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“Old soldiours trained up in the Netherlands”:
The Low Countries and Jamestown, 1572–1614

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Recent scholarship on early modern Ireland and England emphasizes the importance of Continental affairs to domestic society, culture, and politics. Similarly, this article proposes the Low Countries as an important context for early English colonization. Warfare on the European Continent, particularly in the Low Countries, profoundly shaped England’s first permanent American colonial venture in Virginia. It informed English ideas about the nation’s place in the world and dictated the timing of Jamestown’s founding. Men with Continental experiences dominated the Virginia Company’s leadership in London, which deliberately populated the colony with Continental military veterans. Jamestown’s soldier-settlers brought their Continental experiences to bear on their lives in Virginia, replicating there a propensity toward violence and, in remarkably specific ways, the particulars of military organization, rules of war, and tactics to which they were accustomed. The European Continent was where future colonists gained the direct personal experiences that guided their decision-making and behavior in Jamestown and elsewhere in the Atlantic world. This insight sheds new light on classic historiographical debates about the colonists’ alleged idleness, their behavior toward their Indigenous neighbors and adversaries, and why Jamestown survived its precarious early years.