

Dirk Willemsz, the lost son of Asperen.

A board member of our association recently noted that it seems as though the life story of Dirk Willemszoon, an Asperen resident who met his death at the stake in Asperen in 1569, has received more attention, and continues to receive more attention abroad than in Asperen itself.

Upon studying what has been and is being written about Dirk Willemszoon, this indeed appears to be true. Just this year, we received an email from a student at Capital University in Columbus, Ohio, USA, who was working on an assignment for his studies. He asked our association for information that might be missing from the "usual publications." In this context, we delved into these "usual publications" he mentioned and found that, unfortunately, they leave much to be desired.

Dirk Willemszn was an Anabaptist or Mennonite. This was a Christian movement that emerged during the more revolutionary phase of the Reformation. The "Anabaptist movement" reached its peak in 1534 with an uprising in the city of Münster, Germany, where Jan van Leiden (see image) briefly assumed control of the city's worldly authority as a preacher of the Anabaptists. He even declared himself the King of an "Anabaptist Kingdom of Zion." Unfortunately, he quickly turned into a deranged "cult leader" with 17 wives, exercising a reign of terror in the city, resulting in many victims, including one of his wives who wanted to leave him. Money was abolished, and 12 apostles were appointed. The death penalty was imposed for any violation of the "commandments," and, of course, according to Van Leiden's perspective, the "Apocalypse," the end of the world, was imminent. This chaos was halted in 1535 by the Landgrave of Hesse.



A story and course of religious fanaticism that may be familiar to many, as it resembles recent events, such as the Jim Jones cult's collective suicide in 1978, involving 909 men, women, and children in a remote area in French Guiana because, according to Jones, the world was going to end. Finding and maintaining the balance between (popular) preaching and rationality appears to be quite challenging because, regrettably, it's not the only example of such incidents.



The Anabaptists differed from other Reformation movements in their belief that only (adult) believers should be baptized. Since many of their followers had been baptized as children, they had to be rebaptized when joining this movement as adults, hence the term "Anabaptists." According to their beliefs, the resurrection was reserved for those who were baptized as adults and did so willingly out of conviction. The confession of faith should also be entirely voluntary, without interference from the State, whose authority they did not recognize in matters of faith.



In the 16th century, the State was a "Christian Society." Faith and religious practice were intertwined with the state and essentially dictated. Texts used in the church were written or strongly influenced by the political and secular powers of the time, which the Anabaptists rejected. As a result, they quickly came into

conflict with secular authority (the State) because they did not recognize its authority in matters of faith.

Ultimately, Anabaptism found its refuge under Menno Simons (pictured above), who, along with his followers, sought refuge in the new colonies, including the USA. Here, his followers split into a more progressive movement, the Mennonites, and an extremely conservative branch, the Amish, who harked back to the beliefs of the founder of Anabaptism in 1523, the Swiss theologian Ulrich Zwingli.



Amish

Vs.

Mennonites

In the Netherlands, Anabaptism left its mark on movements such as the Pentecostal church and independent Evangelical churches. Common characteristics are pacifism, the separation of church and state, the refusal to take an oath (other than the one they took in their rebaptism to God), and a solemn, withdrawn lifestyle. Their leaders (preachers) emerge from within the community itself.

Diligent readers among you will recall (as published in the *Asperensche Courant* in December 2016, 37th year, number 2, Serial Number 138) that the Baron of Asperen was already strongly reprimanded by the inhabitants of Asperen in 1550. The Baron and his sons, Daniel and his illegitimate son Wessel (appointed as the Sheriff of Asperen in 1563 by his father), supported the reformation of the church and were signatories of the petition to Margaret of Parma, the Regent of the Netherlands under Habsburg (read "Spanish") rule. The Van Boetzelaers advocated for more religious freedom in the Netherlands and supported the "beeldenstorm" (literary translation from Dutch would be 'statue storm' and it entailed the destruction of statues of saints, trappings like wood carvings, icons and wall paintings, formally known as: Iconoclasm or Iconoclastic fury) and the (imposed) reformation of the population. During their rule in Asperen, more Anabaptists came to the city to settle there (under their protection). However, when the Baron appointed an Anabaptist as a teacher in Asperen, this was the last straw for the (still predominantly Catholic) residents of Asperen. They demanded the departure of the 13 "hardlopers" (translated this would mean "runners" of "fast walkers", in Dutch the pronunciation of 'wederlopers' (anabaptists) and 'hardlopers' are similar) a derogatory term for the Anabaptists living in Asperen at that time. On August 22, 1567, the Duke of Alva's arrival marked the end of the Van Boetzelaers' rule. As supporters of the new faith, they were summoned before the "Council of Troubles" and, in absentia, were

sentenced to lose all their property and rights. They fled to Germany, and the Baron unfortunately died before he could reclaim his rights. However, he was finally buried in the Great Church of Asperen.

For the benefit of readers who may not be aware of the motives behind the “Beeldenstorm” or “Iconoclastic Fury,” the following explanation is provided. In 1517, the German monk Martin Luther initiated the Reformation with open criticism of the Catholic Church. His issue with the church was the widespread corruption and the sale of so-called “indulgences” (a document that could be purchased from the church to forgive sins for a considerable payment). It was only around 1566 that groups of Reformation followers emerged, interpreting the 2nd commandment of Exodus 20, ‘You shall not make for yourself a carved image,’ to mean that images of saints, including Mary and Jesus, led to idolatry. Churches were to be devoid of all images (including statues or paintings). This interpretation led to the destruction of statues, icons, and murals from 1566 onwards: the so-called “Iconoclastic Fury” or “Beeldenstorm” in Dutch in the region now known as the Netherlands. These principles apply to varying degrees to this day, with Protestant churches being plain and devoid of any form of decoration, while Catholic churches depict the Stations of the Cross in icons (a form of visual storytelling for the illiterate) and incorporate statues or decorations to celebrate their faith.

On May 6, 1567, a ‘Secretary of the Court of Holland’ named Jacob de Jonge arrived in Heukelum, accompanied by a ‘Sworn Bailiff’ (Bailiff), Ysbrant Stark. Jacob de Jonge was a high-ranking representative of the Duchess of Parma, who came to investigate certain allegations against people in Asperen and its surroundings. The records of these interrogations are included in the documents of the “Council of Troubles” (also known as the ‘Council of Blood’), which was only established in September 1567 to accuse and convict individuals who had destroyed church property or provided an opportunity for such acts. This council was notorious for handing out death sentences, and even high nobles were beheaded after being “tried” before this court. In 1574, this court was dissolved, and all its documents were destroyed. However, some copies have been partially preserved, and despite Johan de Jong’s investigation in 1567 being conducted before the establishment of the Council of Troubles, his reports are included in the documents found in the Brussels City Archives. These documents are not freely accessible, but through a circuitous route, we were able to obtain copies, and we will now provide a portion of these reports for your better understanding of some important points.

The first witness is Brother Dirick van Arssen (68 years old), acting as the Attorney for the Cross Brothers’ Monastery in Asperen, and he solemnly states on March 6, 1567, using the formula “Verbis Sacerdotii et Professionis” (in essence, “I am a priest, so everything I say is true”). He gives the following officially recorded statement about the “Beeldenstorm” or Iconoclasm in Asperen:

***Brother Dirick van Arssen**, acting as the representative of the Cross Brothers' Monastery in Asperen, 68 years old, appeared before my commission as mentioned earlier and, on the oath of his priesthood, attests that there are two convents in the town of Asperen. One for women, namely the St. Ann's Sister House, and one for the Cross Brothers, of which he is a member. He provides this statement not on behalf of the other convent. In the women's convent, there has never been a sermon by an apostate. On a Tuesday in October last year, items were destroyed in the parish church, both convents, and the hospice. I personally witnessed the sons of the Lord of Asperen, along with two castle servants, gleefully destroying the statues in*

the church of the Cross Brothers. The Sheriff of Asperen, who did nothing to prevent it, was also present. I heard from other brothers that the same group did the same in the other churches as well. Some time before they began desecrating the churches, everyone was prohibited (under threat of physical punishment) from removing anything from the churches. This was communicated to various townsfolk in the city. In the end, six soldiers from Culemborg arrived in Asperen to guard the church doors while the gentlemen conducted their business inside. On the same day, Nyeveld (the Sheriff of Vianen) arrived with a preacher from Culemborg, and they dined at the Lord of Asperen's castle. The church vandals, about 20 men with six horses, came to the Cross Brothers' Monastery to eat and spend the night.

*On the Sunday following, one of the brothers from the Cross Brothers' Monastery, dressed in a habit, went to Wouter Jacobssen, the town messenger. He then stood to preach in the church of the Cross Brothers but on the pulpit from the Sister House, which they had brought to our church as we did not have one. In the presence of the Lord of Asperen and his children, this apostate brother delivered a scandalous sermon. Following this, the Lord of Asperen ordered that a new habit, complete with all its accessories, should be made at the expense of the monastery, as the first had only been borrowed. **This apostate brother has since been preaching in the Parish Church, twice a week, except on holy days.** We understand that the sisters of the St. Ann's convent are required by the Lord of Asperen to attend these sermons. They were to come in ordinary clothing, not their habits. I saw the sisters walking down the street to the church in their regular clothes, but I did not go into the church, so I do not know whether they heard the sermon. These same sisters no longer have their own priest since the churches were desecrated. Upon the return of their priest from a visit to Den Bosch, he was grabbed by the two sons of the Lord of Asperen and the Lord of Carnisse (eldest son of Van Boetzelaer) and expelled from the city gate, with the message that he had better not return. On October 11, a group of men went to the Cross Brothers' Monastery, broke into the cell of the St. Ann's convent priest, and tore up his books and destroyed his belongings. Our Prior (Supervisor) also witnessed how they took some valuable items and handed them to the Lord of Asperen at the door.*



Three weeks ago, a new preacher arrived in Asperen, a Frisian. He preaches in the house of the Lord of Asperen and also in the Parish Church. The townspeople of Asperen have been trying to get this preacher and the apostate brother, along with the schoolteacher and the rest of the Mennonites, to leave the city but have not succeeded. These same townspeople went to the monastery recently and asked if a regular mass could be held there again. After much insistence, the Lord of Asperen agreed that, starting on Ash Wednesday (Sunday, March 5, 1567), mass could be celebrated in the monastery as long as the doors remained closed and this mass concluded before the service in the Parish Church so that people could attend there as well. This was communicated by the town messenger to the Prior of the Cross Brothers' Monastery. However, when people arrived, there were so many that the Cross Brothers'

Church was too small, and the doors could no longer be closed.

That is all I know.

In summary, there was a wave of “Beeldenstorm” or Iconoclasm (or Iconoclastic fury) in Asperen on October 8, organized and directed by its owner, Baron Wessel van Boetzelaer and his sons, who were subsequently condemned for it. Formally recorded on Sunday, March 6, 1567, in the statement of Dirick van Arssen, the representative of the Cross Brothers' Monastery in Asperen, this witness states that three weeks prior, a new preacher was appointed by Van Boetzelaer: a Frisian, identified as Quirinus or Quirijn de Palme. Quirinus de Palme was introduced to the town of Asperen as its new preacher on Sunday February 13, 1567. Quirinus was a former ordained (Catholic) priest in Province of Friesland who was re-baptized (so an Anabaptist) in 1560 or 1561. Before the appointment of Quirinus, an apostate (renegade, heretic, someone who renounces their faith) brother from the Brothers of the Holy Cross (Crosier Fathers) Monastery, Joannes Asperensis, held a service on the Sunday following the vandalisms and, since then, two or three times a week (sources differ) in the Great Church of Asperen. Unfortunately for those with different beliefs in Asperen, 1568 was the time to disappear from the town, especially after the lifelong banishment of Wessel van Boetzelaer on August 17, 1568. It would take until 1574 for Spanish troops under Chaippin Vitelli (an Italian mercenary with German troops hired by Alva) to intimidate or drive out the remaining practicing Calvinists in Leerdam and Asperen, culminating in the hanging of Quirijn de Palme and Joost de Jonge (preacher in Leerdam). Quirijn de Palme, as stated before was formally appointed as a preacher in Asperen and Heukelum on February 13, 1566. This is why Vitelli executed him in 1574.



Gaspard Torck served as the Sheriff (also: Reeve or Bailiff) in Asperen in 1569 (and was also the successor of Wessel van Boetzelaer following his escape in 1567). He was also the Droste of Gorinchem and, after 1572, became known as "the defender of the martyrs of Gorcum" (referring to Catholic priests murdered by the Geuzen). He married Johanna van Lynden, Lady of Aalst, and passed away in 1576. When the Geuzen took Gorcum on June 26, 1572, Torck did not surrender the castle to them, which was filled with religious relics and Catholic refugees. After a lengthy siege, the castle ultimately fell, and the monks, nuns, and priests who had taken refuge there were subjected to torture and execution.

For those unfamiliar with this Dutch term, the “Geuzen” (originally “Gueux” or “beggars” in French, the language used in the court of Margaretha of Parma where 200 lower and middle nobles handed her a petition to ease the persecution of the protestants in The Netherlands. The nobles were slighted by the courtiers and called “beggars” or “Gueux” which they retained as a rallying cry in the following conflict) were initially members of the lower to middle nobility in the Netherlands and their fighting men who were the first to formally advocate for religious freedom in the country. They were excessively punished for this stance by King Philip II of Spain. After fleeing, they became pirates operating from the Province of Zeeland in the Netherlands and ports in England (under the protection of Queen Elizabeth I of England). They plundered ships from Catholic countries such as Spain, Venice, and France in the Strait of Dover and the North Sea. Due to the damage they inflicted on Spanish ships, they were actively opposed by the Spaniards. In the later stages of the Eighty Years' War, the

original nobles were restored to their rights, and the Geuzen primarily consisted of undisciplined elements that caused more harm than good to the rebellion. Catholic citizens and clergy were systematically murdered, and monasteries were plundered for personal gain. William of Orange dismissed and banished the leaders of the Geuzen after the murder of the Martyrs of Gorkum, which had taken place on their orders.

While the Geuzen played a crucial role in the conflict, without which victory would likely have been impossible, the atrocities committed during the later period cast a lasting stain on their reputation.

Parts of the Turck or Torck family remained Catholic and settled in the southern provinces, while other branches fought for and with William of Orange in the Eighty Years' War. The Sheriff or Droste had the authority of the time, which included the ability to impose penalties for lesser offenses. Torck was clearly Catholic and had negative experiences with the Geuzen and, so presumably, with those of different beliefs. In 1573, the Duke of Alva left the Netherlands, and by 1575, Spain was effectively bankrupt, making the end of the war seem near. The Spanish king could no longer pay his troops, who then resorted to looting in the southern provinces (modern-day Belgium). Antwerp was massacred and set ablaze in 1576, which temporarily ended the presence of Spanish troops in the Netherlands. The day after this massacre, the "17 rebellious provinces" signed the "Union of Brussels" (in Brussels, of course), which appointed William of Orange as the leader of a General States that could convene independently (not by the order of a king, which was quite revolutionary) and declared a general amnesty for the rebels, allowing the Van Boetzelaer family to return from exile. The discussion of whether the Catholic faith would still be tolerated persisted until 1578 when Calvinists sought to ban this religion, while William of Orange advocated for religious freedom. The matter became violent, with new waves of "Beeldenstorm" or Iconoclasm, causing a division where the land south of the major rivers remained predominantly Catholic, and the north became Calvinist. During this period, the Brothers of the Holy Cross Monastery in Asperen was evacuated, and they relocated to their sister monastery in Cuijk (south of the major rivers). The Eighty Years' War was not yet over, but that is a story for another time. For now, it concerns the execution of Dirk Willemszn.

Dirk Willemszoon (often abbreviated as Willemszn or Willemsz) was born in Asperen in 1554, and it is believed that he chose to be "re-baptized" at the age of 15 or 20. He was arrested in Asperen in 1569 (this is confirmed), and on May 16, 1569, he was executed by being burned at the stake at the execution site in Asperen (near the location of the new sports hall). He had escaped from captivity (one account suggests from a cell in the church tower above the bells, while another account says he escaped from Waddenstein Castle), fled across the Hondegat (a part of Waddenstein's moat, so a cell in the church seems unlikely), and returned to save his pursuer (an assistant to the Sheriff, in other words, a "Burgomaster"), which led to his capture and subsequent death. It's a sort of "you reap what you sow" scenario, but one that strongly resonates with the Mennonites and the Amish. It is said that he "escaped," but he knowingly faced a certain and very painful death to save his enemy. He was arrested in Asperen by the aforementioned Sheriff Torck or one of the three Burgomasters of Asperen at the time and was interrogated and sentenced in Asperen. A verbatim report of this has been preserved.



Dirk Willemszoon, born in Asperen, presently imprisoned and unbound by pain or iron chains, or otherwise, has confessed before the Sheriff and us Schepenen (Aldermen), that he, being approximately 15, 18, or 20 years old at the time, was rebaptized in the house of a certain Pieter Willemse in Rotterdam. Furthermore, he has held and admitted to secret gatherings and prohibited teachings in his house in Asperen at various times, in opposition to our Holy Christian faith and the Royal Majesty's Edict, which should not be tolerated but severely punished as an example to

others. Therefore, we, the aforementioned Schepenen, with mature deliberation of the Council, have drawn up and conceived all that was to be established in this matter, in the name and on behalf of His Royal Majesty as the Count of Holland, etc. We have thus captured and condemned the said Dirk Willemse, who remains obstinate in his views, to be executed by fire, so that death shall follow, and declare all his property confiscated for the benefit of His Royal Majesty.

Done on the 16th of May before Schepenen, Cornelis Govertsz, Jan van Stege Jansz, Adriaan Gerritsen, Adriaen Jansz, Lukas Rutgersz, Jan Jansz, Jan Roelofsz, in the year 1569.

Extracted from the city register, this copy has been found to correspond on the 15th of October 1600. In acknowledgment of me, secretary of Asperen, 't Scheerenberg.

The Sheriff was the highest official in the Schepenbank (municipal government) and was appointed directly by the Lord and represented the Lord in the Schepenbank. He represented the Lord and ensured that the Schepenen met regularly at the administrative level. His role in the judicial field was of greater importance. He had to investigate criminals, act as an accuser before the Schepenbank, ensure that imposed penalties were carried out, and presided over the Schepenbank. In 1569, Gorinchem was fully occupied by Spanish troops, and the appointed Burgomasters, Schepenen, and, of course, the Sheriff supported the King of Spain and his troops.

Schepenen were generally appointed by the Sheriff or the sovereign. They were obligated to accept the office of Schepen. They gathered for the administration of the Schepenbank a few times a year. In these meetings, agreements were made regarding the amount of taxes and their distribution, as well as discussions about local interests. In the judicial system, the Schepenen were the judges who delivered the verdicts in both criminal and civil cases. They were also responsible for voluntary jurisdiction, settling civil cases such as inheritance disputes.

Burgomasters, also known as village masters or townsmen, had a purely administrative function. They participated in Schepenen meetings as representatives of ordinary citizens. The Burgomasters were appointed by the Lord upon the recommendation of the Schepenen.

Unlike today, the Schepenen were the people in the town who made decisions, while the Burgomasters (in Asperen, there were three) had a more administrative, supporting role. The Sheriff was the highest-ranking person in a town after the Lord (owner) of the Lordship or town. In the case of Asperen, Gaspard (Jasper) Torck was effectively the most important person in Asperen, Gorinchem, and the entire region. When Baron Van Boetzelaer was condemned (in absentia) by the Council of Troubles, his property had effectively fallen to the crown, namely King Philip II of Spain, with the Duke of Alba representing him in Brussels at that time. The Sheriff was formally appointed by King Philip II, and in Dirk Willemszoon's verdict, you can see that his properties were declared forfeited to this King (as the owner of the Lordship of Asperen) and not to the town itself.



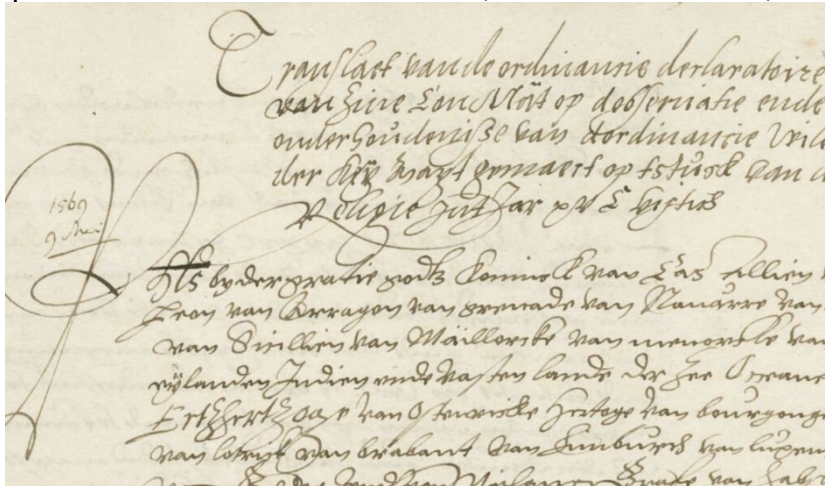
The Schepenen of Asperen were appointed by the Sheriff and were probably cut from the same cloth, likely being wealthy residents of the town, and at the very least, followers of the prescribed faith. Not all of them can be traced, but Cornelis Govertsz certainly can. In 1574, it is described that he leased 5 morgen and 2 hond plus 25 roeden of land from "the Lord of Asperen," also known as the Govert Liefmans Hoeve or later "De Vierde Hoeve" near Asperen. He also leased 1 morgen in Griet Lauwen Hoeve (later the Achtste Hoeve). He took over this lease from his father, Govert Pietersz.

This example shows how challenging it is to trace individuals, their parents, and their roles in the whole story. People did not have names like "Van Herwaarden" or "De Man" in every generation. Instead, a father might be named Govert Pietersz (Govert, the son of Pieter), and his sons were named Cornelis Govertsz (Cornelis, the son of Govert). But there were other people with Govert as their first name in Asperen during that period, so are these brothers, or did their fathers coincidentally both have the name Govert? This goes on for generations. We have lease documents for Asperen going back to the 13th century, but the names are always the same. Only when something more than just a name and a year is mentioned in the document is it possible to make connections and draw lines. The other Schepenen also appear in the register, all of them leasing land and a farm in Asperen, just as more than one person named Willemsz. who leased land in Asperen owned by the Lord at the same time.

So, we have established that Dirk Willemszoon (or Willemszn, Willemsz.) lived in Asperen in 1569, was arrested there, and was sentenced to the stake. Additionally, I have provided you with the surrounding circumstances. In 1568, the Baron and his family fled just before or after their condemnation by the Council of Troubles, as well as his two legitimate sons. His illegitimate son Wessel (who was the Sheriff of Asperen at the time) also fled. As early as 1550, there was a conflict between the Asperen residents and their Baron regarding the growing number of "Hardlopers" (read: Anabaptists), who were settling in Asperen, protected by the Baron, who chose the Anabaptist or Mennonite beliefs over the prescribed Catholic version. It can be assumed that the Anabaptists or pronounced reformers also fled around 1567/1568. Or had the population perhaps become more open-minded by that time? And where would they flee if they were born in Asperen?

After all, the rejection of the Reformation stemmed from an edict by Charles V, the father of the current King Philip II. William of Orange and much of the Dutch nobility presented a petition to Governess (acting on behalf of Philip II) Margaret of Parma on April 5, 1566,

asking for leniency in enforcing the Edicts of Charles V. By that time, there had already been a period of tolerance toward the new faith. It was only after the destruction in churches ("Beeldenstorm" or Iconoclasm) and the associated "sacrilege" of defiling sacred statues and decorations, as well as the mistreatment of priests, monks, and nuns, that Margaret took action. The Council of Troubles, or Council of Blood, was established, investigating the actions of individuals during the "'Beeldenstorm" or Iconoclasm," and began imposing penalties. Baron Van Boetzelaer fled, Alva arrived in 1567, and the armed uprising began.



But in a place like Asperen, very little actually changed. The "Beeldenstorm" or Iconoclasm was investigated, and penalties were meted out. Life then went back to its usual course, and even someone like Dirk Willemszoon, a native of Asperen, who had openly confessed to his beliefs, continued to live there without problems.

On May 9, 1569, however, this changed. Fed up with all the discussions in the Netherlands, Philip II ratified the edicts of his father Charles V regarding the Reformation with his Ordinance Declaratoire 1090.26.

Until that moment, there was still a belief that discussions and arguments could be meaningful, but this changed afterwards. There was only one religion, and it was mandatory for everyone. Deviant behavior in this regard was punishable by death. If the sinner converted, all was well, but if they persisted, they would be put to the stake. It would have taken several days for this news to reach Sheriff Torck, but from that moment on, it was entirely predictable: Dirk Willemszoon was arrested after May 9, 1569, imprisoned in Castle Waddestein, and interrogated. Torture was unnecessary; Dirk confessed and professed to his beliefs and refused to renounce them by converting to Catholicism. According to the documents, his conviction by the Schepenen of Asperen and his burning took place on May 16, 1569, in a field now located between De Wiel and Leerdamseweg, or at the site of De Wiel itself, which was formed during a dike breach in 1658 and did not exist in 1569.

See this drawing of Galgenwiel from 1707 on the next page. It has always been assumed that the Wiel was called Galgenwiel because the gallows stood here before the Wiel came into



existence. According to this drawing of Galgenwiel from 1707, the gallows ("galgen" in Dutch) are located right next to the Wiel (a "wiel" is literal a "wheel" like from a cart or now a car, used in this context it is a round or droplet shaped body of water behind a dike caused by a break in the dike in times of high water. The water forces itself through a fissure in the dike and washed away soil and sand directly behind the fissured dike forming a permanent body of water after the dike is repaired later), on the west side, not in the water. Another possibility is that this drawing from 1707 depicts a situation with new gallows replacing the gallows washed away from the plot where Galgenwiel is now located in 1658.

In short, whether at the location of the gallows depicted in 1707 or at the site of the current Galgenwiel, Dirk Willemszoon was tied to a pole on May 16, 1569, with bundles of brushwood underneath. In the presence of the Sheriff and presumably Schepenen and Aspernaren (the residents of Asperen), the bundles of brushwood were set on fire. This was a gruesome way to execute someone, regardless of the madness of doing so because of his beliefs.

Dirk was not unique in this; during these weeks in May 1569, there were many other bonfires in



places like Bruges, Utrecht, Kortrijk, Amsterdam, Middelburg, Antwerp, and many more. So what makes Dirk Willemszoon so famous, his death so well-known to Anabaptists and other factions within the Reformed Church?

It's not simply because Dirk Willemszoon came from Asperen. Unfortunately, more residents of Asperen ended up on the stake. Earlier in this article, I mentioned the Kingdom of Zion, the Anabaptist kingdom declared by Jan van Leiden in the city of Münster in 1535. Before the rise of Menno Simons as the leader of the Anabaptists, it was a more radical movement that mainly attracted fanatics who saw the end of the world in the current state of affairs. Because they believed the end was near, these fervent followers were more missionary in nature. They wanted to convince as many people as possible of their faith in the shortest possible time to save them from hell. The essence was that baptism was only possible "by conviction," meaning the person being baptized knew what they were choosing and did so willingly, not as a baby as was common in the Catholic period. The small group of Anabaptists believed they were surrounded by people who did not know, understand, or believe this, and thus, in their conviction, were condemned to hell. Therefore, they did not hesitate to use violence to force people "into the faith" because it was the only way to save them from hell.

I understand one has to make an effort to understand this, but the concept is not so new. The burning of Anabaptists had the same purpose. By killing people at the stake, the belief or thought was that their souls were "purified by the flames" and could thus be cleansed and perhaps still travel to heaven. The burning was therefore considered functional and not a punishment. The method of the Anabaptists is also not unique: converting the Indians in South America by the Spaniards and Portuguese to then work them to death in the gold mines had the same goal. In this world, the Indian was already lost, but by converting them, they at

least had a chance of reaching heaven, which was much more important than their physical (abuse) treatment on earth. The delusions of humanity are numerous.

In 1535, there were not only uprisings of Anabaptists in Münster to establish an earthly kingdom that would force all residents to follow the faith but also in many other places. One such case was in our own Amsterdam, but it also happened in Leiden, Friesland, and Groningen. On May 10, 1535, Anabaptists occupied the town hall of Amsterdam, murdered a Mayor, and attempted to seize power in the city. However, this attempt failed, and their leader (Jan van Geel) was the first to step outside as a scapegoat for the City Guard and was shot. His followers (106 men and 8 women) "are put to death by the executioner by being drowned alive" as stated in the judgment. The judgment, in part, reads:

"Considering that Leentgen, the wife of Jan van Rheenen, Adriana Jans, a girl from Benskop, Goechgen Jans, from Lubik, born outside Gouda, Leentgen Hendrix, a girl from Hertogenbosch, Griet Pieters Mollen, a girl, Marritge, Nadminx, a girl from Alkmaar, Aeltje Gillis, a girl from Benskop, Jannetje Jans, a girl from Utrecht, Aeltjen Wouters, born in Asperen, allowed themselves to be rebaptized, and 106 sentenced to the same as before to be executed with water and put to death while alive by the executioner;

Done on May 15, 1535, in the presence of the Sheriff Goossen Janssen Rekalff, mayors, and all the Schepenen.

May 15, 1535, Amsterdam.

Aeltjen Wouters was an early adopter in 1535, and she and many other Anabaptists died during this period because their leaders, such as Jan van Geel and Jan van Leiden, preached the use of force to convert people to their faith. Another figure who is less frequently mentioned in research on this topic was Joost Verbeeck, also a Brother in the Crosier monastery in Asperen (possibly also under the alias Joost Vermeeren, but there is justifiable doubt about this) or Joos Cruysere (Joost the Crosier or Joost the Brother of the Order of The Holy Cross), an Anabaptist elder and preacher in Antwerp but a follower of non-violence. Unfortunately, Joost Verbeeck was arrested on June 7 (at 11:00 pm), 1561, in Antwerp. In his head, were the names of all professing Anabaptists in Antwerp, and many of them were personally baptized by him. For this reason, he was brutally tortured, likely on "the rack," which tore all the ligaments (tendons) in his arms and legs. He was sentenced to be burned at the stake while sitting in a chair (he could no longer use his arms and legs). The Sheriff added at his sentencing that he was impressed by his perseverance and was convinced for life that "his people" (Anabaptists) were telling the truth and nothing but the truth in the future, an exceptional statement for that period. Joost Verbeeck or Joos Cruysere was placed in his chair in the market in Antwerp, and around him, they built a house of straw that was set on fire. Bystanders heard him sing a self-written song, "O God, ick moet u claghen mijns herten droevich leyt" ('O God, I must lament the sadness in my heart', published in 1562 in the Nieu Liedeneboek and is still found in Mennonite hymn books to this day. His courage, but above all, his non-violent resistance to the connection between Church and State (by Philip II), made him one of the later examples and reasons for the emergence of the Mennonite movement and faith.

After the (organized) "Beeldenstorm" or Iconoclasm in Asperen, another Crosier Brother, Johannes or Jan (later known as Jan Asperensis), at the request of Van Boetzelaer, became the very first (Reformed) preacher in the large St. Catharina Church in Asperen. As outlined in

earlier in this article, a precursor to the Council of Troubles questioned people in Asperen regarding the organized “Beeldenstorm” or Iconoclasm in Asperen. Margaretha van Parma was particularly concerned about the violation of the Beguines (ladies) Convent, as the violation of nuns was very sensitive to her. But in these interrogations, a Brother of the Crosier monastery was mentioned as the first (Reformed) preacher to ascend the pulpit in Asperen, wearing borrowed attire, where he conducted the very first Reformed service in Asperen on October 9, 1566. Van Boetzelaer required the other brothers and the nuns of the Beguine Convent to attend this service "in secular clothing" (not in habit), which was heavily counted against him in his judgment by the Council of Troubles.

Jan Asperensis was (see list of people taking part in the synode of Wezel (Germany), just like Joost Verbeeck, a brother in the Cross Brothers Monastery in Asperen. The Cross Brothers are an order in the Catholic Church that frequently ran into problems due to their divergent position on matters and, in light of the later careers of some of their members, can be considered almost a precursor to the Lutheran movement. Jan or Johannes Asperensis (simply a Latin translation of 'Asperen') conducted two services a week in the Great Church in Asperen after October 9, 1566 (as noted in the records of the Council of Troubles). From Sunday, March 5, 1567, a Catholic mass was once again celebrated in Asperen, but this time in the church of the Cross Brothers (located at the present site of the Van Herwaarden family's villa on the corner of Minstraat and Brugstraat in Asperen).

Johannes Lippius.
Godefridus Pistorius.
Willem van Zuylen van Nyevelt.
Petrus de Rycke.
Johannes Asperensis.
Dezelfde in den naam van Hermannus Millenius.
't Is soo, Johannes Masius.
Johannes Wicodurstadius.
Hermannus van der Weede.
Everhardus Laranus.
Johannes Woudanus.
Cornelius de Vos.
Gerardus Cuylenburgius.
Gerardus Venradius.
Adrianus Vossius.
Jakobus Richoboscus.
Ik Johannes Lippius heb dit onderschreven in den naam dergenen die hier volgen, daar toe verzocht zijnde,
Casparus Coolhaas.
Philippus Raesveldt.
Hermannus Rachemius.
Cornelius Ægidii.
Petrus Dathenus heeft onderschreven in den naam van Johannes Oostendorpius.
Leonhardus Panhusius.
Albertus Goudrianus.
Christianus Sinapius Venlo.
Ludovicus Sanarii Heclomensis.
Georgius Ochamus Sylvanus.

Johannes Cubus.
Dezelfde in den naam van Laurentius Bruyminck, anders, Bruxellensis; en van Christophorus Lantsochtius van Brugge.
Henricus Michaël.
Johannes Ydenius.
Franciscus Franckennus.
Philippus Marnixius.
Hubertus Busseurs.
Cornelius Poppius.
Simeon van Habosch.
Johannes Hove Bergensis.
Jacobus Pontifortius, anders, Sterckenbrugghe.
Jacobus Laubegeois.
Christophorus Becanus.
Cornelius Rhetius.
Gaspar van Bygaarden van Brussel.
De navolgende personen, de Lectuur der overgezette copy hun gedaan zijnde, hebben ook onderteekent.
Reynier de Pestere.
Gooris van den Boogaerde.
Lieven de Somere.
Jan van Wingen, voor mij zelve.
Matthys van Loo.
Pieter van Hoorebeke.
Christoffel uit Waes.

While in exile in Germany, Asperensis participated in the Synod of Wesel on November 3, 1568, where the establishment and constitution of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands were prepared. He played a foundational role in the current Christian Church in the Netherlands (see also www.kerkrecht.nl/node/3591). This is a fact that has somewhat escaped the awareness of Asperen. Quirinus de Palme is mentioned as the first minister or pastor of Asperen, but his starting date is unknown. He was appointed by Van Boetzelaer as the minister in the Great Church on February 13, 1567, after Jan Asperensis had held services in the Great Church twice a week (excluding so-called holy days) since October 9, 1566. What is known about Quirinus, or simply Quirijn, is that he was a Catholic priest in Oldemirdum (Friesland) and converted to the side of the Reformation in the 1560s. Fleeing to Emden in the region of the Augsburg Confession (Lutherans), the Reformists hoped for help from the German princes, but the differences in interpretation

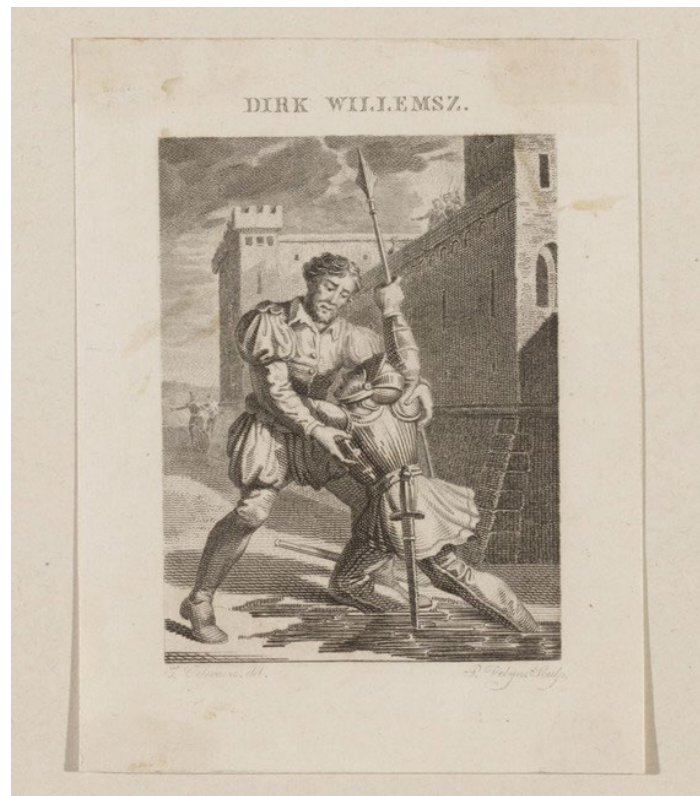
between the various factions turned out to be significant. The scattered Dutch believers in the area lived in poverty. In 1566, Quirijn decided to return to the Catholic faith, leading to his excommunication from the Reformed community of Leeuwarden. Excommunication is not exclusive to Catholics; different factions excommunicate members who, in their view, hold divergent opinions. Quirijn repented his return (motivated by poverty) to the Catholic Church,

and Menso Poppius, a minister near Emden, allowed him to preach from his pulpit. In the vicinity of Emden were Drosts and nobles from the Netherlands, including Culemborg (Van Pallandt) and Wessel van Boetzelaer's sister, Catharina van Boetzelaer, who moved in Reformed circles with her husband Van Praet, who had to flee in 1566. How De Palme came into contact with Wessel van Boetzelaer is unknown but may have been through his sister. Upon the approach of Spanish mercenaries in 1574, Quirijn fled Asperen and Heukelum for Leerdam. It is difficult to say why he fled, but it's possible that Asperen remained strongly divided or still leaned toward Catholicism. Clearly, Quirijn did not feel safe or protected there, seeking refuge with his colleague in Leerdam. Unfortunately, this was a mistake. The Spanish mercenaries, commanded by the Italian Vitelli, captured Leerdam and hanged Quirijn, his colleague from Leerdam, Joost de Jonge, and the schoolmaster of Leerdam, Rogier Joosten.

In 1572, Rutger VI van Boetzelaer (son of the exiled Baron Wessel VI van Boetzelaer Van Asperen) returned from exile in Germany at the request of William of Orange. In 1574, he briefly served as the Governor of Gorinchem and participated in peace negotiations with the Spaniards. He was involved in the Union of Dordrecht and the Pacification of Ghent, playing an essential role in recognizing William of Orange as Count of Holland in 1584. The Van Boetzelaers had fought and sacrificed for the Reformation but ended up in high positions in the new Dutch dynasty. Rutger van Boetzelaer was present and involved in the Pacification of Ghent, a milestone in the 80-year war in 1574. This treaty included a general amnesty for all parties by William of Orange, with one very peculiar and remarkable exception: Wessel van Boetzelaer, Rutger VI van Boetzelaer's father, who had been sentenced by the Council of Troubles in 1568 and was living in exile in Germany. The general pardon did not apply to him. Perhaps Rutger was unwilling to relinquish his new position at court to the rightful Lord of Asperen? Wessel senior died in 1575 and was ultimately reburied in the Great St. Catharinakerk in Asperen.

As the Lord of Asperen, Wessel VI van Boetzelaer had the sole right to appoint a minister. Quirijn de Palme was appointed as the minister by Van Boetzelaer on February 13, 1567, and he served in this role until his murder in Leerdam on July 25, 1574. However, the first minister of Asperen was Johannes Asperensis from October 9, 1566, to February 13, 1567, a fact that has gone unrecognized until now. Asperensis (simply Latin for Asperen) was a brother in the Order of the Holy Cross Monastery but would later play a role in the establishment of a unified (Calvinist) church in the Netherlands.

Philippus Velijn 1802, from: H. Tollens in the Muzen-almanac of 1819.



Therefore, Dirk Willemsz is not the only one who met a gruesome end because of his faith. Asperen has been a refuge for Anabaptists and Reformed believers for some time, and it's not surprising that a native of Asperen like Dirk would adhere to these beliefs. What's exceptional is that he did not renounce his faith and remained steadfast, fully aware of the punishment he would face. According to tradition, Dirk was imprisoned in the seat of the Lord of Asperen or his representative in 1569, Castle Waddestein. Dirk managed to escape from there and fled across the ice on the moat (a remaining part of which is now called "Het Hondengat").



This is an image of Waddestein Castle from a map depicting the town of Asperen in 1549 by Jasper Adriaansz, showing the "Limietscheiding" (fiefdom boundary) between the County of Holland and Gelderland. Half of Asperen is a fief granted by the Count of Holland to Wessel van Boetzelaer, and the other half belongs

to the Count of Holland himself after taking it from the Pieck family. It provides a reasonably accurate representation of the reality around Waddestein Castle. From above, the moat on the west side, with a tower at regular intervals, descends from the Linge River. It ends at the Begijnenklooster with a large tower under which a water gate (known as 'hondenpoortje' or "Dog's Gate") is located, allowing the Min River (flowing within the city) to join the moat outside the city wall. The moat also comes from the south side, along the Heukelumse Poort, towards the reed-covered (marshy) moat zone around the castle itself. The Outer Bailey of Waddestein Castle is connected to the castle itself by a bridge on wooden posts that spans the moat around the castle. The black arrow indicates the position of the water now known as "Het Hondengat" (translated in English: The Dog's Hole) today.

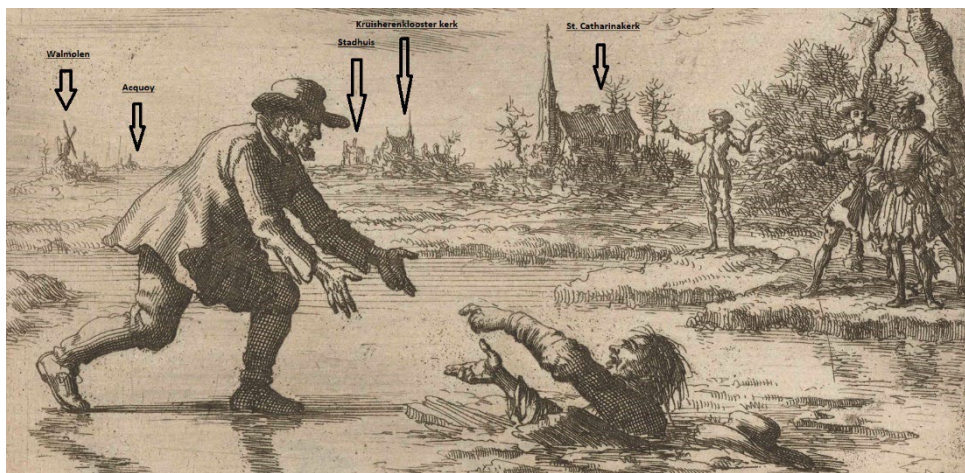


In 2023, the castle, outer bailey, many of the walls, all the towers, including Heukelumse Poort, have disappeared. See the picture on the previous page: The elements are indicated with black lines and are surrounded by water, depicted with a thin white line. Appeldijk in 1549 starts where the Waddestein moat ends, but in 2023, it has been extended to the higher section of the outer bailey where Süter built his villa in the 19th century. This villa, Süter, is indeed located on the remnants of Waddestein's foundations. The present-day Appeldijk, with its later addition, has destroyed much of the original landscape around Waddestein. Therefore, it's not surprising that people did not understand the location of Waddestein's remains until they were unintentionally discovered in 2016. If you erase the later extension of Appeldijk, the Waddestein moat is once again in its full glory in the terrain, with the current "Hondengat" being a part of it.

Dirk Willemsz is imprisoned in Waddestein after his arrest in Asperen by the Sheriff. He has been or will be interrogated, after which a meeting of the Aldermen will take place, with the Sheriff as the (Public) prosecutor. Since Dirk's views are well known in Asperen, and he is likely not the only Anabaptist or at least Reformed believer in the city, he is one of the most prominent ones. Meetings are held in his house, and people are baptized. He is, as we might say today, an "elder" of the Reformed movement in Asperen, despite the uncertainty about his age. The Martyrs' Mirror books from the 17th century claim that he was born in Asperen in 1554. However, this would mean that he was 15 years old at his conviction and execution, which is unlikely. The formal documents state that he was baptized at the ages of 15, 18, or 20 in Rotterdam. Therefore, he could not have been born in 1554. These Martyrs' Mirror books are not always known for their strict adherence to reality, containing stories that were written almost 100 years after the events. They are also not the most reliable source of information, and they were intended to generate propaganda for the increasing anti-Catholic sentiment in the 17th century. The persecution of the remaining Catholic population in the Netherlands had nothing to do with the 80 Years' War, the Spaniards, Alva, or the Inquisition. It was the result of political tensions in the 17th century after the resurgence of Catholicism in the Netherlands. Previously Reformed churches (originally Catholic) were being taken over by Catholic parishes due to lack of maintenance or a too small Reformed congregation. In short, Catholicism was thriving and growing in the Netherlands, which made Calvinist Netherlands suddenly feel threatened "in their own land." The resulting witch hunt against prominent Catholic families in the Netherlands ultimately led to what was called "The Pillarization" until around 1950. It was a kind of "Apartheid" in the Netherlands, where separated churches also meant separated bakers, butchers, associations, towns or villages, cultures, schools, and universities, etc. The religious communities remained separate, forming their own communities side by side without interaction.

So, Dirk escapes by stepping onto the ice of the castle moat or through a gate. Ice in May? You might think it's impossible, and indeed, in a time when ice is only around for a few days or a week in 2023, there was a period in the 16th century we now call "The Little Ice Age." This was an extended period of extreme weather conditions from 1430 to 1850, and it had nothing to do with excess or insufficient CO₂ in the atmosphere. In the summer of 1588, a polar storm froze the North Sea, crops froze in the fields, and Pieter Bruegel painted "Hunters in the Snow" (1565), while Hendrik Avercamp painted "Winter Landscape" (1608) in the summer. So, as unrealistic as it may seem, it's possible that there was ice on the Waddestein moat in May 1569. Additionally, there was another unusual development that makes this very

strange: the introduction of the Gregorian Calendar on October 4, 1582. Until then, the Roman Calendar was in use, which gradually fell out of sync due to not accounting for leap years. The decision was made to compensate for leap years by adding extra days in February (as we still do), and on October 4, 1582, it was advanced to October 15, 1582, to correct the previous leap year errors. Therefore, on May 16, 1569, it wasn't climatically like a typical mid-May, but more like late May or early June. It might seem bizarre, but ice was present during this period.



The story goes that the saved soldier (possibly a Mayor) and/or his colleagues approach the apparent authority figure, standing upright (with a ruff collar and sword), and observe that Dirk Willemsz's

actions deserve his freedom. This authority figure is often referred to as the Mayor, but this is an interpretation from a later time. As mentioned earlier, the Mayor (there were always three in Asperen) was a citizen of the city, serving this function for 1 to 3 years, appointed by the Aldermen. The Mayor was the assistant to the Aldermen, presided over by the Sheriff. A simple fact is that this is not a movie; ordinary city residents did not carry long weapons, but at best a dagger for daily tasks or eating. The wearing of a blade like a rapier (as opposed to a sword) was reserved for nobles or individuals of high standing. A sword is handed to a soldier for use in his job, a rapier is an expensive, thin bladed personal weapon. It is most likely that this person represents the Sheriff. He actually has the power to make such a decision. However, he decides that Dirk should return to prison to appear before the Aldermen for judgment or (more accurately) condemnation. The facts were clear and undisputed.

The story takes a rather unusual turn here. Dirk Willemsz is not imprisoned again in Waddestein Castle but in a cell within the church tower. The exact appearance of this cell is not known. However, it is known to be on a particular floor of the tower. On this floor, there is also a sort of "stocks" where a prisoner's ankles could be clamped between two beams with notches. It wasn't a torture device, but if your ankles were secured in it with a lock, you wouldn't be able to walk. In the photo shown here (taken in Doornenburg Castle), you can see one of these stocks lying on the ground. The door to this floor in the



church was, from what I understand, once equipped with a small window or hatch through which the prisoner could be observed before opening the door. This door has long since disappeared, but the stocks (larger than shown in the photo) still exist. Why this relocation? You would expect that Waddestein Castle had facilities to imprison someone, but perhaps it didn't. Or there might have been too many people in the castle sympathetic to Dirk? After all, Van Boetzelaer and his family had fled not long before, and, at his request, Reformed services had been held in Waddestein Castle for many years. It is also highly likely that his staff (servants and soldiers) were of the same persuasion or at least sympathetic to the Anabaptists and the Reformed in the city. In the eyes of Sheriff Torck, many in Waddestein Castle would be regarded as suspicious. Still, it might have been too challenging to root out this nest of "rebels" entirely, so Dirk is (re-) imprisoned in the church tower instead of Waddestein Castle, which would have had a cell or prison like almost all church towers in that era.

The escape story was reenacted in Asperen in the 1980s during the city's millennium celebration. In this reenactment, Dirk escaped from the church by lowering himself with a rope from the tower. While this spectacle appeared exciting, there is no concrete basis for this in historical records. Interestingly, questions from the United States often focus on the Great



Church and its cell in the tower. This aspect - imprisonment in the church - is nearly as important as Dirk's willingness to sacrifice himself. However, having a prison or cell in a church tower was quite normal during this period. What we think of as a modern prison is an invention of the 19th century. During this time, imprisonment wasn't a punishment but rather a place to temporarily detain someone for questioning, etc. After a conviction, the punishment would typically be immediate, usually physical punishments or the death penalty. Some documents mention a period of 4 days between Dirk Willemsz's arrest and his execution. This wouldn't be unreasonable. On May 9, 1569, a decree was issued by Philip II stating that apostates should either convert or be put to death by burning. This blend of secular power enforcing faith through punishment was precisely what the Anabaptists rejected. In today's Netherlands, we would rightly say that the church and state have nothing to do with each other (as our constitution specifies). But in this period, Catholic faith and the state were completely intertwined. The King (Philip II in this case) was anointed by the church, not elected by his people or nobles. The King was accountable to God, not to his people.



Despite England's self-proclaimed Protestantism with the Anglican Church, King Charles II, in May 2023, was "anointed with holy oil" and did not take an oath to the Constitution, as our King Willem Alexander of Orange Nassau did. Charles II was appointed by

God to rule over his people and is not accountable to his people. In fact, he technically owns his entire realm as King and can do pretty much as he pleases. Our King has taken an oath to the constitution, much like a president would. In essence, we are more like a republic (a positive legacy of Napoleon Bonaparte, among others), with a hereditary King or Queen serving as the head of state.

Philip II was King because God (or more accurately, the Catholic Church as God's only representative on Earth) had crowned him as King. He derived his authority from the Catholic Church. Rejecting this church was akin to rejecting him as a worldly authority, and that was obviously unacceptable; it amounted to high treason. This is why the secular power reacted so harshly. This confusion was also evident in the Anabaptists of 1535. Faith had always been tied to secular authority, so they appropriated this as well when they had the chance. This was an error corrected by Menno Simons, who replaced the trappings of worldly power with compassion and non-violent resistance.

Dirk Willemsz was arrested on May 12, 1569, and was initially imprisoned in Waddestein Castle. Possibly on May 13 or 14, 1569, he escaped from the castle and was then imprisoned in the cell in the tower of St. Catharina Church. In his cell, either in Waddestein or in the church tower, he would have been interrogated. Chains of iron and torture were unnecessary, as the verdict of May 16, 1569, states. Dirk did not object to confirming what he was "suspected" of, as he had openly declared his beliefs for years and organized meetings, and even worse, baptized fellow townspeople or visitors in his house in Asperen. He did not renounce his faith, fully aware of the consequences. On May 16, 1569, he was sentenced by the seven appointed Aldermen of Asperen:

"So Dirk Willemszn, born in Asperen, currently imprisoned, without physical pain or iron chains, or otherwise, has confessed before the Sheriff and us, the Aldermen, that he, at the age of about 15, 18, or 20, was baptized at the house of one Pieter Willemse in Rotterdam, and within Asperen, he has held secret gatherings and prohibited teachings at his house on various occasions and has admitted some persons to baptize them, contrary to our Holy Christian faith and the Royal Majesty's Edict; which should not be tolerated but severely punished as an example to others - thus we, the aforementioned Aldermen, with mature deliberation of The Council, have conceived and constituted all that which was to be established in this matter, in the name and on behalf of their Royal Majesties as Counts of Holland, etc., we have considered and condemned the aforementioned Dirk Willemse, remaining obstinate in his

opinion, that he shall be executed by fire, and that death shall follow; declaring all his goods confiscated for the benefit of the Royal Majesty."

So, it was determined that Dirk Willemsz would be executed by burning him alive.

At the execution site in Asperen, near the gallows that presumably stood at the location of the current "Galgenwiel" that formed in the 17th century, a pyre was constructed with a pole.



Pyres were often made of bundles of branches and pruned wood, such as willow and ash. This wood burns quickly and fiercely, but the terrain was flat and located behind a low dike along the River Linge. The wind and the intense heat didn't bring a (relatively) quick end but rather resulted in a slow death, as described in 17th-century publications. Executions in this manner could last for hours, depending on the intentions of the Aldermen. According to tradition, this

wasn't the intent here, and even Schout Torck, who was present as usual, instructed to give

Dirk a quick death if things didn't go according to plan. Providing someone with "a quick death" on the pyre wasn't entirely new. For instance, in England, it was customary to hang a bag of gunpowder around the victim's neck; if the flames reached this bag, the unfortunate individual was spared further suffering by the resulting explosion. In the Netherlands, the executioner (for payment or to quell unrest among the spectators) intervened by giving the victim a merciful blow or piercing them with a lance.



The execution site is closer to the center of Leerdam in a straight line than to Asperen, and it is entirely plausible that the event could be seen and heard in Leerdam. It wouldn't have been a pleasant experience to witness this event or even hear it from a distance. It's not described whether Dirk was ultimately helped to a quicker end, but Schout's order was more than sufficient for this purpose.

Real awareness of this and similar events didn't truly come to light until the 17th century with the writing of various Martyrs' Mirror books that became popular after 1648. In that year, the "Peace of Münster" was signed, and Spain recognized the Republic of the United Netherlands, finally ending the 80-year war that began in 1568. The new republic demonstrated its principles by depriving the Catholic Dutch, who had also fought against Spanish oppression, of their rights. Catholic worship was banned, and all church properties were seized by the state. The churches still in use by Catholic parishes at that time were taken from them and given to the local Protestant community. The offering of the Catholic Mass was eventually tolerated but had to take place in clandestine churches and remained formally prohibited. Catholics were excluded from almost all public offices. Anti-Catholicism reduced the

Catholic population to non-entities who were simply supposed to cease to exist. In this worldview, writings and cultural ideas emerged in which Catholicism was made the cause of the 80-year war, and the Pope was equated with the devil.

To this day, it is claimed in writing that the Inquisition was invented and organized by the Catholic Church with the Pope as the supreme authority and that entire populations were tortured and murdered by this institution. In fact the Inquisition was established by the Spanish King, shortly after the liberation of large parts of Spain from the Moors in 711. Berbers and Arabs (Moors) occupied large parts of Spain that year, with the ultimate goal of Islamizing Europe. Centuries of warfare on the European mainland ensued, and it wasn't until 750 years later that Spain was on its way to recovery as a kingdom. The "liberated part" of Spain was inhabited by "Moros", the original (Spanish) inhabitants of the country who had become Islamic during that long 750 year period. They had to either convert or leave, and the same fate awaited the many Jews living there. Those who refused were persecuted. To ensure that only 'loyal subjects' remained (no "false" conversions), Ferdinand of Spain established the Inquisition. King Ferdinand was its supreme captain, not the Pope. After completing this task, the Inquisition was used for many centuries against counterfeiters and rebellious population groups (such as the Basques) in Spain itself. In effect, it was a kind of federal police force (Spain was a collection of small kingdoms) under the direct command of the King of Spain. Under the father of Philip II, Charles V, the new threat of Lutherans was also added by him to their task, but only within the territory of Spain. It is, therefore, a widespread misrepresentation that the (Spanish) Inquisition played a any role in suppressing Protestantism in The Netherlands or elsewhere outside of Spain itself. Only a handful of Protestants were tried by the Inquisition (in Spain), probably only a few hundred people in grand total for any offence to the Crown of Spain and only in Spain itself. Ultimately, out of all the hundreds of trials by the Inquisition in the 16th century, only 12 people were sentenced to death, none of which because of their faith.

The suppression of our Catholic fellow citizens in the 17th century and, effectively, the murder of hundreds of priests, brothers, and nuns by the Geuzen and the like during the 80-year war, was more of an expression of anti-papism than a meaningful part of the actual liberation war, which the 80-year war effectively was. William of Orange and his sons always vehemently opposed such acts, as well as the discrimination of Catholics after the peace, which went against the very reason for which the war was fought, namely religious freedom for everyone, not just for the new rulers.

Unfortunately, the Martyrs' Mirror and similar publications are peppered with fables due to this worked up political context. So Dirk was not murdered by the Spanish, and he was not tortured by Catholics. He was prosecuted as a nonconformist based on a decree (law) issued by the then lawful ruler of our country. It's not that all Catholics agreed with the ruling Spanish, and most residents of our country probably didn't even see Philip II as an "occupier" in the classical sense. His laws were the legitimate rules that everyone had to abide by at the time, not much different from current rules with which we may personally disagree. To the great sorrow of William of Orange, the 80-year war didn't even bring about a clear separation of church and state, as we know it in our country today, although religion remains a motivator for many people to vote for a specific party or follow a particular ideology to this day.

In the end, Dirk Willemzoon died for our (religious) freedom. Unfortunately, it wasn't at the hands of a foreign power but rather a verdict and execution by his fellow townsmen, although at the initiative and instigation of Schout Torck, the President of the Aldermen and Public

Prosecutor of the town. However, some aspects are still unclear and require further confirmation or investigation. It has been established to date that:

1. Dirk was born in Asperen and became an Anabaptist at the age of 15, 18, or 20. He held meetings in his house in Asperen where people were rebaptized or admitted to the Anabaptists' community.
2. Dirk was imprisoned for 4 days and was sentenced and executed on May 16, 1569.

Additional findings that need more recognition:

1. Quirijn de Palme was appointed as a minister of Asperen by Wessel VI of Boetzelaer, Baron of Asperen, based on documents from the Council of Troubles on February 13, 1567.
2. Since the “Beeldenstorm” or Iconoclasm in Asperen on October 8, 1566, Jan Asperensis conducted Reformed services twice a week in the Great Church on the orders of Wessel VI of Boetzelaer, Baron of Asperen. Jan was effectively the first minister of Asperen, succeeded by Quirinius de Palme on February 13, 1567.

What remains unknown or unclear:

1. Dirk's age on May 16, 1569, and the year of his birth in Asperen are unknown. In a few documents, it is stated that he was a baker by profession (not to be confused with a baker of the same name in Gorinchem during this period who was a Calvinist leader and elder).
2. Whether Dirk was imprisoned in Castle Waddestein, as indicated in the story of his escape and subsequent re-arrest in the cell in the church tower of the Great Church. Only publications in the so-called Martyrs' Mirrors speak of this and are referred to as references, but these were all published almost 100 years later and are politically biased.
3. Why Dirk was arrested and executed in Asperen, while, according to the judgments and other documents, there were more non-Catholics in Asperen. Quirijn de Palme was the Minister in Asperen at the time, and there were, according to the Aldermen's judgment, people rebaptized in Dirk's house in the preceding years. In one document, it's stated that everyone had fled except Dirk because he (as a follower of Menno Simons) was a pacifist and trusted in God to protect him.
4. The date of conviction and execution (May 16, 1569) and the 4 days in "prison" have been independently confirmed. The escape, therefore, took place between May 12 or 13 and May 16, 1569.

Further investigation is needed to make each part entirely clear, and you are invited to contact us with information (preferably with verifiable sources) or your comments regarding the accuracy of the sources cited in this document. The simple fact remains that some sources are beyond doubt correct. These are the reports of the Council of Troubles on March 6, 1567, and the meeting of the Aldermen on May 16, 1569. The rest is more challenging because some things contradict each other or are not corroborated by unbiased texts. More documents from the period itself need to be found and used to provide certainty in some parts of the professed events.

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