Siege money of the Dutch Revolt

Siege money of the Dutch Revolt - Background

Habsburgs and the Netherlands

Descended from a German noble family, the Habsburg dynasty occupied the throne of the Holy Roman Empire from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century. The height of Habsburg power was the reign of Charles V (1500-1558). Apart from ruling the Holy Roman Empire, he was also sovereign of the Netherlands and King of Spain (with its colonial empire). In 1555 Charles V abdicated his throne and retired to a monastery in Spain. The Habsburg dominions were divided. His brother Ferdinand became Holy Roman Emperor and his son Philip II became King of Spain and sovereign of the Netherlands. The Netherlands had originally passed to the Habsburgs in the fifteenth century when Mary of Burgundy married the Habsburg Maximilian I. The Dutch Revolt in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries brought an end to Habsburg rule in the Northern Netherlands.

The Dutch Revolt- Background

Dutch Revolt

The new ruler Philip II soon came into conflict with his Dutch provinces. Attempts to strengthen his grip on the government of the Netherlands met with resistance from the nobility and the merchant class who had little wish to surrender the freedoms and privileges they had acquired. Most of all, the repression of the Protestant Reform movement led to a bitter confrontation with the Catholic king.

The ensuing Eighty Years War (1568-1648) in which the Dutch fought off Spanish rule led to the foundation of the Dutch Republic. In 1588 the revolt had politically matured to the point of the formation of the Dutch Republic consisting of seven provinces. Known as the United Provinces, these provinces were: Friesland, Gelderland, Groningen, Holland, Overijssel, Utrecht and Zeeland—all located in the northern parts. Thus the Netherlands became distinctly divided between these seven northern provinces of the Netherlands, with the Southern Netherlands remaining loyal to the Spanish king.

The division of the Netherlands also led to a religious split. While the south remained Catholic, the northern provinces tolerated different denominations, with the Protestant Dutch Reformed Church forming the official faith of the Republic.

The Dutch Revolt - Revolution

Alva's Repression 1567 – 1573

Philip's repression of religious reform raised public feeling to boiling point. But it was not the only cause of unrest. The economic crisis which enveloped the region in 1565 was a potent secondary cause, leading as it did to unemployment, poverty and discontent. In 1566 the tensions exploded: the Iconoclast Fury had begun. At the instigation of radical Protestants, Catholic churches were ransacked and their statues and images defaced. Philip II sent the Duke of Alva (Alba in Spanish) to the Netherlands in 1567 with a large army to quell the unrest in the Dutch territories and to rule as replacement of the current Spanish regent.

The harsh regime of the 'Iron Duke' proved counterproductive. In 1568 the unrest turned into a revolt. In 1573 Alva was replaced by a more moderate man. But the revolt against Spanish sovereignty could no longer be stopped. Alva took tough measures. Executions and banishments were proclaimed. However, some had not waited for Alva to arrive and had fled abroad. There they prepared resistance to Alva. The central figure in the revolt was William of Orange.

The Dutch Revolt – Conflict and Siege

Brill: 1572

The battle at the village of Heiligerlee in Groningen in 1568, at which the rebels won a short-lived victory, marked the beginning of the Eighty Years War. But in the years which followed, the rebels failed to win a single encounter. The tide turned in 1572 when a fleet of Sea Beggars (privateers) captured the strategic harbor town of Brill. A series of towns in Holland and Zeeland now came out in support of the Revolt and closed their gates to the Spanish troops. They proclaimed William of Orange Stadholder (governor and commander). Meanwhile, largely for religious reasons, it became clear that the Southern Netherlands would not join the rebellious North. The Spanish armies based in the south now adjusted to a strategy of laying siege to northern Netherlands cities in revolt.

The Dutch Revolt - Resolution

War and peace

During the 1580s, the rebels suffered many blows. In 1584 William of Orange was assassinated, and important cities (such as Brussels, Ghent and Nijmegen) surrendered. In 1585 Antwerp (Europe's leading commercial center in the 16th century) was taken by the Spanish army. This proved advantageous for the northern Dutch cities. Many non-Catholics fled to the new Republic, bringing their capital and their skills. In fact, the port of Amsterdam profited immensely from the subsequent blockade of the Antwerp harbor by the Republican fleet.

The Sack of Antwerp signaled the end of the city's era of growth and prosperity. But Spain's lack of funds - the conflict in the Netherlands was not the only war being fought - reduced Spanish pressure and gave the rebels a breathing space. The army was reorganized, and in the 1590s Spanish troops were driven out of the seven northern provinces.

In 1596 France and England recognized the Republic of the United Provinces which had been formed in 1588. But peace with Spain was still some way off. Spain and the Dutch Republic agreed a twelve-year truce in 1609. Neither nation was able to achieve outright victory. In the Republic the peace was marred by increasing political polarization. Conflict centered on foreign policy, religion and the ties between Church and state. However, it was not until the Treaty of Münster in 1648 that a permanent peace was sealed.

Capture of Breda – 4 March 1590

This 4 cm silver medal commemorates a famous victory in the Eighty Years War. In 1590 Prince Maurice (son and successor to William of Orange) employed a subtle trick to capture the fortress town of Breda from the Spaniards. Hiding in a peat barge, seventy soldiers were smuggled into the city. They attacked the guards and let in Prince Maurice with his army. The medal was awarded to the victors of Breda.
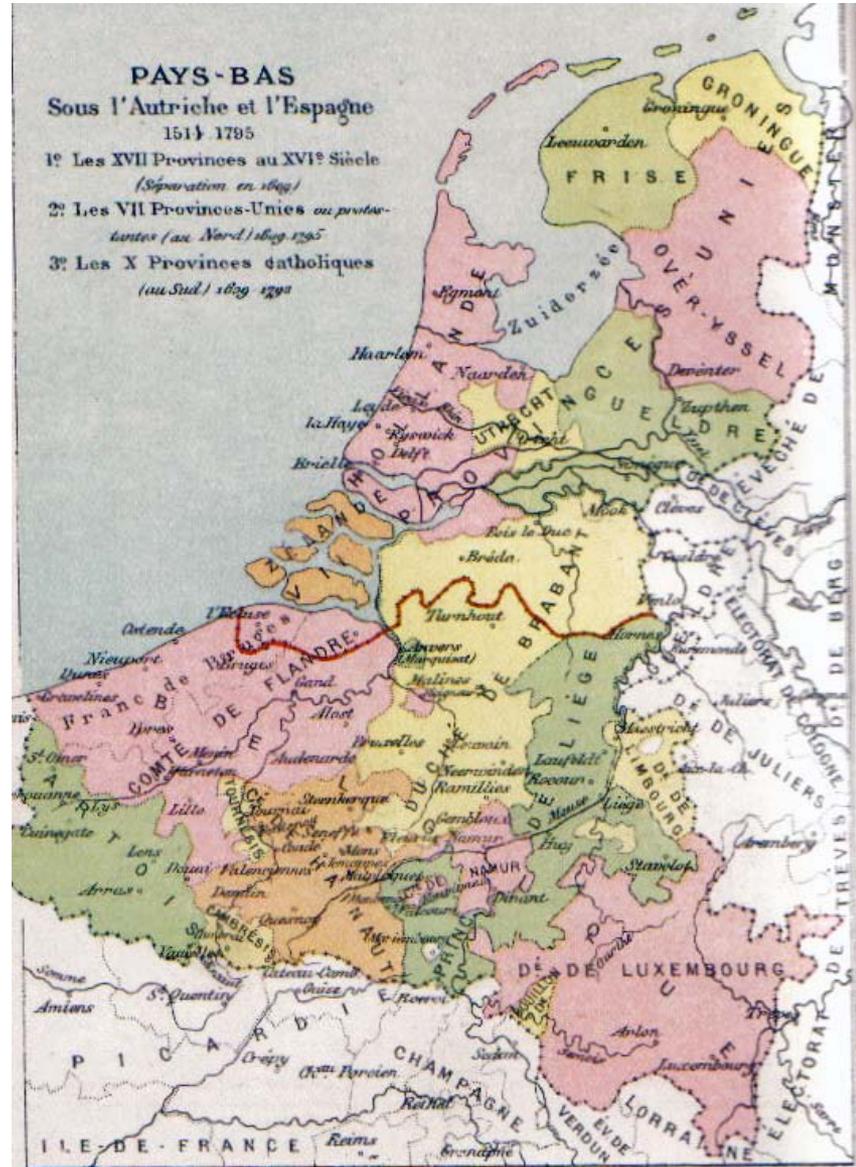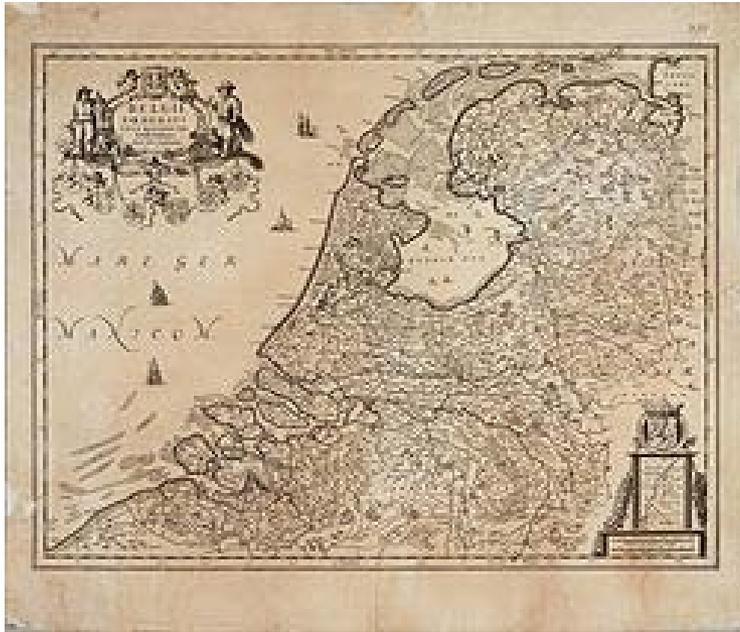
Capture of 1628 Spanish treasure fleet

This gold medal was awarded in 1629 by Stadholder Frederick Henry **(1584-1647) to** Piet Heyn **(1577-1629) in recognition of his achievement in capturing the Spanish treasure fleet in 1628. What makes the medal so unique is that it was a personal gift from** Frederick Henry**. However,** Piet Heyn **was not to enjoy the medal very long: he died in that same year, on 28 June 1629.**

Frederick Henry, Prince of Orange (1584-1647) Frederick Henry (Dutch name: Frederik Hendrik) was born in 1584, the year his father, William the Silent, was murdered. In 1625 he succeeded his half-brother Maurice as stadholder and captain general of the army. In the war with Spain, Frederick Henry managed to recapture a series of towns held by the enemy. This won him the nickname 'stedendwinger' (taker of cities). Under his leadership, North Brabant and parts of Limburg were absorbed into the Dutch Republic. Frederick Henry and his wife Amalia von Solms were the first stadholder-couple to hold court. Their royal standing was further enhanced by the marriages of their children. For instance, their son William married Princess Mary Stuart, daughter of Charles I of England.

PAYS-BAS
Sous l'Autriche et l'Espagne
1514-1795
1º Les XVII Provinces au XVIᵉ Siècle
(Séparation en 1609)
2º Les VII Provinces-Unies *ou protes-*
tantes (au Nord) 1609-1795
3º Les X Provinces catholiques
(au Sud) 1629-1792

Siege money of the Dutch Revolt

Siege warfare is described in the dictionaries as "a military blockade of a city or fortified place to compel it to surrender". The word is derived from the Latin, sedere, to sit; thus the "sitting down" of an army before a fortified place for the purpose of taking it by assault or by starving it into submission.

The production and issue of obsidional, or siege, coins was deemed necessary in more than 30 instances associated with the rise of the Dutch Republic. Denominations ranged from ½ stuiver to ducat. Shapes ranged from round to diamond. Composition ranged from paper to gold. Examples exist in tin, leather, silver, cardboard, and gold.

Siege money of the Dutch Revolt

An obsidional Rixdaler of Groningen, 1577

The coin illustrated here is a variety of Maillet (Monnaies obsidionales et De Necessite).
It was issued by the States of Holland in 1577, during the War against Spain.
Obverse: NECESSITATE – 4 – FEB – 1577. Imperial eagle surcharged with City arms; above G
Of the same series, but with plain reverse, exist also the ½ and ¼ Rixdaler, 1577.

Siege money of the Dutch Revolt

Groningen, the seat of a very early coinage for the Bishops of Utrecht (11th c.), for the city, and for that part of North Holland; the copper

Groningen : braspenning, 1593.

money dating back to 1505, and that in silver also bearing the date in many cases as early as 1455. In the latter metal there were the *jager*, the *kromstaert*, the ordinary *groot*, the piece of eight stuivers, etc. The dated convention-money with East Friesland, 1507, was perhaps struck here. Some very curious siege-money appeared in 1577 with *Ordinaris penninck Voor de Hofman Hendrick van Leer*. There was more than one variety. A second example before us is struck on one side only, and bears the double-headed eagle surmounted by a *G*, and round it *Necessitate*. 4. *Feb.* 1577. An oord or double liard was coined here in 1591 and 1594 during the sieges by Maurice of Nassau. In 1672, during the siege by the Bishop of Munster, square pieces of 50, 25, 12½, and 6¼ stuivers were struck. Of the two former there are several varieties, one of those of 50 having a view of the town and ramparts, and of the 25 stuivers a portrait of the Duke of Holstein-Plon, commander-in-chief of the Netherland forces.

Siege money of the Dutch Revolt

Metallic siege money of Leyden (left), struck in 1574 from a round coin die onto a diamond shaped silver planchet. As the supply of silver available for coinage dried up during the siege, Leyden continued to mint coins made from paper torn from prayer books. These cardboard "notes" became the first paper money to appear in the Western world. Prior to this only the Chinese used paper money.

A cardboard coin struck during the Spanish siege of Leyden in 1574 may be seen at right. The arms consist of a rampant lion with shield and sword. Note the counterstamp located at six o'clock. By order of Prince William of Orange, provincial counterstamps were added to all coins in excess of 1/10 daalder. This act increased the value of the coinage in circulation by one eighth, which was then used as a war contribution.

Siege money of the Dutch Revolt

5 stuiver 1574 30mm Crowned lion with shield and sword,
    Legend: "Pugno Pro Patria",
    With and without countermark.
14 stuiver 1574 Description not available.
16 stuiver 1574 Description not available.
18 stuiver 1574 Description not available.
20 stuiver 1574 37mm Crowned lion with liberty cap on pole.
    Obverse legend: "Haec Libertatis Ergo",
    Reverse legend: "Godt behoedeLeyden"
20 stuiver 1574 37mm Crowned lion with standard, legends as above. With and without countermark.
28 stuiver 1574 43mm Crowned lion with sword and shield
    Legends as above.
30 stuiver 1574 48mm With and without countermark.

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Recommended reading for more on this subject:

From *The Numismatist,* December 1990:

Dutch Sieges of the 16th and 17th Centuries by Lawrence C. Korchnak