

Symposium :The World of the Bentincks, portraits of a European noble family

Abstracts of lectures, to be presented on this symposium

Session I

Menoucha Ruitenberg

The international importance of the Bentinck family archive, a few highlights

The family archive of the originally Dutch (Gelrian) family (Aldenburg) Bentinck, made accessible by me, reflects the European and cross-border character of this family. Different branches lived in the Netherlands, Great Britain and Germany. Complementary archival material is kept in public archival institutions as well as in private possession in Great Britain and Germany. The archival documents kept in Arnhem form the most voluminous part of the family archive Bentinck/Aldenburg Bentinck. Which documents can we consider as highlights in this archive?

Firstly, the incredible number of ego-documents, especially the correspondence of Charlotte Sophie Countess von Aldenburg (1715-1800), who in 1733 married William count Bentinck van Rhoon (1704-1774). More than 25.000 letters have been preserved. Charlotte Sophie corresponded with the intellectual, cultural and political European elite of her time.

Secondly, the rich collections of numerous *adversaria* from Charlotte Sophie and her mother, Wilhelmine Marie von Hessen-Homburg, which give a unique impression of the domestic habits and female life forms of the high nobility in Europe.

Thirdly, the documents of important related noble families, including the French family De la Trémoille and the Dutch family Van Reede.

Yme Kuiper

Father and Sons Bentinck. Fame, Influence and Life Style of a Noble Family in the Dutch Republic (1672-1748)

Hans Willem Bentinck (1649-1709), descended from a landed, old noble family in one of the eastern provinces of the Netherlands, made a great career as diplomat and military officer in service of the Dutch Republic during the last quarter of the seventeenth century. More as a diplomat than military commander, Bentinck served his patron and friend William III who was Prince of Orange, Stadtholder of most provinces in the Netherlands (since 1672) and King of England and Scotland (with his wife Mary Stuart, since 1688-1689). In 1689 Bentinck became the Earl of Portland, Viscount of Woodstock and Baron Cirencester. William III loaded him with many other offices and gifts, including land in Ireland. In the Dutch Republic Bentinck owned among others (since 1675) the country house Sorgvliet (near The Hague) with an impressive garden that had an international reputation around 1700. With his second wife Jane Martha Temple (1672-1751) Bentinck had two sons: William (1704-1774) and Charles John (1708-1779). After the death of William III in 1702 the House of Orange-Nassau was challenged to maintain political power in the Dutch Republic. What was the role of Bentinck's sons William and Charles in restoring the power balance in the Netherlands in favour of the House of Orange? And how did their marriages and life styles contribute to the fame of the Bentinck family in the Dutch Republic and abroad?

Antje Koolman

Masters of Varel and Kniphausen – the later Bentincks and their German possessions

With the unhappy union between Willem Bentinck and Charlotte Sophie von Aldenburg and the purchase of the hereditary title of a count of the Holy Roman Empire, the Bentincks established their rule over two principalities in Northwest Germany. One of them even had Imperial immediacy

Symposium :The World of the Bentincks, portraits of a European noble family

although it only consisted of three villages. For about one hundred years they reigned over Varel and Kniphausen. How well did they really adapt to their roles as members of the German nobility? Most of the time they were governing in absentia. Only when the French occupation of the Netherlands made living there difficult, the Bentincks chose Varel for their main residence. It was Wilhelm Gustav Friedrich Bentinck, grandson of Charlotte Sophie and Willem, who really took possession of his German inheritance and defended it against acts of disempowering him. He became the only ruling count Bentinck to be buried in the family's burial vault in Varel's church. He was also the first to take a German wife. But his choice of a peasant daughter complicated the already precarious position within the German nobility and led to a bitter family feud that ended the Bentincks' sovereignty in Germany.

Session II

Olivier Mertens

Craignez Honte. The Bentinck coats of arms as window to the Bentinck world

The heraldic achievement, better known as coat of arms or armorial bearing, can be considered a quintessential European phenomenon. Coats of arms have been used by families from Norway to Portugal, from Ireland to Transylvania. The medieval, feudal origins of heraldry are still reminiscent in the appearance of most coats of arms, consisting of a shield, a helmet and a crest. Although the basic rules of heraldry are comparable all over Europe, various countries and regions developed their own ways of displaying coats of arms.

The Bentinck family could be considered the paragon of a cross-border aristocratic family, with branches belonging to the nobility of the Holy Roman Empire (until 1806), the Dutch nobility, the English peerage and the nobility (since 1845 high nobility or "Hohe Adel") of Germany, until its abolition in 1919. This presentation deals with many riddles of the Bentinck heraldry.

Christina Randig

Charlotte Sophie and Education – her biography and ideas on educational reform

Charlotte Sophie von Bentinck, Reichsgräfin and the only daughter of the Aldenburgs, a family belonging to the high nobility, received an education befitting her rank: it followed the conventions of French nobility and was based on Protestant religion. Consequently, it focused on a disciplined upbringing and left very little room for free development. The character of Countess Bentinck, her autonomous lifestyle and, in particular, her unflinching desire for self-education raise questions concerning the acceptance of the conventional standards with regard not only to her own life but also to the life of future generations and, especially, to the education of the sons she had with Albrecht Wolfgang zu Schaumburg-Lippe. These issues are particularly exciting because the 85 years of Charlotte Sophie's life were embedded in times of serious social and intellectual change and the discussion of what constitutes an appropriate education was becoming increasingly important. On the basis of letters and other unpublished essays by Charlotte Sophie the lecture will discuss the following topics: the educational programme for Charlotte Sophie and its results; her self-enlightenment by conversation and reading; her reflections on the improvement of general education; and her ideas and actions concerning the education of her sons and grandson.

Jacques Cormier

Voltaire et sa 'grande amie'

Charlotte-Sophie von Aldenburg was an exceptional woman. As much for her character and charm as for her extraordinary relationships and her philosophical outlook of the world. In 1733 she agreed to marry Willem Bentinck for all the wrong reasons. In 1739 they separated and she left for Bückeberg,

Symposium :The World of the Bentincks, portraits of a European noble family

where she entered into a relationship with her cousin, Albrecht-Wolfgang of Schaumburg-Lippe, whom she had loved since she was a teenager.

She would live there until her lover's death in 1748 as his "favourite mistress", braving the prejudices of the Calvinist society from which she came. In 1740 in Bückeberg, she met Voltaire. She was seduced by the man teaching Europe to fight against prejudice; he was fascinated by her humour and her free spirit. Their mutual admiration brought on a romantic friendship, which was reinforced in Berlin and then on the banks of Lake Geneva.

Finally, when Countess Bentinck became a friend of the empress of Austria and of Kaunitz, her all-powerful minister, she succeeded in persuading Voltaire to lobby Choiseul for a change of alliances: France and Austria, having previously been historical enemies, became allies. The two friends could consider themselves the architects of this decisive change.

The literary importance of this friendship resides in the fact that it triggered one of Voltaire's most famous novels, *Candide*. In this work that rejects the autobiographical format, Candide and Cunégonde no doubt represent two ironic portraits of Voltaire and the "good and frank" Westphalian lady.

Daniela Williams

Charlotte Sophie Bentinck and Numismatics – her correspondence with numismatist Joseph Eckhel

Charlotte-Sophie Bentinck was one of the few women of the 18th century to collect ancient coins. Most remarkably, she also published her collection in a two volume catalogue (1787) to which two supplements (one printed in 1788 and a manuscript one) followed. Her coin collection was the result of a life-long interest in numismatics and the catalogue was printed in French with the aim of not being sold on the market but being distributed as a gift among her correspondents; this of course carried social implications. In contact with many intellectuals of her time, she corresponded with the Austrian numismatist Joseph Eckhel (1737–1798), one of the founding fathers of numismatics as a modern discipline. Only nine letters are presently known between the two, which were recently gathered from several archives and studied in detail for the first time. These documents cover the years from 1788 to 1791 and provide many insights into Charlotte Sophie's coin collection, with its many fakes and peculiarities. In particular they deal with some specimens bought in 1788 in Paris at the auction sale of the renowned coin collection owned by Michelet d'Ennery . At the same time they reveal a livelier and somewhat more "authentic" Eckhel, who replies in German to Charlotte Sophie's letters in French and often provides straightforward judgements on numismatic matters.