Henry Piers’s Continental Travels, 1595–1598

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The text, published here for the first time, is a significant addition to Elizabethan travel writing and religious autobiography. It describes a journey in 1595 to Rome through the Low Countries, Germany, and Italy. The author describes life in Rome (he was based in the English College, 1595–1597), including an encounter with the Inquisition, and an account of the ghetto; his work is unusual among contemporary memoirs because it includes a narration of his subsequent sojourn in Spain in 1598. The book affords a rare lay perspective on conversion to Catholicism and its value is heightened by the author’s origins in Ireland and connections in England, thus illuminating a recusant community which straddled both realms. As an eyewitness, the author offers fresh and individual insights on the Elizabethan Catholic diaspora in Rome and Spain during the turbulent decade of the 1590s.

Cover illustration: Detail from The Departure of a Dignitary from Middelburg, Adriaen Pietersz. van de Venne, 1615. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, Object number SK-A-1775, D. Franken Bequest, Le Vésinet.
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