

Reading from Below and Reading from Above: a Comparison between a Lower Class and an Upper Class Reading Circle, 1815-1830

Abstract 'Material Cultures'

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From 1815 to 1830, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg were forcibly combined into one state: the United Kingdom of the Netherlands. It goes without saying that not all the inhabitants of this new nation were enthusiastic about this 'alliance'. The King however was, and very much so. He also implemented several policies in his kingdom to stimulate cultural unison in the hope to create a true and widely accepted nation-state.

In the early nineteenth century, books were arguably the principal way in which new ideas were transmitted. An analysis of reading habits will show which ideas and themes readers were interested in. In the Netherlands, reading circles were a widespread phenomenon. Members were mostly members of the middle class, which may show a particular interest in certain themes. Surprisingly, in the Hague, the minister of Justice was member of a quite unique upper class reading circle. He was a staunch supporter of the Kings policies. It will be worthwhile to compare the reading habits of this 'ministerial' reading circle with those of an average middle class reading circle. This comparison will present us with an idea about the choices different classes made between transmitted ideas in the United Kingdom of the Netherlands.