

Preface

On 1 January I concluded my academic career, which began in 1963 when I started my studies in history at the University of Groningen. As my CV later in this book shows, I have been associated with this university ever since, working in a variety of positions. In 1998 I took on an additional position at Wageningen University, where my distinguished predecessors Bernard Slicher van Bath and Ad van der Woude had prepared the way for me.

Slicher van Bath was an example to me in more ways than one. From 1949 to 1956 he was a professor in both Groningen and Wageningen. In that last year he went to Wageningen full-time and was succeeded in Groningen by Han Baudet, who taught me the discipline and was my PhD supervisor. What I particularly appreciated about Han was that he preferred to inspire rather than control his students, so that the responsibility for learning and research was mainly your own. Han was succeeded by Rainer Fremdling, who remained in the Faculty of Economics after I moved to the Faculty of Arts in early 1997 – accompanied by several colleagues – and was appointed professor there after having held a position for ten years as professor by special appointment of Regional History.

However, even when I worked at the Faculty of Economics I had a lot to do with the Arts Faculty because I was closely involved in the teaching side of the History programme. When dividing my time in this fashion between the two Faculties came to an end, the position at Wageningen was added. As a result, I always operated in two worlds, something I found very inspiring because it automatically leads you to take a multi-disciplinary approach. This was not only because of my colleagues, but also because the students came from many different degree programmes. Especially Environmental history, a subject I taught in both Groningen and Wageningen, offered a particularly interesting mix of disciplines and nationalities.

This volume shows clearly how my research has evolved over the years. In 1970 I graduated with a thesis about the first users of electricity in the city of Groningen. This led me to urban infrastructure and then to urban history, a discipline which was just starting to take shape at that time. Since then urban history has been a constant in my work, and several times the city of Groningen has functioned as a laboratory for that work; specifically, I have studied education, health care and the diffusion of innovations in the context of this particular city.

Cities should not be studied in isolation, but in relation to other cities and the surrounding countryside. This brings urban networks, infrastructure and migration into the picture. I have devoted a lot of attention to migration in particular; and from the relationships between the town and the countryside it is only a small step to regional history, the domain of the Integral History project (1987–

1991), which compared the Groningen region with clay soils and a region with sandy soils in Brabant. I led this project in conjunction with Theo van Tijn and Gerard Trienekens of Utrecht University, and Marten Buist of the University of Groningen. The project resulted in six PhD theses and several monographs.

In 1991 I continued the project with Russian researchers, who needed a new methodology in the framework of the reorientation taking place in Russia at the time. This proved to be a very fruitful collaboration, resulting in two volumes entitled *Where the Twain Meet*. This form of regional history was not very far removed from the history of the countryside and of the green space – a connection which also explains how an urban historian ended up at Wageningen University, which until 1998 had been called an Agricultural University.

Cities, the countryside, regions and the green space are clearly the domains which have always been the focus of my work. These are geographical entities, and spatial aspects have in fact also occupied a significant position in my work in addition to social and economic factors. In recent years I have also made some expeditions into the fields of politics and culture.

The essay about the Randstad which is included in this volume was written jointly by Paul van de Laar and myself. I have written articles in collaboration with several other people as well. It would have been easy to compile a volume called 'With a Little Help from My Friends', though in fact that help was always substantial. The literature list at the back of this book includes several titles I produced in conjunction with my closest colleague Maarten Duijvendak, and I also worked with Aukje Mennens-van Zeist, Vincent Sleebe, Jules Peschar, Piet Pellenbarg, Lydia Sapounaki-Dracaki, Geurt Collenteur, Richard Paping, Daan van der Haer, Minnie Baron and Ben Gales. In every case this was very inspiring. The same applies to the supervision of PhD students, which I also often shared with others, as the list in this volume shows.

I drew a great deal of inspiration from my international contacts. In particular, my 12 years as Secretary of the European Association for Urban History placed me right in the vanguard of urban history, especially because it involved organising a big conference every two years. The Chair changed every two years, but all the time I was there Peter Clark was the Treasurer, and we always worked together very closely and very well. The Commission Internationale pour l'Histoire des Villes and the CORN group (Comparative Rural History of the North Sea Area) were extremely inspiring bodies, while as a result of the annual Flemish-Dutch Historical Conference I had many activities and offices in Belgium.

In my case two universities also meant two departments and two groups of staff. This short preface is not the right place to mention and thank everyone who worked there over the years. I will limit myself to the veterans: J.W. Drukker, Gé Prince, Geurt Collenteur, Maarten Duijvendak, Richard Paping and Vincent Tassenaar in Groningen; Anton Schuurman, Jan Bieleman, Margreet van der Burg, Aicha el Makoui and Leandre Bulambo in Wageningen; and Er-

win Karel, Hanneke de Vries and Wyke van der Meer of the Netherlands Agricultural Historical Institute, who were very helpful in producing this volume, as was Saakje van Dellen in the case of previous *Historias*.

Beyond this, the volume will have to speak for itself. Most of the chapters have already been published elsewhere. References are provided, with thanks to the publishers who gave their consent for the articles to be reprinted.¹ Other chapters include articles specially translated from Dutch for this volume, a previously unpublished conference paper and an English version of my farewell address. No changes have been made to the text, except that the spelling has been made uniform (urbanisation, industrialisation, labour) in both the main text and the footnotes.

I dedicate this book to Anje, who has always shared my activities to our mutual enjoyment though without neglecting her own life to do so, to our children and children-in-law Mathijs, Xandra, Francine and Daniël, and to our grandchildren Koen, Voske, David, Mette, Zarah and Isis, who I can now take to the zoo more often.

Pim Kooij

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¹ We did our very best to trace the copyright holders and inform them. Due to the many mergers among publishing houses, in one case it proved impossible to do so.

