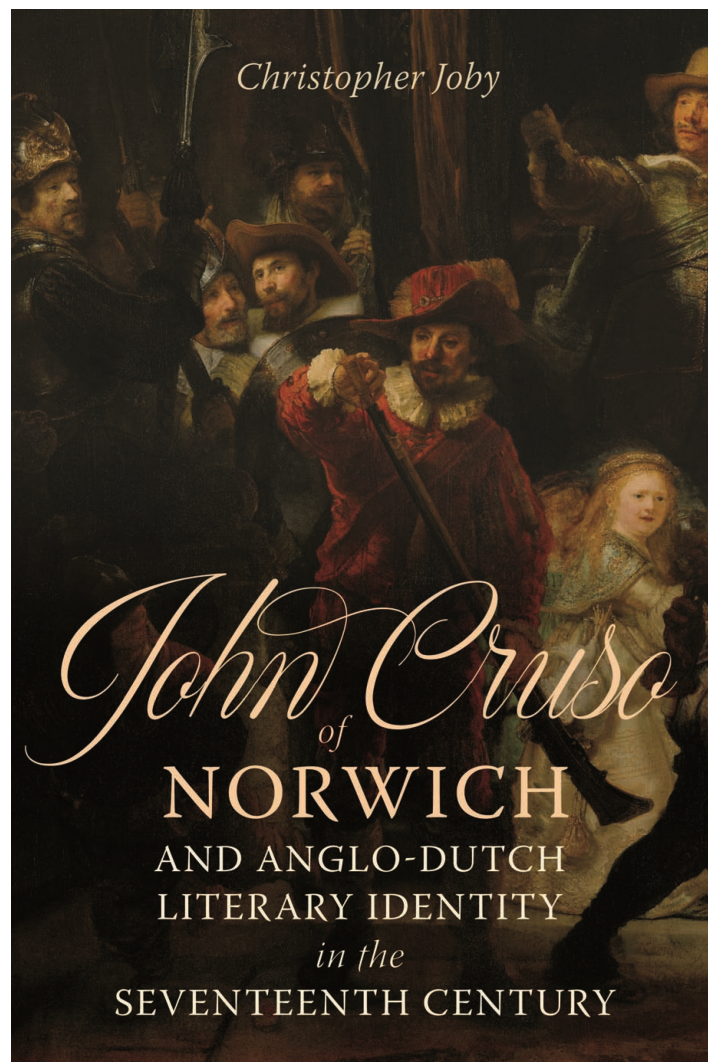


Review
Christopher Joby:
***John Cruso of Norwich and Anglo-Dutch literary identity in
the seventeenth century***

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Reviewed by Ole Peter Grell



Bearing in mind that Christopher Joby has already written extensively about John Cruso and the Dutch community in Norwich, one would expect this monograph to offer important new information about him and his role and significance for the Anglo-Dutch community in Norwich in particular and in England more generally. Furthermore, the book promises to place John Cruso within the wider framework of the Anglo-Dutch literary community of the period. Unfortunately, in both respects it proves disappointing. The book is focussed nearly exclusively on John Cruso and his family where it has little new to add, while making only modest use of other Anglo-Dutch authors of the period.

Joby has mined the archives in Norwich to find new information and sources about John Cruso, but the results are meagre. The first chapter is dedicated to John's father, Jan, who had fled Flanders for Norwich in the 1570s or 1580s and set himself up as a cloth merchant in the city. From the outset Joby builds up the Cruso family, culturally as well as economically, often based on little or no evidence. The fact that Jan named his second son Aquila is taken as proof that Jan was familiar with both Latin and Greek. This chapter sets the tone for a book light on sources and facts and rich on speculation and conjecture. The second chapter is dedicated to John Cruso's schooling of which unfortunately we know nothing. He may have attended the Norwich Free Grammar School, as suggested by Joby, but we have no evidence to support that. Joby rests his assumption on the fact that Bishop John Cosin, who had attended the Norwich Grammar School, referred to John Cruso as his *ancient friend* in 1668. Joby sees this as evidence that the bishop had known Cruso since their school days and therefore proof that John Cruso had also attended the Norwich Grammar School. However, Cruso might just as well have attended a good secondary school in the Dutch Republic, boarding with relatives, as done by a number of well-to-do Dutch refugees. The fact remains we know nothing about John Cruso's schooling. Despite that, Joby repeatedly states that John Cruso had received a classical education at the Norwich Grammar School which informed his life and literary output.

Similarly, the third chapter on John Cruso's early adult life rests on little or no evidence. In fact, nothing is known about John Cruso until 1613 when he was registered as a member of the Dutch Church in London before returning to Norwich in 1615, the year his father transferred his freedom of the city to him. We know nothing of where he spent his teens and early twenties. He may have spent time in Amsterdam like his younger brother, Timothy, who became a member of the London Dutch Church in 1616. John is, however, likely to have spent time in London before 1615, possibly as a trainee merchant with one of the many Dutch merchants in the city. That, at least, might explain why no attestation was needed when he became a member of the London Dutch community.

Among the few things known about John Cruso is that he was listed as a member of the Dutch militia in Norwich from 1616, following in his father's footsteps. Apart from a couple of insignificant notices about him in the records of the Court of Chancery and in the Norwich records, we have no evidence of John Cruso's activities before 1622.

The fact that Cruso was among the 26 contributors to the elegy, *Klacht-Ghedichten*, for the recently departed minister of the Dutch Church in London, Simon Ruytinck, which was published in Leiden in 1622 would indicate his talents as an occasional poet who was recognized within the Anglo-Dutch community. Joby offers a complicated explanation why John chose to write his elegy in Dutch rather than Latin, as used by his university educated brother, Aquila, rather than the simple and obvious reason that John Cruso was limited to the vernacular having at best a very limited knowledge of Latin. His knowledge of classical authors is more likely to have been acquired through translations.

John Cruso was undoubtedly a successful cloth merchant in Norwich as repeatedly emphasized by Joby. His interests in military matters and poetry came second to that. Within the Anglo-Dutch community and among English friends in Norwich he was recognized as a talented poet who might contribute to an occasion or a volume. To put him alongside Shakespeare, as done in the prologue of this book strikes me as excessive even if Joby's statement that he does not intend to claim that Cruso reached *the same literary heights* is taken into account.

We have more information about John Cruso in the years leading up to the publication of his first and most important military work, *Militarie instructions for the cavallrie*, published in 1632. By 1627 he had become an elder of the Dutch Church in Norwich and a captain of the Dutch militia in the city. This was also the period when he began writing poetry in English. Here, as with his poetry in Dutch, Cruso appears as an occasional poet who like some of his Anglo-Dutch contemporaries could produce a verse for the right occasion. Apart from three elegies to his friend, the Norwich minister Lawrence Howlett, which were never published, we only have a couple of short English verses by Cruso published in the second edition of his *The art of warre* (1642). I am not convinced that Cruso's modest poetic output justifies the extensive treatment given to it here.

The best chapters of this book are those dedicated to Cruso's military writings. To a considerable extent they have benefited from the many publications on warfare which have appeared over the last decade. However, even here the author cannot refrain from speculation, suggesting that John Cruso might have served as a soldier on the Continent during the period from around 1608 to 1613 when we know nothing about his activities. The fact that Cruso never referred to any military experience in his publications clearly proves that he did not serve as a cavalryman or soldier. All military writers of this period made sure that their

military experiences were referred to thereby adding weight and importance to their publications.

We know that Cruso was a successful Norwich merchant, socially and culturally ambitious, and with a strong interest in military matters. His military writings, however, were primarily translations and his *Militarie instructions for the cavallrie* was a compilation based on other military writers. He was clearly an appreciated occasional poet, who could write in both English and Dutch, but lacked the educational background to master Latin. He was part of a group of Anglo-Dutch merchants who shared wider cultural and literary interests; even so, this book seeks to make too much of him.

About the reviewer

Ole Peter Grell is emeritus professor of early modern history at the Open University (UK). His interests are in European social and cultural history in the 16th and 17th centuries. He works on early modern European Calvinism, Anglo-Dutch relations, and the Reformation of northern Europe. He also retains a strong interest in early modern history of medicine, especially medicine and religion, health care, and the significance of natural philosophy for early modern medicine. He is a general editor of the book series *History of Medicine in Context*, published by Routledge.