for Otto von der Malspurg, 9 July 1568, WvO 10855; *Bestelbrief* for Balthasar von Wulffen, 26 June

3. „Defension und Notwehr“

In March and April 1568 Orange quickly began organising and directing military actions against the Netherlands. The aim was to capture one or more cities with attacks from several sides. The captured cities were to be nodes of access to the Netherlands and to provide money and supplies. They were also a possible means to provide leverage in any future negotiations. These attacks all failed, the final act being the defeat of Louis of Nassau at Jemgum on 21 July. With the odds now stacked against him even more than before, Orange still went ahead with his own campaign in the autumn. He vainly hoped Alba's repression had generated enough resentment to induce Netherlanders to rise up and support him.²⁸

In the earliest of Orange's pamphlets, the *Verantwoordinge* from March–April 1568, there is no mention of „Defension und Notwehr“, or indeed any justification of military actions. These concepts first appear in the *Bekendtnus* of 20 July 1568 and the undated and unpublished *Printzische Entschuldigung*, both intended to win over the German princes. The *Bekendtnus* was translated into Dutch, French and English.²⁹ This text was already being drafted in April, and at that time Orange sought feedback on a part of the text from the Landgrave of Hesse. The Landgrave declined, but he did allow his councillors to provide advice. Orange wanted to know whether the term „kriegersüstung“ was too hard and sharp. He was worried it might be construed that he was undertaking „ein gewaltigen krieg aus sonderer wollust“, instead of a „gepürliche defension und notwehr“. The Landgrave's councillors did indeed advise the Prince to refrain from talking about acts of war („Kriegshandlung“) and instead emphasise „Defension und Notwehr“ against Alba and his adherents. Orange, as mentioned before, keen to avoid any suggestion he was frivolously taking up arms for

1568, WvO 11071; *Bestelbrief* for colonel Veith Schöner, 10 November 1568, WvO 11725; *Bestelbrief* for Hattstatt, ca. 1 July 1568, WvO 11182. *Weis*, La peur du grand complot, passim; *Pollmann*, Eine natürliche Feindschaft, 78–81.

- 28 On the purpose of taking cities: instruction for John of Nassau, 17 June 1568, WvO 3715; instruction for Simon Bing, 19 July 1568, WvO 219; Lazarus Muller to Orange, 22 June 1568, WvO 1611. Rummen van Orange, 9 May 1568, WvO 10932. *Mörke*, Wilhelm von Oranien, 142–147; *Van der Lem*, De Opstand, 73–76; *Parker*, The Dutch Revolt, 109 ff.
- 29 *Die Verantwoordinge* in: Prins Willem van Oranje, 23–99 (Knuttel 160). *Printzische Entschuldigung* in *Klink*, Opstand, politiek en religie, 305 ff., 336–350. *Geurts*, De Nederlandse Opstand, 27–30. *Summarische Antzeige*: WvO 10892; Dutch version of *Bekendtnus* (*Verklaeringhe*) in: Prins Willem van Oranje, 99–116 (Knuttel 164); *Bekendtnus* (Knuttel 166 f.).

his private affairs, followed their advice.³⁰ It is worth noting here that in 1562 Elizabeth I also stressed that her intervention in France was not „in manner of war“.³¹

Considering the primary audience for the *Bekendtnus* and the context in which it was drafted, it is necessary to study the ideas about the right to take up arms against injustice, real or perceived, in the Empire. These had been formulated and sharpened since circa 1520, coming to full fruition during the Schmalkaldic War (1546–1547). The growth of Lutheranism and the attempts to eradicate it, led to a debate on how to legitimise armed resistance against the highest worldly authority, the Emperor. German scholars have ascertained that contemporary thinkers followed several, connected lines of reasoning using natural law, Roman law, and feudal law. The answer came together around the legal concept of „Gegenwehr“, also rendered as „defensio“, which encompassed the right to self-defence and the duty to protect subjects. This was a privilege from feudal law appertaining to authorities, or rather those exercising lordship („Herrschaft“). Between 1530 and 1542 it was limited to rulers immediately under the Emperor („reichsunmittelbar“).³² At first, the concept of „Notwehr“ denoted something distinct from „Gegenwehr“, namely a natural right to self-defence that even subjects had when their lord could not, or would not, protect them. However, in practice the differences weren't always clear and it is certain that after 1543 they seem to have blurred.³³

In order for „Gegenwehr“ to be appropriate it had to meet a number of criteria. Firstly, the goal had to be protection, keeping or retrieving what was yours rightfully, and not vengeance, i.e. damaging others. Secondly, armed force only qualified as „Gegenwehr“ when used as a last resort.

30 Orange to Landgrave of Hesse, 17 April 1568, WvO 5941; Johann Meixner to Orange, 27 April 1568, WvO 4802; comments of Hessian councillors, 27 April 1568, WvO 4803; *Arndt*, Das Heilige Römische Reich, 240–243. The *Summarische Anzeige* on which the Hessian councillors commented was a brief summary that appears on page 1 of the *Bekendtnus* (Knüttel 166).

31 *Haug-Moritz*, Schutz fremder Glaubensverwandter?, 183. Cf. for the French Kings *Tischer*, Protektion als Schlüsselbegriff, 50, 52 ff., 59 f., and *Babel*, Garde et protection, 207–241, 261–271.

32 *Van Gelderen*, Antwerpen, Emden, London 1567, 110 f.; *Von Friedeburg*, Magdeburger Argumentationen, 390, 398–401, 406 f., 410, 421; *Wolgast*, Die Religionsfrage, 10 ff.; *Von Friedeburg*, Widerstandsrecht und Konfessionskonflikt, 53 ff.; *Haug-Moritz*, Widerstand als „Gegenwehr“, 144–148, 160; *Carl*, Landfriedenseinung und Ungehorsam, 93 ff.; *Haug-Moritz*, Der Schmalkaldische Bund, 70, 89 f., 516.

33 *Von Friedeburg*, Magdeburger Argumentationen, 406 f., 410, 414, 431.

But when all legal and political means had been exhausted, every use of arms became self-defence. And finally, there were criteria regarding the timing. It was allowed to arm yourself for threats expected in the future, but you could also act immediately.³⁴ And so, when the Schmalkaldic League, formed in 1531 by a number of Protestant polities and guided by the Elector of Saxony and the Landgrave of Hesse, went to war against the Emperor Charles V in 1546, this was based on the concept of „Gegenwehr“ and on feudal law. The League sent the Emperor a *diffidatio* (German: „Absage“; Dutch: „ontzegbrief“), an official declaration renouncing their allegiance to him and declaring him to be their enemy; armed resistance against the Emperor to restore violated rights was now a duty. When Charles V refused to receive the *diffidatio*, two manifestos followed declaring that the League was acting to protect threatened subjects and that the Emperor was a tyrant. Calling Charles V a tyrant, made it possible to annul the restrictions imposed by feudal law on cancelling fealty to an overlord. Such cancellations were supposed to be only temporary until wrongs were righted, but with tyrants this need not be the case. Moreover, tyrants could be deposed or even killed.³⁵

Orange's discourse from the *Bekendtnus* onwards, in which he uses both „Gegenwehr“ and „Notwehr“, ties in nicely with this. The Prince, who also was a „reichsunmittelbare“ Count of Nassau, kept stressing that he had no other recourse than to take up arms; he was forced to answer violence with violence. Everything else, such as seeking redress via the courts or mediation through the Emperor, was pointless.³⁶ As a prerequisite for „Gegenwehr“, Orange's assertion that he was acting for the protection of the „oppressed Christians“ and threatened liberties of the Netherlands, also makes sense. Depicting Alba as a tyrant would make it possible to depose or even kill him; around Easter 1568 there was an actual attempt to kidnap or kill the Duke in a monastery near Brussels.³⁷ All in all it becomes clear that Orange's *Bekendtnus* was basically an „Absage“ directed at the Duke of Alba. The Prince, with his kinsmen and friends, declared the

34 *Haug-Moritz*, Widerstand als „Gegenwehr“, 144 ff.; *Haug-Moritz*, Der Schmalkaldische Bund, 89 f.

35 *Haug-Moritz*, „Ob wir uns mit Gott“, 492–496, 502 f.; *Idem*, Widerstand als „Gegenwehr“, 149 ff., 160 f.; *Wolgast*, Die Religionsfrage, 9–13; *Kohl*, Art. „Fehde“; *Reinle*, Art. „Fehdewesen“.

36 *Bekendtnus* (Knuttel 166 f.); *Printzische Entschuldigung* in *Klink*, Opstand, politiek en religie, 336–350; instruction for John of Nassau, 17 June 1568, WvO 3715; Orange to N.N., WvO 3722.

37 *Van Meteren*, Historie, fol. 55v; *Rachfabl*, Wilhelm von Oranien, 296.

Duke to be his enemy and that of the commonwealth, and took up arms to right the injustices that both had suffered at Alba's hands. In fact, Orange referred to the Duke as his „abgesagten feindt“ even before the *Bekendtnus* was officially published.³⁸ It should also be noted that calling someone an „enemy“ presupposes that this person has equal status to oneself. Alba no longer regarded Orange, an outcast condemned as a criminal, as an equal. The Duke merely saw the Prince as a rebel.

There is, however, also a major difference in Orange's case of „Gegenwehr“/„Notwehr“. The Prince did not renounce allegiance to his overlord, King Philip II. On the contrary, he claimed he was his loyal servant and acted in his name. Even some of the flags of Orange's troops in the autumn proclaimed they were campaigning in the name of the law, the King, and the people („Pro lege, rege, et grege“).³⁹ On the other hand, as the governor-general of the Netherlands, the Duke was Orange's superior. With the *Bekendtnus* the Prince, with his kinsmen and friends, annulled any obedience to Alba, since he was an unjust tyrant and usurper of his overlord's prerogatives, and went to war against him. As a means of help for himself to attain justice, the Prince's war against Alba can also be qualified as a feud, albeit one that shows the contemporary restraints imposed by law and princely power. Using a French term, Orange's enterprise of 1568 can be dubbed a „prise d'armes“, an armed attempt to restore interrupted communication with the sovereign by removing the obstacles, i.e. bad councillors and favourites who misled him. The Prince's actions even follow the three hallmarks of a „prise d'armes“: gathering as large an army as possible, appealing for foreign aid, and seizing strategic fortified cities.⁴⁰

38 *Bestelbrief* for Otto von der Malspurg, 9 July 1568, WvO 10855. Also see Orange's „Absage“ for the monastery at Kloosterrade, 24 September 1568, in which he refers to Alba as „unsers offentlichen abgesagten feindts“: National Archives, The Hague, Collectie aanwinsten van de voormalige Eerste Afdeling van het Algemeen Rijksarchief, 14e eeuw-1933, no. 1990.

39 *Bor*, Oorsprongk, Book IV, 255.

40 The kinsmen and friends are explicitly mentioned in the *Bekendtnus*. *Kohl*, Art. „Fehde“; *Reinle*, „Fehdewesen“. *Jouanna*, Le devoir de révolte, 384–388; *Nassiet*, La violence, 127–154.

4. Consequences

Orange's campaign in the late summer and autumn 1568 was an utter failure. There was no uprising of Netherlanders discontented with Alba's repressive policies. Maybe they dared not, maybe their loyalty to the King weighed heavier, or maybe they just did not believe in the Prince's version of events. Orange tried to force a decision through a battle, but Alba skilfully avoided this, in the full knowledge that the Prince's army would disintegrate through a lack of money and the coming winter. Orange ended in Strasbourg early in 1569, unable to fully pay his troops. He handed his artillery over to the magistrate, and with his personal silver as security he got a loan so as to be able to pay his troops a small sum. For the rest he gave the colonels and captains a bond („Obligation“).⁴¹

There are scholars who maintain that, as a result of his failure, Orange's reputation was at its lowest point at the end of 1568. Granvelle mocked him; Alba was triumphant.⁴² Earlier I argued for certain geographical limits regarding the damage to the Prince's honour and reputation. There is no doubt that in the Spanish-Habsburg world he was utterly dishonoured and had no reputation (or „crédit“) left whatsoever, but the Holy Roman Empire was a different universe where the Prince had a different relation with his overlord and peers. Orange's bond with the Lutheran German princes was certainly considerably damaged. After 1568 his correspondence with the Elector of Saxony and Landgrave of Hesse is sparse.⁴³ The fact that the Prince would not listen to them and endangered the peace in the Empire must have lowered their esteem of him, just as the princes' refusal to provide aid also dented Orange's esteem for them. An integral part of maintaining relations with such powerful men was that they could provide aid when needed. Since they did not, they were useless to the Prince. As such, Orange side-lined his wife Anna of Saxony, using

41 *De Graaf*, De prins, 132–135; *Parker*, The Dutch Revolt, 110 f.; *Mörke*, Wilhelm von Oranien, 145 f.; *Van der Lem*, De Opstand, 73–76; *Swart*, Wat bewoog Willem van Oranje, 567. „Obligation“ for colonel Veith Schöner and his men, 11 February 1569, WvO 11728. Also see the renewed agreement with some colonels and captains of 27 April 1571, WvO 11251.

42 On Orange's reputation at its lowest point see for instance *Mörke*, Wilhelm von Oranien, 146, citing *Blok*, Willem de Eerste, vol. 1, 195, and *Vetter*, Wilhelm von Oranien, 102.

43 In the database with Orange's correspondence, only 21 of 251 documents to and from the Elector postdate 1568. Of 294 documents to and from the Landgrave, only 29 postdate 1568. See <http://resources.huylgens.knaw.nl/wvo>.

her troublesome character and an extramarital affair to get rid of her.⁴⁴ From now on he would increasingly rely on the Calvinists in the Netherlands and France. Lutheran families related to the Nassau's by marriage never wavered in their support for the Prince. He would also try to win over the German princes again, but France now remained the main focus of Orange's efforts to get help.

In 1567–1568 Orange incurred huge debts that would never be paid during his lifetime. He basically bankrupted himself and the dynasty to get back what he lost in this period. These debts were certainly a source of shame and therefore dishonour. In 1570–1571, the Prince practically had to beg his former soldiers, clamouring for their outstanding pay, for „mitleidliche Betrachtung“ of his misery and „mitleidliche gedultt“.⁴⁵ Asking for pity cannot have been easy for a nobleman of his stature, who had been one of the wealthiest men in the Netherlands. And yet, this does not seem to have affected Orange's plans to try and regain what he had lost. On the contrary, after a stay with the Huguenots in France in 1569, the Prince returned to the Empire to prepare the continuation of his war with Alba. The need to retrieve his rich Netherlandish possessions remained imperative, far outweighing any dishonour resulting from enormous debt. Giving up would frame Orange as a failed rebel and further tarnish the honour and reputation of himself and the family. This would then almost certainly have negative consequences for the position of the Nassau family in the Empire.⁴⁶

Swart concluded that Orange's enterprise of 1568 might have failed, but that it did form the basis on which he regained the esteem of his contemporaries.⁴⁷ In other words, the failure of 1568 laid the foundation for his later exalted reputation. The Prince himself, it seems, derived some satisfaction from his actions of that year. No one could say he was indifferent; he had done all he could to defend his honour and reputation. In this respect the enterprise of 1568 was a damage-limitation exercise

44 *Deen*, Anna van Saksen, 179, 335 f., 338; *Jouanna*, Le devoir de révolte, 65–90; *Sandberg*, Warrior Pursuits, 49 f., 99 f.

45 The shame already in 1567, see *De Graaf*, De prins, 118 f. *Glawischnig*, Niederlande, 84–89. Agreement with soldiers, 27 April 1571, WvO 11251; Orange to Otto von der Malspurg and Balthasar von Wulffen, 20 March 1571, WvO 4510; Orange to the same, 28 July 1571, WvO 4505; Orange to Jobst II of Holstein-Schaumburg, 18 February 1570, WvO 504.

46 *Mörke*, Wilhelm von Oranien, 147 f.; *Van Tol*, William of Orange in France; *Swart*, Wat bewoog Willem van Oranje, 570; see *Sandberg*, Warrior Pursuits, 181 on what he calls an honour dilemma.

47 *Swart*, Wat bewoog Willem van Oranje, 571.

that must have done some good for Orange's self-esteem. He consistently claimed that the failure of what he called his „Kriegsz expedition inn die Niederlande“ was not his fault. In 1570, for instance, he stated that he had simply lacked „glückh, daruff es alle Potentaten und Kriegszherren vornemblich wagen und setzen muessen“.⁴⁸ Swart also posited that in the long run Orange probably started to believe some of the slogans he or his followers were using to attract support. After all, his fate and that of his dynasty, became tied to defending the liberty of the Netherlands, fighting „tyranny“, and „defending the oppressed Christians“.⁴⁹ This effectively provided the Prince and his descendants with a new context in which honour and reputation were won and lost. Already by 1572 every opponent of Alba's policies was prepared to accept Orange as their leader and protector. Even outside the Netherlands his honour and reputation were restored during his lifetime, at least outside the Spanish Habsburg sphere of influence. Pierre de Bourdeille, Lord of Brantôme, included the Prince in his „great foreign generals“, and Heinrich Rantzau, councillor to the Danish King, honoured the Prince in a gallery of contemporary worthies that also included Alba and Granvelle.⁵⁰

5. Conclusion

Honour and reputation were imperative in impelling Prince William of Orange to take up arms in 1568 against the Duke of Alba and his supporters, serving both to motivate and legitimise action. His conviction as a rebel guilty of lese-majesty cast the Prince out of the Netherlandish commonwealth and dishonoured him. If he had not defended himself, he would have indirectly admitted that the charges against him were true, with grave social consequences for himself and his family. A key indicator that it was above all honour and reputation that moved the Prince was the small chance of success for the enterprise of 1568. Orange himself was well aware of this from the outset. For his enterprise to stand a chance, he needed the support of the great Lutheran German princes, especially the Elector of Saxony and the Landgrave of Hesse. These were always sceptical, firstly because they too judged the chance of success to be small, and

48 Orange to Jobst II of Holstein-Schaumburg, 18 February 1570, WvO 504; Swart, *Wat bewoog Willem van Oranje*, 570.

49 Swart, *Wat bewoog Willem van Oranje*, 566.

50 Brantôme, *Les vies des grands capitaines estrangers*, 164–176; *Gambriuius*, *Epigrammatum historicus liber*, 29, 34, 35.

secondly because they feared that Orange's enterprise would endanger the Peace of Augsburg of 1555. After the failure of the Prince's initial attempts to capture one or more Netherlandish cities by July 1568, the Lutheran German princes saw no hope of success whatsoever. They provided little or no help and told Orange that the most he could hope for was to retrieve his confiscated lands through the intercession of the Habsburg Emperor on his behalf. Honour and reputation, however, made it impossible for Orange to see this as an acceptable solution. When honour and reputation were involved, noblemen were not inclined to accept any sort of settlement or compromise.

But by the middle of the sixteenth century damage to personal honour and reputation was no longer a sufficient justification for a nobleman to go to war. Orange was keen to stress that he wasn't frivolously taking up arms for his „private affairs“. In the Holy Roman Empire this could easily be construed as breaking the peace (*Landfrieden*), resulting in a further conviction and more dishonour. And so, the Prince presented a greater moral and legal justification for going to war, rooted in those justifications already developed since the 1520s by the Lutherans during their struggle against Emperor Charles V. Orange's moral justification was fighting „tyranny“ and protecting the liberties and „oppressed Christians“ in the Netherlands. This legally justified taking up arms as „Defension und Notwehr“. The Prince claimed that all other manners of getting satisfaction had been exhausted, that he was merely answering violence with violence and defending himself, the Netherlands' liberty, and his sovereign King Philip II against the rebel Duke of Alba who was usurping the King's position. Although this justification for taking up arms has many roots, feudal law forms a key part of it. In fact, Orange's war against Alba, his „abgesagten feindt“, can be classified as a feud.

Orange's invasion of 1568 bears great resemblance to an intervention. Like Elizabeth I in 1562, for instance, he proclaimed that his aim was to protect people and restore a situation that threatened to be damaged beyond repair. This was not a war – a term that apparently denoted a frivolous use of arms for narrow, personal interests, merely to damage others –, but the selfless fulfilment of the duty to protect. This notion of protection, which could only be wielded when all other means had been exhausted, had a legal foundation, and not a confessional one. In their justification for intervention England and France used the same conceptualisation of protection as self-defence as had been developed in the Empire

since the 1520s.⁵¹ The main difference between Orange's intervention and others was that he acted as a vassal and not as a sovereign ruler. Because of this the Prince probably had to make a greater effort to dissimulate personal motives than Elizabeth I or other rulers. In other words, he had to stress that the primary threat was not merely to his own honour and reputation, but to the Netherlands as a whole.

The damage to Orange's honour and reputation, both by his conviction as a rebel and the failure of the intervention, was limited by geography, confession, and the extent of Spanish Habsburg influence. Within the latter sphere the Prince was utterly dishonoured. Outside of it, this was not the case. The fact that he at least stood up to defend himself was important. Orange continued to function within the Empire, albeit that his ties with the Lutheran princes, notably the Elector of Saxony and Landgrave of Hesse, became much looser after 1568. Their mutual esteem probably had been damaged. Orange incurred enormous debts that would not be paid during his lifetime, but any dishonour this entailed was far outweighed by the need to regain what he had lost in the Netherlands.⁵² Also, 1568 created a new reality for Orange in which he stood to gain or lose reputation, as his entire life became tied to defending the „liberty“ and „oppressed Christians“ of the Netherlands against „tyranny“. The image of the selfless protector of the liberty and the protestants of the Netherlands against Spanish oppressors, first projected in 1568, would finally prove very successful and enduring.

Let me end by saying that much more research is required to analyse the development of Orange's honour and reputation during his lifetime after 1568. In fact, very little of the Prince's life between 1569 and 1584 has been studied from this perspective. It is almost as if honour and reputation were only relevant to him in 1568. I have referred a few times to the Nassau family honour and that of Orange's brother Louis of Nassau, but these too are worthy of more research than I was able to conduct for the present article.

51 See *Haug-Moritz*, *Widerstand als „Gegenwehr“*.

52 *Bestelbrief* for colonel Veith Schöner, 10 November 1568, WvO 11725; „Obligation“ for colonel Veith Schöner and his men, 11 February 1569, WvO 11728. Both are notarised copies made in Amsterdam in 1613 and sent to Orange's son Maurice of Nassau by the colonel's heirs Georg and Sebastian Schöner.

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