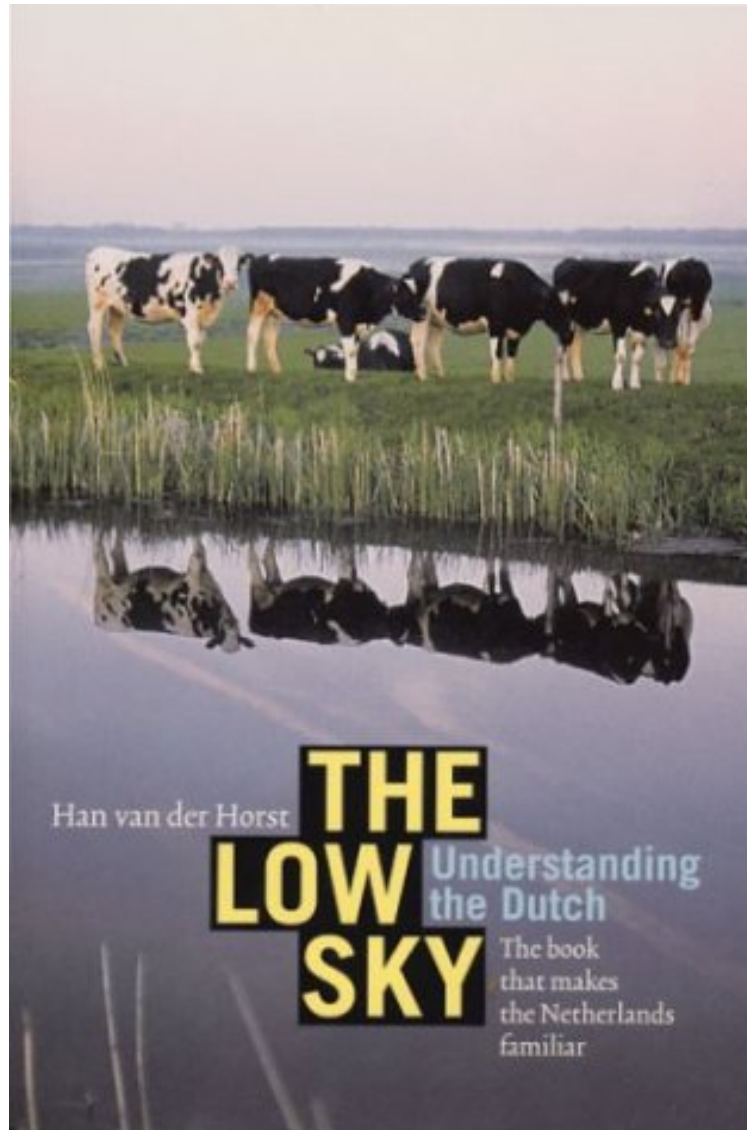


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The Low Sky: Understanding the Dutch

Han van Der Horst

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Han van Der Horst : The Low Sky: Understanding the Dutch before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Low Sky: Understanding the Dutch:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. The author's takeBy (((Marco Buendia)))This is an entirely non-sentimental analysis of the Dutch people. It is not a description of Holland, not treating the landscape, or in more than summary fashion, its history or foreign relations.The books is chaptered using headings that are presumptively prime traits of the Dutch:EgalitarianUtilitarianOrganizedTrade-orientedPrivacy-minded.This would seem to offer a workable

structure of this psychological portrait of the people. As it happens, however, the author will take the aspect named in the chapter heading as a starting off point, and proceed to wander off into other concepts, finally returning to the ostensible matter at hand. In the process, the reader may learn a lot, so there isn't much ground for complaint. The Dutch sound quite conflicted, as most peoples do when they have been analyzed. Americans are probably unsurprised by the idea that a mercantile people would be more than commonly egalitarian. It might strike the English as odd, though. "Organized" and egalitarian might seem more at loggerheads, with "privacy-minded" straining the whole a bit more. But who expects "intelligent design" in the case of a nation, whatever they think about evolution. It only sort of makes sense. One element missing here: trust. How far does social trust extend in Dutch society? It seems to me that trust, or the lack of it, is an important factor in any specific culture. It seems to me that Holland is marked, or was until recently, by strong social trust, as, say, Mexico is not. The author scarcely addresses this, explicitly, though it lurks in much of what he says. How do the Dutch feel about education, however defined? Only touched upon, now and again. Where does intellect stand, in the Netherlands? Americans generally despise intellectuals. How do the Dutch feel? Any observer will probably find the author's list lacking, in some way. There's quite a lot of Dutch thrown in here, mostly used as technical terms, e.g. "overleg" and "beleid". Now and again, however, the author indulges what is clearly a love of music-hall or pop stuff and gives us long ditties from popular singers, when it seemed to him that they illustrated national traits or preoccupations. I have to admit that sometimes I didn't see the point. (These bits and blobs of Dutch are translated as well, don't worry.) There is an epilogue: "The land that is ticking like a time-bomb?" This last deals with issues of immigration, mostly from Muslim countries, as might be expected. Here the author takes a middle course; readers will not find a prediction of utter catastrophe. The author, now in late middle age, displays little of himself, but that little suggests that he is very keen not to have fallen prey to the Dutch intellectual trends of the last generation. E.g. he is quite skeptical of the environmental movement, referring to the Green Party as "radicals", and referring to the killer of Pym Fortuyn as an "environmental activist", whereas, at the time, he was usually described as an animal rights activist. The author shows more respect for aforementioned Fortuyn, and, to a lesser degree, Wilder, as they are rather more in the ascendency of late, even Fortuyn, who, like the American JFK, has perhaps gained in validity by the weight of the bullet. The book is randomly and decoratively illustrated. Faces are a big factor, perhaps because it was thought that the book's biggest market would be the USA, where faces are currently all the rage, or, perhaps, the Dutch have now caught that American bug as well. The author spends little or no time comparing the country to those countries with which it might usefully be compared. Denmark, Belgium, and, further afield, the UK, Germany and even Canada the USA come to mind. It seems to me that comparison often throws the thing-itself into relief, but perhaps the author had decided on principle not to do this. Or maybe it just would have made an already substantial book longer, in his or the publisher's view. The book is to be recommended for those who have a settled interest in the Netherlands. It will be tedious, and perhaps confusing, for those who don't already have their own ideas about the country. For those who already know something substantial about the place, it will be edifying reading. My copy was the most recent edition of several; if a reader were really taken with the book, it would be interesting to go back and see how it's changed over the years.

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By Customer Before I ever visited the Netherlands I was fascinated by the fact that they'd legalized prostitution and de facto legalized pot (and would later become among the first nations to legalize euthanasia and gay marriage). I wondered if the Dutch were more enlightened than other people or if these were examples of a quirk in their system (the way legal abortions were a quirk of the American system, rather than a result of democracy). While in Amsterdam I read *The Low Sky*, and learned to my delight that these advancements were the result of a centuries-old tradition that virtually forces Dutch society to make rational, rather than emotional decisions (the overleg). I strongly recommend this book to anyone who wishes human beings could be more rational in their decision-making processes, and how that can be achieved.

8 of 13 people found the following review helpful. Very revealing

By Customer This book is a very interesting and very revealing analysis of Dutch culture and Dutch character. Although Horst is an insider, he seems to be well aware of the kinds of questions that outsiders have about Dutch culture. As an insider, he has a thorough understanding of what makes the Dutch tick. The book is organized into the 6 broad tropes that anthropologists at the Tropen Museum in Amsterdam have identified as characterizing the Dutch: egalitarian, utilitarian, organized, trade-oriented, privacy-minded, and having a debt of honor. At times, however, this division seems to be overlaid onto the book, rather than providing an essential framework. Inside each chapter, Horst meanders through a wide range of information, interweaving such details as a synopsis of Dutch history, an analysis of modern politics and politicians, lyrics from popular music, and sample lonely heart classifieds. At all times, the focus is on the Dutch mindset, Dutch attitudes, and where they come from. I found the book to be very informative, and I would recommend it to anyone planning a long or short visit in the Netherlands.