Readers in the early seventeenth century must have immediately recognised the description of inhabitants of the Euphrates region in the De Bry collection as an unmistakable swipe at Catholics: the locals were seen as “inhabitants, [who] just like the Papists venerate the deceased saints”. The condemnation was apparent to German readers only, as the whole sentence was missing from the Latin translation. The traveller in question, Gasparo Balbi, himself a Catholic, had not been so critical of Catholicism, making a more inclusive comparison with how “we venerate the saints”. The two De Bry editions, then, once again modified the text in opposite directions. This type of criticism of Catholic idolatry was bread and butter in Protestant circles in early modern Europe: the Reformed, after all, considered the worship of images blasphemous. It was, however, quite unusual for the De Bry collection where not even a handful of such alterations can be found. The collection, instead, attempted to play down most of the confessional strife the travellers generated, regardless of their confessional background. The gross discrepancies between its Latin and German editions add to the complexity of the issue.

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1 Balbi (1590) f11v: “…che essi tengono in adorazione, come noi i santi”; Ind. Or. VII (Ger) 8: “…welchen die Innwohner derselben Gegendt anbeten, gleich wie die Papisten die verstorbenen Heyligen” / (Lat) 48.


3 In the entire collection, I only found a single example of anti-Catholic editing which was apparent in both the German and the Latin editions. Balbi, with regard to the Canarins at Goa, stated (1590) f68r: “…ma adorano l’Idolo, come noi adoriamo nelle imagini, quello che ci rappresentano”; Ind. Or. VII (Ger) 50: “…sondern sie verehren und beten dieses Bildt allein an, wie die Abergläubische ihre Götzten der verstorbenen Heyligen” / (Lat) 81: “…sed ut idolum aliquod, cadem qua superstitesi alli defunctos sanctos colunt & venerantur”.

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8.1. Anti-Spanish tendencies: the Benzoni volumes

Plenty of attention has been paid to the ‘Black Legend’ of Spanish New World tyranny the De Brys presented in the three volumes dedicated to the narrative of Girolamo Benzoni, *India Occidentalis* IV, V, and VI.⁴ Although Benzoni’s text offers a more balanced view of the Spanish conquest than Las Casas’ *Brevissima relación*, which the De Brys deliberately issued outside their collection, the presence of Spanish brutalities in these volumes is anything but fictitious.⁵ The last two books in particular denounce the practices of conversion and exploitation. The De Bry collection, moreover, presents this tyrannical behaviour in spellbinding fashion. While from the many versions published, only the second edition of Benzoni’s report contained illustrations,⁶ the three De Bry volumes together had no fewer than seventy-eight engravings. Around a third of these plates depicted the main topoi of Spanish atrocities and indigenous retaliations, and given the quality of the illustrations and the reputation of the collection, many of these engravings became part of the stock of New World representations, especially in Protestant parts of Europe (ill. 68).⁷

The Benzoni volumes, however, were not exclusively devoted to Spanish tyranny and greed. Roughly another third of the set of seventy-eight was dedicated to factional rivalry among the conquistadors; themes like Indian heathendom, and the struggle for Caribbean supremacy between Spain and France were also prominently represented. To interpret the three *America*-volumes as purely a means to distribute graphic knowledge of the Black Legend would therefore be a mistake. The title-page of the first of the volumes shows as much, as indigenous nudity and heathen rituals were the themes deemed suitable for attracting customers to the collection. The subsequent title-pages emphasised the zeal and the cruelties of the Spaniards. Even more important for a nuanced appreciation of these volumes are the De Bry-written

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⁵ Keen (1976) 108–09.