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Hebban olla vogala

Published by

Slings, Hubert and Frits van Oostrom.

A Key to Dutch History: The Cultural Canon of the Netherlands.

Amsterdam University Press, 2007.

Project MUSE. <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/76693>.



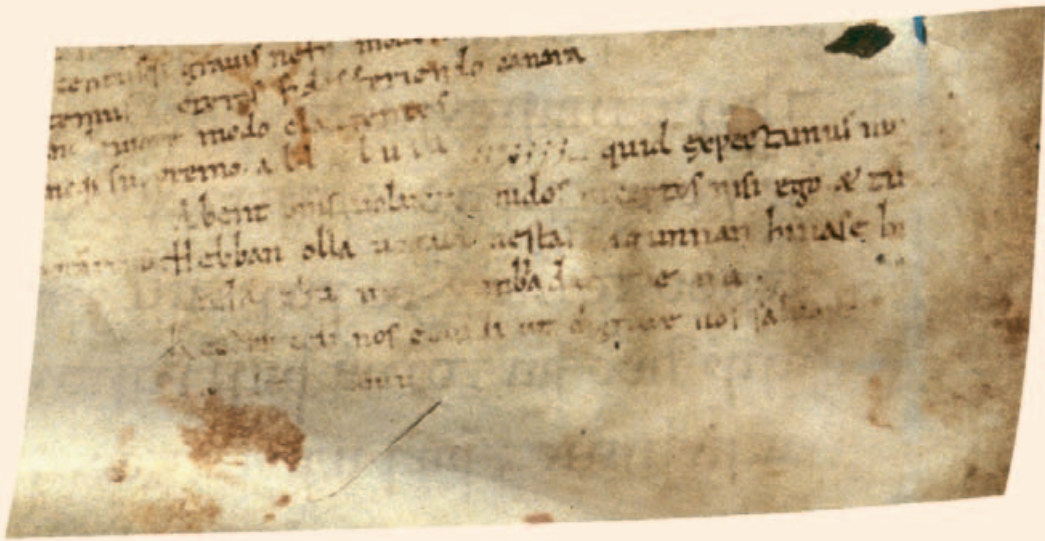
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[136.0.111.243] Project MUSE (2025-01-18 20:23 GMT)



circa 1100

Hebban olla vogala

The Dutch language in writing

*Hebban olla vogala nestas hagunnan hinase
hic anda thu, wat unbidan we nu?*

The above is a Dutch sentence, although at first sight it's barely recognisable as such. This is because it is about the earliest piece of written Dutch we have, some one thousand years old. It literally says: Have all birds nests started except me and you; what wait we for, or: All birds have started making nests, except you and me, what are we waiting for? These lines are probably from a love song, the oldest Dutch love song you could say.

These lines were written to test a quill pen in about 1100 by a Flemish monk who was staying in an English monastery. His daily life was largely filled with copying Latin and Old English texts. Now and then he had to sharpen the goose quill he used

for writing. On the last page of the book he was copying he would try out his newly sharpened pen before continuing his copying. In such instances he wrote the first thing that came into his head. For this monk, it was a love poem that he remembered from his youth in Flanders: *Hebban olla vogala...*

This was simply an incident that only with the wisdom of many centuries could be regarded as the beginning of a new phenomenon: the use of the Dutch language as a medium for written literature. That the first fruits of the pen in Dutch were written in a monastery and were preserved in a sacred monastic book is, of course, no coincidence. Writing had long been the domain of monks and the written word was mainly used for the sacred, Latin texts of the church.



Sub-topics

Primary education sector

Writing then and now

Language families (similarities between and differences in languages)

Love songs

Secondary education sector

Monastic orders

Middle Dutch literature at a glance

Medieval love poetry (Lied van Heer Halewijn, Egidiuslied, Aloëtte, Twee koningskinderen)

Arab culture as a breeding ground

Language families

Past and Present

What is the impact of modern media like computers and text messaging on language?

Contemporary love songs (Is the imagery in "Hebban olla vogala" outdated or not?)

In the Treasure Chest

Goose quill pen, bottle of ink and a piece of parchment

References

Places to Go

The Hague: Meermanno Museum (in the scriptorium you can try writing with a goose quill pen)

Zutphen: Librije, medieval library

Books for young people

Martine Letterie, *Focke en de belegerde stad* (from chapter 7 on)

Agave Kruijssen, *Lancelot* (10+)

Agave Kruijssen, *Merlijn* (10+)

Agave Kruijssen, *'t Ros Beiaard* (10+)

Agave Kruijssen, *Vrije val* (Beatrijs) (10+)

Agave Kruijssen, *Walewein, ridder van de Ronde Tafel* (10+)

Paul Biegel, *Reinaart de vos* (12+)

Paul Biegel, *Anderland, een Brandaan-mythe* (14+)

Joke van Leeuwen, *Waarom een buitenboordmotor eenzaam is...* (info)

Katharina Smeyers, *Schapenvellen en ganzenveren. Het verhaal van het middeleeuwse boek* (info)

Background literature

Frits van Oostrom, *Stemmen op schrift: Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur vanaf het begin tot 1300*, Amsterdam 2006, pp. 93-107.

Jan W. de Vries, Roland Willems, Peter Burger, *Het verhaal van een taal: Negen eeuwen Nederlands*, Amsterdam 2003.

Websites

www.literatuurgeschiedenis.nl

www.dbnl.org