

en Re- volt

Background to the struggle

In the 16th century, the Low Countries are still part of the Holy Roman Empire. In 1555, they come under the dominion of the King Philip II of Spain. Already under the reign of his father, emperor Charles V, there is unrest in the Low Countries because many people feel drawn to the religious views of Luther and Calvin.

This allegorical painting is based on a print published in Middelburg in 1622 by Jan van de Venne with the title *A Picture of the Miserable State of the Low Countries Under the Cruel Tyranny of the Duke of Alba*. It is already almost fifty years since the Duke of Alba has departed the Low Countries. The painting is therefore not so much a propaganda tool as a reminder of the struggle for independence.



Various members of the aristocracy are publicly executed on the Grote Markt in Brussels. In the foreground Margaret of Parma, the Duke of Alba's predecessor, fishes valuables belonging to the executed from a pool of blood.

The Coat of Arms tapestry

To complete the series the States of Zeeland have a coat of arms tapestry made. It shows the new form of government with in the middle the coat of arms of Zeeland and around this those of the six voting cities: Middelburg, Goes, Vlissingen, Zierikzee, Tholen and Veere. As the Eerste Edele (Senior Nobleman) William of Orange takes in a central position.



Coat of Arms tapestry, Middelburg, 1602-1604 (wool, silk). Design Karel van Mandere, cartoon painter Huybrecht Leyniers, weaver Workshop Francijntje Obry, Collection Province of Zeeland. Photo Ivo Wennekes.

Production of the tapestries

The tapestries are woven from a combination of fine wool and silk threads. On a tapestry like for example *The Battle of Rammekens*, three men work side by side on a single loom for almost a year to make this c. 7.5-meter-long tapestry. The first tapestry, the *Battle of Bergen op Zoom*, is made at the workshop of François Spierinck in Delft. The States of Zeeland think the production takes too long and give the next two commissions to Jan de Maecht, who has recently opened a tapestry workshop in Middelburg. The rest of the tapestries are woven by Jan's son, Hendrik de Maecht. The final tapestry with the coat of arms, is completed in 1604 under the supervision of Hendrik's widow, Francijntje Obry. For all the tapestries made in the De Maecht workshop, the designs are transferred to cartoons by Huybrecht Leyniers.



Restoration

In 1953 the Provincial States decide to restore the tapestries, which have suffered over the centuries. The restoration is entrusted to the *Werkplaats tot Herstel van Antiek Textiel* (Workplace for the Restoration of Antique Textiles), now *ICAT Textielrestauratie*. It is decided to undertake a thorough restoration, in many cases replacing entire threads. Firstly, the *Coat of Arms* tapestry is restored in 1954 and the last piece is completed in 2004. Each member of the restoration team has a particular specialisation: one works on the waves, while another works mainly on the flags. On average, the restoration of each square metre takes 120 weeks of 40 man-hours.

You can read more about the tapestries in Katie Heyning's book *The Zeeland Tapestries*, published by the Zeeuws Museum in 2007 (available in the museum shop).

Commission

In 1591 the States of Zeeland decide to commission a tapestry depicting the *Battle of Bergen op Zoom*. The commissioning of such a tapestry fits well with the ambitions of the region. When completed in 1595, it is hung in the large chamber on the first floor of the princes' accommodation. These rooms are used for receiving important guests of the States of Zeeland, including the stadholder, Maurice, Prince of Orange. In the same year, it is decided to create an entire series of tapestries depicting crucial battles in Zeeland's waters during the war with Spain.

The tapestries are designed by Hendrik Corneliszoon Vroom (c. 1562-1640), the founder of Dutch marine art. For this commission, Vroom visits the various locations where the battles took place and speaks with eyewitnesses such as Joos de Moor and Pieter Reijgersbergh in order to make the depictions as accurate as possible.

Under the orders of Philip II, Protestants and rebels are tortured and sentenced to death.

The Duke of Alba's retinue, comprising advisors and Catholic clergymen, encourage him in his reign of terror.

The members of the States General, the Dutch parliament, have been gagged.



Anonymous, *Allegory on the tyranny of the duke of Alba in the Netherlands*, 1622-1625 (oil on canvas). Collection Zeeland Society. Photo Ivo Wennekes.

Seated on the throne is the Duke of Alba, appointed in 1567 by King Philip II of Spain to suppress the unrest in the Low Countries.

The seventeen provinces are represented by as many virgins on leashes. They implore the Duke of Alba for tolerance for religious differences and for lower taxes.

The Struggle Continues

With the end of the battles in Zeeland's waters in 1576, the Eighty Years' War (1568-1648) is far from over. Zeelanders continue to struggle with Spain both on land and at sea.



Aert Verbeeck, Medals on the battle of the Slaak, 1631 (silver), Collection Zeeland Society, Photo Anda van Riet.

The Battle of the Slaak

On 10 September 1631, in an attempt to divide Holland and Zeeland, Isabella Clara Eugenia, the Spanish sovereign of the Netherlands, sends a fleet of ninety small and large ships in the direction of Zeeland's waters. Two days later the fleet reaches Sint Philipsland. Stadholder Frederick Henry, Prince of Orange, orders the admiralties of Zeeland and Holland to supply as many ships as possible. Fifty ships are dispatched to see off the Spaniards, who sail into the Slaak, a narrow tidal gully with which they are unfamiliar.



J. Looff, Medal on the battle of the Slaak, 1631 (silver), Collection Zeeland Society, Photo Anda van Riet.

The Siege of Hulst

Towards the end of the Eighty Years' War, Hulst is still in Spanish hands. The Dutch army wishes to capture the city. Although Hulst is heavily fortified, the Spanish governor initially has only 600 men at his disposal. Shortly before the arrival of the Dutch troops, he receives reinforcements of several regiments. The Dutch army of 15,000 men defeats the Spaniards.

The battle takes place in two phases. In October 1645 the Dutch attack and capture the eastern part of Hulst with infantry and artillery. Stadholder Frederick Henry then gives the command to attack the centre of the city. A Spanish surprise attack with 250 cavalry fails: most of them are killed in an ambush. The Spanish governor surrenders after eighteen days of fighting on 4 November.