



# Editorial

## *Objet de mémoire – objet de désir*

There is a growing interest in objects in cultural memory studies, which until recently focused primarily on documentary sources. Objects bear witness to a specific moment in the past and accrued significance as they are assigned a role over time. As Lieke van Deinsen and Jan de Hond explain in this issue, an *objet de mémoire* is always the result of a process of assigning a meaning.

When the present Rijksmuseum was built in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the heritage debate in the Netherlands was in full swing. The architect Pierre Cuypers and Victor de Stuers, champions of the conservation of monuments and historic architecture, decided to form a tangible heritage collection by bringing together parts of endangered buildings. Iris Ippel describes one of these fragments – the ‘Breda Wall’ – which was once part of one of the House of Nassau’s oldest palaces, occupied by the sons of William of Orange. The wall is one of the façades of the stable complex, which housed the stud and the hunters, and was the accommodation for pages and messengers, essential attributes for the display of princely status. Likewise, Prince Maurits’s embellishment and expansion of the castle in the seventeenth century contributed to that standing.

Maurits has also gone down in history as the man who had his aged political opponent, Johan van Oldenbarneveldt, beheaded. Their political conflict was about the absolute power of the nobility versus provincial sovereignty. Oldenbarneveldt has become a permanent part of the Dutch canon and stands for patriotism and freedom. The Rijksmuseum holds the executioner’s sword and an eighteenth-century album of poems about it. As well as examining the authenticity of the sword, Van Deinsen and De Hond use the album to investigate how Oldenbarneveldt’s political legacy endured and how it was employed in new political struggles.

Among the acquisitions in this issue, Marjan Unger’s jewellery collection enjoys special attention. Following an earlier substantial donation, she generously gifted it to the Rijksmuseum. Unger collected this jewellery not so much for its significance in modern arts and crafts but rather as signs of the times. A piece of jewellery is pre-eminently an *objet de désir*, but it is also an *objet de mémoire* for the maker and for the wearer. Sadly, Marjan died recently. She will be missed as one of our most important patrons, and we will always cherish her and her tangible memories.