The Manuscripts of Jan van Naaldwijk’s Chronicles of Holland, Cotton MSS. Vitellius F. XV and Tiberius C. IV

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Jan van Naaldwijk was the son of a Dutch nobleman. Between 1513 and c. 1520 he wrote two unpublished Dutch prose chronicles of Holland. In his first chronicle, he lamented that he had not been able to gain access to the most recent scholarship concerning the history of Holland. Therefore, he based his work on the Dutch version of Jan Beke’s mid-fourteenth-century chronicle of Holland and Utrecht, the principal source for the history of the region. In addition, he claimed to have used more than thirty different additional sources. Shortly after he completed this text, a large vernacular chronicle of Holland, which later became known as the *Divisiekroniek* (‘Division Chronicle’), was published. Recognizing that this new work presented a different perspective on the history of Holland, he decided to supplement his first chronicle with a second one, largely an abridgement of the *Divisiekroniek*, but with some additional material from other sources. Jan van Naaldwijk’s two chronicles of Holland are preserved only in their autograph manuscripts: London, British Library, Cotton MSS. Vitellius F. XV and Tiberius C. IV. There is no indication that he intended to publish either chronicle.1

There are a significant number of Dutch historical manuscripts in the Cotton collection, some of which have been identified as having been brought to England by the efforts of Emanuel van Meteren (Demetrius, Meteranus, 1535–1612),2 merchant and historian, son of an Antwerp trader who is believed to have been the financier of one of the earliest English printed bibles, the Coverdale Bible. Van Meteren was the commercial consul for the Netherlands in London.3 My investigation of the autograph manuscripts of Jan van Naaldwijk’s chronicles of Holland has shown that they, too, passed through van Meteren’s hands: marginal notes in both manuscripts can be identified as written by him.4

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1 Sjoerd Levelt, *Jan van Naaldwijk’s Chronicles of Holland: Continuity and Transformation in the Historical Tradition of Holland during the Early Sixteenth Century* (Hilversum, 2011). I am most grateful to the anonymous readers for the *eBLJ* for their comments on an earlier version of this paper.

2 Cotton MS. Tiberius C. XI, one of the most important early historiographical collections from Holland, is known to have been supplied by van Meteren, as was Cotton MS. Vespasian D. IX, art. 10, a copy of the ‘Chronicle of Gouda’: C. G. C. Tite, *The Early Records of Sir Robert Cotton’s Library: Formation, Cataloguing, Use* (London, 2003), p. 14.


While van Meteren was actively on the lookout for manuscripts for Cotton whenever he was in the Low Countries, and possibly brought them over as a lucrative business enterprise, these two manuscripts may have come to him by a unique route: from a seventeenth-century genealogy, we learn that the daughter of author Jan van Naaldwijk, ‘Miss Barbara van Naaldwijk, married Sir van Kuyck, lord of Meteren.’ The coincidence suggests that the manuscripts could have passed from Jan to his daughter Barbara, eventually reaching Emanuel van Meteren through family connections. They would have been acquired by Cotton in 1612 at the latest, on van Meteren’s death. But before the manuscripts of Jan van Naaldwijk’s chronicles of Holland entered the collections of Sir Robert Cotton, where they were to stay virtually unnoticed until the second half of the eighteenth century, they were read from beginning to end by van Meteren, their last Dutch-speaking owner, who was an historian himself, author of the first history of the Dutch Revolt.

Van Meteren made several notes in the margins which give brief indications of the subject matter, in all probability as an aide-mémoire for later consultation, making it easier to find and identify episodes of particular interest. Each of these annotations is in Dutch, except for a small set in Jan’s second chronicle, drawing attention to an account of England’s Peasants’ Revolt of 1382; on this occasion, alone, van Meteren’s notes are in English. Did his mind, on reading the specifically English material Jan had added to the history of Holland, inadvertently slip from his and Jan’s mother tongue into the language of his new homeland? Or was he perhaps planning to show these passages to one of his English friends with historical interests – for example, Robert Cotton or William Camden – just as he might have shared those annotated in Dutch with his contacts in the Netherlands, such as the humanist historians Janus Dousa the Elder and Younger or the antiquarian historian Pieter Corneliszoon Bockenberg? There is no evidence that the chronicles served as sources for van Meteren’s own historical works.

On its cover page, the second chronicle (Cotton MS. Tiberius C. IV), which breaks off mid-sentence in 1461, was described by van Meteren as ‘finishing anno 1461’; the first (Cotton MS. Vitellius F XV), which ends in 1514, was mistakenly identified by him as ending in 1414.

5 Cotton MS. Julius C. III, ff. 138r-142r, letters by van Meteren to Sir Robert Cotton.
8 Cotton MS. Vitellius F XV, ff. 8v, 65v, 71v, 89r, 91r, 149r, 151r, 152r, 156v, 196v, 197r, 199r, 257v, 329r, 329v, 331r, 363r, 363v, 367r, 371r; Cotton MS. Tiberius C. IV, ff. 57r, 64r, 101v, 160v, 165v, 166r, 266v.
10 A good picture of van Meteren’s circle of acquaintances is provided by his album amicorum: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Douce 68, ed. H. C. Rogge, ‘Het album van Emanuel van Meteren’, Oud Holland, xv (1897), pp. 159–92. See Verduyn, Emanu el van Meteren, pp. 231–5, for an index. For letters by van Meteren to Sir Robert Cotton see, e.g., Cotton MS. Julius C. III, ff. 138r–142v.
11 Levelt, Jan van Naaldwijk’s Chronicles of Holland, pp. 202–4, ‘Emanuel van Meteren as a Reader of Jan van Naaldwijk’s Chronicles of Holland’.
12 Cotton MS. Tiberius C. IV, cover leaf: ‘Historie ofte cronycke van Hollant ende Zeelant, daer den authuer in seijt een vermeerderinge te sijn van syn eerste cronijcke al bescreuen bij Johan van Naaldwijk edelman van Hollant eijndende anno 1461’.
13 Cotton MS. Vitellius F XV, f. 1r: ‘Croonijcke van Hollandt van Jan van Naaldwijk totten jare 1414’.

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These indications led later historians to misdate both texts, assuming that they were written in the fifteenth century. In the early 1620s they were recorded, side by side and together with another manuscript known to have come from van Meteren, in the earliest catalogue of the Cotton collection; lists of their contents were added on the verso sides of their cover leaves at this time.\(^\text{14}\)

Once they had entered the Cotton library, Jan’s chronicles led a dormant existence until the 1760s, when the first printed notice of the manuscripts was published by Jean Paquot, whose account of the texts was faulty in almost every detail. He claimed that the manuscript of the first chronicle (Vitellius F. XV) ended in 1363 (as mentioned above, it ends in 1514). Believing the second chronicle to be written ‘anno 1461’, he misidentified the author as an older homonymous second cousin of Jan’s who died in 1489; and he erroneously claimed that the two chronicles together were the same as the work known under the title *Het oude Goutsche chronycxken* (‘The Old Short Chronicle of Gouda’).\(^\text{16}\) This last statement in particular has been the cause of much confusion in the following two and a half centuries.\(^\text{17}\)

The manuscripts were damaged in the Ashburnham House fire of 1731; while the text of Tiberius C. IV remained mostly unharmed,\(^\text{18}\) Jan’s first chronicle, Vitellius F. XV, suffered severe damage, leading to loss of text at the top corner of every page at the side of the original binding;\(^\text{19}\) about eight per cent of the text is irretrievably lost, but enough is preserved to make sense of the chronicle, even if particular details occasionally remain uncertain. The manuscript was rebound, in November 1844,\(^\text{20}\) in oblong format along the bottom edge of the written page.\(^\text{21}\) During the repairs to the manuscript, a section was misbound. The original order, however, can still be determined on the basis, firstly, of the

\(^{14}\) Harl. MS. 6018: nos 157 (Tiberius C. IV) and 158 (Vitellius F. XV); no. 156 (Cotton MS. Tiberius C. XI) is another van Meteren manuscript.

\(^{15}\) Such tables were usually added during Sir Robert’s life: Tite, *Early Records*, fig. 4b, p. 21, and p. 15, n. 89.

\(^{16}\) J. N. Paquot, *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire littéraire des dix-sept Provinces des Pays-Bas, de la principauté de Liège, et de quelques contrées voisines*, 18 vols (Leuven, 1763-70), vol. ix, pp. 99-100; the manuscript must have been in a very poor state, and its quires may have been gathered incorrectly when Paquot consulted it, though the current binding reveals no irregularity around f. 178, which contains events of 1363.

\(^{17}\) Up to the present day, the ‘Chronicle of Gouda’ is erroneously advertised by antiquarian booksellers as probably written by Jan van Naaldwijk. I have not been able to trace the basis for the unlikely attribution of editions of the ‘Most Excellent Chronicle of Brabant’ to Jan van Naaldwijk, found not only in Google Books, but also in the supposedly more reputable Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren Basisbibliotheek (http://www.dbnl.org/basisbibliotheek/).

\(^{18}\) At some point before this – possibly when it had been in the possession of van Meteren – the manuscript had been bound together with a printed chronicle of the reign of Maximilian of Habsburg, *Dit zijn die wonderlijcke oorloghen van den doorluchtighen hoochgheburen Prince, Keyser Maximiliaen* (Antwerp, [c. 1531]). The manuscript and print suffered identical damage (decreasingly towards the end, and therefore less visible in the print than the manuscript).

\(^{19}\) For the fire and the subsequent restoration of the library, see A. Prescott, ‘“Their Present Miserable State of Cremation”: The Restoration of the Cotton Library’, in C. J. Wright (ed.), *Sir Robert Cotton as Collector*, pp. 391-454. Additional MS. 62577, the account of the repairs and rebinding of the Cotton manuscripts, records (ff. 7v-8t) that Cotton MS. Tiberius C. IV was rebound in October 1845. I am grateful to the anonymous reader for the eBLJ who provided me with this reference and the information in the following three notes.

\(^{20}\) Additional MS. 62577, ff. 24v-25r.

\(^{21}\) It was further rebound in 1980, when the earlier covers were kept to be stored separately.
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original foliation (in the same hand as the text), traces of which are visible on a number of folios throughout the manuscript, and, secondly, by comparing the text and the table of contents on ff. 2v–17r.\(^{22}\)


Folio 330 appears to be inserted as an afterthought by the compiler of the manuscript: no trace of the original foliation is visible on this leaf; the burn marks appear different from the surrounding leaves, suggesting it was shorter at the top than the rest of the manuscript; and both the text and original foliation are consecutive between ff. 329v and 331r. The leaf does not, however, appear to be missing elsewhere; the water damage suggests that it was in its current place in 1731; and the events described on f. 330 are chronologically in the correct place and referred to in the table of contents (f. 15r). The manuscript, including f. 330, was written by a single hand (Jan’s) throughout.

In his chronicle, Jan also included Dutch translations of several tales from Poggio’s *Facetiae*, translated from the French translation by Guillaume Tardif, a friend of Robert Gaguin.\(^{23}\) Sadly, ten folios are now missing from the manuscript, including all but the start of the first tale and the conclusion of the final one.\(^{24}\) Apart from these two fragments, only the chapter headings for about twenty other tales remain in Jan’s table of contents.\(^{25}\) The decision to remove the *facetiae* from the chronicle may have been made by Jan himself, perhaps after reconsidering the appropriateness of this material for a chronicle or with the aim of producing a self-contained booklet.\(^{26}\) Whoever removed the pages made an effort to preserve the continuity of the text. The verso in which Jan introduces the *facetiae* is badly worn, but only from the point where the *facetiae* begin; the condition of the part of the page above this point, containing a passage about events in Utrecht, in sharp contrast to the bottom part of the page, is in much better shape. The wear on this page – unique to this page in the manuscript, and possibly explained by erosion caused by an adhesive – appears to suggest that when the *facetiae* were removed, fresh paper was pasted over the remaining lines of the *facetiae*, presumably so that text serving as a bridge to the next passage in the manuscript could be written on it. The paste-on was probably lost when the manuscript was restored after the Ashburnham House fire; the manuscript suffered extensive water damage as a consequence of the fire, which can have caused a paste-on to come loose.

When the chronicles were first subjected to study by Dutch scholars in the late nineteenth century, the historian and bibliographer Samuel Muller Fz. soon concluded that after the short article that resulted from his consultation of the manuscripts, there was no need for further

\(^{22}\) The foliation refers to the folio numbers which were added, in pencil, in 1884 under a programme of general refoliation of the Cotton manuscripts (see Prescott, “Their Present Miserable State”, n. 303).


\(^{24}\) The remaining passages are at Cotton MS. Vitellius F. XV, ff. 218v and 214r respectively.

\(^{25}\) The approximate number of tales can be deduced from the table of contents at Cotton MS. Vitellius F. XV, ff. 8v–9r.

\(^{26}\) The existence of such booklets and some of the contexts in which they were re-used in medieval manuscript culture were first highlighted by P. R. Robinson, ‘Self-Contained Units in Composite Manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxon Period’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, vii (1978), pp. 231–8.
research: ‘our author does not deserve any great effort. And this would be necessary: the opportunity to have the manuscript investigated by an authority on our medieval history is lacking while it is in London. I cannot recommend anyone to make the journey for this reason. The only possibility would be to produce an anthology of everything he reports about Naaldwijk, Loosduinen and the region in his first version: perhaps we shall find some pieces of information among the village gossip.’

Not surprisingly, a long period of neglect followed Muller’s indictment, interrupted from time to time by short notices in bibliographies (generally drawing on the earlier descriptions) and by publications on the ‘Chronicle of Gouda’, still occasionally attributed to Jan van Naaldwijk, though elsewhere his authorship was explicitly dismissed. In recent decades, however, the chronicles have received renewed attention from scholars in the Netherlands. In the course of her research into the sources and context of the Divisiekroniek, Karin Tilmans of the University of Amsterdam acquired microfilms of the two manuscripts, which she shared with colleagues, thereby increasing the accessibility of Jan’s chronicles to Dutch scholars. Nevertheless, the contrast between the often faint ink and dark patches from burn marks throughout the manuscript of Jan’s first chronicle renders substantial parts of its microfilm illegible, adding to the permanently lost text destroyed by fire. A newly prepared complete transcription of the manuscripts makes Jan van Naaldwijk’s chronicles of Holland accessible in their entirety for the first time to readers outside London, now making it possible not only to read all their ‘village gossip’, but also to come to a better understanding of the position of these interesting chronicles in the history of historiography in Holland in the crucial early sixteenth century.


29 S. Muller Fz., Lijst van Noord-Nederlandsche kronijken: met opgave van bestaande handschriften en literatuur (Utrecht, 1880), pp. 15-16 (where Muller erroneously claims that Jan was the continuator and printer of the ‘Chronicle of Gouda’), 23-4; K. de Flou and E. Gailliard, Beschrijving van Middelnederlandsche en andere handschriften die in Engeland bewaard worden, 3 vols (Ghent, 1895-7), vol. iii, pp. 103-11; U. J. Chevalier, Répertoire des sources historiques du moyen âge ... Bio-Bibliographie, 2 vols (Paris, 1877-86), vol. ii, col. 2451.

30 J. Romein, Geschiedenis van de Noord-Nederlandsche geschiedschrijving in de middeleeuwen: bijdrage tot de beschavingsgeschiedenis (Haarlem, 1932), pp. 107; Narrative Sources, no. NL0177.


32 Provided on CD-ROM with Levelt, Jan van Naaldwijk’s Chronicles of Holland.