

**TUDOR ENGLAND'S RELATIONS WITH SPAIN,
THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE AND THE LOW COUNTRIES¹.**

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The expansion and then fragmentation of the Habsburg domains during the sixteenth century presented English diplomacy with its greatest challenges.² The union of the Netherlands, the Spanish kingdoms and the Holy Roman Empire in the 'empire' of Charles V in the years leading up to 1519 created a bloc that included England's major trading partners. The difficulties were compounded when Henry VIII decided to terminate his marriage to the Emperor's aunt, Catherine of Aragon. Thanks to Charles V's abdication in 1556 and the partition of his empire between his son Philip and his brother the Emperor Ferdinand I, Elizabeth I faced a novel situation on her accession. The future of Anglo-Habsburg relations was then transformed by the revolt of the Netherlands, which became the central foreign policy issue she faced in the last thirty years of her reign.

In 1519 England had established commercial relationships with two of Charles V's domains. One was the Hanseatic League of North German ports, whose privileged and controversial trading position in England had been established by the treaty of Utrecht with Edward IV in 1474.³ The other was the Netherlands. Anglo-Netherlands relations hinged on the trading monopoly over English cloth exports granted by Henry VII to the Merchant Adventurers Company and the subsequent commercial treaty, the *Magnus Intercursus* (Great Intercourse), of 1496. Henry VII's attempted revision of the treaty in England's favour in 1506, nicknamed the 'malus intercursus' in the Netherlands, created a running dispute over the terms of trade. Despite a series of major negotiations on the subject throughout the century, no final settlement was reached.⁴

The need for an agent in the Netherlands knowledgeable in commercial affairs led Henry VII in his last years to post there one of the first two English ambassadors resident.⁵ The other (thanks to the marriage alliance created by Catherine of Aragon) was appointed to the Spanish court. The latter post was transformed by Henry VIII's initial avuncular affection for his nephew Charles V. At Gravelines in May 1520 Henry and Charles agreed on the reciprocal posting of a gentleman of confidence at each other's court to counterbalance Henry's earlier agreement with Francis I of France. However, Cardinal Wolsey's hegemonic

control over Henry VIII's foreign policy during the 1520s left English ambassadors at the Emperor's court with little to do.⁶

The King's 'Great Matter' brought the Wolsey era to an end and created an unprecedented diplomatic situation. Although Charles V was unwilling to go to war over Henry VIII's repudiation of the Papacy, he was determined to protect the interests of Catherine of Aragon and her daughter, Princess Mary. This, he considered, would be done most effectively by his ambassador with Henry, the long-serving Savoyard, Eustache Chapuys (1529–1545), and he treated Henry's ambassadors in a perfunctory manner bordering on rudeness.⁷ For his part, Henry turned to the Lutheran princes of the Schmalkaldic League, beginning with the embassy of William Paget in 1531–1532.⁸ From 1534 Henry employed a Lutheran lawyer, Dr Christopher Mundt, as his resident with the League. However, the new Anglo-Lutheran relationship was a hollow one. Henry's concern was to win support for the divorce and allies against the Papacy; he was less happy with the theology of Lutheranism. For the League, allying with a foreign prince was a controversial issue and Henry's hesitancy was countered by a more generous and aggressive French diplomacy, which effectively ignored the religious issue.

In 1543 mutual hostility to France brought about a brief and self-interested reconciliation between Henry VIII and Charles V. The Emperor made peace with France in the following year, compensating Henry with a treaty for mutual defence (the declaration of Utrecht) in 1546. This was a price Charles was willing to pay to isolate the Schmalkaldic League. Thanks to Henry's death and the decision of Edward VI's government to revive 'the rough wooing' with Scotland, Charles was able to defeat the League decisively in 1547. Despite the declaration of Utrecht, he remained studiously neutral during the ensuing Anglo-French confrontation over Scotland, limiting his involvement in England to the protection of Princess Mary. Edward's government, seriously damaged by the failure of the Scottish war, was too cautious to support the Lutheran revolt of 1551–1552 and then became obsessed by the possibility of a Habsburg break-up following the Emperor's physical collapse at the beginning of 1553.

However, Edward VI died first and in the summer of 1553 England unexpectedly became the focus of European diplomacy.⁹ Mary Tudor's quick victory prevented foreign intervention, though Charles's ambassadors may have played a significant, if disingenuous, role in

providing assurances that the Emperor did not support the marriage of Mary to his son, Prince Philip. The vocal domestic opposition to Mary's ultimate decision to go ahead with the marriage was in part a response to perceived Imperial duplicity. Charles V's interest in the marriage was inspired more by the security of the Netherlands than the subsequent English reconciliation with Rome; the alliance with England would ensure both the commercial prosperity of the Netherlands and its defence against France.

Behind these calculations lay the impending partition of the Habsburg lands between Ferdinand I and Philip following Charles's abdication. However, Mary's brief reign brought England's Habsburg phase to a sharp end. The accession of Elizabeth I coincided with further disillusion over the Habsburg connection following the loss of Calais in January 1558.¹⁰ Philip II, anxious to return to Spain and to retain the spirit of the alliance, accepted Elizabeth as preferable to Mary, Queen of Scots, despite her return to Protestantism.¹¹ His policy was heavily influenced by advice from his ambassador with Elizabeth (the bishop Alvaro de La Quadra), who claimed the majority of the English population remained loyal to the old church and therefore Elizabeth's new regime would not last for long. This assumption would lead La Quadra and his successors into encouraging and assisting Catholic discontent. In the meantime, Philip sought to prevent an open confrontation by preventing a papal excommunication and encouraging Ferdinand I's proposal of his son, the Archduke Charles of Styria, as a husband for Elizabeth.¹²

Nominally, Elizabeth's government wished to maintain the Habsburg connection and a resident ambassador accompanied Philip to Spain. The Austrian proposals of marriage were undoubtedly encouraged by indirect hints, but very early in the reign most observers were sceptical of Elizabeth's personal interest given her relations with Lord Robert Dudley. But Elizabeth's government also renewed direct contact with the Lutheran princes of the Empire, now accorded an official status following the 'religious peace' of Augsburg. Christopher Mundt, whose commission had lapsed under Mary, was re-engaged as agent. Elizabeth and the Lutherans shared an initial common interest in framing a response to the Papal summoning of a general council in 1560–1561. Yet the English continued to evade a commitment to Lutheran theology (the Confession of Augsburg), while the emergence of German Calvinism in the Rhenish Palatinate made the Lutherans more dogmatic.

The ultimate stumbling block in Anglo-German relations was involvement in the recurrent religious civil wars in France. The strongest German supporter of the French Protestants was the Elector Palatine, but he lacked the financial resources to do so single-handedly. The wealthier Lutheran princes were unhappy about foreign adventures, which left Elizabeth the paymaster of any German recruiting for the French Protestants. Anglo-German relations thus became a series of tedious negotiations every time a crisis broke out in France in which Elizabeth put up a nominal sum and then tried to persuade or cajole the Lutherans to contribute. By the middle of her reign Elizabeth was openly sceptical of the Germans as effective allies.¹³

The problems in France were soon eclipsed by the revolt in the Netherlands. From the start of Elizabeth's reign Philip II and his ministers were worried about English influence on religious dissidence in the Netherlands and, as domestic tension in the Netherlands grew, it came to pose a central strategic dilemma. On the one hand, there was the common sense approach that only once order was restored in the Netherlands could England be dealt with; yet on the other, there was the view that so long as England was free to encourage discontent, the Netherlands would never be pacified.¹⁴ Elizabeth's government read the situation in the same way, and depriving Philip of the most convenient base for an invasion of England became the strongest argument for aiding the Dutch rebels.

For all the strategic calculations, the commercial relationship became the first open issue as it became linked to the wider question of Elizabeth's refusal to curb English attempts to penetrate the Spanish New World. In 1563–1564 the Netherlands government made an initial attempt to force concessions from Elizabeth by embargoing English shipping. However, this manoeuvre backfired badly when pressure from Antwerp forced the repeal of the embargo. A second issue was Elizabeth's appointment of a protestant clergyman (John Man) as ambassador to Philip in 1566, possibly in retaliation for his clerical ambassadors. Philip took the appointment extremely badly and dismissed Man in 1568. Man was Elizabeth's last resident in Spain.¹⁵

Man's dismissal coincided with the outbreak of the first Dutch Revolt and the appointment of a new Spanish resident, Don Guerau de Spes, who saw the flight of Mary, Queen of Scots to England as the opportunity to ignite a Catholic revolt. English confiscation of treasure en route to the Netherlands and another embargo brought Elizabeth and Philip to the brink of

war in 1569. It was mainly the desire of the Duke of Alba (then governor in the Netherlands) for a peaceful settlement that prevented an open conflict, though a privateering war at sea lasted until 1574.¹⁶ At the end of 1571 Elizabeth dismissed De Spes for his part in a conspiracy to depose her in favour of the Queen of Scots (the Ridolphi Plot) and he was not replaced until 1578.

The crisis over the Ridolphi Plot was overtaken by the outbreak of the main Dutch Revolt in 1572. Alba now offered a resolution of the trade dispute on very favourable terms, which was agreed in the treaty of Bristol in 1574, but Elizabeth's offers to mediate a wider settlement in the Netherlands were rebuffed. Diplomatic contacts between England and the leader of the Dutch Revolt, William I of Orange, began during these years, but Elizabeth neither accepted nor rejected an offer of the sovereignty of Holland and Zeeland in early 1576.¹⁷ Following the collapse of Spanish government in the Netherlands several months she tried to persuade Philip II to accept William of Orange as his governor-general, an attractive but utopian solution. In July 1577 she appointed William Davison as her resident agent in the Netherlands, nominally with Philip's governor-general Don Juan of Austria, but in reality with Orange.

The possibility of an open war at the end of 1577 led Philip to post his last resident ambassador, Don Bernardino de Mendoza, whose purpose was primarily to obtain intelligence about Elizabeth's intentions in the Netherlands. He also took up the cause of the Queen of Scots for which he was finally expelled in 1584. However, in 1578 Elizabeth abandoned unilateral intervention in the Netherlands in favour of joint action with France through the Duke of Anjou, the cause of much controversy in England. This remained her policy not just until Anjou died in 1584 but as late as the spring of 1585 when Henry III of France finally rejected a Dutch offer of sovereignty.¹⁸

In the summer of 1585 Elizabeth concluded the treaty (technically treaties) of Nonsuch with the United Provinces (the northern Netherlands), which effectively defined her policy for the remainder of her reign.¹⁹ Hostilities broke out with Spain as a result, though war was never officially declared. She did not at this stage abandon a negotiated settlement, but her attempt to control the United Provinces indirectly through the Earl of Leicester was unsuccessful and only revealed the Dutch unwillingness to accept any settlement that did not include independence.²⁰ Nevertheless, despite the defeat of the Armada, she continued to wage war

with Spain defensively with some form of restoration of the *status quo ante* being the assumed outcome.²¹ She did not seek a decisive victory over Spain – for which she was regularly criticised – nor attempt to seize Spanish colonies. Her immediate strategic aim was the destruction of the Spanish fleet so it could pose no threat to her. In 1598 there was a revision of the treaty with the United Provinces, under which they took over the paying of the English troops there, but at the price of reduced English political influence.

The war was widely seen as a personal struggle between Elizabeth and Philip and as a result both sides assumed that peace would not be made until one or the other died. Philip's death in 1598 was followed by an attempt at a settlement in 1600, but neither side was willing to compromise and the Spaniards decided to wait until Elizabeth died, a policy that bore fruit in 1604.²² For all the criticisms of Elizabeth's conduct of foreign policy, she had at least ensured that Habsburg control of the Netherlands was limited to the defence of the southern provinces. In retrospect, the relationship between the Tudors and the Habsburgs during the course of the century had always hinged on the Netherlands, the main point of contact. Whatever the wider dynastic, religious or strategic aspects of the relationship, the importance of amity between England and the Netherlands to their mutual prosperity meant that both dynasties had either to maintain a wider peace or try to dominate the other, either diplomatically or by force. Concern about the Netherlands caused Charles V to hesitate over going to war with Henry VIII and then seize the opportunity for dynastic union. The Dutch Revolt paralysed Philip II's relations with England and provided Elizabeth with the opportunity for a new relationship with the Netherlands that, whatever her caution, she could not reject.

Citation:

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Notes

¹ For the English embassies see the relevant sections of Gary M. Bell, *A Handlist of British Diplomatic Representatives 1508– 1688* (Royal Historical Society, 1990). Many of the ambassadors are also the subject of articles in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography(ODNB)* (Oxford, 2004-2009) as are the Habsburg ambassadors for the first half of the century. Financial constraints have prevented the inclusion of those of the second half. For Philip II's first three ambassadors see Manuel Fernández Alvarez, *Tres Embajadores de Felipe II en Inglaterra* (Madrid, 1951). For the diplomatic representation of the United Provinces, see O. Schutte, *Repertorium der Nederlandse Vertegenwoordigers residerende in het Buitenland, 1584– 1810* (The Hague,

1976) and *Repertorium der Buitenlandse Vertegenwoordigers residerende in Nederland 1584–1810* (The Hague, 1983).

² The history of the Public Record Office's transcribing and calendaring of the relevant Habsburg archives after the opening of the Archivo General de Simancas in 1844 is complex. Publication of the 13 volumes of *Letters, Despatches and State Papers, relating to the Negotiations between England and Spain* began in 1862 and concluded in 1954 and covered the period 1485–1558. In the meantime the series *Correspondencia de Felipe II con sus Embajadores en la Corte de Inglaterra 1558 á 1584* was published in the *Colección de Documentos Inéditos para la Historia de España* [CODOIN] (5 vols, 1886–88). M. A. S. Hume (ed.), *Letters and Papers relating to English Affairs, preserved principally in the Archives of Simancas* (4 vols, 1892–1899) is effectively a translation of the *Correspondencia* with the addition of some further material.

³ T. H. Lloyd, *England the German Hanse 1157–1611: a Study of their Trade and Commercial Diplomacy* (Cambridge, 1991).

⁴ H. J. Smitt (ed.), *Bronnen tot de Geschiedenis van den Handel met Engeland, Schotland en Ierland: Tweede Deel: 1485–1585* (2 vols, Rijks Geschiedkundige Publicatiën, lxxxvi, xci, The Hague, 1942, 1950) assembles the main documentary sources for the Anglo-Netherlands commercial relationship. For the first decade of Elizabeth's reign, see G. D. Ramsay, *The City of London in International Politics at the Accession of Elizabeth Tudor* (Manchester, 1975) and *The Queen's Merchants and the Revolt of the Netherlands* (Manchester, 1986).

⁵ Betty Behrens, 'The Office of the English Resident Ambassador: its Evolution as Illustrated by the Career of Sir Thomas Spinelly, 1509–22', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th ser., xvi (1933), pp. 161–95.

⁶ Peter Gwyn, *The King's Cardinal: the Rise and Fall of Thomas Wolsey* (London, 1990).

⁷ For Chapuys' career see the article by C. S. L. Davies, 'Chapuys, Eustache (1490–92?–1556)', *ODNB* (Sept 2004; online edn, May 2008).

⁸ Rory McEntegart, *Henry VIII, the League of Schmalkalden and the English Reformation* (Royal Historical Society, 2002).

⁹ E. H. Harbison, *Rival Ambassadors at the Court of Queen Mary* (Princeton, 1940), M. J. Rodríguez-Salgado, *The Changing Face of Empire: Charles V, Philip II and Habsburg Authority, 1551–1559* (Cambridge, 1988)

¹⁰ M. J. Rodríguez-Salgado and Simon Adams (eds), 'The Count of Feria's Dispatch to Philip II of 14 November 1558', *Camden Miscellany XXVIII* (Camden Society, 4th ser., xxix, 1984), pp. 302–44.

¹¹ There are two large-scale, multi-lingual but incomplete documentary collections on aspects of the relationship between Elizabeth I and Philip II: J. M. B. C. Kervyn de Lettenhove (ed.), *Relations politiques des Pays-Bas et de l'Angleterre sous le règne de Philippe II* (11 vols., Brussels, 1882–1900), and Jorge Calvar Gross *et al.* (eds), *La Batalla del Mar Océano: Corpus Documental de las hostilidades entre España e Inglaterra (1568–1604)* (3 vols. published, Madrid, 1988–).

¹² Kurt Diemer, *Die Heiratsverhandlung zwischen Koningen Elisabeth I. von England und Erzherzog Karl von Innerösterreich 1558–1570* (unpub. Ph.d.diss., University of Tübingen, 1969) is an invaluable exploration of the relevant Austrian and German archives.

¹³ For Anglo-Palatine relations see E. I. Kouri, *England and the Attempts to form a Protestant Alliance in the late 1560s: a Case Study in European Diplomacy* (Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae, ser. B., 1981) and the documentary collections, August Kluckhohn (ed.), *Briefe Friedrichs des Frommen, Kurfürsten von der Pfalz* (2 vols., Brunswick, 1868–72) and Friedrich von Bezold (ed.), *Briefe des Pfalzgraven Johann Casimir mit verwandten Schriftstücken* (3 vols, Munich, 1882–1903).

¹⁴ See Geoffrey Parker, 'The Place of Tudor England in the Messianic Vision of Philip II', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., xii (2002), pp. 167–221, and *The Grand Strategy of Philip II* (New Haven and London, 1998).

¹⁵ Gary M. Bell, 'John Man, the last Elizabethan Resident Ambassador in Spain', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, vii (1976), pp. 75–93.

¹⁶ In the 1569 crisis see Julio Retamel Favereau, *Diplomacia Anglo-Española durante la Contrarreforma* ([Santiago de Chile], 1981) and William S. Maltby, *Alba: A Biography of Fernando Alvarez de Toledo, Third Duke of Alba 1507–1582* (Berkeley, 1983).

¹⁷ Simon Adams, 'Elizabeth I and the Sovereignty of the Netherlands 1575–1585', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., xiv (2004), pp. 309–19. The most recent study of Orange is K.W. Swart, *Willem van Oranje en de Nederlandse Opstand 1572–1584* (The Hague, 1994), English translation, *William of Orange and the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1572–1584* (Aldershot, 2003). Thanks to French influence, the Netherlands employed registers (or *depechen boeken*) extensively. These are largely unpublished, but are regularly cited in N. Japikse (ed.), *Resolutiën der Staten Generaal van 1576 tot 1609* (11 vols. (to 1603), Rijks Geschiedkundige Publicatiën, The Hague, 1915–50).

¹⁸ Simon Adams, 'The Decision to Intervene: England and the United Provinces 1584–1585', in José Martínez Millán (ed.), *Felipe II (1527–1598): Europa y la Monarquía Católica* (5 vols, Madrid, 1999), I, pp. 19–31.

¹⁹ The report of the Dutch embassy on the Nonsuch negotiations has been published, 'Rapport van de Nederlandsche Gezanten in 1585 naar Engeland gezonden', *Kronijk van het Historische Genootschap*, 5th Ser. 2 (1866), pp. 215-77.

²⁰ F. G. Oosterhoff, *Leicester and the Netherlands 1586–1587* (Utrecht, 1988).

²¹ R. B. Wernham, *After the Armada: Elizabethan England and the Struggle for Western Europe 1588–1595* (Oxford, 1984), and *The Return of the Armadas: the last years of the Elizabethan War against Spain 1595–1603* (Oxford, 1994).

²² Paul C. Allen, *Philip III and the Pax Hispanica, 1598–1621: the Failure of Grand Strategy* (New Haven, 2000).