

Raymond Fagel and Joke Spaans (Eds.), with the cooperation of João Miguel Simões, *Nonnen verdreven door geuzen. Cathalina del Spiritu Sancto's verhaal over de vlucht van Nederlandse clarissen naar Lissabon*. Verloren, Hilversum 2019, 181 pp. ISBN 9789087048013. €25.

Quite a few remarkable episodes in the religious history of the early modern Portuguese-speaking world relate to the Netherlands. For instance, in the age of the Inquisition, the Dutch embassy in Lisbon was a rare enclave of Protestant worship in Portugal, accommodating several Protestant chaplains who were allowed to conduct religious services within its walls. In addition, one of the all-time greatest Portuguese men of letters, the Jesuit priest António Vieira (1608–1697), earned his fame in large part through his ornate fire-and-brimstone sermons against Dutch Calvinists and their occupation of Brazilian Recife in the mid-seventeenth century. Furthermore, the translation and publication of the very first Portuguese-language Bible, in the decades around 1700, was taken care of by the Dutch East India Company and the Dutch Reformed Church in Batavia. Another remarkable case does not feature Dutch Protestants, but involves a handful of Poor Clares from the Netherlands, who had to flee their convent in the Holland city of Alkmaar in 1572 and ultimately settled in Lisbon in early 1582 after a long and arduous trek. Colloquially known as '*flamengas*' (a term relating to the Low Countries as a whole), these religious women were joined later in 1582 by a Poor Clare from a convent in the Brabant town of Hoogstraten, who chronicled their history, together with the history of her own vicissitudes, in a Spanish-language report that was published in Lisbon in 1627. The historians Raymond Fagel and Joke Spaans have devoted a volume to this nun, Cathalina del Spiritu Sancto (Catharine of the Holy Spirit), and her *Relación de cómo se ha fundado en Alcántara de Portugal, junto a Lisboa, el muy devoto monasterio de N.S. de la Quietación* [...].

As Fagel and Spaans explain in the short introduction to their volume, Cathalina's 86-page *Relación* is an extraordinary eyewitness account of the most violent phase of the Dutch Revolt, covering the advance of William the Silent's (1533–1584) anti-Spanish coalition in the decade after the Capture of Brielle in 1572. Its exceptionality and historiographical importance stem from its authorship: the *Relación* is written from the perspective of those who not just ended up at the 'losing' side of Dutch early modern history (i.e. the Roman Catholics), but arguably suffered most from the Dutch Revolt (i.e. the religious) and whose experiences are even less well known than the fortunes of their male counterparts (i.e. religious women).

The translation of Cathalina's *Relación* into Dutch, which comprises the first half of the volume, is Fagel's. Being the last survivor of a group of 21 Poor Clares

and three novices from the Low Countries who found refuge in Lisbon in 1582 and 1583,<sup>1</sup> Cathalina del Spiritu Sancto put her pen to paper in 1627, in order to keep the memory of her deceased sisters alive. Most of her group of *flamengas* came from a convent in Alkmaar, where, in the early 1550s, a quiet, small nun had prophesied the bloody spread of Protestantism in the Low Countries and the partial resettlement of this convent abroad. Cathalina gives all the gory details of what happened afterwards, describing the persecutions and humiliations that men and women living a consecrated life had to undergo in the Netherlands from 1572 onwards, paying special attention to the history of the (mostly Franciscan) Martyrs of Gorcum, and retelling the Poor Clares' flight to the still Catholic and pro-Spanish city of Amsterdam after the Calvinist takeover of Alkmaar in 1572.

When Calvinists seized power in Amsterdam six years later, nineteen of the Alkmaar Poor Clares sought refuge in a convent in the Brabant city of Antwerp. Ten of them were obliged to travel further to Mechelen, being chased back to Antwerp by Calvinist rebels in 1580. Because the Calvinist civil government in Antwerp prohibited the public exercise of the Roman Catholic religion in mid-1581, three Poor Clares (two from the Alkmaar convent and one from England) fled to the French city of Rouen, in the company of their father confessor, the Englishman Stephen Fox Parkinson. Although their attempt to join a local convent of Colettine Poor Clares proved unsuccessful, six other Alkmaar Poor Clares followed them to Rouen. Together, the nine nuns and Parkinson subsequently embarked at Le Havre for the Iberian Peninsula, finding temporary shelters in Northern Spain and Portuguese Estremadura before permanently settling in Lisbon in early 1582.<sup>2</sup>

There, the Spanish Habsburgs, who ruled Portugal and its overseas territories since 1580, took pity on the Poor Clares from the Low Countries, lodging them at the *Convento da Madre de Deus* at first and a separate room at the *Convento de Nossa Senhora da Glória* later in 1582. By royal order, the group of *flamengas* was enlarged with Cathalina del Spiritu Sancto on October 4 that same year and with fourteen others afterwards. Among them Alkmaar Poor Clares were in the majority. Due to a lack of space and hygiene in the *Convento de Nossa Senhora da Glória*, the Habsburgs decided to build the *flamengas* a new convent in Alcântara, at the time a village to the immediate west of Lisbon. This *Convento de Nossa Senhora da Quietação* was ready in late 1586.

1 One novice was born in Portugal into a noble family from the Low Countries.

2 Based on the sequence of events that she herself presents, Cathalina's remark that Parkinson and the nine nuns left Spain for Portugal in early 1581 must be a typo or a false memory.

Those who read Spanish and consult the digital version of the *Relación* at the website of the National Library of Portugal,<sup>3</sup> can see for themselves that Fagel has produced an excellent translation. Sticking close to the original text, he has managed to preserve Cathalina's smooth and compelling style. Together with Spaans, he has supplemented his translation with helpful explanatory footnotes.

As the authors acknowledge, their interest in Cathalina del Spiritu Sancto and her *Relación* was triggered by lectures that Nieves Baranda and Darcy Donahue gave at a conference in Bruges in 2016. Contrary to these American scholars, who have published on the *Relación* in the context of early modern Spanish female writers' identities and foundation narratives of convents,<sup>4</sup> Spaans relates Cathalina's text to the history and organisation of the Order of Saint Clare in the (Northern) Netherlands and the tragic fate of religious men and women during the first years of the Dutch Revolt. She states that Franciscan friars, the Poor Clares' male counterparts, were a particular object of Protestant ire, because they had preached loudest against Protestant 'heresies.' The Alkmaar Poor Clares were more fortunate: like many other nuns in Protestant Europe, they managed to reach Catholic territory. They could not have done so without outside help, which shows that they had excellent international contacts: the Poor Clares could rely on the assistance of a nun's aristocratic sister in Amsterdam, eminent citizens and relatives in Antwerp, English Catholic networks in France, and none other than the Habsburgs in Lisbon. In maintaining their royal and local connections in Portugal, the Poor Clares could rely on one of the sisters in their midst: understanding both Spanish and Dutch, Cathalina assumed the role of their interpreter and ultimately became their abbess.

In a second contribution to the volume, Fagel explains why the Habsburgs were so eager to associate with the *flamengas*. King Philip II (1527–1598) could use the latter's flight to Lisbon to reinforce his 'guardianship' of the Catholics in the Low Countries. Archduchess Margaret of Austria (1567–1633), to whom Cathalina dedicated her *Relación*, and her mother, Maria of Austria (1528–1603), supported the *flamengas* in order to build a new life for themselves on the Iberian Peninsula after the death of their father and husband, the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian II (1527–1576). Fagel shows that Cathalina del Spir-

3 <http://purl.pt/17446/3/#/1>.

4 N. Baranda, "Beyond Political Boundaries: Religion as Nation in Early Modern Spain," in *Women Telling Nations*, ed. A. Sanz, F. Scott, and S. Van Dijk (Amsterdam, 2014), 63–83; D. Donahue, "Foundation Narratives," in *The Routledge Research Companion to Early Modern Spanish Women Writers*, ed. N. Baranda and A.J. Cruz (London, 2018), 299–314.

itu Sancto had some royal blood running through her veins: she was a natural daughter of Don Luis Carrillo de Castilla, one of whose great-great-grandfathers was a natural son of King Peter I of Castile (1334–1369). Holding the office of governor of Hoogstraten, Don Luis was involved in a fierce quarrel with a certain Don Alonso de Herentals, who had defected from Spain to William the Silent's troops and tried to settle the feud by doing harm to Cathalina. Referring to this incident in her *Relación*, Cathalina sought refuge in Lisbon to escape Don Alonso's cruel intentions. In the Portuguese capital, she and the other *flamengas* were not the only Catholics from the Low Countries: as Fagel highlights, there was a vibrant 'Flemish' community of clerics, merchants, and tradesmen. One of the latter, Pedro Craesbeeck (c. 1552–1632), was the publisher of the *Relación*.

The third and final contribution is a translation from English into Dutch of an article on the material cultural heritage of the *Convento de Nossa Senhora da Quietação*. Its author, the Portuguese art historian João Miguel Simões, completed his undergraduate studies with a thesis on the same subject in 1998. Simões convincingly explains that the convent of the *flamengas* was built in Alcântara due to a toponymic resemblance between this village and the city of Alkmaar. Moreover, Alcântara was the location where Philip II of Spain, the lord of the insurgent Netherlands, had fought his decisive battle in his quest for the Portuguese throne in 1580. The *flamengas'* close ties with the Royal Family that ruled Portugal remained intact when the Braganzas dethroned the Habsburgs in 1640. As Simões argues, this was due to the proximity of the convent to the royal palace where the Braganzas came to reside (the *Palácio do Cavário*) as well the peace and quiet that the new rulers of an independent Portugal were seeking, which the *flamengas'* worship of Our Lady of Serenity symbolised. However, the Braganzas were not willing to sponsor structural alterations to the interior of the convent church in the years between 1783 and 1786, which, consequently, the Poor Clares had to finance themselves by collecting donations from local parishioners. During the renovations, the convent church was adorned with a series of eighteen *azulejos*. The iconography of these typically Portuguese blue-and-white tiles lacks artistic quality, but is valuable from a historiographical point of view: the *azulejos*, printed and described in a colour supplement in the middle of Fagel's article, visualise the content of Cathalina's *Relación* and relate it to Old Testament verses. The convent church is still in use by the Roman Catholic parish of Alcântara. The convent itself, on the other hand, was transformed into a state-owned accommodation for the families of deceased soldiers and their descendants after the death of the last Poor Clare in 1887. Nowadays, the building is literally overshadowed by one of the piers of the iconic *Ponte 25 de Abril*.

Although the volume has been carefully edited, it does contain two factual errors that are too important to be left unmentioned. Contrary to what Spaans states in her article (p. 94), the Martyrs of Gorcum were not hanged in the city of the same name (present-day Gorinchem) in 1572, but in Den Briel (Brielle). Simões writes that the Poor Clares from the Netherlands set foot on Portuguese soil “in the vicinity of the monastery of Arrábida, south of Lisbon,” and received a warm welcome from its friars (p. 164).<sup>5</sup> The only location that fits Simões’s description is the *Convento de Santa Maria da Arrábida* near Setúbal. However, as becomes clear from Cathalina del Spiritu Sancto’s text, the Poor Clares landed at “Puerto de San Martín” (São Martinho do Porto), a village north of Lisbon, and enjoyed a meal at a nearby Capuchin friary that belonged to the (Franciscan) “province of Arrábida,”<sup>6</sup> which can be identified as the *Convento de Santa Maria Madalena* in Évora de Alcobaça.

It is a pity that Fagel does not say anything about the relationship between the community of merchants from the Low Countries in Lisbon and the local convent of the *flamengas* after the signing of Luso-Dutch treaties of truce and peace in 1641 and 1661. With the Portuguese now recognising the sovereignty of the Dutch Republic and granting Dutch citizens in Portugal freedom of conscience in private, a predominantly Protestant *Hollandsche natie* (Dutch nation) emerged in the Portuguese capital, which had more or less replaced the older, Catholic *Vlaamsche natie* (Flemish nation) by the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>7</sup> This dramatic reconfiguration of the local community of merchants from the Low Countries must have affected the Poor Clares’ convent in one way or another, all the more since, as Fagel writes, the Flemish nation in Lisbon provided the convent with fresh blood on a regular basis (p. 125).

Spaans mentions that the scenes depicted on the *azulejos* in the *Convento de Nossa Senhora da Quietação* bear close resemblance to the images in a 1622 history of a group of English Bridgettines who had taken refuge in Lisbon in 1594. Just as Cathalina’s *Relación*, the booklet was dedicated to a member of the Spanish Royal Family (albeit never actually printed). It seems quite likely

5 “[...] waren ze gedwongen om te stoppen in de omgeving van het klooster van Arrábida, ten zuiden van Lissabon. De broeders van dit klooster ontvingen de nonnen uiterst hartelijk [...]”

6 “[...] nauegaron quasi ocho dias, y no pudiendo llegar a Lisboa, fue necessario desembarcar veynte leguas atras en vn lugar llamado puerto de S. Martin, junto del qual estaua vn monasterio de los Padres Capuchos de la santa prouincia del Arrabida, los quales las lleuaron a su monasterio [...]” <http://purl.pt/17446/3/#/66>.

7 J. Everaert, “Sur le balcon de l’Atlantique: La nation ‘flamande’ à Lisbonne au xvii<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Handelingen van het Genootschap voor Geschiedenis “Société d’Émulation” te Brugge* 132 (1995), 347–372, here 355–356, 368. See also: C. Antunes, *Globalisation in the Early Modern Period. The Economic Relationship between Amsterdam and Lisbon, 1640–1705* (Amsterdam, 2004), 137–142.

to Spaans that Cathalina wrote her *Relación* in reaction to this booklet on the English Bridgettines and an older account of their history, published immediately after their arrival in Lisbon (pp. 106–107, 130).<sup>8</sup> These sharp observations call for a thorough comparison between the vicissitudes and international contacts of the *flamengas* and the English Bridgettines before and after their settlement in Portugal, which Spaans unfortunately does not offer.

A final omission is the lack of a list of both the (secondary) sources to which the authors refer in their footnotes and the Portuguese sources on the Lisbon *Convento de Nossa Senhora da Quietação*. Such a bibliography would have shown the reader that the history of the Alkmaar Poor Clares is less obscure in Portugal than it is in the Netherlands.

Nevertheless, Fagel and Spaans are to be praised for calling attention to a truly unique and fascinating source. Spaans has written the perfect ‘reader’s guide’ to Cathalina’s text, putting the history of the Lisbon *flamengas* in perspective. Fagel has clearly performed a heuristic *tour de force* in order to reconstruct both Cathalina’s genealogy and the networks and contexts in which she and her convent were embedded in the Low Countries and Portugal. Simões has a keen eye for the architectonic and artistic particularities of the structure and the interior of the *Convento de Nossa Senhora da Quietação*. No one interested in the early modern religious and political history of the Low Countries and the Iberian Peninsula can put this volume aside unopened.

*Tom-Eric Krijger*

Leiden University, Leiden, The Netherlands

*t.e.m.krijger@hum.leidenuniv.nl*

---

<sup>8</sup> *Relación que embiaron las religiosas del Monasterio de Sion de Inglaterra* [...].