Every year in March a procession of men and women moves through the streets of night-time Amsterdam. In complete silence they follow an age-old procession route which has its origins in a medieval Eucharistic miracle. According to tradition, in the night of 15 to 16 March 1345, a dying man vomited and spewed up the Host that his parish priest had administered to him earlier that evening. In accordance with liturgical regulations, the wafer was thrown into the hearth but it miraculously survived the fire and could be retrieved from the ashes the next morning. What is more, after having been taken back to the Old Church by the priest, the Host inexplicably returned no less than three times to the dying man’s house. The fact the miracle Host kept coming back was a sure sign that the house was a *locum sacer*, a Holy Place (‘Heilige Stede’) where God had revealed Himself. Consequently, the house was converted into a chapel and soon became a famous pilgrimage site.

The personal history of authors Charles Caspers and, especially, Peter Jan Margry with the Amsterdam Miracle goes back a long way. Ever since the 1990s they have published extensively about the historiography and cultural meanings of the Amsterdam Miracle, in particular about the so-called ‘Stille Omgang,’ the silent procession that the original pilgrimage grew into at the end of the nineteenth century. In *Het Mirakel van Amsterdam* Caspers and Margry seek to write a ‘cultural biography’ of this devotion (p. 10). Their approach illustrates the fact that the authors have joined the growing number of scholars who prefer the bottom-up perspective of lay religiosity over the traditional top-down institutional focus on religious phenomena. In line with this cultural turn, Caspers’s and Margry’s study gives a great degree of prominence to the dynamic interaction between clergy and lay Catholics, and the agency of laypeople in the appropriation and accommodation of the Miracle cult.

Whilst acknowledging the extensive scholarship on the Amsterdam Miracle, the authors find sufficient grounds for their cultural biography. Firstly, because the sheer amount and often ‘pillarized’ (‘verzuilde’) nature of the current literature calls for a comprehensive synthesis; and secondly, because in their eyes the most prominent exponent of Catholic historiography in the twentieth century, L.J. Rogier (1894–1974) neglected to reflect on the revival of the Miracle cult in the 1880s. Because of the importance of this revival to the national mobilization of the Dutch Catholics in their struggle for emancipation, the authors believe this omission should be remedied.
The first three chapters address the ups and downs of the Miracle cult during the Ancien Régime, describing the rise to prominence of the ‘Heilige Stede’ as a pilgrimage site of international allure in the Middle Ages up to and including its transformation into a clandestine beacon of Catholic devotion and memory after the Reformation. Instead of a uniting factor within the urban community, the Miracle cult turned into a contested devotion, forbidden by the municipal authorities and dividing Amsterdam’s Catholic and Calvinist inhabitants. As the authors themselves indicate, this part of their biography has little new to offer from a factual point of view. However, by approaching the Amsterdam Miracle not only from a local angle, but examining it also from a regional and even international perspective, the authors successfully reveal how the Amsterdam cult was not so much an isolated Amsterdam phenomenon but was actually part of a larger European chain of dozens of medieval Eucharistic miracles. In order to prove that their empire enjoyed God’s special protection, the Habsburg rulers actively promoted many of these cults, including the Amsterdam Miracle. The city profited greatly from the Habsburg attention, both in religious and in economic respect.

Chapters 4 through 6, analysing the revival of the cult in the nineteenth and twentieth century, form the heart of this cultural biography. Here, the authors provide us with a wealth of new facts and insights, of which this review can highlight only a few. The 1798 granting of equal rights allowed Catholics to begin their emancipatory advance. Its century-old status as a clandestine religion had, however, left its mark on Dutch Catholicism. In the course of time the Catholic community had developed a type of ‘calvinist’ Catholicism, averse to any outward display of religious beliefs and with a strong focus on inner devotion. Such accommodation-Catholicism, as the authors label it, also affected the nineteenth-century struggle for emancipation in the sense that Catholics continued to avoid offending Protestant eyes and ears as much as possible. The ‘Stille Omgang’ initiated in 1881 by two lay Catholics, fitted in perfectly with this particular brand of Catholicism.

However, by walking the medieval procession in silence and at night, Catholics not only practised their faith, they simultaneously issued a clear and public statement against their position as second-class members of society. Consequently, the ‘Stille Omgang’ was both accommodation and resistance. The creative, nuanced game that Catholics thus played with a still hostile outside world could have been explored in more depth. Parallels could have been drawn with their early-modern fellow believers. In the first decades after the Alteration (which turned Amsterdam into a Protestant city in 1578), individual Catholics had already silently circumambulated the former holy chapel to express their devotion and at the same time manifest themselves as Catholics in public,