



Martijn Kleppe, ***Canonieke icoonfoto's. De rol van (pers)foto's in de Nederlandse geschiedschrijving*** (Dissertatie Rotterdam 2013; Delft, Zutphen: Eburon, 2013, 264 pp., ISBN 978 90 5972 722 9).

In this clearly written and richly illustrated book, historian Martijn Kleppe has investigated which photographs returned most often in Dutch high school history books between the years 1970 and 2000. The main question the book asks is whether these photographs have functioned as *iconic* photographs, a group with membership gradience dependent on nine possible characteristics divided into three categories: production (e.g., does the photograph refer to an archetype?), distribution (e.g., has the photograph been published often?) and reception (e.g., has the photograph been given a symbolic meaning?). The first third of the book consists of two chapters in which the main concepts of the study as well as its methodology are introduced. Next follow a short chapter on the most reproduced photographs in the investigated school books, two chapters on individual photographs – a 1912 photograph of Dutch socialist leader P.J. Troelstra giving a speech and a 1970 photograph of a protest against abortion laws by the Dutch feminist group Dolle Mina –, a chapter with an analysis of the usage of photography in the 2006 ‘Canon of the Netherlands’ project and finally a conclusion.

Combining concepts from cultural memory, visual culture and content influence studies – the latter field analyses how media products are assembled, for instance by gatekeepers such as editors –, the book is clear and consistent in its use of concepts, while its main innovation is its structural-qualitative research method, which combines qualitative and quantitative methods. Of the three categories mentioned above (production, distribution, reception), the book only looks at the first two (no [former] students or teachers were interviewed) by analyzing the circumstances of production of the photographs, by briefly describing their social biography and finally by analyzing their appearances in the high school history books. 412 such books with a total of 3,921 photographs were analyzed, leading to a ‘top ten’ of most occurring photographs—for instance, the two mentioned above returned thirty and twenty times, respectively, forming numbers one and two of this top ten. A final part of the book’s methodology consists of semi-structured interviews with the editors of the schoolbooks and with the secretary of the 2006 canon project, a key figure in the selection of this project’s images.

In the third chapter it is described that all photographs were labeled in a digital database using software called Fotostation Pro. For each photograph, information about the book in which it was published was recorded as well as information about the photograph itself (e.g., themes and period of production). This yields a number of valuable insights, to give another top three: 18.7% of the photographs in these school books are in some way connected to the Second World War; 6.5% to decolonization (I presume primarily of Indonesia) and 6.3% to the economic crisis of the 1930s. Strikingly, 42.2% of the photographs are labeled 'unclear' in terms of their subjects and serve no didactic purposes, the book holds.

The chapters on the Troelstra and Dolle Mina photographs both offer well-documented and fascinating accounts of the production and early circulation of these images. Both chapters offer meticulous information about photographers, where these photographs were printed and how the photographed subjects themselves, so Troelstra and Dolle Mina, used the images. The book only discusses in passing the visual cultures that made both photographs possible and the connections it makes (for instance between Dolle Mina's bared bellies and Marilyn Monroe's billowing dress from the 1955 film *The Seven Year Itch*) sometimes seem arbitrary. Written by a historian, the book largely lacks a vocabulary for both visual and textual analysis, for instance of the narrative structures of the texts surrounding the photographs in each publication. It is particularly the second part of each of these chapters that is less convincing, because of their nearly absent treatment of the photographs' social biography outside of the high school textbooks. Maybe it is too much to ask, after all in this research project almost 4,000 photographs in more than 400 books were coded! Yet of these 4,000 only two are analyzed in some depth. What are missing are essentially two elements. First of all, an account of the broader social-historical context. For instance, in the Troelstra chapter, we read nothing about the history of social democracy in the Netherlands after 1918, of changing conceptions of socialism in the Netherlands or on the collapse of the Soviet Union. Instead, no more than an enumeration is offered of the photograph's return in the public sphere, after which the book brings the reader directly to the schoolbooks and their editors. There, the focus is too much on individual choices and not enough on social and cultural processes and the ensuing dynamics of cultural remembrance. In these latter analyses, the second lack of these chapters becomes clear, namely that they do not understand cultural memory as a product of the present. Instead of describing the (perhaps) changing meanings of these photographs in school books between 1970 and 2000 and analyzing these changes within a broader, historical framework, the book limits itself to pointing out 'historical errors', particularly in the usage of Troelstra's 1912 photograph to illustrate a 1918 event. The interviews with the schoolbooks' gatekeepers thereby offer worthwhile views of selection processes, but the book treats their decisions as individual and autonomous and not as conditioned by dominant discourses. It is because of this lack of social analysis and an exclusive focus on individual decisions that the book cannot answer its own important question which factors produce an iconic

photograph and ends with the rather disappointing statement that iconic photographs remain mysteries.

All in all, *Canonieke icoonfoto's* has much to offer. What makes it an exciting read is its combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, resulting in well-founded claims about which photographed subjects and which particular photographs return most in the corpus it investigated. The database that has been assembled for this project has been made available for other researchers, meaning that this no doubt time-consuming piece of work can in the future yield even more important results. Students of history, photography and other disciplines, as well as a general audience, will no doubt be inspired by what this book has to offer, in terms of both its methods and its results. Finally, the analyses of the production and initial circulation of the Troelstra and Dolle Mina photographs are exciting and memorable.

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