

gap in our knowledge of the life of Mata Hari, and will benefit her new biography by Jessica Voeten and Angela Dekker, which is due out in 2017.

Nonetheless, in these letters we also see how Margaretha Zelle went in search of a new future. Deciding to emigrate, she never looked back and started a new life on her own terms, a resilient, nomadic life of an imaginative kind, reinventing herself as a totally new *persona* - an exotic oriental dancer, a star of immense charm and eroticism, scoring triumph after triumph, right up to the First World War, as a star of the theatre, dancing in theatres all around Europe - projecting a beguilingly seductive image wherever she performed, in the Musée Guimet, the Trocadéro and the Folies Bergère in Paris, La Scala in Milan, the Metropol theatre in Berlin, and the Apollo theatre in Vienna, leading a life of glamour and luxury in the capitals of Europe, having scores of admirers and lovers everywhere. And yes - in all those countries, she did have a thing for members of the officer class.

In the end, though, as she was flitting from one officer in one European country to others in different countries, the Great War caught up with her, and she had to pay the ultimate price. Sentenced for espionage and high treason, she was executed,

aged forty-one, by a French firing squad, at dawn on 15 October 1917 in the Bois de Vincennes.

Today, in her native Leeuwarden (which she left aged fifteen), there is not much that reminds one of her. And looking back from today, it is almost impossible to understand how she ever managed to conjure up this new and exotic image as a Javanese princess, embodying the height of European orientalist fantasy - especially when the photographs in this new book show her so very clearly as a solid Frisian woman from the north of the Netherlands.

She really did make the most of it - in the performance of her second life as Mata Hari, and living on ever after, through countless pictures, paintings, sculptures, musicals, opera, novels, and films, as an icon and a byword for *femme fatale* and female spy.

REINIER SALVERDA

Don't Think That I'm Bad - Margaretha Zelle Before Mata Hari / Denk niet dat ik slecht ben - Margaretha Zelle vóór Mata Hari, bilingual edition by Lourens Oldersma, Bormmeer - Tresoor, Gorredijk - Leeuwarden, 2016, 215 pp.



Mata Hari (1876-1917). Photo taken by the Amsterdam Studio Merkelbach in 1915

'The Only Friend of the Indians' **Restoring the Reputation of Father Pieter-Jan De Smet**

On 4 December 2016, outgoing US President Barack Obama ordered work to stop on the Dakota Access Pipeline. For months, environmental activists and members of the Lakota people of the Sioux Nation in North Dakota had been protesting against the laying of this pipeline. In their protests they invoked a treaty signed by the Lakota and neighbouring Native American tribes with the US government in 1851, which grants the region crossed by the pipeline to the Lakota. This treaty also had a Belgian flavour, as one of the negotiators was the Belgian missionary Pieter-Jan De Smet (1801-1873).

De Smet (sometimes referred to in Dutch as *Grote Zwartrok* (Great Blackrobe)), was in the news in 2016 when the Museum aan de Stroom (MAS) in Antwerp and the Catholic Documentation and Research Centre in Leuven joined with the provincial

executive of Oost-Vlaanderen to organise an exhibition dedicated to him (*The Call of the Rockies*) in the Caermersklooster cultural centre in Ghent. The exhibition reawakened the debate about Father De Smet, the missionaries who went to 'Christianise' America in the nineteenth century and the question of whether they were accomplices of the colonising whites, or 'protectors' of the indigenous peoples.

The controversy surrounding De Smet also coincided with the wave of paedophile scandals that has come to light in recent years. Priests and nuns in the United States, too, committed assaults on innocent (often indigenous) children. The Catholic Church has already paid out 3 billion US dollars in damages to abused children or their descendants. And although no accusations were made against De Smet himself, his status as 'friend of the Indians' was severely damaged. In May 2015, the (Jesuit) Saint Louis University removed a statue of De Smet because it was felt to be too paternalistic.

In the 1970s, Native American activists and publicists such as Vine Deloria Jr. were fiercely critical of missionaries like De Smet, arguing that they had 'facilitated' the suppression of the Indian nations.

What is certain is that De Smet left for the US in 1821 full of good intentions. His family, part of the wealthy bourgeois society in the Flemish town of Dendermonde, had hoped that he would become a priest in his own country, but the stories of Father Karel Nerinckx set his head reeling. Nerinckx was the first Catholic to be ordained as a priest in the US. He was keen to introduce the old 'reductions', founded by the Jesuits in Paraguay but disbanded at the end of the eighteenth century, into the United States. These reductions were independent Native American states which even had their own armies.

Nerinckx and De Smet believed that they could bring together the Indians in a large area to the west of the Mississippi. Here, they would spend two generations separated from the (negative) white influence and, under the supervision of missionaries, would learn how they needed to become a sedentary people (and Catholic, of course). Thereafter, the area would acquire full status as a US State.

De Smet's plan took shape in the period 1840-1860, when he established a whole series of missionary posts in Montana. For a long time it looked as though his experiment would succeed. Then came the discovery of gold in the area, and the

whole dream collapsed like a house of cards. Gold prospectors and other colonists flooded onto the prairie, prompting the Indians to take up arms. Initially they were highly successful, and America accepted treaties that were fairly favourable (for the Indians). For example, the 1851 and 1868 Treaties of Fort Laramie stipulated that large tracts to the west of the Missouri could remain in the hands of the prairie tribes.

In 1868, De Smet travelled to meet the legendary Lakota leader Sitting Bull to persuade him to accept a second treaty. Sitting Bull did not sign himself, but he had so much faith in De Smet ('the only friend of the Indians') that he allowed his lieutenant to sign the treaty, rendering it binding.

Sitting Bull understood that De Smet was right when he warned the Indians about the determination of the American government. They either had to accept the treaties or they would be wiped out. An offensive by the American army which began in 1876 quickly made this clear. Following their initial victory at the Battle of Little Bighorn, the prairie tribes were eliminated one by one. De Smet had been dead for three years by this point. The Indians were driven together on small reservations which were but a fraction of the size of the Great Sioux Reservation that was established under the 1851 treaty.

Viewed through a modern lens, it is all too easy to dismiss missionaries like De Smet as paternalistic white religious zealots who regarded the Indians as inferior heathens. The Jesuits made a sincere attempt to set up an 'Indian state' in the United States, and when that attempt failed, they opted for a strategy of damage limitation. Any other choice would have been criminal.

Critics should ask themselves whether the Indians – who still defend their rights with great vigour – would stand any chance today if their forefathers (such as Sitting Bull) had not signed the treaties. Those treaties between the Indians and the US government are legally valid and enforceable in the courts. They have proved to be a thorn in the flesh for many US politicians – including Donald Trump – because, while the reservations may be unsuitable as farmland, they are chock-full of valuable commodities such as uranium and petroleum. The centuries-old hunting and fishing rights can also not simply be swept aside.



Father Pieter-Jan De Smet (1801-1873),
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division –
Brady-Handy Photograph Collection

Father De Smet was a man of his time. Was he a paternalist who regarded the Indians as small children? Undoubtedly. Was he a warmonger who wanted to assimilate the Indian peoples? Absolutely not; he respected their culture and their history too much for that. The fact that he was ultimately forced to watch on with chagrin as the American government shamelessly infringed all the treaties, caused him sorrow to his dying day. The fact that the descendants of Sitting Bull have today achieved an historic victory in North Dakota against the American government is however a posthumous feather in De Smet's cap.

KARL VAN DEN BROECK

Translated by Julian Ross

The author of this article published a book in 2016 entitled *Waarom ik de indianen wil redden - Op zoek naar het kruis van Sitting Bull* (Why I Want to Save the Indians. In Search of the Crucifix of Sitting Bull), Polis, Antwerp.

500 Years Old

The 'Collegium Trilingue' in Leuven

Canon Hieronymus Busleyden (ca. 1470-1517), member of the Great Council of Mechelen, played host at his Mechelen residence to visits from Erasmus, Thomas More and Adriaan Boeyens, later Pope Adrianus VI. When the humanist and patron Busleyden died in 1517, he left enough money to enable an idea cherished by Erasmus finally to be turned into a reality: the founding of a school in Leuven dedicated to the study of the three classical languages Hebrew, Greek and Latin, in accordance with the philological principles of the humanists. Erasmus had published his first critical edition of the New Testament in Greek in 1516, and more importantly had produced a Latin translation which made many corrections to the 'sacred' translation by the fourth-century church father Jerome (the well-known Vulgate edition). His edition, however imperfect, marks the beginning of the scientific approach to Bible texts.

The *Collegium Trilingue* or *Collegium trium linguarum* was the first of its kind in Europe. Leuven University, and in particular the conservative Faculty of Theology and the Artes faculty, which was afraid of losing students, initially regarded the Collegium with distrust. It was not until 1519 that the Collegium, founded by will in 1517, and officially launching its teaching programme in 1518, was formally recognised by the university as a full-status institution.

Erasmus did not teach at the Collegium himself, but did recruit the best teachers and was the driving force behind the institution. A meagre remnant of the original buildings can still be seen on Busleidengang, a short alleyway leading off the Vismarkt in Leuven. King Francis I of France took inspiration from the Leuven Collegium when founding the *Collège Royal* (now the *Collège de France*) in Paris in 1530. He tried to attract Erasmus, but his invitation was turned down.

The Collegium quickly became a success. Renowned alumni included the anatomist Vesalius,