

# MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER

## The Archives of the University of Leuven (1425-1797) : University Heritage of Global Significance (Belgium)

2012-37

### ***1 SUMMARY***

Universities, known and recognized as the most important institutions for higher education and research, are worldwide organized according to the same model, characterized by its subdivision in faculties. They originated in Western Europe during the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries, further developed during the Western Middle Ages, and spread over the colonies of European states from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards (first in the Americas: Santo Domingo (1538); first in Asia: Manila (1611)) and have been adopted worldwide since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Universities are by far the most influential modellers of the intellectual heritage of the world.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Leuven was the largest university after Paris, north of the Alps. The presence of prominent savants such as Desiderius Erasmus, Gerard Mercator and Justus Lipsius attracted much international attention. The foundation of the *Collegium Trilingue* in 1517 was a milestone in the history of humanism. Leuven also played a major international role in the earliest developments of typography and cartography, and in the introduction of the Catholic reformation.

While the well preserved architectural patrimony is a very visible reminder of the impact of the old University of Leuven (Louvain) (1425-1797), the most convincing testimony of its larger meaning and importance for society can be found in the almost 200 linear metres of university records. They are – despite their eventful history – one of the most homogenous university archives from the *Ancien Régime*.

These archives provide a thorough insight into the reality of an early modern university in a manner only very few archives can do, be it at intellectual, social, religious or cultural level. Not only do they offer insight into classical university infrastructures, such as the colleges, the anatomical theatre and the botanic garden, but also into the university tribunals and the administration of the university beer and wine cellar, which all bequeathed well ordered homogenous archives. These not only show the functioning of the university, but also demonstrate the interactions between students, professors and the broader society

### ***2 DETAILS OF THE NOMINATOR***

#### **2.1 Name (person or organisation)**

State Archives in Belgium (Leuven)  
*KU Leuven (University of Leuven)*, University Archives and Art Collections  
Archives of the *Université catholique de Louvain*

#### **2.2 Relationship to the documentary heritage nominated**

The State Archives in Belgium (Leuven) and the *KU Leuven (University of Leuven)* preserve the archives of the medieval and early modern University of Leuven. The *Université catholique de Louvain* (UCL) and the *KU Leuven (University of Leuven)* are the legal successors of the old (medieval and early modern) university (1425-1797).

## 2.3 Contact persons

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## 3 ***IDENTITY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE***

### 3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated

The archives of the old University of Leuven (1425-1797) are partly preserved at the State Archives in Belgium (Leuven) and partly in the Archives of the KU Leuven (University of Leuven).

State Archives in Belgium (Leuven), *Archives of the old University of Leuven*  
BE-RAL 517-37 (171 linear metres)  
(furthermore abbreviated as RAL, OUL)

KU Leuven (University of Leuven), University Archives and Art Collections, *Oude Universiteit Leuven (1425-1797), Archives of the Old University from 's-Hertogenbosch*  
BE/212934/OU/M (8 linear metres and ca. 375 charters)  
(furthermore abbreviated as UAL/OU/M)

KU Leuven (University of Leuven), University Archives and Art Collections, *Oude Universiteit Leuven (1425-1797)*, Archives of the Old University in possession of Jan Frans Van de Velde BE/212934/OU/G (11 linear metres)  
(furthermore abbreviated as UAL/OU/G)

### 3.2 Description

#### *IN GENERAL*

The archives of the medieval and early modern University of Leuven had an eventful history. When the French troops approached the city in 1794, large parts of the archives were brought to safety abroad, as far as Denmark. What remained in Leuven was confiscated by the French after the dissolution of the university in 1797 and stored at the State Archives in Brussels. The records that were taken away by Jan Frans Van de Velde, professor in theology, librarian and archivist of the university, underwent a real odyssey. The French discovered one part and added it to the confiscated archives in Brussels. A second part made its way to a seminary at 's-Hertogenbosch, where it remained hidden until about 1909; in 1983, it became property of the University of Leuven again thanks to an exchange. A third part ended up in the archives of the Seminary of the Diocese of Gent and was deposited at the KU Leuven (University of Leuven) in 2001.

The archival fonds preserved at the State Archives mainly contain administrative records: the documents of the activities of the central administration, the faculties, the colleges, and other institutional units. The archives of the rector contain among others administrative affairs relating to the students, the accounts and the decisions of the academic council. Other records have been created by the five faculties (theology, canon law, civil law, medicine and the *Artes*) and the more than 60 colleges where students resided and studied. The exercise of certain privileges regarding immunity, right of appointment and tax exemption led to the creation of extensive archival series. In the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this fonds was complemented by the acquisition of various archival documents that had gone astray, among which were documents from the collection P.F.X. De Ram. All these archives have been opened up for research in 1927 thanks to the famous inventory by Henri De Vocht (see *below*). When a State Archives repository was set up in Leuven in 2001 (in one of the former university colleges), the archives were transferred from Brussels.

The Archives service of the KU Leuven (University of Leuven) preserves the largest part of the charter treasure (approx. 375 charters) and other archival material which mostly originates from the central administration, the faculty of theology and some colleges. In 1909 the diocese of 's-Hertogenbosch returned the bull of foundation it preserved since 1794. Only a few years later, when the Germans invaded Leuven in August 1914, this bull was lost in the blaze of the university library.

In order to make this – scattered – picture complete, we should remark that some discrete items of limited volume are still preserved elsewhere, for instance at the Belgian Royal Library in Brussels (Manuscripts no. 22172, 22192, 22197, 22199, II 187, II 199).

#### SIGNIFICANT RECORDS

The value and homogeneity of these archives is perhaps more reflected by the beautiful backbone series rather than by isolated items:

- In the **registers of enrolment** (RAL, OUL, no. 22-29), the rectors personally recorded the names of the thousands of students who studied at the *alma mater* in Leuven in the course of the *Ancien Régime*. Reusens, Wils and Schillings published these registers.

*Bibliography: Matricule de l'Université de Louvain*, eds. Edmond Reusens, Joseph Wils and Arnold Schillings, Brussels, 1903-1980; Leo Van Buyten, 'De Leuvense

Universiteitsmatrikels (16de-18de eeuw). Kritische beschouwingen', in: *Arca Lovaniensis*, 3, 1974, 9-35; Peter Vandermeersch, 'The Reconstruction of the Liber Quintus intitolatorum Universitatis Lovaniensis (1569-1616). An Application: the Theologians 1562-1578', in: *Lias*, 12, 1985, 1-80.

- The **acta universitatis**, the minutes of the academic council (1432-1793, RAL, OUL, no. 51-88), and the *acta* of particular faculties have an important research value (theology: 1608-1796, RAL, OUL, no. 387-391; *Artes*: 1427-1791, RAL, OUL, no. 710-725). They bear witness to the actions of the academic council and of the faculty administration. The first two volumes of the minutes of the academic council (1432-1455) have been published (see 4.1)

- The **collection of charters** contains almost all papal and princely privileges, granted to the university between 1425 and 1797. These charters constituted the legal basis on which the *Alma Mater* was able to act. The exercise of these privileges was time and again contested and the documents on which they were based have often been used. For instance, we can mention:

- The (burnt) **bull of foundation and the related privileges** (the four papal bulls of 9 December 1425 and three bulls of 9 September 1427) (UAL/OU/M 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 34)

*Bibliography*: Marc Nelissen a.o., *De stichtingsbul* (see 4.1); Erik Van Mingroot, *Sapientie immarcessibilis* (see 4.1).

- The **appointment privilege** of Leo X for the *Artes* faculty, 19 September 1513, which granted the faculty the right to have its members appointed, under certain conditions, in particular benefices all over the country and thereby supply them with an income (UAL/OU/M, s.n.)

*Bibliography*: Bruno Boute, *Academic Interests and Catholic Confessionalisation* (see 4.1).

- The **Visitatio** of the archdukes Albert and Isabella, 18 April 1617, by force of which the local rulers took over parts of the administration of the university, limiting its autonomy and the power and influence of Rome (UAL/OU/M, 26a[1])

*Bibliography*: Jan Roegiers and Peter Vandermeersch, 'Les archiducs et l'université de Louvain', in: Werner Thomas and Luc Duerloo (eds.), *Albert & Isabella 1598-1621: Essays*, Brussels-Turnhout, 1998, 285-291; Bruno Boute, 'Academics in action. Scholarly Interests and Policies in the Early Counter Reformation: the Reform of the University of Louvain 1607-1617', in: *History of Universities*, 18.2, 2003, 34-89.

- The **archives of the faculty of theology** and its determining role in the Catholic reformation. In this matter we can refer to:

- The **drafts of the first version of the index of prohibited books**, 9 May 1546 (UAL/OU/G, 5).

*Bibliography*: Henri De Jongh, *L'ancienne Faculté de théologie*, 260 (see 4.1); Jesús Martínez de Bujanda, *Index de l'Université de Louvain 1546, 1550, 1558* (Index des livres interdits, 2), Sherbrooke, 1986; *Transit Brugge Novgorod: eine Strasse durch die europäische Geschichte*, Essen, Ruhrlandmuseum, 1997.

- The **letters Cornelius Jansenius** wrote from Spain to his colleagues in Leuven reporting on his mission to limit the influence of the Jesuits in Leuven (UAL/OU/G, A3)

*Bibliography*: Jan Roegiers, *Brief van Cornelius Jansenius aan zijn Leuvense collega's*, in: *550 jaar universiteit Leuven*, 52 (see 4.1); Jean Orcibal, *Les origines du Jansénisme, dl. I : Correspondance de Jansénius*, Louvain-Paris, 1947.

- The archives of the **university courts** (RAL, OUL, no. 5530-6270) constitute exceptional documentation. Leuven was one of the few universities boasting an officer responsible for maintaining order and combatting crime. The archives of the four courts and of the university police

and prison provide an in-depth view into the litigiousity, but also into the delinquency and the *petite histoire* of university life during the *Ancien Régime*.

*Bibliography:* Carl Vandenghoer, *De rectorale rechtbank* (see 4.1).

- The exercise of the university **appointment privileges** (see above) led to the creation of particularly interesting files (RAL, OUL, no. 4679-5339). Both the university as a whole and the faculty of *Artes* had extensive appointment privileges that allowed them to appoint numerous graduates in ecclesiastical functions. This was one of the university's main vectors of influence on society.

*Bibliography:* Bruno Boute, *Academic Interests and Catholic Confessionalisation* (see 4.1).

- The **accounts of the beer and wine cellar** (RAL, OUL, no. 5340-5529) provide a detailed picture of the impact of tax exemptions granted to the university. The university housed and administrated its own beer and wine cellar where the members could buy beverages.

- The numerous **scholarship foundations** have led to the creation of rich archives (RAL, OUL, various nos.).

*Bibliography:* Edward De Maesschalck, 'Scholarship Grants and Colleges, established at the University of Louvain up to 1530', in: Jacques Paquet and Jozef IJsewijn (eds.), *The Universities in the Late Middle Ages*, Louvain, Leuven University Press, 1978, 484-494.

Apart from the archives of the university *stricto sensu*, we can also refer to the correspondence of Franciscus Cranevelt (1485-1564) in the KU Leuven (University of Leuven) Archives (containing letters from Erasmus, Juan Luis Vives and Thomas Morus) and the collections of college dictations (lecture notes), assembled both by the KU Leuven (University of Leuven) and its sister institution U.C.Louvain. For expertise in this field, see among others: Françoise Mirguet, *Collection de cours manuscrits de l'Université de Louvain 1425 - 1797 : catalogue analytique* (Publications des archives de l'Université catholique de Louvain, 7), Louvain-la-Neuve, 2003. In Leuven, the college dictations from the library collection have been digitised within the framework of the project *Ex Cathedra* and have been fully described in order to make them widely accessible.

#### FINDING AIDS

RAL, OUL:

Henri De Vocht, *Inventaire des archives de l'Université de Louvain (1426-1797)*, Brussels, 1927.

UAL/OU/M:

Etienne Van Cauwenbergh, *Inventaire d'un fonds d'archives de l'ancienne Université de Louvain conservé au Séminaire diocésain de Bois-le-Duc, à Haaren (Brab. Sept.)*, in: Léon van der Essen et al. (eds.), *L'Université de Louvain à travers cinq siècles. Etudes historiques*, Brussels, 1927, 261-272.

UAL/OU/G:

Fernand Claeys Bouuaert, *Inventaire de documents relatifs à l'ancienne Université de Louvain (Faculté de Théologie) conservés au Grand séminaire de Gand*, in: Léon van der Essen et al. (eds.), *L'Université de Louvain à travers cinq siècles. Etudes historiques*, Brussels, 1927, 273-308; Fernand Claeys Bouuaert, 'Inventaire de pièces d'archives provenant de l'ancienne Université de Louvain', in: *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, 53, 1958, 796-829 and 54, 1959, 66-114; [Jan Roegiers], *Voorlopige en beknopte inventaris van het Fonds Van de Velde in het Archief van het Bisschoppelijk Seminarie te Gent. Reeks D: stukken die niet werden geordend door F. Claeys-Bouuaert, s.d., s.l.*

#### PUBLICATIONS ABOUT THE ARCHIVES

Jan Roegiers, 'Van toen tot nu', in: Marc Nelissen a.o., *De stichtingbul*, 263-275 (see 4.1).

Jan Roegiers, 'Archiefbescheiden of bibliotheekmateriaal? Het 'Fonds De Ram' in de Koninklijke Bibliotheek en het Algemeen Rijksarchief', in: Gustaaf Janssens, Griet Maréchal and Frank Scheelings (eds.), *Door de archivistiek gestrikt, Liber amicorum prof. dr. Juul Verhelst* (Archiefinitiatie(f), dl. 4), Brussels, 2000, 197-216.

## **4 JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION/ ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA**

### **4.1 Is authenticity established? (see 4.2.3)**

These archives are – despite their eventful history – one of the most homogenous university archives from the *Ancien Régime*. Authenticity is attested by older inventories. The significant amount of research carried out into these archives also clearly testifies to their authenticity.

#### *SELECTIVE LIST OF SOURCE EDITIONS*

*Privilegia academiae Lovaniensi per summos pontifices et supremos Belgii principes concessa, variis edictis, decretis, sententiis, concordatis etc. confirmata*, Louvain, Apud Aegidium Denique, 1728.

*Actes ou procès-verbaux des séances tenues par le conseil de l'Université de Louvain. Tome premier (31 mai 1432 – 21 septembre 1443)*, ed. Edmond Reusens; *Tome deuxième (26 mai 1445 – 17 août 1455)*, ed. André Van Hove, Brussels, 1903 and 1917.

*Matricule de l'Université de Louvain*, eds. Edmond Reusens, Joseph Wils and Arnold Schillings, Brussels, 1903-1980, 10 vols.

The Belgian State Archives provide digital images of the original registers on their website (<http://arch.arch.be>).

### **4.2 Is world significance, uniqueness and irreplaceability established? (see 4.2.4)**

Seen within the context of the development of the Western university, the history of Leuven is both exemplary and unique.

**Exemplary** is its position as a representative of the second wave of university foundations. The first universities (Bologna, Paris, Oxford ...), were never “founded”, but developed within earlier existing schools to be recognized at a certain moment as a *studium generale*. The universities of the second wave (ca 1350-1450) were established on the initiative of bishops, princes or local city authorities (Cologne, 1388; Louvain, 1425). As almost all universities outside Italy, Louvain University was organized according to the Paris model.

The history of the University of Leuven between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries is exemplary for the development of the universities and their institutions (colleges, scholarships, student unions, etc.), for the growing impact of the State on this originally almost exclusively clerical institution, for the development into a national institution instead of an institution of Western Christianity as a whole, for the role of Protestant and Catholic reformation in these developments and for the struggle between medieval traditions and the innovations introduced by Renaissance humanism, scientific revolution and Enlightenment.

The University of Leuven was also **unique** in many ways and thereby often of international importance. Nowhere else in Europe were the typically medieval academic immunities developed to such extent, especially in the judicial field. Almost nowhere on the continent were so many colleges

founded. As one of the very few catholic universities Leuven maintained an important international student recruitment in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Already in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century its student number surpassed that of all other universities to the North of the Alps, apart from Paris.

Renaissance humanism secured in Leuven an important stronghold, especially after the foundation of the *Collegium Trilingue* (1517), which became the model for the *Collège de France* and others. It attracted students and scholars from all over Europe. The mathematical Renaissance at Leuven gave rise to a world famous school of cartography and construction of instruments.

Together with Cologne, the University of Leuven was the first institution to condemn Luther's ideas (1519), even before the pope or the German Diet. The Leuven theologians developed the instruments of the Catholic reformation (index, catholic profession of faith, official Bible translations), later adopted by the whole Catholic church. The dispute between Jansenists and anti-Jansenists, which dominated the Catholic church for a whole century, originated in Leuven.

The unique political role Leuven played in the growing resistance against the policy of reform of emperor Joseph II and in the Brabant Revolution of 1789-90, preluded to the role many universities would play in both the national and the anti-colonial revolutions of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

All these episodes and aspects of the university's history are documented by its records. While particular archival documents are irreplaceable, it must be stressed that the uniqueness of this fonds is based primarily on its homogeneity. Indeed, it is very remarkable that the archives of the old University of Leuven have been handed down in a relatively intact state despite its eventful history.

Things could have gone differently. When the German army wilfully set fire to the library of the University of Leuven on 25 August 1914, the whole world was aghast. Thousands of precious manuscripts and books burst into flames. However, from the university archives, only the bull of foundation and a few registers were destroyed. Almost all records were at that moment stored in other places. The partial confiscation by the French Republic and the diaspora somehow saved these archives from total destruction. Their high symbolic value is therefore also due to their particularly eventful history.

#### **4.3 Is one or more of the criteria of (a) time (b) place (c) people (d) subject and theme (e) form and style satisfied? (see 4.2.5)**

##### *(A-B) TIME AND PLACE*

Especially in the period 1515-1565, Leuven was one of the most outstanding intellectual hotspots in Europe, a status exemplified by the presence of scholars such as Erasmus and Mercator. Therefore, it is no exaggeration to claim that the history of humanism can not be written without the archives of the University of Leuven.

During the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, Leuven played a key role – as the Roman toehold north of the Alps – in the Catholic reaction towards Reformation. During the years prior to his pontificate, Adrianus VI (1459-1523) was professor at the faculty of theology. The index of forbidden books the same faculty composed in 1546 was the first of its kind. Leuven quickly became a bastion of the Catholic reformation, although the revolt caused student numbers to drop. The return of the humanist Justus Lipsius from Leiden in 1592 was highly symbolic, both for the revival of the university and for the role of Leuven in the Catholic reformation. In this context one can also refer to the foundation of an Irish college in 1607, later expanded by the *Irish Pastoral College* (1622) and the *Irish Dominican College* (1624). The Catholics of the Northern Netherlands also established colleges for the training of priests, who were afterwards sent to the Republic as missionaries. The Savoie college (1548), the College of Westfalen (1582), the College of Luxemburg (1595) and a series of short-lived English and Scottish foundations also had an international focus.

The discussion about Jansenism, that would deeply mark the intellectual history of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, is closely related to the history of the University of Leuven. Cornelius Jansenius wrote his *Augustinus* when he was professor in exegesis in Leuven. The tensions between Jansenists and anti-Jansenists left their marks, not only on the faculty of theology but also on the university as a whole.

(C-D) PEOPLE AND SUBJECT

The students (about 175.000 between 1426 and 1797) were of international origin, as was the case in all universities during the *Ancien Régime*, when the mobility of students was high. The strong presence of students from the Northern Netherlands, from the German Empire and the north of France was characteristic for the University of Leuven. One can also mention the important English, Scottish and especially Irish presence; the Irish formed the largest foreign community in Leuven.

*Bibliography:* Joseph Wils, *Les étudiants des régions comprises dans la Nation germanique à l'Université de Louvain*, Louvain, 1909; Chris Coppens, *Reading in exile. The libraries of John Ramridge (d. 1568), Thomas Harding (d. 1572) & Henry Joliffe (d. 1573), recusants in Louvain* (Libri pertinentes, 2), Cambridge, 1993; Gustaaf Janssens, 'Españoles y Portugueses en los medios universitarios de Lovaina (siglos XV y XVI)', in: *Foro Hispánico. Revista hispánica de los Países Bajos*, 3, 1992, 13-29; Jeroen Nilis (ed.), 'Irish students at Leuven University, 1548-1797', in: *Archivium Hibernicum*, 60, 2007, 1-304. Also published as: Jeroen Nilis, *Irish Students at Leuven University, 1548-1797* (Fasti Academicici), Louvain, 2010.

Some 1200 professors taught in Leuven between 1425 and 1797. Especially in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, many prominent scholars played a major role in the spread of humanism, in many scientific disciplines, such as:

- *Cartography and mathematics:* Gemma Frisius (1508-1555), Gerard Mercator (1512-1594)
- *Medicine:* Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564)
- *Theology:* Johannes Driedo (ca. 1480-1535), Michaël Baius (1513-1589), Cornelius Jansenius (1585-1638)
- *Law:* Gabriël Madaeus (1500-1560)
- *Philology:* Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536), Juan Luis Vives (1493-1540), Nicolaus Clenardus (1493/4-1542), Justus Lipsius (1547-1606)

(E) FORM AND STYLE

This fonds is, in an international perspective, one of the most voluminous and best preserved university archives. It allows us to study the reality of an early modern university from many different perspectives.

Furthermore, only few university archives from the *Ancien Régime* are described in a fully-fledged inventory. During World War I, professor Henri De Vocht from Leuven started the compilation of a finding aid, published in 1927 by the Belgian State Archives (Henri De Vocht, *Inventaire des archives de l'Université de Louvain (1426-1797)*, Brussels, 1927; reprint: Brussels, 2001). This inventory shows that the university archives are in fact a conglomerate created by many institutions (faculties, colleges, scholarship foundations, etc.). Hence, this representation of the archives reflects in a striking manner the multiform and versatile institutional reality of the university during the early modern period.

#### **4.4 Are there issues of rarity, integrity, threat and management that relate to this nomination? (see 4.2.6)**

The charter collections of both the State Archives in Leuven and the Archives of the KU Leuven (University of Leuven) are particularly threatened. The very fragile seals often did not very well withstand the ravages of time. Indeed, among the 403 seals that were once present in the collection of

the KU Leuven, 144 have disappeared and 72 are damaged. The remaining 187 pieces are, except for the almost indestructible lead bulls of the papal charters, in a bad state of preservation. The charters of the archival fonds of the Old University of Leuven at the State Archives in Leuven will be restored and kept flat in especially for that purpose designed cabinets.

Large efforts will equally be required in order to put the archival documents preserved at the KU Leuven (University of Leuven) into storage media which is appropriate for the high research value of the documents and for today's preservation requirements (acid-free envelopes and storing large-format documents horizontally and flat). At the same time, a thorough revision of the older existing descriptions of varying quality and detail for these archival documents is necessary (see 3.2 *Finding aids*). The KU Leuven (University of Leuven) has invested heavily in new archive management and digital repository system for this purpose.

## **5 LEGAL INFORMATION**

### **5.1. Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)**

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### **5.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details, if different to owner)**

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