

Virginia Hoel, *Faith, Fatherland and the Norwegian Seaman: The work of the Norwegian Seamen's Mission in Antwerp and Dutch Ports 1864-1920* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2016, 476 pp., ISBN 978 90 8704 564 7).

During the long nineteenth century, the organization of seamanship in ports was mainly in the hands of go-betweens such as crimps, runners, and lodging-house keepers. With their local knowledge and services, they facilitated the transit of sailors and introduced them to shipmasters, representing a vital link in this atypical labor market. As these actors left hardly any records, our knowledge of how sailors transited through ports has many blind spots. The study by Virginia Hoel of the Norwegian Seamen's Mission offers substantial new insights. The mission was established out of a growing concern that seamen were easy prey for any kind of corruption in foreign harbors. To protect them, the seamen's mission gradually extended its services, focusing first on spiritual welfare (church services, providing reading rooms, visiting the ships, caring for the sick, and organizing funerals) and later on socioeconomic well-being (lodging, labor rights, money transfers, contact with home, cultural activities, and entertainment). By doing so, the mission increasingly entered into competition with local go-betweens.

Based on unique archival material produced by the pastors working in the mission and the seamen's mission association, Virginia Hoel describes how the institution was established and how it operated. She also analyzes the mission's impact on the life of Scandinavian seamen in Dutch and Belgian ports. It shows that the institution's work was sustained by the combined effort of various interest groups in the homeland, expatriate communities, and local authorities in the port, as well as the seamen themselves. Hoel focuses on the cultural aspects of the mission's work to assess the impact of Norwegian nation building on their activities. The book convincingly describes how spiritual well-being became increasingly linked to strengthening ties with the fatherland through national symbols (flags, language, literature, national celebrations, national anthems, et cetera). It shows that emissaries abroad played a role in the nation-building process, supporting Anthony Smith's notion that expatriate communities often function as nurseries for nationalism. Hoel cleverly analyzes the use of national symbols and manifestations before and after Norwegian independence in 1905. The interaction between the seamen's mission, its surrounding communities, and the fatherland through personal contact, the seamen's association, women's societies, et cetera, sheds new light on how national identity was constructed abroad.

The book has twelve chapters and is structured chronologically, divided into two parts discussing the case studies of Belgian and Dutch ports separately. This choice is defensible, yet a more thematic structure would have allowed more explicit comparisons. This could have sharpened the analytical and critical interpretation of the sources, which are now sometimes pushed into the background by contextual and narrative descriptions. The lush transcriptions of the sources give new insights, yet at times could have used more juxtaposition with existing literature and critical thought. For instance, the vilification of crimps, runners, and boarding-house bosses relentlessly exploiting the seamen is never put into question. At the same time, Hoel confirms that most were former seamen and many became members of the congregation attached to the seamen's mission. These were businessmen providing crucial services to seafarers. The latter, through personal experience and social networks, had more agency in deciding whom to trust than is generally ascribed. If the business had been purely exploitative in nature, sailors would not have sustained it for centuries. The negative image that the seamen's mission portrayed about these go-betweens was influenced by self-interest and served to justify its own existence. The difficulties of the seamen's mission to become established in the lodging-house market seems to indicate that boarding houses offered a decent standard of service (controlled by local authorities) at competitive prices that were hard to meet.

These remarks, however, do not diminish the value of the book, which is based on extensive archival research. It is also well framed in maritime history, religion, and nationalism studies, and richly contextualized by literature on Dutch, Belgian, and Scandinavian history. It offers new insights into the organization of seamanship in ports, the role of the mission in consolidating the social cohesion between the seamen and the home communities, and how the mission functioned as a nursery for nationalism. It does so for a crucial period in both Norwegian state formation and the shipping world alike, with the transition from sail to steam. Inevitably with such a large scope, some literature has been overlooked and yet the scope is greater than the author suggests.

The study will also be of significant interest to migration historians. The lack of integration of migration history in the book can for a great part be blamed on the sub-discipline itself, for generally having failed to include sailors into relevant analyses. However, Jan and Leo Lucassen have, for example, recently convincingly incorporated seamen into migration studies. There are earlier notable exceptions such as David Mauk's work on the Norwegian seamen's community in Brooklyn and the broad research of Jelle van Lottum on maritime labor mobility (part of which specifically includes Norwegians) in the northern seas and beyond. Hoel could have used these works to better differentiate between those who abandoned seamanship to establish themselves in a foreign port and those who remained at sea until settling back home. Unknowingly, Virginia Hoel answers the call by Patrick Weil and Nancy Green to redress the distorted focus on how countries of

arrival shaped migration policies while the policies of countries of departure have been neglected. The work of the seamen's mission centered for a great part on keeping ties with the home country alive and these efforts were increasingly linked to a national identity. Comparing these with similar activities of associations representing Norwegian migrant communities abroad holds promising perspectives to shed new light on the differences and similarities between seamen and other labor migrants. It could also uncover how Norwegian policies to reach out to their nationals abroad (mainly the U.S.) and those at sea are linked. This example serves to highlight that Virginia Hoel's book is a great and inspiring read that will be of interest to a very broad range of scholars.

Torsten Feys, Vrije Universiteit Brussel