The year 1572 was of crucial importance in the history of the Netherlands. The capture of Den Briel by the Sea Beggars on 1 April, followed later in that month by the occupation of Flushing, provided the rebels with a base in their battle against King Philip II in the Northern Netherlands. Militant protestant minorities in the Dutch towns did their utmost to bring the insurrection within their own walls. Those who were Roman Catholic and loyal to the government were hereby subjected to increasing pressure, the more so after the greater part of the Spanish troops in Holland had been directed by the Duke of Alva to the Southern Netherlands to withstand the invasions from France and Germany and to strike down the rebellion that had occurred in some towns. At the beginning of August, Prince William of Orange’s allies had secured the greater parts of the provinces of Holland and Zeeland, although a majority of the population had remained royalist and Roman Catholic. However, after the Massacre of St Bartholomew in Paris—the night of 23 to 24 August, when the French Huguenots, supporters of Orange, were murdered en masse—the fortunes of war changed. The Prince, whose campaign in the Southern Netherlands proved a fiasco, disbanded the rest of his troops and took refuge in Holland. The Spanish troops caused great carnage in Mechelen, Zutphen and Naarden, which alienated a large part of the population of the Dutch towns from the authority of King Philip II. The Sea Beggars, however, also carried out a number of lynchings especially under their brutal chief, Willem van Lume. Among the Roman Catholic clergy who were the particular victims of this belonged Cornelis Muys, priest to the tertiaries of St Agatha’s convent in Delft.

On 26 July 1572 Delft, as the last great town in South Holland, had gone over to the side of the Prince; it opened its gates to a group of Sea Beggars guided by Lume. The situation for the Roman Catholics and especially for
The priests was becoming increasingly threatening during that autumn. Although the Prince had been staying at St Agatha’s, (the later Prinsenhof), it seemed advisable to Cornelis Muys to flee to The Hague. Having left Delft on 9 December, Muys was stopped by Lumey’s soldiers and led off to Leiden into captivity. There he was, in the night of 10 to 11 December, tortured atrociously and subsequently hanged without any form of due process. Although eye-witness reports and authentic deeds are missing, contemporary sources contain sufficient data for at least an overall reconstruction of the shocking events. As early as 13 December, Wouter Jacobsz, previously prior of the Gouda monastery Stein, who had fled to Amsterdam, recorded the following rumour in his diary:

Likewise we also heard that within Leiden the priest of a Delft convent was killed, who was charged with wanting to poison the Prince by means of a venomous serviette, but we could not learn who that priest was (fo. 54r.).

And on 16 December he wrote in addition to this, amongst other things:

Here we were told of the priest of whom it was recorded on St Lucia’s day that he had been killed within Leiden, that he was the reverend man the priest of St Agatha within Delft. And this good gentleman had fallen into these angry hands because he had gone to The Hague to avoid this tyranny. A heavy piece of wood was thrown onto his body so that his loins were broken, and he was heavily tortured. Then they cut off his manhood and he was found in the morning hanging from the gallows, where he remained hanging the whole day. And it was said that these atrocities were done to this devout gentleman for the satisfaction of Lumey, who thirsted after the blood of the Lord’s priests (fo. 55r.).


4 ‘Des gelycks hoerden wij meer dat noch binnen Leyden gedoot was een pater van een convent van Delft, die men te last leyde, dat hij de prinsch hadde willen vergeven door middel van bevenijnt serviet, maer en conden niet vernemen wat die pater was’ (fo. 54r.). – ‘Hier werden ons bekent gemaeckt van de pater, daerof geteykent staet op sinte Lusciëndach dat binnen Leyden is gedoot, dat dese was die eeuwerdighe man die pater van sint Aechte binnen Delft. Ende was dese goede heer in deser booser handen gecom, doerdien want hij hem nae den Hage gekeert hadde om dese tyannie te wijken. Der werden een swaer hout op syjn lijf geworpen, sulx dat hem sijn lenden braken, ende men pijnichde hem seer. Voerts sneed men hem sijn manlickheyt of ende men vont hem smorgens an die galghge hangen, daer hij den geheel en dach bleef hangen. Ende men seyde, dat dese afgrislickheyt desen goodsvuuchtigen heer angedaen werde tot complacentie van Lynmee, die toch seer dorstichde het bloet van des Heeren priesteren’ (fo. 55r.). The diary rests as MS 228 in the University Library of Nijmegen and was published: *Het dagboek van broeder Wouter Jacobsz (Gualtherus Jacobi Musius), prior of Stein*, ed. I.H. van Eeghen (Groningen 1959-60); the quotations in vol. 1, pp. 99, 101-2.

An elaborate analysis of the events is given by P. Noordekoop, *Cornelius Musius [Cornelis Muys], pater van Sint Agatha te Delft, humanist, priester, martelaar* (Utrecht, etc. 1955). Important historical sources: