

TITLE: Monument in Commemoration of Prof. Dr. A. de Froe, 1907-1992

AUTHOR: Hans van Houwelingen

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Introduction

The University of Amsterdam (UvA) and the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences (KNAW) commissioned a monument to be erected in 2015 in honor of Prof. Dr. Arie de Froe (1907-1992), a former professor of Physical Anthropology and Genetics at the UvA. A physical anthropologist, de Froe committed academic fraud, resisting the German occupiers during World War II. Specializing in ethnology and held in high academic esteem by the Nazis, he fraudulently identified Sephardic Jews as non-Jews in order to prevent their deportation during the racial 'purification' of the Netherlands. In these circumstances, academic integrity yielded to human morality.

Erecting this monument raises several crucial concerns regarding time and timing. On the one hand, the commemoration of Arie de Froe must stand the test of time; as befits a monument, an attempt is being made to keep the memories of this scholar alive, to save him from oblivion. On the other hand, no timeless paradigm exists to evaluate de Froe's work, because ethics shift over time. The way we should remember de Froe is not determined by history. On the contrary, his memorialization is inextricably connected to the contemporary discourse on academic integrity. The starting point for this monument is not only the celebration of the individual, the scholar Prof. Dr. A. de Froe, but also the intrinsic academic

dilemma he embodies. This posthumous monument will in fact render Prof. Dr. A. de Froe the embodiment of ethical dilemmas in science.

This proposal returns the human bones acquired by physical anthropologists for science during the first half of the 20th century, now resting untapped and stigmatized in the depots of the National Museum of World Cultures, to the university where these remains will again be available for scientific research as a monument in honor of Arie de Froe.¹

Context

At the opening of the symposium on Arie de Froe held at the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences (KNAW) in Amsterdam on October 30, 2012, the mayor of Amsterdam stated: “Science, it is your turn now.” Populism has a hold on us, and like politics, art, sport, religion and the courts, academia can no longer elude the magnifying glass of the media and people’s tribunal. This symposium, intended to discuss a fraudulent scholar, was meant to be a countermove. De Froe did indeed commit fraud, but for a good cause. The introduction of human morality as a criterion for academic integrity is a populist taste of one’s own medicine—the humane aspect diverts the gaze from the system considered to be infallible. Imparting the deceiver’s motif to the subject of debate leaves the question untouched whether science itself is indeed still reliable. In this respect, there is no better figurehead than Prof. Dr. A. de Froe, who saved the lives of Jews by distorting the racial Nazi doctrines. Everyone sympathizes with his courageous deeds. In 2006, he was posthumously included in the *Righteous among the Nations* by Yad Vashem and now a monument is to be built in his honor.

The reasons to commemorate de Froe as a Resistance hero are sound, but the act of commissioning a monument in his honor opens to larger questions of scientific integrity. De Froe is not lauded in spite of committing his fraud, but precisely because he did so. The UvA would not choose to erect a monument only to honour his scholarly work.² At the same time, the university does not wish to glorify fraud and de Froe’s academic accomplishments allow the prevention that perception. Statements written about de Froe and descriptions of him presented during the symposium, including several of his own quotations, testify to this ambivalence. The deception is revealed and optimally minimized. He did indeed act fraudulently, but given the situation at the time we do not like to look at it that way. De Froe will be commemorated with a monument for his work at the expense of science, in service of science.

Posthumously, De Froe shall represent the face of a contemporary dilemma: the *Dutch Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice of the Association of Universities* is increasingly breached and thus is becoming less tenable. Is fictitious science perpetrated in

¹ This explanatory text was used for the proposal that artist Hans van Houwelingen was commissioned for in 2012 by a jury from the University of Amsterdam (UvA) and the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences (KNAW). The commission was approved in 2013. Its controversial character necessitates the support of several authorities in order to be able to factually realize the monument. At this moment, December 2014, support is given by: the board of directors of the KNAW, the board of directors of the Academic Medical Centre (AMC). The Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (NIOD), Prof. Dr. J.W.M. Roebroeks, Archaeologist, Faculty of Archaeology, Human Origins, Leiden University. Prof. Dr. R.H.A. Corbey, Philosopher and Cultural Anthropologist, Faculties of Archaeology and Humanities, Leiden University, Senior University Lecturer in Philosophical Anthropology, Tilburg University. Prof. Dr. L.P.H.M. Buskens, Anthropologist, Faculty of Humanities, Leiden University. Mr. K. van Brakel, chief curator Museum of Worldcultures. The board of directors of the UvA is expected to give final approval to realize the monument in early 2015

² Although a respected scientist, Prof. Dr. A. de Froe did not have a high-profile academic career. His fame derived from the resistance during World War II.

spite of contemporary ethics, or as a result thereof? “Grow accustomed to it,” the mayor said. Indeed, in the spotlight of current events, the deontology of science cannot ignore political and tendentious ethics. De Froe personifies the labyrinth where science, ethics and time have become entangled. De Froe’s monument will not be bound by linear time but will unfold in a state of “contra-time,” where past, present and future run in parallel. It will not cover-up academic dilemmas, but instead place them at center stage as a constant reminder of this tension.

Timing

In 2010, it was revealed that D. A. Stapel, professor of social psychology at the University of Tilburg had largely manipulated research findings. Co-authors, doctoral committees, and peer reviewers of specialist literature were also accused of negligence. After submitting his PhD dissertation, Stapel was sentenced to 120 hours of community service for having falsified research findings.³ The levy had broken and media unleashed a flood of critique concerning scientific integrity. Universities revealed and admitted case after case of scientific fraud in an attempt to redeem their tainted reputations.⁴ In a short time, a veritable catalogue of instances of misconduct emerged, with the press denouncing perpetrators. Scientific fraud was hot.

Prof. de Froe’s scientific fraud dates back to 1942 when members of the Portuguese Jewish community in Amsterdam funded anthropological research they hoped would prove that Portuguese Jews did not belong to the Jewish race.⁵ De Froe was asked to carry out this study. In August 1943, his report was published, entitled: *Die Anthropologie der sogenannten portugiesischen Juden in den Niederlanden* (*The Anthropology of So-Called Portuguese Jews*

³ The Levelt Committee investigating the case came across fifty-five articles and ten book chapters containing fictitious material and expressed strong suspicions of fraud in another ten articles.

⁴ In 2011, the executive board of the University Medical Centrum St. Radboud (UMC, Nijmegen) announced the resignation of a senior researcher after it had been revealed that his research data could not be verified and that he may have been guilty of academic misconduct. Later that year, the Erasmus Medical Centre (Rotterdam) revealed the academic deception carried out by Prof. D. Poldermans; he and his doctoral candidate had conducted research on the blood levels of patients in order to predict complications during vascular operations. Only a few patients in their research met with the subject criteria, and the data in a number of studies had been falsified or lost. Poldermans was removed from his position because of breaching the academic integrity. In 2012, the Erasmus University (Rotterdam) announced it was withdrawing two articles written by Prof. D. Smeesters. This professor of Consumer Behaviour and Society had selectively applied data in order to render the desired results statistically significant. Smeesters chose to resign. In 2013 a Belgian biomedical researcher, previously associated with the University of Leiden, was dismissed by the Vrije Universiteit Brussel due to fraudulent research on epilepsy. He had manipulated results of tests on animals. Simultaneously, the Leiden University Medical Centre (LUMC) withdrew two articles presented by a researcher in the Rheumatology Department and dismissed her for manipulating lab results. In 2012 science journalist F. van Kolfshoten published his book titled *Ontspoorde wetenschap* (Derailed science) that provides us with a summary of all instances of scientific fraud committed in Dutch universities since 2005, including penalties.

⁵ At that time research on genetics and racial purity was a common academic practice. Scientifically it is not easy to determine the exact difference between the ideas of the Nazis and other oriented eugenics, nor to indicate the difference between respectable science and ideological derailment, or a transition from one to the other. (Stephan Snelders, Gerwina 30/2007. *Op weg naar een ‘germaansche’ volksgezondheid. Nationaal-socialisme, erfelijkheidsleer en eugenetica in Nederland 1940-1945.*) On behalf of the Dutch government, for instance, de Froe collaborated with the *Instituut voor sociaal onderzoek van het Nederlandse volk* (Institute for social research on the Dutch people) for ethnological research aimed at determining which human species should be chosen to populate the future generations of the then new uninhabited IJsselmeer Polders.

in the Netherlands).⁶ De Froe's report was based largely on skull measurement data. More than thirty physical traits and psychological character traits led to the conclusion that Sephardic (Portuguese) Jews belonged to the Western Mediterranean races or the Alpine race and not to the Jewish race. According to de Froe, this could be explained by the fact that, during the late Middle Ages, the Sephardic Jews had assimilated into the population of the Iberian Peninsula when the Jews residing here were forced to choose between a conversion to Christianity or exile. Consequently, the Nazi anti-Jewish measures did not apply to the Sephardic community.

De Froe later commented on this report as follows: "I had the idea to help them all. [...] Why not use anthropological research in order to prove they were not pure Jews? And that became my report. I covered physiology and psychology [...] everything in it is true; rather, I should say it is not false." Initially, the Nazis did accept De Froe's report on the Portuguese Jews, but in the end only a small group survived. "When we realized it was going wrong, we told them: you should see it as a postponement, allowing you stay longer, but you must try to go into hiding now. However, the people refused to believe it."⁷ Many insisted on their non-Jewish status, but were nevertheless deported, once classified as sub-humans in the *Rassisches Untermenschentum*.

De Froe evaded the academic code of conduct because ethics had changed in the context of the German occupation. If the enemy does not observe any ethical code, why should a scholar do so? Which moral appeal does society make to scholars if that change comes from within, if the cause is implied in its own cultural, economic and political dynamics? Should they be as bothered with society as de Froe was? How must they comply with an academic monopoly on ethics if society dictates different rules of conduct?⁸ These delicate issues determine who is given a statue and who is put in the pillory. Here statue and pillory are the same, revealing the constant anxiety that defines the relationship between science, ethics and time. The *Nederlandse Gedragscode Wetenschapsbeoefening van de Vereniging van Universiteiten (Netherlands Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice of the Association of Universities)* is not static. Time and again it addresses the question: Which science suits which society?

⁶ Die Anthropologie der sogenannten portugiesischen Juden in den Niederlanden, published 1943 by the Institute of Anatomy and Embryology, Amsterdam University.

⁷ Jaques Presser, from an undated interview with Arie de Froe, archive of the Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (NIOD) Amsterdam.

⁸ In October 2013, four prominent Dutch academics presented a manifesto, titled Why Science Does Not Work as IT Should, stating that academe has lost its mind as a result of an out-dated view of itself and call for a completely different type of organisation. To them academia no longer appears capable of adhering to the ethics it prescribes. They argue that the prevailing university motto to pursue excellence and competition places too large a burden on contemporary codes of integrity. The pressure to perform and the close ties to industry or politics stimulate fraud.

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The Columbus Monument, N.Y.C.



The pillory in the Se Cathedral Square, Porto.

Physical anthropology

How does de Froe fit into our society and how do we fit into his? A physical anthropologist, he was at home in an environment dominated by German researchers, in a context of Social Darwinism, and in an ambience of *Blut und Boden* (Blood and Soil) and *Volksempfinden* (Popular sentiment). In the mid-twentieth century ethnology, including anthropometry and craniometry—a technique applied to measure bodies, bones and skulls, was considered a “hard” science. Objective findings with regard to human variations were however widely deployed in political interventions relating to eugenics and scientific racism. Colonial history and Nazi ideology definitively defiled ethnology in a political sense, providing proof as well as justification for distinguishing between civilized whites and primitive savages, or between *Über-* and *Untermensch*.

Today, obscured by contemporary morals, it is almost impossible to view ethnology without a political dimension. Moreover, it is not acceptable at present to praise de Froe’s skill as an ethnologist beyond what it meant to the Resistance. On the other hand, his act of fraud sits well with contemporary mores. He did then what we applaud today: the sabotage of German racism. This bestows contemporary legitimacy on a historic case of scientific fraud, providing ethnology an acceptable position while turning de Froe into a modern hero. Looking back, de Froe’s heroic, anti-racist image derives from a scientific practice today considered to be racist. De Froe resisted Nazi politics, but not the Nazi view on ethnology and race. In 1951, de Froe wrote: “The assumption that we manipulated data is naive. We were faced with an opponent that could apply and did apply a far more powerful anthropological apparatus than we had at our disposal. Apparently, it is less easy to assume

that the truth may sometimes be beneficial. Well then, we took full advantage of the truth wherever it lent itself to our desired conclusion. The report was accepted, as were its conclusions. The Germans were convinced.”⁹

The Physical Anthropology Collection

Dr. Arie de Froe officiated as the Professor of Physical Anthropology and Human Genetics at UvA until 1977, and served as a Rector Magnificus for the last four years of his career. Between 1915 and 1964, this branch of science at UvA has in various ways been correlated with the collection of physical anthropological artifacts kept at the Colonial Institute, from 1949 named the Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen (KIT) and renamed in 2014 as the National Museum of World Cultures.

In 1915, Dr. J.P. Kleiweg de Zwaan (1875-1971), occupying an endowed chair at UvA, was in charge of the Physical Anthropology Sub-department in the Colonial Institute established in 1910. His assistant in the Colonial Institute, Dr. A.J. van Bork-Feltkamp (1893-1970), also a physical anthropologist, obtained her PhD at the UvA in 1930 with a thesis on the anatomy of sixty Chinese preserved brains belonging to UvA's collection. In 1947, Kleiweg de Zwaan was succeeded by R.A.M. Bergman (1899-1967), who was appointed a professor occupying an endowed chair in Tropical Anthropology at UvA in 1950. At that time evolutionary theories comparing “primordial” man to contemporary cultures had become *passé*. The German *Völkerkunde* had unobtrusively been discredited after World War II to the benefit of the American school of cultural anthropology. The heyday of pre-war physical anthropology had come and gone. The KIT thus became alienated from the Physical Anthropology Collection. Nonetheless, incoming artifacts enhanced the collection of human materials up until 1964. Bergman's successor in 1962 was Dr. J. van Baal (1909-1992), the former Governor of Dutch New Guinea who, from 1960 on, had served as a professor of cultural anthropology at UvA and later at the University of Utrecht. Van Baal showed little interest in “all that skull business” wishing the museum to be attuned to the modern world.¹⁰ Once the Physical Anthropology Department had become defunct in 1964, the systematic collection of human remains was discontinued. Acquired between 1906 and 1969, it contained more than 1900 bone fragments, skulls, plaster casts and instruments.

In 1973, it was decided to move the collection to the Museum Vrolik, a part of the Anatomy and Embryology department in the UvA Faculty of Medicine. Museum Vrolik refused to convert the long-term loan into a donation and in 2002 the loan was terminated on the grounds that the artifacts “had little to no scientific value” with regard to the future of the museum.

The Physical Anthropology Collection was soon returned to the depot of the KIT, in the midst of an intense ethical discussion on the status of human remains in public museum collections. After scientific interest in such items had waned during the 1960s, the postcolonial criticism of procuring it at all intensified. Increasingly, the members of ethnic groups preferred to be in charge of their own heritage as well as of the restoration of their oppressed or lost cultural identity. The KIT was burdened with the responsibility of a collection deemed scientifically useless and ethically irresponsible. How and where might one find a suitable final resting place for these objects?

⁹ Arie de Froe, from a letter to professor David Cohen, former chairman of the Jewish Council, september 1951

¹⁰ D. van Duuren, *Physical Anthropology Reconsidered: Human Remains at the Tropenmuseum* Amsterdam: KIT publishers, 2007

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In 2003, a new inventory of the collection was compiled. In addition, it was reorganized and documented. The existing documentation was outdated due to incorrect organization, remarkable combinations, and missing collection numbers. The relationship between objects (ranging from a mummified Peruvian hand to Amsterdam fetuses) was unclear. The collection consisted mainly of donations to the Physical Anthropology Department regardless of the source and cultural or historic context. Despite difficulties the inventory was completed in 2005 when the Physical Anthropology Collection was categorized and divided into labeled boxes on shelves, ready to be moved elsewhere.

The museum devised several organizations in order to facilitate partial selections to be considered for donation to various institutions, repatriation or disposal. Despite careful planning, all options were still subject to complex, sensitive and sometimes paradoxical conditions and possible consequences. Ten years later, these items have not left the depot due to the absence of a tenable ethical program concerning their removal. As with de Froe's scientific practice, it is impossible to judge this collection without being confronted by conflicting moral perspectives from the past, present and future. Sooner or later, every argument meets with a counter-argument. The museum must find a scientifically responsible model in order to facilitate the distribution of the collection. The nature of science does not provide a suitable model.



Part of the physical anthropology collection in depot at the Museum of World Cultures (Amsterdam), 2013

Design for the monument in honor of Arie de Froe

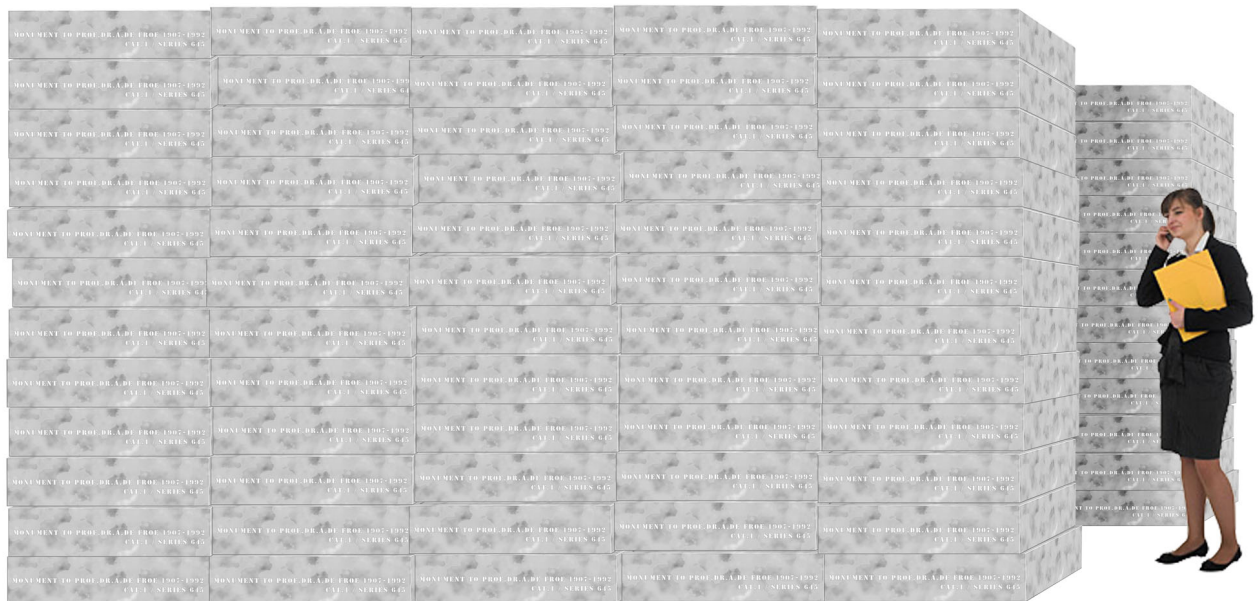
Art, however, can provide such a model. The nature of art presents a reality of incompatible contradictions. If the Physical Anthropology Collection were a work of art, its intrinsic conflict would constitute its beauty. However, the collection is not a work of art but the collective heritage of the UvA and the KIT. Albeit the university has an opportunity to once again render this collection scientifically relevant on the platform of art. Not a platform from which to view a different reality, but to view the contours of science through the eyes of art. Artistic methodology casts a different view on this collection providing it with a method of reflection that does not exist in other disciplines. A system perceived as infallible by definition cannot incorporate its own flaws, but art can. Academe has no code of conduct governing the infringement of the code of conduct, just as no code of conduct governs the perpetration of fraud. However, the intrinsic obstacles of scientific ethics can exist next to one another on the platform of art, openly and with impunity. The monument, therefore, is the proper artistic medium. Moreover, Arie de Froe is the proper personification of these dilemmas. The Physical Anthropology Collection is the tangible material that connects de Froe with this monument.

A large collection of human bones and skulls acquired for scientific purposes by physical anthropologists during the first half of the 20th century now lies idle and stigmatized in the depot of the KIT. The proposal is to once again move this collection to the university and put it at the service of science—as monument in honor of Dr. Arie de Froe. The monument will consist of galvanized steel boxes reading: MONUMENT TO PROF. DR. A. DE FROE 1907-1992. They contain all parts of the collection, exactly as organized and registered between 2003 and 2005 with the registration codes perforated on the side. For example: CAT 1 / SERIES 645. The cardboard boxes that currently contain remains will be placed in the steel boxes, partially visible through the perforated letters. All steel boxes, complete with lock and key, can be stacked like bricks in various configurations depending on the situation and location. Together they make up the monument, an amorphous design chosen purposely in order to allow time to play its role—it can always be varied. The monument anticipates a possible future in which, for example, parts may be requested for repatriation. The specific boxes can be taken from the monument and moved elsewhere. Or parts of the collection may temporarily serve specific research purposes once again. Unlike a traditional monument, the memorial of de Froe may even travel. The spacious central entrance in Building C of the new university building in the Roeterstraat in Amsterdam, which opens in 2015, is the preferred home base.

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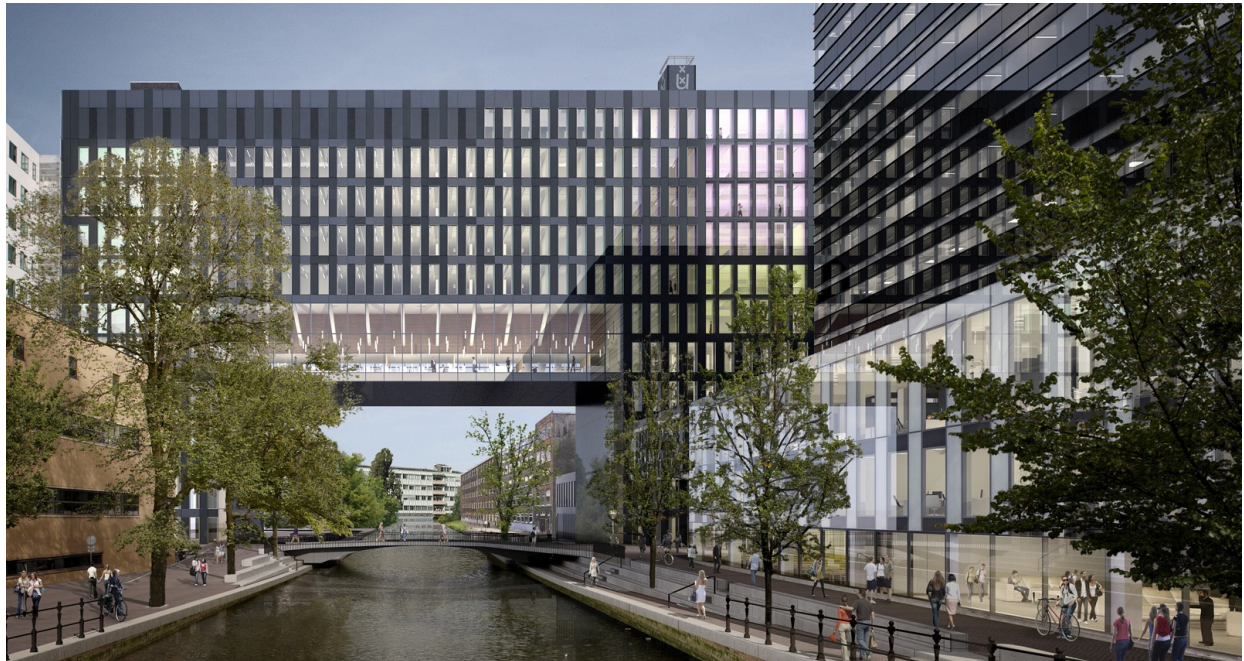
A lockable galvanised steel box containing parts of the physical anthropology collection. MONUMENT TO PROF. DR. A. DE FROE 1907-1992 and collection code in perforated letters on the side.



Monument in commemoration of Prof. Dr. A. de Froe (1907-1992).

Galvanised steel boxes, containing the complete physical anthropology collection, stacked in various ways.

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UvA, Roeterstraat Amsterdam.