



## MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER – NOMINATION FORM

### Belgium - Business archives of the Officina Plantiniana

The Officina Plantiniana can be regarded as the most important printing and publishing house that Belgium has ever had. It was founded in 1555 by Christoffel Plantin who, in one of the most turbulent periods of Western history, succeeded in making himself the greatest typographer of his day, and was continued until 1876 by his descendants, the Moretuses. The rise and the heyday of the Officina in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries coincide with an era in which scholars from the Low Countries - present-day Belgium and Holland - were able to play an extremely important part in the development of Western thought. The history of the Officina Plantiniana is therefore more than an account of the fortunes of a large capitalist enterprise: it also reflects and is part of the great cultural currents of the West. Since the business archives of the house have, providentially, been preserved almost intact it is possible to illuminate three hundred years of book history in all its aspects and problems with an incredible wealth of detailed and accurate data.

### PART A – ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

#### 1. Identity and Location

- 1.1 Name of documentary heritage  
Business archives of the Officina Plantiniana
- 1.2 Country  
Belgium
- 1.3 State, province or region  
Antwerp
- 1.4 Address  
Museum Plantin-Moretus  
Vrijdagmarkt 22  
2000 Antwerpen
- 1.5 Name of organization or institution (if appropriate)  
Museum Plantin-Moretus

#### 2. Legal Information

- 2.1 Owner (name and contact details)  
Stad Antwerpen [The City of Antwerp]  
Het college van Burgemeester en schepenen  
Grote Markt 1  
2000 Antwerpen

## 2.2 Custodian (name and contact details)

Dr. Francine de Nave  
 Director  
 Museum Plantin-Moretus  
 Vrijdagmarkt 22  
 2000 Antwerpen

Tel: +32(0)3/221.14.55  
 Fax: +32(0)3/221.14.60  
 Email: francine.denave@cs.antwerpen.be

## 2.3 Legal status ( if different from 2.1)

(a) category of ownership (e.g. public, corporate or private)  
 Public

(b) details of legal and administrative provisions for the preservation of the documentary heritage  
 The Flemish Community declared the Museum Plantin-Moretus in its entirety a protected monument on July 10th, 1997. On November 24th, 1997, the city council of Antwerp committed itself to preserving the permanent museological destination of the museum and its collections.

(c) accessibility  
 The archives can be consulted every working day from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the reading room of the museum. Microfilms can be ordered by written request.

(d) copyright status  
 The City of Antwerp / Museum Plantin-Moretus

## 2.4 Responsible administration

details should be given of the mechanism or organization already established, or to be established, to ensure the proper management of the documentary heritage

City of Antwerp.

## 3. Identification

### 3.1 Description and inventory

The archives comprise the old bookkeeping of the Officina Plantiniana, the bookkeeping of the diverse ventures of the Moretuses and their relatives, the remains of the correspondence of Christoffel Plantin and the Moretuses with their business relations and the household archives of Christoffel Plantin and the Moretuses.

The archives consist of 1382 registers, 990 volumes and 187 boxes of miscellanea (including 1385 documents on parchment). Together the archives take up 158 running meters.

Typographical Archives (644) can be further catalogued under the following headings:

“Grands livres” (49), Journals (33), Bookselling (83), Booksellers (109), Spain (& Portugal) (46), Frankfurt (8), Catalogues (56) Bookbinders (30), Journeyman (43), Chapel and internal organisation (14), Guild (12), Printing shop (35), Paper (25), Punches (16), Illustrators (21), Correspondence (64).

### 3.2 Bibliographic/Registration details

-Jan Denucé, *Museum Plantin-Moretus. Inventaris op het Plantijnsch Archief. Inventaire des Archives Plantiniennes*, Antwerp, 1926.

-Complemented by Dr. Chris Coppens, *The Plantin Moretus archives: an index to Jan Denucé's inventory of 1926*, in: *De Gulden Passer. Jaarboek van de Vereniging der Antwerpse bibliofielen*, 76-77 (1998-1999), Antwerp, 2000, p. 333-360. (appendix 1)

History, context and description by Dr. Francine de Nave, *Het Museum Plantin-Moretus te Antwerpen. II: De Archieven (Publications of the Museum Plantin-Moretus/Municipal Printroom, nr. 2)*, Antwerp, 1985. (appendix 2)

3.3 Visual documentation, if appropriate (for example, photographs or a video of the documentary heritage)  
see digital images attached to the nomination form

### 3.4 History

The archives are the product of Christoffel Plantin (ca. 1520-1589) and his successors the Moretuses, who kept record of all activity in their printing and publishing business “The Officina Plantiniana” from 1555 until the second half of the 19th century. Their last owner, Sir Edward Moretus, sold the house and all its belongings to the City of Antwerp on April 20th, 1876.

3.5 Bibliography: Please indicate up to three published sources describing the proposed documentary heritage.

Voet, L., *The golden compasses. A history and evaluation of the printing and publishing activities of the Officina Plantiniana at Antwerp*, 2 vols., Amsterdam-London-New York, 1969-1972.

Max Rooses and J. Denucé, *Correspondance de Christophe Plantin*, 9 volumes, Antwerpen-Gent, 1883-1918. (Anastatical reprint by Kraus, Nendeln (Liechtenstein), 1968).

L. Voet, *The Plantin Press 1555-1589. A bibliography of the works printed and published by Christopher Plantin at Antwerp and Leiden*, 5 vols., Amsterdam, 1980-1983.

See also 3.2. as well as:

J. Van der Stock, *Printing images in Antwerp. The introduction of printmaking in a city, fifteenth century to 1585*, Rotterdam, 1998.

Note: The Antwerp Bibliophiles, one of the two supporting societies of the museum, publish an annual journal (“De Gulden Passer” or “The Golden Compasses”) treating diverse aspects of book history. Contributions frequently have the study of the archives as their subject.

3.6 Names, qualifications and contact details of up to three independent people or organizations with expert knowledge about the values and provenance of the documentary heritage

**Mrs. I. Schoups, archivist of the City of Antwerp**

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 Venusstraat 11  
 2000 Antwerpen  
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**4. Management plan – see below Annex 1**

- Statement of the significance of the documentary heritage  
 World unique and exceptionally complete business archives of a printing and publishing house dating back to the middle of the sixteenth century.
- Access policy and procedures  
 The consultation of the archive documents is possible from Monday to Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Consultation is free. Registration in the reading room is required. Microfilms and photographs can be ordered. Photocopying is not permitted.
- Details of preservation budget  
 The archives are not specified on the preservation budget of the museum.
- Preservation procedures and policies  
 The archives are preserved in a special air raid, fire and waterproof shelter at the lowest level of the museum. They are stored on wooden shelves and –when appropriate- in acid free card board boxes.  
 From the 1980's onwards, several initiatives have been put forward to make the archives more easily accessible and protected from disasters and degradation due to consultation (microfilming or digitisation the whole of the archives). These attempts have failed on behalf of 1. lack of funds, 2. the quantity of documents, and 3. the

complexity of the task and the lack of a specialised archivist as a consequence of a limited budget.

- Preservation treatments employed

The preservation state of the archives are under supervision of Dr. F. de Nave, director, and Ms. Hanne Moris, certified bookbinder and restorer of old books.

Since the documents involved date back as far as the 16th century, their general overall condition is satisfactory (compared to nineteenth century documents).

For passive preservation there is climatic control and –partly- the use of acid free card boxes.

- Disaster prevention and recovery plan

Due to their location in the museum, the archives are protected against bomb raids, flood, fire and theft. The evacuation plan in case of a disaster includes all archival material, including the records that are permanently exhibited. A fully adequate recovery plan, however, would include complete microfilmation and digitisation whereby at least one copy of the originals is being kept outside the museum, in the City Archives.

- Number of preservation staff, their qualifications and opportunities for continued training

Two fulltime employees, both certified and trained as book restorers. They safeguard the whole paper collection of the museum (archives, old books collection (ca. 25.000 items) and manuscripts (ca. 650 items)). The city of Antwerp encourages further training by offering opportunities to follow specialised courses.

- Description of how the preservation activities are incorporated into general management activities.

To ensure preservation and to facilitate access to the archives, microfilmation and digitisation would be appropriate solutions. This project is included in the general policy document of the museum (1998). The museum and its responsible administration (i.e. the City of Antwerp) committed themselves to the Flemish Community to do everything in their power to accomplish this task.

The policy document also projects the elevation of a new building, annexed to the museum, that will include the necessary space and facilities to preserve the archives in the most optimal conditions.

## 5. Assessment against the Selection Criteria

### 5.1 Assessment of the documentary heritage against each criterion described in Annex 2.

#### **Criterion 1 - Influence**

With the establishment of Plantin's Officina Plantiniana in 1555, Antwerp consolidated its role as the most important typographical centre in the West together with Venice and Paris for more than half a century.

Its Officina expanded into the largest printing and publishing house of the time : the first example of a capitalistic industrial enterprise in the typographical sector whose production thanks to an especially well developed distribution network, reached as far as North Africa, America and the East. Since Plantin held the monopoly for printing religious works for the

Spanish home and colonial market, the archives contain detailed figures of publications meant for the Christianization of the Spanish colonies.

The archives reflect the activity of the Officina Plantiniana in all its aspects for the period of ca. 1555 (the start of the Officina) to the 2nd half of the 18th century (the start of the industrial revolution in printing). They provide information on the printing and book trade history, on economic and socio-economic history and on humanism and Counter Reformation.

The archives also provide first hand information on the fields of science (cartography and mapmaking, botany, medicine) and philosophy.

### **Criterion 2 - Time**

- 1555 until 1865.

- unique for the period 1555-1700 for the history of printing, typography and book illustration

- importance also due to covering a continuous period of over 300 years.

### **Criterion 3 - Place**

The archives are unique in as far as they are conserved in their original setting, Vrijdagmarkt 22, Antwerp (Belgium).

The outlet of the Officina included the whole of Europe (via book fairs like that in Frankfurt, Germany) the Spanish colonies and the coasts of North Africa.

The Officina Plantiniana was the beating heart of humanism in the Low Countries.

### **Criterion 4 - People**

- The archives are obviously of primordial importance for our knowledge of the life and work of Christoffel Plantin, the greatest printer-publisher of his time.

- The archives also provide first hand information on important humanists, scientists and artists of the Low Countries. Among them are Justus Lipsius, Franciscus Raphelengius, Joannes Sambucus, Rembert Dodoens (Dodonaeus), Charles de l'Ecluse (Carolus Clusius), Gerard Mercator, Mathias de L'Obel (Lobelius), Abraham Ortelius, Gemma Frisius, Cornelis and Philip Galle, Aubertus Miraeus, Heribert Rosweyde (Rosweydus), Daniel Van Papenbroeck (Papebrochius), Benedictus Arias Montanus, Roberto cardinal Bellarmino, the publishers Blaeu and Elsevier, Antoine Perrenot cardinal de Granvelle and Peter Paul Rubens.

- Far less conspicuous however, is the presence of the average working man in the archives. An important number of documents provide essential information on working conditions in the Officina Plantiniana, its social organisation, and the position of women.

### **Criterion 5 - Subject/Theme**

Beside information on printing techniques and everything associated with them, the archives record the management and production of the Officina Plantiniana as an industrial printing and publishing house. As such they illuminate the socio-economic, cultural and religious history of Antwerp, the Low Countries and, as far as the cultural and scientific innovation is concerned, of Europe and the world.

### **Criterion 6 - Form and style**

The archives consist of 1382 registers, 990 volumes and 187 boxes of miscellanea (including 1385 documents on parchment). All is hand-written.

### **Criterion 7 - Social value**

- The archives are a unique source for the study of Antwerp, the Low Countries and Europe in the fields of science, religion and humanism.

- An important number of documents provide essential information on working conditions in the Officina, its social organisation, and the position of women and the average man (e.g. the “complaint books” with lamentations of his employees, and 9 volumes on the “Chapel”, a pre-industrial form of union or guild).

### **Secondary Criterion 1 - Integrity**

Period 1555-1562: fragmentary series of records.

Period 1562-1865: practically complete series of records of both business and family household.

### **Secondary Criterion 2 - Rarity**

On a worldwide scale no older archives of a typographical business have been preserved. Nor is there an archive that documents a full and continuous three hundred years of printing and publishing activity.

5.2 Contextual assessment including an assessment of the importance of a series of documents, the importance of a series of documents in a particular setting, and the assessment against other documentary heritage

No business archives of such an important printing and publishing business as that of Plantin (16th - 19th centuries) have been preserved. Mention can be made of the business archives of the Enschedé family in Haarlem, but these records only date back as far as 1707, that is: 150 years later than the archives of the Officina Plantiniana. Original documentation on the art of typecutting, type designing and printing at such an early stage of their development is preserved nowhere else. Please also note the importance of the Officina Plantiniana as a whole. That is: edifice, collections, *and* archives.

5.3 An evaluation of the authenticity

The archives are inextricably bound up with the printing house “The Officina Plantiniana” that remained in the hands of Plantin and his successors for over 300 years, before being sold to the City of Antwerp on April 20th, 1876. No later than August 19th, 1877, the Officina was opened to the public as a museum.

The signatures of Christoffel Plantin, his successors and their prominent correspondents further substantiate the authenticity of the archives.

5.4 An assessment of rarity (if appropriate)

No business archives of an industrial printing and publishing house like Plantin’s have been preserved. Their importance is best proven by the many international researchers and scholars (Europe, the Americas, Australia etc.) who regularly consult the archives in the Museum’s reading room.

## **6. Consultation**

6.1 Details of consultation about the nomination with the:

- (a) Owner  
Stad Antwerpen (City of Antwerp) / Museum Plantin-Moretus
- (b) Custodian  
Dr. Francine de Nave

(c) Relevant Regional or National Memory of the World Committee (if appropriate)

No National Memory of the World Committee exists in Belgium.

## **7. Nominator**

- 7.1 Name  
Stad Antwerpen / Museum Plantin-Moretus
- 7.2 Relationship to documentary heritage  
Owner
- 7.3 Contact person (if appropriate)  
Dr. Francine de Nave
- 7.4 Contact details  
Dr. Francine de Nave  
Director  
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2000 Antwerpen
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