

# Metamorfoze in transition for prioritizing digitization archives

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## Abstract

*Since 1997, Metamorfoze has developed into a mature subsidy program which is financed on a structural basis by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. It is still the programme that safeguards the preservation of important paper collections that suffer from accelerated self-destruction. The main threats to the Dutch paper heritage are identified as acidification in wood pulp papers, and ink corrosion.*

*Metamorfoze has been based on selection and prioritization. Existing inventories and prioritization models have remained in effect until 2009. In addition to this, a selection model for archives was developed in 2005.*

*The new track Archives and Special Collections focuses on archival materials and special collections. Within this track the emphasis lies on the conservation of the original sources, which calls for extremely high quality digital scans (Metamorfoze Preservation Imaging Guidelines).*

*The projects in the Archives and Special Collections are now funded 70%, with the idea that institutions have a responsibility for the preservation of their collections.*

*In the near future, more and more of the available resources of Metamorfoze will be applied for the permanent storage of the master scans, consequently and there will be less money available for the preservation and digitization of the Archives and Special Collections. This raises the question whether the truly most important archives of the Netherlands have yet been preserved and digitized. The desire is therefore that from 2013 onwards, the ABC program will be rearranged according to a thematic classification, to be imposed by an Advisory Committee, so that instead of a more or less demand-driven approach there will be a more structured approach.*

*Partly because of the ensemble value or multidisciplinary nature, the projects within this approach should be fully (100%) subsidized.*

## Introduction

Seeking to preserve paper heritage suffering from autonomous decay such as acidification and ink corrosion, Metamorfoze has been the national programme for the preservation of paper heritage since 1997. This involves printed publications, special cultural-historical collections and archives of national interest. The programme is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. More than 300 collections of nearly 100 Dutch heritage institutions have been preserved since 1997.

Metamorfoze's approach is twofold: on the one hand, it preserves original copies, wraps them properly and stores them in a cool place; on the other, it makes an identical copy of each original (the master copy). A user copy is sent to the institution that owns the collection and that has a duty to make it available to the public, which allows the institution to withdraw the master

copy from use. The Koninklijke Bibliotheek (KB) stores the master copies in a sustainable way.

Metamorfoze provides subsidies, issues guidelines and advises institutions in carrying out preservation projects. Metamorfoze initially limited itself to printed publications and collections with cultural and historical value. In 2005 it expanded its activities to the archive sector and created the Archives Section, to which end the KB formed an alliance with the National Archives of the Netherlands (NA). In 2010 it was decided that Metamorfoze should be split up into two sections: the Books, Newspapers and Periodicals (*Boeken, Kranten en Tijdschriften*; BKT) section and the Archives and Special Collections (*Archieven en Bijzondere Collecties*; ABC) section. Each section requires a different approach and organisation. The KB administers the BKT section, whereas the NA is responsible for the approach and organisation of the ABC section.

## Allocation of subsidies

Each year, € 6 million is available for preservation. € 2.5 million is reserved for the ABC section. Based on the belief that institutions themselves are responsible for preserving their collections, approved projects in this section are granted a 70% subsidy. Subsidy applications are assessed by an independent external assessment committee.

€ 3.5 million each year is reserved for the BKT section. Metamorfoze makes this budget available to the three large university libraries and the KB, institutions that preserve parts of their collections' Dutch publications at Metamorfoze's request. Based on the belief that the published, printed works are randomly spread across Dutch libraries and that Metamorfoze bears ultimate responsibility for preservation, the subsidy granted in this section is 100%.

## Transition to digitisation

Until 2007, analogue copies (microfilms) were made according to strict guidelines. Due to the lack of user friendliness of this medium, the high demand from participating institutions and digitisation benefits, in 2008 Metamorfoze switched to digitisation as its method of preservation. To this end, the *Preservation Imaging Guidelines* were issued in 2007. The double approach could be maintained: the original copy is protected, the – high-quality – digital files serve as a substitute for the original copy and are stored in the e-Depot in a sustainable manner.

## Archives and Special Collections Section

The preconditions and selection criteria that apply to the library sector are used for the archives as well. Complete archives are eligible, as are consecutive sections or series of larger archives.

The main substantive criterion for eligibility for the Metamorfoze programme is that the archive is of national importance (see also *COMA, final version, November 2005*).

Additional criteria for archives are unicity, public interest and intrinsic value.

### **Problem areas in respect of the current approach**

No prior inventory has been made of the archives of national interest that are to be preserved for the future of the Dutch Collection, resulting in a wide variety of archives being offered for preservation for the period 2005-2012.

In the near future, more money will be needed on a long-term basis to pay for the sustainable storage of the master scans. The consequence will be that substantially less money will be available for preservation and digitisation of the ABC section. The question is whether the most important archives of the Netherlands will have been preserved and digitised by that time. Therefore, with the intention of developing a more structured approach and working from a demand-oriented supply in the years to come, Metamorfoze is exploring the option of dividing the ABC section by theme.

### **Ideas from the heritage area: towards a single Archive Collection**

The 2009 position paper *Archiveren is vooruitzien* written by Branchevereniging Archiefinstellingen in Nederland (BRAIN) and Koninklijke Vereniging van Archivarissen in Nederland (KVAN) advocates that an archive cannot truly become heritage until there are people who consider themselves to be heirs. In other words, archives only acquire significance when they are seen and used. Access to the archives to be preserved is currently being improved; this is one of the key tasks of archive-managing institutions and they are working hard on this.

In the position paper, the authors believe that increased collaboration is a prerequisite for efficient use of scarce resources (money and knowledge). It is for good reason that in this document they refer to the Dutch Archive Collection: the whole of all publicly accessible archive collections – irrespective of their appearance – that the Netherlands boasts. ‘It is no concern of archive researchers why, for what mysterious reasons, a file is stored by institution X and not by Y. They do not care about the way we divide our tasks. They are looking for information and sources, not for institutions. And that is how we should serve them.’ The policymakers in the archive sector opine that ‘It is impossible, and also commercially speaking senseless, to digitise everything’. Choices have to be made. A structural classification by theme will allow Metamorfoze to form the basis for the selection of archives and the creation of the Dutch Archive Collection.

If we are to follow a structural approach within the Metamorfoze Programme to preserve important archives for the future according to a classification by theme, we do have to realise that the choices we now make are time-sensitive. But not only choices are time-sensitive, the role of heritage institutions themselves is also subject to change, just as that of public authorities, for instance regarding the extent to which they assume responsibility for heritage.

This is why we need to involve the heritage area in the classification by theme. We do not do so by imposing themes, but by formulating these in consultation and presenting them to the Archives and Special Collections Advisory Committee.

## **New structural approach, 2013-2016**

### **Classification by theme**

In order to create themes that the archive institutions themselves support, they will actively be involved in these choices. It is proposed that two discussion meetings be held: one for researchers and one for representatives of Dutch archive institutions. At these meetings, they will have the opportunity to indicate which collections and archives or themes they wish to preserve for the future within the framework of the Metamorfoze Programme.

The classification by theme may also link up with national research programmes of university libraries and the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. It is also possible to take stock of what the relevant cultural heritage programmes offer.

Metamorfoze recommends that current affairs – such as commemoration years – for the various themes be considered for the next five years. For example, slavery will be in the picture in 2013-2014, and the 200th anniversary of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 2013 and the royal succession in April 2013 similarly constitute major themes that will be presented to the Archives and Special Collections Advisory Committee. Expectations are that a demand-oriented supply will significantly enhance the frequency of use of the preserved archives.

### **Selection criteria**

The basic principle is that the project themes or topics are of national or international interest:

- these are archives and/or collections with visible autonomous decay and of absolute unicity; no similar materials exist;
- there is a social demand, demonstrated or expected high consultation frequency and/or archives and collections that are of interest for multiple disciplines and lines of research.

### **Theme manager**

A theme manager will be appointed for each theme. He/she may be a representative of an archive institution or collection-managing institution that owns a substantial number of metres of archives covered by this theme. This theme manager will submit the project proposal on behalf of the institutions that wish to supply related archives for the relevant theme.

The theme manager will be responsible for content and process and will ensure that the archives are preserved and digitised. He/she will work closely with an ABC coordinator of Bureau Metamorfoze to warrant that the institutions submit proper project applications.

### **100% subsidy**

Partly because of their collective value or multidisciplinary nature, it is proposed that the projects within this thematic approach be fully (= 100%) subsidised. The costs to be claimed are in line with common practice in the BKT section. This means that, in addition to preparation, preservation, digitisation and sustainable storage, Metamorfoze will also finance archive accessibility. In a few years' time, this accessibility may lead the National Archives of the Netherlands to make the scans and metadata available through a platform of a Dutch Archive Collection created for that purpose.

## Conclusion and follow-up

The two themes Slavery and the 200th anniversary of the Kingdom of the Netherlands have been selected as pilot projects for the subsidy round in the autumn of 2013. The Archives and Special Collections Advisory Committee will also determine two additional themes. In the years ahead, the aim will be to establish 3 to 4 themes each year for which project proposals may be submitted.

It will be up to the Archives and Special Collections Advisory Committee to prioritise the project proposals within these themes. Using the annually available resources of € 1.8 million, we seek to create a solid basis for a well-preserved Dutch Archive Collection for the next four years.

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## Author Biography

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