



LIGUE DES BIBLIOTHÈQUES EUROPÉENNES DE RECHERCHE  
ASSOCIATION OF EUROPEAN RESEARCH LIBRARIES

## Manuscript Librarians Group

# The Netherlands – Backgrounds

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Contents: Libraries. – Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Den Haag. – Universiteitsbibliotheek Leiden. – Universiteitsbibliotheek Amsterdam. – Other university libraries with manuscript holdings – Archival institutions. – Papers of historical interest. – Ecclesiastical papers, manuscripts. – Literary papers, manuscripts. – Cooperation (access, conservation). – *Quaerendo*. – *Bifolium*.

### Libraries

The oldest still existing library collections in the Netherlands were formed in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, partly in connection with the Dutch Revolt. Calvinist activism and political opposition against the centralizing and repressing government of King Philip II in Brussels led to the closing down of catholic churches and monasteries in the Northern Netherlands. Lands were confiscated, libraries destroyed or sold. A small part of the manuscripts collected in churches and monasteries ended up in several city libraries (e.g. Amsterdam, Haarlem, Gouda, Rotterdam, Deventer) and in Utrecht University Library. Nowadays, a considerable part of the institutional manuscript collecting in the Netherlands takes place at university libraries (since the 17<sup>th</sup> century), at the Koninklijke Bibliotheek (since the 19<sup>th</sup> century) and at the Letterkundig Museum (since the 1960s).

The Koninklijke Bibliotheek provides a survey of '[Libraries and related organizations in the Netherlands](#)' on its website. Note that not all mentioned libraries hold manuscripts or even special collections.

A useful guide on special collections in Dutch research libraries is J. Mateboer (ed.), *Repertorium bijzondere collecties. Historische en moderne verzamelingen in universiteitsbibliotheken, de Koninklijke Bibliotheek, de bibliotheek van de Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen en de bibliotheken met wetenschappelijke steunfunctie*. Den Haag 1997. A digital version of this guide is part of the [Bibliopolis](#) website. The best guide in English is M.L. Brogan (ed.), *Research Guide to libraries and archives in the Low Countries*. New York [etc] 1990. Please note that information about addresses, opening times, etc. in these tools may be outdated.

The largest manuscript collections are held by the Koninklijke Bibliotheek and the university libraries of Leiden and Amsterdam. Other institutions with substantial historical collections

(estimations of medieval codices between brackets): Universiteitsbibliotheek Utrecht (650), Universiteitsbibliotheek Groningen (350) [Atheneumbibliotheek Deventer](#) (120), libraries of [Museum Meermanno](#), The Hague (200) and Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht (300).

#### [Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Den Haag \(KB\)](#)

Established in 1798, incorporating the former library of the stadholders of the House of Orange-Nassau and of several governmental institutions. An important part of the collection is constituted by the loan from the Royal Academy of Sciences (1937). After 1945 the KB developed into the National Library of the Netherlands, with a coordinating and facilitating role for Dutch research libraries.

Major collections:

- [Medieval manuscripts](#) (1,500), including 450 illuminated manuscripts, also substantial numbers of liturgical manuscripts and manuscripts in Middle Dutch
- [Post-medieval manuscripts](#) (5,000), including over 500 alba amicorum, 130,000 letters and personal collections
- The collection post-medieval manuscripts also incorporates more or less significant separate documents concerning Dutch history (national, regional or local), literature and law

#### [Universiteitsbibliotheek Leiden \(UBL\)](#)

Established in 1587. Acquired a large part of its manuscripts through private collectors, mostly scholars, whose libraries were bought or received as a gift. The Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde (founded 1766) deposited its library in UBL in 1876, which includes an important collection of Dutch manuscripts and papers.

Major collections:

- [Western manuscripts](#): medieval codices (2,000, fragments excluded), comprising over 100 dating from the 9th century and 500 in Middle Dutch; modern manuscripts, including papers of Leiden scholars, lecture notes and alba amicorum of students, literary papers, extensive [letter collections](#)
- [Bibliotheca Neerlandica Manuscripta](#): database with descriptions of over 11,000 Middle Dutch manuscript kept all over the world
- [Oriental manuscripts](#) in more than 100 languages, mostly originating from the Middle East and South East Asia
- [University archives](#) (16<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century)
- Archives from the [Walloon Churches in the Netherlands](#) (16<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century), [Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde](#) (18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century) and from the publishing houses [Bohn](#) and [Sijthoff](#) (19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century)

#### [Universiteitsbibliotheek Amsterdam \(UBA\)](#)

Established in 1578 (as municipal library), 1632 (as library of the Athenaeum Illustre), 1877 (as university library).

Major collections:

- [Manuscripts, letters and archives](#): over 200 medieval manuscripts; literary manuscripts and papers (P.C. Hooft, Multatuli, Frederik van Eeden, Albert Verwey) and papers from Amsterdam scholars, including 500,000 letters
- [Church history collections](#) (including manuscripts), related to theology and church history in general, and to the history of Dutch protestantism and the Radical Reformation in particular
- Over 1,000 Hebrew manuscripts in the [Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana](#)
- [Book history collections](#); includes numerous archives of Dutch publishing houses and the booktrade.

### Other university libraries with manuscript holdings

- [Universiteitsbibliotheek Vrije Universiteit](#), Amsterdam (UBVU)
- [Universiteitsbibliotheek Groningen](#) (UBG)
- [Universiteitsbibliotheek Utrecht](#) (UBU)

### Archival institutions

Dutch administration has a national, provincial and local level; this triple structure was reflected in the institutions responsible for the keeping of public records: the Algemeen Rijksarchief, twelve Provincial Archives and numerous municipal archives. Recent years, however, saw a clustering of municipal archives into regional archives (e.g. Regionaal archief Leiden) and of provincial and municipal archives (e.g. Zeeuws Archief, Utrechts Archief, Noord-Hollands Archief). In 2002 the Rijksarchief in Zuid-Holland and the Algemeen Rijksarchief merged into the [Nationaal Archief](#). Most of these institutions also hold private archives and manuscripts. To search the Dutch archives one may use two websites:

- [Archiefnet](#) – Dutch archives listed and linked by provinces and by towns (A-Z)
- [Archieven.nl](#) – accesses over 14,000 inventories of some 30 archival institutions

### Papers of historical interest

The papers of many Dutch scholars may be found in the libraries of their universities, those of several beta scientists in the Noord-Hollands Archief, Haarlem. The papers pertaining to Dutch persons of national importance are held first and foremost at the Nationaal Archief. Other institutions with concentrations of private archives and specialized documentation:

- [Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis](#), Amsterdam (IISG) – International Institute of Social History holds over 2,700 archival collections in the field of social history, in particular of the history of the labour movement)
- [Koninklijk huisarchief](#), Den Haag – Royal archives, comprising the Oranges' personal archives as well as their library, photographic archives and art collection
- [Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie, Amsterdam](#) (NIOD) – holds archives and documentation on the history of World War II in the Netherlands and its colonies)
- [Centraal Bureau voor Genealogie](#), Den Haag (CBG) – hold genealogical and heraldic collections and documentation
- [Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie](#), Den Haag (RKD) – Netherlands Institute for Art History holds archives and documentation pertaining to Dutch art

### Ecclesiastical papers, manuscripts

Concentrations of ecclesiastical archives and documentation are held by:

- [Utrechts Archief](#) – a.o. Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, Nederlands Hervormde Kerk, Oud-Katholieke Kerk in Nederland, Rooms-Katholieke Kerk in het bisdom Utrecht
- [Katholiek Documentatiecentrum](#), Radboud Universiteit, Nijmegen – archives and documentation pertaining the Roman Catholic institutions and persons since 1800
- Historisch Documentatiecentrum voor het Nederlands Protestantisme (1800-), Bibliotheek van de Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam – <http://www.hdc.vu.nl/>
- UBL (Archives Wallonnes) and UBA (Church History Collections) – see above

The library of [Museum Catharijneconvent](#), Utrecht, contains medieval religious manuscripts formerly collected by the Bisschoppelijk Museum Haarlem, Seminarie Warmond, Aartsbisschoppelijk Museum and Oud-Katholiek Museum in Utrecht.

### Literary papers, manuscripts

The [Letterkundig Museum](#) (LM), Den Haag, holds literary archives, manuscripts (including over 1,000,000 letters) and other materials (e.g. photographs, paintings, paper cuttings, objects, audiovisual recordings) of over 6,000 authors from 1750 onwards. – Other (mostly older) material is held by KB, UBL (Library of the Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde) and many other institutions. – [Tresoar](#) is the Frisian Historical and Literary Centre, Leeuwarden.

**Cooperation (access, conservation)**

Information exchange and cooperation between manuscript curators in research libraries are enhanced through a working group which reports to (the Special Collections Committee of) [UKB](#), a consortium for Dutch research libraries. Important results of this cooperation:

- [Medieval Manuscripts in Dutch Collections](#) (MMDC) — This database (established 2007) contains English descriptions of more than 6,000 medieval manuscripts in Latin script kept in Dutch libraries, links to digital images and PDF versions of the *Manuscrits datés conservés dans les Pays Bas*, vol. 1 (1964) and 2 (1988). Since 2009 also part of the [CERL Portal](#).
- Catalogus Epistularum Neerlandicarum (CEN), the national letters catalogue (established c. 1985). Unfortunately, this database is still inaccessible outside the context of the cooperating institutions. Letters kept at KB, UBL and LM may be searched in their local catalogues.

[Metamorfoze](#) is the Dutch National Programme for the Preservation of the Paper Heritage, financed on a structural basis by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. Concerns printed books, archival collections and newspapers produced in the Netherlands, 1840-1950, and kept in Dutch institutions (that can apply for projects). The material (including manuscripts) is microfilmed and repacked in acid free folders and boxes.

***Quaerendo***

[Quaerendo](#) is a quarterly journal from the Low Countries devoted to manuscripts and printed books. Each volume contains, besides a selection of peer-reviewed scholarly articles, special sections on *Varia Bibliographica*, Book Reviews and Notes and News. These sections give particular attention to recent discoveries, publications and current events. Printed issues; also partly available in pdf files.

***Bifolium***

[Bifolium](#) is an online bulletin with news about manuscripts and rare books (recent publications, exhibitions, conferences, etc.).