

Medieval Studies in the Netherlands (Institutes, Associations, Resources)

by Arie van Steensel

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Introduction

The medieval history of the Netherlands was neglected up until the mid-twentieth century. Long a predominantly protestant country, the revolt against Spain in 1568 and the foundation of the Kingdom in 1813 were traditionally regarded as the beginning of its national history, while the Dutch Golden Age functioned as the most important point of reference in time. Although the Middle Ages enjoyed growing attention from the mid-nineteenth century onwards – at first among nationalist and catholic circles – the era never became a constitutive part of Dutch national identity. The reader can find bibliographic references in P.G.J.M. Raedts, *A Serious Case of Amnesia: the Dutch and their Middle Ages*, in *The Uses of the Middle Ages in Modern European States. History, Nationhood and the Search for Origins*, eds. R.J.W. Evans and G.P. Marchal, Basingstoke 2011, pp. 75-87. The influence of Romanticism did not awaken an interest in the Middle Ages in the Netherlands: *De Middeleeuwen in de negentiende eeuw*, eds. R.E.V. Stuip and C. Vellekoop, Hilversum 1996.

It was the earliest professional historians of the nineteenth century who showed considerable interest in the medieval predecessors of the Dutch Republic, but the first lecturer in medieval history was only appointed at the University of Utrecht in 1904. Johan Huizinga, probably the preeminent Dutch medievalist, who was trained in Indo-European linguistics, succeeded far better than his colleagues at the history departments in introducing medieval history and culture to a broader audience. The reader can find bibliographic references in B.H. Slicher van Bath, *Guide to the Work of Dutch Medievalists, 1919-1945*, in «*Speculum*», 23 (1948), pp. 236-266; C.G. Santing, “*De Middeleeuwen ontsluit*”. *De beoefening van de middeleeuwse geschiedenis in Nederland*, in *De*

geschiedenis van de middeleeuwen aan de Groningse Universiteit, 1614-1939, ed. C.G. Santing, Hilversum 1997, pp. 159-187; C. Strupp, *Die Institutionalisierung der Geschichtswissenschaft in den Niederlanden. Otto Opperman und das Institut für mittelalterliche Geschichte in Utrecht*, in «Rheinische Vierteljahrsblätter», 62 (1998), pp. 320-352.

Medieval studies expanded gradually within Dutch universities after the Second World War, with, for example, chairs in medieval history being established at all major universities, each with a distinct focus on the Middle Ages. Reflecting international developments, medieval studies in the Netherlands became a rather specialised field of research, with scholars from different countries looking far beyond the borders of the medieval Low Countries. Medievalists now took a more interdisciplinary perspective, and have developed new themes and fields of research in the past decades. At the same time, it has mainly been literary historians who have brought the medieval period to life for the general public. This might well explain why medieval studies is a thriving international research area in the Netherlands, although not very visible one for those outside academia, and why, amongst other things, educational programmes in medieval studies increasingly struggle to attract a sufficient share of students.

Medieval studies is actually a bit of a misleading label in this context, since it generally does not form a single discipline or organisational unit in the Dutch academic landscape. In fact, medievalists can be found amongst archaeologists, art and architectural historians, historians, linguists, literary historians, philosophers and scholars in religious studies, who are affiliated with different organisational units within the faculties of archaeology, humanities or the arts. In recent years, a convergence towards more interdisciplinary research and educational programmes in medieval studies has been taking place, mainly due to the introduction of graduate schools and to organisational changes within the faculties. In this brief overview of medieval studies in the Netherlands I shall focus on the institutions, associations and resources that bind these scholars together, apart – obviously – from their shared fascination with the Middle Ages.

Resources

1. Institutes

Medievalists in the Netherlands are generally affiliated with one of the six major universities: Amsterdam < <http://www.uva.nl/en/about-the-uva/organisation/faculties> > (including the Free University, <<http://www.vu.nl/en/about-vu-amsterdam/organization/faculties/index.asp> >), Groningen < <http://www.rug.nl/about-us/organization/faculties/> >, Leiden < <http://www.about.leiden.edu/contact/faculties.html> >, Nijmegen < <http://www.ru.nl/english/about-us/organisation/contact/important-addresses/addresses-faculties/> >

and Utrecht < <http://www.uu.nl/en/organisation/governance-and-organisation/faculties> >, which all have rich traditions of specialised research into medieval history and culture. Each of the academic research groups has its own distinct thematic, chronological and geographic focus, which will not be elaborated upon here. See the website (in Dutch) of the Research School for Medieval Studies, < <http://medievistiek.nl/en/research/lokaalonderzoek> >, for an older overview of the research profiles. At almost all these universities, the various relevant disciplines have now been merged into faculties of humanities (instead of separate faculties for archaeology, arts, philosophy or theology), within which disciplines are often further clustered into (interdisciplinary) departments or research institutes. This development, as well as the introduction of graduate schools modelled on Anglo-Saxon examples, has reinforced the formation of interdisciplinary research groups and educational programmes; so far, three universities have set up research centres specifically dedicated to medieval studies: the Utrecht Centre for Medieval Studies (< <http://www.uu.nl/organisatie/faculteit-geesteswetenschappen/onderwijs> >), the Amsterdam Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (< <http://cmsa.uva.nl/> >) and Radboud Medieval and Early Modern Studies (Nijmegen, < <http://www.ru.nl/hlcs/research-groups/radboud-medieval-and/> >).

The formation of these centres is often hampered by organisational obstacles, and truly interdisciplinary research programmes are still not very common for practical reasons. Nevertheless, the major “turns” – social, linguistic, cultural, spatial, global and, more recently, environmental – in cultural studies and social sciences, as well as the emergence of new digital methodologies, have driven traditional medievalist scholarship in the Netherlands towards multi-disciplinary approaches and research topics, blurring long-standing distinctions between sub-disciplines. This development will probably lead to a further convergence with other historical studies, especially those focussing on societies in the Middle East and Asia. Besides this trend towards more (international) collaboration, medievalists in the Netherlands are increasingly aware of the necessity to reflect on the societal relevance of their research.

With regard to educational organisation, the Dutch universities introduced the Bachelor’s/Master’s structure as an outcome of the Bologna Process in 2002. In general, Bachelor’s programmes have a broad and introductory setup, while Master’s programmes are more specialised, especially the two-year Research Master’s programmes designed for the training of potential researchers. As programmes in medieval studies would be too small to be sustained, they are generally offered as minors or specialised trajectories within broader programmes, for instance in history or in Dutch language and culture. A concern of recent years is the state of the auxiliary disciplines of medieval studies, which have been particularly hard-hit by the on-going restructuring of educational programmes, meaning that it is increasingly difficult to offer dedicated courses on palaeography, codicology, hagiography, philology or old languages (Latin, Old and Middle Dutch, French etc.) within regular BA or MA programmes. On the other hand, students profit from the growing interest in digital humanities

(for a discussion: < <http://www.hsozkult.de/debate/id/diskussionen-2396> >) among medievalists, and learn how to use digital tools in textual scholarship, mapping, databases of (non-)textual objects and so on.

Since educational programmes tend to change each year, one can best search for BA and MA programmes in medieval history and culture via Studyfinder, < <https://www.studyfinder.nl/> >, a website that should give an overview of all (Dutch and English) programmes offered by universities in the Netherlands. Bachelor's programmes are generally taught in Dutch, but several Master's programmes and all Research Master's programmes are taught in English. Currently, two-year research Master's in medieval studies in English are offered at Groningen (Classical < <http://www.rug.nl/masters/classical-medieval-and-renaissance-studies-research/?lang=en> >, Medieval < <http://www.rug.nl/masters/classical-medieval-and-renaissance-studies-research/?lang=en> > and Renaissance Studies < <http://www.rug.nl/masters/classical-medieval-and-renaissance-studies-research/?lang=en> >) and Utrecht (Ancient < <http://www.uu.nl/masters/en/ancient-medieval-and-renaissance-studies> >, Medieval and Renaissance Studies < <http://www.uu.nl/masters/en/ancient-medieval-and-renaissance-studies> >). As for the other universities, medieval studies is generally embedded as specialised trajectories in broader (R)MA programmes, such as (art) history or Dutch language and culture. See, for instance, the different programmes in history with a specialisation in medieval history at the University of Amsterdam (< <http://www.uva.nl/onderwijs/master/masteropleidingen/item/geschiedenis.html> >), the Free University of Amsterdam (< <http://www.vu.nl/nl/opleidingen/masteropleidingen/opleidingenoverzicht/g-h/geschiedenis/index.asp> >), Leiden University (in English, < <http://www.mastersinleiden.nl/programmes/europe-1000-1800/en/introduction> >), and Utrecht University (< <http://www.uu.nl/masters/middeleeuwen-en-renaissance-studies> >), while a specialisation in medieval Dutch literature is offered as part of Dutch Studies (< <http://en.mastersinleiden.nl/programmes/neeerlandistiek/nl/introduction> >) at Leiden and Historical, Literary and Cultural Studies (< <http://www.ru.nl/english/education/masters/historical-literary/> >) at Nijmegen. All in all, some searching has to be done by those interested in finding the various programmes in which medievalists participate. Finally, foreign students who intend to enrol at a Dutch university for a graduate programme should have a look at the website of Nuffic (< <https://www.nuffic.nl/en/education-promotion/study-in-holland> >) as a starting point for the practicalities involved in studying in the Netherlands.

In addition to the academic institutes, there are several national research institutes to which medievalists are attached and which offer a variety of services, such as providing relevant (online) texts and data for medievalists. First of all, Huygens ING, < <https://www.huygens.knaw.nl/?lang=en> >, The Hague, focuses on history, history of science and textual scholarships. Of particular interest are the medieval sources series published (online) by the institute. For social and economic data, the International Institute of Social History (IISG < <http://socialhistory.org/en> >), Amsterdam, is of importance, while

the Meertens Institute, < <http://www.meertens.knaw.nl/cms/en/> >, Amsterdam, studies the diversity of language and culture in the Netherlands. The three institutes will be united in a new humanities centre, which will be established in Amsterdam in the very near future.

2. Associations

The Netherlands Research School for Medieval Studies (< <http://medievistiek.nl/en/> >) is a national association for medievalists, and as such the main platform through which they communicate and interact. The universities of Amsterdam (including the Free University), Groningen, Leiden, Nijmegen and Utrecht participate in this association, and ties also exist with scholars attached to the universities of Rotterdam (< <http://www.eur.nl/english/faculties/> >) and Tilburg (< <https://www.tilburguniversity.edu/about/schools/> >). Moreover, the Flemish universities (Antwerp, Ghent and Leuven) are affiliated with the Research School for Medieval Studies, and Flemish medievalists actively participate in (joint) activities. The Research School also cooperates closely with the Vlaamse Werkgroep Mediëvistiek (< <http://www.vlaamsewerkgroepmedievistiek.org/> >), the Flemish Association of Medieval Studies, and is active within CARMEN (Co-operative for the Advancement of Research through a Medieval European Network, < <http://www.carmen-medieval.net/> >), the worldwide network of medievalists.

Since the community of medievalists is relatively small in the Netherlands and Flanders, the Research School for Medieval Studies provides the necessary interdisciplinary contacts and the critical mass required for maintaining the quality of academic research. Its core aims and activities are, firstly, to provide a training programme for PhD candidates in medieval studies in conjunction with local graduate schools. To this end, the Research School organises courses every year on sources, methodologies and research design, as well as conferences for doctoral candidates in medieval studies. In 2013, the Research School was honoured by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research with a grant for its Graduate Programme *Communication and Exploitation of Knowledge* (< <http://medievistiek.nl/news/introductie-graduate-programme-communication-and-exploitation-of-knowledge> >), which oversees the appointment of a number of doctoral candidates. Secondly, the Research School organises an annual Medieval Studies Day, at which senior and early career researchers present their research and enjoy the opportunity to meet each other. Finally, the Research School stimulates and promotes (international) cooperation between researchers in medieval studies, especially in initiating (multidisciplinary) research programmes and applying for national or European funding.

In addition to the Research School for Medieval Studies, other nation-wide research schools harbour medievalists, depending on their specialisation, most notably social and economic historians, who generally join the Posthumus Institute (< <http://www.hum.leiden.edu/posthumus/> >), or

art historians, who form part of the Dutch Postgraduate School for Art History (OSK, < <http://www.onderzoekschoolkunstgeschiedenis.nl/site/index.php?page=home&lngg=en> >), and who in lesser numbers become members of the ARCHON Research School of Archaeology (< <http://www.archonline.nl/> >), and the Netherlands School for Advanced Studies in Theology and Religion (NOSTER, < <http://www.noster.org/> >).

Furthermore, there are several thematic, and sometimes more informal, associations and workgroups of scholars in medieval studies. For instance, scholars of medieval Dutch literature in the Netherlands and Flanders organise a conference (“Dag van de medioneerlandistiek”) on a regular basis; the Werkgroep Middelnederlandse Artesliteratuur (< <http://www.let.uu.nl/wemal/> >) stimulates the study and opening up of *artes* literature in medieval Dutch; the Contactgroep Signum (< <http://www.contactgroepsignum.eu/> >) brings together medievalists interested in religious and ecclesiastical history; and the Society for Old Dutch Law has its own portal for Dutch legal history (< <http://www.rechtshistorie.nl/en/home> >). Finally, researchers and amateur historians specialising in the Middle Ages can be found among members of the numerous local historical associations.

3. *Other resources*

A wide array of sources and manuscripts is accessible to medievalists in archives and libraries across the Netherlands, and a growing number of primary and secondary sources are currently being made available online. The National Archives in The Hague are primarily responsible for preserving documents relating to central governing bodies (for example, the archives produced by the medieval County of Holland and the Estates of Holland), but also some interesting family archives from the medieval period. Important medieval archives are also held by provincial, regional and local (city) archives, an almost complete overview of which is accessible at the online *archieven.nl* portal (< <http://www.archieven.nl/en/> >). The holdings of these archives cover a wide range of documents that originate from the activities of regional authorities, town councils, courts, religious institutions, guilds, confraternities, and other organisations and individuals. Depending on the provenance of the source material, most of them are written in Middle Dutch (dictionary, < <http://gtb.inl.nl/> >) or Latin (dictionary, < <http://dictionaries.brillonline.com/niermeyer> >), and some in Middle French (dictionary, < <http://www.atilf.fr/dmf/> >). Generally, functional inventories and additional finding aids are available at location or online to navigate through the rich and extensive collections. Increasingly, archives offer the possibility of viewing archival sources online and of ordering photographic reproductions.

Obviously, libraries hold significant resources for medievalists. Apart from the Royal Library in The Hague (< <https://www.kb.nl/en> >, with a dedicated website for medieval manuscripts, < <https://www.kb.nl/en/resources-re>

search-guides/kb-collections/medieval-manuscripts >), the special collections of the university libraries of Amsterdam (< <http://bijzonderecollecties.uva.nl/en> >), Groningen (< <http://www.rug.nl/bibliotheek/services/ub/gebouw/derdeverdieping/zaalbijzonderecollecties/bijzonderecollecties/?lang=en> >), Leiden (< <http://www.library.leiden.edu/special-collections/> >), Nijmegen (< <http://www.ru.nl/library/library/about-library/special-collections/> >) and Utrecht (<<http://bc.library.uu.nl/> >) are of great value too. In recent years, libraries have been investing in the digitisation of their collections, and fast growing corpuses of manuscripts and images can now be consulted through various online portals and databases, of which the Narrative Sources from the Medieval Low Countries (< http://www.narrative-sources.be/colofon_nl.php >) and Medieval Memory Online (< <http://memo.hum.uu.nl/> >) are excellent examples. With regard to secondary literature on the medieval period, one can consult the library catalogues, while the Digital Bibliography of the History of the Netherlands (< <http://www.dbng.nl/en/> >) and the very useful German RI-Opac: Literature Database for the Middle Ages (< <http://resources.huylgens.knaw.nl/archangel/perioden/middeleeuwen/en> >) provide more specialised bibliographies on the medieval history of the Low Countries.

Over the past decade, medievalists have benefitted from numerous digitisation projects initiated by archives, libraries, research institutes, museums and other heritage organisations, of which a few have already been mentioned. Extant reproductions of documents, images and artefacts are becoming accessible online in increasing numbers, as well as datasets with valuable data for archaeologists, (art) historians, textual scholars and other researchers interested in the medieval period. The most important online resources are listed at the portal of Huygens ING (< <http://resources.huylgens.knaw.nl/archangel/perioden/middeleeuwen/en> >), at [historici.nl](https://www.historici.nl/resources?f[O]=im_field_periode%3A11) – < [https://www.historici.nl/resources?f\[O\]=im_field_periode%3A11](https://www.historici.nl/resources?f[O]=im_field_periode%3A11) >, a general portal for the community of historians in the Netherlands – and at [textualscholarship.nl](http://www.textualscholarship.nl/?page_id=6573) (< http://www.textualscholarship.nl/?page_id=6573 >). Further worth mentioning are the Digital Library of Dutch Literature (< <http://www.dbnl.org/> >), the Netherlands Institute for Art History (< <https://rkd.nl/en/> >), the archaeological portal of the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Netherlands (< <http://archeologiein nederland.nl/> >), the historical GIS-portal (< <http://www.hisgis.nl/> >) built by HISGIS and the recently launched Common Lab Research Infrastructure for the Arts and Humanities (< <http://www.clariah.nl/> >).

The research community is served by a number of multilingual (and peer reviewed) journals dedicated to the medieval period. Recently, the «Jaarboek voor Middeleeuwse Geschiedenis» and «Millennium. Tijdschrift voor Middeleeuwse Studies» merged into a new historical journal, «The Medieval Low Countries» (< <http://www.brepols.net/Pages/BrowseBySeries.aspx?TreeSeries=MLC> >). Furthermore, «Queeste, Journal of Medieval Literature in the Low Countries» (< <http://queeste.verloren.nl/> >) is devoted to this era of literature, and «Madoc. Tijdschrift over de Middeleeuwen» (< <http://www.verloren.nl/madoc> >) addresses a broader public interested in the Middle Ages. Contributions to the

medieval history and culture of the Low Countries can also be found in the more general journals, such as «BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review» (< <http://www.bmgn-lchr.nl/> >), the «Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History» (TSEG, < <http://tseg.nl/index-en.php> >), «Stadsgeschiedenis» (< <https://www.uantwerpen.be/nl/projecten/tijdschrift-stadsgeschiedenis/> >), the «Journal of Nobility Studies» (< <http://virtusjournal.org/> >), «Medieval and Modern Matters» (< <http://www.brepols.net/Pages/BrowseBySeries.aspx?TreeSeries=MMM> >), the «Journal of Archaeology in the Low Countries» (< <http://jalc.nl/cgi/t/text/text-idx7c37.html> >), as well as in numerous more specialised Dutch journals and, of course, in international journals. Dutch publishers with series on medieval studies include Verloren (< <http://www.verloren.nl/> >), AUP (<<http://en.aup.nl/> >) and – for the deep-pocketed – Brill (< <http://www.brill.com/> >), amongst others.

Finally, a few words about university positions and research funding are appropriate. Over the past years, Dutch universities have been facing budget cuts, and some disciplines in arts and humanities have to cope with a declining number of students, making it difficult for universities to employ new academic staff. The reasons for these financial challenges, as well as the position of the humanities in general, are currently topic of (public) debate in the Netherlands. As for now, the job market is not likely to improve in the near future, but the occasional positions can be found on Academic Transfer, < <https://www.academictransfer.com> >. Most often, positions are being offered on research projects funded by the Netherlands Organisation of Scientific Research (NWO < <http://www.nwo.nl/en/funding/our-funding-instruments> >), the European Research Council (ERC < <http://erc.europa.eu/funding-and-grants> >) or the Humanities in the European Research Area (HERA < <http://heranet.info/> >). Medievalists in the Netherlands have been fairly successful in obtaining funding for their research in these very competitive grant programmes.

In sum, medieval studies is a vibrant and rich research and teaching area in the Netherlands, offering a home to scholars from different parts of the world. Several of them are actively promoting medieval studies through social media and blogs (see, for instance, Medieval Books < <http://medievalbooks.nl/> >, a blog on medieval manuscripts) or by means of apps (see, for example, Vogala < <http://www.vogala.org/> >, an app that makes medieval Dutch audible). However, medievalists face a few challenges. On the one hand, medieval studies has to adapt to the rapidly evolving academic environment; on the other, medievalists – perhaps more than ever before – should be aware of the fact that the purpose and meaningfulness of studying the Middle Ages are in fact not obvious.

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