



Finding the Flemish in Rome

In residence at the San Giuliano dei Fiamminghi hospice

San Giuliano dei Fiamminghi is the national church of Belgium in Rome. The small but beautiful building stands at the heart of the old city, situated between the imposing San Andrea della Valle and the Largo Argentina. San Giuliano first served the counts of Flanders, with a history going back more than a thousand years. Four allegorical figures representing Flanders adorn the church's front beneath the words:

ECCLESIA S. GIULIANI HOSPITALIS FLANDRIAE

According to tradition, the hospice of Saint Julian in Rome was founded in the eighth century. It is said that count Robrecht II of Flanders visited the foundation on his way to the Holy Land in 1096. Apparently, right after their conversion to Christianity, the Germanic people flocked to the places where Saints Peter and Paul were being revered, sparking the creation of guest houses to welcome the pilgrims of various nationalities.

The first mention of a chapel to Saint Julian date from the fifteenth century. After the Great Schism, the return of the papal court to Rome ushered in a new golden age. Following the Curia came a new surge of foreign immigrants, making Rome a *communis patria*, a homeland for all. Not least among them were the Flemish, the Fiamminghi, who created their own infrastructure to deal with the large number of visitors from the home country. Archives going back to the fourteenth century attest to the operation of the guest house; for example, a full set of statutes and regulations for the Flemish pilgrim hospice from 1444.

A meticulously-kept register of pilgrims, started in 1624, gives us an impression of the steady stream of pilgrims from the Southern Netherlands to the Eternal City. Between 1624 and 1790, no fewer than 21,213 mostly Flemish travellers found a place to rest. Furthermore, the books of San Giuliano show how the foundation intervened on behalf of robbed nobles, mortally ill people coming off the papal galleys, and seamen captured with their entire families by North African pirates, only to be released after paying hefty sums of money.

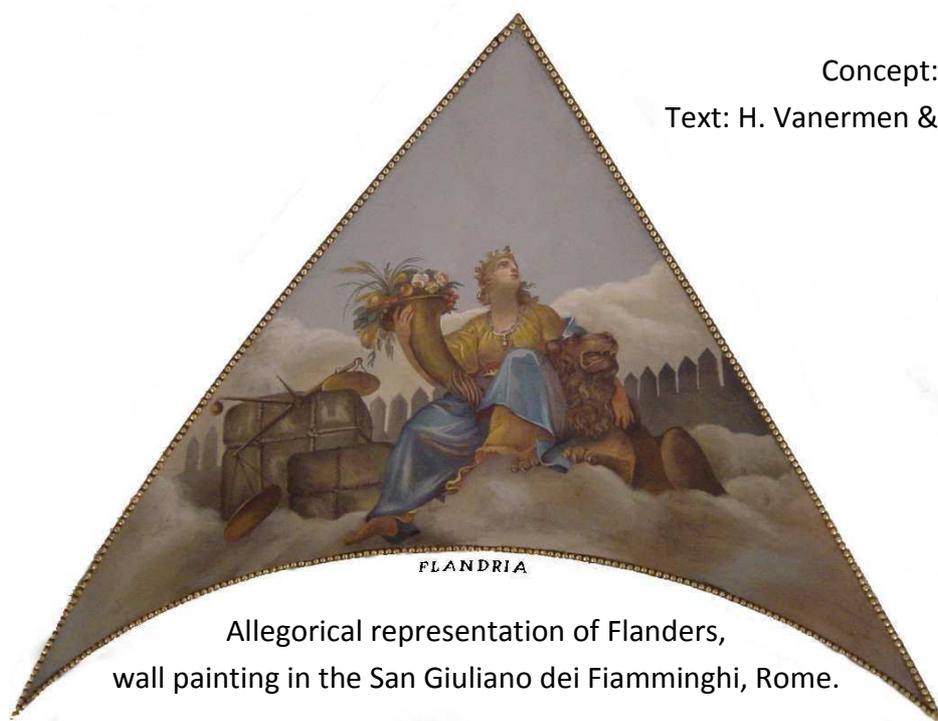
From the early sixteenth century on, Rome became even more attractive after the rediscovery of Antique culture. Cultivated by the art-loving Renaissance popes, the city became a dazzling centre of culture, drawing painters, sculptors, musicians and scientists. Foundations like San Giuliano provided the support for all those fifteenth- and sixteenth-century newcomers, making Rome a second homeland for shoemakers, carpenters, jewellers, glass painters, tailors and soldiers as well. The rich among the Roman Flemish community, including prelates, merchants, successful artisans and artists, served on the hospice's board of directors and were also members of the related Saint Julian confraternity. This society had a religious as well as a material dimension, since its members stood by their less fortunate compatriots in times of joy and need. But San Giuliano provided more than material support: the small church was a friendly meeting place for all Romans who called the Southern Netherlands home.

Between 1798 and 1814, the organisation of San Giuliano fell when the French took over control of the foundation. Later, the church became the property of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and eventually of Belgium. Meanwhile, the goal of the foundation has remained the same as written in the old statutes: serving pilgrims - fellow Belgians staying in Rome or visiting the Eternal City.

Flanders Recorder Quartet enjoys the hospitality of the Hospitium Flandriae looking for the Fiamminghi who dominated Europe musically during their stay here.

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Text: H. Vanermen & Tom Beets



Allegorical representation of Flanders,
wall painting in the San Giuliano dei Fiamminghi, Rome.

Finding the Flemish in Rome. A concert programme with music of those who once were guests at San Giuliano hospice: Guillaume Du Fay, Johannes de Stokem, Heinrich Isaac, Josquin des Prez, Jacobus de Kerle, Orlandus Lassus, Philippus de Monte, Jean de Macque and others

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