Recent Dutch-language Publications

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Willem Blaeu (1571–1638) and his son Joan (1598/9–1673) earned their lasting fame by publishing maps and atlases, with Theatrum orbis terrarum (1635) and Atlas maior (1665) as their highlights. Most publications on Willem Blaeu focus on this part of his prodigious activities; curiously, although he had a rich and storied life, a full-fledged biography remains unpublished. In this revised edition of her PhD dissertation, Djoeke van Netten demonstrates Blaeu’s versatility through the range of his vocations. He was a printer, publisher, and bookseller, a ‘koopman in kennis’, a merchant in knowledge, a scientist-printer. Van Netten analyses his prominent role in the print culture of the time. Blaeu was an able mathematician, which explains why he published so many titles in this field. His place in the international network, scholarly as well as commercial, is shown by a number of case studies. Commercial success he scored with seaman’s guides like Het licht der zee-vaert and Zeespiegel, of which more than fifty editions appeared since 1608, and which were also translated. Other maritime activities involved the production of globes, instruments and tables. He was an examiner for the VOC, a lucrative and prestigious task. Apart from the chapter about the seaman’s guides, Van Netten only mentions Blaeu’s maritime and VOC connection in passing—on purpose, as she rightfully concentrates on hitherto neglected aspects of the activities of Willem Blaeu.

Professional artists rarely visited seventeenth-century VOC Indies. One of the few was Andries Beeckman (1628–1664), who left Deventer and his well-to-do family in 1652 to enlist as a VOC soldier. He survived the hardships of travel and stay, must have visited Japan, and returned in 1658. He brought back sketches and notes which he used to make watercolours depicting Indies natives, Chinese and Japanese people, and mestizos, as well as tropical animals. He did the same with material he collected on Madagascar and the Cape Colony. He sold two large paintings of Batavia, which are now showpieces in the Rijksmuseum. His watercolours became instantly popular, and were regularly copied and adapted and used in publications on the Indies, as faithful representations of the tropical reality. A set of 55 of the 57 original watercolours was rediscovered in a Paris museum, and with the availability of two sets of copies, there was enough incentive to make Beeckman subject of a project at Radboud University Nijmegen. Its outcome is an exhibition in the Kunsthal Rotterdam, and this scholarly monograph. Six essays by six authors give the scant details of his biography, a survey of the scale and way his watercolours were used in books, and a closer look at the paintings on Moluccan warriors, Chinese and Japanese, Albinos and exotic animals. And more than half of the book shows Beeckman’s watercolours with extensive and expert commentaries.


Anthologies of Indies poetry have been rare. Samuel Kalff and E. du Perron were early compilers, while Joop van den Berg collected *Indië-Indonesië in honderd gedichten* (1984), but with its own premises. Now, Bert Paasman and Peter van Zonneveld, the two most qualified experts on the subject, have collected 220 poetical works, from the early VOC period, mostly anonymous, till the third generation of the present day. They have organized the poetry in ten categories: the journey to the Indies; nature, town and village; colonial daily life; life and culture of the Indonesians; colonial wares; love and eroticism; historical
persons and facts; revolution and independence; and the journey back home and nostalgia. The top five represented are G.J. Resink (19), Willem Brandt (15), J.F. Kunst (10), Drs. P (10) and J. van Soest (9). Their selection also includes songs, cabaret texts, and political poetry from the right and the left. This Indies poetry is not just literature, of course, but as the editors are very much aware, aims to interest readers for its social, historical, and political circumstances as well. The introduction is brief, and the poems are adequately annotated. The book is a feast for the eyes as for its lay-out, with beautiful full colour illustrations. Senior actor Willem Nijholt, of Indies background, reads 44 poems on the CD included in the book.


The brothers Dirk (1761–1822) and Gijsbert Karel van Hogendorp (1762–1834), members of the rich aristocratic elite in the Dutch Republic were close to the Orangist stadtholder’s court. Their education at first followed the same course: the Prussian military academy in Berlin, but then they parted ways, and made different choices during the revolutionary turmoil of the French Revolution, the French-dominated Batavian Republic in the Netherlands, and the Empire of Napoleon. Napoleon’s defeat, after his Russian campaign ended in disaster, gave Gijsbert Karel the long-awaited chance to stage a comeback in politics. He was instrumental in the return in 1813 of the Orangist heir to the throne, now as King Willem I. He also laid the groundwork for a rather conservative constitution. His 1813 activities secured him a place of honour in Dutch history. Dirk is less well-known, but became involved in Indies affairs, with remarkable points of view. In contrast to his contemplative brother, Dirk was impulsive, strong-willed and arrogant—traits which regularly landed him in trouble. In 1783 he commanded the army men on board of a fleet that was sent from Holland to support a French fleet in Asia. He was successful in battle in Melaka. He continued his career as a merchant with the VOC. He was stationed in Patna (India), Japara (Java) and Surabaya, and gradually became more critical of the VOC colonial practices. He favoured land and agricultural reform, and opposed slavery—even to the extent of publishing *Kraspoekol* (1801), a play that condemns the slave trade. It did not earn him support with the VOC—he was arrested and fled the Indies. He now abandoned his conservative past and became a staunch supporter of French and Batavian reformism. In a number of polemical writings, some of these together with Gijsbert, he expounded
his views on colonial rulership. He became a member of the Commissie voor Oost-Indische Zaken that had to advise on the course to take after the VOC bankruptcy. Dirk here could not outplay S.C. Nederburgh, his old foe from the Indies, nor was he nominated as governor-general, a post he eagerly wanted. He had to settle for Batavian ambassador in Russia. Later, he became Minister of War, ambassador in Vienna and, after the Netherlands were annexed by France, he became Napoleon's aide-de-camp, one of the emperor's closest and most trusted advisors. He was now a general, became involved in the Russian campaign and shared Napoleon's downfall. In contrast to many others among the Dutch elite who cooperated with the French, for Dirk there was no clemency. He was commonly referred to as a traitor. He left the new kingdom for Brazil, where he died as a poor plantation owner. Edwin van Meerkerk, affiliated with Radboud University Nijmegen, has combined the biographies of the two brothers with very divergent careers in one volume—as they embody the dilemmas faced at the time and the different reactions possible. In practice, this means that chapters for the greater majority alternate between the two brothers, and rarely intertwine. This is not a problem—the result is a fine, well-researched and accessible double-biography.


*Indische Letteren*, published by the Werkgroep Indisch-Nederlandse Letterkunde, with a stunning 600 subscribers, now for almost thirty years in a well-proven formula has disseminated its findings and analysis on Indies literature, always closely coupled to historical and sociological developments. Not a minor role in this respect played the Dutch-language Indies press, which, by lack of democratic institutions, functioned as a kind of informal parliament. As such it severely criticized the colonial government, which was not averse to prosecute journalists. The colonial readership was particularly fond of conflict and polemics, probably to find a distraction from the monotonous daily life. The newspapers suited their readers and developed a ‘tropenstijl’, an aggressive style full of abusive terms. In his monumental two-volume history of the Indies press Gerard Termorshuizen has mapped these developments and many more things about this press. *Indische Letteren* in 2011 organized a symposium with fourteen contributions to celebrate the publication of the second volume. Seven were already published in a special issue of *Indische Letteren*; the other seven, with an added two, as well as a bibliography of Termorshuizen,
are now separately published as *Van felle kritiek tot feuilleton*. For all practical purposes—in layout and contents—it looks like an issue of *Indische Letteren*. The contributors are well-known protagonists of the Werkgroep, now concentrating on the links between Indies press and literature. There are general accounts on the prosecution of journalists (Olf Praamstra) and the ‘tropenstijl’ (Geert Onno Prins), on a notorious murder case in 1908 (Reggie Baay), on Tjoet Nja Din, famous now as a heroine of the Aceh War (Peter van Zonneveld), on the ill-fated marriage of Thérèse Hoven and Sam Kalff (Adrienne Zuiderweg), on Melati van Java (Vilan van de Loo) and Gerret Rouffaer (Frank Okker), and two pieces, mainly on Jan Boon/Tjalie Robinson (Pamela Pattynama and Bert Paasman). All deserve to be read—and many make you want more.


Raden Mas Haryo Soerjosoeparto (1885–1944) left Surakarta in June 1913 for a two year’s sojourn in the Netherlands to study eastern languages and philosophy. This rare distinction he owed to prominent colonial officials, like C.Th. van Deventer and D.A. Rinkes, who supported the endeavours of the talented young man, who was also a candidate to become the next Mangkoenegoro. To cover expenses he wrote an extensive account of his experiences on board and in ports of call like Tanjungpriok, Padang, Aden, Suez, Port Said, and Marseille, that was published by Volkslectuur in 1916. It is exceptional that after a century his account is published in translation. Soerjosoeparto was an acute observer, had literary ambitions and also shows his personal feelings. He always had his Javanese audience in mind and this focus makes his journal different from the many accounts by Dutch travelers. Soerjosoeparto was considered progressive, and twice (pp. 128, 142) he alludes to his wish that equivalence would exist between Javanese and Dutch, and that the time that one people will rule another people is past. Volkslectuur, the government publishing-house, printed these sentences. Soerjosoeparto returned in 1915 and the next year was indeed elevated to be Mangkoenegoro vii, who earned fame as a patron of Javanese art and culture. The editors have added adequate introduction and epilogue (20 pages) to give the necessary background.

Willem Gerard Hofker (1902–1981) has become famous as a painter of Bali, and especially Bali’s beautiful women. He arrived in Bali in 1938, and became a member of the circle of artists residing then on the island. During the Japanese occupation he found himself in internment, and in the chaotic postwar period a return to Bali was impossible. In 1946 he resumed his career in the Netherlands, becoming an acclaimed painter of portraits and architecture, in the late impressionist style he clung to all his life. Most attention, however, was always paid to his Bali works, that now fetch hundreds of thousands of euro. Already in 1978 and 1993 monographs on Hofker were published, concentrating on his Bali period. Now, an exhibition in the Teylers Museum Haarlem, supplied a welcome motive to compile a third monograph, now in a bilingual (Dutch and English) edition. It pays attention to the formative years of Hofker, and his post-Bali works, detailing his biography by way of quoting from his diaries and the letters he exchanged. Still about half of the book, and half of its more than 400 illustrations, are devoted to Hofker’s Indies work. As well a catalogue of his 83 known Bali works is included. The book is a fine example of an art historical publication, the result of scrupulous labour, and patient and time-consuming research.


Fred Lanzing (1933) has written a short account of the experiences of the ordinary Japanese soldier during the Pacific War. It is brief, but ambitious: no less than 170 footnotes and a bibliography of almost 60 titles accompany the text on a hitherto neglected subject. Lanzing, of course, can only sketch the outlines. The conscripts were subjected to iron discipline, harsh training and endless indoctrination. Individual conscience and morale were stamped out. Their own mistreatment translated itself in the same treatment of opponents, military or civil, and the population of occupied territories. In the particular circumstances of Indonesia military life was generally boring and quiet, only to change after 1944 when logistics failed, and hunger and illness hit soldiers, as well as western detainees and Indonesians. After the August 1945 surrender almost the whole army obeyed orders and followed Allied orders to protect Allied prisoners. Part of the army engaged in large-scale operations against the
Indonesian independence fighters. The figures proof this: the invasion of Java in 1942 cost 225 Japanese lives, the actions in 1945–1946 1078 casualties. It took till May 1947 before all Japanese left for home. Lanzing’s account, also basing itself on his experiences as an internee, can only touch on the subjects raised, but still is interesting enough.


Herman van Roijen was the archetype of a diplomat of his time, and an outstanding example of it moreover. His origins were patrician, from a very well-to-do family, with his father a diplomat too. He was groomed to follow his footsteps, and studied law. He had all the time to get acquainted with a diplomat’s life when in his first years with the Foreign Affairs department he was tutored in Washington by his father (1930–1933). It was followed by terms in The Hague, where he married the daughter of a diplomat, and Tokyo, and then a return to The Hague in 1939. He worked closely with his direct superior Eelco van Kleffens. In 1940 war interfered. Van Roijen was involved in resistance activities, arrested a few times, and participated in a number of informal circles of prominent Dutchmen where the future of the post-war Netherlands was debated. It earned him prestige and respect, as well as a myriad of personal contacts on which he capitalized in the years to come. He crossed the front line to the liberated south and London, the site of the government in exile. He returned home in June 1945, to become minister without portfolio, to assist Minister of Foreign Affairs Van Kleffens in reconstituting the Dutch foreign relations. He made the switch from pre-war Dutch neutralism and aloofness to post-war international alliances. When in March 1946 Van Kleffens became the United Nations representative, Van Roijen was the new Minister of Foreign Affairs, until July 1946 when he became ambassador in Canada, and also the close assistant of Van Kleffens in UN dealings. Already as a minister he gradually became ever more involved with the developments in Indonesia, where the Republic of Indonesia of Soekarno and Hatta demanded independence. Van Roijen agreed with the Dutch position, in which the Dutch autonomy to arrange a solution of this internal affair was emphasized. He was to repeat this in the UN over and over again in the next few years. Notwithstanding, the international dimension became more and more important, with the United States as the ultimately decisive factor. Van Royen and his colleagues played the anti-communist card by denouncing the Republic as a crypto-communist...
structure. The Linggadjati and Renville agreements did not bring a solution, and the Dutch cabinet resorted in its flight ahead in December 1948 for the second time to military action. There, however, was no clear-cut follow-up. The US and the UN were outraged, and strong reprisals threatened. Van Royen and his delegation made overtime to avert the worst dangers, while Dutch politics in Jakarta and The Hague were hesitant and indecisive. Thus, initiative inevitably switched to foreign affairs. Van Roijen’s realistic appraisal of the situation was to lead the Netherlands out of the quagmire. In April 1949 he entered into negotiations with his Indonesian partner Mohammed Roem. He succeeded in reaching agreement, with US support, and with a Dutch cabinet and Dutch authorities in Jakarta angry, teeth gnashing, only agreeing after Van Roijen’s threat to resign. After signatures were appended many difficulties ensued, and many a crisis followed, up until the conclusion of the Round Table Conference in November 1949. According to the authors an ambassador never interfered with government policies as decisively as Van Roijen did.

Van Roijen was again instrumental in reaching compromises. Van Roijen was lavishly praised, then and up until now. He was with his particular skills the right man at the right place at the right time. He returned to a diplomat’s unobtrusive life, now as ambassador in Washington (1950–1964). Indonesia, however, kept haunting him, now as a dispute with Indonesia on New Guinea, which was exempted from the transfer of sovereignty in December 1949. Talks soon ended in a deadlock, with the Dutch claiming to educate the New Guinea population to become independent. Minister of Foreign Affairs Joseph Luns was the staunch opponent of transfer to Indonesia, and was backed by the Dutch cabinet and public opinion, as well as Van Roijen. Indonesia, however, put rising pressure on the Dutch and sought international support. The US was reluctant to give assurances to its Dutch ally, however much Luns tried to persuade them to do so. The only result was a half-hearted promise, by Foreign Secretary Foster Dulles, in 1958, which was used by Luns as a trump card, a clear case of wishful thinking. Inevitably, support crumbled and the Dutch became increasingly isolated.

Internationalization and self-determination met a cold shoulder. It all became even more hopeless when the Kennedy Administration took over and set its priorities. New Guinea was to be ceded to Indonesia. Van Roijen was aware of this and the only recourse was to work together with the US to maximize Dutch interests. Luns did not agree, and stuck to his intransigent position, even through selectively informing his department and his cabinet. In the end Luns was all but relieved of his discretionary power in the crisis. The cabinet turned to Van Roijen to find a way out. This time there was not much room for maneuvering. He had to yield to Indonesian, US, and UN demands, and next he had
to put accomplished facts before a grudging cabinet. And here and elsewhere Luns continued his opposition, blaming Van Roijen for insubordination, and making him a scapegoat. Van Roijen was bitter about this and in his retirement he was eager to set matters straight in interviews.

This solid biography of Van Roijen, with almost 130 pages of endnotes, is the work of two historians. Hans Meijer is mainly responsible for the four chapters on Indonesia and New Guinea. Altogether 250 pages are devoted to Van Roijen’s Indonesian exertions. This is all solidly based on archival sources and published literature. It is not untrodden ground they are exploring, but their careful reorganization of these sources, among a number of new ones, concentrating on Van Roijen’s role adds surplus value. And they also engage in discussions with Joop de Jong’s Avondschat. Hoe Nederland zich terugtrok uit zijn Aziatisch imperium (2011), and Albert Kersten’s Luns. Een politieke biografie (2010). Also an image is given beyond the impeccable, classic diplomat by interviewing his family and his inner circle of fellow-diplomats. His diaries and notebooks, as well as the frank letters to his wife, add a lot of flavour to this biography—impeccable and classic as his subject.

A minor error concerns Roem’s study in the Netherlands (p. 222): he did not study there. And Cochrans oral note of 10 September 1948 was not after the suppression of the communist Madiun Revolt, as this only started on 18 September. And it may be too explicit to speak of an about-face of the Americans when the Republic succeeded in suppressing the Madiun Revolt. The US remained reluctant and yet (from its perspective) still steered an impartial course.


The nomination of Willem Schermerhorn (1894–1977) as Prime Minister in June 1945 was a bolt out of the blue. The farmer’s son from the province of North Holland studied civil engineering at the Technical University of Delft. At a young age, in 1926, he became a Professor of Geodesy. He specialized in aerial survey, and became a pioneer and leading expert in this fast expanding research field, combining scientific and commercial activities. It brought him a few times to the Indies where he was closely involved in mapping inhospitable New Guinea. Next to this he was a devout Remonstrant, active in a number of protestant organizations, and, because of his organizational skills, he was often elected a board member. As a committed intellectual he was chairman of the movement Eenheid door Democratie, opposing dictatorship and strengthening democracy, and a counterweight for the fascist party NSB.
The German occupation drastically changed Shermerhorn's career path. He was involved in higher-echelon networks, discussing the future organization of the Netherlands. This was reinforced when he was taken hostage in May 1942, and along with hundreds of prominent people was sent into custody. He became the highly praised camp commander, and he was actively involved in the blueprint for a broad, religiously inspired people's movement, based on a 'personalistisch' socialism. After his release in December 1943 he went underground and was active in the resistance, and talks about the new postwar political order, the Doorbraak (Breakthrough). He presided over the Indonesia Committee, in which the main resistance groups were represented, and which produced a rather progressive statement. Schermerhorn's Doorbraak schemes were heartily supported by Queen Wilhelmina, and she used her powers to charge Schermerhorn and Willem Drees, the leading social democrat, with the formation of a cabinet to 'effectuate a cabinet of recovery and renewal'. It faced enormous problems, and to these were added the problems in Indonesia, where the Republic of Indonesia in August 1945 proclaimed its independence. It took a number of months and British pressure before contacts were established and negotiations started. Schermerhorn was a novice on the subject, and depended on Minister of Overseas Affairs J.H.A. Logemann and Lieutenant Governor General H.J. van Mook, who also mitigated his initially conservative views. The Hoge Veluwe Conference in April 1946, the first chance to reach an agreement with the Republic, ended in failure—a first lost chance, according to Schermerhorn.

In the 1946 elections Schermerhorn was not the party leader of the new Partij van de Arbeid (PvdA), but shared this position with others. In the following cabinet formation, by Drees and Catholic leader L.J.M. Beel, Schermerhorn was passed by—probably a sign of resentment of the 'old' political parties against the Doorbraak. Drees acquiesced, proof also of the importance for him of taking part in the cabinet. This concern was to lead to tensions between him and Schermerhorn, particularly concerning Indonesia, as Schermerhorn, with ministerial rank, was made chairman of the Commissie-Generaal, that was to assist Van Mook in his negotiations with the Republic. In September 1946 he started his task, closely in line with Van Mook, of building up a good relationship with his Republican counterpart Sutan Sjahrir. It first went smoothly, with a ceasefire and the draft Linggadjati agreement, initialised in November 1946. But then opposition arose—in the Dutch as well as the Republican cabinet, armed forces and public opinion. The Dutch cabinet and parliament took many weeks to approve a drastically amended agreement, which was not acceptable to the Republic.
Although the agreement was formally signed on 25 March 1947, the momentum was lost. Talks dragged along in a rising crisis atmosphere, with the threat of armed action looming closer and closer. As for Schermerhorn there were hesitations and volte-faces, often leading to vagueness. An example hereof which was to haunt him in the future, was his telegram to the cabinet of 17 July in which he speaks of Yogyakarta, the capital of the Republic, as the origin of pestilence that has to be wiped out. He was also ill-informed and neglected by the PvdA ministers, who for the sake of the coalition were ready to give in to the Catholic party. His relationship with Minister J.A. Jonkman of Overseas Affairs was problematic. It all ended in the First Dutch Military Action of July–August 1947. Schermerhorn, and the Commissie-Generaal, had outlived their usefulness and were dropped without much ado in September 1947. It also meant his eclipse from the central political scene—as fast as his rise. He became for a few years a backbencher in parliament for the PvdA, and joined the opposition in this party against the cabinet’s Indonesian policy. In 1951 he returned to his scientific profession and founded and led the International Training Centre for Aerial Survey. His Indonesian experiences, however, remained a sensitive subject, and he was always eager to explain his role and express his regrets about his own actions, but not sparing his fellow-politicians either.

Herman Langeveld (1949), who wrote a two-volume biography of Hendrik Colijn, has done a fine job clearing up the enigmas of Schermerhorn, the most atypical prime minister of the last century, and also assesses his record negatively, as to the Doorbraak as well as to his role in Indonesia. He devotes about 200 pages to Indonesian matters, basing himself on the mass of published material, especially Schermerhorn’s diary, kept when the Commissie-Generaal’s chairman. Added is information from letters exchanged by Schermerhorn, available in his personal archives. Curiously, Langeveld did not consult Jonkman’s memoirs, nor Joop de Jong’s monographs—impardonable lapses. Langeveld does not open new vistas, but puts useful new accents as to the Indonesian course of affairs, apart from clarifying Schermerhorn’s personality. It’s a pity that Indonesian names and places are not always spelled out as these should be, and the title of Chapter 7 contains a big mistake.