The Belgic Confession, which was published in 1561 and first surfaced in Doornik, in the Southern part of the Netherlands, appeared anonymously. The title page informed the reader that the confession had been made with common accord by the believers in the Netherlands. This cannot be taken to mean that all reformed Dutch people were involved in the making of the Belgic Confession. The title is derived from the Gallican Confession and refers to the general agreement to the doctrine of the confession rather than to the actual making of the Confession. The title page does not provide any information on the author.

Information concerning the author began to become public in the seventeenth century, fifty years after its first appearance. This began with a letter Saravia wrote to Uytenbogaert in 1612. His information was repeated in different forms by Thysius (1615), Uytenbogaert (1647), Trigland (1649) and Schoock (1650). The author was identified as Guido de Brès, together with some helpers (according to the Remonstrants) or many helpers (according to the Reformed). This information was used as an important argument in the seventeenth-century discussion on the Belgic Confession, which concentrated on its authority.

It took almost three hundred years before a sixteenth-century annotation on the authorship of the Belgic Confession became known. When J.A. van Langeraad did research for his doctoral dissertation on Guido de Brès, he found a handwritten note in a book published in 1762:

Thomas van Tielt wrote to Arnoldus Cornelii, minister at Delft, from Antwerp, July 17, 1582: I have spoken with Taffinus about the confession, which he says was made by Guy de Brès.2

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1 See for their statements, J.N. Bakhuizen van den Brink, De Nederlandse belijdenisgeschriften (2nd ed.; Amsterdam: Ton Bolland, 1976), 8f.
2 L.A. van Langeraad, Guido de Bray (Zierikzee: S. Ochtman & Zoon, 1884), 117; see also J.N. Bakhuizen van den Brink, De Nederlandse belijdenisgeschriften 8.
This quotation has since been used as the basis for the discussion on the author of the Belgic Confession. It brought to an end the debate on the number of people involved in the making of the confession and it clinched Guido de Brès' position as the author. The certainty with which the question of the authorship is decided today in favour of Guido de Brès is the direct result of the discovery of this statement. That is remarkable, considering the fact that it was written more than 200 years after the publication of the Confession. This important quotation deserves a closer investigation. Where does it come from, and can its content be trusted?

The origin of the quotation

Before investigating the content of the quotation, we should know more about its provenance. It was discovered in a copy of W. te Water's study on the Belgic Confession, published on the occasion of its bicentenary. This copy can be found in the library of Leiden University. It is an unusual copy, for it is interleaved with blank pages. On p. 7 of his book, Te Water concluded that Guido de Brès is the author of the Confession on the basis of an extensive quotation taken from a book by Prof. M. Schoock, published in 1651. The handwritten statement can be found on the blank page opposite p. 7. This unidentified annotation obviously intended to support the general opinion on the author of the Belgic Confession with the much older statement of Thomas van Tielt.

The question arises who wrote this statement in W. te Water's book. Investigation in the library showed that this was not the only interleaved copy of Te Water's book owned by the library. Two such copies are present, and they have successive numbers in the library catalogue, ending with 12 and 13, respectively.

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3 W. te Water, Tweede eeuw-getyde van de geloofsbelijdenisse (Middelburg: P. Gillissen, 1762). At the time, the two 1561 editions of the Belgic Confession had not yet been rediscovered. Te Water thought the confession had first been published in 1562, see pp. XI and 4. He did not take into account the early information he provided himself, that the Corpus et syntagma confessionum fidei dates the confession from 1561, see p. VII.

4 I thank my long time friend, Drs. J.M. de Jong, who went to Leiden at my request to study the original source for the quotation. He discovered that two interleaved copies are included in this collection and provided me with the first hand information on these books used in this article.