

NEWSLETTER

No 91 - January 2024



NEWS

JOB OFFER

The State Archives/CegeSoma is recruiting a full-time research scientist (m/f/x) for March 1, 2024, for a 15-month period (extension possible) as part of the CONCILIARE research project.

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THREE - AND MORE - QUESTIONS TO ...

Alain Colignon, CegeSoma librarian for thirty-five years, talks about the different facets of his job and traces the evolution of the library.

► [Read more](#)



ON THE AGENDA

ARCHIVES & COLD WAR

On Friday 15 March 2024, as part of the FED-tWIN BELCOWAR project,



CegeSoma and *KULeuven* organize a study afternoon on the economic aspects of the Cold War. Registration now open.

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RESEARCH



EHRI-CONNY KRISTEL FELLOWSHIP

Interview with Solange Manche on her research into the story of Till Eulenspiegel, the medieval trickster exploited during WWII by the Flemish and Dutch collaboration movements.

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Vacancy - Conciliare Project



The State Archives/CegeSoma is currently recruiting :

One full-time research scientist (m/f/x) for a period of 15 months (extension possible) as part of the CONCILIARE research project to be carried out at CegeSoma. The preferred starting date is 1 March 2024.

The CONCILIARE project focuses on changes to the colonial cultural heritage in four key areas: schoolbooks, public space, museums and the cultural consumption of products and traditions. These areas will be analyzed in terms of their development and perceptions over time and space by different social groups. The aim is to contribute to the implementation of new relationships of trust in the societies and groups considered. Cegesoma/State Archives is associated with workgroup 2 on the question of public space. This group will analyze contested colonial cultural heritage in public spaces of large and medium-sized cities in Belgium, Italy and Portugal.

For more information on this project, including job description, required profile, work conditions and selection procedure, please [download the vacancy sheet \(Dutch\)](#) or [download the vacancy sheet \(French\)](#).

Other news

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THREE QUESTIONS AND MORE TO ... Alain Colignon,

CegeSoma librarian



Alain Colignon has been CegeSoma's librarian for over thirty-five years. Passionate about history, he has read almost everything about everything. In fact, asking him questions is often more effective than consulting Wikipedia. So you'll understand that sticking to the 'three questions to' principle for our column wasn't an option ... many thanks for your comprehension!

What was your background? Why did you choose to study history?

I graduated in history from the University of Liège in 1981. My thesis dealt with the world of veterans in the Province of Liège. I chose this discipline for one simple reason: I loved listening to stories told by the elderly, starting with those of my grandmother, who came from a small village in the Hannut region. She used to talk about her younger days before 1914.

History has always been a refuge for me, because I didn't really like the society in which I had to evolve in the '70s and '80s, any more than the one that succeeded it, which became more and more technocratic and less and less human, with growing pressure on the workplace.

Originally, the idea was to become a secondary school History teacher. But finding a teaching job at the time was very difficult. So I first worked at the Lierneux Provincial Psychiatric Institute, which was celebrating its centenary. I was recruited to write its history, produce an exhibition, and finally to carry out a study on social medicine in the province of Liège. My agrégation only lasted 15 days as a moral education teacher in Visé. I was then hired by the 'Centre'* on 1 February 1989, under the direction of Jean Vanwelkenhuysen.

What did you do at CegeSoma?



At first, I did a bit of everything: answering occasional correspondents, selecting and classifying Belgian brochures, etc. It wasn't until 1991 that I became a librarian in collaboration with Kathleen Vandenberghe and Hilde Keppens. As such, I select books I consider interesting, and contribute to seminars, study days and colloquia. I have collaborated extensively on RTBF Charleroi's 'Jours de guerre' series, writing numerous contributions. I took part in specific productions by the Centre, notably for the commemorations of the fiftieth anniversary of the Liberation, when with Dirk Martin we analyzed the semiological content of these commemorations. I contributed to various one-off publications, such as '*Hitler, Haider: même combat?*' with Emmanuel Debruyne, and later on '*Le rexisme, un pré-poujadisme*', ...

I also took part in conferences for local history societies and others. Then I collaborated with Fabrice Maerten and Mélanie Bost on the '*Villes en guerre*' series published by *La Renaissance du Livre*. A new book with Mélanie Bost is to be published by *Éditions Aparté* in March this year. For the past 6 or 7 years, I've also been answering questions

from regular or occasional correspondents about the two world wars. I act as an intermediary for researchers and the general public, especially now that CegeSoma has been integrated into the National Archives of Belgium [AGR/ARA]. More and more people are interested in what their ancestors lived through during the two world wars.

How do you go about supplying the CegeSoma library?

Initially, the Centre's library didn't want to step on the toes of the Royal Military Museum, so it had little or no interest in "militaria" or military history in the strict sense of the term. The hallmark of our Centre was to study the impact of the 'war' phenomenon on civil society in Belgium and surrounding countries. From 1997 onwards, our chronological scope expanded. We no longer focused exclusively on the 1930-1950 period. We moved on to the concept of the "Second Thirty Years' War". So, still in the spirit of "the impact of war on civil society", I collected everything to do with cultural, political, socio-economic history, mentalities and collective representations, but now for the 1914-1950 period. In 2005, we decided to embrace the entire short 20th century, from 1914, with the outbreak of the First World War, to 1991, when the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc collapsed. The focus was on the consequences of radicalism in politics, and the impact of war on culture, art and collective mentalities, as well as on massacres, ethnic cleansing, Judeocide, genocide and so on...

I scoured numerous bibliographies and publishing house catalogs for works that might be of interest to us. From 1993 to 2015, we had a substantial budget to supply the Library. Since then, budgets have been reduced, as in all federal scientific institutions.

I also add to the collections thanks to other colleagues who are specialized and suggest titles to me. I also 'salvage' antiquarian items, because I personally love to read, it's my guilty pleasure ... or I visit large bookshops. So I proceed partly by browsing specialized bibliographies and partly by 'guesswork', on the understanding that my intuition can be wrong. If I have any doubts about the interest of a book, I use the computer to obtain one or more critical reviews of the work in question. The smaller the budget, the more rigorous my selection process.

Today, the library holds over 80,000 books (not including brochures). Of these, 70% are purchased and 30% are either bequeathed or donated. Unfortunately, many donations are made of books we already have. Our library is currently 35% in French, at least 30% in English and 20% in Dutch (Flanders and the Netherlands). The rest are in German, Spanish and Italian. Books in English and German are unfortunately much more expensive, and are therefore subject to a stricter selection process given our budget.

What are the gaps in CegeSoma's library?



There are still gaps in certain academic and university works from the days when the Centre didn't yet exist. The Centre's library came into being with the creation of the Centre itself in 1969. Initially, we received a collection of books from the National Archives [AGR]. It was a remnant of the Belgian World War Museum (embryo of a research center devoted to the two world wars) initiated by a *ULB* professor, Suzanne Tassier, in 1944-1945. She had begun accumulating books, but the project was interrupted. We benefited from a second collection of books, also from the *AGR*. It was made up of works from collaborationist publishing houses that had been confiscated in the aftermath of the war by Resistance organizations or by the judicial authorities of the Belgian state, and were deposited at the *AGR* after legal proceedings. When I became librarian at the Centre, there were around 13,000 titles.



BELCOWAR Study Afternoon

A black and white illustration of a windmill where the blades are replaced by various national flags, including the Union Jack, the Swiss flag, the Turkish flag, the American flag, and the German flag. The windmill is set against a dark, cloudy sky. Below the windmill, the text 'Whatever the weather' and 'We must move' are written in a simple font, followed by the word 'together' in a large, bold, sans-serif font.

Whatever the weather
We must move
together

On Friday, March 15, 2024, the State Archives (CegeSoma) and the KU Leuven are organizing a study afternoon on the economic aspects of the Cold War. This event is part of the FED-tWIN BELCOWAR project. The first part of the afternoon will focus on some preliminary results of ongoing research in, among others, the archives of the Departments of Foreign Affairs and Economic Affairs. In the second part, various methodological aspects linked to the relationship between archival research and political-economic research will be discussed. The conference will conclude with a debate between archivists and researchers, moderated by Bart Kerremans (KULeuven).

Upon registration, you will receive the program and it will also be made available online at the beginning of February. Registration (free of charge) is now open and can be made at the following address isabelle.ponteville@arch.be



15/03/2024 - 13:00 to 17:45

Main language

Dutch
English
French

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EHRI- Conny Kristel fellowship for Solange Manche



Solange Manche was awarded a Conny Kristel-fellowship of EHRI to work in the collections of CegeSoma early January. We had a short interview with her on her research project and findings.

Could you briefly introduce yourself?

I recently finished my thesis in French contemporary philosophy at the University of Cambridge, and I am currently a lecturer at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris. In my doctoral thesis, I try to unpack in what ways and to what extent the financialisation of the economy affects the subject by which I understand both the subject as an individual and the subject matter of philosophy. When people talk about financialisation they tend to denote the period that started around the mid-70s and which is characterised by a change in capitalism: from then on, profits were no longer primarily derived from the production of commodities but increasingly came to be made in the world of finance. I noticed that this period coincided with a shift in the history of French thought. Whereas thinking about ontology and reality had been side-lined due to Cold War tensions and the shadow of the Second World War, contemporary French philosophers are interested again in the connection between science, anthropology, and the economy. It is this new approach, more specifically as found in the work of Catherine Malabou, Bernard Stiegler, and Frédéric Lordon that I use to understand how finance affects the temporalities of our lives.

What is your research as an EHRI fellow about and why did you want to research this topic?

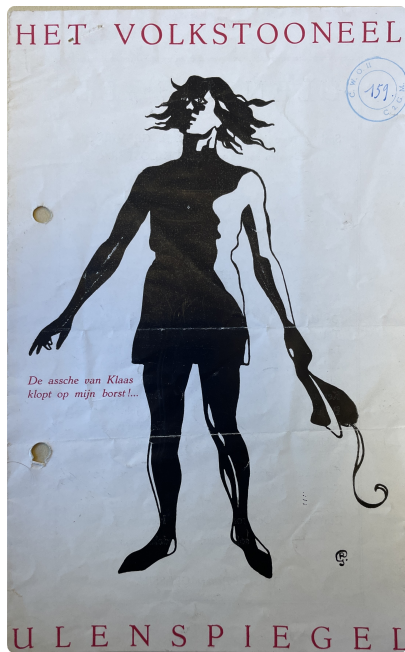
My doctoral research might seem very far removed from the work that I'm now conducting as an EHRI fellow. However, more broadly speaking, my research explores how history, politics and economics influence the way we come to think about ourselves and how that in turn shapes the world we live in. With the example I previously gave, about the shadow of WWII, I more particularly hint at the equation that was being made between grand narratives that philosophers were known for and totalitarianism. This presupposes that thought drives history, whereas I think it is rather the other way round.

With a background in literary studies and the fine arts, I was struck by the intricate history of the Germanic medieval trickster figure of Tijn Uilenspiegel and how the myth became instrumentalised across the political spectrum in Belgium. In 1867, Charles De Coster wrote a novel that depicted Tijn as a freedom fighter against Spanish rule. Whereas the medieval Tijn is a more subversive trickster appealing to communists and liberals alike, it was De Coster's more traditionally heroic character that fitted the anti-Burgundianism of several national socialist movements in Flanders. Wies Moens, the co-founder of the fascist movement Verdinaso, penned songs about the jester that were sung by Verdinaso's paramilitary groups. Likewise, Tijn was used to recruit for the SS and appears frequently in fascist youth magazines to boost war morale. In 1998, Marnix Beyen wrote an extensive study on Uilenspiegel.

Most studies, like Beyen's, focus on the figure in Flanders. Even if Tijn's vivid cultural appropriations are fore and foremost Flemish, there is also reason to believe that Uilenspiegel might have had a Dutch afterlife following Verdinaso's merger with the Dutch National Socialist Movement (NSB) in 1940. This might also explain his contemporary resurgence in Dutch neo-fascist youth organisations. It is the history of this Belgian-Dutch connection that I am now researching as an EHRI fellow, at CegeSoma in Brussels and the NIOD in Amsterdam.

Besides this specific transnational connection, I am also interested in how the appropriation of Tijn fits in the restructuring of cultural production after the occupation. This is a topic I am more familiar with in the case of the Netherlands, but my archival research is already revealing common ground found between Dutch and Flemish fascist organisations in terms of their outlook on the institutionalisation and control of artistic production.

Which sources and collections have you already worked on?



Brochure for the play Ulenspiegel
directed by Renaat Grassin, 1942-43 season.
Ref : AA155 (DeVlag)

So far, I have consulted CegeSoma's library, primarily for newspapers and censored press. I've focussed on propaganda and SS recruitment in the archives of the VNV (collaborating party), DeVlag (pro-German cultural organization), and Verdinaso. Without having been trained as a historian, I am still figuring out how and where material is being archived. In this respect, it was invaluable to have worked with Dirk Luyten, and I am looking forward to coming back this spring for new material.

Have you made any special findings up till now?

I am yet unsure whether my findings are a big addition to Beyen's work. I imagine that this will become clearer in my comparative approach. Before coming to Brussels, what I really hoped to stumble upon was a Tijn play mentioned by Beyen but that he hadn't been able to find. This would have enabled more detailed comparisons of performances. I did come across other documents that stirred my interest, in particular a speech by physician and professor (Gent) Frans Daels on the so-called "Toulouse professors," a group of professors at Gent who fled to France and intended on founding an institute of Belgian refugees there. These plans never came to fruition, as Pétain came to power. Most of them returned to Belgium, a return that Daels greatly disapproves of in his speech. Having grown up in the southwest of France, I had never heard of the role Toulouse played for Belgium in WWII. I imagine that an article would be of great interest to people in the region.

Other news

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