



January 1990

Mapping Library Resources in Dutch Studies Through the Conspectus

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Reprinted from *The Low Countries: Multidisciplinary Studies*, edited by Margaret Bruin Lacy (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990), pages 77-85.

NOTE: At the time of publication, the author Martha L. Brogan was affiliated with Yale University. Currently June 2007, she is the Associate University Librarian for Collection Development and Management at the University of Pennsylvania.

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Mapping Library Resources in Dutch Studies Through the Conspectus

Abstract

The academic library profession has a long tradition of responding to two conflicting forces: local autonomy and national interdependence. The demand for self-sufficiency is usually promulgated by faculty who expect to have their teaching and research interests satisfied by the collections at their local Institutions. Indeed, academic librarians involved in collection development pride themselves on not merely fulfilling, but anticipating, the needs of faculty. Further, the gravity of research libraries, in particular, has been measured by both the breadth and depth of coverage in their stock. A library's national rank has often been determined primarily in terms of the number of volumes it holds. These factors led research libraries to strive for - if not to attain - comprehensive collections.

Comments

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Publications of the American
Association for Netherlandic Studies • 3

Margriet Bruijn Lacy, Series Editor

THE LOW COUNTRIES: MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

edited by
Margriet Bruijn Lacy
North Dakota State University

UNIVERSITY
PRESS OF
AMERICA



Lanham • New York • London

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
PREFACE.....	ix
HET MES SNIJDT AAN TWEE KANTEN:	
ON THE SEMANTICS AND PRAGMATICS OF THE DUTCH SENTENCE-FINAL PARTICLE <i>HOOR</i>	1
Robert S. Kirsner and Jeanine Y. Deen, University of California, Los Angeles	
PRONUNCIATION NORMS IN THE DUTCH LANGUAGE AREA.....	13
Uus Knops, Katholieke Universiteit, Nijmegen	
THE EDUCATION OF LINGUISTIC MINORITIES IN THE NETHERLANDS.....	21
Marisa Garrett Castellano, University of California, Berkeley	
DUTCH IN TRANSLATION.....	27
André Lefevere, University of Texas, Austin and Ria Vanderauwera, Austin	
PRONUNCIATION ERRORS IN DUTCH: THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ASPECTS.....	35
S. De Vriendt, Vrije Universiteit, Brussel	
NEDERLANDS TUSSEN ENGELS EN DUIJS A TYPOLOGICAL COMPARISON.....	45
Thomas F. Shannon, University of California, Berkeley	
EVALUATING THE INFLUENCE OF <i>ZUIDNEDERLANDS</i> ON THE LANGUAGE OF HOLLAND IN THE 16TH AND 17TH CENTURIES.....	61
Gregory Hanson, Bradley Holtman and Robert Howell University of Wisconsin, Madison	
MAPPING LIBRARY RESOURCES IN DUTCH STUDIES THROUGH THE CONSPECTUS.....	77
Martha L. Brogan, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis	
DUTCH, FLEMISH, AND FRISIAN MATERIALS AT BERKELEY: COLLECTIONS AND ACCESS.....	87
James H. Spohrer, University of California, Berkeley	

ACCESS TO DUTCH STUDIES MATERIAL IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE:	
THE CLIO PROJECT.....	97
Michael Wintle, University of Hull, Hull	
RECONSTRUCTION OF A DISFIGURED DUTCH HISTORY PAINTING.....	105
Mary Ann Scott, University of Denver, Denver	
<i>BUITENPARTIJEN: GARDENS OF LOVE OR GARDENS OF LUST?.....</i>	111
Kahren Jones Arbitman, The Frick Art Museum, Pittsburgh	
NEW VISTAS ON NETHERLANDIC LANDSCAPE AND THE NATURAL WORLD.....	123
Anne W. Lowenthal, New York	
A FEMALE FAUST: <i>MARIEKEN VAN NIEUMEKEN</i>.....	131
Johanna C. Prins, Columbia University, New York	
<i>MAX HAVELAAR: A ROMANTIC NOVEL FOR SOCIAL FLUIDITY.....</i>	139
Gary L. Baker, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis	
ASPECTS OF MYTH IN FERDINAND BORDEWIJK'S <i>KARAKTER</i>.....	147
Augustinus P. Dierick, University of Toronto, Toronto	
THE OCCUPIED MIND: REMEMBERING AND FORGETTING SOME RECENT EXAMPLES IN DUTCH LITERATURE.....	157
Jolanda Vanderwal Taylor, University of Wisconsin, Madison	
CHILDREN, CHURCH, AND SICKBED? THE LIVES OF DUTCH IMMIGRANT WOMEN.....	165
Suzanne Sinke, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis	
THE FLEMISH MOVEMENT IN SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO, 1927-1931.....	175
Joan Magee, University of Windsor, Windsor	
SYSTEM-THREATENING OR SYSTEM-TRANSFORMING?: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF <i>VERZUILING</i>.....	183
Stanley W. Carlson-Thies, Northwestern College, Orange City	

MEDIEVAL NETHERLANDS HISTORY
THE BURGUNDIAN PERSPECTIVE.....195
Arthur L. Loeb,
Harvard University, Cambridge

NETHERLANDIC STATEMAKING THROUGH PRINCELY JUDICATURE
IN THE 16TH CENTURY.....211
Hugo de Schepper,
Katholieke Universiteit, Nijmegen

REPUBLICAN CULTURE IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE:
THE DUTCH REPUBLIC AND THE SEARCH
FOR DIPLOMATIC RECOGNITION.....227
Matthew T. Holland,
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

THE DUTCH REVOLT AND ITS IMPACT ON ENGLAND
DURING THE FIRST HALF OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.....237
Hugh Dunthorne,
University College, Swansea

POPULAR SONG-BOOKS IN THE SIXTEENTH-CENTURY LOWLANDS.....247
Hermina Joldersma,
University of Calgary, Calgary

MAPPING LIBRARY RESOURCES IN DUTCH STUDIES THROUGH THE CONSPECTUS

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The academic library profession has a long tradition of responding to two conflicting forces: local autonomy and national interdependence.¹ The demand for self-sufficiency is usually promulgated by faculty who expect to have their teaching and research interests satisfied by the collections at their local institutions. Indeed, academic librarians involved in collection development pride themselves on not merely fulfilling, but anticipating, the needs of faculty. Further, the gravity of research libraries, in particular, has been measured by both the breadth and depth of coverage in their stock. A library's national rank has often been determined primarily in terms of the number of volumes it holds. These factors led research libraries to strive for - if not to attain - comprehensive collections.²

At the same time, limited acquisitions budgets have always forced librarians to practice a degree of selectivity in building collections. While the encyclopedic library may have been an ideal, it has never been a budgeted reality in recent times, except in the case of narrowly defined specialized subject collections. As a consequence, at least since the Second World War, research libraries - including the Library of Congress - have embarked on various cooperative projects at a national level to mitigate local inadequacies.

J. Michael Smethurst, Director General of the British Library's Humanities and Social Sciences Division, identifies two requirements that must be satisfied in order to promote resource-sharing: (1) "realistic and reliable guides to the scope of the collections in the major libraries in the system" and (2) "knowledge of their priorities for future acquisition expenditure in particular subject areas."³ The "Conspectus" meets these conditions.

The Conspectus, which derives its roots from the word "to perceive" or "to make conspicuous," provides a means to survey the composite strengths of library collections on a national level. It is an inventory, available both in printed form and interactively online, which describes the existing collection strengths and the current collecting interests of libraries. It is a subjective, qualitative tool, usually based on the perceptions of those librarians or bibliographers who have nurtured the collections in various subject areas at their local institutions. In this regard, the Conspectus differs from other collection evaluation methods, such as the National Shelflist Count based

strictly on title counts held by an institution in each division of the Library of Congress (LC) classification scheme.⁴

The Conspectus was conceived in 1979 as a means to encourage resource-sharing by systematically describing collections at four major U.S. research libraries: Stanford, Yale, New York Public, and Columbia. It was adopted in 1980 as a principal program of the Research Libraries Group (RLG), a non-profit consortium which numbers 36 members today. In 1983, the 108-member Association of Research Libraries (ARL) chose the Conspectus as the tool for its North American Collections Inventory Project (NCIP).⁵ The Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) and the National Library of Canada endorsed the Conspectus in 1985.

By the mid-1980s the Conspectus had become a national standard for describing library collections. It now includes collection descriptions of RLG libraries, the Library of Congress, and selected ARL libraries, including Indiana University, Notre Dame, Purdue, University of California system, and the University of Virginia. The Conspectus is an evolving tool and presently contains records from about one-third of the major U.S. research libraries. Notable exclusions, particularly for those interested in Dutch studies, are the University of Illinois, Texas, Chicago, and Harvard.

Today, the Conspectus is also being adopted in Western Europe. The British Library has already completed an inventory of its collections using the Conspectus instrument, and the results of its findings appear alongside those of U.S. research libraries in the online version of the RLG Conspectus. The Conspectus has also been completed in Scotland and Sweden; is underway in France; and is under discussion in the Netherlands.⁶ Thus, in less than a decade, the Conspectus has expanded from an informal descriptive tool used by four U.S. research libraries to an international instrument used as a standard for describing collections.

The Conspectus uses a scale ranging from zero to five to describe a library's collection strength in some 7,000 subjects in 22 broad fields derived from the Library of Congress classification scheme. In brief, a rank of "zero," identifies a subject area "out of scope" and not collected by the library. "One" specifies a "minimal level" collection in which few works are acquired. "Two" is used for "basic information" collections which offer an introduction to the subject, but are not of sufficient depth to satisfy advanced undergraduate, graduate, or independent study. "Three" denotes an "instructional support" collection that might adequately sustain undergraduate and most graduate instruction. According to the Conspectus manual, a level 3 collection "includes a wide range of basic monographs, complete collections of the works of more important writers, selections from the works of secondary writers, a selection of representative journals,

access to appropriate non-bibliographic databases, and the reference tools and fundamental bibliographical apparatus pertaining to the subject." "Four" signifies a "research level" collection that can support dissertation and independent research. Level 4 collections are extensive, include pertinent foreign language materials, and retain older materials for historical research. Finally, "five" represents a truly "comprehensive" collection in which a library attempts to acquire "all significant works of recorded knowledge, in all applicable languages." Level 5 is reserved, by necessity, for well defined and limited subject fields, such as those represented in a "special collection."⁷

Codes are assigned for both "existing collection strength" (ECS) and "current collecting intensity" (CCI) to allow for change over time in collecting policies. In other words, it is possible for a library to rate its collection on the "Dutch language," 1/2, as indeed the University of Minnesota has, to indicate that its existing collection is at a minimal level, but that its current collecting policy has been upgraded to a basic information level. Conspectus ratings - even for existing collections - are fluid, and may be revised at the discretion of the local institution.

Core indicators are used along with language codes to mark the prevailing languages represented in the collecting area. The following codes are used to indicate the language coverage:

- E -- English language material predominates. Little or no foreign language material is in the collection.
- F -- Selected foreign language material included in addition to the English language material.
- W -- Wide selection of material in all applicable languages. No programmatic decision is made to restrict materials according to the language.
- Y -- Material is primarily in one foreign language. The overall focus is on collecting material in the vernacular of the area.⁸

In conjunction with provisions for brief notes, the language codes permit a more refined definition of the collection level. For example, the Library of Congress identifies its "Dutch language" collection as a 4/3W, noting that textbooks are at level 3 while scholarly works and dictionaries are at level 4. This means that although LC has an existing research collection, it currently collects at an instructional support level in a wide array of languages.

Using Dutch studies as a case study, the Conspectus informs us at the aggregate level about subject areas which are adequately represented among research libraries in this country. It also exposes those areas which are "endangered subjects" - where only one or two libraries are collecting materials at a research level,

or in certain instances, at an instruction support level. Libraries that accept "primary collecting responsibility" (PCR) for a subject area, agree to maintain their collections at the highest level within the partnership. Subjects with "PCR" assignments represent areas for which scholars might be concerned about our collective responsibility to preserve library support.

As is the case for any interdisciplinary study, collection data relevant to Dutch studies is spread across a number of subject areas. There are 22 broad subject fields represented in the Conspectus, ranging from agriculture to technology. Materials specifically pertaining to Dutch studies can be found in seven of the 22 divisions. The areas are: art and architecture; cartographic materials; education; government documents; history; law; and linguistics, languages, and literatures.

Although the Library of Congress classification scheme, from which the Conspectus derives its structure, provides great depth for subjects relevant to the Low Countries, the Conspectus typically relies on very broad subject categories. For example, Dutch literature is treated as a whole (LC class: PT5001-5980) despite the fact that the class itself is broken down into fine detail according to genre, historical period, and even individual authors. Or to cite another example, constitutional history of the Netherlands is simply identified by LC class JN5703, while the class dealing with the Netherlands itself ranges from JN5703 to JN5999 and covers historical periods, treatises, government structure (executive, legislative, and judiciary) and political parties. Further, many interdisciplinary subjects such as social anthropology, women's studies, and political economy defy a simple class approach and are not identified through the Conspectus framework for the Netherlands. From the area specialist's perspective, and unless the library has provided a note, it is difficult to judge subjects in-depth or to ascertain how thoroughly different authors or chronological periods are covered. The Conspectus, holding true to its etymological roots, provides only a broad overview.

With these limitations in mind, what can be learned about Dutch studies' collections from the Conspectus? In the seven divisions with pertinent information, there are a total of 47 sub-topics relevant to the Low Countries - half of these are found in the history category which contains by far the most detailed data pertinent to Dutch studies. Linguistics, languages, and literatures, and art and architecture follow with six subdivisions in each. Cartographic materials and government documents are represented by four subdivisions. The history of education in the Netherlands and Belgium is identified by one subdivision. Finally, foreign law collections for Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands are rated in three separate subdivisions.

LINGUISTICS, LANGUAGES, AND LITERATURES - GERMANIC LANGUAGES AND
LITERATURES (EXCEPT ENGLISH)

PCR:NYCG

Dutch Literature

PT5001-5980

UC Berkeley	4/4
UCLA	4/4F
LC	4/3W
Michigan	4/3
Columbia	4/4F
NYPL	4/2F
British Library	4/4F

The outlook for the other subdivisions in the language and literature area is even bleaker. Among U.S. libraries, only the New York Public indicates an existing collection strength at the research level for Frisian language and literature (LC class: PF1401-1558) or Flemish language (PF1001-1184). Primary collecting responsibility for Frisian has been assigned at the instructional support level only to Berkeley. No "PCR" assignment has been made for Flemish language, an obsolete class, but presumably it will be covered by Columbia's responsibility for Dutch language. Columbia has also been assigned responsibility to maintain research level collections for provincial and local Dutch literature. Alongside the British Library, Columbia is the only library which professes to collect at level 4 in this subject. Meanwhile, Berkeley has been assigned responsibility for Flemish literature since 1830 (LC class: PT6000-6471) - an area for which only four libraries, including the British Library, affirm research collections.

To summarize, it is evident that for the area of language and literature, researchers can expect to rely almost solely on Columbia and Berkeley. The Library of Congress and Yale remain consistent at level 3 for most of the areas. Meanwhile, the New York Public Library appears to have targeted this area for reduction, moving from level 4 to level 2 in all subjects. It is heartening to note that the British Library rates itself as a stable 4/4 for each of the seven subdivisions in language and literature.

Among the 23 subject subdivisions for history, Stanford, Yale, Berkeley, the Library of Congress, Princeton, and the British Library attest to numerous research level collections. These collections are supported by a strong line of level 3 collections at such institutions as the University of Iowa, Northwestern, Dartmouth, Rutgers, Columbia, and Brigham Young. Princeton and Brown appear to be regularly upgrading their history collections from level 3 to level 4, while Minnesota, Michigan, and Cornell register a decline from level 3 to level 2 in several subjects. New York Public Library indicates constant research

collections for Belgian history, but registers a downgrading from level 4 to level 2 for Dutch history. None of the history subdivisions is considered sufficiently "endangered" to warrant assigning particular institutions "primary collecting responsibility."

The note fields are particularly rich for the history subdivisions and often provide useful information about the collections. For Belgian history, Cornell notes that it collects in "French, Flemish, and some English"; also, "mainly the big cities: Brussels, Bruges, and Antwerp." Northwestern comments that "the library makes very few accessions of materials in the Flemish language." And Stanford frequently comments on the strengths of the Hoover Institution when these indicators vary from its other collections. For example, Stanford registers a 3/3F for the history of Holland (LC class: DJ401), but notes that Hoover acquires "internal history of World War II, including the German Occupation at 4/4F."

All of this data is accessible interactively via computer and its usefulness will increase as more libraries here and abroad add their Conspectus ratings to it. Presently, it is possible to search the database by combinations of 15 different indexes. The indexes include broad subject division phrases, such as art and architecture, as well as specific subject phrases like Benelux Economic Union. A keyword index combines the division, category, and subject indexes, thereby allowing for greater flexibility in retrieving relevant material. Boolean logical operators - and, or, not - can be used to extend or limit search commands. A search by keyword for "Netherlands or Belgium or Flemish or Dutch" will retrieve all Conspectus records categorized at any level in these subjects. Records are also indexed by existing collection strength, current collecting intensity, and primary collecting responsibility. A summary of the "PCR" assignments for Dutch studies appears below:

Table 2: PCR Assignments

<u>Subject</u>	<u>LC Class</u>	<u>Institution</u>	<u>Level</u>
Dutch language	PF1-929	Columbia	4/4F
Dutch literature	PT5001-5980	Columbia	4/4F
Dutch provincial & local literature	PT5901-5980	Columbia	4/4F
Flemish literature			
since 1830	PT6000-6471	Berkeley	4/4
Frisian language & literature	PF1401-1558	Berkeley	3/3
History of Education - Netherlands. Belgium	LA800-829	LC	4/4W
Maps - Surinam. Dutch Gulana	G5260-5264	Santa Barbara	3W/3W 4/4 Topo

A search can be limited to retrieve only those institutions with a current collecting intensity of level 2, for example. Or the search can be set to identify the records belonging to a particular institution or set of institutions. It is possible to extract, for example, only British Library records on any given subject.

The Conspectus has engendered "verification studies" - expertly constituted literature lists used to review duplicate and unique holdings in a given subject among libraries and to confirm the Conspectus code assignments.¹⁰ Nine verification studies have been carried out on a variety of subjects, ranging from Swiss history to agricultural economics. A library is expected to have a certain percentage of titles from the bibliographic tool in order to validate its Conspectus rank as a level 3, 4, or 5 collection. Verification studies attempt to quantify and render objective the Conspectus indicators. In the case of Dutch literature one might suppose, for example, that even a minimal level collection should hold all of works listed in the new edition of *Books for College Libraries*.¹¹ At the instructional support level, King's and Wintle's new *The Netherlands* bibliography might be used as a yardstick for certain subject areas.¹²

At the local level, the process of completing the Conspectus may be one of its greatest assets. In conducting this exercise, the librarian is required to analyze systematically the scope of the library's collection in a certain subject area. It also provides a flexible means of manipulating and comparing local records, in essence, a collection development policy in machine readable form.

At the institutional level, the Conspectus may be used to identify library materials for preservation treatment, to establish budget priorities, to communicate with new faculty, to document grant proposals, or to support accreditation reviews. Several libraries are creating an institutional database from the Conspectus that contains all local records. The database may be enhanced and annotated with faculty research interests, corollary course offerings, acquisitions budgets, or shelflist title counts.

Nationally and internationally, the Conspectus provides a common framework in which to assess and compare collection resources. It forms the basis for cooperative agreements in acquiring, cataloging, making accessible, and preserving library materials.

NOTES

¹ The author gratefully acknowledges the editorial advice of Mariann Tiblin, University of Minnesota.

- ² For elaboration consult: David H. Stam, "Collaboration Collection Development: Progress, Problems, and Potential," *IFLA Journal* 12 (1986): 9-19.
- ³ J.M. Smethurst, "Resource Sharing and Conspectus in the British Library," *Liber News Sheet* 21 (1987): 26.
- ⁴ See Joseph J. Branin, David Farrell, and Mariann Tiblin, "The National Shelflist Count Project: Its History, Limitations, and Usefulness," *Library Resources and Technical Services* (Oct./Dec. 1984): 333-342.
- ⁵ Articles about NCIP are contained in: Association of Research Libraries, "NCIP: Means to an End," in *Minutes of the 109th meeting: October 22-23, 1986* (Washington, D.C.: ARL, 1987): 6-35.
- ⁶ In the Netherlands, librarians are discussing how the Conspectus structure coincides with the existing national online union catalog (PICA). The Royal Library is considering the feasibility of entering Conspectus codes directly into the national bibliography for each new title listed. For elaboration see the report: UKB - Samenwerkingsverband van de Universiteitsbibliotheken, de Koninklijke Bibliotheek en de bibliotheek van de Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, "Coördinatie van de Collectievorming: Methodiek en Realisering," in *Voortgangsrapport UKB - Begeleidingscommissie Coördinatie van de Collectievorming*, (Maart, 1987): 1-73. Available from the Secretariaat UKB, p/a Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, Postbus 616, 6200 MD Maastricht, Nederland.
- ⁷ Jutta Reed-Scott, *Manual for The North American Inventory of Research Library Collections* (Washington, D.C.: Association of Research Libraries), January 1985.
- ⁸ See note 7 above.
- ⁹ Table 1 was downloaded directly from the RLG online Conspectus.
- ¹⁰ See James Coleman, "Verification Studies: Design and Implementation," *College & Research Libraries News* (July-August, 1985): 338-340.
- ¹¹ *Books for College Libraries*, 3rd edition, (Chicago: American Library Association, 1988).
- ¹² Peter King and Michael Wintle, *The Netherlands*, World Bibliographical Series, (Santa Barbara: Clio Press, 1987).