

## Webrecensie BMGN – LCHR 126:4 (2011)

Vroom, Wim, ***Financing Cathedral Building in the Middle Ages: The Generosity of the Faithful*** (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010, 734 pp., ISBN 978 90 8964 035 2).

Wim Vroom's dissertation on the process of commissioning and financing the construction of cathedrals in the Middle Ages, especially the cathedral of Utrecht (*De financiering van de kathedraalbouw in de middeleeuwen, in het bijzonder van de dom van Utrecht* (Maarsse 1981)), is a key publication on the complex interactions between the society and the Church, and a brilliant exploration of a nearly unknown aspect of cathedral architecture. The present book is a revised and expanded version that integrates thirty years of international scholarship on cathedral building and results from the lifelong research of the author. The English edition makes this standard work available for the wider academic community.

Some 700 cathedrals were built in medieval Europe. As head churches of dioceses, cathedrals were much more than architectural statements of the Church's power and havens for the faithful. Their construction resulted from huge, long-term, efforts involving all components of society. According to the author, 'the financing systems were almost as monumental as the cathedrals themselves'. Until the twelfth century the bishop and his treasurer controlled the building operations (i.e. the *fabrica ecclesiae*), but from the first half of the thirteenth century the chapter, acting as a corporate body, gradually took over the fabric. The chapter appointed a fabric administrator (*magister fabricae*) whose tasks were limited to the supervision and the financial management of the works. Having a global view on the incomes and outcomes, the canon treasurer (*custos*) was the real key person within the chapter. Fabric account rolls, which were yearly audited and presented to the chapter, constitute the main historical source. Vroom has traced medieval fabric rolls at some 80

cathedrals: the oldest go back to the second half of the thirteenth century, whilst the majority dates from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The first part of the book discusses the various income sources employed by cathedral fabrics (25-281). Vroom's typology of the origin and nature of construction monies makes the complexity of the system comprehensive. Many examples from different regions and periods illustrate each of the ten main categories of his typology. These categories are worth to be enumerated here: the bishop's contributions, the chapter's contributions, joints contributions from the bishop and chapter, papal contributions, contributions from the ruler (emperor, king, lord), contributions from civic administration and urban institutions, contributions from ecclesiastical property and fiscal sources in the bishopric (benefices, *annualia*, tithes), voluntary contributions from the faithful (veneration of relics, indulgences), donations made for the fabric in the cathedral, money collected in and outside the diocese. The most fascinating category is that of the long-term collections or active fundraising strategies developed from the end of the twelfth century. The bishop addressed 'begging-letters' (*mendicatoria*), which messengers (*nuntii*) read in all the churches in the bishopric. Relics tours and promises of indulgences were part of these campaigns. The parish priests were obliged to collaborate, and specific brotherhoods or cathedral fabric confraternities were developed to stimulate lay donors and generate financial support, including through testamentary bequests. At least, under certain conditions, the bishop, acting as a whitewasher, had the power to designate unlawfully acquired goods for the cathedral construction.

The second part of the book deals with the scale and relative significance of the total amounts these various income sources generated (285-480). In 1981, Vroom was the first to undertake such a quantitative study and analyzed the Dom of Utrecht because of its exceptionally well-preserved account rolls (1395-1558). The case of Utrecht is characterized by the absence of large donations from pope, overlord or bishop, the lack of significant endowments, and the rather conventional contributions of the

chapter, which meant that the building funds came essentially from the bishop's *mendicantia*. Following the Utrecht case study, the author gives an overview of the incomes of eight other partially documented cathedral fabrics – Exeter (1300-1514), Milan (1387-1391), Osnabrück (1477-1543), Sens (1490-1517), Troyes (1294-1550), Bourges (1508-1537), Toledo (1418-1438), Segovia (1525-1650) –, before concluding with some considerations about the mythic fabric of St. Peter's cathedral in Rome (1506-1626). A series of color graphs allow for a comparison of the scale and origin of the incomes. The book has no formal conclusion, but ends with some considerations about the duration and pace of construction. It is evident that bishops and chapters had no conception of the amount of time and the quantity of resources needed for the task they were taking on when they launched a building project. 'Observed over the long term, the general pattern of cathedral fabric expenditures paints a picture of instability' (462). The 250 last pages of the book provide an extensive bibliography, an inventory of medieval cathedral fabric accounts, a (too) short introduction about money and coins, and indices.

Thirty years after his pioneering work, Wim Vroom signs a brilliant reference work, which is indispensable to all scholars working on medieval cathedrals because it reveals the other side of architecture, without which no cathedral would have been built. This book indeed is not about style and design, architects and lodges, building techniques and materials, decoration and furniture, nor about liturgy, spirituality and iconological meaning, but reconstructs the ecclesiastical administrations and the creative strategies developed to incite the 'the generosity of the faithful'.

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## Webrecensie BMGN 126:2 (2011)

Wijfjes, Huub, *VARA. Biografie van een omroep* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2009, 639 blz., ISBN 978 90 8506 654 5).

Door de lawine aan nieuwe media-ontwikkelingen en het afsluiten van het klassieke, analoge omroeptijdperk lijken radio en televisie stilaan ‘oude’ media, wat leidt tot toenemende historische reflectie. Ook de vieringen van 75 jaar radio en van 50 jaar televisie in Europa zorgden het voorbije decennium voor een toenemende interesse in het omroepverleden. Vaak resulteerde dit in journalistieke, overdadig geïllustreerde en nostalgische overzichtswerken, niet zelden uitgegeven door de omroepen zelf. De academische reflectie volgde meestal met enige vertraging en probeerde de anekdotiek te overstijgen door in te gaan op achterliggende thema’s en spanningvelden in de evolutie van radio en televisie. Huub Wijfjes voegt hier een mooi boek aan toe. Zijn biografie van de VARA is een aantrekkelijk, leesbaar en mooi geïllustreerd boek geworden. Goedgekozen illustraties maken het nauwgezet gereconstrueerde ‘levensverhaal’ aanschouwelijk, wat nuttig is bij een onderwerp waar het visuele zo belangrijk is. De geïnteresseerde lezer kan dit stilstaande beeldmateriaal trouwens aanvullen met beeld- en geluidsfragmenten op de bijhorende website [biografie.vara.nl](http://biografie.vara.nl). Door deze audiovisuele ondersteuning komt het boek zeker tegemoet aan de wensen van een niet-academisch lezerspubliek.

Daarnaast biedt Wijfjes echter ook een gedegen historisch overzichtswerk voor een meer gespecialiseerd publiek. In dit omvangrijke boek vertelt hij chronologisch het verhaal van de ‘rode’ omroepvereniging VARA (Vereniging van Arbeiders Radio Amateurs), vanaf het ontstaan in de jaren twintig tot in de huidige gecommmercialiseerde en competitieve omroepmarkt. Hij weeft daarbij informatie uit uiteenlopende bronnen en over diverse aspecten van het omroepwezen tot één coherent verhaal. Dit is het verhaal van één omroepvereniging, in haar institutionele, politieke, economische, organisatorische en inhoudelijke aspecten. Het is ook het verhaal van het unieke, verzuilde Nederlandse publieke omroepbestel, verteld vanuit het standpunt van één speler in dit complexe schaakspel. Als ‘rode’ omroepvereniging illustreert de VARA de nauwe verbondenheid tussen omroep en samenleving, die in Nederland niet op nationaal maar vooral op levensbeschouwelijk en politiek niveau georganiseerd werd. De Nederlandse