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## Archives of old University of Leuven recognised as documental world heritage

UNESCO has decided at its conference of 18-21 June in Gwangju to inscribe the archives of the old University of Leuven (1425-1797) in the Memory of the World Register.

This list bears on archives and library documents and is the documental equivalent of the world heritage sites list. It contains individual items such as the diaries of Anne Frank, the files of the trial against Nelson Mandela and the films of the Amundsen South Pole Expedition from 1910-1912, but also whole collections such as the archives of the West-India Company en the Jean Jacques Rousseau collection in Geneva and Neuchâtel.

The State Archives in Leuven and the Catholic University of Leuven preserve the archives of the old University of Leuven (1425-1797) whose legal successor are the Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL) and the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KU Leuven). In international comparison, these archives are among the most voluminous and best preserved early modern university archives (State Archives: 171 metres, KU Leuven: 8 metres and 375 charters).

The archives of the University of Leuven are essential for the intellectual history of the 16th century, when Leuven – just after Paris – was the biggest university 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.

These archives provide, as only few others do, deep insight into the reality of an early modern university and all its intellectual, social, religious and cultural aspects. They shed light onto classic university infrastructures, such as the colleges, the anatomical theatre and the botanic garden, but also onto the university tribunals and the administration of the university beer and wine cellar that all bequeathed well ordered and homogenous archives.

The archives form a vibrant testimony of the rich and varied institutional reality of the university during the late Middle Ages and the Early modern period. Due to the turbulent history of the archives, a number of items got scattered in most various places. The State Archives is planning to publish a new inventory online, in collaboration with its partners, in order to provide a global overview of the different parts of the archives of the old University of Leuven, independently of their respective place of conservation. This way, the scattered documents will be regrouped in a virtual manner in a single archive. Core document series such as the minutes of the university administration will be made accessible in digital format. The registers of enrolment, which are already available online today, enjoy large international interest. The students of the time very often had an international background and student mobility was high. Leuven was characterised by a strong presence of students from the Northern Netherlands, Germany, England, Scotland and Ireland.

The whole dossier can be viewed

online:<http://www.unesco.org/new/fr/communication-and-information/flagship-project-activities/memory-of-the-world/register/full-list-of-registered-heritage/registered-heritage-page-8/the-archives-of-the-university-of-leuven-1425-1797-university-heritage-of-global-significance/>

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