

Jason Storbakken  
CH 108  
Dr. Jane Huber/Russell Gasdia

### Codicological Description of 1685 Edition of *Martyrs Mirror*

The *Martyr's Mirror* was first published in Dutch in 1660 and documents the testimonies of Christian martyrs. The second edition appeared in 1685 and includes additional content as well as engravings not included in the first edition. The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York contains a copy of this magisterial 1685 edition of the *Martyr's Mirror*, and it is this text to which I will provide a codicological description.

The full title of the book is *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians who baptized only upon confession of faith, and who suffered and died for the testimony of Jesus, their Savior, from the time of Christ to the year A.D. 1660*. Second only to the Bible, the *Martyr's Mirror* is held in utmost prominence among Anabaptists, especially Amish and Old Order Mennonite. The term "Defenseless" is in reference to the pacifist convictions of the Anabaptist martyrs.

This Anabaptist martyrology was published by Thieleman van Braght, a Dutch Mennonite minister and elder of the Flemish Mennonite congregation at Dordrecht.<sup>1</sup> The second edition of van Braght's *Martyrs Mirror*, which was not edited by van Braght who died in 1664, but by an anonymous unknown editor, was published in 1685 at Amsterdam. This physically colossal book contains "two title pages, 104 elaborate illustrations, and

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<sup>1</sup> "Martyrs' Mirror." *GAMEO*. Web. 16 Mar. 2015. <[http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Martyrs'\\_Mirror](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Martyrs'_Mirror)>.

countless markers, subheadings, marginal glosses, and indices, as well as a series of prefaces, all sprawled across 1,364 pages.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Cover page**

The text of the 1685 edition differs only slightly from the 1660 edition. Of significant note, the title of the 1685 edition was slightly modified from the first edition, reading *Het Bloedig Toneel of Martelaers Spiegel der Doopsgezinde of Weereloose Christenen*, etc. Notably, the words “Martelaers Spiegel,” translated as “Martyr’s Mirror,” were added and thus the popular title was given in this second edition.

Also of interest on the title page is a wood cut of a European peasant digging in a field or vineyard. In the background is a church steeple. Above the image of the peasant is the motto, “FAC ET SPERA,” which is translated from Latin as “do and hope” or “work and hope.” This image “can be traced to the book’s first printing, done in 1660 by Jacob Braat of Dordrecht. The title page of the 1660 edition bears an elaborate colophon or emblem in which a divine arm extends a laurel wreath to reward the peasant who labors outside the village under the motto Fac et Spera.”<sup>3</sup> Although the image of the peasant in the 1685 edition is less ornate than the first edition, the motto remained and has remained a thematic current in the Mennonite Church.

### **Overview of contents**

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<sup>2</sup> Covington, Sarah. “Paratextual Strategies in Thieleman Van Braught’s Martyrs’ Mirror.” *Book History* 9 (2006): 1-29. CLIO. Web. 15 Mar. 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Kasdorf, Julia. “‘Work and Hope’: Tradition and Translation of an Anabaptist Adam.” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 69.2 (1995). Print.

The *Martyrs Mirror* has two parts: Part 1 begins with Christ's crucifixion and continues through the late Middle Ages; Part 2 focuses almost exclusively on Anabaptist martyrs, although the term "Anabaptist" in this text is very broad. In the 1685 edition there were no textual additions to Part 1 and only a "few documents were added in Part II, and a summary account at the end of this part, concerning the persecutions in Switzerland in 1671."<sup>4</sup>

According to the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online, the introduction of the 1685 edition of the *Martyrs Mirror* contains a note from the printers to the readers; a note from van Braght to his "friends and companions in Jesus Christ"; a "general address to the readers"; a summary of the book; a treatise, "The true church of God and its origins, expansion and immovable stability through all centuries" — in this section are found the "three major confessions of the Dutch Mennonites; viz., the Olyftacxken of 1627, that of Jan Cents of 1630, and the Dordrecht Confession of 1632"; a treatise "concerning the ungodly and false church"; and a "poem by Cornelis van Braght, entitled 'Martyrs' crown for Jesus Christ the Savior and those nonresistant crossbearers who follow in his train.'"<sup>5</sup>

Van Braght aimed only to include Anabaptist martyrs "who gave testimony to a Biblical faith and held strict nonresistant principles." It is for this reason that he intentionally excluded all Anabaptists who were connected to the Munsterite rebellion, although there were several martyrs connected to the rebellion that were included in the Martyr's mirror simply because van Braght was unaware of their connection.<sup>6</sup> According to Mennonite Historian John D. Roth, "The Anabaptists of the Martyrs Mirror are earnest,

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<sup>4</sup> "Martyrs' Mirror." *GAMEO*. Web. 16 Mar. 2015. <[http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Martyrs'\\_Mirror](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Martyrs'_Mirror)>.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> "Martyrs' Mirror." *GAMEO*. Web. 16 Mar. 2015. <[http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Martyrs'\\_Mirror](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Martyrs'_Mirror)>.

scripturally-grounded, sober-minded Christians, whose only crimes were baptizing adults and refusing to wield the sword.”<sup>7</sup>



## Engravings

The 1685 edition was published after van Braght's death by a group of Anabaptist investors. This edition included 104 superbly crafted copper etchings by the renowned Mennonite artist Jan Luyken. There are 49 etchings in Part 1 and 55 in Part 2. Each of the etchings captured the climactic moment in a particular martyr story. According to Roth, "The Luyken etchings were not only a stroke of marketing genius, making the 1685 much more popular than the earlier version, but they also transformed the way later generations

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<sup>7</sup> Roth, John. "The Complex Legacy of the Martyrs Mirror among Mennonites in North America." *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 87 (2013). Print.

would encounter the volume.”<sup>8</sup> Luyken’s powerful images provided a simple way to understand and interpret the massive and complex martyr stories, making the text much more user-friendly, although these images perhaps simplified the depth and nuance of many of the stories.



The above image depicts Anneken Jans giving her child to another person immediately before her execution. This image exemplifies the classic Anabaptist conviction to place allegiance to God before all things, even one’s own biological children. Yet there are many details not included in the image that complicate the story of Anneken Jans. According to the *Martyrs Mirror*, Anneken was initially arrested for publically singing an Anabaptist hymn. But what van Braght neglects to tell his readers is that “the hymn she was singing was composed by David Joris— a revolutionary spiritualist, opponent of Menno

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<sup>8</sup> Roth, John. “The Complex Legacy of the *Martyrs Mirror* among Mennonites in North America.” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 87 (2013). Print.

Simons, and someone closely associated in the popular imagination with the violent events that unfolded in Münster.”<sup>9</sup> It is quite likely that van Braght was unaware of this connection and if he had known he may have not have included Anneken’s martyr story.

## **Conclusion**

Although various heirs of Anabaptist traditions will continue to debate the importance and impact of the *Martyrs Mirror*, without question this text has greatly shaped Anabaptist theological imagination and the Anabaptist witness to the world.

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<sup>9</sup> Roth, John. "The Complex Legacy of the Martyrs Mirror among Mennonites in North America." *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 87 (2013). Print.

