

## DEVELOPMENTS IN RESEARCH ON DUTCH TILES<sup>1</sup>

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Some years ago I received a photograph from the private album of Mr. Paul Stoffels, one of the participants on the international Congress in tiles studies in Lisbon, 1971 (Fig. 1). It was attended by a serious delegation of Dutch



Fig. 1. Santos Simões (centre) and Pluis (at his left hand) at the international Tile congress in Lisbon, 1971 (photo coll. Paul Stoffels).

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Prof. Doutor Vitor Serrão for his kind invitation to participate in the international congress 'A Herança de Santos Simões'.

researchers, among the younger ones Jan Pluis and Pieter Tichelaar.<sup>2</sup> Tichelaar was director of a century's old faience and tile workshop in Makkum, a family enterprise that exists already for more than 300 years and still produces traditional, tin-glazed earthenware. Pluis was a young, independent researcher who became exceptionally productive in the study of Dutch tiles, and is still active. In 2010 he received a royal decoration for his lifelong research on tiles. In an interview three years ago for the annual of the Dutch Tile Museum he was asked who he admired most as author and researcher. He then declared to be inspired by Santos Simões, for his knowledge, systematic research and his personality.<sup>3</sup> On the photo they are standing next to each other.

The study of Dutch tiles originated with architects and designers who were interested in the repetitive patterns of tile decorations.<sup>4</sup> The first collectors started between 1900 and 1920, a period of large scale renewal in the centres of the historical cities in Holland. Especially the modernization of the crowded 17th century town centre of Amsterdam and the construction of a new town hall in the centre of Rotterdam (1914-1920) led to the removal of huge quantities of antique tiles.<sup>5</sup> The early collectors tried to assemble panels of 6 x 8 tiles of each single pattern to demonstrate the ornamental effects. That was not so easy, because in the Netherlands tiles were not used for covering complete walls, but on relatively small surfaces in the domestic interior, in the fire place, around a stair case or as a skirting-board. Many of the tile collections in our museums date from this period and concentrate on the early polychrome tiles and the beginning of blue-and-white painted tiles from the 17th century.

A first systematic approach on the decorative and iconographic diversity of the patterns was launched by Dingeman Jan Korf (1906-1982), an art teacher (professeur de dessin). He started collecting tiles and early tin-glazed earthenware (maiolica) in the 1950s and published some handsome books on these topics.<sup>6</sup> His book on Dutch tiles, first published in 1960, went through 7 editions until 1979. Collecting of tiles had popularized in these days and Korf offered a very useful guide for generations of amateurs. He analyzed the different types of ornament and the development of all kinds of figurative decoration and put them in a chronological order. He paid attention to the

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<sup>2</sup> Jan Daniël van Dam, 'Historiador da Azulejaria Holandesa', in: Paolo Henriques e.a., *João Miguel dos Santos Simoes 1907-1972*, Lisboa 2007, 78.

<sup>3</sup> Lejo Schenk, 'Jan Pluis: 'Er is meer dan de voorkant.' Portret van Nederlands grootste tegeldocumentalist', in: *TEGEL* 36 (2008) 46-51, 49.

<sup>4</sup> J.D. van Dam, 'Tegelverzamelaars in Nederland', in *De vrije Fries* 61 (1981) 109-118; International introductions on Dutch Tiles are Hans van Lemmen, *Delftware Tiles*, London 1997; Jan Daniel van Dam, 'A Survey on Dutch Tiles', in Ella Schaap (ed.), *Dutch Tiles in the Philadelphia Museum of Art*, Philadelphia 1984, 16-34.

<sup>5</sup> Ingrid de Jager and Nora Schadee, *Tegels uit Rotterdam, 1609-1866*, Rotterdam/Zaltbommel 2009, 6.

<sup>6</sup> Dingeman Korf, *Tegels*, Bussum 1960; id., *Nederlandse majolica*, Bussum 1963.

development of typical corner motifs like the ‘Ox-head’, the ‘Lily’ and the ‘Spider’. His publications, also about the excavation of maiolica near Haarlem, Leiden and Deventer, are characterized by the illustrations he designed himself (Fig. 2).

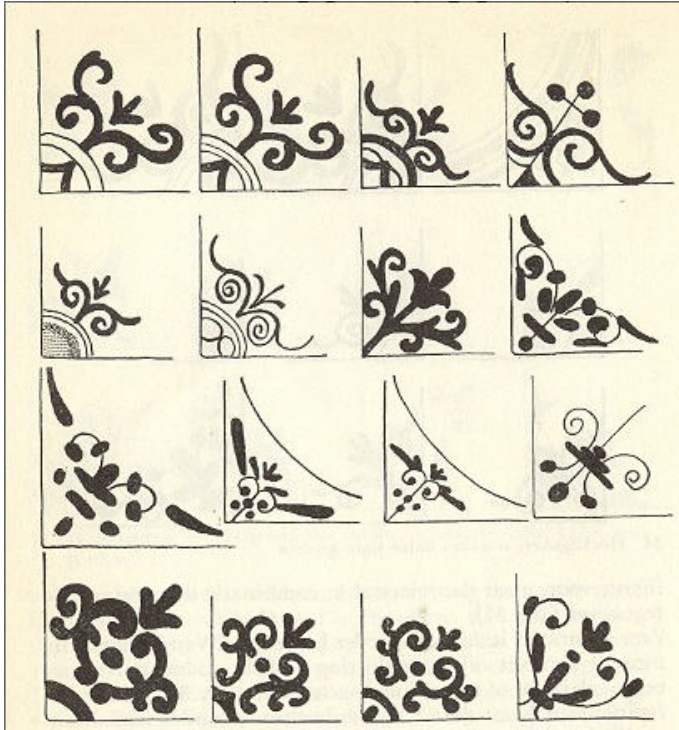


Fig. 2. Various executions of the corner motif ox-head, drawn by Dingeman Korf.

One of the enthusiast tile collectors of his generation was the architect Gerrit Feenstra (1890-1985). In 1950 he came across an 18th century ‘commandeurswoning’ (the house of a merchant captain) on the Frisian island Terschelling, with a room of which the walls were completely covered with panels and figurative designs. After he learned that the tiles would be probably removed by a new owner and sold for export to the U.S., he decided to buy the house himself for restoration. Thus he became involved in tiles and started to build a historical representative collection.

In his time, it was no longer possible to acquire large panels of early polychrome tiles of the same origin. Therefore he put more attention to the developments in the 18th and 19th centuries and the production in the province of Friesland than his predecessors had done. He also brought together a nice collection of tile pictures. In 1961 he opened a specialized museum on Dutch tiles in a bungalow he had built for himself in Otterlo. In 1968 a Society of Friends came into being, that with yearly meetings and an annual publication

Tegel developed into a centre for the research on Dutch tiles. Feenstra donated his private museum to a foundation that would secure its continuity.<sup>7</sup>

Some researchers started building up a documentation of all tiles they could find in public and private collections, in catalogues of auctions, but also in situ, in the interiors of old houses. Especially Jan Pluis (1937) gathered since the 1960's an impressive documentation.

His research concentrated on separate iconographic topics that were presented in articles, exhibitions, catalogues and books. The diversity of images within each subject is inventoried and compared with all known series of prints on this theme. Product catalogues of 19th century tile workshops are analyzed, so that series of tiles can be ascribed. The few preserved stock inventories and administrative records of tile workshops give information on the names of patterns and the quantity of production.

A good example is his study of children plays, in which he counts up to a number of nearly 100 plays depicted on tiles, as playing with hoops, swinging, or driving a hobby horse.<sup>8</sup> At the same time it is an overview on these plays themselves and it learns us a lot on their representation in Dutch art. The first Rotterdam series of children plays, with 48 images, date from the middle of the 17th century. They correspond completely with a popular wood engraving, although the latter has only survived in rare copies from the end of the 18th and early 19th century.<sup>9</sup>

Other themes were animals and birds,<sup>10</sup> together with small articles about panels with bird cages,<sup>11</sup> ships<sup>12</sup> and the scenes from the hunting of whales.<sup>13</sup> Ella Schaap, curator of the tile collection in the Philadelphia Museum of Arts, published an overview on flowers and floral motifs on 17th century Dutch tiles, with the influence of renaissance herbals and florilegia.<sup>14</sup>

The study of biblical iconography led to a description of 319 Old Testament and 273 New Testament stories that were painted on tiles and panels, most of them known in a variety of versions.<sup>15</sup> It was based on a

<sup>7</sup> The collection of the Dutch Tile Museum is searchable at [www.geheugenvannederland.nl](http://www.geheugenvannederland.nl).

<sup>8</sup> Jan Pluis, with the assistance of Minze van den Akker and Ger de Ree, *Kinderspelen op tegels*, Assen 1979.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, 32-35.

<sup>10</sup> J. Pluis, M. van den Akker and H.E. Muller, 'Dieren op tegels' in: *Mededelingenblad Vrienden van de Nederlandse Ceramiek* 75/76 (1974), 128 pp.

<sup>11</sup> Jan Pluis, 'Kanariëkooitableaus', in: *TEGEL* 11 (1983) 16-41.

<sup>12</sup> Jan Pluis, *Tegelvaart. Friese Schepentableaus*, Sneek 1988.

<sup>13</sup> Jan Pluis, 'De invloed van de etsen van A. van der Laan op de tegelschilders van schepentableaus', in: *Jaarboek 1966 Fries Scheepvaartmuseum en Oudheidkamer*, Sneek 1968, 53-88.

<sup>14</sup> Ella B. Schaap, *Dutch Floral Tiles in the Golden Age and their Botanical Prints*, Haarlem 1994, 183 pp.

<sup>15</sup> Jan Pluis, with the assistance of Jurriaan Wijchers, *Bijbeltegels. Bijbelse voorstellingen op Nederlandse wandtegels van de 17<sup>de</sup> tot de 20<sup>e</sup> eeuw*, Münster 1994, 952 pp.

documentation of nearly 7.600 tiles with biblical subjects gathered until 1992 (Fig. 3). In 2011 will appear a new book by Jan Pluis about mythological



Fig. 3. Tile with Biblical scene, the parable of the talents or minas (Matthew 25:14-30), Utrecht, c. 1750.



a: Copperplate, engraved by Matthaëus Merian for the Icones Biblicae (1625-1627)



b: Engraving, 18th century



c: 'Spons', pricked stencil. Design for tile, Utrecht, c. 1725-1750



d: Reverse of c, where one sees the contours of the design pricked through.

scenes, describing not only all tiles that depict stories from the *Metamorphoses* by Ovidius, but also all kinds of cupids and putti, mermaids and roman heroes.<sup>16</sup> This study demonstrates also the influence of classical mythology in Dutch applied art.

This descriptive and cataloguing approach culminated in 1997 in the publication of *The Dutch Tile*, a bilingual systematic overview of the whole range of all known ornamental decors, and the exploration of the variety of iconographic themes in figurative tiles and panels.<sup>17</sup> It was based on a lifelong documentation of tiles in situ, in museums or in private collections.

An emphasis in this documentation was laid on the Frisian tile production, a shared interest with Pieter Tichelaar and a few other researchers. In the Province Friesland, in the north of the Netherlands, there was a tradition of 'gleibakkerijen', producers of tin-glazed earthenware and tiles since the early 17th century. Their production developed in some respects separately from the centres in Holland. Frisian earthenware was exported to northern Germany, Denmark and the Baltic area.<sup>18</sup> Ten workshops could be identified by archival research in three Frisian cities and villages: Harlingen, Makkum and Bolsward. Harlingen is the only centre in the 17th century; only three workshops survived the Napoleonic era and existed still in the beginning of the 20th century.

Table 1. Documented objects from Frisian Workshops, c. 1700-1876

Production centres	Dishes	Decorative earthenware	Tile pictures	Total
Harlingen	426	440	1.116	1.982
Makkum	394	566	827	1.787
Bolsward	21	43	158	222
Not yet attributed		49	7	66
Total	841	1.108	2.108	4.057

Source: Pieter Jan Tichelaar, *Fries Aardewerk. Een studie in delen, Een wetenschappelijke proeve op het gebied van de letteren*, Leiden 2004, 37.

The table gives an overview of the number of surviving objects that were documented until 2003. Friesland. From a few conserved archival sources the total amount of the production could also be reconstructed, so we can guess that 6% of the produced tile panels from the period 1700-1876 has been conserved or is documented at least.

<sup>16</sup> Jan Pluis and Reinhard Stupperich, *Mythologische voorstellingen op Nederlandse tegels. Metamorphosen naar Ovidius, herders, cupido's en zeewezens*, Leiden 2011, 400 pp.

<sup>17</sup> Jan Pluis, with the assistance of Daniël Hanekuijk, Piet Bolwerk and Jan van Loo, *The Dutch Tile. Designs and Names/ De Nederlandse Tegel, decors en benamingen, 1570-1930*, Leiden 1997, 696 pp.

<sup>18</sup> Rainer Marggraf (ed.), *Niederländische Wandfliesen in Nordwestdeutschland. Einfluss der Niederlande auf die Wohnkultur zwischen Weser und Ems*, Bramsche 1984.

The results were published in a series of seven books.<sup>19</sup> This project learned us a lot about the organization of the workshops, highly specialized enterprises that counted on average about 15 craftsmen who could make, glaze, paint and fire some 25,000 tiles in a cycle of 10 to 12 days.

In this group of craftsmen were 4 or 5 painters, one of which was the leader, the most experienced and talented, responsible for the production of all panels and the more refined figurative tiles. Although they were not considered as independent artists and never or seldom signed their work, we can in Friesland recognize all the leading painters in the details of painting water, clouds, a foreground or faces. With the help of archival sources and a few signatures, most of them could be identified with some certainty. We also pay nowadays special attention to handwriting of numbers on the back of tiles, as these were clearly done by these 'prime painters' themselves, each in their own manner.

For example, in the administration of Tichelaar in Makkum we find that Douwe Klazes is paid in December 1808 for painting two tile pictures with a saw-mill, each picture 63 tiles. Indeed those tile pictures with an unusual subject have been conserved (Fig. 4). We know of Douwe Klazes (1767-1815) that he started at the age of 15 as a pupil in the tile factory of Tichelaar, where he was an apprentice of Gatse Sytses. From the administrative books we know that he headed the list of painters during 18 years, from 1796 until 1813. From evidence of archival records and twelve dated objects it is possible to ascribe some 160 documented objects (85 pieces of decorative earthenware, 55 tile pictures and 20 dishes) to Douwe Klazes, although he only once put his monogram DK on a



Fig. 4 Tile picture with a saw-mill, painted by Douwe Klazes at the tile workshop of Tichelaar in Makkum, 1808 (collection Nederlands Tegelmuseum, Otterlo).

<sup>19</sup> Pieter Jan Tichelaar, Jan Pluis, Arend Jan Gierveld, Sytse ten Hoeve, Adri van der Meulen en Paul Smeele, *Fries Aardewerk*, 7 Volumes, Leiden, 2001-2005. It is published on internet too: <http://www.friesaardewerk.nl>



colander.<sup>20</sup> In this way the anonymous craftsmen of the Frisian workshops become recognizable artists with their ‘oeuvre’ restored to them.

Comparably much less is still known from the many production centres in Holland. In the 17th century nearly each town in Holland had workshop for tiles and maiolica. It is only for a few rare and remarkable products we can assume their origin. For example the extremely refined portraits of tulips on 2 tiles have only been found on two sites in the centre of Hoorn, while the curious birds sitting on a nail are only known from the neighbourhood of Gouda (fig. 5).



Fig. 5 Bird on an iron nail, Gouda, ca. 1640.

There is a local study on Gouda, based on evidence from tile decors that were specifically found in this city and by unofficial excavations in the 1950's on the site of the former tile workshop.<sup>21</sup> Archival research is also done in the last years to workshops in Enkhuizen, Hoorn, Gorinchem and Rotterdam.

Rotterdam is probably the most important centre of 17th century tile production. In the 18th century, and already since 1660, the moment that Delft becomes the centre of delftware, the workshops that produce tiles and majolica in other towns disappear. The tile industry concentrates in a few centres of large scale production: Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Utrecht and, at some distance, Alkmaar and Gorinchem.

<sup>20</sup> Pieter Tichelaar, *Fries Aardewerk III, Tichelaar Makkum 1700-1876*, Leiden 2004, 153-167.

<sup>21</sup> Johan Kamermans, Kitty Laméris and Ewoud Mijnlief (eds.). “*De Swaen*”. *Geschiedenis en productie van een Goudse plateelbakkerij uit de zeventiende eeuw*, Gouda/ Otterlo 2002.



Rotterdam has been the domain for the German researcher Wilhelm Joliet. His attention was drawn to Rotterdam as he became advisor on the restoration projects of Augustusburg and Falkenlust, two German palaces in Brühl (near Cologne). Constructed in the years 1725-1740 after designs by the important rococo-architect Francois Cuvilliés, large quantities of very refined Rotterdam tiles were ordered for their interior decoration. The stair house of Falkenlust contains tiles depicting the falconry, produced once-only for this house. The designs for these tiles were found by Joliet in the Rotterdam Municipal Archives.

Since then he documents the Rotterdam tile production and export in the 18th-19th century thoroughly. He studied the conserved designs in the Rotterdam town archives and spent a lot of attention in tracing the printings that served as examples for the Rotterdam workshops of the families Aalmis and Schut and for the painter Cornelis Boumeester (1652-1733).<sup>22</sup>

The production of Utrecht found also its researchers, although specializing into the 19th century. Most complicated is our image of Amsterdam, where the workshops of Jan van Oort and Willem van der Kloet have an international reputation, but nearly nothing in our country in situ can be ascribed to them.<sup>23</sup> The archival sources for Amsterdam are so abundant that it is nearly impossible to find your way in them, maybe the opposite situation for the archives of Lisboa before the earthquake.

When we will look at some underdeveloped domains in research, we can mention a few directions.

Nearly no systematic archaeological excavations of workshops have been done or published, with the exception of a kiln in Deventer that existed in the years 1624-1637.<sup>24</sup> Although there is nowadays much more attention for archaeological research in the early modern history of cities.<sup>25</sup>

There is not much attention to chemical or technical analysis of Dutch tiles and ceramics. We are supposing that most production centres were too nearby each other, and made use of partly imported clay from Flanders or England, so that an analysis will give no decisive differences between Dutch factories.

Also there is no systematic research on the application of tiles, they were since long collected for their individual quality without respect for their

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<sup>22</sup> Joliet publishes his documentation, also on export of Dutch tiles to Portugal, on his websites [www.tegels-uit-rotterdam.com](http://www.tegels-uit-rotterdam.com) and [www.geschichte-der-fliese.de](http://www.geschichte-der-fliese.de).

<sup>23</sup> Rainer Marggraf, Ruth Oldenziel and Jan Daan van Dam, *Os Azulejos de Willem van der Kloet em Portugal*, Lisboa 1994.

<sup>24</sup> H.H.J. Lubberding, H. de Beer, Dingeman Korf and A. Bruyn, 'De Deventer Majolica-oven', *Mededelingenblad Nederlandse Vereniging van Vrienden van Ceramiek*, 119-120 (1985) 56 pp.

<sup>25</sup> Compare for example recent publications on London: Kieron Tyler, Ian Betts and Roy Stephenson, *London's delftware industry. The tin-glazed pottery industries of Southwark and Lambeth*, Museum of London 2008.

context. It is not usual to find 17th century tiles in situ anymore, and there has been. That remains an important subject to be explored. Closely connected to the documentation of tiles in situ is archival research that will explain the relationship with clients, the distribution to consumers and development of demand.

In the last decade's attention has shifted to the introduction of industrial techniques at the end of the 19th century and the design of Art Nouveau tiles. The history of many art potteries has been described since, although the tiles are usually treated as a minor chapter within studies that concentrate on ceramics. But these tiles can still be found in situ and also, impossible for earlier Dutch tiles, on the exterior.

To conclude, it is important to continue the international exchange between researchers on tiles, in the tradition that has been stimulated more than 40 years ago already by João Miguel dos Santos Simões.



Fig. 6 – Map of Holland