

# Quantity, quality and the public. The electronic edition of historical sources

by Donald Haks  
Institute of Netherlands History

The Royal Historical Commission (*Koninklijke Commissie voor Geschiedenis/Commission Royale d'Histoire*) belongs to what David Knowles referred to as the 'Great Historical Enterprises': the large-scale national source editions of the 19th century, like the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, the *Rolls Series* and the *Collection des documents inédits sur l'histoire de France*.<sup>1</sup> The reasons behind these ambitious projects that were performed with great dedication, were twofold. In the academic sense, there was a strong demand for reliable editions of historical sources. The critical study of documents should constitute the basis for historical research into a country's national past. Indeed national, because in addition to an academic goal, these great historical enterprises also had a cultural goal, namely to shape the identity of the nation by explaining and justifying the rise and development of the 19-century nation state through its national historical sources.

And yet this national framework has been more of a source of inspiration than a restriction. Views on method and subject evolved in conjunction with historiography itself in the various fields of interest of historians. The over 400 volumes the Royal Commission has published since its establishment, thus bear witness to a continuous interaction with the academic community.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the Commission has critically examined its policy. This was emphasised by the choice of the 'digital edition of sources' as the theme for the Commission's 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

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<sup>1</sup> David KNOWLES, 'Great historical enterprises', in: *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5<sup>th</sup> Series, 10 (1958-1960).

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.kcgeschiedenis.be>. In particular the section on the history of the Commission and the publications.

The Institute of Netherlands History was established in the same tradition but dates from a later time. It was established in 1902.<sup>3</sup> The programme of 1904 numbers 62 planned editions many of which are enormous in scope and complexity.<sup>4</sup> Especially after the Second World War, emphasis was placed on large series, like charters, correspondences and government documents. In the 1980s, this policy led to doubts and seeking new paths. Doubts, for example, about the representativeness of selective source editions, concern about the lack of flexibility of large projects and the vision that electronic technology (the first computers were appearing at that time) would radically change the publication of historical sources. The institute therefore expanded its goal in 1990: *From the editing of sources to the disclosure of sources*.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the text editions, overviews, guides and repertories became important. Thought was quickly given to digital publication. This is definitely true of overviews of sources, because the search options offered by overviews and repertories when presented digitally are better than when appearing in print. For the Institute of Netherlands History, the step towards digital publishing was thus based on academic and technological considerations. And we can now pose the question: what changes and what benefits has it delivered?<sup>6</sup>

### **An example: the correspondence of William of Orange<sup>7</sup>**

William of Orange is one of the most important figures in Dutch and early-modern European history. He led the Dutch Revolt against Philip II of Spain. To enable the tiny Netherlands to resist the might of the Spanish crown, William of Orange tried to win many foreign rulers to his cause, including Queen Elizabeth of England and the protestant German princes. To this end, he conducted extensive correspondence. He corresponded not only with foreign rulers but also with numerous local

<sup>3</sup> Established by Royal Decree as the Commissie van Advies voor 's Rijks Geschiedkundige Publicatiën [Advisory Committee for National Historical Publications]: J.P. DE VALK and K. KOIJMANS, "‘Een dienende onderneming’. De Rijkscommissie voor Vaderlandse Geschiedenis en haar Bureau 1902-1968", in: K. Kooijmans et al., editors, *Bron en publikatie. Voordrachten en opstellen over de ontsluiting van bronnen, uitgegeven bij het 75-jarig bestaan van het Bureau der Rijkscommissie voor Vaderlandse Geschiedenis* ('s-Gravenhage 1985) pp. 203-283.

<sup>4</sup> *Overzicht van de door bronnenpublicatie aan te vullen leemten der Nederlandsche geschiedkennis, samengesteld door de Commissie van Advies voor 's Rijks Geschiedkundige Publicatiën* ('s-Gravenhage 1904).

<sup>5</sup> *Bronontsluiting voor historisch onderzoek* ('s-Gravenhage 1990). An internal report from 1987 preceded this publication.

<sup>6</sup> For a similar overview from ten years ago, Donald Haks, 'Elektronische ontsluiting van historische bronnen. Wetenschappelijke principes en vormen van bronontsluiting', in: *Theoretische geschiedenis*, 26 (1999) pp. 417-431.

<sup>7</sup> Donald HAKS, ed., *De correspondentie van Willem van Oranje. Presentatie van de data – en beeldbank in Stedelijk Museum Het Prinsenhof te Delft* (Den Haag 2005).

| Zoeken in de correspondentie van Willem van Oranje                     |   | zoekhulp                                     |
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| Briefnummer  | <input type="text"/>  | <a href="#">briefnummerlijst</a>             |
| <input type="text" value="en"/> Datum tussen                           | <input type="text" value="dag"/> <input type="text" value="maand"/> <input type="text" value="jaar"/> | Zoektip                                      |
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| <input type="text" value="en"/> Zoek in alle velden                    | <input type="text"/>  |  |
| <input type="text" value="en"/> Correspondent                          | <input type="text"/>  | <a href="#">correspondentenlijst</a> Zoektip |
| <input type="text" value="en"/> Verzendplaats                          | <input type="text"/>  | <a href="#">verzendplaatsenlijst</a> Zoektip |
| <input type="text" value="en"/> Inhoud                                 | <input type="text"/>  | Zoektip                                      |
| <input type="text" value="en"/> Incipit                                | <input type="text"/>  | <a href="#">incipitlijst</a> Zoektip         |
| <input type="text" value="en"/> Bron                                   | <input type="text"/>  | <a href="#">bronnenlijst</a> Zoektip         |
| <input type="text" value="en"/> Toegang                                | <input type="text"/>  | Zoektip                                      |
| <input type="text" value="en"/> Verschijningsvorm                      | <input type="text" value="alle"/>   | Zoektip                                      |
| <input type="text" value="en"/> Opmerkingen                            | <input type="text"/>  | Zoektip                                      |
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authorities. His correspondence is therefore of great importance for the study of subjects such as the development of modern states, the financing of wars, dealing with differences in religion and, naturally, the creation of the Dutch Republic.

William of Orange was not missing from the 1904 programme. With great national pathos it was stated: 'Historical writing of the northern Netherlands of the 16<sup>th</sup> century has a duty to honour the memory of William of Orange'. At that time, the archivist of the Royal Archives, Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer and the archivist of the Belgian National Archives, Louis Prosper Gachard, had already published a significant portion of William's letters from their archives. But it was clear that the actual number must be much greater. When, in 1969 the plan was finally implemented, some 3500 letters of William of Orange were published. The expectation was that at least another 4000 letters would be added to this. The plan was to begin with an inventory, to be followed later by an edition of the correspondence. For the research, two hundred archives and libraries in fourteen different countries were visited: the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Spain, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, the former West Germany and East Germany, Poland, Denmark, Sweden, Great Britain and the Vatican City. The final outcome exceeded all expectations: the database comprises 12,600 letters some 9000 of which were previously unknown.

The inventory was not only to be an overview of letters but also a research tool. And so, system cards were used to record the key details of every discovered letter: the names of the sender and recipient, the date, the form (draft, copy, etc.), the archive in which it was stored and a tran-

scription of the first line (for recognition in archival research). Work could have stopped there. But, in 1981 when work had progressed quite far, it was also decided to add an indication of the content to each letter, a kind of summary. The intention was to give researchers an impression of the content and purpose of each letter so that without consulting the document itself, the distinction could be made, for example, between a simple note of congratulations and a substantive report. The decision entailed expanding the project considerably and, moreover, many letters still had to be looked at again to describe their content.

The long duration of the project meant that time caught up with it on several occasions. In the mid-1980s, the idea was born of entering the information on the system cards into a database. The danger existed as it were, that the thousands of system cards would bury the project's own staff member and the assistance of the computer was expected to provide efficient storage as well as enabling the cards to be searched and sorted. And indeed, in 1985, work began on entering the cards into the computer. The limited options of the databases of the time resulted in many headaches and delays. For quite some time, the database and system cards were used alongside one another. The move to the computer was, after all, only intended as an aid to work processes. The plan was still to publish the inventory in print.

A short time earlier, another change had been implemented that unintentionally had great significance. In 1978, the decision had been made to make a photograph of every letter so as to have access to a working file of microfiches. This collection of microfiches would enable future researchers to consult the fiches of the collection of letters at one single place, instead of having to visit several archives. Ultimately, the entire collection was used for a different purpose. In 1998, a project was launched to scan the 40,000 microfiches, photographs and photocopies. The aim was to link the digital images to the number of a letter in the database and to establish in this way, not only a database but a database of information and images. This would to some degree compensate for the fact that what was involved was the publication of an inventory rather than a text edition. The idea to publish the inventory in print was quietly disregarded.

Let us take a look at the results.<sup>8</sup> First of all, there is a start page with an explanatory note on the publication, a short explanation of the search options and references for further information. Users can access a chronological overview of all the letters. The oldest letter is dated 2 January 1549 and, as we can read, it is addressed to Philip III of Hanau-Münzenberg and was sent from Brussels. By clicking through, a more extensive description of the letter can be read. In this case, the summary of the letter's content reads as follows: 'Notification of good health. Hopes to be able to hold a horse race with him in the coming summer on the horse

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.inghist.nl/Onderzoek/Projecten/WVO>.

Charles V gave him.’ A scan of the letter is included. This scan can be enlarged. The description of the letter provides several search options, in this case, Philip of Hanau (does he appear elsewhere in the database?), the place of dispatch (what other letters were sent from Brussels?) and the Hessian State Archives in Marburg (what other correspondence of William of Orange is to be found in that archive?). The ‘Advanced search’ option is best suited to research purposes. This makes it possible, for example, to search using combinations of date, correspondent and words from the description of the letter’s content. ‘Search tips’ provides a brief explanation and suggestions.

With this database, the problem of volume, of quantity, was solved. The size of the correspondence made it scarcely manageable for both the editor of the sources and for users. Theoretically, it is possible to manually select these 12,600 letters, put them in order and combine them. In practice, however, this is virtually unfeasible but with a database this problem can be solved. Moreover, the click-through option from the information on the letter to an image of the letter means that letters spread across a great many archives and libraries can be studied from any given place in the world. The option to manipulate the digital images can significantly improve the legibility of the images.

But there are also negative aspects alongside these positive ones. First, the inclusion of the images of the letters only partially eliminates the problem that 16<sup>th</sup>-century handwriting is difficult to decipher. It is asking too much of even professional researchers that they should be competent in reading so many different hands. When an edition of a letter is available, we recently started to add an image of it to the database. In spite of this, many professional researchers will ask for an up-to-date edition, i.e. more quality. Another point of concern is: is it sufficient to take professional researchers as the starting point? When the current Prince of Orange, the Crown Prince of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, opened this database on 2 April 2005, the publicity and the ‘royal connection’ caused a run on the website. But many of the members of this public probably left the website disappointed because they had encountered an academic research tool with only scant accessible general information. This is a problem for an academic institute that publishes on the internet.

The William of Orange publication leads us thus to three perspectives I would like to explore further: quantity, quality and the public.

## Quantity, quality and the public

### QUANTITY

Archives contain a huge amount of historical information. How can we make accessible what we consider important? The German historian Manfred Thaller is a specialist in this field. He uses a threefold classification: digital facsimiles, digital editions, and digital archives and libraries.<sup>9</sup>

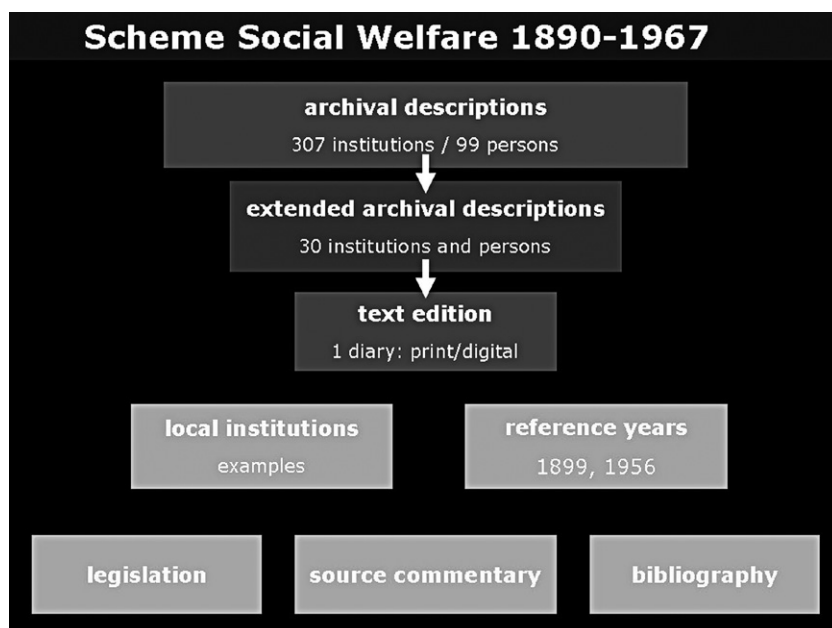
- *Digital facsimiles*: digital images of handwritten or printed sources, transcriptions and aids like a prosopographic or geographic catalogue for indentifying persons and places.
- *Digital editions* are the equivalent of what is usually referred to as a critical text edition: an edition together with text variants, a critical apparatus and aids, for example, for comparing different versions.
- *Digital archives and libraries* constitute the most general level of the disclosure of sources. Due to the size of this layer of sources, the disclosure is not very deep and is the equivalent of, for example, the disclosure of archive inventories and library catalogues.

The Institute of Netherlands History had something similar in mind with the publication of *Sociale Zekerheid 1890-1967 (Social Welfare 1890-1967)*.<sup>10</sup> The aim was to set out the sources in the field of social insurance, social services, unemployment benefits and poor relief. Historical research in this field leans heavily on contemporary monographs and printed sources like newspapers and magazines. There is, however, an overabundance of archival sources. But it is precisely this overabundance that is the problem. Researchers do not know where to start. Social welfare is, moreover, a complex field with national and local levels, and governmental and private initiatives and policies, implementation, oversight and jurisdiction. To conquer this enormous volume and complexity, a system of different products was set up.

A *research guide* occupies the central position. The guide contains descriptions made of the archives of 307 institutions and 99 persons who played an important role in the area of social welfare. These descriptions have been standardized. They provide information about institutions and persons and about the archives they left behind. The type of source mate-

<sup>9</sup> Manfred THALLER, 'Principles of digital source editions', in: Axel Bolvig, *Electronic filing, registration, and communication of visual historical data*, 18<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Historical Sciences (Montreal 1996) pp. 35-48; idem, 'Reproduktion, Erschliessung, Edition, Interpretation: ihre Beziehungen in einer digitalen Welt', in: Brigitta Merta, Andrea Sommerlechner und Herwig Weigl hrsg., *Vom Nutzen des Edierens. Akten des internationalen Kongresses zum 150-jährigen Bestehen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung Wien*, 3.-5. June 2004 (Wenen 2005) pp. 205-229. Cf.: Onno Boonstra, Leen Breure and Peter Doorn, *Past, present and future of historical information science* (Amsterdam 2004) pp. 39-43.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.inghist.nl/Onderzoek/Projecten/Socialezekerheid>.



rial users may encounter is indicated, including minutes, reports, statistical information and correspondence. A more extensive description was made of several of these archives. The deepest level is a *text edition* of the journal of one of the most important people involved in the establishment of the social welfare system in the Netherlands, the Catholic minister and member of parliament, P.J.M. Aalberse.<sup>11</sup> Between 1918 and 1925 he brought various social acts into being. His journal of 2500 pages contains a lot of information on what was discussed behind the political scenes. Moreover, his journal is highly personal. It has been published digitally and in print. The printed version certainly reads more easily, the digital version offers more and faster search options and is full text searchable.

Several *references* were also added. The simplest is a list of legislation from the period 1890 to 1967. A bibliography of 8000 titles was compiled comprising manuals, source materials, statistics, monographs and magazine articles. Finally, there is a separate publication with commentaries on important sources in the area of social welfare in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries which explain and clarify the *ins* and *outs* of these sources.<sup>12</sup> As a

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.inghist.nl/Onderzoek/Projecten/Aalberse>. For the printed edition: J.P. DE VALK en A.C.M. KAPPELHOF, *Dagboeken van P.J.M. Aalberse 1902-1947*. Rijks Geschiedkundige Publicatiën (Den Haag 2006).

<sup>12</sup> G.A.M. VAN SYNGHEL, ed., *Broncommentaren met betrekking tot de armenzorg en sociale zekerheid in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw*. Institute of Netherlands History (Den Haag 2005). Also available in digital format: [http://www.inghist.nl/pdf/Broncommentaren/voorlopig/Broncommentaren\\_6\\_Compleet.pdf](http://www.inghist.nl/pdf/Broncommentaren/voorlopig/Broncommentaren_6_Compleet.pdf).

further aid for researchers interested in the local level, *two in-depth surveys* were added that provide insight into social services at the local level.

Here too, an attempt was made to solve the problem of volume. With the *Sociale Zekerheid* project, a great many sources were disclosed. Moreover, an attempt was made to provide depth and thus to create a balance between overview and in-depth, between the general and the exemplary. But much is still left to be desired. The publication, that dates from 2004, is not very dynamic. It lacks links from the archive descriptions to the digital inventories of, for example, the National Archives. Furthermore, in this project no scans – the digital facsimiles of Thaller – were added from major archive components like minutes or reports. These would have brought the researchers closer to the source and so closer to the information.

What Thaller thus meant is that information technology makes it possible to link and disclose large and complex source files. He even considers it to be a condition for the publication of sources as such. In the collection of articles entitled *Vom Nutzen des Edierens*, the preeminent German historian Winfried Schulze claims that the usefulness of the publication of sources remains limited to sources in the fields of the state and politics. Source editions, he suggests, have hardly had any academically innovative impact, such as after 1945 in the case of the emergence of social history and the history of mentalities. Thaller – and he is not alone – regards the accessibility of sources and bodies of texts that are large-scale and diverse in content as the solution to this problem, and thus a condition for increasing the impact of source materials on research.<sup>13</sup> However, the basic fact remains that it will always be necessary to provide adequate access to the material, to create quality.

## QUALITY

Since at least the 19<sup>th</sup> century, research into and criticism of sources have lain at the heart of historical writing. That is why editing principles were developed. They are discussed in manuals and other scholarly literature, set down in editorial rules and for each source publication they are specified and justified. These principles involve heuristics, selection criteria, transcription rules, modes of annotation, etc. Whether an edition appears in print or digitally, the academic principles that apply are more or less identical.

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<sup>13</sup> Winfried SCHULZE, 'Editionstätigkeit und Forschungsorientierung in der Neueren Geschichte', in Merta, *Vom Nutzen des Edierens*, pp. 338-348; Thaller, 'Reproduktion, Erschließung, Edition, Interpretation', pp. 225-227. The 'creation of large digital research corpora' was also urged by Patricia ALKHOVEN and Peter DOORN, 'New research perspectives for the humanities', in: *International Journal of Humanities and Arts Computing*, 1 (1) 2007, pp. 35-47.



A good example of how such editing principles apply to both printed and digital editions, is the *Rijmkroniek van Holland* (Chronicle of Holland). This source is important for the history of Holland in the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the early 14<sup>th</sup> century. This was a turbulent time for the county of Holland, marked, among other things, by the violent death of Count Floris V in 1296. According to the story, the Count was popular and his arrest and murder by the nobility is a well-known tale from Dutch history. How was this chronicle edited?<sup>14</sup>

Two versions of the *Rijmkroniek van Holland* still exist. In the printed edition, the two versions are placed side by side. The normalised transcription of this chronicle offers an accessible text for reading in terms of spelling, punctuation and the use of capital letters. This makes the text usable for reference by historians and other scholars, while a wider audience of amateur historians and other people interested in history can also read the text, with the assistance of the extensive annotations in which both words and context are explained.

The digital edition is intended for those who would like to delve more deeply into the text, its creation and its ongoing tradition. This edition gives diplomatic transcriptions of *all* the different handwriting and fragments, accompanied by palaeographic annotations. Moreover, there are images of all the sources in their entirety. Users can examine a photograph of a page written by one hand together with a transcription of it, but they can also choose to look at every surviving handwritten piece of text, fragments and old print versions, side by side on the screen. It is simple to navigate the various options.

The digital edition thus provides previous unknown possibilities for researchers who desire to zoom in on the text. Furthermore, such an edition is very well suited to specialists like genealogists or historical linguists who can find here a body of texts that has not been ‘contaminated’ by the intervention of an editor. And finally, the digital edition naturally also offers researchers search options that are impossible in printed publications. The example of the *Rijmkroniek van Holland* proves that printed and digital versions can complement one another. Readers who wish to familiarise themselves with longer pieces of text from the chronicle as historical or literary texts, will benefit from the traditional, printed form. For other research, digital editions are a step forward.

*Quality* thus has a twofold significance for digital source editions: first, the digital edition must be based on traditional academic principles, for example, regarding the selection and transcription. In this respect, reference is given to the ‘Quality criteria for electronic source editions’ that the European network *Porta Historica* has developed and placed on its

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.inghist.nl/Onderzoek/Projecten/Rijmkroniek>. For the printed edition: J.W.J. BURGERS, *Rijmkroniek van Holland (366-1305) door een anonieme auteur en Melis Stoke*. Rijks Geschiedkundige Publicatiën (Den Haag 2004).

website. In these criteria, the way in which sources are made digitally accessible and can be searched is quite correctly considered as a dimension of quality.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, *quality* encompasses the development of search options and research tools that can further assist research. In their evaluation of the interaction between information technology and historiography, Boonstra, Breure and Doorn observe that up until now, historiography has made little use of 'fundamental methodological and technical research with respect to computing in history'. According to them this is the reason why digital source texts often lack advanced tools.<sup>16</sup> Such tools could include semantic and syntactic-based research techniques that would improve the searching of texts according to, for example, meaning and style.

## THE PUBLIC

Most editions of historical sources do not contain an explanation of the intended target group. Apparently, the editor of the sources deems this to be obvious. The majority of academic source editions produced in print will probably not exceed several hundred copies. They are intended for libraries and are usually consulted by specialists. Does anything change when the publisher of the sources makes the editions available digitally and free of charge on the worldwide web?

First, a few figures.<sup>17</sup> According to a survey conducted in 2006 by the *Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau* (Netherlands Institute for Social Research), 90% of residents of the Netherlands has a computer at home and 80% has an internet connection. In 2003, 12% of the population aged 6 years and older on occasion searches the internet for information about the past. In this regard, use was made of general search engines like Google. This would lead people to the websites of heritage institutions such as museums, archives and libraries and also to the websites of academic institutions. The large number of visitors to the website of the Institute of Netherlands History can partly be explained by this. In 2008, visitors numbered an average of 9000 per day. The number of academic pages called up was 8.7 million. The Institute's website currently comprises some 50 web publications, from the Middle Ages to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, consisting of reference works, databases, text editions and the digital versions of previously printed sources. The results of a user survey carried out in 2008-2009 provides some insight into the who and why of these website visits.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.portahistorica.eu/reports>.

<sup>16</sup> BOONSTRA et al., *Past, present and future of historical information science*, pp. 91-92.

<sup>17</sup> JOS DE HAAN and ANNA ADOLFSEN, *De virtuele cultuurbezoeker. Publieke belangstelling voor cultuurwebsites* (Den Haag 2008).

Visitors to the website are usually well educated: 48% with a university education or current university students and 25% with higher professional education. 10% was still in secondary education. Why did they visit the institute's website? 25% indicated that their visit was work or study related, usually for university studies. From this we can conclude that the site is an important research tool. Furthermore, 31% indicated visiting the site out of general historical interest and 14% out of genealogical interest. This means that a relatively large group comes to the website for non-academic purposes. Almost half the visitors were new to the website. Approximately 35% visited the website more than once a month and can thus be termed loyal customers. The respondents were also asked to describe the purpose of their visit. Academic visitors in particular desired to consult a specific edition, such as the *Rijmkroniek* referred to above. But many other visitors wanted to find information on widely varying subjects, ranging from the history of certain villages and towns to family names. The visitors were also asked about any suggestions they had about the structure and content of the website. One of the respondents asked for a more extensive and broader package of historical information than what is offered by the website, as well as for relevant links and contact possibilities for obtaining further information.

In this regard, what is the extent of the duty of an editor of historical sources? Are there reasons and possibilities for serving a wider public than specialists alone? The user survey indicates a large-scale 'market' of mainly well-educated people, a percentage of whom has occupational – academic – reasons for visiting a website like that of our institute and a further percentage who are generally interested in history. Can an academic institute ignore this 'general public'? Programming is naturally the task of the academic institution itself. But I believe that it is part of the duty and responsibility of an academic institute to look beyond the boundaries of its own domain. Moreover, with only a little effort, the in-house knowledge of academic institutions can be made suitable for a wider target group either by the editor of the sources or by organizations specialized in that area. In this way, editors can contribute to what every historian should have in mind: developing interest in history and developing a critical view of the past.

One example will suffice. The Institute of Netherlands History, commissioned by the Ministry of Public Health, Welfare and Sports, is preparing a web publication on the legacy of the Second World War, in particular the archival material regarding the consequences of the war.<sup>18</sup> This digital research guide should, according to the Ministry, be both academic as well as informative for the general public including students in the final

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.inghist.nl/Onderzoek/Projecten/ArchievenOorlogsgetroffenen1942-2000>; <http://www.inghist.nl/Onderzoek/Projecten/OpsporingEnVerificatie,1944-present>. These projects are implemented in cooperation with the Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie [Netherlands Institute for War Documentation].

year of secondary education. The research guide will be structured in such a way that researchers will be able to navigate it easily. Additions have been made for the public. The guide will contain themed texts as well as the answers to frequently asked questions. This means that both the subject and the sources will be introduced and explained. Furthermore, the web publication is constructed dynamically with many internal links and hyperlinks, to archives and museums, for example. Finally, over 1000 illustrations will be included. How successful this attempt will be, remains to be seen. However, in this regard it is useful to examine American examples in which it is usual for academic source editions to be presented in such a way that they are also of use to the general public.<sup>19</sup>

## Conclusion

Digital editions of historical sources have altered the field significantly. The example of William of Orange shows how dramatically this project has changed in form and presentation over a long period of time as technical possibilities became more advanced. For the future of the digital publication of historical sources, three relevant perspectives were discussed in this article. First, dealing with *quantity*. Information technology makes it possible to disclose large amounts of archival material. This has several benefits: with more sources made available it will be better possible to do justice to the scope and diversity of subjects and historical sources. Moreover, the context of the deepest imaginable level of disclosure, the text edition, can be made more visible. The *quality* of editions of historical sources depends on the application of generally accepted academic principles. In this respect, there is no essential difference between printed and digital editions. Both forms can complement one another well. In the future, research should in particular benefit from advanced digital research tools. The *public* is an emerging dimension: the general, actively interested public is waiting, as it were, to do its own research using academic source materials. Those who disclose their source materials on the worldwide web, should take into account that their public is wider than a select group of specialists alone. This requires modifying the manner of presentation. Editing and publication of historical sources thus have a full agenda for the future. The benefits for research will become visible in the long term. In this way, digital editing of sources in the 21<sup>st</sup> century does not differ from the ‘Great Historical Enterprises’ of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>19</sup> For example: <http://gwpapers.virginia.edu> regarding the publication of the *Papers of George Washington*.