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Visualising Literary Heritage: a viable approach?
The Case of the *Panpoëticon Batavûm* (1772-1780).

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1. Introduction

Somewhat lost against a pillar in one of the rooms devoted to the eighteenth century in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, one can find two identical wooden panels with small portraits of Dutch authors attached to them. Each panel contains eleven small portraits in laurel-shaped gilded lead frames, arranged in three rows (4-3-4) (Fig. 1). A cartouche on the lower part of the frame of each portrait provides space for a small parchment strip that contains the name of the portrayed author. However, nothing reminds the 21st-century observer of the original function of the panels. The two panels are actually two trays of the so-called *Panpoëticon Batavûm* (loosely translated as ‘All the Dutch poets’), an eighteenth-century collector’s cabinet which once contained the portraits of over 350 Dutch and Flemish poets and poetesses, playwrights and, incidentally, other artists, including Joost van den Vondel, Constantijn Huygens, Hugo Grotius (Fig. 2) and Peter Paul Rubens.

Fig. 1. The Panpoëticon Batavûm display in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 2016.

Fig. 2. Arnoud van Halen, portrait of Hugo Grotius (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam). The parchment strip with Hugo Grotius' name is missing.

Throughout the eighteenth century the Panpoëticon functioned as one of the most compelling representations of the contemporary fascination with the literary and artistic past.¹ The cabinet became a (semi-)public attraction for lovers of the (literary) arts from all over the country and even from beyond its borders (Van Deinsen 2016a, 260-262). The physical interaction with the cabinet, its collection of portraits, and, in addition, the literary past inspired dozens of contemporaries to write down their experiences. As a result, a dynamic, both visual and textual, reception culture surrounded the Panpoëticon Batavûm.

Present-day researchers wishing to study the cabinet, the portraits it contained, and the significance and impact of the collection are confronted with a simple problem: the cabinet has been lost since 1849, and the portraits in the collection have been scattered or have vanished. As of 2016, 83 of the portraits and six of the original trays are in the Rijksmuseum collection, by far the largest number of objects preserved in a single location.² In other words, researchers lack an image of the collection as a whole. Furthermore, although we still have a number of valuable sources which describe or depict the Panpoëticon (paintings and drawings, textual descriptions), these sources are often contradictory. All this explains why only very few researchers have studied the cabinet and the collection as a unity.³ The intended function and cohesion of the original collection is lost. And with the loss of the wooden cabinet itself, one of the most important aspects of the collection, its materiality, has vanished as well.

Any attempt at recreating the original experience of an eighteenth-century visitor is futile or would at least lay claim to a false authenticity. How then can we bring together the various sources available (contemporary accounts, visual representations, material remains) in a unified whole? Previous personal experiences with computer modelling and virtual reconstructions, including the creation of models of lost theatres (De Paepe 2009; De Paepe

¹ For a detailed account of the history of the cabinet and its collection, see van Deinsen 2016b.

² The whereabouts of the rest of the Panpoëticon collection are largely unknown. The present location of only a few portraits is known. For example, the portrait of Jacob de Witt can be found in Museum van Gijn, Dordrecht, and the two portraits of Anna Maria van Schurman are part of the collection of the Centraal Museum, Utrecht. Several portraits, for example those of Samuel van Hoogstraten and Diederik Liebergen, are part of private collections. See for a complete overview: van Deinsen 2016b, appendix.

³ Heeren 1919; De Haan 1969; van Thiel 1976 and van Thiel 1978 describe the cabinet from the art historical point of view. Leemans & Johannes 2013, 111 and van Stipriaan 2007, 263-267 focus on literary historical aspects.

2012), have illustrated the role 3D models can play in the assessment of sources and the visualising of theatre heritage.⁴

Whereas a textual analysis allows one to gloss over the conflicting nature of the original sources describing or depicting the cabinet and its collection in various stages of its existence, a computer reconstruction demands specific decisions and forces one to deal with the contradictions. In search of an understanding of the cultural importance of the collection, one is confronted with very diverse primary sources, and, above all, with inconsistent and even unrealistic interpretations of later researchers. A computer model can help to reconcile the sources and to determine which interpretations are plausible.

In the current article we will discuss a reconstruction of the Panpoëticon itself, and we will also place the cabinet in a reconstructed original environment, namely the meeting room of the Dutch literary society *Kunst wordt door arbeid verkregen* (1772-1780) (Fig. 3). This will allow us to gain insight in the functioning of the cabinet in its concrete physical and historical context.⁵ But more importantly, through our approach we wish to explore the role 3D modelling can have in the study of literary heritage and history.

Fig. 3. P. C. La Fargue, *Meeting room of the society Kunst wordt door arbeid verkregen*, 1774 (Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden). The Panpoëticon cabinet can be seen against the wall, at the center of the painting.

⁴ Other projects involving 3D models include the reconstruction of destroyed synagogues (De Paepe 2013).

⁵ The cabinet has a long history, from 1719 to 1849, but for reasons of conciseness we have selected a single moment we wish to present in this article, namely between 1772 and 1780.

2. The Panpoëticon Batavûm

In 1719, the Amsterdam amateur painter Arnoud van Halen (ca. 1673-1732) commissioned a wooden cabinet that would come to function as the repository for the almost 200 small portraits he would make. After his death, the cabinet and its contents changed hands several times as art lovers and literary societies sought to acquire the Panpoëticon Batavûm. In 1732, shortly after van Halen had passed away, the cabinet came into the possession of the wealthy Amsterdam merchant and art lover Michiel de Roode (1685-1771), who added over one hundred portraits – mostly depicting contemporary poets – and several trays to the collection.

In 1772 the cabinet could be found in the meeting room of the Dutch literary society *Kunst wordt door arbeid verkregen* ('Art is attained through labour') in the university city of Leiden. It is here that the Panpoëticon would play its most public role, as the cabinet and its collection were open to and could be experienced by anyone interested in the literary past of the Low Countries. The cabinet prospered within the rooms of the Leiden art society until 12 January 1807, when the city centre of Leiden was devastated when a ship filled with gunpowder exploded near the Rapenburg, leaving the city in ruins. The disaster severely damaged the Panpoëticon, as the city historian Jan Roemer (1769-1838) described in his detailed account: 'The life-size statue of Apollo has fallen over and lies buried: the *Pan Poëticon* has been pulverised, the extremely life-like portraits of the poets have been damaged and are strewn about here and there... – perhaps the entire thing has been destroyed forever'.⁶ The damaged cabinet remained in the possession of this society until 1818. In 1849 the painting collection was sold off at auction and all traces of the cabinet itself disappeared.⁷ In 1880 a substantial part of the portraits and six remaining trays were located in the *Accademia Reale di Belle Arti di Venezia* in Venice, where they were bought by the Nederlandsch Museum voor Geschiedenis en Kunst (the Dutch Museum for History and Art), the predecessor of the Rijksmuseum.

3. Approach

For our goal – assessing the sources and creating a visualisation of the cabinet and its surroundings as they appeared between 1772 and 1780 – the modelling process should be straightforward and simple. Previous experiences led us to the easy to use 3D modelling

⁶ Roemer 1807, 91.

⁷ For a detailed account of the history of the cabinet and the collection, see van Deinsen 2016b.

software by Trimble, SketchUp Pro. The main reason was the software's user-friendliness and accessibility, an important argument as both creators of the model come from a Literature department and do not have a background in informatics or computer modelling.

For the final visualisations, Shaderlight was used to render both the cabinet and its room.

4. Visualising the Panpoëticon Batavûm

4.1. Sources

4.1.1. The portraits

All 83 Panpoëticon portraits in the Rijksmuseum collection have been measured and photographed in the past (see for example Fig. 4). For the present project a select number of portraits were measured again. The four surviving panels in the Rijksmuseum depots were also measured.

Fig. 4. Jan Maurits Quinkhard, portrait of Constantijn Huygens (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam).

4.1.2. The cabinet

Unfortunately, the original design sketches of the cabinet are lost. However, due to the lively culture surrounding the cabinet and its collection during the eighteenth century, four drawings or engravings and four paintings depicting (part of) the cabinet exist (Fig. 5). Although the visual sources functioned as a natural starting point for the digital reconstruction, one should note that the images were not, primarily, meant as realistic representations. Often the cabinet only appears in the background.

Fig. 5. Details from five eighteenth-century depictions of (a part of) the cabinet. From left to right Jan Goeree, frontispiece of Lambert Bidloo's *Panpoëticon Batavûm*, 1720 (Radboud University, Nijmegen) (detail of fig. 7); Arnoud van Halen, *Portrait of Lambert Bidloo*, before or around 1724 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam) (detail of fig. 6); Christoffel Lubieniecki, *Portrait of Arnoud van Halen*, 1725 (Pushkinmuseum, Moscow); Jan Maurits Quinkhard, *Portrait of Michiel de Roode en Jan Punt*, 1738 (private collection); P. C. La Fargue, *Meeting room of the Society Kunst wordt door arbeid verkregen*, 1774 (Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden).

A number of eighteenth-century written descriptions also survive and mention the material aspects of the Panpoëticon. The two most extensive are Lambert Bidloo's *Panpoëticon Batavûm* (1720) (Fig. 6), an almost 300 pages long panegyric on the collection, and Arnoud van Halen's *Pan Poëticon, verheerlijkt* (1773), which was published to celebrate the acquisition of the cabinet by the Leiden literary society *Kunst wordt door arbeid verkregen*.

Fig. 6. Arnoud van Halen, *Portrait of Lambert Bidloo*, ca.1725 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam). In his left hand Bidloo holds a drawing of the *Panpoëticon Batavûm*.

The sources agree on the basic shape of the cabinet, namely a cabinet-on-stand with a dome and decorated with three statuettes. However, the sources are silent or disagree on a number of details. What are the precise dimensions of the cabinet, for example? On which side does the door open? What is the exact shape of the dome? What does the interior look like? Only the engraving by Jan Goeree (1720) offers a very limited and sketchy view of the interior, showing about 30 stacked trays, just visible behind the door at the right side of the cabinet (fig 7, see also fig. 14).

Fig. 7. Jan Goeree, Engraved title page of Lambert Bidloo's Panpoëticon Batavûm, 1720 (Radboud University, Nijmegen).

In order to digitally reconstruct the cabinet, we worked from the inside out, starting with the dimensions of the surviving portraits (measuring, on average, 9.5 cm x 11 cm) and the surviving trays (measuring, on average, 45.5 cm x 40 cm x 1 cm; or 45.5 cm x 40 cm x 2.2 cm including the portraits)). This resulted in our first models (Figs. 8 & 9).

Fig. 8. Schematic visualisation of a cabinet tray

Fig. 9. Visualisation of a cabinet tray, with the portraits in chronological order.

Obviously the dimensions of the trays have an important impact on the dimensions of the cabinet itself. Two previous researchers – Pauline de Haan (1969) and Rijksmuseum curator P.J.J. van Thiel (1978) – have attempted to reconstruct the cabinet, but *in words* only, overlooking any inconsistencies that would have become obvious if they had attempted a *visual* reconstruction. Both de Haan and van Thiel assumed that the cabinet contained two rows of trays (in total respectively 82 and ca. 60 trays), despite having only a single door. Our research shows that the dimensions they calculated are impossible to reconcile with other

elements, such as the presence decorative pilasters and of the statuettes on the sides of the cabinet. Their reconstructions must therefore be rejected. We created our own hypothesis, namely a cabinet that is 280 cm tall and 140 cm wide, that contains only a single row of trays, but does have several extra drawers as indicated by certain textual sources (Fig. 10).⁸

Fig. 10. From left to right: visualisations of a single tray; of the textural reconstructions by de Haan (1969); of the textural reconstructions by van Thiel (1978); and of our own hypothesis.

Confirmation of our hypothesis comes in the form of a preparatory sketch by the Amsterdam painter Jacob de Wit (Lunsingh Scheurleer 1954).⁹ In 1738 the then-owner of the cabinet, Michiel de Roode, commissioned Jacob de Wit to create a grisaille as a decoration for the inner side of the cabinet door. As this painting had to match the proportions of the door, the surviving preparatory sketch – the painting itself has been lost – confirms the long, narrow shape of the door which we propose (Figs. 11 & 12).

⁸ See for example: De la Ruë 173X, 3,11,8-9; *Catalogus* 1849.

⁹ A preparatory sketch of the Teylers' drawing, which could be found in the Witt Library, London, in 1972, illustrates the consistency in the proportions of De Witt's design. In addition, the late Janno van Takehove emphasized Lunsingh Scheurleer's identification by concluding the paper itself could well have originated in the year 1738. The authors of this article are grateful to Robert-Jan te Rijdt who shared this unpublished material with us.

Fig. 11. Jacob de Wit, Painting and Poetry (preparatory drawing), 1738 (Teylers Museum).

Fig. 12. Visualisations of the reconstructions of de Haan (1969) (lef) and van Thiel (1978) (center) and of our own hypothesis, with the preparatory drawing of the grisaille by Jacob de Wit superimposed (right).

4.2. Results

The resulting 3D model (Fig. 10) shows a cabinet with a box-shaped upper part, resting on four robust, fluted and tapered, Louis XIV-style legs joined by a stretcher. On the left and right of the cabinet, two niches each contain a statuette: Thalia, the muse of comedy, on the

right, Melpomene, the muse of tragedy, on the left.¹⁰ The cabinet is made out of oak with burl wood veneer.¹¹ The Panpoëticon is topped by a distinctive S-shaped dome. This unique feature sets this cabinet apart from most other Dutch eighteenth-century cabinets. The dome is crowned with a statuette of Apollo, the god of the arts (Fig. 13).

Fig. 13. Computer visualisation of the 3D model of the Panpoëticon

[Animation can be included here]

[Animation of the 3D model of the Panpoëticon]

¹⁰ Bidloo 1720, 9-10.

¹¹ Bidloo 1720, 8; *Catalogus* 1849, 48; L.J. 1853, 187.

Behind the door, a single row of trays is visible (Fig. 14). Each tray can be taken out of the cabinet. The trays rested on simple supports, and were not put inside a drawer. The grisaille by Jacob de Wit does not survive, but the 3D model allows us to integrate the preparatory sketch as a replacement.

Fig. 14. Computer visualisation of the 3D model of the Panpoëticon with the door opened.

5. Visualising the meeting room of *Kunst wordt door arbeid verkregen*

In 1772 the Panpoëticon came into possession of the Leiden literary society *Kunst wordt door arbeid verkregen*. The cabinet and its content became the centrepiece of the meeting room. Available contemporary sources make it possible to reconstruct the historical context in which the cabinet functioned after it was bought by the society.

5.1. Sources

The reconstruction of the meeting room is primarily based on two paintings (1774 and 1780) by Pieter Constantijn La Fargue depicting both sides of the meeting room (Figs. 3 & 15), and on a preparatory sketch for the 1774 painting (Fig. 16).¹² The paintings and drawing show a long, narrow room with a vaulted ceiling. Light enters through three windows, and access to

¹² Both paintings will be displayed together in the Rijksmuseum from the summer of 2016 onwards.

the room is provided by two doors. Two smaller doors, presumably leading to a pantry, kitchen and/or storage room, are hidden by green curtains.

Fig. 15. P. C. La Fargue, *Meeting room of the Society Kunst wordt door arbeid verkregen*, 1780 (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam).

Fig. 16. P. C. La Fargue, *Meeting room of the Society Kunst wordt door arbeid verkregen* (preparatory sketch), 1774 (University of Leiden).

In addition to the visual sources, written contemporary accounts (for example Frans van Mieris and Daniël van Alphen's *Beschryving der Stad Leiden* (1770), a travel journal by the

Swedish tourist J.J. Björnsthål (1783), and an account by an anonymous traveller (Backer 1989)) shed light on the myriad objects owned by the society. The room was located on the ground floor of the annex of a house along the Pieterskerk Choorsteeg (literally: Saint Peter's church choir alley) in Leiden (Moerman 1993, 14). Despite additional archival research in the City Archives of Leiden, no architectural drawings of the house or detailed plans of the city block were discovered. The dimensions of the hall (7m x 12.50m) were calculated based on our dimensions of the Panpoëticon, combined with the maximum building width of houses in Leiden comparable to the ones in the Pieterskerk Choorsteeg.

5.2. Outcome

The 3D model allows us to better understand the experience of the eighteenth-century visitor. Upon entering the room, the long conference table immediately draws the visitor's eye towards the cabinet which is placed against the southern(?) wall (Figs. 17). In a sense the table functions in a similar way as an aisle of a church, guiding the visitor's eyes towards the literary shrine or profane high altar of the room, the Panpoëticon.

Fig. 17. View from the entrance towards the Panpoëticon.

After entering the room, the visitor would most likely have taken a turn to the right (Fig. 18), passing along the society's book collection, before coming face to face with a replica (Fig. 19) of the monument that was placed in the Nieuwe Kerk in Amsterdam in memory of

Joost van den Vondel, the most important seventeenth-century Dutch poet (Fig. 20). After paying respects to the ‘prince of Dutch poetry’ and continuing the tour to the other end of the room (Fig. 21 & 22), the visitor would pass several literary memorabilia: portraits of poets, old blazons of chambers of rhetoric, an allegory on the arts over the chimney, a statue of Apollo, and framed poems by poetess Lucretia van Merken. The visitor would then reach the goal of the tour, the Panpoëticon Batavûm (Fig. 23).

Fig. 18. Hypothetical route followed by a visitor.

Fig. 19. 3D model of the replica of the monument dedicated to Joost van den Vondel.

Fig. 20. Herman Schouten, Drawing of the monument dedicated to Vondel in the Nieuwe Kerk in Amsterdam, 1795 (Amsterdam City Archives).

Fig. 21. View of the northern(?) wall, with the entrance

Fig. 22. View of the western(?) wall, with the monument dedicated to Joost van den Vondel, the most important Dutch seventeenth-century author

Fig. 23. View of the southern(?) wall, with the Panpöeticon

The addition of a large painting, an ‘altar piece’ as it were, behind the cabinet, depicting putti carrying the four coats of arms of the society’s protectors enhances the almost ‘sacred’ character of the Panpoëticon. The door of the cabinet would then be opened with a large key that was kept in one of the drawers beneath the door. Next, a tray with eleven portraits could be taken out of the cabinet, together with one of the books which were also kept in one of the drawers and which contained biographical information on many of the portrayed authors and artists.

During the annual meetings of the society its most important members would sit along the table. The place in front of the cabinet remained empty, and when the cabinet’s door was opened, it created the illusion that the admired poets and artist would ‘join’ the meeting.

6. Conclusions

The case of the Panpoëticon Batavûm illustrates the added value of 3D modelling and digital reconstruction of literary heritage objects. The model provides us with a (hypothetical) framework in which the individual historical ‘fragments’ can be placed and valued. By combining contemporary sources, including paintings, drawings and textual descriptions, the hypothetical virtual reconstruction of the Panpoëticon Batavûm we created sheds new light on the concrete use of the cabinet itself. Reconstructing the physical space in which the Panpoëticon was once placed, allowed us to study the function of the cabinet and its collection in its historical context, the meeting room of the Leiden literary society *Kunst wordt door arbeid verkregen*, between 1772 and 1780. The cabinet was much more than a piece of furniture: it was a symbol-laden object which, in the room of *Kunst wordt door arbeid verkregen*, became part of an almost sacred literary experience, both for the members of the society and any visitor. Therefore, the 3D model provides us with the cultural historical context which echoes in the contemporary sources. And finally, with the help of our 3D model we were able to ‘restore’ two somewhat obscure and isolated panels from the Rijksmuseum to their original eighteenth-century cabinet.

The next step will be to translate the eighteenth-century experience to a twenty-first-century public. A first attempt is a website, www.schrijverskabinet.nl (Figs. 24 and 25).¹³ Besides a short history of the cabinet and a reconstruction of the collection (including images of the surviving portraits and short biographies of the depicted authors), this website aims to translate the eighteenth-century process of engaging with the literary past with modern technology.

¹³ The website was launched in October 2016.

Fig. 24. One of the pages of www.schrijverskabinet.nl.

Fig. 25. One of the pages of www.schrijverskabinet.nl.

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Arnoud van Halen's Pan poëticon Batavûm verheerlijkt door lofdichten [...] getrokken uit het stamboek van Michiel de Roode; En nu eerst in 't licht gebragt door het genootschap [...] Kunst wordt door arbeid verkreegen

Voor het genootschap, Leiden (1773)

Catalogus van eene fraaije verzameling schilderijen, door beroemde oude en hedendaagsche Nederlandsche en andere meesters

Amsterdam (1849)

Backer 1789 J.A. Backer

De jonge reiziger door Nederland, zynde een verzameling van brieven, waarin al het merkwaardige der Zeven Vereenigde Gewesten is byeen verzamelt

D.M. Langeveld, Amsterdam (1789)

Bidloo 1720 L. Bidloo

Panpoëticon Batavûm, kabinet, waar in de afbeeldingen van voornaame Nederlandsche dichteren, verzameld, en konstig geschilderdt door Arnoud van Halen, en onder uytbreyding, en aanmerkingen, over de Hollandsche Rymkunst

Andries van Damme, Amsterdam (1720)

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