
The Picture Gallery of Duke Engelbert Marie d'Arenberg in Brussels, ca. 1903/04, Edingen, Arenberg Foundation

COLLECTIONEURS NOBLES

Continuity and Change in Aristocratic Collecting Practices in Belgium and the Netherlands (1750-1950)

The long nineteenth and early twentieth century is often considered a period of socially widening collecting practices. Besides the boom of public museums, the general understanding of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century collecting is dominated by the rise of the *bourgeois collectioneur* as new social type. Within the broader historiography much attention has been paid to the new industrial tycoons and businessmen, as well as the (higher) middling sort of collectors, all eager to tap into a growing 'collection mania'. Less well studied for this period, however, remain the blue-blooded collectors or *collectioneurs nobles*. This comes as quite a surprise since the practice of collecting itself has deep and long running roots, intimately tied to endeavours of early-modern royal houses and noblemen, amassing *Wunderkammern* full of Fine and Decorative Arts, precious manuscripts and books, *naturalia*, and myriad other collectables. While some, less fortunate noblemen, were forced to sell their prized family collections during the age of political, industrial, and cultural revolutions, others retained their titles and fortunes, and continued to collect for economic reasons (as investment), or for reasons tied to their specific, albeit changing, social and cultural status in modern societies.

In spite of the recent upsurge in books and articles on collectors and collecting practices in Belgium and the Netherlands, research on this *blue blood* collecting in the Low Countries after 1750 remains thin on the ground. Who were these highborn collectors? What did they collect? And why? In this special issue we aim to draw a detailed portrait of these *collectioneurs nobles*, their changing social profile, and their motivations. How different were their motives and aims from their emerging *bourgeois* counterparts? What were the norms and values that fuelled aristocratic collecting? Did they, for instance, pay more attention to noble pedigree and patina in the selection of objects? And in what way were older, Humanist and Enlightenment values carried over in modern times with these collectors? Tying in with a recent strand, we also want to pay attention to the links between gender and collecting. To what extent were the collection profile and practices of noble ladies and lords different? We also aim to shed more light on the presentation, musealisation, and afterlife of these noble collections. To what extent became noble collections more accessible for a wider public in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and how were they received by noble, bourgeois or lower class visitors? How were these aristocratic *ensembles* eventually integrated into public museums? Last but not least, we also try to identify local, regional or even national differences between well-bred collectors in Belgium and the Netherlands, in the industrial cities and in the countryside, and so on.

We aim to provide some answers to these questions by sampling the latest research on noble collectors and collections in the Low Countries. The special issue will be published in *Virtus: Journal of Nobility Studies*. [WoS A1- journal] Abstracts – ca. 350 words, including a short bio-sketch – should be send to gerrit.verhoeven@uantwerpen.be before 1 February 2022. Full chapters (5000 words, including footnotes) should be submitted in the same way before 1 October 2022.

Guest editors of the special issue:

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Pierre Degobert, Théodore de Coninck de Merckem in his picture gallery, lithography after a drawing by Henri Van der Haert, published in: Galerie de Tableaux du Chevalier de Coninck (Brussels: Debobert, 1838)