

# ‘Eternal Memory Mirrors’: Seventeenth-century Dutch Newsprints of Political Executions

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## Abstract

Map and newsprint publishers Claes Jansz. Visscher and Herman Allertsz. developed a new kind of wall print in the first decade of the seventeenth century that depicted contemporary political executions and which served as ‘eternal memory mirror[s]’. These prints evince the high value contemporaries placed on proportionate justice: the desire for visual affirmation that the punishment fit the crime. Visscher was keen to put a good face on things, downplaying disorganization, unflattering or unfortunate aspects of executions, and he emphasized events that suggested divine approval. The success of his early execution prints had a profound impact on the format and variety of Visscher’s later military newsprints. The large scale, sophisticated organization of text and image, and superior aesthetic qualities – all strategies borrowed from monumental wall maps – enhanced the commercial and polemical potential of his execution imagery. The article first considers Visscher’s early professional relationships and training in cartographic circles. Then, it analyses his multi-plate compositions and the relationship between image and text in his execution prints from 1619 and 1623, which were related to the Truce Conflicts and fights between Remonstrants and Counter-Remonstrants. Finally, the article considers the implications of viewing execution imagery on the wall.

*Keywords:* printmaking, newsprints, cartography, capital punishment, politics, Protestant propaganda

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In 1623, Claes Jansz. Vischer published a large execution print – measuring 54,2 x 47 cm – made from six etchings and letterpress (fig. 1). It portrays the death and dismemberment of more than a dozen men who plotted to assassinate Prince Maurice in retaliation for executing Johan van Oldenbarnevelt and expelling Remonstrants.<sup>1</sup> Its accompanying text is exactly the same height, suggesting that some impressions were assembled into a print measuring roughly 58,2 x 102,5 cm that was intended to hang on the wall (fig. 2).<sup>2</sup> Most wall prints were maps, often embellished with letterpress, decorative borders, and hand-colouring. They were made by the first generation of celebrated Amsterdam map and newsprint publishers, from the late sixteenth century onward. These wall maps were generally mounted on canvas and framed or hung from wooden rollers. Wall maps are a particularly illustrious genre of Dutch prints and their aesthetic appeal and commercial value endure to this day. The same cannot be said for large-scale images of executions. Understanding the historical purpose of and attraction to this type of print requires that we consider Protestant news propaganda, cartographic conventions, and Visscher's zeal for experimental printmaking.

Map and newsprint publishers Claes Jansz. Visscher and Herman Allertsz. developed a new kind of wall print in the first decade of the seventeenth century that depicted contemporary political executions. The success of their prints had a profound impact on the format and variety of Visscher's later military newsprints. Their scale, sophisticated organization of visual and textual information, and superior aesthetic qualities – all strategies borrowed from wall maps – enhanced the commercial and polemical value of these prints. Visscher's early professional relationships and training in cartographic circles laid the foundation for his later dominance in the field of newsprints. They helped inspire his multi-plate compositions and the relationship between text and image in his subsequent execution prints, made in 1619 and 1623, as well as his later multi-plate, multi-edition news maps. Fashioning execution imagery for display on the wall had different implications than creating it in more traditional formats, such as smaller single-sheet prints or illustrated texts,

<sup>1</sup> Warren, 'A Shameful Spectacle', 223-244. Thanks to this volume's editors, copyeditor, anonymous reviewer, and Elizabeth Sutton for comments on earlier drafts. Thanks to Tom van der Molen, Martijn Storms, and Paula van Gestel-van het Schip for other assistance.

<sup>2</sup> This estimate presumes a woodcut title like that found on the Battle of Gibraltar (4,2 cm tall), see fig. 4 below.



Fig. 1 Claes Jansz. Visscher, Executions of the Conspirators against Prince Maurice, 1623, etching and letterpress, 54,2 x 47 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

which were generally preserved in print collections or libraries. While no surviving sources attest to who purchased these monumental prints of contemporary executions, it stands to reason that displaying printed images of judicial death and dismemberment in one's home – where family, friends, and acquaintances might see them – would have been an avowal of political and confessional loyalties, the justness of the courts, and good government in the Dutch Republic more broadly. In that regard, hanging execution newspapers on the wall communicated specific and enduring political and religious worldviews.



Fig. 2 Claes Jansz. Visscher, Reconstruction of Executions of the Conspirators against Prince Maurice, 1623, etching and letterpress, 54,2 x 102,5 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

### The Rise of the Newsprint

Newsprints combine an image about a current event with text, generally captions or an extended description. Buyers consumed both in tandem, often with numbered or lettered indices guiding viewers in a sequential, back-and-forth analysis of the image and text. From the late fifteenth century, illustrated leaflets and pamphlets about current events were a common, flexible, and persuasive method of communication. The earliest illustrated broadsides, such as those published by the fifteenth-century Augsburg printer Gunter Zainer, emulated vernacular books. They included an oblong woodcut with two columns of didactic text below. Late fifteenth-century broadsides, which were the starting point for the genre, relied upon text to persuade; images were more illustrative than persuasive and were meant to catch the eye.<sup>3</sup> This changed as time progressed. The Reformation transformed many aspects of how broadsides were used, but the primary rules of layout, text, and subtext remain unchanged. A century later, Visscher experimented with predominantly visual formats to persuade viewers, but text remained an integral component.

3 Eisermann, 'Mixing Pop and Politics', 159, 162, 164, 167, 174.

The genre of newsprints was well established by the time Visscher etched his prints.<sup>4</sup> From 1570, Jean Perrissin and Jean Tortorel in Geneva and the workshop of Frans Hogenberg in Cologne made print series about recent political and military actions. In 1587, Christopher Plantin published Richard Verstegan's *Theatrum Crudelitatum Haereticorum Nostri Temporis* (*Theatre of the Cruelties of the Heretics of our Time*), an illustrated book about Protestants torturing and executing Catholics in England, France, The Netherlands, and Ireland. Beginning with Henry VIII and ending with Mary Queen of Scots (executed nine months before the book's publication), it urged Catholic monarchs to avenge her death.<sup>5</sup> But even before print media was used in this manner, *pittura infamante* and *Schandbilder* defamed individuals who escaped punishment by portraying them in a number of unflattering ways, including by imagining their execution, as a surrogate form of punishment.<sup>6</sup> But those images did not *record* punishments; they *were* a punishment. Standalone printed images of executions were produced elsewhere in Europe, notably in German-speaking lands. Like their Dutch equivalents, German broadsides portrayed especially sensational crimes. Authorities went out of their way to shame certain offenders, especially those that threatened the social and political order, with extreme punishments that grabbed public attention.<sup>7</sup> Prints of political acts of violence – such as assassinations and revolts – were seen as an affront to the governing ruler, state, or religious body, and required a forceful response. Karl Harter estimates that such broadsheets had a print run of 1,000 to 2,000 impressions, which like those by Visscher picture the crime, perpetrator, and their punishment.<sup>8</sup>

Newsprints of executions should be distinguished from prints of biblical, mythological, or historical executions. Their topicality distinguishes them from prints such as those Jan Luyken made for the 1685 edition of the Anabaptist martyrology *Het Bloedig Tooneel*, which focused primarily on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century executions of Anabaptists, but none more recently. And yet, those prints also speak to contemporary judicial practices. As Michel van Duijnen has shown, Luyken's compositions were shaped by his interest in secular judicial violence as much as the religious and political implications of the imagery.<sup>9</sup>

### *Visscher's Earliest Execution Prints: Working for Amsterdam's Cartographic Titans*

Claes Jansz. Visscher made his first execution print in 1606, when he was nineteen. He started his career working for some of the most important publishers in Amsterdam, including Willem Jansz. Blaeu, Herman Alertsz., Cornelis Claesz., and Pieter van den Keere. He designed and sometimes etched embellishments for their maps, including cartouches, town views, regional fashions, rulers, and genre scenes. He also made prints after designs by David Vinckboons, who might have been his teacher and probably helped him find work with

4 Much of the following discussion is based on Benedict, *Graphic History*, 75-121.

5 Arblaster, *Antwerp & the World*, 41-42. Thanks to the anonymous reviewer for suggesting this parallel.

6 Behrmann, *Images of Shame*; Edgerton, *Pictures and Punishment*.

7 Harter, 'Images of Dishonoured Rebels', 76.

8 Harter, 'Images of Dishonoured Rebels', 81-84.

9 Van Duijnen, "Only the Strangest and Most Horrible Cases", 169-197.

Blaeu.<sup>10</sup> Visscher's early employers were at the heart of Amsterdam's news and cartographic networks. They were innovators, finding tremendous financial success by packaging visual and textual information in attractive printed formats, both large and small.

Honing his artistry and learning the publishing trade from these cartographic titans made Visscher uniquely situated to dominate the market for news maps and newsprints. Much like Cornelis Claesz., who sold both 'art' prints and maps, Visscher would go on to successfully promote both fine art prints, with their enduring market value, and up-to-date representations of current events and topography. Visscher also learned from these early employers that a small number of recent events had the potential – if rendered beautifully and on a grand scale – to serve as the basis for something we might consider 'art' newsprints: fine works about current events that buyers would cherish and preserve for a long time. These newsprints are monumental in the original sense of the word: they were memorials for posterity. Several of Visscher's newsprints had this enduring appeal. One of the best documented examples is his 1628 print of Piet Heyn's capture of the Spanish treasure fleet, which appears in two household inventories from 1648 and in the 1680 stock list for Visscher's grandson Nicolaes.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, Visscher's execution prints have not been found in household inventories, nor are they included in the stock list. However, inventories rarely mention prints by name and while the stock list includes battles and sieges, it lacks almost all other newsprints sold by Visscher.<sup>12</sup>

The first execution print Visscher made portrays the Gunpowder Plot conspirators in London in 1606 (fig. 3). Visscher was not yet a publisher, so this print was likely to have been issued by Willem Jansz. Blaeu or Herman Allertsz. Koster.<sup>13</sup> Several Amsterdam map publishers were adept at capitalizing on recent events. They made smaller prints as well as monumental works, such as Cornelis Claesz.'s 1603 portrayal of the Dutch victory over the Portuguese off Bantam in 1603 or Blaeu's 1607 ode to Jacob van Heemskerck at the Battle of Gibraltar (fig. 4), both of which feature prints by Visscher and extensive letterpress. Visscher's prints were sold not only by their publishers but also by other map and print dealers in their international networks.<sup>14</sup> On the etching, a descriptive title in Latin is held aloft by allegorical figures of Justice and Fame (meaning here Infamy). Using continuous narrative, eight executions are shown: four that occurred on 30 January 1606 in Saint Paul's Churchyard and four the following day outside Westminster Hall.<sup>15</sup> In the foreground and at the right, five men are hauled to the place of execution on hurdles, a practice that was a mark of dishonour and part of their punishment. One condemned man is being hung from the gallows, another is quartered with an axe as his heart is torn from his chest, and pieces of a third are boiled in a cauldron. Observers from all walks of life watch the

10 Leeflang, 'The Sign of Claes Jansz Visscher', 243.

11 Van Groesen 'A Week to Remember', 43-44; Visscher inventory in Waals, *Prenten in de Gouden Eeuw*, 221.

12 The exceptions are Visscher's 1619 etching of Loevestein Castle and Esias van de Velde's 1624 etching of the aftermath of a flood, which concern Dutch topography as much as news and incorporate little or no letterpress.

13 Visscher's early work was likely sold by Blaeu, Allertsz., and Vinckboons: Orenstein, Leeflang, Luiten, and Schuckman, 'Print Publishers in the Netherlands', 191.

14 Schilder, *Monumenta cartographica Neerlandica*, vi, 39; Coelen, 'Something for Everyone?', 55-56.

15 Sir Everard Digby, Robert Winter, John Grant, and Thomas Bates died the first day; Guy Fawkes, Thomas Winter, Ambrose Rookwood, and Robert Keyes the next.



Fig. 3 Claes Jansz. Visscher, Execution of Eight Gunpowder Plot Conspirators in England, 1606, etching, 23,4 x 33,8 cm, London, British Museum.



Fig. 4 Claes Jansz. Visscher after David Vinckboons, Battle of Gibraltar, 1607, engraving, 43,5 x 85 cm (image) plus letterpress (after reconstruction by Vanessa I. Schmid), Leiden, University Library.

spectacle, along with soldiers present to keep the peace. Visscher might have portrayed this rather Netherlandish-looking town square because he lacked the necessary images of London. Nonetheless, the stepped-gables were likely to have evoked memories of Spanish-sponsored attacks against Protestant leaders closer to home, or fears of future attacks.

The criminals are numbered from one to eight, indicating the print originally had an accompanying text. It probably identified the men and recounted the more salacious details, like the fact that Guy Fawkes intentionally broke his own neck on the gallows to avoid a prolonged death. This text likely had an explicitly partisan perspective, like the execution print Visscher helped make four years later. But, because the text is lost, we can only speculate. However, there is good reason to group the two prints together, given their physical similarities and because both describe antagonism toward Protestant leaders abroad. Visscher's second execution etching, from 1610, is nearly the same size and shape as his first (23,4 x 33,8 cm versus 26,7 x 33,2 cm), suggesting these two prints had similar formats when combined with their accompanying text, and perhaps were both published by Herman Allertsz. (fig. 5). The second print portrays the murder of King Henry IV of France and the execution of his assassin, François Ravaillac. Ravaillac is shown climbing into the royal carriage, brandishing a knife. The composition includes portraits of the king, his widow and heir, and the murderer. The title, written in Latin for a broad educated audience, emphasizes the centrality of Ravaillac's crime: 'Representation of the accursed parricide, committed against Henry IV King of France and of Navarre.'<sup>16</sup>

Visscher's etching, like the execution ritual itself, sought to produce a sense of proportionate justice. Early modern Europeans were deeply invested in having a system of scalable punishments that could be layered to match the crime's severity. Proportionate justice left little room for error. If an executioner botched a beheading – not severing the head in a single stroke – he might be stoned or even killed by onlookers.<sup>17</sup> To ensure civic tranquillity, punishments could not be too harsh nor too lenient. For that reason, not all death sentences were equal. They were more or less painful and – more importantly – more or less shameful. Regicides had it the worst; they were given the most prolonged, excruciating, and ignoble death. Visscher pictures Ravaillac's punishments in the corners. At top left, the executioner burns Ravaillac's right hand, which holds an ornate knife. In reality, the executioner pierced his hand with another knife (the murder weapon having been lost) and burned it with molten lead. Regardless, the meaning is the same: the part of Ravaillac's body that killed the king had to be punished first, and preferably with his own weapon. Opposite, the executioner tears flesh from Ravaillac's chest and thighs with pinchers. At bottom left, horses rip Ravaillac's limbs from his torso. Drawing and quartering with horses was an extremely rare punishment; there are only about a dozen recorded instances of this sentence in European history.<sup>18</sup> Opposite, the executioner carries a pair of limbs away, with children cheerfully following behind. In the background, he hangs a leg from a tower for all to see. For his image, Visscher omitted certain disorderly and unpleasant aspects of the story. Ravaillac's quartering had not gone smoothly.

<sup>16</sup> 'Execrandi parricida in henricum IIII galliarum et navarrae regem perpetrati exemplar'.

<sup>17</sup> Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering*, 13-16.

<sup>18</sup> Egmond and Mason, 'Domestic and Exotic Cruelties', 31-52.





Fig. 5 Claes Jansz. Visscher (printmaker/publisher) and Herman Allertsz. (publisher), Murder of King Henry IV of France and the Execution of Francois Ravailac, 1610, etching, 26,7 x 33,2 cm (newsheet 43,4 cm x 63,7 cm), Chantilly, Musée Condé.

An exhausted horse had to be replaced partway through and even still the executioner had to resort to cutting away Ravailac’s limbs. What’s worse, some spectators took trophies from the corpse, some of them even cooking and eating the flesh. Mutilating and even consuming the bodies of traitors was a symbolic act of cleansing that helped the populace restore authority to their rightful leaders, but it did not exactly suggest orderly and measured justice.<sup>19</sup>

Visscher situates the viewer in the scene, placing us in the crowd so that we participate in the spectacle. Ravailac’s punishments surround his crime. Rather than one single ritual, the penalties ordered by the judges and depicted by Visscher function like so many veils draped over Ravailac, dishonouring him in accordance with the severity of this crime. In many ways, this print epitomizes seventeenth-century Dutch execution prints. Killers, victims, or executions had to be extraordinary to compel publishers to issue newsprints. The assassination of a monarch and the cruel, antiquated punishment of a fanatical king-slayer was nothing if not extraordinary.

Two impressions of this print survive with their letterpress, and together they reveal that the work was co-published. The impressions are identical in text and image, including the publication date of 1610, except that one names Allertsz. as publisher and the other



Fig. 6 Pieter Bast (printmaker), Claes Jansz. Visscher (printmaker/publisher), Hugo Allartz (publisher), *View of Amsterdam*, 1611, etching and letterpress, 62,8 cm x 171,7 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

Visscher.<sup>20</sup> A year after this print was published, Visscher moved his shop to the bustling Kalverstraat between the Dam Square and the Stock Exchange, where he gradually amassed a huge stock of maps, city views, newsprints, and 'art' prints. Estimates of Visscher's output over the course of his career are astonishing: a thousand prints produced and more than four thousand printed from second-hand plates.<sup>21</sup> But in 1610, Visscher was living and working in the Nieuwezijds Kolk and his productivity was still fairly modest. He had been a publisher only three years, and his early offerings were mainly copies of maps issued by Blaeu and Hondius. In collaborating with Allertsz. on this project, Visscher paired his exceptional artistry with his former employer's superior financial assets and professional networks. At that time, Visscher owned rolling presses for intaglio prints, but probably not letterpresses. Allertsz. had both, and he was much better established within the vast, international network of publishers that sold one another's work. We can assume this collaboration was a success, not least as a year later they teamed up again to produce their celebrated *View of Amsterdam*: a monumental print – 62,8 x 171,7 cm – that celebrates the city as international mercantile superpower (fig. 6). The accompanying text praises Amsterdam as a source for 'all sorts of works on paper, in such abundance that their number could hardly be counted', including exactly the kind of things found in the shops of Blaeu, Allertsz., and Visscher: books, art prints, sea charts, and 'all kinds of beautiful and precious maps of the entire world, large and small, white and hand-coloured'.<sup>22</sup>

The execution print Visscher and Allertsz. co-published is significantly larger than earlier sixteenth- and seventeenth-century execution newsprints. It is roughly the same height as most contemporary broadsheets but twice as wide, and double the size of the newsprints that came from the Cologne firm of Frans Hogenberg.<sup>23</sup> The latter had set a

<sup>20</sup> 'Woonende op de kolck inde Visscher' on an impression at the *Atlas van Stolk*, and 'koster van de Nieuwe Kerck' on the impression here reproduced.

<sup>21</sup> Leeflang, 'The Sign of Claes Jansz Visscher', 247.

<sup>22</sup> 'Allerhande papieren in alsucke overvloedicheyt/ dat men het ghetal nauilijck souden connen noemen'; 'allerleye schoone ende costelijcke afbeeldingen van gantsche Weerelt-kaerten/ groote ende clyne/ witte en afgesette'.

<sup>23</sup> Broadsheet placards were roughly 40 x 30 cm: Pettegree and der Weduwen, *The Bookshop of the World*, 206-207. Hogenberg's print of Ravallac's execution measures 21,8 x 29,5 cm to Koster's 43,4 x 63,7 cm.

certain standard by producing newsprints with more frequency and greater homogeneity than any other European publishing house. From 1570, Hogenberg, like his Flemish predecessors Jean Tortorel and Jean Perrissin in Geneva, made prints either as a series or as individual works with a shared format, which lent themselves to being compiled and preserved in bound volumes.<sup>24</sup> While any newsprint could be posted on the wall, larger prints were more likely to be hung up.<sup>25</sup>

The large scale of these execution prints enhances their explicitly commemorative function. The letterpress account on the 1610 print describes the etching as a 'figural representation of the horrible murder of the Pearl of Kings, Henry IV, King of France and Navarre,' with 'in the corners [...] Justice [done] to the murderer named François Ravail-lac'.<sup>26</sup> It explains the print includes 'a short recounting of the most important history of the same' and advertises that the work is 'worthy not only to read but also to hang as an *Eternal Memory Mirror before your eyes*'.<sup>27</sup> In other words, this newsprint is not merely an account of noteworthy current events to view and to discard, but rather a memorial to be kept on the wall in perpetuity. These publishers had ambitious goals for their execution print, as they sought to shape collective memory for generations.

The work has an overtly partisan perspective, memorializing Henry's murder as belonging to a series of attacks against Protestant leaders sponsored by the Habsburgs. It is explicitly anti-Jesuit, as was typical of Dutch news coverage of the killing. As Marije van Rest has shown, Dutch and English pamphlets about the assassination of Henry IV appealed to transnational Protestant fears and stereotypes, framing the event as a joint papal and Spanish plot to depose Henry, vanquish the English, and reclaim the Northern Netherlands.<sup>28</sup> Like pamphlets such as *Een slecht ende eenvoudigh discours, over de doot van Henry le Grand* (1611) and *Waerachtighe beschrijvinghe vanden grouwelijcken moordt des alder-christelicksten conincks van Vranckrijck* (1610), Visscher and Allertsz.'s print connects Henry IV's murder with earlier assassinations of Protestant leaders – especially William of Orange – and traces these attacks to Jesuit conspirators acting as the militant arm of the papacy.<sup>29</sup> It impugns the King of Spain (without directly naming him), saying he tasked the Jesuits with running a school for assassins. The letterpress states: 'In these last centuries, the father of lies [i.e., the Spanish King], murderer from the beginning, has established through his instruments a king and sovereign murder-school, from which

24 Benedict, *Graphic History*, 6,9.

25 Large newsprints could be bound if folded many times. Visscher and Allertsz. paired the etching, which is the size of the majority of the prints the Visscher firm published (a half sheet or 27 x 42 cm), but with its letterpress title and description, the sheet falls between the largest (imperial, 55 x 72 cm) and second largest (royal, 48 x 58 cm) single sheet sizes. On sizes, see Coelen, 'Something for Everyone?', 41.

26 'Figuerlijcke Afbeeldinghe Vande Afgrijselijcke Moordt begaen aenden Peerle der Coninghen HENRICUS den vierden, Koningen van Vranckrijck ende Navarre [...] Inde Hoecken werd afgebeeldt de Iustitie over den Moordenaer ghenaeemt Francois Ravail-lac.'

27 'Met een cort verhael der voornaemste gheschiedenissen der selver niet allen weerdich om te lessen maer tot een Eeuwige Memorie Spieghele voor Ooghen te hangen.' Emphasis added.

28 Van Rest, *News in Early Modern Europe*.

29 *Een slecht eende eenvoudigh discours* also cited the Gunpowder plot: Van Rest, *News in Early Modern Europe*, 19.

have sprouted and sprung all these sovereign-murderers, who by now have unfortunately passed their exams in France, England, and Germany as well as the Netherlands.<sup>30</sup> Not surprisingly, the author discusses William of Orange more than any previous victim, reminding the reader that his dying words were 'God be merciful to my soul and to this poor people'.<sup>31</sup> The author cites Henry III of France – assassinated by the Dominican friar Jacques Clément in 1589 – as another example of this murder-school's handiwork. Dutch and English pamphlet writers made the same accusations, saying Henry IV's murder was the latest of many coordinated attacks against Protestants that were carried out by Spanish-sponsored Jesuits, identifying previous examples including the Gunpowder Plot and the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre.<sup>32</sup>

Protestant pamphleteers concentrated on historical precedents, not the potential consequences of Henry IV's assassination.<sup>33</sup> Visscher and Allertsz., on the other hand, conclude by affirming that God wishes for Protestant nations to take action to safeguard themselves. The last paragraph proclaims:

God, by His goodness and power, wants to eradicate once and for all this School of Murderers and poisoners and whatever stealthy treason they commit, before they carry out even more damaging murders to the destruction and sorrow of true Christians. God wants – I pray – by His power, to open all the hearts of kings and princes, their children, and families everywhere where these people have ever done anything, to rip the scales from their eyes and make them conspire to hunt all these sinners from the world, which would be the most secure not only for their state, but also for their own life, those they love, and what they possess.<sup>34</sup>

While the author does not promise a swift victory, triumph is surely inevitable with God's support. Like contemporary pamphlets, this 'eternal memory mirror' memorializes Henry's murder as one of many covert attacks against Protestants, but it goes one step further: the sight of it should galvanize the faithful across Europe to fight toward divinely sanctioned victories in the future. It does not take much imagination to envision a similar message accompanying Visscher's etching of the execution of the Gunpowder Plot conspirators, which Dutch pamphleteers also cited as a Spanish-sponsored assault, and which was carried out by Guy Fawkes, who at one time was a soldier serving the Spanish *tercios* in the Netherlands.

30 'De Vader der leughenen Menschen-moorder van aen aenbeginne/heeft in dese laetste eeuwen der weerelt door zijne instrumenten/een Koninghen ende Vorsten Moort-Schole opgherichtet uyt de welcke gesproten ende voortghecomen zijn/alle dese Vorsten-moorders die by onse tijden/ so in Vranckrijk/Engeland/ Duytsland/ als oock in Nederland hare droevige proefstukken leyder gedaen hebben.'

31 'Godt west mijn Zielen ende dit arm Volck gedanich'.

32 Van Rest, *News in Early Modern Europe*, 24.

33 Van Rest, *News in Early Modern Europe*, 37.

34 'God wil door zijne goedheydt ende macht dese Schole der Moordenaers en fenijn-gevers/ ende watse voor heymelicke Verraderijen practiceren/eenmaelte gronde laten uytroyen/eerst meerder schadelijcke Moorderijen aenrechten tot verderf ende bedroevinge vande oprechte Christenheydt; God wil bidde ic door zijne macht geven dat alle herten der Coningen/Vorsten hare kinderen ofte Bloetvrienden daer sy luyden oyt yets op hebben gepractiseert openen/ende hare oogen het scheel der ooghluycinghe afreucken/ende tesamen laten spannen datse alle desen verdervers vande Weerelt wech jagen/het welck het aldersekerste wesen sal van haren staet niet alleenich/maer oock van harer eyghen leven ende alle diesen liefhebben/ met t'samen al watse besitten.' Thanks to Tom van der Molen for helping me with the translation. Any mistakes are my own.

While a publisher's or printmaker's faith did not always affect their output, it is worth mentioning that Allertsz. and Visscher were Calvinists, and later sided with the ultra-conservative Counter-Remonstrants. Their print about Henry IV was published at the start of the Twelve Years' Truce (1609-1621), while debates raged about the merits of peacetime trade versus continuing the war until the Southern Netherlands were won back. Their newsprint is part of a larger body of print media that attempted to expand and revitalize the pro-war faction in the Republic by appealing to rampant Hispanophobia.<sup>35</sup> Allertsz. later made an even larger contribution to this literature. In 1614, he published (and might have written) the popular *Mirror for the Young, or Spanish Tyranny* (*Spieghel der jeught, of Spaansche tyrannye*), a children's book about the Dutch Revolt based on Willem Baudartius's influential Calvinist historiography *Morghen-wecker* from 1610.<sup>36</sup> *Spieghel der jeught* and *Morghen-wecker* were written with the goal of reminding Dutch citizens of Spain's duplicitous and violent nature, urging them to reject a false peace and resume the war as soon as possible, so that they might liberate the Southern Netherlands from Spanish tyranny.<sup>37</sup> Fearing that young people might not believe their parents about past atrocities, one such publication, Johan Duym's 1606 *Memory Book* (*Gedenck-Boeck*), explains that all people must 'see clear as a mirror the bloodthirsty heart, the old hatred, and the hidden plans the Spaniards and their adherents have borne, and still bear, towards the miserable Netherlands'.<sup>38</sup> Likewise, *Spieghel der jeught* was meant 'to instil in children from a young age and to drill into their hearts the hatred of imperious Spaniards' and to ensure 'eternal remembrance' of Spanish cruelties.<sup>39</sup> That book – again published and perhaps written by Allertsz. – functions in a manner analogous to the newsprint about Henry IV. Both memorialize (allegedly) Spanish-sponsored attacks or plots, all while visualizing the violent means by which the Habsburgs were attempting to recapture the Northern Netherlands.

### *Visscher's 1619 Execution Prints: Experimenting with Multi-Sheet Wall Prints*

In 1619, the Pensionary of Holland, Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, fell victim to the international press and diplomatic campaign to unite forces to oppose a supposed Habsburg-papal plot against Protestant nations.<sup>40</sup> That campaign included pamphlets and prints such as Visscher's 1618 *Truce Testament* and his earlier execution prints.<sup>41</sup> Oldenbarnevelt's

35 Müller, *Exile Memories and the Dutch Revolt*, 59-83.

36 For more on Allertsz. as author, see Schmidt, *Innocence Abroad*, 381, n. 104.

37 Müller, *Exile Memories and the Dutch Revolt*, 74-77.

38 Johan Duym, *Ghedenck-Boeck*, 1606, preface, fol. 2v-r, cited in Müller, 'Recapturing the Patria', 76: 'All menschen voor te stellen, daer sy soo clear als in eenen spiegel sullen mogen sien het bloeddorstich hert, den ouden haed, den heymelicken boosen raed, die den Spaignaerts ende haren aenhanck dees onse bedroefde Nederlanden gedraghen hebben, ende noch draghende zijn.'

39 *Spieghel der jeucht*, sig. Av, cited in Schmidt, *Innocence Abroad*, 232. Schmidt also addresses the reasons to credit Allertsz. and not Johannes Bouillet.

40 Helmers, 'Foreign News'.

41 For the *Truce Testament*, see Helmers, 'Foreign News', 257.

beheading tore the political sphere asunder. For more than a century, his political descendants in the province-centric States party would battle Orangists for control of the government. Oldenbarnevelt's trial and execution could not have been more controversial. The States-General had passed a secret resolution to arrest him, which violated the *ius de non evocando*, the legal right of every province to judge its own citizens and servants unless they approved extradition. In addition, not all of the jurors on Oldenbarnevelt's ad hoc jury were lawyers and some were even personal enemies. This execution (or judicial murder, depending on one's political persuasion) permanently fractured Dutch society on issues related to Reformed theology, the relationship between church and state, and provincial versus national powers.

The fall of Oldenbarnevelt's regime resulted in a ceasefire between these warring factions. However, with tempers running high at home and allies abroad torn on the wisdom of the decision, this armistice was highly unstable. Sensitive to this volatility, Visscher and other printmakers made highly ambivalent newsprints. Dutch publishers could openly abuse the Spanish king and Jesuits for crimes committed abroad, but not an illustrious fellow citizen charged with more equivocal charges on his home turf. The Pensionary of Holland, even if he died on the scaffold after having been found guilty, was second only to William of Orange as a founding father of the Republic. As a representative of the provincial government of Holland and the nation as a whole in international affairs, to denigrate Oldenbarnevelt was dangerously close to denigrating Holland and indeed the Republic itself. On the other hand, he had been found guilty, if not of treason (officially), then at least of undermining the unity of the Republic and endangering its freedom. Indeed, this was a unique situation: a state-sponsored beheading that did little to quell uncertainty and animosity, and merely produced a ceasefire rather than restoring governmental and social equilibrium, as executions were intended to do.

In the end, Visscher found a safe way to capitalize on these events (fig. 7). He affirmed the verdict, and eschewed overtly partisan personifications or allegorical elements like those in his etching of the Gunpowder Conspirators. But his representation is not neutral. Visscher omitted the cordon of soldiers that had encircled the scaffold to prevent possible interference from disobedient citizens, and he even included spectators climbing the platform for a better view, which was an obvious fiction.<sup>42</sup> More importantly, he did not produce an accompanying text. The title reads: 'Image of Justice Done on 13 May 1619 to Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, Former Advocate [Pensionary] of Holland'. When Visscher re-etched this composition, he shortened it to 'Justice Done to Johan van Oldenbarnevelt on 13 May 1619' (fig. 8). In the second version, Visscher downplayed the military presence even more, replacing the regiment in the lower left with civilians. Of course, having two plates could have had a practical function as well as an ideological one. Twice the plates meant twice the impressions of this timely subject, as one could be inked while the other was in the press.<sup>43</sup>

42 Warren, 'Paper Warfare', 167-175.

43 This was done to expedite map production: Schilder, *Monumenta cartographica Neerlandica*, vi, 34.



Fig. 7 Claes Jansz. Visscher, Execution of Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, 1619, etching, 18,6 x 36,5 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.



Fig. 8 Claes Jansz. Visscher, Execution of Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, 1619, etching, 20,2 x 37,1 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

This scarcity of text was highly unusual for a newsprint, especially because this was an event that contemporaries had not come to terms with, and which still required a lot of explanation. Visscher's ingenious solution to cope with the volatility of the times was to package his tamer execution prints with sentences for Oldenbarnevelt and his Arminian allies: Gillis van Ledenberg, Rombout Hogerbeets, and Hugo Grotius, which were issued

by Hillebrant Jacobsz. van Wouw, the official printer for States-General.<sup>44</sup> Even if those documents were unashamedly partisan, they were official records and thus of interest to everyone. In addition, this way Visscher could not be seen as having questioned the trial or its outcome. Every precaution was necessary; an engraved portrait of Hogerbeets that praised his public service had been banned during the trial, with all impressions seized and the publisher and poet fined two hundred guilders.<sup>45</sup> Visscher paired Van Wouw's printed sentences with his execution prints in two different formats.<sup>46</sup> The first was a bundle that could serve as the basis of a bound volume. He paired the four official sentences for these men with their corresponding engraved portraits and prints of Oldenbarnevelt's and Ledenberg's executions. He organized these bundles according to the men's notoriety and the severity of their punishment, beginning with Oldenbarnevelt and then Ledenberg, Hogerbeets, and lastly, Grotius.

For those wanting something more ostentatious than a book for their library, Visscher produced a monumental wall print. Three states survive in unique impressions, demonstrating that Visscher experimented with pre-existing plates, rearranging them before re-etching the executions to produce a monumental, eye-catching composition. The earliest states were made using Visscher's portraits of Oldenbarnevelt and his allies from 1618 and his first etching of the statesman's execution (figs. 9 and 10). One has a horizontal orientation and the other vertical, but both suffer aesthetically from the somewhat arbitrary direction in which their respective portraits face. In addition, they lack Gillis van Ledenberg's execution, which Visscher first etched as a square-shaped print. A third variant incorporates the two execution prints Visscher re-etched – in all likelihood for the express purpose of producing a satisfactory wall print (fig. 11). The first of the two new etchings is the aforementioned print of Oldenbarnevelt's execution. Its larger, more succinct title better suits the scale of the wall print. The second is a smaller version of Ledenberg's execution, made in the same format as the portraits and incorporating a view of Loevestein Castle, where Hogerbeets and Grotius were imprisoned. With the addition of these two plates, Visscher memorialized the punishment of all four statesmen. However, this state was not totally satisfactory either, perhaps because the composition remained awkward and while it included Johannes Wtenbogaert – who fled the Republic to escape trial – it lacked the final portrait from Visscher's 1618 series, that of Adolph van der Wael. Van der Wael was the only member of Oldenbarnevelt's entourage to confess any wrongdoing during the half-year-long trials. He requested a pardon, admitting wrongdoing in exchange for clemency, and was exiled for six years. Van der Wael was much less illustrious than his peers, but his confession – along with Ledenberg's death by suicide in prison – was construed as evidence of the guilt of the entire regime by Oldenbarnevelt's enemies. Accordingly, Visscher's print needed all six portraits.

The fourth and final state combines all six portraits and the two new execution prints in a striking horizontal format (fig. 12). This design is almost perfectly symmetrical; Wtenbogaert's portrait is the only one in which the subject faces out of the print rather than

44 While contemporaries used the terms interchangeably, some scholars now distinguish between Remonstrant as a faith and Arminian as a political ideology.

45 Bögels, *Govert Basson*, 160-177.

46 Warren, 'Singular Multiples', 334-338.





Fig. 9 Claes Jansz. Visscher, Execution of Oldenbarnevelt on 13 May 1619, 1619, etching and engraving, 36,7 x 49,5 cm, Dordrecht, Huis van Gijn.

inward. The layout has a pleasing logic and flow. Oldenbarnevelt is in the privileged position at top left, turned in the direction of his beheading. Wtenbogaert is opposite: the leader of the Remonstrants standing in for all those expelled from the Reformed Church for following Arminius. At bottom left, Grotius and Hogerbeets look right, toward their prison at bottom centre. On the other side, Ledenberg faces his ignoble end on the gibbet. Van der Wael finally joins his companions, taking the last spot. Many impressions of this print survive, some of them hand-coloured, testifying to Visscher's commercial success with this experiment. Together with Van Wouw's printed sentences, the ensemble print and print bundles disseminated an authoritative vision and rationale for these contentious events.

When adding smaller prints to a large one, Visscher may have taken inspiration from maps with decorative borders, which had always been part of his repertoire. Such maps had existed since the last quarter of the sixteenth century.<sup>47</sup> Visscher was one of the early exponents of the genre and did much to popularize it.<sup>48</sup> The eminent cartographic scholar Günter Schilder said maps with decorative borders 'must be considered one of the finest

<sup>47</sup> Schilder, 'Jodocus Hondus', 40-43.

<sup>48</sup> Campbell, *Claes Jansz Visscher*, 4.



Fig. 10 Claes Jansz. Visscher, Execution of Oldenbarnevelt on 13 May 1619, 1619, etching and engraving, 53 x 37 cm, Champaign, Krannert Art Museum.



Fig. 11 Claes Jansz. Visscher, Execution of Oldenbarnevelt on 13 May 1619, 1619, etching and engraving, c. 53 x 37 cm, reproduced in an exhibition on view in 2015 at Loevestein Castle, private collection.



Fig. 12 Claes Jansz. Visscher, Execution of Oldenbarnevelt on 13 May 1619, 1619, hand-coloured etching and engraving, 46 x 6,4 cm, Rotterdam, Atlas van Stolk.

products of the Amsterdam map-making industry' because of their artistic ingenuity and the vast amount of knowledge they represent.<sup>49</sup> Unfortunately, the number and variety of wall maps that were produced is uncertain because their survival rate is exceptionally poor. Their scale and prolonged exposure to light, humidity, and grime made them much more vulnerable than atlas maps or other prints that were preserved in volumes or portfolios, and primary sources mention many that no longer survive.<sup>50</sup> More wall maps incorporated letterpress additions than did not, with customers choosing one or more texts in Germanic and Romance languages or Latin.<sup>51</sup> Decorative wall maps were incredibly popular among the moneyed classes in the Republic, adorning private homes and state rooms alike. They were especially appealing to Dutch families that participated in mercantile exchange, invested in the East and West India Companies, and those interested in scientific expeditions, colonial ventures, and warfare. Oldenbarnevelt himself displayed

<sup>49</sup> Schilder, *Monumenta cartographica Neerlandica*, vi, 5.

<sup>50</sup> Welu, 'Vermeer. His Cartographic Sources', 539.

<sup>51</sup> Private communication with Paula van Gestel-van het Schip, 7 March 2021. Van Gestel-van het Schip and Günter Schilder are working on a major bibliography of Dutch wall maps.

seven printed maps of the world in gilt frames in his home, which is not surprising given his vocation and his central role in establishing the *voc*.<sup>52</sup>

Visscher designed the decorative elements for Willem Jansz. Blaeu's 1605 world map, which were printed separately from the map itself and subsequently combined into a larger sheet – just as the early states of the 1619 execution prints were cobbled together from individual impressions.<sup>53</sup> This technique was ideal for two reasons. First, paper sizes simply did not allow for all the plates to be printed on one sheet. Second, from a practical perspective, printing the decorative elements apart from the central map allowed customers to determine the size of their map at the time of purchase. According to the circa 1680 Visscher stock list, a fifteen-sheet map of Europe could be enlarged with twelve cities on the sides or twenty on the sides and bottom; and a twelve-sheet map of Germany could be enlarged with a decorative title and twelve cities or the title, cities, and electors.<sup>54</sup> Of course, multiple letterpress options were available, too.

These descriptions call to mind maps with decorative borders from the Visscher firm such as the 1660 map of the seventeen Netherlandish provinces from the Klencke Atlas, which was a later edition of a 1608 Blaeu map with borders designed by Claes Jansz. Visscher (fig. 13). These maps were some of the most attractive Dutch wall maps, and they appear to have been faithfully depicted in contemporary genre paintings. For instance, Vermeer's 1667 *Art of Painting* replicates an actual map of the seventeen United Provinces published by Claes Jansz. Visscher (fig. 14). James A. Welu, who reconstructed the appearance of that map from several extant fragments on the basis of the painting, considers it to be one of Visscher's finest cartographic achievements.<sup>55</sup> Maps in Dutch paintings are the same ones most common in the inventories of Dutch homes: Holland, the seventeen provinces, and the world.<sup>56</sup> These maps were not only realistic details, but also added meaning to these paintings. For instance, by the time Vermeer depicted it, Visscher's map of the Northern and Southern Netherlands was outdated. The two parts were no longer united, and as such the map has been interpreted as representing the historical past.<sup>57</sup>

The presence of wall maps in paintings and inventories are important reminders that prints were a notable feature of Dutch interiors, and for some, Visscher's and Allertsz.'s execution wall prints seem to have served similar decorative and edifying functions. Although no extant paintings, prints, or household inventories include the execution prints discussed in this article, there are early modern depictions of interiors decorated with newsprints, including some about corporal punishment. For example, Jacob Gole's *Tric-trac Players* includes a broadside called 'Woeful Tale' ('droevig verhaal') with an executioner whipping a criminal tied to a gibbet and a corpse hanging from a gallows (fig. 15).<sup>58</sup> It is not clear if Gole reproduced an actual print here, as is the case with some

52 Schilder, *Monumenta cartographica Neerlandica*, vi, 47.

53 Schilder, *Monumenta cartographica Neerlandica*, vi, 19.

54 Van der Waals, *Prenten in de Gouden Eeuw*, 219.

55 Welu, 'The Map in Vermeer's *Art of Painting*', 2.

56 Welu, 'Vermeer. His Cartographic Sources', 539-540.

57 Welu, 'Vermeer. His Cartographic Sources', 541.

58 Whipping was a common punishment for burglary or assault: Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering*, 68-69. Thanks to Isabel Casteels for suggesting this mezzotint.



Fig. 13 Claes Jansz. Visscher, *Nieuwe ende Waarachtighe Beschrijvinghe der Zeventien Nederlanden*, *Klencke Atlas*, c. 1660 (first edition William Jansz. Blaeu 1608), engraving, 176 x 231 cm, London, British Library.

of his other mezzotints.<sup>59</sup> Either way, a broadside such as this – with a sensational tale of wrongdoing and comeuppance – would be right at home in a place of entertainment and socialization like a tavern.

Even if we do not know who bought Visscher's and Allertsz.'s execution prints, as is true of almost all newsprints, we can speculate. Given the anti-Habsburg and anti-Catholic tenor of much of the media coverage about the Gunpowder Plot and murder of Henry IV (and certain reports about the Oldenbarnevelts in 1619 and 1623), Visscher and Allertsz.

<sup>59</sup> Gole included a print with the steps of life (*levenstrap*) in his c. 1675-1704 mezzotint *Childhood*, which is a naturalistic detail that also functions as a synecdoche for his entire series: *The Four Ages of Man*. He included military newsprints in other tavern interiors, including his mezzotints *October* (c.1675-1704) and *A Peasant and a Woman* (c. 1670-1724).



Fig. 14 Johannes Vermeer, *The Art of Painting*, c. 1666-1668, oil on canvas, 120 x 100 cm, Vienna, *Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien*.

must have known Protestants would be interested. And not only those in the Republic, who might read the Dutch letterpress, but also elite buyers abroad for whom there were captions in Latin. Visscher's 1619 execution prints also had broad appeal. Certainly, Oldenbarnevelt's enemies would have been enticed. That includes Counter-Remonstrants, proponents of the establishment of the West India Company, and the pro-war faction,



Fig. 15 Jacob Gole after Cornelis Dusart, Tric-trac Players, c. 1670-1724, mezzotint and engraving, 24,7 x 18, cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.



including many Flemish émigrés. However, because Visscher had carefully avoided partisan editorializing, his prints could appeal to Oldenbarnevelt's proponents as well. This was fiscally smart, but ultimately did not serve the government's intention of ending debate. The States-General banned images of Oldenbarnevelt and his allies on 17 November, six months after his beheading.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, Visscher had more than proved his proficiency as a news man. In the 1620s, he became the official 'spin doctor' for the directors of the West India Company, powerful enemies of Oldenbarnevelt after he postponed the formation of the WIC to secure the truce.<sup>61</sup> Michiel van Groesen seems to be correct that Visscher's anti-Arminian prints (including those of Oldenbarnevelt's execution) helped earn him a place on their payroll.<sup>62</sup>

### *Visscher's 1623 Execution Prints: A New Vision of Tailor-Made Newsprints*

After his successful experiment with multi-plate, multi-edition execution prints, Visscher was primed to capitalize on the media storm surrounding a foiled plot in 1623 to assassinate Prince Maurice, which was spearheaded by Oldenbarnevelt's resentful sons. The publisher made seven different execution prints: four depicting various executions and three more made of combinations of those four plates.<sup>63</sup> The first shows the execution of Reinier van Oldenbarnevelt and three others on 29 March (fig. 16). The second has three more conspirators along with the former Remonstrant preacher Hendrick Slatius (fig. 17). Whereas Reinier was a naive young man under the sway of his older brother Willem (who escaped to Brussels), Slatius was reviled as one of the ringleaders. As such, when his hands were accidentally severed during his execution, it was seen as proof of God's wrath. Visscher emphasized this connection, citing the proverb "The judge determines the sentence but God carries it out".<sup>64</sup> Below the severed hands, he portrayed a book with the words '[for] such work, such rewards'.<sup>65</sup>

While Visscher made much of this accident, another coincidence is conspicuously absent. That day, people had climbed the trees for a better view. One branch, overloaded with spectators, broke and fell on the crowd below. While the text reveals the branch killed an old woman and hurt several others, Visscher's close-up views of the scaffold crop out the spectators in the trees. By omitting the fall and the jumbled array of observers in the trees, Visscher's etching glosses over any disarray. Once again, his execution prints evince nothing but the orderly (and divinely measured) dispensation of justice.

<sup>60</sup> *Resolutiën der Staten-Generaal*, IV, no. 2000, 17 November 1619.

<sup>61</sup> Groesen, *Amsterdam's Atlantic*, 51-88, esp. 53; Groesen, 'Week to Remember', 36-45.

<sup>62</sup> Groesen, *Amsterdam's Atlantic*, 52; Groesen, 'Week to Remember', 38.

<sup>63</sup> Warren, 'A Shameful Spectacle', 223-244.

<sup>64</sup> 'Hier mach met recht geseyt werden: Den Rechter 'tvonnis sluyt/ Maer Godt die voert het uyt.' Nicolaes van Wassenaer made the same claim: 'De Richter 't Vonnis sluyt, Maer God die voert het uyt.' See Van Wassenaer, *t'Vyfde-deel*, 57.

<sup>65</sup> 'sulck werck, sulck Loon'.



Fig. 16 Claes Jansz. Visscher, The Execution of Reinier van Oldenbarnevelt, David Coorenwinder, and Adriaan van Dijk, 1623, etching and letterpress, 40,8 x 32,5 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

Families of the conspirators could not stop the dissemination of such prints – but a few brave souls did try to give the condemned men a more dignified resting place, rather than leave their remains to fall on un consecrated ground. On the night of 11 May, someone



Fig. 17 Claes Jansz. Visscher, The Execution of Hendrick Slatius, Willem Perthy, and Jan and Abraham Blansaert, 1623, etching and letterpress, 28,6 x 32,7 cm, Champaign, Krannert Art Museum.

stole some corpses from the gallows field near Rijswijk. Visscher referred to them as ‘certain seditious and worrisome people’ and they probably included Hendrick Slatius’s wife, Barendina Telle, and a sister of Cornelis Gerritsz., who was Slatius’s brother-in-law and fellow conspirator.<sup>66</sup> Risking criminal charges, they stole the body of Slatius and the quartered remains of two conspirators that were hung near him, David Coornwinder and Cornelis Gerritsz., and they buried the bodies in a wooden box near the Geestbrug, which spans the Trekvliet canal near Rijswijk.

66 Claes Jansz. Visscher, *Hendrick Slatius Goes Back from Whence He Came*, 1623: ‘sekere poerrienge en ongeruste menschen’. Authorities accused Bernardina Imansd. Tielle and her kin of committing the theft, which they denied: NA, Archief Hof van Holland, 5228.5, Inquest regarding Bernardina Telle, 1623. For the involvement of the sister of Cornelis Gerritszoon, see Knappert, ‘Slatius en zijn Libel’, 152-154, esp. 153. Barendina was the sister of the polemicist and satirist Regnerus Vitellius (Reinier Telle) of Zierikzee, who was a fierce advocate for religious toleration: Siehruis, ‘Controversy and Reconciliation’, 147-148.



Fig. 18 Claes Jansz. Visscher, Hendrick Slatius Goes Back from Whence He Came, 1623, etching and letterpress, 27 x 23,2 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

This was not to be their final resting place. A farmer ploughing his field accidentally uncovered them five days later and summoned the authorities. Visscher portrayed the gruesome antics that ensued in a newsprint entitled 'Slatius comes out of the grave, and goes [whence] he departed' (fig. 18).<sup>67</sup> We see the farmer discovering the remains, which Visscher unsympathetically calls 'crow-bait'. When the executioner and his servant arrived to retrieve them, the corpses were too heavy for them to drag by themselves and bystanders refused to help. This was a job for dishonourable men; direct contact with executioners and executed criminals carried a terrible stigma.<sup>68</sup> In the end, the executioner had to rely on 'a few unsuitable boys' for help.<sup>69</sup>

After travelling down the Trekvljet canal, they dragged the corpses across the land. Slatius's shirt came off and was used to carry the severed heads, leaving him naked. At the wheel on the gallows field, the executioner tried hoisting Slatius with a rope, but it broke, sending the corpse crashing to the ground. Then the executioner climbed atop the wheel and lifted the body with a plank. That broke too, leaving the naked, headless

67 'SLATIUS komt uijt het Graff, /en vaert op daer hy Voer aff.'  
 68 Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering*, 91.  
 69 'enighe ongeschickte Jonghers'.

body swinging by the ankles while someone went to fetch a ladder. 'Finally, each [man] arrived at his place': Slatius on the wheel and the quarters of his co-conspirators on gibbets.<sup>70</sup>

Unlike his portrayal of the Pensionary of Holland, Visscher did not shy away from symbolic imagery. A bat, indicating secrecy and sin, hovers above Slatius's seditious pamphlet the *Bright-Shining Torch*. The caption reads: '[He] who puts an end to light, his cause follows wrath.'<sup>71</sup> Visscher contrasts the darkness of devious behaviour – plotting murder or stealing corpses – to the light of discovery and public punishment. It should be noted that Visscher also portrayed the remains of the executed men as if they were unblemished, which was impossible. When they were stolen, they had been outdoors somewhere between a week (Slatius) and a month or two (Coornwinder and Gerritsz.).<sup>72</sup> Strict naturalism was not his priority. Issues of decorum, pictorial precedent, and ideology shaped his choices.<sup>73</sup> Like the missing spectators in the trees, the condition of the bodies evinces Visscher's emphasis on the infamy of these individuals (within the bounds of propriety) rather than and sometimes in spite of the particulars of their punishment.

The historian Laurentius Knappert has described this print and contemporary accounts of these events as demonstrating an 'almost unbelievable callousness and harshness, even for that time, that can only be explained by the fierce passions in those wicked years of civil strife and religious hatred, which were stirred up even more by the attempt [on Maurices's life]'.<sup>74</sup> Knappert is correct to call attention to this extraordinary viciousness. These events could have been interpreted as a series of farcical mishaps, but instead the extraordinary, even gratuitous degradation of the bodies is justified according to providence, eliciting a sense of sanctimonious *schadenfreude*. The ferocity of this imagery can be understood as a return to the more overt polemics of Visscher's execution prints from the first decade of the seventeenth century, which were motivated by the desire to denounce papal-Habsburg enemies perpetrating crimes against Protestants abroad. Visscher had been reticent to extrapolate on the execution of the elder Oldenbarnevelt; his seemingly straightforward and naturalistic images and his reliance on official documents effectively problematized a clearly partisan interpretation of events. But the 1623 conspirators were another matter entirely. Such ambivalence was not necessary; the conspirators had irrefutably plotted to commit a despicable act. Visscher and his fellow citizens likely felt a near-hysterical rage – much more than Ravaillac or the Gunpowder plotters elicited – because these were

70 'is eindelijk weder op sijn plaetse geeraect'.

71 'Wiens light ontstight, Diens saeck volght wraeck'.

72 Cornelis Gerritsz. was executed on 27 February, David Coornwinder on 29 March, and Slatius on 5 May. Their bodies were stolen the night of 11 May.

73 Klinkert, *Nassau in het nieuws*, 13-14. Klinkert makes a persuasive, much needed argument that scholars need to consider these issues and the desire to organize and clarify the narrative when they examine newsprints, rather than considering any deviation from events as reported by textual sources as an error on the printmaker's part.

74 Knappert, 'Slatius en zijn libel', 154: 'Zowel de taal, waarin het feit word beschreven als de manier, waarop het is afgebeeld geven een duidelijken indruk van de toedracht zelve, in eene, zelfs voor dien tijd schier ongehoofelijke ongevoeligheid en ruwheid, slechts te verklaren uit de felle, nog door den aanslag te meer opgezweepte, hartstochten in deze booze jaren van burgertwist en godsdiensthaat.'

traitorous Dutchmen, not foreign saboteurs acting in London or Paris. Everything about these men – their nationality, their Protestant faith, and especially their elevated social status – should have made them above reproach, and yet they had conspired to murder their own stadtholder. Visscher's depiction of 'almost unbelievable callousness and harshness' must have seemed fair recompense for such betrayal.

After the corpses were returned to the gallows' field, the ugly affair seemed settled. But Slatius's loved ones remained undeterred. Barendina Telle stole her husband's remains again and buried them in an orchard near the village of Warmond.<sup>75</sup> This time, they remained undisturbed. And yet, the second theft of the bodies from the gallows is neither depicted or nor described in Visscher's prints, even though some impressions were undoubtedly published after the fact. Visscher referenced it only indirectly, with some impressions of the aforementioned print having an additional line of text in the lower left corner, in a different font, which was likely added to existing impressions. It reads: 'Even if you snatch the criminal, and steal him seven more times, even so everyone here is depicted well enough.'<sup>76</sup> Here, Visscher asserts his newsprint is sufficient for justice to be served, regardless of whether the real body sits on the wheel in plain sight or buried and hidden from view, because he has 'depicted [everyone] well enough' for their dishonour to be disseminated. This is a bold claim for the shaming potential of his prints; they can stand in for and even replace the real criminal body, thus continuing to subject Slatius, his family, and those affiliated with him to the shame and humiliation of public execution and display.

Visscher's fourth execution print from 1623 portrays three men that were beheaded in Leiden and another in Rotterdam (fig. 19). He included their portraits and an elevated view of a beheading in Leiden. Perhaps because the men were not well known, it is a simple composition with a brief, straightforward account. It is also the only execution print Visscher did not sign.

It was not simply the public hunger for news that drove Visscher to make these prints, which are more finely wrought and printed on nicer paper than most contemporary representations of these events. He had political objectives along with financial ones. The plot to murder the prince had taken a long time to resolve. Over a period of several months, fourteen men had been executed in three cities. Visscher's monumental wall print combines all his individual executions prints (see fig. 1), and they fit together so perfectly that conjoining them must have been his intent from the start.<sup>77</sup> This fitting grand finale thus includes copious images of dismemberment, death, and public display. The print increased the dishonour conveyed by the individual prints, making it a singular tour de force of propaganda. In the accompanying letterpress text, Visscher

75 Knappert likens Barendina Telle to the Old Testament heroine Rizpah, who guarded the remains of her executed sons from carrion animals (2 Samuel 21:1-14) and to Maria van Reigersberch, but said the object of Telle's devotion was less worthy: Knappert, 'Slatius en zijn libel', 154. Whereas Van Reigersberch, celebrated for her marital fidelity and incredible courage, was regarded as a heroine to Remonstrants and later the States Party, Barendina Telle was largely forgotten. Even most scholars (Knappert included) do not name this stalwart woman, referring to her only as 'the widow of Slatius'.

76 'Of ghy den boef al roof, en seven mael noch steelt,/ Soo is een yder hier genoechaem afghebeelt.'

77 Warren, 'Claes Jansz. Visscher's 1623 News Prints'.



Fig. 19 Claes Jansz. Visscher, Executions of 'Arminians' in Leiden and Rotterdam, 1623, etching and letterpress, 37,4 x 29,1 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

acknowledges the works had been published before, but explains that as individual news-prints they could not defame the criminals and their Remonstrant allies in perpetuity:

Dear spectator, on occasion we have shared with you in the past, the Justice [done to] the aforementioned Conspirators, each separately. These were not so useful to serve as a memorial-mirror to hang before one's eyes. So, it seemed like a good idea to combine them handily into one sheet, so as

to share them with all good Patriots and real lovers of the Fatherland. They will serve as an eternal memorial for us and for our descendants [to help] to remember the evil that emerged and happened in this country.<sup>78</sup>

The text recounts earlier (alleged) injustices perpetrated by Remonstrants and their political benefactors, which situate the plot to murder Prince Maurice as the most recent effort by 'Arminians' to undermine the legitimate Dutch government. Without specifically naming Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, the text claims his administration's efforts to curb the 'true Reformed religion' were part of a larger, ongoing conspiracy – just like Henry IV's assassination had been part of a series of Spanish-sponsored attacks. Functioning as a 'memorial-mirror' and an 'eternal memorial', the wall print endeavours to sustain antipathy toward Oldenbarnevelt and his political and religious descendants for generations. This ensemble print was intended to have a powerful and lasting polemical impact by remaining on view indefinitely, and in a fairly prominent place given its large scale.

### *Conclusion*

These execution newsprints had lofty artistic and educational goals. It is worth noting that while Visscher claims only his wall prints could serve as perpetual memorials to the dishonour of these men to galvanize future action, individual execution prints – including those by Visscher – were also preserved in albums and bound in books for exactly this reason.<sup>79</sup> On the wall or in albums, prints were not subject to the limitations of a real execution; they dispersed like seeds blown in the wind, sowing a criminal's notoriety across space and time. The difference between a print on the wall and one in an album is that the former is a deliberate and conspicuous semi-public display of interests and attitudes. Then as now, hanging something in one's home or place of work or leisure necessarily indicates that we deem it worthy of repeated and prolonged observation, and because Dutch publishers did not commemorate military losses or other bad news in newsprints, we can safely assume most buyers understood these executions to be victories worth sharing with posterity.

Coming of age professionally among map publishers had a profound impact on Visscher's design sensibilities and career trajectory. His multi-plate, multi-edition newsprints and news maps became something that distinguished him from publishers without a cartographic background. Unfortunately, Visscher's execution wall prints

<sup>78</sup> Claes Jansz. Vischer, Text page for large print of the execution of the conspirators against Prince Maurice, 1623, letterpress, 54,2 cm x 55,5 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum: 'Beminde aenschouwer/bewijle wy U.E. voor desen hadden mede ghedeelt de Justitien der voormoemde Conspirateurs/elck in 't besonder/ende deselve niet soo bequaem en waren/om tot een ghedenck-spieghel voor ooghen te hangen/soo heeft ons goet ghedocht/ deselve bequaemlijck in een stuck te voeghen/ende alsoo alle goede Patriotten ende ware Lief-hebbers des Vaderlands mede te deelen/tot een eeuwighe memorie voor ons en onse naekomlingen/om daer by te ghedencken/ het quaet dat deze Landen ontstaen/ ende overkomen is.'

<sup>79</sup> Warren, 'Paper Warfare'.



have mostly survived in one or two unique impressions (except for those depicting Johan van Oldenbarnevelt), suffering the same fate as many large-scale prints displayed in domestic settings; they were ‘used’ to death. Nevertheless, a testament to the success of these prints are the many monumental siege and battle maps Visscher later produced, such as his four-plate news map of Olinda de Pharnambuco from 1630 or seven-plate *Siege of Den Bosch by Frederick Hendrick in 1629* (fig. 20). Visscher offered the latter in several editions, too. First, he sold one news map, then he updated and reissued it, adding a decorative title and new letterpress in Dutch and French. The same map could be further enlarged with three plates portraying Spanish troops leaving their garrison. In the cartouche, an inset map appears as a wall map, mounted on fringed linen and hung with wooden rollers (fig. 21). Visscher’s monumental newsprints of executions and military victories had become so iconic by this point that he could playfully include this sort of metacommentary, punning on the purpose and function of his ‘eternal memory mirrors’.

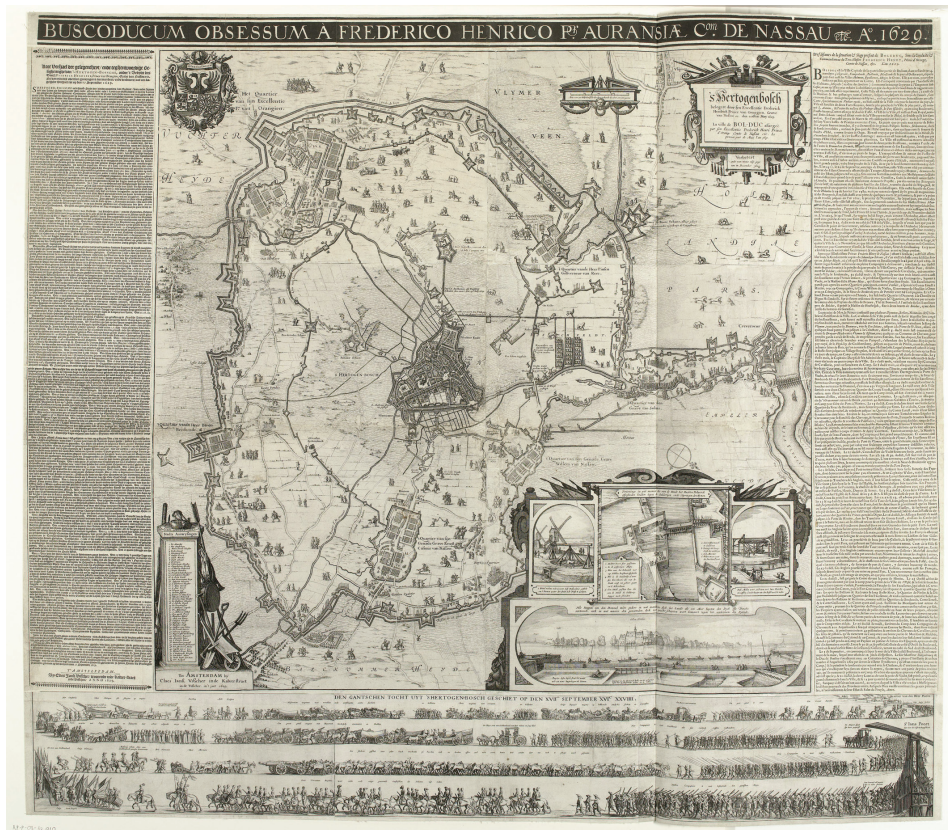


Fig. 20 Claes Jansz. Visscher (publisher), Large map of the Siege of Den Bosch by Frederik Hendrik, 1629, etching, engraving, woodcut, and letterpress, 95 x 108,6 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

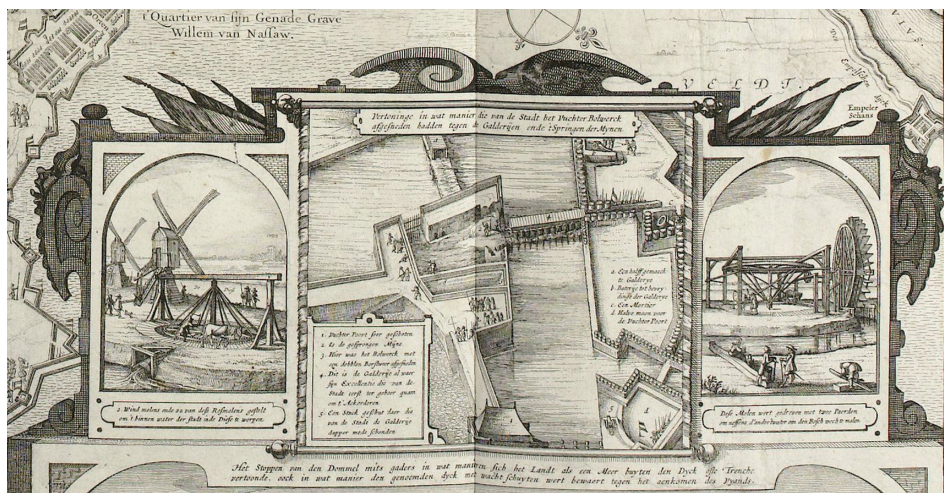


Fig. 21 Detail of fig. 20.

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