

Letter to the Editor

Willem Steur's letter about Camus' Amsterdam has inspired another contributor. Her letter follows:

8, 17-1994

Sir,

In your Spring 1994 issue, page 27, Mr. Willem Steur gives one of the etymologies of *Jordaan*, the name of an old quarter of Amsterdam. I asked for information at the department of Onomastics of the Meertens-Institute, an institute of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences and Letters. The head of that department told me that the theory that this name is a corruption of the French word *jardin* has been abandoned. The most plausible etymology is that *Jordaan* is identical with the name of the river spoken of in the Bible. In texts of the end of the 17th century the meaning is clear: well-to do people lived on the city side of the *Prinsengracht*, in the Promised Land, while the poor lived on the other side.

A third etymology, nowadays also abandoned, is that the quarter is named after a big house of the same name, located in the quarter. It was assumed that the house was marked by a signboard, representing the river Jordan. To mark a house by a signboard was the normal way before the adoption of street names and house numbers. The quarter has changed a lot since the 17th century, especially after the first world war. Nowadays it is fashionable, especially for artists and students, to live in this quarter. Most of the former inhabitants have left it.

Best regards,

Jo Daan
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