



Universiteit  
Leiden

## Tracking the reception of new knowledge in Low Countries' chronicles, 1500-1850

### Applicants

Eligible proposals must have at least two applicants from Humanities, preferably with an interdisciplinary approach.

Supervisor Name	Discipline
Prof. dr. Judith Pollmann	History
Dr. Gijsbert Rutten	Linguistics

### Project description

For innovation to happen it is not enough that new ideas and technologies are being invented. Research on current-day innovations suggests that the chances of a new idea catching on strongly depend on human factors that vary from culture to culture. An analysis of innovation in historical societies can help us to map, evaluate and understand the 'anchoring' of innovation. This project focuses on one such historical society: the Netherlands and Flanders between 1500-1800. It emerges from Pollmann's NWO VC project *Chronicling Novelty. New knowledge in the Netherlands, 1500-1850* (<https://chroniclingnovelty.com/>) that researches the circulation and evaluation of new knowledge, ideas and technologies among a non-specialist public of middle-class authors in the Netherlands, who kept handwritten chronicles to record events and phenomena that they considered important.

The historians and computational linguist on the interdisciplinary project team develop a method to study around 200 chronicles comparatively, so as to track and analyse the circulation, evaluation and acceptance of old and new ideas and information over time and spatially. For this purpose it will create a large high quality annotated corpus of texts through crowd sourcing.

We would like to involve students in the first experiments with the annotated corpus. One of the topics that needs exploration is the use of various media (newspapers, pamphlets, oral sources etc.) by the authors of the chronicles and the reliability attributed to these media. References to sources of information are being annotated manually by the volunteers on [Vele Handen](#). With the extracts of the annotated references to these sources, the students can analyse the chronicler's media use in their historical context and secondly, examine how the sources (and their reliability) are introduced and marked linguistically and, finally, how this changed from the late sixteenth to the eighteenth century.

### Interdisciplinary Collaboration

The first academic challenge in this project is for the students to be involved in a truly interdisciplinary digital humanities project; they will learn how to understand each other's terminology, skills and questions. They will also need to familiarize themselves with the computational approach of the project. The project team is developing a tool to normalize the corpus and will also work with computational methods to trace patterns in topics, perspectives and appreciation of novelty. Both tools and data we generate can also be used for many other research purposes, such as Rutten's NWO VC project *Pardon my French* on Dutch-French language contact (1500-1900), which covers the same period and is also corpus-based. The students will

work closely together with the team in exploring the possibilities of automatic identification of 1. types media/sources of information and 2. the authority attributed to these sources by the authors. They will be working towards a paper that can be (co-) presented at an expert meeting, in September 2020 and which may result in a co-authored academic publication.

As is evident from the information above, our aim in involving students is not only to give them a taste of ongoing research, but also to make them acquainted with the practice of interdisciplinary research at the crossroads of history, linguistics and digital humanities.

### **Research Trainee Profile**

**A BA 3 history student** will classify the sources of information that the authors were using when compiling their texts and make a comparison over time. It would be useful for this student to have some background in early modern history. The challenge is in the combination of reading skills and the need to systematize the data for the purpose of comparison.

If we can recruit a **(Res)MA history student** he/she will also try and identify some of the sources regularly mentioned (e.g. Newspapers, the *Nieuwe Nederlandsche jaerboeken*, almanacs), and evaluate their use by a selection of authors. For that purpose this student would ideally have some experience in searching for early modern print, and some knowledge of early modern media; the challenge here will be in the recognition of media types.

**The linguistics (Res) MA student** will make a linguistic description of how several aspects related to the mention of sources are expressed, focusing on evidential and epistemic (evaluative) constructions: 1) what are the linguistic expressions used to introduce sources; 2) what are the expressions used to attribute information/beliefs/etc. to sources; 3) what are the linguistic expressions that authors use to express their attitudes towards the source or towards the information attributed to the source. The resulting linguistic description will be a new finding in itself, since such a description has not been produced before, but it will also be useful to develop a computational system that automatically finds attributions in chronicles. Additionally, it will be useful to study which linguistic phenomena are indicative of the expression of novelty and appropriation of knowledge in early modern chronicles. For English, attribution phenomena in modern language corpora have already been described, and the history of evidential constructions has been investigated, whereas we are not aware of similar type of studies for Dutch and certainly not for historical Dutch.

### **Deliverables**

The deliverable will be a joint paper that is to be presented to an international expert meeting of the Chronicing Novelty project in September 2020. Possibly the work can be published as a co-authored article. If the students want to, we will help them expand their work into a BA or (Res)MA dissertation, or help them reflect on a PhD proposal based on the corpus.

### **Planning**

February: Meeting team, introduction of the project and corpus, selecting chronicles (in collaboration with the PhDs).

March: Reading related literature.

April-May: Identifying, describing and classifying the different types of sources (history student), as well as evidential and epistemic constructions (linguistics student); writing a draft report with the first findings.

June-August: Evaluating the data, comparison over time, writing the paper (in collaboration with PhDs)

September: present the paper at expert meeting

### **Student Application**

We welcome applications from

BA3 students in history; MA and ResMA students in History with a specialization Europe 1000-1800, and a good reading knowledge of Dutch.

MA and Res MA students in Linguistics with a good reading knowledge of Dutch.

Candidates should include a short CV and a letter of motivation, to be sent to [j.s.pollmann@hum.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:j.s.pollmann@hum.leidenuniv.nl) by 16 December.