

Recensie

David van der Linden. *Experiencing Exile. Huguenot Refugees in the Dutch Republic, 1680-1700*. Farnham, Ashgate, 2015. xvi + 289 pp. ISBN 978-1-4724-2927-8. £75.

Migration is surely one of the most topical and thriving topics in early modern European history. Recent years have seen the appearance of various monographs, PhD theses and essay collections on topics such as international economic mobility, exile identities, and religious refugees by scholars such as Geert Janssen, Johannes Muller, Nicholas Terpstra and Anne de Winter. These studies have greatly enhanced our knowledge of early modern mobility and have shown the pertinence of the subject. To this growing body of work, David van der Linden has now added an important monograph.

In *Experiencing Exile. Huguenot Refugees in the Dutch Republic, 1680-1700* Van der Linden focuses on one of the largest influxes of religious migrants into the Dutch Republic to date. It has been estimated that some 150,000 French Protestants left their country after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, which had provided them with the right to exercise their religion since 1598. Many went to Protestant countries such as England, Switzerland, and German principalities. More than 30,000 headed for the Dutch Republic, where they were initially received to great popular acclaim as sufferers for the true faith, their arrival appropriated by the authorities to advertise their adherence to the Protestant cause.

Huguenot historiography is long and complicated, but Van der Linden navigates it expertly. The first histories of their diaspora were already written by those who had lived through it. From the nineteenth century onwards, the Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français started reinserting the Huguenots into French history, and historians have been researching that history ever since. Influenced by ideology and mythmaking, many of the studies written before the late-twentieth century portrayed in a glorious light, focusing on businessmen and intellectuals who were successful in

exile, and reinforcing the image that the flight from France was the principled and final decision of firm believers who prospered for their suffering. While newer studies have nuanced this image, virtually no history had tried to describe what it was like to be part of the Huguenot diaspora. In *Experiencing Exile*, Van der Linden seeks to do exactly that. In contrast to recent Huguenot studies, which focused on integration, Van der Linden wants to capture the 'living experience' of exile and to bring 'the complexity of the Huguenot exile experience' (p. 2) into focus. To this end, he adopts a 'synthetic approach', bringing together various methods and sources.

The book is divided into three clearly delineated parts. The first part looks into the socioeconomic aspects of exile. This part deconstructs the image of the Huguenots as successful migrants, whose exemplary dedication to the Protestant fate compelled them to leave their homes. Chapter 1 forcefully illustrates that the choice Huguenots made to leave France before and after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes cannot be explained from an exclusively religious point of view. In line with insights in migrations studies, Van der Linden argues that there was no clearcut distinction between religious exile and economic exile. Using new archival source material, Van der Linden is able to trace the Huguenots' 'migrant pattern', and to show that most did not act on religious impulse alone. Socio-economic reasoning figured large in their decision. Those who did leave went where they knew people, and where they expected to be able to make a livelihood. And even then, many refugees left their converted parents to retain their possessions, to keep open the option of returning. In chapter 2 Van der Linden takes on the myth of the Huguenots' economic prosperity, adding valuable new evidence to studies that have already painted a more prosaic picture of making ends meet in exile. He discusses four distinct groups: those active in the textile industry, publishers and booksellers, ministers, and the poor. Entrepreneurs in the textile industry and the booktrade found it difficult to compete in the crowded Dutch market – despite the loans some received from Dutch magistrates to set up their shops. Perhaps surprisingly, ministers turn out to have been an especially precarious group. Since there were so many of them, with few transferable skills, only a handful was able to secure a ministry or a pension, and many were happy to resort to a chaplaincy. Among the poor, of course, the situation was even worse. Many struggled to make a livelihood and depended on the increasingly overburdened charity of the Walloon church.

The central part of the book consists of three chapters on faith in exile. Treating the content and audience responses of Huguenot preaching, these chapters seek to bring the 'profoundly unsettling experience of exile' into view. In chapter 3, Van der Linden expertly reads twenty sermons by eight Huguenot ministers. He traces familiar themes such as anti-Popery and divine providence and shows how these were applied to the Huguenots' recent history and their exiled condition, and how the ministers tried to stiffen the resolve of their flock and to impose on them the idea that their sufferings and tribulations were preparing them for a glorious future in Heaven. Chapter 4 deals with audience responses to sermons. Having only a limited range of disparate sources at his disposal, Van der Linden here rather skirts the subject. Since surviving responses

of the Huguenot church-goers themselves are scarce, he has to approach it through the statements of others. Chapter 5 confronts the orthodoxy that the Huguenot exodus was a one-way street, and explores the theme of returning to France. Some 1,000 Huguenots eventually preferred this option, even if that entailed converting to Catholicism. Many more must have considered it.

The final part of the book deals with memory and investigates how Huguenots constructed their own stories in egodocuments and histories. The emphasis is on construction, and Van der Linden reads his sources with an eye for ambiguities, incongruities and silences. One of those was the remarkably ambivalent attitude towards Catholics. Van der Linden notes how exiles drew sharp confessional lines, but also had fond recollections of their Catholic neighbours and friends in France. Van der Linden is too good an historian to take such stories at face value, however, and in line with memory studies argues that rather than mere individual experiences, they were crafted for an audience, and influenced by circulating texts and models. The same is true for the published histories that constructed the Huguenots' collective memory. Focusing on Pierre Jurrieu's *Lettres Pastorales* and Elie Benoist's *Histoire de l'Édit de Nantes*, chapter 7 explores not only what these memories were, but also from which information networks they derived.

As the synopsis above suggests, *Experiencing Exile* is a rich and well-written study of a subject that is both of great scholarly and topical interest. Van der Linden has a masterful grasp on his sources – many of them new, others well-known – and his argument is forceful and balanced. Few criticisms are in order here, and none of any weight. With books like this, one can only complain about inevitable absences, or rather, wish that it had been more extensive on particular points.

One subject that is only cursorily treated is the question of integration, a major topic in Huguenot studies. The excellent and carefully crafted index does offer an entry 'integration', and points towards several relevant passages. We learn that the Huguenots in Rotterdam 'formed a tight-knit community', that the overwhelming majority attended the Walloon church, and that they remained 'strangers abroad' tending towards endogamy (p. 45). Chapter 2 could be read as a chapter on economic integration, showing that many households remained dependent upon poor relief from the French-speaking Walloon church (which, since 1578, was separated from the Dutch Reformed Church). Sustained discussions of the subject are few and far between, however.

This is clearly a conscious choice: Van der Linden explicitly distances himself from earlier studies of the Huguenot *Refuge* in which integration was a central issue. Older studies, he writes, asserted the success of Huguenot integration in exile, while more recent scholarship in Germany and elsewhere has shown that it was actually far less successful than previously thought. Van der Linden does not truly engage with this debate, opting rather to sidestep it by focusing on experience rather than integration (p. 8–10). At one point he even comes close to arguing that social integration is not part of the experience of exile, or perhaps even antithetical to it (p. 228). Yet that argument only goes so far. Throughout his study, Van der Linden implicitly sympathizes with the more recent scholarship by emphasizing that Huguenots in the Dutch Republic too

suffered neglect, rejection and hostility from the parts of their hosts. It would have been interesting to also learn more about the Huguenots who did participate in Dutch networks, who did intermarry with their Dutch hosts, and who did master the Dutch language even if the measure of integration might have been limited in the acute and uncertain phase Van der Linden studies.

The way in which integration is relegated to the periphery of *Experiencing Exile*, is related to the more philosophical issue that is foregrounded by Van der Linden's book: what exactly is experience, and how can historians approach it? This is a trickier question than Van der Linden concedes. Van der Linden has chosen to silently retain the term's ambiguity; in his hands 'experience' can either refer to the subjective mental state of an individual or to a sequence of events that have been lived through. The present participle in his title suggests that he focuses on the former meaning of the word – on the way in which Huguenots were perceiving their exile. In fact, however, *Experiencing Exile* outlines the life, conditions, and (religious) culture of the Huguenots in the Dutch Republic, which begs the question where experience begins and ends (is integration part of experience or not?). How Huguenots themselves experienced exile remains much more elusive. In the chapter on audience responses to sermons, exile and the exiled audience play only minor parts. Although Van der Linden observes that exile was a 'tortuous' (p. 2) and 'unsettling experience' (p. 230), the refugees themselves have given him little material to work with. The chapter on memoirs in which we would have expected to encounter the torture and unsettledness turns out to be the shortest of the book. Intriguingly, Van der Linden here finds that the memoirs he studied largely focused on the period *before* exile. Does this suggest that not even the Huguenots themselves had access to their subjective exile experience? It might be, because exile, in their view, was about the fate of the group rather than of the individual. For this fate, Van der Linden's work is a superb point of entry.

Helmer Helmers