

Closing remarks

A complex of factors: Prayer and politics

The foundation of the Mariënpoel convent and its memorial practices demonstrate that a complex of factors played a role. The foundation was inspired by care for spiritual salvation as well as political motives. Boudewijn van Zwieten founded a convent for nuns whom he must have considered the victims of the adversaries of his Lord, Philip the Good.

The written sources and the memorial pieces provide insights into the hierarchical relations in medieval society and into what was deemed important. Texts, the placement of the portraits, the clothing and coats of arms all show a person's function, station, status and rank. Through texts and images it becomes clear to which social groups and networks the commemorated persons belonged. Both types of sources, texts and images, demonstrate that social motives played their part as well: they are testament to the bond beyond death in a community of nuns and families.

Do ut des, I give so that you may give, was the basis for the transactions in the Middle Ages, also in religious affairs. The nuns and the rector and fellow priests, who were expected to provide the spiritual counter-gift, earned their livelihood in this manner. We find in fact a network of donors to Mariënpoel who were not only connected to the convent, but were also interconnected: nuns' family members, also by marriage, and people who were acquainted through their social functions. They constitute a group whose members had mutual obligations.

Rule and reality

It is difficult to discover the relation between the stipulated obligations and their actual execution. The administrative sources for commemoration indicate what should have happened; we are dependent on sources to find information on the actual situation. These sources are often texts that lay down in writing the solution to certain problems pertaining to the fulfilment of the obligations.

We have no knowledge of any complaints by visitators regarding *memoria* in Mariënpoel. There are indications, however, that the position of the Van Zwieten family dwindled in the sixteenth century. The sacristan's books seem to have treated the obligations to the family as one of many; not all stipulations by Boudewijn van Zwieten are recorded. Perhaps this was not necessary, perhaps other manuals have been lost, but we may nevertheless assume that the Van Zwieters gradually became only one party among a large group of benefactors.

At least two factors are responsible for this development. There were no direct descendants who entered the convent after 1500, and we know of no donations by the family until the 1550s, when Johanna van Zwieten donated the memorial. Other important donors came forward who had family members in the convent, and the return-gifts they required took the nuns' time and attention away from the Van Zwieters.

On the other hand, burials, memorial services and festivities will have inspired the sisters to share memories and to discuss and contemplate events and benefactors in the history of the convent. This must also have been the case when the large memorial painting with the seventeen Van Zwieten portraits was placed in the choir in 1552. The founder and his family may have become the focus of the nuns' attention again, at least for a while.

Questions and further research

Tradition, fixed patterns, recognisability, as well as deviations and change combined to give the persons to be commemorated their due. For this reason the modern researcher regularly wonders why certain things happened or failed to happen. This also goes for Mariënpoel.

Two examples illustrate this: All of Boudewijn's en Ludgard's children agreed to the use of family capital for the foundation of the convent. Then why are they not all mentioned in the donations register and the necrology? Do we lack important sources, or were there other reasons? We regularly find texts in memorial pieces that provide room for a death date but where the death date has not been filled in. This is also the case in the text under Johanna van Zwieten's portrait. Perhaps there is a simple explanation for

convents like Mariënpoel, where people from the outside world were not allowed to enter. Were the nuns reluctant to bring in a painter to fill in the death date?

In conclusion we may say that many questions remain: What was specific to Mariënpoel and what corresponded to events happening elsewhere? Were there other founders who had their coats of arms included in the seal of the convent? We have not found any to date. Was Boudewijn van Zwieten a more forceful founder than most, and did he request more than others for the salvation of himself and his family? The statutes do not indicate that the commemorative customs in Mariënpoel differed much from those in other convents in the Chapter of Sion. But what happened in actual practice? And are the donation practices and the riches of Mariënpoel representative for convents of Regular Canonesses? Such matters can only be discovered in broad comparative and quantitative research studies.