

The pre-Reformation Order of Saint Lazarus in the Netherlands

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Abstract

The Order of Saint Lazarus truly established a continuing presence in the present Kingdom of the Netherlands after 1930. There was however an earlier Lazarite presence during the pre-Reformation period and in the Catholic regions of the post-Reformation Age.

Introduction

The present Kingdom of the Netherlands was only formally established in 1830. Any research into the presence of the Order of St. Lazarus in the Netherlands as separate jurisdiction must therefore be limited to the time from 1840 to the present. From 1433 when the Duke of Burgundy assumed control over the Burgundian Netherlands up to the ratification of the Dutch-Belgian separation treaty of 1839, the Low Countries included the modern-day Kingdom of Belgium with part of France and Duchy of Luxembourg. Any research into the presence of the Order of St. Lazarus before 1840 must necessarily involve the whole region.

History of the Low Countries

The Low Countries is an area of lowland plain in north-western Europe that forms the catchment area of the lower Rhine, the lower Maas and the Scheldt, largely like the current Netherlands and Belgium. Before the nineteenth century, there was not a unitary nation state in the area and each region had its own form of government. These regions have therefore had varying relationships between themselves throughout history, sometimes united, often divided, sometimes near the center of power, often at the fringe. The landscape played an important role in this,

¹ This article is based on the notes compiled by Ronald Hendriks (†11 September 2019) for the purposes of the Academic Meeting and was written posthumously by Charles Savona-Ventura on the basis of these notes.

so that rivers served as both as dividing lines and binding elements simplifying transport and communication.²

In the 10th century, the invasions of Europe by Vikings, Moors and Asian steppe people came to an end. The ensuing stability led to an expansion movement from the eleventh century. Fens and marshes were drained, forests were cleared, and soil was reclaimed. Improvements in agriculture allowed more people to withdraw from the primary production process. Once the outside threat had



disappeared, the feudal lords turned against each other. The regional conflicts served to enable several feudal lords expand their authority at the expense of others, and from an unclear patchwork of regional holdings, secular and spiritual land domains developed. For a very long time, the county of Flanders under the initially weak king of France was the most important region in the area. In Lorraine, the German emperor was more powerful since he prevented the development of dynasties by granting bishops secular power with the Reich's church system. With the growing power of the bourgeoisie, the cultural monopoly of the Church was however broken and, from about 1100, the secular land domains grew into practically independent principalities. A successful marriage policy during the period 1384 and 1428 enabled the dukes of Burgundy to unite several northern and almost all southern areas for the first time since the Carolingian era. Again, as a result of a political marriage policy, the Burgundian Netherlands fell under the Habsburgs and became part of

² Geschiedenis van de Lage Landen. *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia* 2019, https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geschiedenis_van_de_Lage_Landen

the Spanish empire at the time of Emperor Charles V (1515-1555). While the center of power shifted to Spain, the government of the Netherlands was left to a governor.

The Protestant Reformation of the 16th century triggered a series of uprisings against Spanish rule in the Netherlands. The first uprising in 1567-1568 was quickly suppressed, but a second uprising in 1572 enabled the confederacy of Calvinist Dutch nobles – the Geuzen – to assume control of most of the region. The capture by the Spaniards in 1585 of Antwerp, strategically placed on the Scheldt, lost the Southern Netherlands to the insurgents. In the south the majority were Catholic; while in the north, the reformed church was in charge. The division was allegorically depicted by the Dutch artist Adriaen Pietersz van de Venne in his 1614 painting *De zielenvisserij*.³ In this painting, the artist depicted a river between two banks with a rainbow spanning the river. The river in the middle of the painting, thought to represent the Scheldt, forms a broad barrier between the Northern Protestant (where the Republic was born) and Southern Catholic regions (under Habsburg rule).

Following the Napoleonic War, the 1815 Congress of Vienna pushed for the union of the Northern and Southern Netherlands to create a strong buffer state against the French desire for expansion. This was initially accepted by the Belgians after Napoleon's hundred days. However, the conservative politics of the sovereign monarch William I resulted in a significant underrepresentation of the Belgians in government and high army posts, although the Belgians made up a larger part of the population and the army.⁴

³ De splitsing van de Noordelijke en Zuidelijke Nederlanden *Historisch Nieuwsblad* 8/2011; Geertje Dekkers

⁴ Geschiedenis van de Lage Landen. *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia* 2019, https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geschiedenis_van_de_Lage_Landen



***De zielenvisserij*, Adriaen Pietersz van de Venne, 1614 – oil on panel
98.5x187.5 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam ⁵**

William I was a Calvinist and unsympathetic to the religious culture and practices of the Catholic majority. He promulgated the "Fundamental Law of Holland", with some modifications. This entirely overthrew the old order of things in the southern Netherlands: it abolished the privileges of the Catholic Church and guaranteed equal protection to every religious creed and the enjoyment of the same civil and political rights to every subject of the king. The country was still divided on religion and language with the Wallonia region of Belgium and the higher bourgeoisie in Flanders speaking French rather than Flemish. The Catholics, who made up most of the population, demanded freedom of education and religion; while the Liberals objected to the authoritarian government style of William I. This led to the "Monster Alliance" and ultimately to the Belgian separation in 1830, finally ratified by the Dutch-Belgian separation treaty of 1839. Following the death of William III in 1890, the succession was taken up by his daughter Queen Wilhelmina. Luxembourg law excluded women from ruling the country thus resulting in the separation of Luxembourg from the rest of the Netherlands, this being assigned to the Adolphe Duke of Nassau who became the first Grand Duke of Luxembourg.

⁵ Artist Adriaen van de Venne - www.rijksmuseum.nl : Home : Info : Pic, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=299055>



The United Netherlands – 1815-30



The Netherlands & Belgium - 1839

The history of the Low Countries can thus be broadly be divided into four phases:

1. The Pre-Reformation phase before 1585 when the Low Countries incorporated the regions of Netherlands, Belgium and Luxemburg.
2. The Post-Reformation phase until 1815 when the region was split into two sections incorporating the region of the Netherlands and Luxemburg in the northern Calvinistic portion and Belgium in the southern Catholic region.
3. The United Netherlands phase from 1815 to 1830 when the Low Countries again incorporated the regions of Netherlands, Belgium and Luxemburg.
4. The Modern phase when the region was split up into three different countries – The Netherlands, Belgium and Luxemburg.

The history of the Order of Saint Lazarus in the Low Countries is very much dependant on the political and religious history of the different regions. It is likely that during the Reformation and the adoption of Calvinism in the Netherlands any holdings belonging to the Catholic Order

of Saint Lazarus would have been lost. A historical presence in the Netherlands region would therefore only likely be found in the Pre-Reformation and in the Modern phase of history. The situation was different in the southern Belgian region which retained a Catholic identity.

Dutch knights in the crusades.

The First Crusade to liberate Jerusalem and the Holy Land from Islamic rule was initiated by Pope Urban II at the council of Clermont in 1096 when he inspired his listeners to go to war and liberate the Holy Land from the hands of Christ's enemies. Peter of Amiens (Peter the Hermit), the great cross preacher, had also made his mighty voice heard in the southern regions of the Netherlands and the cry *Deus vult* – “God wills it” had echoed there and further north.⁶ It is known that many knights and other warriors from the Netherlands responded to this call. It is logical to assume that these crusaders established links with the Order of St. Lazarus in Jerusalem and potentially assisted the Order to establish houses and leprosaria in the Netherlands.⁷

The First Crusade however was not the first occasion when knights from the Low Countries visited the Holy Land. Well-known pilgrims during the 11th century include Dirk III van Holland (*~982 †1039) and Robrecht I the Frisian (*~1029/32 †1093). Dirk III served as Count of Friesland from 993 to 1039. It is believed that Dirk III went on pilgrimage to the Holy Land around 1030, hence his nickname of *Hierosolymita* meaning ‘The Jerusalemite’.⁸ Robrecht I the Frisian served as Count of Flanders from 1071 until his death and regent to Dirk V, Count of Friesland from 1063 to 1070. In 1086, Robrecht went on pilgrimage leading a considerably armed escort to the Holy Land staying there until 1091. During his travels, he assisted the Byzantine Emperor Alexios I Komnenos against the Seljuq Turks. In one battle Robert and three of his companions rode ahead of the

⁶ Peter the Hermit. *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_the_Hermit

⁷ *Geschiedenis van het Nederlandsche volk. Deel 1(1923) – P.J. Blok*

⁸ Dirk III, Count_of_Holland. *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia* 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dirk_III,_Count_of_Holland

main army charging the forces under the command of Kerbogha, whose forces the Christians scattered completely.⁹



Dirk III Hierosolymita



**Count Robrecht I
from *Flandria illustrata*,
1641**



**Count Robrecht II
*Hierosolimitanus***

A number of Flemish knights and soldiers joined the Christian forces of the First Crusade (1095–1099), notably Robrecht II Count of Flanders, eldest son of Robrecht I, known as Robertus Hierosolimitanus (*~1065 †1111) who joined the contingent led by Godfrey de Bouillon. He distinguished himself in various sieges and reportedly participated in the destructive rampage of conquered Jerusalem earning him the title "Robrecht of Jerusalem, deliverer of the Holy Tomb".¹⁰ In addition, it is reported that as the Christian forces were assembling, they met with a

⁹ Steven Runciman, *The First Crusade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 32; *The Alexiad of Anna Comnena*, Trans. E.R.A. Sewter (London: The Penguin Group, 1969), p. 351. Robert I, Count_of_Flanders. *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia* 2019,

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_I,_Count_of_Flanders

¹⁰ Robert II, Count of Flanders. *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia* 2019,

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_II,_Count_of_Flanders

group of pirate adventurers from Antwerp, Tiel, Friesland and Flanders sailing in the Mediterranean. These adventurers had lived a life of piracy but now assumed the banner of repentance scoring the cross and joining the Crusaders.

Flemish knights continued participating in the subsequent crusades launched primarily to defend the Outremer against the Islamic threat. Notable names included:

- **Second Crusade (1147–1149):** Thierry d'Alsace alternatively known as Diederik van den Elzas (*1100 †1168), count of Flanders – took part in the 1146 Second Crusade and distinguished himself by his exploits. In 1157 he resigned the countship to his son Philip of Alsace and betook himself once more to Jerusalem.¹¹
- **Third Crusade (1189–1192):** Count Floris III of Holland (*1141 †1190 on campaign)¹²; Count Otto I of Guelders (*1150 †1207)¹³, Duke Hendrik the courageous (*1165 †1235)¹⁴; and Count Philip of Flanders (*1143 †1191 on campaign)¹⁵ are known to have participated in the siege of Akko during the Third Crusade.
- **Fourth Crusade (1202–1204):** Baldwin I (*1172 †~1205) Count of Flanders and Hainaut was one of the most prominent leaders of the Fourth Crusade, which resulted in the sack of Constantinople and the conquest of large parts of the Byzantine Empire, and the foundation of the Latin Empire with Baldwin being established as the first emperor of the Latin Empire of Constantinople.¹⁶ The Frisians were under the command of Bishop Hartwig of Bremen.

¹¹ Thierry, Count of Flanders. *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia* 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thierry,_Count_of_Flanders

¹² Floris III, Count of Holland. *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia* 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Floris_III,_Count_of_Holland

¹³ Otto I, Count of Guelders. *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia* 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otto_I,_Count_of_Guelders

¹⁴ Henry I, Duke of Brabant. *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia* 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_I,_Duke_of_Brabant

¹⁵ Philip I, Count of Flanders. *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia* 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_I,_Count_of_Flanders

¹⁶ Baldwin I, Latin Emperor. *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia* 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baldwin_I,_Latin_Emperor

- **Fifth Crusade (1217–1221):** Count William I of Holland (*~ 1167 †1222) led a contingent of Flemish soldiers conquering the city of Damietta.¹⁷ A member of this contingent, the Frisian Roorda van Genum successfully fought a duel to the death with a Moroccan prince. Another Frisian who supposedly participated in the Battle for Damietta was the knight Hayo van Wolvega. However, Hayo may have been a fictional character.¹⁸ Other Frisian soldiers mentioned during this crusade include: Aylva, Beyma, Botnia, Cammingha, Burmania, Dekama, Forteman, Galama, Hartman, Hermana, Hettinga, Liauckema, Martena, Ockinga, Poptatus, Roorda, and Watse Joulma.¹⁹
- **Sixth Crusade (1228–1229):** On the 22 May 1227, a Frisian fleet left the island of Borkum to join the Crusade, but the participants suffered many losses as a result of a storm.
- **Eight Crusade (1270):** About Frisian 50 cogs participated in this crusade in Tunis. There, they were victorious in a major storming of the city. When the Crusaders became hesitant in their endeavors after the death of their leader King Louis IX, the Frisians sailed off to Akko where they were encouraged by Archbishop of Tyre to remain to protect the region.²⁰

During the Crusades, many of the Flemish knights are said to have worn a green cross insignia, though they were not members of the Order of Saint Lazarus. The green cross was adopted following an agreement between King Philip of France and Henry II of England who agreed that to distinguish the various contingents, the French crusaders would wear red crosses, the English white, and the Flemish knights green.

¹⁷ William I, Count of Holland. *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia* 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_I,_Count_of_Holland

¹⁸ Hayo van Wolvega. *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia* 2019, https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hayo_van_Wolvega

¹⁹ De Friezen waren fanatieke vechters tijdens de kruistochten. <https://rkforum.activeboard.com/t26109180/de-friezen-waren-fanatieke-vechters-tijdens-de-kruistochten/>

²⁰ *De Friezen waren fanatieke vechters tijdens de kruistochten, op. cit.*

Pre-Reformation leprosaria establishments in the Netherlands

Proof of the presence of the Order of Saint Lazarus in the Netherlands during the pre-Reformation period is fragmentary. The towns of Ghent and Bruges were the main centers of political economy in the Netherlands. Late medieval urban service provision in respect to health care and poor relief was generally provided by a wide range of public and private institutions who offered services to specific groups.²¹ Not all leprosaria dedicated to Saint Lazarus were necessarily managed by the Order. A leper hospital dedicated to Saint Lazarus was established in Ghent in 1146 AD. This leprosy house (*Léproserie Notre Dame*) stood on the outside of the city on the corner of Molstraat and Hoogstraat.²² A similar leprosarium was established in Bruges. In 1542, a leprous woman Ursula Balcaen, dissatisfied with being pronounced healed by the Bruges leprosarium, presented to the Ghent establishment for review. The “mistress and her company of Saint Lazarus Hospital” there confirmed that Ursula was in fact diseased but refused her admission since she was not a Ghent citizen. Instead, they wrote to the Bruges brethren “out of respect for your community and against gossip from people out there”. On review, the Bruges panel declared Ursula to be leprous and admitted her to that institution.²³

In 1236 Gautier, the prelate of Tournai, issued rules of life for the monks and (sisters) nuns who lived in the monasteries of Saint Lazarus.²⁴ In the Hainaut district there was a leper house until the seventeenth century and a suburb of Bergen, named St. Lazarus, was named after this hospital. Also, in the region of Kamerijk, the nuns who were involved in

²¹ J. Haemers, W Ryckbosch. *A targeted public: public services in fifteenth-century Ghent and Bruges*. *Urban History*, 2010, 37 (2): pp.203-225

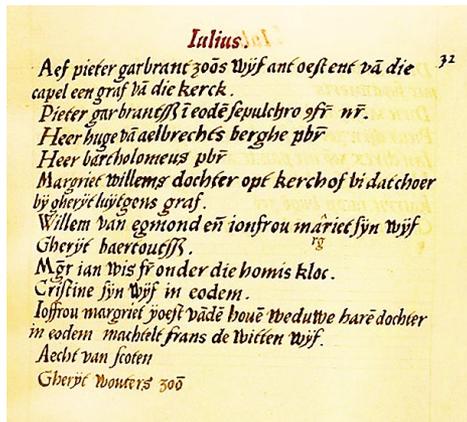
²² The establishment is presently non-existent but was sited in the present area housing the Dominicans and the Credit Commercial de Belgique.

²³ L. Demaitre. *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine: A Malady of the Whole Body*. U.S.A.: John Hopkins University Press, 2007.

²⁴ R. Willemyns. *Dutch: Biography of a Language*. University Press, Oxford, 2013, p.53

nursing lepers until the seventeenth century were called the Ladies of Saint Lazarus.

In Haarlem, a city near Amsterdam, there was a monastery and leprosarium of the Order of Saint Lazarus on the outer canal near Den Hout known as *Niuwenclooster*. This establishment was originally founded in 1307 by Willem van Egmond, member of an important noble family. In 1309, the pope extended this establishment the privilege of collecting alms and to preach once a year in every parish church in the region. In 1310, Willem van Egmond bequeathed extra money to the convent in his will, as well as his armor, clothing and a number of beds with blankets. His small wooden bowl, possibly used in the Holy Land during his crusade, was bequeathed to Menso, the commander of the house.²⁵ At the original foundation of the Lazarist monastery, William of Egmond had stipulated that memorial services were to be held for the salvation of his soul and that of his wife.²⁶



Register of the Jansclooster

²⁵ C.J. Gonnet, *De Lazaristen te Haarlem. Bijdragen voor de geschiedenis van het bisdom van Haarlem*, BBH, 1875, 3: pp.139-152; K. Westerink, *Het leprooshuis bij Haarlem*. Utrecht, 1985, pp.5-9.

²⁶ Registered in the memorial register of the Jansclooster: '*Willem van Egmond ende ionfrou margriet sijnwijf*' – North Holland Archives, Haarlem, fol. 32r.

All these developments appear to have been initiated without reference to the central house of the Order in Boigny. When one of the members of the Haarlem house visited Boigny in 1310, he was negatively received by the master Thomas de Sainville and ordered to lay down his habit at once. Sainville even threatened him and his fellow brothers with excommunication if they continued to pass themselves off as members of the Order of Saint Lazarus since the convent was founded without his knowledge and consent. The bishop of Utrecht was involved in the problem who ordered his local provisor and deacon of Kennemerland, magister Gerard, to look into the matter. Gerard concluded that the commandery had been founded on insufficient legal grounds.

On 7 May 1311, Willem van Egmond confirmed his donations and declared he wanted to continue with his foundation by either having the brothers join another order or by transforming the convent into a collegiate chapter. Willem died in 1312 and the issue was taken up by his brother Wouter who transferred all the convent's possessions to the Hospitallers who assumed possession of the house and Commander Menso and the other former Lazarites moved to the Order of St John.²⁷

There appears further to have been an establishment of the Order of Saint Lazarus in the town of Oudewater. A receipt dated to the 8th May 1317 records the donation of 3½ *morgen* of land on Scarpenort in the court of Haastrecht and 10 pounds of black *Tournoiisen* made to the Commandery of St. Lazarus in recognition of the care given to Matheus. The donation was made by Matheus' heir and executor Erembertus Eremberti dean of St. Salvator and procurator of the H. Geesthuis.²⁸ This

²⁷ Florence Koorn, Johannes A. Mol. *Jacob van Zuden and the early fourteenth century expansion of the Hospitallers in the bishopric of Utrecht*1. *Crusades*, 2015, 14: pp.183-209

²⁸ Nettie Stoppelenburg. *Tijdslijn van Oudewater*. Geschiedkundige Vereniging Oudewater, 2019,
<http://www.geschiedkundigeverenigingoudewater.nl/tijdslijn+van+oudewater/1300>

establishment may have in later years served as a guesthouse for lepers outside the Broekerpoort.

A further Lazarite holding was to be found in Subburchdike situated near Kats in Zeeland. It was supposedly swallowed by the sea in 1540.²⁹ The Order also may have had a number of properties in the Rumst area where a leprosarium based on the regulations of the Order in Jerusalem had been established by Pieter de la Croix. Pieter, a soldier with great influence, was affected by leprosy. He further established a chapel in honor of Our Lady be established, with the rules of the old order in Jerusalem.

Conclusion

It would appear that the Order of Saint Lazarus had limited influence in the Netherlands. This influence was markedly decreased with the Reformation when the Protestant and Lutheran governments took control of many of the ecclesiastical possessions, including the commanderies of the chivalrous orders except those of the Teutonic Order which became Protestant. On the 4th June 1666, the Grand Priory of the Belgian Tongues was founded, which from 1683 was called the Grand Priory of Flanders, with its seat in Lille. Commanderies were established in the part of Flanders that had become French territory and in other parts of the Netherlands. The Commandery of Yperen, Tournai and Saint Michael in the Brussels conurbation can be mentioned as an example.³⁰ These preceptories were lost in the turmoil of the French Revolution. The Order re-established a presence in the Netherlands in the 1930s.

²⁹ Michael Schoengen, David de Kok, *Monasticon Batavum II, de Augustijnsche orden*. Amsterdam: Noord-Hollandsche uitgevers maatschappij, 1941, pp.40-41.

³⁰ Jacques Le Pelletier. *Recueil général de tous les bénéfiques & commanderies de France, & de ses dépendances*. Paris, 1690. +64pp.

Timeline: 1930-1990

1932	Mr. M.W.R. van Vollenhove, lord of Kleverskerke, the Dutch envoy in Madrid, was appointed as Grand Prior of the Netherlands in 1932. He received the Grand Cross of the Order in 1935.
1938	The Dutch Grand Priory established a Bailiwick for the Northern Netherlands with the specific purpose of including Protestants in the Order. C.J.A. Begeer becomes Bailiff.
1945	The Dutch Grand Prior, M.W.R. van Vollenhove marries Maria Christina de Borbón y Madan (1886-1985), daughter of the Duke of Durcal and a niece of the Spanish king. After the Second World War, the family lived mainly in Spain.
1964	In 1964 the Dutch members of the Paris-based Order of Saint Lazarus established their own Dutch section. It took until 1975 for the Paris Obedience branch in the Netherlands to formally register as an association and request royal approval. This delay may have been due to necessity for Royal approval prior to change in legislation requiring only enrolment with the Chamber of Commerce.
1965	During a solemn ceremony at Castle Moersbergen near Doorn, the Grand Priory of the Netherlands was "Reinstalled" by the Grand Administrator, the Duke of Brissac.
1967	The Grand Priory of the Netherlands opted for the Paris Obedience following the schism that arose in the International Order.
1973	The "Bailiwick of the Netherlands" was established as an informal association in the Netherlands as part of the Malta Obedience with H.A. van den Akker as Bailiff. Elevated to Grand Bailiwick in 1979.
1974	In order to be able to work through a legal entity, an association with full legal capacity was established in 1974 with the name "Independent commandery of the Netherlands of the Military and Hospitaller Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem" (Chamber of Commerce number 40409738). The Paris Obedience in the Netherlands established the Dutch Association of members of the Ordre Militaire et Hospitalier de Saint-Lazare de Jérusalem. (Chamber of Commerce 40478426).
1987	The two branches of the Paris and Malta Obediences united in the new Dutch Association of Members of the "Ordre Militaire et Hospitalier de Saint-Lazare de Jérusalem".