

A late-medieval shroud brass in Alkmaar in the new MeMO database

Thursday, 31st January 2013 saw the official launch of the MeMO (Medieval Memoria Online) database, which contains a wealth of material on the medieval memorial culture within the present-day Netherlands.¹ The database incorporates both memorial texts and objects up to c.1580, including tomb monuments and slabs. All entries are in English and contain descriptions, measurements, locations, sources, inscriptions (with translations) and photos where available, thereby offering scholars internationally a wonderful new research tool that is freely available.

Among the many new photographs specially commissioned for MeMO is that of the impressive double shroud brass of Pieter Claeszoon Paelinck (d. 21st March 1546) and his wife Josina Willemsdochter van Foreest (d. 28th February 1541) in the Grote or St. Laurenskerk in Alkmaar (Noord-Holland).² The slab is located on the floor of the south transept and measures 2570 x 1470 mm. Around the outer edge runs an inscription on a brass fillet that also includes four heraldic shields in the corners with the arms of Paelinck and Van Foreest at the top left and right, and two along the sides featuring religious imagery: on the left a Catherine wheel and on the right the *vera icon*, i.e. the veil of St. Veronica with the impression of Christ's face. The centre of the slab is covered by a large rectangular brass; one can also observe a filled-in *lewis* hole below and the ledger number 94 in the lower right corner.³

The central brass plate depicts the deceased couple, Josina occupying the traditional position at her husband's left side. Both are dressed in shrouds, with their heads inclined towards each other; their eyes open and their hands crossed over their abdomen. Pieter's shroud is loosely draped around his body, leaving the right shoulder and arm bare, whereas Josina is more modestly dressed with the shroud covering her head like a veil. The figures appear to be standing in a shell-headed niche with two herm figures in the spandrels, yet the background shows the texture of the mats on which cadaver effigies are also customarily laid.



*Joint shroud brass of Pieter Claeszoon Paelinck, 1546,
and wife Josina Willemsdochter van Foreest, 1541,
Grote or St. Laurenskerk, Alkmaar (Noord-Holland)
(Photo: Chris Booms for the Rijksdienst van het Cultureel Erfgoed)*

There is otherwise nothing 'macabre' about these two figures; they look remarkably fresh and alive, except for their shrouds.⁴ Two winged cherubs above the figures support a Jerusalem shield with crossed palms, which suggests that Pieter Paelinck belonged to the Order of the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.⁵

The inscription on the outer fillet reads in raised Roman majuscules:

Hier leyt begr[aven] Pieter Claessoen Palinck,
Gods Ridder, die gerust is den XXIen dach

meerte anno M CCCCC ende XLVI. En Iosina van Foreest Willems dochter, sijn huysvrouw die gherust is den XXVIIIen Februarii anno M Vc ende XLI.

(Trans.: Here lies buried Pieter Claeszoon Palinck, knight of God, who died on the 21st day of March in the year 1546. And Josina van Foreest Willemsdochter, his wife, who died on the 28th of February in the year 1541.)

A long banderole waving its way around the figures presents the reader with *avanitas* warning in incised Roman majuscules:

Wy waren als ghi / nu ligghen wij hier / denckt om sterven / ghy en weet niet hoe schier / wat is op deser werelt bedreven / als eenen roock is des menschen leven.

(Trans.: We were as you are, [but] now we lie here; remember to die; you do not know how fleeting this world is; human life is like smoke.)

Finally a Latin inscription in large incised Roman majuscules below the figures echoes Psalm 30:2:

In te Domine speravi; non confundar in eternum.

(Trans.: In thee, O Lord, have I put my trust; let me never be confounded.)

As his patronym suggests, Pieter was a son of Claes Paelinck.⁶ He was churchwarden of the church and served as burgomaster of Alkmaar in 1516 and again in 1533. His wife Josina came from a noble Dutch family.⁷ She must have been related to Jorden van Foreest (1494-1559), who was burgomaster of Alkmaar in 1535, 1537 and 1540. Pieter and Josina were obviously wealthy enough to commission a large brass of superior quality. The couple took further steps to ensure their salvation, for in their joint will of 1540 they left money for the foundation of an almshouse for women; the 'Hofje van Paling en van Foreest' still exists in Alkmaar.⁸

The primary aim of the MeMO project is to offer better insights into Dutch medieval memorial culture. It will also be a tool for genealogists to discover family connections; for example, the

database contains two other monuments in Alkmaar and Gouda to members of the Van Foreest family. Moreover, it facilitates stylistic comparisons between monuments in different parts of the country, for the representations of Pieter and Josina on their brass in Alkmaar bear a strong resemblance to similarly 'fresh' shroud figures to be found among the many contemporary incised effigial slabs in Zeeland.⁹

More time (and funding) is still needed to complete the mammoth task of inventorying and describing all extant Dutch medieval monuments, but the present database is already an impressive result. And there is yet more information in antiquarian texts and drawings waiting to be researched and added. The MeMO database can be found at <http://memo.hum.uu.nl/database/index.html> and users are invited to leave comments, corrections and additions.

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- 1 See also S. Oosterwijk, 'Reformation and recycling in the Netherlands', *M.B.S. Bulletin* 119 (Feb. 2012), pp.372-3.
- 2 H.K. Cameron, *A List of Monumental Brasses on the Continent of Europe* (London, 1970), p.80, no.1.
- 3 Lewis holes were sometimes inserted into floor slabs to facilitate lifting them with a lewis. See S. Oosterwijk, 'The story of Bianca Rubea: an emblem of wifely devotion, or death by tomb slab', *Church Monuments*, 27 (2012), pp.66-74.
- 4 This variety of 'fresh' cadavers is not included in K. Cohen, *Metamorphosis of a Death Symbol: The Transi Tomb in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, California Studies in the History of Art, 15 (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London, 1973).
- 5 W.F. Greeny, *A Book of Facsimiles of Monumental Brasses on the Continent of Europe* (London, 1884), p.73, with thanks to Paul Cockerham for sending me scans of the relevant pages and the superb rubbing.
- 6 The name is variously spelled Palinck, Paelinck, Palinc, Paling, or Palingh; the modern Dutch word *paling* translates as 'eel', but in the 16th century it meant 'pile-work' or 'boundary'.
- 7 The family can be dated back to Sir Willem van Foreest, who was recorded in 1278 as lord of Middelburg, Spoelwijk, Nieuwkoop and Foreest. The family castle of Foreest was built in 1350 but destroyed in 1440 during the Hook and Cod wars (Dutch: *Hoekse en Kabeljauwse twisten*) that affected the county of Holland between 1350 and 1490.
- 8 http://www.alkmaar.nl/eCache/36388/Hofje_van_Paling_en_van_Foreest. Pieter's and Josina's will was passed by notary Alardus Bloemen on 5th October 1540; it still survives, now largely illegible, in the Regionaal Archief Alkmaar. Not many such joint wills are known.
- 9 We still find seven incised shroud slabs in the church in Kapelle (Zeeland). See also my article on these and related slabs in Oudelande, forthcoming *M.B.S. Trans.* M. Norris, *Monumental Brasses: The Memorials*, 2 vols. (London, 1977), I, p.107, suggests that the brass in Alkmaar and that of Dean Willem van Gaelen at Breda might be by the same master.