

Henk Roosenboom, *Ontvoerd of gevlucht? Religieuze spanningen in Brabant en de zaak Sophia Alberts (1700-1710)* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2016, 233 pp., ISBN 978 90 8704 628 6).

Sophia Alberts was an eighteen-year-old girl who ran away from home. From the town of Helmond in States-Brabant, she was the only child of Maria Vogelsangh, who ran a fabric shop, and Theodorus Alberts, a notary with a drink problem and a nasty temper. In a town where Catholics vastly outnumbered Protestants, the family was Dutch Reformed, with ministers among their close relatives, and Theodorus served as deacon of the local Reformed congregation, headed by one Ds. Nathanaël Walraven. Sophia was no model of virtue: if rumours were correct, she stole from her mother and had a series of liaisons with young men. She and her parents often fought, and after one clash in November, 1700, that turned violent, Sophia disappeared. After hiding out for a few days in Helmond, she got a ride in a cart to Venray, across the border in a territory belonging to the southern Netherlands. There she declared a longstanding desire to convert to Roman-Catholicism. This claim won her protection in Venray and transformed her story into a case of conscience, at least in the eyes of southern authorities, who refused to extradite her back to Helmond. From a Dutch perspective, though, Sophia was a minor who, as such, fell under the authority of her parents. Under Dutch law, she had no capacity to act on her own behalf, so that her removal from Helmond could only be construed as an act perpetrated by others – in other words, a kidnapping. By whom? Ds. Walraven and the Alberts family immediately pointed the finger of blame at Catholics in Helmond. At the urging of minister and family, the Dutch States General took reprisal measures, ordering the arrest of Helmond's Catholic clergy and a halt to Catholic worship in the town until Sophia was returned. It did not work: over the following years, Sophia resisted all pressure to return to her parents, rebuffing the pleas of Helmond's Catholic pastor and the intervention even of the apostolic vicar of 's-Hertogenbosch. She married; she moved, eventually seeking safety in France; the reprisals against Catholics in Helmond and the wider area continued. The case was only resolved by news of her death in 1708.

A microhistory, *Ontvoerd of gevlucht?* presents the story of Sophia Alberts in far greater detail than a brief summary can convey. For Henk Roosenboom, the book was clearly a labour of love, researched and written over a period of some twenty years, beginning when the author worked as city archivist of Helmond. As one would expect, Roosenboom conducted exhaustive research, uncovering every bit of relevant information he could dig out from national,

regional, and local archives. Indeed, Roosenboom goes beyond what is necessary, providing information about how notaries were trained, how taxes were collected, what the rods were made of with which schoolchildren were beaten, seating arrangements in the assembly-room of the States General, the history of Mechelen (where Sophia lived for several years), and many other tangential matters. Such copious background information may be useful to some readers, but it detracts from the narrational flow and pace of the book, which is not as lively a read as some other microhistories. One wishes also that the author had allowed the figures in his story to speak more often in their own words, including more quotations from his rich sources and relying less on paraphrasing.

The title of the book poses the question whether Sophia was kidnapped or had fled. In fact, the book makes clear from early on that the answer was both. Empirically, there can be no doubt that Sophia fled home of her own will; legally, though, Sophia's leaving was indeed a kidnapping. And just as her will was irrelevant under Dutch law, so the question whether Catholics in Helmond were guilty of inducing her to convert or aiding her escape was irrelevant, argues Roosenboom, to the decision of the States General to perpetrate acts of reprisal against them. As the author rightly observes, such acts were a form of hostage-taking, intended to pressure not just local Catholics but also the Catholic Church hierarchy into securing Sophia's return. They were the standard response of the States General to cases in which Protestant children from the Generality Lands were 'kidnapped' by Catholics. At the end of his book, Roosenboom surveys (and in an appendix offers further evidence concerning) nine other cases. Here his research has not been thorough, nor does he present it as such: there were more such cases from States-Brabant, not to mention the other Generality Lands, which Roosenboom excludes from his purview. It goes almost without saying that the book does not compare the Alberts case to known cases of child-kidnappings in Germany and France. This sort of context is lacking in the book, and the lack does arguably influence the author's interpretation of his material.

For Roosenboom, the key to interpreting the case of Sophia Alberts lies in an early modern culture that attributed to parents absolute authority over their children – a culture that expressed itself in a code of familial honour as well as law. Theodorus Alberts would not admit that his daughter had run away from home, Roosenboom argues, because of the loss of face it would have entailed to concede his own inability to control her. Undoubtedly this is true, but Roosenboom underplays another factor acting on both the father and the States-General: anti-Catholicism. This is ironic, given that the very subtitle of the book announces its subject to be religious tensions in Brabant, namely between the large Catholic majority there and the small Reformed minority who held most of the reins of power. In an epilogue that serves as a conclusion, Roosenboom suggests that his microhistory should serve to

qualify the image of a harmonious *omgangsoecumene* (getting along in daily life) prevailing among people of different faiths in the Dutch Republic. In fact, other recent historiography has done the same, suggesting that tensions between Protestants and Catholics in particular were quite high around the turn of the eighteenth century. Roosenboom goes on, though, to place greater emphasis on a split within the Reformed camp: between ‘de gematigde, tot samenwerking met de katholieken genegen leden enerzijds en de kerkenraad onder aanvoering van de predikant anderzijds ... [die] voortdurend bij de Staten-Generaal aandrongen op strengere maatregelen tegen de roomsen’ (197). Surely the very existence of this split points to something religious that the father, minister and consistory, and authorities in The Hague had in common that led them to blame Helmond’s priests and other local Catholics for kidnapping Sophia. That something was a certain conception of ‘popery’: a religion that in their minds was at once aggressive and seductive, with agents intent on leading the Reformed astray, preying especially upon the vulnerable, like the sick and dying – and children. Roosenboom underestimates the role of such preconceptions, which appear in his primary sources just as they do in the sources that document other child-kidnappings.

Benjamin J. Kaplan, University College London