



Breda and La Calahorra Castles as European Heritage

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The European Commission has declared 2018 to be the European Year of Cultural Heritage. Intended for us as Europeans to get reacquainted with our heritage and history, meaning not only our own but also that which we share with each other. So, what role do castles play in this? One way of broaching the subject is by looking at the influence of foreign castles on the origin and appearance of Dutch castles and vice versa.

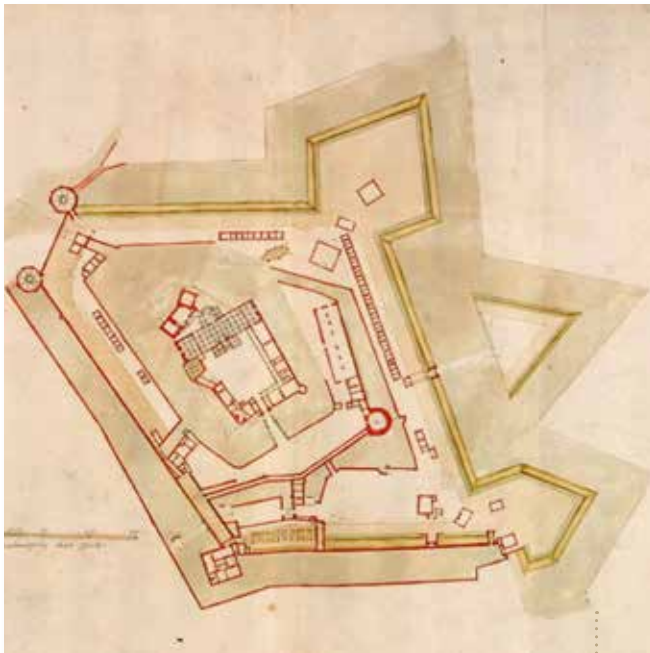
The Renaissance Castle Horst in Gelsenkirchen, which was designed by a master builder from Arnhem, can be seen as a Dutch castle manifested on German soil. Not only castles in the Dutch-German border region but also castles in Southern Europe have exerted influence on one another despite the distance separating them. North Italian architecture and architecture treatises have to a large extent influenced the 17th century country houses in the Republic, much like the Dutch Mannerist architecture style from the late 16th and early 17th century was adopted by the Danish. A special relationship across a great distance exists between Breda Castle and the Spanish Castle La Calahorra in Andalusia.

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

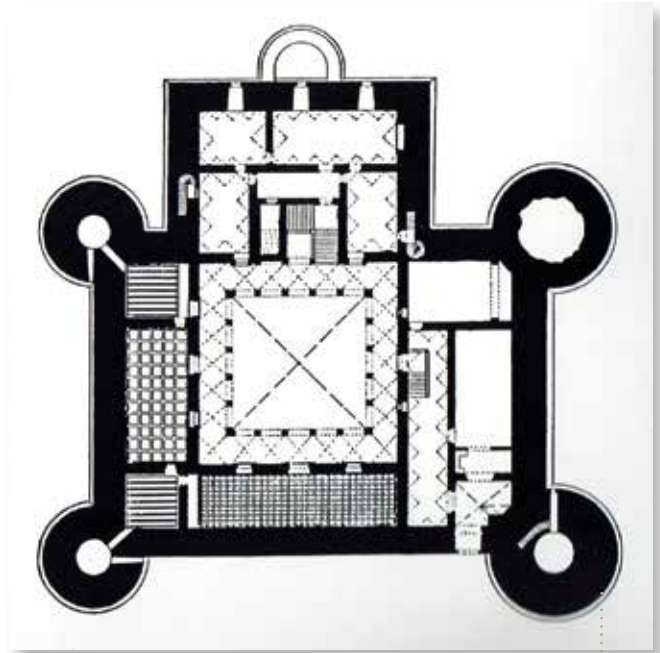
This remarkable relationship becomes even more evident if we compare the political history of Spain with that of the Netherlands. In 1496 the marriage of Joanna of Castile to the Burgundian Philip the Handsome, son of the German Emperor, created a personal union which for the North of the Netherlands

lasted till 1581 and for the South even till 1701. In 1500 Joanna gave birth to the future Charles V in Gent, who would become better known in Spain as King Carlos I. After he was declared of age in 1515, he was able to succeed his father, who had passed away in 1506, as ruler of the Burgundian Netherlands. One year later he was named regent, on behalf of his mother Joanna who had by now been declared mad, closely followed by his coronation as king. Charles V stayed intermittently in Spain, the Netherlands and the German Empire. In 1519, after the death of his grandfather Maximilian, Charles also became Archduke of Austria, a position he would only hold for 3 years. In 1519 he became Roman King, 11 years later he even proceeded to become Holy Roman Emperor. Because of his numerous functions Charles stayed in various places throughout his vast empire. Just like his son Philip II, who largely grew up in Spain, he was Duke of Brabant and Guelders, Count of Flanders,

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> PLATTEGROND VAN HET KASTEEL VAN BREDA ROND 1600.
COLLECTIE NATIONAAL ARCHIEF



> PLATTEGROND VAN DE DE BELETAGE VAN LA CALAHORRA. UIT
MONRAEL Y TEJADA 1999

Holland and Zeeland as well as Lord of Frisia, Groningen, Overijssel and Utrecht. Charles placed Dutch confidants in Spanish high functions. It is within this context that Henry III of Breda and the young Spanish Marquise Mencia de Mendoza came to play an interesting role.

MENCIA DE MENDOZA

In Andalusia, a mostly bare red-brown hilled landscape, the north slopes of its Sierra Nevada mountain range are unusually green. This is due to irrigation as canals distribute the melting water of the snow-covered mountaintops among the villages at the foot of the mountain range. With these same irrigation canals watermills were powered. The north slopes of the Sierra Nevada are in the Marquisate of Cenete.

The Marquis of Cenete, don Rodrigo de Mendoza, who commanded the construction of La Calahorra died in 1523. His wife Maria de Fonseca y Toledo had passed away two years prior. The couple had no sons. The dowry of their eldest daughter, the fifteen-year-old Mencia, attracted many Spanish noblemen. She was raised in the artistic environment of the Royal courts in Valencia. The Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives (1493 – 1540) even praised - in his 1524 treaty on the upbringing of the Christian woman - Mencia's wisdom and knowledge of the classical languages. Mencia would later gain repute as patroness of artists and scientists.¹ In 1524 she married Henry III of Nassau-Breda who was 25 years her senior in favour over Spanish young noblemen. Charles V probably intended to use this marriage to tie together elites from the various corners of his vast empire, although it should be noted that this remains the only known marriage arranged by Charles V personally. The groom was born in 1483 in Siegen in Germany as the son of count Johann V of Nassau-Dillenburg. At 21 years of age Henry III inherited from his childless uncle Engelbert II of Nassau properties in the Netherlands, including a city manor in Brussels and the fiefdom of Breda.

¹ M. Klatter, Mendoza y Fonseca, Mencia de (1508-1554), in: *Vrouwenlexicon* (Nijmegen 2013), nr. 103. Zie ook Th. M. Roest van Limburg, *Een Spaansche gravin van Nassau, Mencia de Mendoza, markiezin van Zenete, gravin van Nassau (1508-1554)* (Leiden 1908)

Henry quickly made a name for himself. In 1511 he was named Captain General of Brabant and held this title for many years in the war against Charles the Duke of Guelders. At the start of 1522 Henry was appointed as Charles V's head chamberlain, which was one of the most important positions at court. Henry married 3 times. In Breda in 1519 his second wife, Claudia of Chalon, gave birth to his only son Rene who would succeed his father as Lord of Breda and later his uncle as Prince of Orange. Early 1522 Henry travelled, by now widowed twice, in the retinue of Charles V to Spain via England. The first few years he stayed at Court in Valladolid and Pamplona, later in Burgos. There Henry married Mercia. They remained in the retinue of Charles V even after his marriage to Isabella of Portugal and their subsequent move to Seville and Granada. The summers there were cooler and more pleasant than in other Spanish cities. Charles V ordered the construction of a large Renaissance palace with a round courtyard within the Alhambra between existing Moorish palaces.

LA CALAHORRA

In July 1526 Henry and Mencia visited Cenete and La Calahorra that had been built by her father. This Marquisate, an area that had been in Moorish hands till the late 15th century, was bequeathed to Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar y Mendoza by Isabella of Castile in 1491. Rodrigo commissioned the construction of a new castle at the foot of the Sierra Nevada, whose exterior appears much older than it is. This castle, La Calahorra, could be considered a detached outpost of the Spanish monarchy in Andalusia which had been conquered from the Moorish Caliphs. Henry III was evidently – just like I was in October of last year – very impressed by this castle. Henry III's private secretary noted in a letter dated July 9th, 1526 'sunderlich ein schones haus gnant Calahorra'. He continued 'Wand ich sag e.g. zu, das ich viel hubscher heuser in Hispanien gesehen, aber noch keins so lustig, auch reich von mergelsteynen, seulen, stiegen und anderm und sundelich von so guten ordonnantien, als das auch mit seinen vier thurmen umbher und guten vestungen und

geschützt nach diesen Lantart wol versehen und an allem nichts gespart ist.² The castle had a rectangular layout with a round tower at each of the four corners. These towers have thick walls and very small round interior spaces. They were most likely only meant for artillery. At the north side of the rectangular castle a smaller square building was added, in which the monumental open staircase has been incorporated. The exterior of the building has the outward appearance of a fortress due to an almost complete lack of windows. To ensure habitability of the living spaces over the course of the summer thick walls were necessary to keep the heat out. A single entrance at the base of one of the heavy walls gives access to the basement of the building where horses were stabled. Via a broad straight staircase, one would arrive at the square courtyard which at all sides was encased by double arched galleries. The various living quarters have retained their original 16th century spatial finishes. The Renaissance hearths and parts of the tile floors are also still present. The impression is that the castle was little used from the 16th century onward. Its use was at least not a cause for any large renovations. The founder chose specifically the Renaissance style, in particular Italian High Renaissance style, which was not yet introduced in 1509 Spain. Because there were no suitable craftsmen in Spain at the time parts of the galleries, the monumental staircase and other building components were commissioned from the workshop of Italian sculptor Michele Carbone in Genoa.

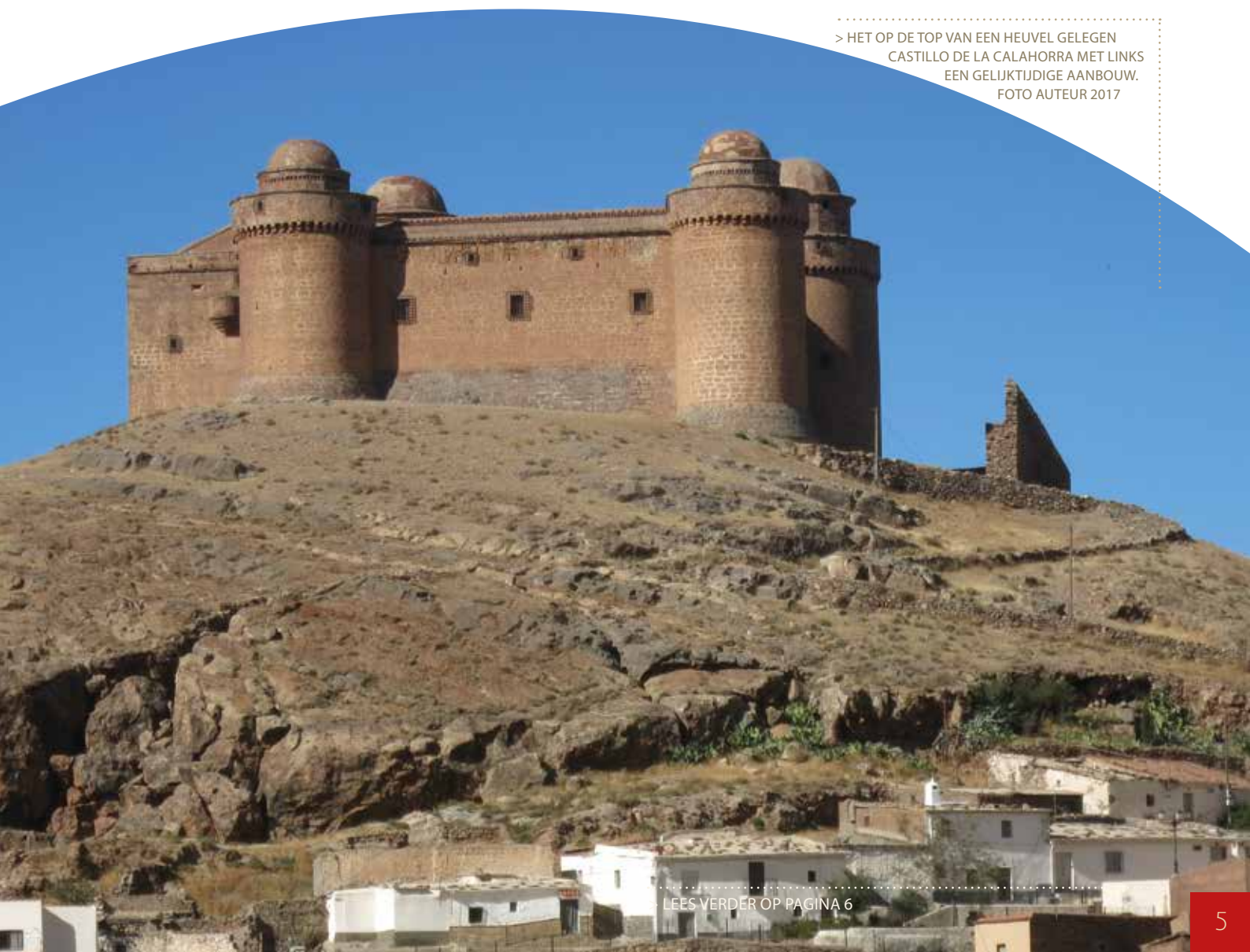
The carved parts most likely departed Genoa 'prefab' for the harbour of Almeria in the south of Spain from where they travelled another few hundred kilometres across poor roads to the construction site at the north foot of the Sierra Nevada.

THE CASTLE OF BREDÁ

It is alluring to assume that it was La Calahorra that gave Henry III the idea to transform the castle in Breda into a Renaissance palace. It would most definitely be plausible in terms of timing. In the winter of 1527/28 Henry was staying in Valladolid and received news from his representative that the 14th century Breda Castle was quite ruinous with the great hall at the brink of collapse. Henry intervened and sent over building plans, which unfortunately have not survived, drawn up by him personally. Whether the plans contained fortification instructions or drawings for in 1536 built Renaissance palace we do not know. Most likely the former, as before construction of the new palace could commence, heavy reinforcement of the old structure had to be put in place to ensure the castle's protection in future. First necessary lands were acquired to facilitate the expansion of the castle terrain and even the beguinage was moved. The start of the construction was postponed till the return of Henry himself who arrived in 1530. Henry and his young wife resided alternatively in the Nassau Palace in Brussels and the ruinous Breda Castle.

² G.W.C. van Wezel, *Het paleis van Hendrik III graaf van Nassau te Breda* (Zeist/ Zwolle 1999), p. 64

> HET OP DE TOP VAN EEN HEUVEL GELEGEN
CASTILLO DE LA CALAHORRA MET LINKS
EEN GELIJKTJDIGE AANBOUW.
FOTO AUTEUR 2017



In 1533 they witnessed Henry's son Rene of Chalon's official entry into the Principality of Orange. An event at which the French King Francis I and his wife were also present. Francis I was the one who had brought famous Italian architect Serlio to France for the commission of this royal palaces. However, if a knowledge exchange on Renaissance architecture took place between Henry III and Francis I, remains unknown. From 1535 onwards Henry and Mencia took up permanent residence in Breda. The castle underwent invasive drastic? renovations and even before its completion Mencia transformed it into a centre for the arts and sciences. Henry passed away in September 1538 in Breda. His marriage to Mencia had remained childless. She returned to Spain and married Ferdinand of Aragon, Prince of Naples, in 1540. In 1550 she became a widow once more after yet another childless marriage. At the beginning of January 1554, she died in Valencia, a city that held a lot of meaning for her.

The continual presence of Henry and Mencia in Breda would have been to oversee the construction. Not just relating to the castle but also the extension and fortification of the city and the chapel in the Grote Kerk where Henry II placed an impressive memorial in honour of his uncle Engelbert II.

Breda Castle took on its current form after the 19th century transformation of the Renaissance palace into the Royal military Academy³. The oldest mention of Breda Castle dates to the end of the 12th century. From 1360 till 1362 John II of Polanen built a new castle. In the 16th and 17th century this made way for a new building, but a small yet impressive part, the so-called Tower of John II Polanen remained intact till the early 19th century. In the 15th century the castle already had a double moat. Henry had the still existing building of the Audit Office with its massive staircase tower built on the outer bailey. Henry transformed the castle into a 'palazzo in fortezza', a new type of fortified Renaissance palace, that in the decennia that followed was imitated in Antwerp and Jülich. The construction of the new largely stone fortifications started, with still at the southeast corner two pre-existing brick turrets from 1532 and 1534. At the southeast corner the 'Blokhuys' (fortified building), with adjoining heavy curtain wall in which the main gate had been incorporated, was erected in 1534/35. Above the casemates of the square Blokhuis were the living quarters of Henry and Mencia. They were connected to the 16th century building of the Audit Office by a covered Renaissance gallery.

³ Zie voor de bouw vooral J. Kalf, *De Nederlandse monumenten van geschiedenis en Kunst, deel 1 De Baronie van Breda* (s Gravenhage 1912) en Van Wezel 1999



> BINNENPLAATS MET ZUILENGALERIJ VAN KASTEEL BREDA.
FOTO ALBERT SPEELMAN

The living quarters of Mencia were initially located in the Tower Mill above the watermill. This location was desirable due to the view of the Valkenberg gardens across the outer moat. This positioning of the living quarters at the garden side was not uncommon in Spain. At courts throughout Europe living quarters were not within the actual palace itself but usually located in an adjacent building.

In 1536 the construction of the actual Renaissance palace, that in its original layout consisted of wings around two large courtyards. For the new building the orientation was turned 90 degrees to the east-west. However, the new palace did not align properly with the Medieval structures. That the Medieval parts remained functional up until the 19th century is therefore remarkable.

The supervision of the construction efforts had been entrusted by Henry to Italian architect Thomasso de Vincidor, whom he met in Bologna in 1530. Between both courtyards the wing with the large hall was erected with at the eastside a monumental terrace staircase? and on the other side a chapel.

These monumental stairs seem to be inspired by the staircase at La Calahorra. The plan of the western courtyard was, in contrast to the still existing eastern courtyard, never realised. This eastern courtyard, of which the construction was only finished by King-Stadtholder Willem III at the end of the 17th century, had at both its sides Renaissance galleries that are open on the ground level but closed off on the top floor. They were connected by a fine surviving staircase. Only the hall wing, the north wing and half of the east wing were built in the 16th century. The southern part of the Medieval castle, where the kitchens were located, remained intact and were demolished by King-Stadtholder Willem III at the end of the 17th century. The large Medieval Polanen Tower and a wing at southeast corner were not demolished until the 19th century.

CONCLUSION

The Dutch castle in Breda and the Spanish La Calahorra have a strong connection. It is safe to assume that La Calahorra was the leading example for the Renaissance palace in Breda. Both were combinations of fortification with Italian southern noble living culture and perhaps for Mencia a reminder of comfortably warm Spain. La Calahorra has, in contrast to Breda, been preserved well and gives an impression of the high nobility's international living culture in the 16th century. An image that for the castle of Breda, since its transformation into a Royal Military Academy, can only be recalled with a large dose of imagination. Both are part of the European cultural heritage and remind us of time where sovereigns were forced to reside at various locations throughout their vast domain. The same goes for the nobility that travelled around with their sovereign during a time in which travelling was time consuming, dangerous and most, highly unpleasant. ■