“I CAN READ HOLLANDSCH VERY FAIRLY.”
THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN
JAMES MURRAY (1837–1915)
AND PIETER JACOB COSIJN (1840–1899)

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1. Introduction

When it comes to the study of language use throughout the history of English, there is no better research tool than the *Oxford English Dictionary* (henceforth *OED*). The importance of its publication in fascicles from 1884 to 1928 and subsequent supplements and updated editions cannot be overstated, even though scholars have also questioned some of the implicit and explicit biases of the *OED*’s editors and voluntary readers (Brewer 2019). Awareness of the subjectivity of some of the *OED* data has sparked an interest in the history of this ambitious dictionary project (e.g. Willinsky 1994; Mugglestone 2000; Brewer 2007; Gilliver 2016). Scholars have thus far focussed on various aspects of the *OED*’s coming into being, including a biography of its legendary founding editor James A. H. Murray (1837–1915) (Murray 1977), a tracing of the “hidden history” of the *OED* through a study of such unpublished archival material as annotated proofs (Mugglestone 2005), and a popular novelisation of the *OED*’s connection to one of its notable voluntary readers, William Chester Minor (Winchester 1998). This article seeks to contribute to this growing body of *OED* historiography by considering how the *OED*’s editor James Murray sought the help of the Dutch philologist Pieter Jacob Cosijn (1840–1899) through the medium of scholarly correspondence. In doing so, it provides another behind-the-scenes look at the genesis of the most important dictionary of

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1 For examples of how to use the *OED* for historical sociolinguistic research into Late Modern English, see Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2006, 53–75).
the English language and its connection to its Dutch equivalent, the *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* (WNT).

Lynda Mugglestone (2005, xviii–xix) has demonstrated how unpublished archival material may illuminate the elusive working methods of the *OED*'s early editors and collaborators. Scholarly correspondence is particularly suited for this purpose, since scholars relied on letter-writing for collaboration, peer-feedback and the building and sustaining of academic networks (see e.g. Ellis and Kirchberger 2004). Writing about scholarly correspondence in relation to the history of philology more generally, Ton van Kalmthout (2018) has pointed out that the value of letters for the historian of scholarship is threefold. First of all, letters were considered a quick, efficient way to share insights, data and discoveries with colleagues; since the road to publication was often long and expensive, letters were a preferred medium for knowledge transfer and some findings never found their way to print. Secondly, letters allow historians to reconstruct the "ethnology of knowledge," i.e. how ideas developed and in what social and institutional contexts they were disseminated. Lastly, as private documents, letters reveal something of the personalities, ambitions and daily lives of the correspondents (van Kalmthout 2018). As this paper hopes to demonstrate, the correspondence between Murray and Cosijn indeed offers valuable insights into nineteenth-century lexicography and two of its practitioners.

2. Two lexicographers: James Murray and Pieter Jacob Cosijn

The life and career of James A. H. Murray, from teaching at Hawick Grammar School to becoming the primary editor of the *OED*, are well documented, thanks to a biography by his granddaughter Elisabeth (Murray, 1977). Murray was a keen etymologist, polyglot and active member of the Philological Society. His talents made him a suitable candidate to spearhead the Society’s ambitious project to produce a new English dictionary on historical principles that would replace that of Samuel Johnson. He was appointed as the dictionary’s primary editor in 1879 and would continue to serve the dictionary until his death in 1915 (Willinsky 1994, 35–56; Gilliver 2016, 109–329). In his capacity as the main editor of the *OED*, Murray relied on correspondence for much of his work: voluntary readers sent in slips with quotations by post, and Murray negotiated with the publisher and sub-editors via letters (Mugglestone 2005). Murray’s correspondence was so voluminous that the Post Office decided to install a post box outside
Murray’s Oxford residence for his convenience (Gilliver 2016, 268). Part of Murray’s correspondence was devoted to requesting help and support from various scholars unconnected to the OED, whom he credited in his prefatory material as follows:

> Independently of the Readers and Sub-editors already mentioned, I have had constantly to seek advice and assistance on various points, literary, critical, philological, phonological, bibliographical, historical, scientific, and technical. Such advice and assistance has been most liberally given, often by men whose time is much occupied, but whose interest in this under-taking has led them willingly to place some of it at the Editor’s service. (OED Volume I Part I: A–Ant 1884, v)

This statement was followed by a long list of names, including those of such notable philologists as Eduard Sievers, Walter William Skeat and Henry Sweet. In subsequent fascicles, the list was supplemented with the names of other helpful scholars, including one “prof. Cosijn of Leiden” (OED Volume I Part II: Ant–Batten 1885, vi).

Like Murray, Pieter Jacob Cosijn (1840–1899) started his career as a school teacher. During his teaching years, he wrote various textbooks on grammar for pre-university students and set up a journal for etymological and text-critical studies. In 1871, he moved to Leiden in order to join the editorial board of the Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal (WNT), a lexicographical project as ambitious as the OED; it had been initiated by Matthias de Vries (1820–1892) around 1850 and would be finished only in 1998. At the WNT, Cosijn worked on etymologies of various Dutch words and produced a number of important studies on Old Dutch texts, including a set of Old Dutch Psalms. In 1877, Cosijn became Leiden University’s first professor of Old Germanic and Anglo-Saxon and his focus shifted towards Old English. He made his mark in the field of Anglo-Saxon studies with an exhaustive grammar of West-Saxon and a work of textual criticism on the

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2 The bulk of Murray’s correspondence in relation to the OED is kept in more than twenty-four uncatalogued archive boxes as part of the James Murray Papers at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. Part of Murray’s correspondence also survives in the OED archive at Oxford University Press.

3 For a short biography of Cosijn, see Bremmer 1991. I would like to thank Rolf Bremmer for sending me a revised and updated version of his biography of Pieter Jacob Cosijn, as well as for his helpful comments on a draft version of this article.

4 The Taal- en Letterbode, which ran from 1870 to 1875. In 1881, Cosijn initiated the Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsche Taal- en Letterkunde which currently still exists; for Cosijn’s role, see van Anrooij and Ruijsendaal (2000, 305–16).
Old English poem *Beowulf*. Yet, the interest in the etymologies of Dutch words never left him: Cosijn was involved, as an adviser and translator, in the production of the first Dutch etymological dictionary on Neogrammarian principles, the *Etymologisch Woordenboek der Nederlandse Taal* (1884–1892) by the German scholar Johannes Franck (on this dictionary and Cosijn’s involvement, see Cox 1990; Bremmer 1990).

Given Cosijn’s expertise, Murray could not have asked for a better correspondent on etymological matters concerning English words of Dutch origin. Indeed, it is for this category of words in particular that Murray sought Cosijn’s advice, as he put it in his first letter to the Dutch scholar: “I should be glad to be permitted to apply to you occasionally for assistance, especially with words which are (or may be) of Nederlandishe origin” (Murray to Cosijn, 30-04-1884). It is unclear why Murray decided to approach Cosijn out of the blue at the end of April, 1884, and not before. Possibly, he had been advised to contact Cosijn by members of his expanding scholarly network which also included people with whom Cosijn was in correspondence. Perhaps more likely, Cosijn had caught Murray’s attention because the latter had just got his hands on the published first fascicle of Franck’s etymological dictionary of Dutch, written with Cosijn’s assistance. In Murray’s first letter to Cosijn, he expressed his enthusiasm for Franck’s work:

> I have just examined with much interest the 1st part of Dr Franck’s *Etymologisch Woordenboek*, and I am full of admiration of it. Naturally, I have been interested in comparing his treatment of the words with which I

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5 Cosijn’s work on *Beowulf* was translated into English in 1991, see Bremmer, van den Berg and Johnson (1991).

6 Cosijn’s correspondence largely survives in the Leiden University Library; parts of Cosijn’s correspondence have been published and contextualised in a number of recent publications, see Porek (2018a,b), van Baalen (2018) and Eskes and Mudde (2019a,b,c).

7 The full text of the correspondence between Murray and Cosijn is reproduced in the Appendix of this article. References to the correspondence in the main text of the article are to the Appendix.

8 Like Murray, Cosijn corresponded with Henry Sweet, Eduard Sievers and Julius Zupitza (see Bremmer 1991). Murray had met Zupitza two weeks prior to writing to Cosijn, at the Tercentenary Celebrations of Edinburgh University on 15 April, 1884 (Murray 1977, 235). Murray would have heard of Cosijn by 1883 at least, when one of his voluntary helpers at the Dictionary, James Platt Jr, was censured by the Philological Society for plagiarism of Cosijn, Sievers and Sweet; Murray had lent Platt the proofs of Henry Sweet’s *Oldest English Texts*, which had brought the plagiarism to light (van Baalen 2018).
also have had to deal, as aals, aanbeeld, aap, aars, aarts-, abeel, abrikoos, abt, adeler, etc. etc., and I have been delighted to see the resulting harmony.
(Murray to Cosijn, 30-04-1884)

Murray’s apparent ability to peruse a Dutch etymological dictionary demonstrates his affinity with a wide range of languages. In the same letter, Murray tells Cosijn: “In your answer, you may write in Hollandsch, German, or French, as most convenient. I can read Hollandsch very fairly” (Murray to Cosijn, 30-04-1884). All extant postcards sent by Cosijn to Murray were indeed written in Dutch.

Murray’s initial letter was the start of a correspondence which lasted at least until 1887 and has survived only fragmentarily: a mere two letters by Murray to Cosijn are kept in the Special Collections of the Leiden University Library; 9 four postcards by Cosijn were pasted into one of Murray’s old algebra notebooks and are now part of the OED papers at Oxford University Press; 10 and one more postcard by Cosijn was identified in the uncatalogued James Murray Papers at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. 11

3. The correspondence: Etymological advice and disagreement

The extant correspondence between Murray and Cosijn concerns the etymology of the following English words: arsedine, asparagus, (h)arquebus, asquint, beg, Beghard, biltong, boor and calkin. Interestingly, some of Cosijn’s postcards to Murray were cited in the etymology sections of these entries in the OED and remain so until this day. For the word Beghard, for instance, the etymology section cites Cosijn’s letter in translation:

An extraordinary error, which appears even in Littré, 12 refers it to an alleged Flemish beggen ‘to beg,’ which never existed. (On the contrary, Old French begard may be the source of the English beggar and beg; see these words.) It has been by some referred directly to the adjective bègue ‘stammering’ as

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9 Leiden, University Library, Special Collections, LTK 1762.
10 Thanks are due to Beverley McCullough, archivist of the OED papers at Oxford University Press, for giving me access to these postcards.
11 In a personal communication, Peter Gilliver, historian of the OED, first made me aware of the existence of this letter, found in box 7/2 of the James Murray Papers at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. The letter is not included in the incomplete index to the correspondence in box 25 of the James Murray Papers.
if it meant originally ‘stammerer,’ and has been ‘derived’ in various other ways. But its origination in the name of Lambert Bègue is ‘now established beyond all dispute’ (Prof. Cosijn). *(OED Volume I: A–B, 1888, s.v. Beghard)*

Er bestaat geen nl. of vlaamsch werkwoord *beggen*. Dr. De Jager in zijn *Woordenboek der Frequentatieven in het Nederlandsch*, I, 15 *vermoedt* een ww. *beggen* (in den zin van *bägen*, *bäggen*, een Zwitsersch woord zie Stalder I, 121) als simplex van *beggelen* ‘babbeln.’ Maar het woord komt niet voor. Littré is geen autoriteit. De afleiding van *begijn*, t.w.v. Lamb. Bègue, is boven bedenking verheven. (Cosijn to Murray, 07-11-1885)

The *OED* entry’s reference “(Prof. Cosijn)” is vague and it is only because of Cosijn’s postcards that reconstruction of this reference is possible. In the etymology section for the related verb *beg*, the reference to the content of Cosijn’s postcard is even more obscure: “The Flemish *beggen* appealed to by Littré under Beguin has no existence (Cosijn)” *(OED Volume I: A–B 1888, s.v. beg)*. In the case of *beghard* and *beg*, the references to Cosijn are retained in the online version of the OED, which, by the time of writing this article, still features the original entries *(OED Online, s.vv. beghard, beg)*.

By contrast, the entry *boor* used to include a reference to one of Cosijn’s postcards but as of June 2019 it no longer does. The original entry contained the following information about the Middle Dutch cognate of *boor*:

> MDu. *ghebure*, *ghebuer*, and *buer*; also (late) *geboer*, which was not properly a Du. form, but probably, according to Cosijn, adopted from Frisian, or, according to Franck, from the LG. on the eastern frontier of the Netherlands. This last is in mod.Du. *boer*. *(OED: Volume I: A–B 1888, s.v. boor)*

While the reference to Franck can be traced to the *Etymologisch Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* (1884–1892, s.v. *boor*), the reference

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13 Lambert Bègue was a twelfth-century priest from Liège, founder of the Beguine order.
16 “No Dutch or Flemish word *beggen* exists. Dr. De Jager in his *Woordenboek der Frequentatieven in het Nederlands*, I, 15, suspects a verb *beggen* (with the meaning of *bägen*, *bäggen*, a Swiss word, see Stalder I, 121) as a simplex of *beggelen* ‘to chat’. But the word does not occur. Littré is not an authority. The derivation of *begijn* from Lambert Bègue is established beyond all dispute.”
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In the current version of the entry for *boor*, from June 2019, the information about a possibly Frisian origin of Middle Dutch *geboer* no longer occurs *(OED Online, s.v. boor)*.

In at least two entries, Murray had used information provided to him by Cosijn but failed to mention his correspondent’s name. A case in point is the entry for *biltong*, which uses a quotation from Changuion’s *De Nederduitsche Taal in Zuid-Afrika Hersteld* (Rotterdam, 1848), provided by Cosijn:

> Het woord *biltong* is niet Nederlandsch, maar uitsluitend Kaapsch. Changuion in zijne Grammatica (Rotterdam 1848) verklaart het als samengesteld uit *bil* en *tong*:

> ‘Rookvleesch, aldus genaamd omdat het veelal uit een bilstuk gesneden wordt, en in gedaante eenigzins met eene gerookte ossentong overeen komt.’ (p. IX). (Cosijn to Murray, 05-05-1886)

Similarly, the etymology section for *calkin* uses information provided by Cosijn but without attribution:

> Possibly going back to a Middle English *“calkain, < Old French calcain heel < Latin calcâneum heel; but the earliest form *kakun* agrees with the Dutch

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17 “Middle Dutch *boer* does not occur, its full form *geboer* does, alongside *gebeur* or the form *buur*. According to Franck, the *oe* stems from the pronunciation of Eastern (Saxon or Guelder) Dutchmen, for whom Old Germanic *à = oe*, English *oo* luidt. But the form can also be Frisian, which seems more likely to me.”

18 “The word *biltong* is not Dutch, but solely Cape Dutch [= Afrikaans]. Changuion in his grammar (Rotterdam 1848) explains it as being compounded from *bil* and *tong*: ‘Smoked meat, named as such because it is mostly cut from the buttock, and in appearance resembles a smoked neat’s tongue.’”
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*kalkoen*, Middle Dutch *calcoen* ‘*ungula,*’ < Latin *calx*. (*OED Volume II: C* 1893, s.v. *calkin*)

*Calcoen* komt driemaal voor in Maerlants *Historie van Troyen (= ungula equi)*. Afgeleid van lat. *calx* met het suffix -ôn-. (Cosijn to Murray, 26-08-1887)

As with *Beghard* and *beg*, the information provided by Cosijn for the entries *biltong* and *calkin* is still found in the online version of the *OED* by the time of writing this article (*OED Online*, s.vv. *biltong*, *calkin*). Cosijn’s replies to Murray’s inquiries about the words *arsedine*, *asparagus*, *(h)arquebus* and *asquint* have not come down to us and it is, therefore, impossible to reconstruct how Murray dealt with the information Cosijn provided.

Aside from demonstrating the origin of some of the etymological information in the *OED*, the correspondence between Cosijn and Murray also demonstrates the latter’s meticulousness in drafting his dictionary entries. In his first letter to Cosijn, Murray apologetically declares “Accept of my apologies for thus troubling you: only the ambition to attain as nearly as possible to truth impels me” (Murray to Cosijn, 30-04-1884). Indeed, Murray does not show himself easily convinced: apparently unsatisfied with Cosijn’s initial answer to his question whether the French word *haquebute* (whence English *(h)arquebus*) might derive from Dutch or Flemish, he repeated the question in his second letter: “I hoped to find a Flemish form intermediate between *Hakenbüchse* and the French. Is O. F. *haekbuyse* certainly from French?” (Murray to Cosijn, 10-05-1884). Similarly, after having received Cosijn’s opinion on the etymology of the word *Beghard*, Murray had apparently written to Matthias de Vries to double-check. De Vries’s reply was short and snappy: “What Mr. Cosijn wrote you on the subject, was the expression of our common opinion” (de Vries to Murray, 04-01-1886; cited in Stuurman 1994, 57). Clearly, Murray was not prepared to skate on thin ice when he weighed the advice of correspondents and this may have contributed to the lengthy process of bringing the *OED* to print.

When it came to matters of etymology, Cosijn, in turn, often voiced his disagreement with his friend and collaborator Johannes Franck. Despite the fact that the two had worked together for the etymological dictionary of Dutch, Cosijn often tells Murray that his opinion differs from Franck’s: “De etymologie van dr. Franck [...] deugt niet” (Cosijn to Murray, 07-11-1885)

19 “*Calcoen* occurs three times in Maerlant’s *Historie van Troye (= ungula equi)*. Derived from Latin *calx* with the suffix -ôn-.”

20 Cf. *OED Online*, s.vv. *arquebus*, *hackbush*, which indeed suggests a Dutch or Low German origin for the French *harquebuse*. 
and “Met boort heeft Franck zich vergist” (Cosijn to Murray, n.d. but after 22-09-1886). Cosijn’s letters to Murray are a testimony of the growing tension between Cosijn and Franck over the etymologies of words, a tension that would ultimately culminate in Cosijn demanding that his name be taken off the eventual title page of Franck’s etymological dictionary (Eskes and Mudde, 2019c). In a letter to Murray, Cosijn clearly disassociates himself from Franck’s etymological opinions:

Het feit, dat dr. Francks naam alleen op den titel voorkomt, bedoelt niets anders dan dat hij uitsluitend voor den inhoud aansprakelijk is. Ik mag adviseeren, maar daaraan is geene verantwoordelijkheid verbonden. Voor etymologische questies kunnen zelfs twee menschen niet altijd gelijkelijk denken. (Cosijn to Murray, n.d. but after 22-09-1886)

Cosijn’s outright criticism of his friend Franck’s work demonstrates a point made by Ton van Kalmthout about scholarly correspondence in general: “letter writers were often more candid than they could afford to be elsewhere” (2018, 162–63).

4. Cosijn as a link between the OED and the WNT

The correspondence between Murray and Cosijn appears to have been instrumental in establishing an exchange of dictionaries between the OED and its Dutch equivalent, the WNT. From Murray’s second letter, we can surmise that Cosijn had mediated between Murray and the main editor of the WNT, Matthias de Vries:

It will give me great pleasure to make the exchange of Dictionaries which Prof. De Vries proposes. What do you think will be the best way of sending them from London to Leiden and vice versa? (Murray to Cosijn, 10-05-1884)

21 “The etymology proposed by Dr Franck … is no good.”; “Concerning boort, Franck has made a mistake.”
22 An additional reason for Cosijn to distance himself from Franck’s work was that Franck’s dictionary relied too heavily on the Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache (1883) by Friedrich Kluge, almost to the point of plagiarism (see Cox, 1990).
23 “The fact that Dr Franck’s name is the only one to appear on the title page means nothing other than that only he is responsible for its contents. I can advise, but there is no responsibility connected to this. For etymological issues not even two people can think alike all the time.”
24 For a comparison between the OED and the WNT, see Osselton (2000).
This initial exchange of dictionaries was the start of a fruitful collaboration between two of the most ambitious dictionary projects of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

As Frits Stuurman (1994) has outlined, the exchange of dictionary fascicles continued until the OED’s completion in 1928, even though both parties occasionally lost track of how the exchange had been established. Upon request of one of Matthias de Vries’s successors at the WNT, Jacob Wijbrand Muller (1858-1945), Murray himself recalled with difficulty Cosijn’s mediating role between the WNT and OED. To ensure the continuation of the exchange, Murray sent over Cosijn’s letter for inspection:

I have at once looked to see if I could find the letter in which Dr De Vries proposed to me the exchange; but no such letter was to be found in my letter-books, and no correspondence with Dr de Vries until a much later date. My own memory of the matter was quite indistinct, and I thought I should have to write and give you meekly my impression; but in pondering over the matter last night, it recalled to me that the original proposal was not made directly by Dr de Vries, but by someone else, and a further research today has disclosed this letter of Prof. Cosijn, which I have taken out of my letter-book (tearing it in the process) in order to send it for your inspection. When done with, please return it. If prof. Cosijn keeps letters which he receives, he will have my answer acceding to his proposal.

From the letter it would seem that the parts of the Dutch Dictionary are sent me by the Redaction and not by Dr De Vries personally, & that the copy of the Eng. Dict. belongs to the Redacteuren, I suppose I asked Cosijn how to address it. I think you also have advised me of the sending of parts of the Dutch Dictionary, on some occasions.

I shall of course continue to send you the parts of the new English Dictionary. When the next is ready, I should either have addressed it to you, or written to ask how you wish it addressed. Please inform me as to this.

I did not know anything about the Dutch Dictionary until Prof. Cosijn thus wrote to me about it, nor did I (ignorant man!) know anything then of Dr. De Vries or of his relation to the work.

Yours very truly,

J. A. H. Murray

25 James A. H. Murray to Jacob Wijbrand Muller, 09-09-1892. Leiden, University Library, Special Collections, LTK 2018 M 54.
Unfortunately, the letter by Cosijn that Murray sent to Muller has not come down to us. As such, the scholarly correspondence between Cosijn and Murray does not only illustrate how such letters were fundamental in establishing scholarly relationships, it also demonstrates the volatility of this type of source material; its survival is highly influenced by its perceived utility to later generations and, therefore, correspondence between scholars is often incomplete.

5. Conclusion

The correspondence between Murray and Cosijn provides an intriguing backstage look at one of the most important lexicographical projects of the past two centuries. In most cases, Cosijn’s advice appears to have been heeded by Murray and often the correspondence alone allows for the reconstruction of how the *OED* came to include some of its information. The correspondence was also instrumental in establishing a connection between the *OED* and the *WNT*. Murray acknowledged his debt to Cosijn by adding his name to the list of scholarly correspondents in the prefatory material of the *OED* as “prof. Cosijn of Leiden” in *Volume I part II: Ant–Batten* (1885) and as “Prof. E. H. [sic!] Cosijn of Leiden” in *OED Volume I: A & B* (1888). On the basis of the misspelling of Cosijn’s initials in the 1888 volume, Stuurman (1994) has hypothesized that the relationship between Murray and Cosijn may not have been too personal. Be that as it may, the fact that Murray saw fit to cite some of Cosijn’s letters in his entries to the *OED* suggests a measure of respect for the Dutch scholar. This regard for Cosijn is confirmed by a note in James Murray’s hand, written in the top margin of a postcard by Cosijn on the etymology of the Dutch word *calcoen* ‘calkin’: “Prof. Cosijn of Leiden - Greatest Eng. scholar of Holland.” High

26 A reference to a letter by Cosijn dated to 5 May, 1884 survives in a hand-written index to Murray’s correspondence in box 25 of the James Murray Papers at the Bodleian Library, Oxford. However, this letter cannot be found in the archive at present (Lucy McCann, senior archivist at the Bodleian Library, personal communication). This letter would have been written 5 days after Murray’s initial letter to Cosijn on 30 April, Murray’s second letter, dated 10 May of the same year; starts with “Many thanks for your very kind letter.” The now-lost letter of 5 May likely contained Cosijn’s thoughts on the words *arsedine, asparagus* and *(h)arquebus* that Murray had inquired after.

27 On the role of correspondence on scholarly networks and the issue of fragmentary survival, see, for example, the various contributions to Porck, van Baalen and Mann (2018).
praise for the first of many excellent English philology professors at Leiden University!\textsuperscript{28}


\textsuperscript{28} Following Cosijn, notable Leiden University professors with a focus on English philology include Christiaan Cornelis Uhlenbeck, Anton Adriaan Prins, Noel Edward Osselton, Rolf H. Bremmer Jr and Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade.
Appendix: Annotated edition of the correspondence between Murray and Cosijn

The edition below is a semi-diplomatic rendering of the correspondence between James Murray and Pieter Jacob Cosijn. The following guiding principles have been used for this edition:

- Original spelling and capitalisation are preserved, but the punctuation is normalized to aid the modern reader (e.g. full stops have been added after abbreviations and at the end of sentences).
- Murray and Cosijn inconsistently underlined lemmata, book titles and phrases in languages other than the main language of the letter; in this edition, these features are consistently indicated by the use of italics.
- Underlining for emphasis in the original has been retained.
- The letters and postcards are numbered in chronological order.
- Changes and corrections by Murray and Cosijn themselves are not noted in the edition; the text represents the final version of the letters.
- Explanatory notes as well as Modern English renderings of Cosijn’s Dutch postcards are provided in the footnotes.

1. Murray to Cosijn (30-04-1884)²⁹

Mr James A. H. Murray LL. D
London
30 April 1884

Dear Sir,

You may perhaps have heard of the new English Dictionary, which I am preparing. I should be glad to be permitted to apply to you occasionally for assistance, especially with words which are (or may be) of Nederlandish origin. In the ‘proof’ which I send to you, the word Arsedine has completely foiled my efforts to trace it. As it is also called Dutch gold, ‘Deutsches gold’ or ‘Nederlandsche goud’, it is possible that you may be able to help me with it.

²⁹ Leiden, University Library, Special Collections, LTK 1762.
2) *Asparagus*. Barnaby Googe (1580) in his translation of Conrad Heresbach’s *Husbandrie*,\(^{30}\) says ‘the Dutch men call it *Sperages* and *Spiritus*, because it comes up of itself.’ Now *Sperage* was the regular name of *Asparagus* in English from 1530 to 1700. Do you know of any old form like *Sperages* in German or Nederlandsch? One thinks of *Spargen, Spargel, Sparge, Sparger*, but none of these suit. I should desire *sperage* from Middle French *esperage*, formed in the common med. Lat. *Spassagus*, vel Ital. *sparágio, sparácio*.

Accept of my apologies for thus troubling you: only the ambition to attain as nearly as possible to truth impels me.

In your answer, you may write in Hollandsch, German, or French, as most convenient. I can read Hollandsch very fairly.

I have just examined with much interest the 1st part of Dr Franck’s *Etymologisch Woordenboek*,\(^{31}\) and I am full of admiration of it. Naturally, I have been interested in comparing his treatment of the words with which I also have had to deal, as *aal, aanbeeld, aap, aars, aarts-, abeel, abrikoos, abt, adeler*, etc. etc., and I have been delighted to see the resulting harmony.

I had almost forgotten: Can you also give me the old Nederl. vel Vlaamsche forms intermediate between German *Hakenbüchse* and Fr. *haquebute, harquebuze*. I believe the French was taken from Flemish, and not directly from German, and I should like to know all the 15th 16th c. Flemish forms. I have seen *haeckebuyse* given as one.

Yours very truly,

James A. H. Murray

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Many thanks for your very kind letter. It will give me great pleasure to make the exchange of Dictionaries which Prof. De Vries proposes. What do you think will be the best way of sending them from London to Leiden and vice versa? I have, as you know, only Part I ready; I do not know how much of the Groote Ndl. Woordenboek has been published.

I want to know all that you can tell me of the history and etymology of schuin, schuinen, schuinte. which is the parent form? What are the Germanic affinities? How early is schuinte? The latter seems to me the only probable source of Eng. asquint 'scheel, loensch', which appears already in 1225 or 1230 in Ancre. Riwle. \[33\] Biholdeð luft and asquint. The separate 'squint adv. and adj. was a much later aphetic form of asquint; thence still later (1600) squint vb. and sb. Hence, asquint is the original form in English of which we have evidence and this makes one think of schuinte, and desire to know its age and history. Geschuind also suggests itself. I cannot suggest how a Hollandsch or Flemish word could appear in Eng. by 1200; but there seems to be no help from O. E. (=Ags.) or any other source. Please tell me what you think of the matter.

Yours very truly,

J. A. H. Murray

Mill Hill, London, N.W.

[in the margin:] I hoped to find a Flemish form intermediate between Hakenbüchse and the French. Is O. F. haekbuysé certainly from French?

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\[32\] Leiden, University Library, Special Collections, LTK 1762.

\[33\] Ancrene Riwle, an early thirteenth-century monastic guide for anchoresses.
W. H.,


Hoogachtend heb ik de eer te zijn uw ever Cosijn.

Leiden 7 Nov. 85.

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34 Oxford, OUP Archive, OED Papers. “Dear Sir, no Dutch or Flemish word *beggen* exists. Dr. de Jager in his *Woordenboek der Frequentatieven in het Nederlands*, I, 15, suspects a verb *beggen* (like *bägen, bäggen*, a Swiss word, see Stalder I, 121) as a simplex of *beggelen* ‘to chat’. But the word does not occur. Littré is not an authority. The derivation from *begin*, from Lambert Bègue, is established beyond all dispute. The etymology proposed by dr Franck (*Et. Wdb. 69*) is no good. Sincerely I have the honour to be your ever Cosijn.”


38 I.e. Lambert Bègue, a twelfth-century priest from Liège, founder of the Beguine order.
4. Cosijn to Murray (05-05-1886)\textsuperscript{39}

W. H.,

Het woord \textit{biltong} is \textit{nieu} Nederlandsch, maar uitsluitend Kaapsch. Changuion in zijne Grammatica (Rotterdam 1848)\textsuperscript{40} verklaart het als samengesteld uit \textit{bil} en \textit{tong}:
‘Rookvleesch, aldus genaamd omdat het veelal uit een bilstuk gesneden wordt, en in gedaante eenigzins met eene gerookte ossentong overeen komt.’ (p. IX)

Cosijn

Leiden 5 Mei 86.

\textsuperscript{39} Oxford, OUP Archive, \textit{OED} Papers. “Dear Sir, the word \textit{biltong} is not Dutch, but solely Cape [South African]. Changuion in his grammar (Rotterdam 1848) explains it as being compounded from \textit{bil} and \textit{tong}: ‘Smoked meat, named as such because it is mostly cut from the buttock, and in appearance resembles a smoked neat’s tongue.’”

5. Cosijn to Murray (22-09-1886)\textsuperscript{41}

W. H.,


Hoogachtend,
Uw ever
Cosijn

Leiden 22 Sept. 86

\textsuperscript{41} Oxford, OUP Archive, \textit{OED} Papers. “Dear Sir, Middle Dutch boer does not occur, it’s full form geboer does, alongside gebuer or the form buer. According to Franck, the oe stems from the pronunciation of Eastern (Saxon or Guelder) Dutchmen, for whom Old Germanic û = oe, English oo. But the form can also be Frisian, which seems more likely to me. See also Verdam, \textit{Mnl. Wdb.} I, 1486. It is also unclear whether Middle Dutch û was always pronounced as û, so that the spelling buer does not form conclusive proof. Professor de Vries would like to know whether you have received the last two fascicles of the Dutch Dictionary [WNT]. Sincerely, your ever Cosijn.”

\textsuperscript{42} J. Verdam and E. Verwijs (Eds.), \textit{Middelnederlandsch Woordenboek} I (1885).
6. Cosijn to Murray (undated; after 22-09-1886)\textsuperscript{43}

De Mnl periode eindigt ±1500. Wanneer de korte vorm boer het eerst voorkomt, kan ik U niet zeggen, maar daar geboer Mnl. is, kan eng. bour zeer goed vóór 1551 met wegwerping van ge- ontleend zijn. Maar de vorm boer moet oud zijn: het Oudfriesch kent dien en daaraan hebben wij dien te danken.

Met boort heeft Franck zich vergist: hij had moeten schrijven: mnl. (vroeg mnl!)

Het feit, dat dr. Francks naam alleen op den titel voorkomt, bedoelt niets anders dan dat hij uitsluitend voor den inhoud aansprakelijk is. Ik mag adviseeren, maar daaraan is geene verantwoordelijkheid verbonden. Voor etymologische questies kunnen zelfs twee menschen niet altijd gelijkgelijk denken.

Cosijn

\textsuperscript{43} Oxford, OUP Archive, \textit{OED Papers}. “The Middle Dutch period ends ±1500. When the short form boer first occurs, I cannot tell you, but since geboer is Middle Dutch, English bour could very well be borrowed before 1551 with the omission of the ge. But the form boer must be old: it is known in Old Frisian and we owe it to that.

Concerning boort, Franck has made a mistake: he should have written: Middle Dutch (early Middle Dutch!).

The fact that Dr Franck’s name is the only one to appear on the title page means nothing other than that only he is responsible for its contents. I can advise, but there is no responsibility connected to this. For etymological issues not even two people can think alike all the time.”
7. Cosijn to Murray (26-08-1887)\textsuperscript{44}

W. H.,

Calcoen komt driemaal voor in Maerlants Historie van Troyen (= ungula equi).\textsuperscript{45} Afgeleid van lat. calx met het suffix -ôn-: vgl. fra.caleçon, ofra. chausson en ons harpoen.

Hoogachtend U.d.d.
Cosijn

Leiden 26 Aug. 87\textsuperscript{46}

References


\textsuperscript{44} Oxford, Bodleian Library, James Murray papers, box 7/2. “Dear Sir, calcoen occurs three times in Maerlant’s Historie van Troye (= ungula equi). Derived from Latin calx with the suffix -ôn-: cf. French caleçon, Old French chausson and our harpoen. Sincerely, your humble servant Cosijn.”

\textsuperscript{45} Reference to the thirteenth-century Dutch poet Jacob van Maerlant’s lengthy poem Historie van Troyen, an adaptation of the twelfth-century Roman de Troie by Benoît de Sainte Maure.

\textsuperscript{46} Added in the top margin, in the hand of James Murray: “Prof. Cosijn of Leiden - Greatest Eng. scholar of Holland.”
I Can Read Hollandsch Very Fairly.


Porck, Thijs, Amos van Baalen and Jodie Mann, ed. 2018. Scholarly Correspondence on Medieval Germanic Language and Literature, special issue of Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik 78(2–3). Leiden: Brill.

