

Plantin-Moretus Museum (Belgium)

No 1185

1. BASIC DATA

<i>State Party:</i>	Belgium
<i>Name of property:</i>	Plantin-Moretus Museum
<i>Location:</i>	Antwerp (Flanders)
<i>Date received:</i>	27 January 2004
<i>Category of property:</i>	

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *monument*.

Brief description:

The Plantin-Moretus Museum is a printing works/publishing house dating from the Renaissance and the Baroque period.

It is associated with the history of the invention and spread of printing. Its name refers to the greatest printer-publisher of the second half of the 16th century: Christophe Plantin (c. 1520-1589). In addition to its outstanding architectural value, the monument contains remarkable examples of old printing equipment, a large library and invaluable archives.

2. THE PROPERTY

Description

The old town of Antwerp (*Antwerpen*, in Flemish) developed on the right bank of the Schelde River, at the foot of a fortress with a tollgate for the control of river transport, dating back to the 9th century. After being substantially extended during the 13th and 14th centuries, Antwerp asserted its position, at the expense of Bruges, as:

- a centre of monetary transactions, and
- an international marketplace (including an art market); but also as:
- a meeting place for humanists and artists
- and a hub of European cultural exchanges, importing in particular the key elements of the Italian Renaissance which were to inspire the Flemish Renaissance.

The booming vitality of Antwerp from 1500 onwards was conducive to the development of printing. By the mid-16th century, some 140 printers, publishers and booksellers were working in the town, where the book market took on an increasingly international dimension. Antwerp thus

became the centre of the book businesses for all regions north of the Alps, and (with Venice and Paris) one of the three capitals of European typography, thanks primarily to the activity of Plantin between 1555 and 1589.

It was in the setting of the metropolis of Antwerp, which in the mid-16th century had a population of over 100,000, that Christopher Plantin set up his printing and publishing firm, the *Officina Plantiniana*, with a complex of workshops adjoining a patrician residence. The *Officina* at that time had 16 presses, 80 workers (including 22 typesetters), 32 printers and 3 proofreaders, in addition to the household servants. It was quite easily the largest typographical company in Europe. On the death of Plantin in 1589, his son-in-law Jan Moretus I (1543-1610) took over at the head of the best equipped company in Europe, and it was thanks to the Moretus family that the continuity of the production activities of the firm was maintained until 1867.

This continuity refers to the same functions carried out in the same place. This explains the homogeneity of the plan of the building, which is reflected in the present-day museum. We thus find:

a./ on the ground floor:

- the reception (an 18th century room), with an interior garden;
- following on from the hall leading into the vestibule, a dining room (18th century) and a kitchen (also 18th century);
- two formal rooms dating to the 17th century: a small drawing room and a large drawing room, with tapestries and above all paintings by Rubens (1577-1640);
- a third drawing room, larger in size, with a Renaissance fireplace, is used for the exhibition of manuscripts (638 in all, in Greek, Latin, Hebrew, etc.);
- finally, some rooms recently converted into a reception room, a presentation room and an interpretation room - in the West wing.

The West wing of the ground floor is the oldest in Plantin's residence. In this wing have been retained the Proprietor's Office of Plantin, the Proofreaders' Room, and another room (Justus Lipsius Room) which reminds us that the great humanist Justus Lipsius (1547-1606) stayed in the mansion of Plantin, and then of the Moretus, to work on his frequent visits to Antwerp.

The South wing of the same ground floor is also very old. Plantin, who around 1585 had some 90 typefaces at his disposal, made a store room there (the Letter Room) for the lead characters of the various alphabets, including Arabic and Hebrew. He also set up there the printing works, a large rectangular room, with maximum exposure to daylight. There are still 10 presses there - including two of the oldest printing presses in the world - and a paper press.

b./ on the first floor:

An 18th century monumental staircase leads to the first floor.

The first floor comprises:

- the Gutenberg room, in which is exhibited the *36-line Bible*, the second most important work in the history of Western printing, after the *42-line Bible*, also by Gutenberg, printed in Mainz (1452-1455). The only example of the *36-line Bible* in Belgium, it is one of only 14 known examples worldwide.

- the Plantin room, a typical 18th century room (with a marble fireplace and a canopy with a moulded frame), presenting the major works of Plantin who, during his career (1555-1598), published 2450 books or an average of 72 per year, for 34 years, making him the most prolific printer/publisher of the 16th century and the leading printer of the humanist thought, languages and sciences of his time.

- Adjoining this room, the reading room is a reconstitution (with period fireplace, mirror, shelves and book cabinets) of the intimate atmosphere of an 18th century reading room. It is followed by a corridor/painting gallery (16th-17th centuries).

The South wing, whose construction dates to the years 1637-1639, comprises:

- the Small Library, with a collection of precious books constituted over a period of four centuries, of which the master work is the *Biblia Polyglotta* (or *Biblia Regia*, in reference to Philip II of Spain who financed the enterprise). This is a scientific edition, prepared by the greatest philologists and humanists of the time, of the full text of the Bible in 5 languages (Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Syriac and Aramaic), under the supervision of the great theologian Benito Arias Montanus.

- the Moretus Room, a former workshop in which are presented the major editions produced by the Moretus family over a period of two and a half centuries, and in particular the only parchment copy of *Graduale Romanum de Tempore et Sanctis*, dating from 1599, and a drawing made in 1589 which is the first known representation of a potato seedling.

- the Rubens room, a room showing Italian influence (Renaissance and early Baroque), highlights the contribution of Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), who was linked to the Moretus family and the dissemination of books in the Baroque period, as illustrated by many drawings and designs for book title pages.

The West wing, containing the following rooms:

- the Printers' Room, the former library of Balthasar I Moretus, presents incunabula collections in 19th century cases, and in particular post-incunabula from Antwerp, acquired since 1876,

- the 17th-18th century drawing room, an impressive example of a refined atmosphere in a French-style interior (gold leather and wainscoting, Louis XV clock, family portraits). It contains an exceptional harpsichord/spinnet of 1734.

- the archives room. With their 1382 registers, 990 collections and 187 packets and boxes of over 1385

parchment items (spread over 158 linear metres), these archives:

- o contain the oldest sources in the world on the history of printing since 1440 and Gutenberg, and on the evolution of typographic technology;

- o constitute one of the richest sources of information on the history of humanism, the Counter-Reform, ancient and Oriental languages, sciences, the economic and social history of the 16th and 17th centuries, culture and mentalities, and the major currents of Western civilisation on the eve of the Industrial Revolution;

- the geography room, which recalls, through the exhibition of a large number of printed cartographic works, that 16th century Antwerp was the main European centre of cartography. It evokes the memory of Abraham Ortelius (1527-1598), the father of the first atlas, and of Mercator (1512 - 1594), who triggered the decisive turning point in the history of cartography after Ptolemy (2nd century A.D.) and whose internationally renowned masterpiece is on display here: *Atlas sive Cosmographicae Meditationes de Fabrica Mundi*, completed in 1595, after Mercator's death.

The North wing comprises:

- the Room of Foreign Editions, created in 1876. Its showcases, arranged by period and by country, contain rare and precious editions from the greatest European printing works, from the pioneering period of the 15th and 16th centuries (such as the Italian printer/publisher, the great humanist Alde Manuce (1420-1480), the Estienne family, the first family of 16th century French printers, the Basle printer Joannes Frobenius (1460-1527), etc., up to the Enlightenment. It also contains the 35 volumes of the *Dictionnaire raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers* (1751-1780), the famous *Encyclopédie* which represented a summit in the history of European thought and helped to inspire the French Revolution in 1789.

- a small drawing room and a bedroom.

- the book illustration room, where are displayed in the showcases and on the walls, the various stages and processes of illustration. Plantin and then the Moretus made this their speciality and the collection is impressive: 15,000 woodblocks, 3000 engraved copper plates and 791 sketches for copper engravings, made by the great Antwerp master of graphic arts in the 16th and 17th centuries, Peter Paul Rubens.

- Plantin, with his 1566 edition of *Vivae Imagines partium corporis humani* by Juan Valverde, marked a turning point in the history of book illustration throughout Western civilisation: during the 17th century, copper engraving completely supplanted wood engraving for high quality printing.

- a bedroom with an alcove, which since 2001 has contained the facilities for presenting the museum CD-Rom to visitors.

- the foundry workshop and the letter foundry, which are unique, with a selection of 4,500 dies, alongside 16,000

adjusted matrices, 4681 non-adjusted matrices and 62 moulds.

The East wing comprises:

- the small and large library, remarkable rooms giving out on to the inner court of the mansion, constituting an impressive example of an original 17th century private library (Particularly worth noting: a collection of plaster busts of Greek scholars and Roman emperors, wooden busts of saints and popes, and globes dating from 1751 from the celebrated Parisian workshop of Robert de Vaugondy).

- the Max Horn room, which houses a priceless series of 1447 books of 16th and 17th century French literature, bequeathed to the museum by Max Horn (1882-1953). It also contains a collection of precious bindings:

- o Medieval bindings, pressed in relief without ink or colour,
- o Oriental bindings with golden decoration,
- o Bindings used in the Netherlands (13th to 18th centuries).

Final remark:

In all, the historic building in its current state comprises 35 rooms (including the drawing room dedicated to the memory of the jurist René Vandevoir (1892-1966), a benefactor of the Museum, and of the French-speaking Flemish writer, Emile Verhaeren (1855-1916)).

History

In the application, the history of the old town of Antwerp and the development of the mansion of Plantin and the Moretus, with its printing and publishing workshops, are fully and accurately set out. It was the constantly growing economic role of the town which was crucial; the other essential factor was the fact that Christophe PLANTIN moved to Antwerp in 1555, and took up residence in the mansion (today the Museum premises) which later came to be known as the Golden Compass, in the heart of the historic nucleus of the town, explain the evolution of the monument and its importance in the history of printing and publishing, from 1579, the date of the construction of the first set of printing workshops (*Officina Plantiniana*) to 1871, when the last in the line of printers/publishers associated with the workshops, Edouard Moretus (1804-1880) abandoned the printing activity, dedicating himself to preserving the furniture and property patrimony, and the treasures accumulated over the centuries.

Over this long period, a distinction can be drawn between three phases:

The thriving enterprise of Plantin, up to his death in 1589 (by that date, his *Officina* had already produced some 2450 works) was continued by his son-in-law Jan I Moretus (1543-1610), who made it the best equipped printing works in Europe. His son, Balthasar I Moretus (1574-1641) took over from him and consolidated the firm's reputation, with the help of his friendship with Peter Paul Rubens. This famous artist produced drawings for remarkable and

exceptional works of Baroque publishing, which were universally imitated in the second half of the 17th century.

The *Officina's* international reputation and the unrivalled quality of its books led to visits to the *Officina* by Marie de Médicis in 1631, Queen Christina of Sweden in 1654 and a number of Italian and Polish princes and princesses.

The second half of the 17th century marked the beginning of a period of decline for printing in Antwerp. However, the Moretuses' *Officina* maintained its position as the largest in the Spanish Netherlands. Its books, mainly religious, were produced for the Spanish market and were exported as far afield as China, and to the Spanish possessions in the New World. From 1715 to 1764, its output made one of the largest contributions to the international export trade in books.

Despite an incipient renewal in the first quarter of the 19th century, the situation of the Moretuses deteriorated. They provide unable to come to terms with the modernisation of printing, and in particular the consequences of the development of mechanical and rotary presses. Edward Moretus (1804-1880) was to be the last of the printer/publishers of the family, and after the publication in 1866 of a final book, *Horae diurnae S. Francisci*, he was forced to cease printing. In 1871, he became the curator of the family patrimony and a collector.

The Plantin/Moretus saga was over.

In 1873, he negotiated the sale of the property with all its contents under an agreement with the Belgian state and the City of Antwerp.

In 1876, the Plantin-Moretus Museum was born.

To these phases of historical evolution correspond developments in architecture, refurbishment and museographical equipment.

a- 1576–1580:

Establishment of the core of the mansion, and construction of the printing works with its tools and equipment

b- 1620–1640:

Successive extensions of the residence, and various alterations which create the interior courtyard in its present form.

c- 1761–1763:

During the flourishing period under the ownership of Franciscus Joannes Moretus (1717-1768), the seven small house fronts were demolished and replaced by the existing building, in a transitional Louis XV-Louis XVI style, reflecting the tastes of the ennobled upper bourgeoisie.

d- From 1876 to the present day:

- Purchase of the whole property (including its contents) by the Belgian state and the City of Antwerp in 1876.
- Opening of the Plantin-Moretus Museum on 19 August 1877.

- In 1937, addition of a new wing to house the Print Room of the City of Antwerp, a subsidiary of the Museum, with its sizeable collection of graphic art.

- In 1947 restoration work was carried out following the damage caused in WW2: on 2 January 1945, a flying bomb damaged the house of 1580 on the south side, and the facade of the East wing.

Fortunately, the collections, which had been moved to a safe place, were not damaged.

Management regime

Legal provision:

The Plantin-Moretus Museum (with its annex, the Print-Room) is a public institution, which belongs, with all its buildings and contents, to the City of Antwerp.

Transfer of ownership from the Government of Flanders (of the Kingdom of Belgium) to the City of Antwerp took place by an Order dated 8 December 1998, approved at communal level by the College of the Burgomaster and Aldermen on 6 May 1999 and by the Town Council on 25 May 1999.

Furthermore, because of its historic and artistic value, the whole of the Plantin-Moretus Museum complex - including its furniture, fixtures and patrimony - is listed as a Historic Monument and thus protected under the terms of the Ministerial Order of 10 July 1997.

Management structure:

a./ at Museum level:

The general and day-to-day management is the responsibility of the Chief Curator of the Museum, appointed by the City of Antwerp, who reports to the communal authorities and submits an annual activity report to them. He is in charge of the management of personnel, of material and financial resources, and of all the listed structures as well as the management of the collections.

b./ through the Flanders authorities:

In view of the importance and composition of its collection, and its management and conservation policy, the Museum was awarded the title of Outstanding Museum (national/international) on 15 February 1999.

As a result, its management policy is supervised by the Fine Arts & Museum Division of the Ministry of Flanders.

As a listed historic monument, the management of the Museum is governed by the Division of Monuments & Sites, which is part of the Ministry of Planning.

Resources:

a./ at local level:

The Museum has ordinary and extraordinary operating credits obtained from the General Directorate of Municipal Museums (City of Antwerp), revenues generated by its

own activities, and private contributions, donations and bequests.

b./ through the Flanders authorities:

As a protected historic monument, the Museum receives grants (maintenance, restoration work) and as an Outstanding Museum, it receives subsidies (operating subsidies and project subsidies).

Justification by the State Party (summary)

The Plantin-Moretus Museum bears witness to an important interchange of human values, relating to the development of technology, in this case printing, publishing and dissemination of books.

The Plantin-Moretus Museum bears an outstanding testimony to a cultural tradition.

The Plantin-Moretus Museum is an outstanding example of an architectural and technological ensemble which illustrates significant stages in human history.

The Plantin-Moretus Museum is directly and tangibly associated with ideas, beliefs and artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance.

3. ICOMOS EVALUATION

Actions by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS mission visited the Museum in August 2004.

Conservation

Conservation history:

The nucleus of the patrician mansion, dating back to 1576, and the additions and alterations made as tastes, domestic architecture and lifestyles changed from the 16th to the 19th centuries were preserved in an excellent condition first by the founder, Christophe Plantin, and then by his successors, the Moretuses, who inhabited the premises continuously up to 1876.

Since the purchase of the ensemble - both property and contents - by the Belgian state and the City of Antwerp in 1876, and the opening of the Plantin-Moretus Museum in August 1877, the conservation of the built heritage and collections has been carried out at Museum level under the supervision and with the subsidies of the City of Antwerp, and at the level of the Flanders authorities, with the technical and financial support of the Fine Arts & Museums Division and the Monuments & Sites Division.

State of conservation:

Protected as a historic monument and as an Outstanding Museum, the upkeep of the Plantin-Moretus Museum is an ongoing process.

To ensure that it receives its maintenance grant from the Flemish government, it is under an obligation to draw up a

5-year maintenance plan and carry out an annual technical inspection.

In the same way, in order to receive the restoration work grant, the museum must take out insurance cover for the monument and carry out a survey of the technical and physical condition of the premises every three years.

Lastly, the Flanders authorities have an agency for monitoring the condition of monuments (*Monumentenwacht* / Monument Surveillance & Guarding), founded in 1991, specifically responsible for :

- carrying out comprehensive inspections at regular intervals,
- drawing up reports on the condition of the buildings,
- supplying long-term upkeep plans.

An initial comprehensive inspection of the Museum took place on 21/22 October 1998, and led to the proposal of a list of urgent work (building work), work necessary in the short term (repair of weathered stones and joints), and important points for long-term upkeep.

Its recommendations were incorporated in the restoration plans and works for the period 1998–2002.

Management:

A highly detailed management plan for 2003–2009 has been drawn up by the Museum's curator. It covers the whole of the property nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List, both as a historic monument and as a museum.

The management is primarily that of all the protected structures. This includes conservation, ongoing upkeep, necessary repairs, emergency interventions (in the event of water infiltration, for example), and restoration. All these actions are carried out under the supervision of the Monuments and Sites Division of the Flemish Culture Ministry.

The management also covers the collections: exhibits, archives, books, reserves and museographical stores. The key tasks are carried out in accordance with international recommendations (such as those of ICOM), in conjunction with the General Directorate of the Municipal Museums of Antwerp, and under the supervision of the Fine Arts and Museums Division of the Flemish Culture Ministry.

Lastly, these key activities are complemented and supported by the management of personnel and equipment (including financial resources) and scientific management: publications, specialist libraries, automation and digitisation, organisation of temporary exhibitions, and international loans and exchanges.

Risk analysis:

The dossier highlights the following:

- + Natural constraints:

Flooding:

Although situated relative close to the Schelde River, there is no flooding problem for the buildings: a small wall barrier protects the quays from overflow and flooding.

Fire:

The Museum is equipped with an electronic fire detection system linked directly to the Fire Service.

- + Environmental constraints:

The City of Antwerp is constantly striving to reduce pollution in the historic centre resulting from road traffic. Traffic in the zone is now restricted, and pedestrian areas have gradually been introduced.

However, the traditional markets of second-hand goods and antiques, and the Friday market, mean that pressure in the zone continues.

- + Visitor flow and tourism constraints:

The visiting route is organised in a way that regulates visitor flows (70, 000 visitors per year).

Authenticity and integrity

Authenticity:

Testimony to the art of building and lifestyle of their period, each of the phases of the complex today converted into a museum - i.e. central nucleus of 1580 and gradual additions of 1578–1584, 1620–1630 and 1760–1763 - has retained its authenticity.

But above all this authenticity is reflected in the continuing existence in the same places (mansion and workshops) of the same activity (printing/publishing) carried out by the same family (the Moretuses, descended from the son-in-law of Plantin, the founder).

In formal terms, the restorations required for the ongoing upkeep of the buildings, and those made necessary by war damage (in 1945) have not affected the authenticity of the ensemble.

The same applies to the museographic appointments, which are fully in keeping with the historical evolution of the monument.

Integrity:

The complex has generally retained its integrity, both as regards its characteristics and its constituents.

Comparative evaluation

A museum since 1876–1877, there is no equivalent property to the Plantin-Moretus Museum.

It is the only museum to be created inside the historic residence and workshops of printer/publishers.

It is the only one which is a testimony to an activity which continued to be carried out in the same location for 3 centuries: 1576–1876.

With exceptional archives bearing witness to a firm of European and worldwide global stature, it is the only one to represent the most eminent 16th century punch and matrix cutters, such as Claude Garamond (1499–1599) who developed Greek, Roman and Italic alphabets, and his successor Guillaume Le Bé, who specialised in the Hebrew alphabet.

Lastly, it is the only one to contain two of the oldest presses in the world.

The nomination application compares the museum to other museums, while specifying the differences:

- Odense (Denmark), Stavanger (Norway), London (U.K.): limited to 19th century printing,
- the Gutenberg Museum in Mainz (Germany), which centres on the typographic art invented by Gutenberg,
- the Museum of Printing and Banking in Lyon (France), which is limited to an albeit outstanding 16th century xylographic collection.

Outstanding universal value

General statement:

The Plantin-Moretus Museum is the only printing and publishing house in the world dating back to the Renaissance and the Baroque period.

It is situated in the mansion and workshops of founder, Christophe Plantin (1520–1589), who was the most eminent printer/publisher of the second half of the 16th century.

Plantin's successors, the Moretus family, occupied the same premises from the 16th century to the 19th century, producing work of a very high intellectual quality and outstanding workmanship by world standards.

The Museum combines property and furniture, equipment and collections which are of outstanding value, not only in historical and scientific terms, but also from a technological and documentary viewpoint.

Lastly, the archives conserved in the Museum, which have no equivalent anywhere else in the world, contain continuous series of accounting records from the 16th to the 19th centuries, and were entered by UNESCO, on 4 September 2001, in the Memory of the World register.

Evaluation of criteria:

The inscription nomination application, which refers to criteria ii, iii, iv and vi justifies the nomination by the symbiosis between:

The architecture of the complex and its urban evolution from the 16th to the 19th century,

The appointments of the workshops (printing-press, foundry, typesetters' room), which in their kind are unique,

The furniture and the collections that have remained in situ (equipment, tools, libraries, furniture, portraits, archives).

All this patrimony has been meticulously conserved in the Museum for more than a century (since 1876–1877).

This evaluation, which is reflected in the application, seems to be fully justified.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS BY ICOMOS

Recommendations for the future

The management plan for the period 2003–2009 stipulates that the Plantinian archives, which are of outstanding universal value, must be preserved in optimum condition. With this in mind, the Museum has scheduled, in agreement with the competent local and administrative authorities, the construction of a new store room equipped with an adequate air conditioning system and an effective surveillance system.

For carrying out this plan, it is recommended that a solution should be found - in conjunction with the Monuments and Sites Division and the Fine Arts and Museums Division of Flanders - which is compatible with the authenticity of the whole Mansion and Workshops complex.

Recommendations concerning the title of the proposed inscription

It is suggested that it should be amended, by adopting the title of the property as indicated on the cover of the inscription nomination application.

By adopting the title “Plantin-Moretus House-Workshops-Museum Complex”, the emphasis is placed on the unique symbiosis in this Museum between architecture, function and the “spirit of the place”. In this way, the monument is not limited to its identity as a museum, and a precedent in the World Heritage List is avoided which would have given the impression that other museums could also be inscribed.

Recommendations for inscription

ICOMOS recommends that the World Heritage Committee adopt the following draft decision:

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Document WHC-05/29.COM/8B,
2. Inscribes the property, provided that its title is changed to: “Plantin-Moretus House-Workshops-Museum Complex”, on the World Heritage List on the basis of ***criteria ii, iii, iv and vi***:

Criterion ii: Through the publications of the Officina Plantiniana, the Plantin-Moretus complex is a testimony to the major role played by this important centre of 16th century European humanism in the development of science and culture.

Criterion iii: Considered as an integral part of the Memory of the World (UNESCO, 2001), the Plantinian Archives, including the business archives of the Officina, the books of commercial accounts and the correspondence with a number of world-renowned scholars and humanists, provide an outstanding testimony to a cultural tradition of the first importance.

Criterion iv: As an outstanding example of the relationship between the living environment of a family during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, the world of work and the world of commerce, the Plantin-Moretus Complex is of unrivalled documentary value relating to significant periods of European history: the Renaissance, the Baroque era and Classicism.

Criterion vi: The Plantin-Moretus complex is tangibly associated with ideas, beliefs, technologies and literary and artistic works of outstanding universal significance.

3. Recommends that for carrying out the construction of a new store room for the archives a solution should be found which is compatible with the authenticity of the whole Mansion and Workshops complex.

ICOMOS, April 2005

KADSCAN

Gem : ANTWERPEN
Gemnr : 11002
Kadgem : 4 AFD/ANTWERPEN
Kadgemnr : 11804
Percid : 11804_D_0574_A_000_00
Plannummer : N104D020
Volgnr : 3126076
X : 152050.48
Y : 212028.00
Ignisnr : 11002
Sectie : D
Grondnr : 574
Exponent : A
Macht : 0
Bisnr : 0
Toestand : 19980101

N 51° 13' 06"
E 4° 23' 52"

Limites du bien culturel
proposé pour l'inscription

extrait du plan cadastral
échelle approximative :
1: 1000



Map showing the core zone of the property



Inner Yard



Printing House