

CEGESOMA NEWSLETTER

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INVENTORY

The inventory to the archives of historian Jacques Wynants, former correspondent of CegeSoma and president of its non-profit organisation for many years, has now been published. [\[MORE INFO\]](#)

<https://www.cegesoma.be/en/publication/inventory-jacques-wynants-archives-published>

ADOCHS PROJECT

This project aimed at improving the processes of quality control for the digitization of cultural heritage collections enters its final phase. A user guide is being prepared, about the different quality control stages of digitization projects of cultural heritage organisations. [\[MORE INFO\]](#)

<https://www.cegesoma.be/en/project/new-researcher-has-joined-adochs-project>

RESEARCH

Upon initiative of the Province of Limbourg, a new research project about the provincial government of Limburg during the Second World War was started at CegeSoma. [\[MORE INFO\]](#)

<https://www.cegesoma.be/en/project/new-research-project-provincial-administration-limburg-during-second-world-war>

LIBRARY

A major donation of publications to be discovered by anyone interested in the Eastern Front and in the different units of the Waffen-SS deployed there. [\[MORE INFO\]](#)

<https://www.cegesoma.be/en/%E2%80%9Cnostalgia-comrades%E2%80%A6-%E2%80%9D-story-about-books-and-steel-helmets%E2%80%A6>

CONFERENCE

How did historians try to shape their 'truth' about the Second World War in the past 75 years ? Watch the lecture of Nico Wouters at the Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium on 23 September. [\[MORE INFO\]](#)

<https://www.cegesoma.be/en/news/historical-truth-and-perception-second-world-war-belgium-these-times-so-called-%E2%80%99post-truth%E2%80%99>

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Reminder of the modalities for an appointment in our reading room. [\[MORE INFO\]](#)

<https://www.cegesoma.be/en/corona-measures-and-your-visit-our-reading-room>

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Inventory of the Jacques Wynants archives published!

Les fonds Jacques Wynants et Yan Simonis aux Archives de Verviers

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Notwithstanding the vicissitudes of life, scores of human beings show a desire to leave “something” to posterity or, more prosaically, to their family. In doing so, they get the feeling - self-love, vanity, pride, illusion...? - that their passage on this lowly earth was not in vain and that “something” that characterised them shall last beyond mere biological descent and clouds of memories that disperse in the course of time... After all, it is honourable to desire to transcend death, even though this falls into the domain of unverifiable hopes. But after all, doesn't humanity thrive on hope?

Historians - who usually are neither wealthy nor keen to amass material wealth through the exercise of their profession - are mostly quite satisfied to bequeath an intellectual capital to “theirs” (whether family members

or people sharing their passion). And, as everyone knows this legacy is often just made of “old papers”... in the eyes of the common people and heirs in a hurry.

Historian Jacques Wynants, who for decades was one of the most loyal and most active correspondents of CegeSoma and who passed away on a sad day of November 2018, would certainly have been very pleased to see what happened to the historical heritage that he had amassed over half a century about his good city of Verviers and its hinterland...Fortunately, this cultural heritage was not dispersed, and keeping its unity, richness and diversity (over 80 archive boxes, piles of newspapers from the early twentieth century, folders, etc.), it found a convenient haven at the municipal archives of the former textile industry city of Verviers, Rue Pont de Sommeleville. And the cherry on top is that this mass of documents is unlikely to lie dormant for long, being very recently made more accessible to the public at large thanks to the inventory* written under the auspices of the Scientific Committee for the History of Verviers. On top of that, this inventory was also realised thanks to the generous help of Freddy Joris, an old friend of Jacques and an historian, esteemed for the quality of his works about the press and the regional cultural heritage.

In short, with the inventory to these rich archival holdings, anyone interested in the history of Verviers and its surrounding regions during World War 2 has now found a favorable “drop zone” on the banks of the Vesdre river, so that all history buffs should rejoice.

The digital version of the inventory to the archive holding bestowed upon the city of Verviers by Jacques Wynants can be accessed here: [Les Fonds Jacques Wynants et Yvan Simonis aux Archives de Verviers](#), Verviers, CSHV, 2020, 200 p. or [on the website of Freddy Joris](#).

PRODUCT DETAILS

Number of pages: 200 p.
Publishing date: June 2020
Editor: Verviers, CSHV

AUTHOR(S)

Freddy Joris

[LOOK INSIDE](#)

TAGS

[Local history](#) [Wallonia](#) [Occupation](#) [Economic history](#)

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A new researcher has joined the ADOCHS project

War and Society



In 2016, CegeSoma - in partnership with the Royal Library of Belgium (KBR), VUB and ULB - launched the ADOCHS project (Auditing Digitalization Outputs in the Cultural Heritage Sector) aimed at improving the quality assurance process for digital heritage collections.

The project is now coordinated by Anne Chardonnens and Nico Wouters and enters its final stage as a new researcher, Chloé Brault, joins the team. Her goal shall be to draft a methodological guide for the different steps in digitisation projects of cultural heritage institutions, thereby drawing up the synthesis of the research results obtained since the start of the project.

This tool is geared towards the digitisation services of federal institutions and the decision-makers of these institutions; it shall enable them to raise awareness among cultural heritage stakeholders about the challenges and good practices of digitisation. The guide is intended to be a practical tool in which all steps of the digitisation process - such as preparing the documents, joining meta data, denominating the files, and conserving the digital data - are explored, while focussing on quality control in each step.

The spread of this tool should help to harmonise existing practices within the different cultural heritage and scientific institutions, and give each stakeholder involved in the digitisation of cultural heritage the opportunity to understand the importance of its role within the global process.



01/09/2020 to 31/08/2021

Project manager(s)



Project member(s)



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New research project: The provincial administration of Limburg during the Second World War

World War II



The recent appearances of the Antwerp provincial governor Cathy Berx, in an effort to help prevent the spreading of the Coronavirus, have put the provincial administrative level in the spotlight again, making citizens who usually have no direct dealings with this level of administration more aware of its existence. During the Second World War, the provincial administrations played a key role in the daily lives of the citizens as well. For example, they organized the rationing system and helped protect the citizens against airstrikes.

Strangely enough, the provincial administrative level at the time of the Second World War has so far only scarcely been studied. So the initiative by the province of Limburg to have research carried out about the history of the provincial administration during the Second World War is highly welcome. The research mission was assigned to the State Archives/Cegesoma.

Archive inventory and historical research

The research mission is twofold: First, the existing but dated inventory about the provincial administration archives from the Second World War period must be revised and expanded. Second, historical research must

be carried out about the role of the provincial administration during the occupation, based on which an illustrated text aimed at the large public must be produced. The focus will be both on the mode of operation of the provincial administration and on the impact that the administration had on the citizens. The new social and economic missions entrusted to the province, with regard to the provision of supplies for example, shall therefore take center stage.

The research perspectives are indeed promising: prospecting of the archives has revealed that in addition to common sources of administrative and formal nature (service orders, regulations, internal guidelines, forms, etc.), the archives contain sufficient documents to allow an approach "from the bottom up" (complaints of citizens, reports of supervisors about all sorts of infringements against regulations). As the research project is scheduled for a period of ten months, the results shall have a rather exploratory character, and it shall not be possible to study the history of the provincial administration in all aspects. Nevertheless, we will have a better understanding of the role played by the provincial administrations during the occupation.

Aline Thomas, master in history and in Dutch and German Linguistics and Literature (*UGent*), is in charge of research. She has already gained experience through earlier work at *Geheugen Collectief*.



15/07/2020 to 14/02/2021

Project manager(s)



Project member(s)



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“Nostalgia, comrades... !” - a story about books and steel helmets...

“Tell me what you read and I’ll tell you who you are” some good writers say. This peremptory assertion ought to be somewhat put into perspective however. Indeed, in the course of a life, the fields of interest of men (and women!) may certainly evolve and the eclectic nature of a personal library may in fact be the result of successive particular interests (or professional obligations). Personal book collections are certainly shaped, sometimes inevitably, by key events that left a mark in a person’s life, and more than once the memory about a past and long gone “trauma” manifests itself - sometimes poignantly, sometimes more subliminal - in a world of paper and ink. The expression of such a “past that does not pass” is rarely put down on paper in an appeased manner; and these writings are either coined by a supposedly regained serenity or characterised by a more scientific approach in order to pen an “objective assessment”, to shed a different light on these years engulfed in the depths of the past... Indeed, here and there transpires the strain of hurt memories, of vain moments of exaltation, of dashed hopes, of a wasted youth, of broken promises... This type of literature and sentiment (or resentment?) flourishes among veterans from all periods of time and all countries...

A library such as the one of CegeSoma, dedicated by essence and by “mission statement” to the study of the two world wars, would sooner or later see this type of literature appear on its shelves. CegeSoma has also put particular focus on this literature because it is so abundant, ranging from “personal diaries” or self-published memoirs of soldiers to historical narrations about large military units on campaign or major engagements, strategically important. In the latter case, they are usually published in a more elaborated format thanks to the involvement of publishing houses, and have quite some success among the large public once they hit the shelves. Needless to say, the historian on duty quickly understands the limitations of these kinds of literary productions, in particular their quite significant part of subjectivity. Mentally stuck in a specific time period, the author rarely goes beyond a mere statement of facts, he barely conceptualise and hardly put into perspective his personal odyssey or that of the belligerent/militant community to which he adhered during a key moment of his life.



In other words, this type of literature shows a weak degree of critical analysis and is characterised by its intentional or unintentional apologetic nature, in which the sum of the struggles that the author underwent due to his or her life choices becomes justification or excuse for everything. And even some “omissions” are sometimes required: mentioning the one or the other event that took place between battles might indeed be regarded by contemporary readers as a stain in the narrative, as an alteration of the value or purity of the extreme commitment taken “in illo tempore”. Nevertheless, by



systematically tapping into these writings and accounts and their factual parts, one can draw up a psychological panorama of these times and of a community within its particular “space-time” environment.

To some extent, the library of Jan Vincx, which was recently so kindly bestowed upon our institution by his family, is quite representative of such “engaged literature”, much more committed to the strictly military aspects of war than to its militant and political ones. Jan Vincx is actually not an unknown figure among the small world of Dutch-speaking historians studying the Second World War. In his early twenties he volunteered in the *Waffen-SS* for the Eastern Front and belongs to that category of fighters who “*came back from the war... but never overcame it!*” A look at his library indicates that the parable of his Flemish ideal rests on

his engagement in a *feldgrau* uniform at the service of a “Greater Germany” and a “New Europe”. A “New Europe” spelled out in a somewhat peculiar tone, as everyone knows... By accumulating dozens, even hundreds of publications about the “Eastern Crusade” and the different units of the *Waffen-SS* that were involved, Vincx does not really question anything: he visits and revisits a fight and its combatants without ever disavowing them or questioning the goal of this campaign (one can imagine the Germanisation of Russian lands that would have taken place if the *Reich* would have won). It becomes clear how much this type of literature, mostly in Dutch in his collections, is full of clichés and deadlocked in a warlike register. Furthermore, these writings were in vogue during the 1970s and 1980s, when in our regions the censorship and self-censorship that emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War, over time, slowly lost its grip so that both professional and amateur historians were able to address various aspects of collaboration, including military, paramilitary and policing aspects, with less restraint. Among these amateur historians was Jan Vincx, a prolific writer who did not merely confine himself to building up a topical library for his own use. Indeed, he penned a study of epic proportions (7 volumes) titled *Vlaanderen in uniform* published by “Etnika” editors in 1980-1984 (still very sought after by amateurs of uniformology), but also more discrete writings with self-justification purposes, such as the collective works *Wee de overwonnen! Strijd en offergang van de Vlaamse vrijwilligers tijdens en na de Tweede Wereldoorlog van 1940 tot...* (also published by “Etnika”, in 1985) or *Archivalia 1940-1945: Vlamingen aan het Oostfront, Vlamingen op het thuisfront* (Etnika, 1995).

This body of writings surely holds something of interest for amateurs of hyperbolic or dramatised testimonies, picaresque stories and pictures of military gear...The rest of us will probably think that a library such as the one of CegeSoma cannot ignore that just about any book can be put to good use in the right hands. And if they have no use for these writings, they will look further into our vast and rich collections where everyone can find something to suit their needs!

Alain Colignon, librarian
10.9.2020

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The historical truth and the perception of the Second World War in Belgium in these times of so-called 'post-truth'



On 23 September, [Nico Wouters](#) (CegeSoma/State Archives) held the Da Vinci lecture at the Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium about the historical truth and the perception of the Second World War in Belgium in these times of so-called 'post-truth'.

In the 50-minutes lecture, Nico Wouters looks into the manner in which historians have tried to carve out the historical 'truth' about the Second World War in the past 75 years, against the background of intense societal debate. He discusses the tensions between 'history' and 'memory', and exercises critical self-reflection. He reasons that after 2002, WWII historians did not sufficiently manage to launch own projects based on the attitude and intention specific to science.

Tying in with the current debate about the colonial past, he argues that resisting particular societal pressures does not mean 'withdrawing into an ivory tower', and that the discussion about whether or not to participate in

(political) public history initiatives is a false discussion. According to him, our truth claim must not only be substantiated by our methodology and our empiricism, but especially by sharpening and more closely defining the attitude and intention specific to science.

If WWII historians want to gain strength and confidence to actively take part in society, they can only manage to do so by becoming aware again of the specific status that their scientific 'truth' actually has.

The lecture is about 50 minutes long and can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/o4M6HKVtYKg>

Other news

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Corona measures and your visit to our reading room

The reading rooms of the State Archives/CegeSoma are accessible again for the larger public, upon appointment and under the condition that visitors wear a face mask. Reservation of workspace in the reading room must be made by e-mail to the State Archives in question at least 2 workdays before the visit. You can find the contact details of our services [here](#). The maximum amount of visitors per day is limited. You will therefore always receive a confirmation of the date of your visit by e-mail, that also counts as the confirmation of your reservation. **Please reserve your documents in advance using [our online catalogue PALLAS](#)**. Please note that if you order larger volumes from our depot in the Belgrado Street, there might be some delay.



The State Archives/CegeSoma shall of course take all necessary **precautions** to ensure the security of both visitors and staff. The number of available workspaces in the reading rooms depends on the individual configuration of the premises and shall be limited accordingly. In order to prepare your visit at best, please consult the [special preventive measures against Coronavirus/COVID-19](#).

- In the meantime, we continue to provide **minimum service** to the maximum extent and to increase our online offer of [archives and finding aids](#).
- In order to somewhat alleviate the effects of the long closure of our reading rooms, all scheduled **repository inventorying activities** for 2020 are **cancelled**.
- All **public events**, such as colloquia, group visits, receptions, book presentations, training, etc. organised by the State Archives **until further notice** are cancelled. Seminars for small groups of students may exceptionally be organized under strict conditions (by observing hygiene safety measures).
- **Transports and deliveries** will progressively resume on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, provided that security distances can be respected.

During the period in which our reading room is closed, you can still carry out some research online via [our digital reading room](#), for instance:

- The general catalogue of PALLAS can be accessed [here](#).
- The content descriptions for a number of archive holdings and collections can be found [here](#).
- Some digitised documents [can be accessed online](#).
- Thematic help files for research can be accessed via ["How to start a search?"](#)

You can stay informed about further developments via our website and via [Facebook](#).

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