



Patricia Stoop, ***Schrijven in commissie. De zusters uit het Brusselse klooster Jericho en de preken van hun biechtvaders*** (Hilversum: Verloren, 2013, 495 pp., ISBN 9789087041953).

The regular canonesses of the convent of Jericho in Brussels liked sermons. Among the thirty-six surviving manuscripts, twenty contain such texts, all of them written by the sisters. In her 2009 dissertation, the Antwerp medievalist Patricia Stoop focused on a selection, i.e. six of the eight codices which contain what are known as ‘convent sermons’. The sisters wrote these manuscripts between 1456 and 1510, which was also the period of the height of their copying activities. Convent sermons were preached to the sisters by the confessors and visiting preachers. Several sisters from Jericho collected them for the purposes of furthering their own or their sisters’ spiritual progress, as some of them assert in the prologues to the manuscripts. In addition, they wanted to remember the excellent rectors of the past. By writing these manuscripts, later sisters also remembered the exemplary sisters who collected them. Stoop’s purpose was to research how these copiers went about writing and collecting sermons: did they copy from their own or the preachers’ notes or from memory? How far did they collaborate with the original preachers in editing the texts? Who was responsible for the structure of the texts? Stoop’s contention is that the sisters were much more active in the composition than is usually supposed. Rather than being passive copiers, they should be seen as co-authors of the sermons alongside the preachers.

*Schrijven in commissie* consists of an introduction, five chapters, a conclusion and four appendixes, containing codicological descriptions of the manuscripts, an extensive overview of unpublished sources about Jericho, editions of the prologues to the convent sermons, and an index to the manuscripts which contain them. The first chapter introduces these codices. Moreover, it discusses previous research on the genre, for instance on the connection between a sermon’s orality and its written form, and links the Jericho sermons to similar collections from other convents. Moreover, it discusses whether religious women produced manuscripts for sale. Jericho’s book of accounts clearly shows that the sisters did, contrary to current scholarly opinion that writing for sale was a male prerogative. The second chapter discusses the historical context of the convent. Jericho was well connected: in 1456, Philip the Good and his wife Isabel of Portugal created it by merging two convents. The new convent inherited a close relationship to the Chapter of Windesheim, but could not be a full member in view of the

1436 prohibition against incorporating female communities. Nevertheless, in Stoop's words: it was almost a Windesheim community. Rectors and visitators came from the Chapter of Windesheim. In addition, at least one rector preached to its General Chapter on a regular basis. The convent probably usually comprised about 45 choir sisters; the number of other inhabitants such as lay sisters and donates is not known. It is certain that the sisters educated girls, as the book of accounts registers income from this practice. Stoop concludes her historical overview with a discussion of officials and other important people in the convent, including information about the rectors who first supplied the sermons, and the sisters who wrote them down. The latter were clearly among the most valued sisters in the community: many became prioresses eventually, either in Jericho or another convent. Chapter three discusses the practice of writing in Jericho. From at least 1465 the convent had a scriptorium, judging by the expenses for the construction of a window and writing materials in the account book. This chapter also deals with the education of the sisters in connection to their activities as writers. In addition to the choir sisters, at least two lay sisters copied manuscripts. Apparently, several sisters knew Latin beyond the minimum required for participating in the choir. This is clear from the way they were able to quote the authorities in Latin in the convent sermons, in addition to providing a Middle Dutch translation. It is unclear how they came by this knowledge: did they know works in Latin or just quotations from *florilegia*? Finally, this chapter provides a view of the library of the convent, which was fairly average, consisting primarily of exegetical, devotional and hagiographical works. In addition, they owned mystical works by authors such as Ruusbroec. Chapters 4 and 5 constitute the core of Stoop's book. They concentrate on the edition of the separate sermons and how the collections of convent sermons were created. In contrast to collations, convent sermons are always connected to a feast; the manuscripts give them in the order of the liturgical year. The copiers wrote from notes, memory or both, expertly using rhetorical devices, such as asking rhetorical questions or addressing God, Jesus, saints and personified concepts such as love directly: 'O Love'; 'O Paul' and so on. In some cases sisters may have collaborated closely with the confessor, who may have given them his notes and consulted with them about their editions. In addition, it is striking how the sisters identified with the preacher, as is shown by their use of the first person singular.

*Schrijven in commissie* is a rich book, which contributes to knowledge and understanding in several fields: sermon studies, Devotio Moderna studies, the intellectual history of religious women, codicology, and the history and organization of religious houses. It is very detailed, for instance it provides extensive accounts of the format of sermons or the offices in a medieval convent – on occasion a little too much. This is probably due to the book's previous history as a PhD thesis, in which, after all, a candidate has to prove impeccable knowledge of all the bits and pieces concerning the subject. Another point of criticism is Stoop's loose way of using the term mysticism: it is unclear why certain texts are identified as being mystical and others not. However, these critical comments pale into insignificance against my appreciation of this book. Stoop

effectively counters cliché assumptions about women's education and their efforts as far as writing is concerned. Thus she gives the Jericho sisters their proper place as the creative co-authors of sermons, and in addition the co-educators of their fellow sisters, now and in the future.

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