

*The Chronicles of Nazareth (The English Convent) Bruges 1629-1793*, ed. Caroline Bowden, Woodbridge: Boydell Press for the Catholic Record Society, 2017, pp. xxxi + 553, £50.00, ISBN: 9780902832312

The earliest publications of the Catholic Record Society included seminal editions of texts from early modern English convents on the Continent, and the Society's recent return to this fruitful source material reflects the growing scholarly interest in these institutions (*Mannock Strickland, 1683-1744: Agent to English Convents in Flanders*, ed. Richard G. Williams, 2016). It is particularly fitting that Caroline Bowden, a pioneer within this subfield, is the editor of the Society's latest publication in this vein. Documenting the history of the English Augustinians at Bruges over the course of a century and a half, *The Chronicles of Nazareth* provides a richly-detailed narrative of cloistered life and a fascinating example of convent writing.

The Convent of Nazareth is the only English convent of this era still in operation on the Continent today, and its prioresses recorded its long and colourful history in three manuscript chronicles that are full of human interest, historical significance, and scholarly importance. Volume 1 documents the Convent of Nazareth from its foundation as an offshoot of the Louvain Augustinians in 1629 through its centennial in 1729. Extant only in an eighteenth-century copy, this manuscript is often illegible due to iron-rich ink that has oxidized. Bowden bases her edition on a twentieth-century typescript of this manuscript due to its fragility. Written in the hands of its original composers, volume 2 begins in 1729 and continues until 1793, when the Canonesses prepared to leave Bruges during the upheavals caused by the French Revolution. A third volume, which is not included in this edition, covers the years from 1794 to 1818.

In terms of their genre, *The Chronicles of Nazareth* illustrate how monasteries developed forms suited to their unique institutional needs. In addition to describing the major events that occurred each year both inside and outside the Canonesses' enclosure, the chronicles function as a register by recording the arrival and departure of boarders, schoolgirls, and convictrixes (women who hoped to join the convent). Prioresses also included obituaries for nuns who passed away during the year, effectively using the chronicles as a necrology. *Sui generis*, the resulting text is an excellent example of the bespoke genres that flourished in convents.

The chronicles offer valuable evidence of the authorial practices typical of monastic settings. These texts have been probably composed retrospectively rather than in the moment, as shown by deleted eyeskips (moments where the scribe accidentally skipped forward in her transcription and omitted material as a result) in Volume 2 that indicate the prioress was working from foul papers (pp. 279, 372). The

chronicles also incorporate documents written by outsiders, most notably a studiously impartial recounting of the controversial tenure and ouster of Francis Hinde, confessor from 1761 to 1766 (pp. 376-82). Likely composed by a priest, this narrative (c. 1770) is placed between the contemporaneous accounts of Prioress Mary Olivia Darrell and her successor Prioress Mary Augustine More. Through the juxtaposition of these different perspectives, the chronicles paint a complex picture of one of the many such spiritual disputes that occurred in exiled convents.

*The Chronicles of Nazareth* provide an engaging and lively account of monastic life, exiled experience, and European history during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Its authors record events within the secular sphere that impinge upon the cloister, as when Prioress More consulted an English colonel to determine if the house should flee the Revolutionary soldiers (p. 490). Keenly aware of their place within the religious landscape of Bruges, the nuns resolved a rivalry with the local parish church by paying a yearly tribute (pp. 268-69). The convent also played an active role in preserving and disseminating Catholicism, whether by sheltering ex-Jesuits after the order's suppression in 1773 (p. 404) or by converting a series of Protestant Englishwomen (pp. 253, 317-18, 341, 345, 391, 395, 397, 414). The most interesting material, however, concerns life within the enclosure. Prioresses have recorded extraordinary events, such as the elaborate, masque-like entertainments that celebrated the jubilees of the prioresses (pp. 253-56, 314-15, 319-20, 355-56, 417-18, 474-75) or the cannons that local workmen set off to mark the house's centennial (p. 217). While some convent histories and obituaries omit unedifying incidents, *The Chronicles of Nazareth* use such moments for educational purposes. Indeed, the chronicles contain much sensational material, ranging from a confessor who exposed himself in public (p. 435) to Sister Perpetua Errington's elopement, marriage, and contrite return eleven years later (pp. 97-100, 126-29, 299). Prioresses also reflect on the importance of choosing new members wisely. Commenting on the 'unhappy temper' of one deceased nun, Prioress Lucy Herbert observes that the community would not have admitted her again for even a thousand-pound dowry because 'peace & quiet is preferable to all things' (pp. 280-81). Especially striking are the chronicles' frequent references to the toll taken by insanity. In addition to documenting suicides by drowning and self-starvation (pp. 137, 153) and an attempted suicide by drowning (p. 370), the chronicles relate how one violent nun was confined in the garden only to be cured through intercessory prayer (pp. 243-44).

Intriguingly, the chronicles also serve as indirect autobiographies of their composers, reflecting the idiosyncrasies of each prioress. The personality of Herbert emerges most strongly. Prioress from 1709 to

1744, she used the chronicles to validate her divisive alterations to the house's habits, singing, and statutes (pp. 167, 171-73, 205, 215-16, 250). A charismatic yet polarizing leader, Herbert was a former member of the Jacobite court, and her detailed descriptions of convent festivities reveal that she retained a love of pageantry while also providing unusual insight into a little-known aspect of convent life.

Bowden supplies a semi-diplomatic edition of these manuscripts by maintaining their original spelling, clearly identifying deletions and insertions, modernizing i/j and u/v, and expanding frequently used abbreviations. In addition to Bowden's brief but illuminating glosses, the volume's extremely useful appendices include maps, plans, a glossary of convent terminology, and a list of professed nuns at Bruges (supplied by Victoria Van Hyning and Alyn Still).

With this fine publication, Bowden makes a vital contribution to a field that she has already had a major hand in shaping. *The Chronicles of Nazareth* is an authoritative critical edition of an essential monastic text that will broaden scholarly understandings of nuns' lives, spirituality, and writings. It will be required reading for those working on early modern monasticism or women writers, and of great interest to scholars in history and religion more generally.

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Katharine Keats-Rohan, *English Catholic Nuns in Exile, 1600–1800: A Biographical Register*, Oxford, Prosopographica et Genealogica, 2017, pp. xciii + 614, £75, ISBN: 9781900934145

In 2012, the 'Who Were the Nuns? (WWTN)' online database (<https://wwtn.history.qmul.ac.uk/>), the major output of an Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project of the same name, was launched. Led by Caroline Bowden, the WWTN project recovered a wealth of information relating to over 4,000 women who joined twenty-one English convents established in Europe during the seventeenth century. Combining surviving convent sources with relevant documentation held in state and ecclesiastical archives to create discrete prosopographical records for each woman, the resulting database was a pioneering feat that considerably enhanced our knowledge of the nature, operation, and gendered dimensions of post-Reformation English Catholicism. Furthermore, the inclusion of several genealogical tables, created by Katharine Keats-Rohan, brought to light the importance of family and patronage networks to the ongoing survival of the English convents in particular, and English Catholicism in general during the early modern period.