

Remaining at the top of the European aristocracy The House of Arenberg from the French Revolution until World War I

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‘Austrian in France, French in Austria, the former or the latter in Russia’: this witty self-description of Prince Charles-Joseph de Ligne sums up the aristocratic cosmopolitanism which is characteristic of the Enlightenment.¹ Indeed, aristocratic identity was not limited by state borders, nor by the national conflicts that were still in their early stages in pre-revolutionary Europe. The concept of *gotha* thus summed up the ambivalence of the supra-national identity of the high nobility. Not only did it refer to the exclusiveness of the famous *Almanach du Gotha* which had been published since 1764 in the eponymous German town, but it also proclaimed that the most prestigious families were part of a European elite which was determined less by the geographic origin and settlement of its members than by their antiquity. Such a representation was to be firmly adopted by the members of the few dynasties whose names were listed in the *Almanach*: not only were they undoubtedly proud of being mentioned in the most elitist armorial of Europe, but they also used it as a tool to be informed of various dynastic events and to identify individuals among their plethoric genealogical trees (which could be useful in society life as well in matrimonial strategies).

Nevertheless, the nobility could hardly be reduced to an exclusive internationalism of blue-blood, as territorial roots and dynastic loyalties remained essential criteria for its hybrid strategies, practices and self-representations. This was particularly obvious among the aristocrats of the Southern Netherlands, who were torn between a strong provincial sense of identity, a tested faithfulness to the Austrian monarchy and – for some of them – the growing attraction of the court of Versailles, which was

¹ R. Pomeau, *L'Europe des Lumières. Cosmopolitisme et unité européenne au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1991); P. Coulmas, *Les citoyens du monde. Histoire du cosmopolitisme* (Paris, 1995) 206-247; P.-Y. Beaurepaire, *Le mythe de l'Europe française au XVIIIe siècle. Diplomatie, culture et sociabilité au temps des Lumières* (Paris, 2007).

made easier by their speaking French and the reversal of diplomatic alliances of the 1760-1770s.

Aristocratic cosmopolitanism did not disappear with the revolutionary events of the late eighteenth century or the death of the generation of the Enlightenment in the early nineteenth century: long after the French Revolution, different forms of association between national nobilities were perpetuated through marriages, high society life and careers, and did not boil down to an archaic persistence of the Ancien Regime. The 'over-consumption of space,' which was a consequence of the aristocratic distinctive social practices,² was made easier by the modernization of transports and the internationalization of economic networks. Aristocrats thus had unquestionable assets in the complex and ambiguous process of internationalization of the elites, which has been underlined by Michel Pinçon and Monique Pinçon-Charlot as the most distinctive privilege of high society.³

In this respect, the House of Arenberg was both a singular and revealing case of the specific problems deriving from the multiterritoriality and the transnational identity which characterized some families of the highest European aristocracy and contributed to their social superiority.⁴ Whereas it is nowadays valued as a cornerstone of family identity, the European dimension of this ducal House was much more problematic during the nineteenth century. First, because the most prestigious families were not protected from the great economic, social and political changes of the post-revolutionary era that jeopardized the perpetuation of their prominent position. In order to preserve their wealth, power and influence, they constantly had to adapt – and particularly to combine or redefine dynastic loyalties and national identities that could be incompatible at times. Secondly, because the different scales involved in this study reveal that aristocratic multiterritoriality was increasingly incompatible with the rise and affirmation of nation states: nobles were henceforth required to become part and parcel of their national community, which implied a complex redefinition of their ideals and self-representations.

Transnationality: from cumulated settlements to aristocratic cosmopolitanism

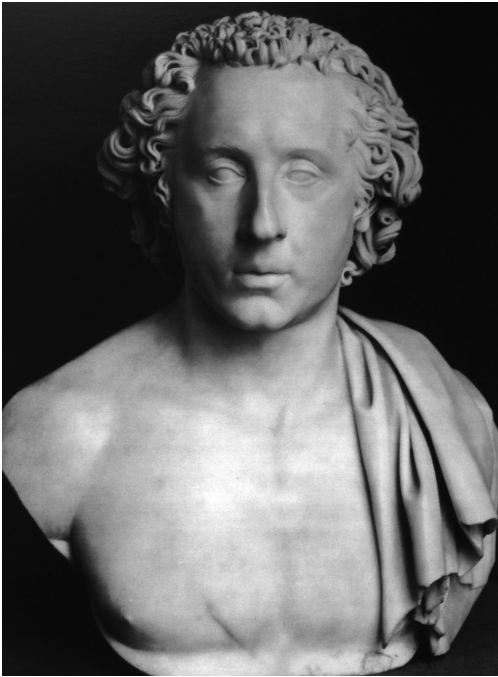
At the end of the Ancien Regime, the Arenbergs had a prominent position among the aristocracy of the Southern Netherlands. Their estates in the provinces of Hainault, Brabant, Flanders and Luxemburg, their luxurious palace in Brussels and castles in Edingen and Heverlee, their prominent position at the Habsburg court as well as their artistic and cultural patronage gave them an exceptional prestige, which the French Revolution hardly challenged, as stressed by the Marchess of La Tour du Pin – the wife of the first French prefect in Brussels – in her diary.⁵ The Arenbergs were

² M. de Saint Martin, *L'Espace de la noblesse* (Paris, 1993).

³ M. Pinçon and M. Pinçon-Charlot, *Grandes fortunes. Dynasties familiales et formes de richesse en France* (Paris, 1998) 15, 130, 147.

⁴ B. Goujon, *Entre cosmopolitisme, insertions nationales et ancrages locaux, l'aristocratie au XIXe siècle: la Maison d'Arenberg (1820-1919)* (Ph.D. Université Lyon 2 Lumière, under the supervision of Prof. Claude-Isabelle Brelot, 2006).

⁵ Marquise de La Tour du Pin, *Journal d'une femme de cinquante ans (1778-1815) suivi de sa correspondance (1815-1846)* (Paris, 2002) 384.



Louis-Engelbert Duke of Arenberg (1750-1820), the 'blind Duke'. Louis-Engelbert of Arenberg lost his sight in a hunting accident in 1775. Marble bust made by Jan Antoon de Vaere, 1791 (coll. Victoria and Albert Museum, London)

also to be distinguished from the other noblemen of the future Belgian kingdom because they had been princes in the Holy Roman Empire since 1576. Moreover, thanks to Napoleon's favour, they benefited from the territorial reorganization of the German area following the *Reichsdeputationshauptschluss* of 25th February 1803: until 1811, they managed to preserve the existence of a duchy of Arenberg, which was relocated from the Eifel to the Ruhr and the Emsland. Finally, the House of Arenberg was particularly Francophile in the late eighteenth century. Louis-Engelbert d'Arenberg – the 'blind Duke' – was greatly influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment and had married the heiress of an old French noble family, Louise de Brancas-Villars.⁶ His younger brother, Prince Auguste d'Arenberg, known under the title of Earl of La Marck, was a close friend of Queen Marie-Antoinette's and was involved in the secret rapprochement between the royal family and Mirabeau in 1790-1791.⁷ Yet both remained sentimentally attached to the cradle of their family. They thus played an active, though ambiguous, part in the Brabant Revolution: despite their opposition to the Josephist reforms and the Viennese centralization, they did not cling to regional idiosyncracies and were above all attached to the maintenance of public order and traditional hierarchies.⁸ They mainly considered the Brabant revolution to be an opportunity to be seized that would enable them to preserve their transnational power and prestige.

⁶ *De blinde hertog. Louis-Engelbert van Arenberg en zijn tijd 1750-1820. Tentoonstelling Universiteitsbibliotheek van Leuven, van 21 oktober tot 19 december 1996* (Brussels, 1996).

⁷ G. Dansaert, *Le comte et la comtesse Auguste de La Marck, prince et princesse d'Arenberg* (Brussels, 1952).

⁸ J. Polasky, 'Les démocrates bruxellois', in: R. Mortier and H. Hasquin, ed., *Etudes sur le XVIIIe siècle. XXIV: Jean-François Vonck (1743-1792)* (Brussels, 1996) 60.

The geographic dispersion of its estates all over Europe also accounts for the international dimension of the House of Arenberg. During the nineteenth century, they expanded in some new areas where they held a prominent position as regional landlords. Political circumstances contributed to this territorial redeployment: the first estates to be acquired in Germany outside the borders of the Eifel mountains were former Church properties which were located in the districts of Recklinghausen and Meppen (then included in the new duchy of Arenberg) and had been secularized in 1803. Marital and inheritance strategies were even more decisive. The estates in the French provinces of Franche-Comté and Berry were for example inherited from the Countess de Lauraguais, the 'blind Duke's' mother-in-law. When they married rich foreign heiresses, the Arenbergs were inclined to re-orient their land acquisitions – at least partially. In the 1810s, Prince Ernest d'Arenberg bought the domains of Patschlawitz, Kokorzin and Stadl after his wedding with the Austrian Countess von Windisch-Grätz. Thanks to his wife, born Countess de Mérode, Prince Antoine d'Arenberg extended his land holdings in the provinces of Limburg and Antwerp, where the ducal family owned little land before the nineteenth century. The Arenbergs also acquired large estates, once the consequences of the French Revolution on their wealth were no longer to be felt. Whereas he sold a few properties in Britain, Northern France and the Land of Liège, Duke Prosper-Louis d'Arenberg was one of the main land acquirers of his generation: he bought large estates in Belgium, in the grand duchy of Luxemburg and above all in Germany, where the *fideicommiss* system persisted and protected the nobility from egalitarian successional partition. When he bought land across the Rhine, the Duke thus took a step towards securing and perpetuating the fortune of his dynasty. His grandson, Duke Engelbert-Marie of Arenberg, expanded these German estates when he bought Nordkirchen castle in 1903 from Prince Esterhazy. This luxurious mansion, which was nicknamed the 'Westphalian Versailles', materialized the Arenbergs' opulence and became the main residence of the ducal family just before the outburst of World War I.

Family networks also contributed to an international dimension to the House of Arenberg. Whereas marital exclusiveness in terms of religion, rank and prestige of the potential suitors and brides remained unchanged throughout the nineteenth century – and were even hardened by family laws in 1907 and 1909⁹ –, their nationality was not considered a problem. Until the 1860s, well-born Austrian ladies were all the more appreciated by the Princes of Arenberg as marriages with the Vienna and Prague aristocracy were made easier by pre-existing family connections with the Starhemburghs, the Windisch-Graetz and the Schwarzenbergs. Duke Prosper-Louis d'Arenberg and Princes Pierre, Joseph and Charles d'Arenberg thus respectively married Princess Ludmilla von Lobkowitz, Countess Caroline von Kaunitz-Rietberg, Princess Francesca von Liechtenstein and Countess Julie Hunyadi von Kethely. However, the members of the French branch were less and less inclined to marry members of the Austrian aristocracy: marriages within the French nobility (Talleyrand-Périgord, Greffulhe, Gramont, La Rochefoucauld, Laguiche and Vogüé)

⁹ Duke E.-M. of Arenberg, *Die Hausgesetze für das herzogliche Haus von Arenberg* (Düsseldorf, 1916).

helped them to become a truly French family. And at the end of the nineteenth century, even the elder branch looked for good matches in Germany (Croÿ-Dülmen) or in Belgium (Croÿ-Solre, Ligne) rather than in Austria.

The Arenbergs were thus well integrated into genealogical transnational networks. Great family events, hunting and high-society parties reactivated their sense of belonging to a European elite; they were also opportunities for them to travel through the whole continent and share their time between their urban mansions and their castles according to the aristocratic tradition of double-residence.¹⁰ Their elitist residential itinerancy was partially determined by their age, health, generation, tastes or activities. Unlike his uncle, Duke Prosper-Louis d'Arenberg, who was crippled with rheumatism and was reluctant to leave his Belgian residences, Prince Auguste d'Arenberg was a familiar face at Epsom and Ascot racecourses, at Vichy, Baden-Baden and Marienbad spas, and at Deauville and Dieppe beaches.¹¹ His two sons, Princes Pierre and Ernest of Arenberg, were also aristocratic globe-trotters, but were of a more inquiring mind: they thus brought drawings and photographs from Sudan and the Marquise islands, which they used as material for public conferences, scientific reports and publications.¹²

Finally, this international dimension was also of significance in the Arenbergs' educational and cultural practices. Multilingualism was a cornerstone of their early education: not only did German or Austrian *Fraulein*, English governesses and French private tutors take care of them during their youth, but several languages were also commonly used in the domestic sphere. When they grew older, sons could attend foreign boarding schools or universities: whereas they spent their childhood in Belgium, most of Duke Prosper-Louis' sons and grandsons attended Bonn University, in the Rhineland. They perpetuated the tradition of the *Grand Tour*, but also progressively included destinations such as Egypt, Northern Africa, the Bosphorus straits or India where they bought precious books and works of art. Perpetually enriched and diversified, the Arenbergs' libraries and collections contributed to their dynastic prestige and reflected their wealth, culture and personal tastes. Whereas Duke Prosper-Louis was an eclectic art lover, bought Greek vases and Roman sculptures as well Flemish paintings and was one of the greatest European plant collectors of his time,¹³ his wife Ludmilla acquired Asian china, Japanese lacquers and exotic objects, while his brother Paul mostly collected mineralogical samples and precious snuff-boxes.¹⁴

Contrary to those of many provincial noblemen,¹⁵ the Arenbergs' cultural tastes were thus not limited by national borders. This was obviously due to their transnational settlements and networks. Yet they had to take the rise of nations as political

¹⁰ Cl.-I. Brelot, *La noblesse réinventée. Nobles de Franche-Comté de 1814 à 1870* (Paris, 1992) 747-748.

¹¹ This is what a systematic reconstruction of his schedule (thanks the social registers of the Parisian conservative papers of the late nineteenth century such as *Le Figaro* or *Le Gaulois*) shows.

¹² *Journal du Cher*, 2 Feb. 1902. Ernest d'Arenberg's handwritten report of his trip to Marquise islands is still kept by the Laguiches at Arlay castle. As for Prince Pierre d'Arenberg, he published a beautifully illustrated *Voyage au Soudan Egyptien* (Paris: A. Lahure, 1904) 87 p.

¹³ 'La galerie de M. le Duc d'Arenberg', in: *L'Observateur*, 19 Feb. 1844; E. Matthieu, *Histoire de la ville d'Engghien* (Mons, 1877) 184 ff.

¹⁴ General Archives of the Kingdom of Belgium (Brussels), Arenberg Fund, Sa 5 397; Private Archives of the House of Arenberg (Edingen), Biography 30, inventory of Duchess Ludmilla's apartments, 1868.

¹⁵ Brelot, *La noblesse réinventée*, 877-880.

and territorial entities as well as the spreading of the principles of the Napoleonic Code into account. That is why the House was divided into national branches in the 1820s, each of them then developing its own strategy of national integration.

National integration: three national branches, diverging strategies

The concept of nation as it was shaped by the French Revolution forced the Arenbergs to decide to which community they would henceforth intend to belong. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, they had painfully experienced to what extent multinationality had become suspect in the eyes of the powers-that-be and was condemned as anti-patriotic and contrary to the prominence of national interests.¹⁶ In order to recover his sequestrated goods in the former Southern Netherlands (then annexed to France), Duke Louis-Engelbert d'Arenberg (whose mother-in-law had been guillotined in 1794 for having kept up a lengthy correspondence with her daughter and her son-in-law whereas they were regarded as foreign princes) was forced to relinquish his sovereignty in the German duchy of Arenberg in favour of his elder son Prosper-Louis and applied for French naturalization as well as his other sons Paul, Pierre and Philippe in 1803. His nephew, Ernest, also had to do so to keep his properties in Northern France. These pragmatic choices won the Arenbergs the favours of the Napoleonic regime: Louis-Engelbert entered the French Senate¹⁷ while Prosper-Louis became an appreciated ally in the Rhine Confederation and was given the hand of one of Empress Josephine's nieces. Yet the relationships between the two dynasties deteriorated at the beginning of the 1810s, when Prosper-Louis was captured during the Peninsular War and his duchy was annexed by the kingdom of Westphalia in 1811.

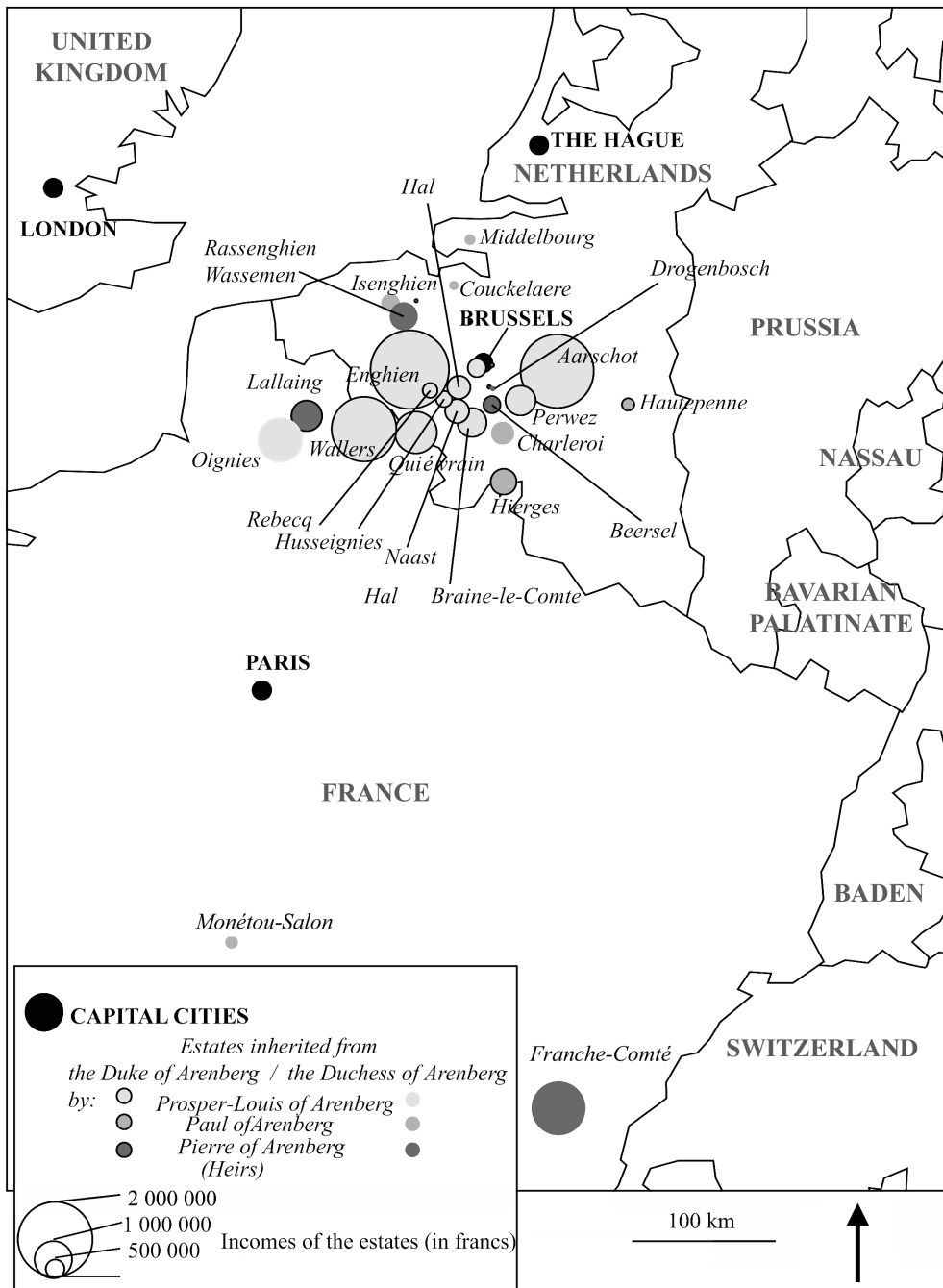
The structure of the ducal House in national branches did not survive Napoleon's fall: the 'blind Duke' and his sons were naturalized Dutch in 1814 and Ernest d'Arenberg received the *Inkolat* in Bohemia in 1816. Nevertheless, Louis-Engelbert's death in 1820 – a few months before his mother, the last heiress of the prestigious House of La Marck, and eight years after his wife – was to contribute to the reformation of national branches. Whereas Prosper-Louis – who had owned most of the German dynastic properties since 1803 – inherited the largest estates located in Brabant, Hainault, Flanders and Luxemburg, his younger brothers, Princes Paul and Pierre, mainly received French domains which had belonged to their maternal grandmother, Countess de Lauraguais. But it was obvious that Paul – a canon at Namur cathedral – was intellectually unable to manage his patrimony. Its administration was thus divided between Prosper-Louis and Pierre, who finally inherited it in the 1830s.¹⁸

¹⁶ R. Brubaker, *Citoyenneté et nationalité en France et en Allemagne* (Paris, 1997) 77-80.

¹⁷ V. Azimi, *Les premiers sénateurs français. Consulat et Premier Empire 1800-1814* (Paris, 2000) 32, 44-45. In 1806, the 'blind Duke' was one of the earliest 'foreign' senators (i.e. who lived in areas which did not become French until 1794) in the Napoleonic Senate, as he entered this prestigious institution three years after Degregory Marcorenco (from Turin), two years after Saint-Martin de la Motte (from Turin), Count de Lannoy (from Belgium), Saür (from Württemberg) and Rigal (from Württemberg) and one year after Ferino (from Milan), Cambiaso (from Genoa) and Durazzo (from Genoa).

¹⁸ Private Archives of the House of Arenberg (Edingen), Agreements 117 (settlement of Duke Louis-Engelbert's succession) and Duke Prosper-Louis d'Arenberg's correspondence 147 (donation act by Maitre Roberti, 6 Sept. 1838); Departmental Archives of Pas-de-Calais, 13 J 88 (acts by Maitre Faider and Maitre Roberti, 24 Oct. 1835 and 21 Jan. 1836).

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Partition of Duke Louis-Engelbert of Arenberg's and his wife's inheritance, 1820-1823

The francization of the branch established by Pierre d'Arenberg was neither an obvious nor a linear process. At the beginning of the 1820s, the Prince's priority was to take his estates in hand again, not to ask for letters of naturalization – especially since he continued to spend several months a year in his Brussels mansion. Without the law of the *milliard des émigrés*, which excluded foreign citizens from any financial compensation, he would certainly have remained Dutch. Moreover, Prince Pierre was very appreciated by King Charles X, who intended to confer peerage on him – which required him to be a French citizen. He thus asked to be officially naturalized, but was not aware of the political debate it would give rise to. Liberal deputies vividly criticized this sign of favour for the descendent of a former princely House in the Holy Roman Empire, who was furthermore reputed to be an ultra-royalist and a protégé of the King; yet their attacks remained unsuccessful. At last, in 1829, Prince Pierre married Alix de Talleyrand-Perigord, who was a cousin of the famous politician and one of the best matches of the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

But the Prince's high social position was deeply compromised by the July Revolution, as he refused to serve the new king, Louis-Philippe, who had removed him from peerage and whose political choices he disagreed with, even though he was more a conformist legitimist than an ardent one. Moreover, the premature death of his wife in 1842 and the opportunity to found a *majorat* in Rhineland with the Saffenburg domain – which he had inherited from his grandmother La Marck – contributed to redirect his ambitions across the Rhine. The 1848 revolution confirmed his will to leave France: he took refuge in Brussels after the February riots and arranged his daughter's marriage with Count Charles de Mérode-Westerloo. In the 1850s-1860s, as he was definitely converted to the Austrian pattern of neo-absolutism, he married Countess von Kaunitz-Rietberg and also convinced one of his sons, Prince Louis d'Arenberg, to become an officer in the imperial army. Louis won renown during the German-Danish War (1864) and the Seven Weeks War (1866), before he was killed as a military attaché in St-Petersburg in 1870. More than half a century after some of the Rhine Imperial Knights who were studied by William D. Godsey, the Arenbergs were still subjected to the attraction of the traditional and pre-national aristocratic ideal which persisted in the Austrian Empire.¹⁹

During the same period, Prince Pierre's other son, Prince Auguste d'Arenberg, still considered himself a French citizen – and thus vigorously opposed his father's wills. He spent his youth in Paris with his grandparents, Duke and Duchess de Périgord, and became a great figure of the *fête impériale*. Thanks to his wife, Jeanne Greffulhe, he was introduced to the members of a brilliant society life and the high banking world of Paris, as the Greffulhes were some of the wealthiest – and amongst the few Catholic – Parisian bankers in the first half of the nineteenth century, who had been ennobled and received the title of Count during the Restoration. Prince Auguste d'Arenberg undoubtedly benefited from their wealth, which gave him the means to maintain a princely way of life and to have his castle at Ménetou-Salon sumptuously restored. But the Greffulhes' influence and networks in the Parisian business world

¹⁹ W. D. Godsey, *Nobles and Nation in Central Europe. Free Imperial Knights in the Age of Revolution, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, 2009) 141-185.

were also useful when he became administrator of the Coal Mines of Anzin Company, the Paris-Orleans Railway Company or the Universal Company of the Suez Maritime Canal in the 1880s-1890s – he was President of the latter from 1896 until 1913. Because of his marriage, his investments and his activities, he was a symbol of the partial, but successful aristocratic conversion to modern capitalism in late nineteenth-century France. At the same time, he also started a career in politics. During the 1870-1871 Franco-German War, he had enrolled in the mobile troops of the Cher department and thus won great popularity. He first became a town councillor in Ménéton-Salon, then represented the district of Saint-Martin d'Auxigny at the *Conseil général* of the Cher department and was finally elected deputy for Bourges from 1877 to 1881 and from 1889 to 1902. Not only was he a notable in the province of Berry, but he also contributed to the national reconfiguration of the French right-wing parties. A legitimist supporting the Count of Chambord in 1877, he was one of the most well-known *ralliés* in the 1890s who wanted to build a moderate Republic; a conservative on religious matters, he proved to be economically and politically liberal, and advocated moderation during the Dreyfus Affair.²⁰ He was also an influential champion of colonization and notably presided over the Committee for French Africa (*Comité de l'Afrique Française*). He thus embodied the centre-right of the *fin-de-siècle* political class. However, none of his sons succeeded him at the National Assembly:²¹ the elder one, Prince Pierre d'Arenberg, was defeated in 1902 and 1906 and only managed to keep his father's seat at the *Conseil general* until his own death in 1919. But these political frustrations did not compromise the national integration of the French branch of the House of Arenberg: marriages, active society life in Paris, patronage in favour of culture and sports, and self-sacrifice for the nation during World War I proved that they had definitively become part of the French aristocracy.

The Austrian-Bohemian branch was not to know such continuity. Its founder, Prince Ernest of Arenberg, had been severely injured at the battle of Marengo and never completely recovered from it. Because of his frail health, he spent much of his time in spas or in Italy. He was undoubtedly isolated in Vienna's high society, and his situation still worsened when he lost his first wife, born Windisch-Graetz, and his only daughter in 1842. He then married Princess Sophie von Auersperg: only one of their two daughters survived and she married her first cousin, Duke Engelbert-Auguste d'Arenberg. The Austrian-Bohemian branch thus vanished for demographic reasons in two generations. Furthermore, its Viennese palace and most of its estates in Central Europe were sold at the end of the nineteenth century. It is quite a paradox that the best European conservatory of aristocracy was precisely the territory in which no branch succeeded in settling permanently, as it is also proved by the following generation. Neither Prince Joseph's, nor Prince Charles d'Arenberg's children survived, and

²⁰ Cl.-I. Brelot, 'Entre nationalisme et cosmopolitisme: les engagements multiples de la noblesse', in: P. Birnbaum, ed., *La France de l'Affaire Dreyfus* (Paris, 1994) 339-361.

²¹ This is quite different from some aristocratic political dynasties which persisted during the twentieth century, particularly in Western France where the prestige of the nobility remained strong: B. Menager, 'La succession des mandats: une affaire de famille?', in: J.-M. Mayeur, J.-P. Chaline and A. Corbin, ed., *Les Parlementaires de la IIIe République* (Paris, 2003) 205-208.

VIRTUS 17 (2010)

Prosper-Louis Duke of Arenberg (1785-1861), son of Louis-Engelbert.
Anonymous portrait miniature, early nineteenth century (private coll.)

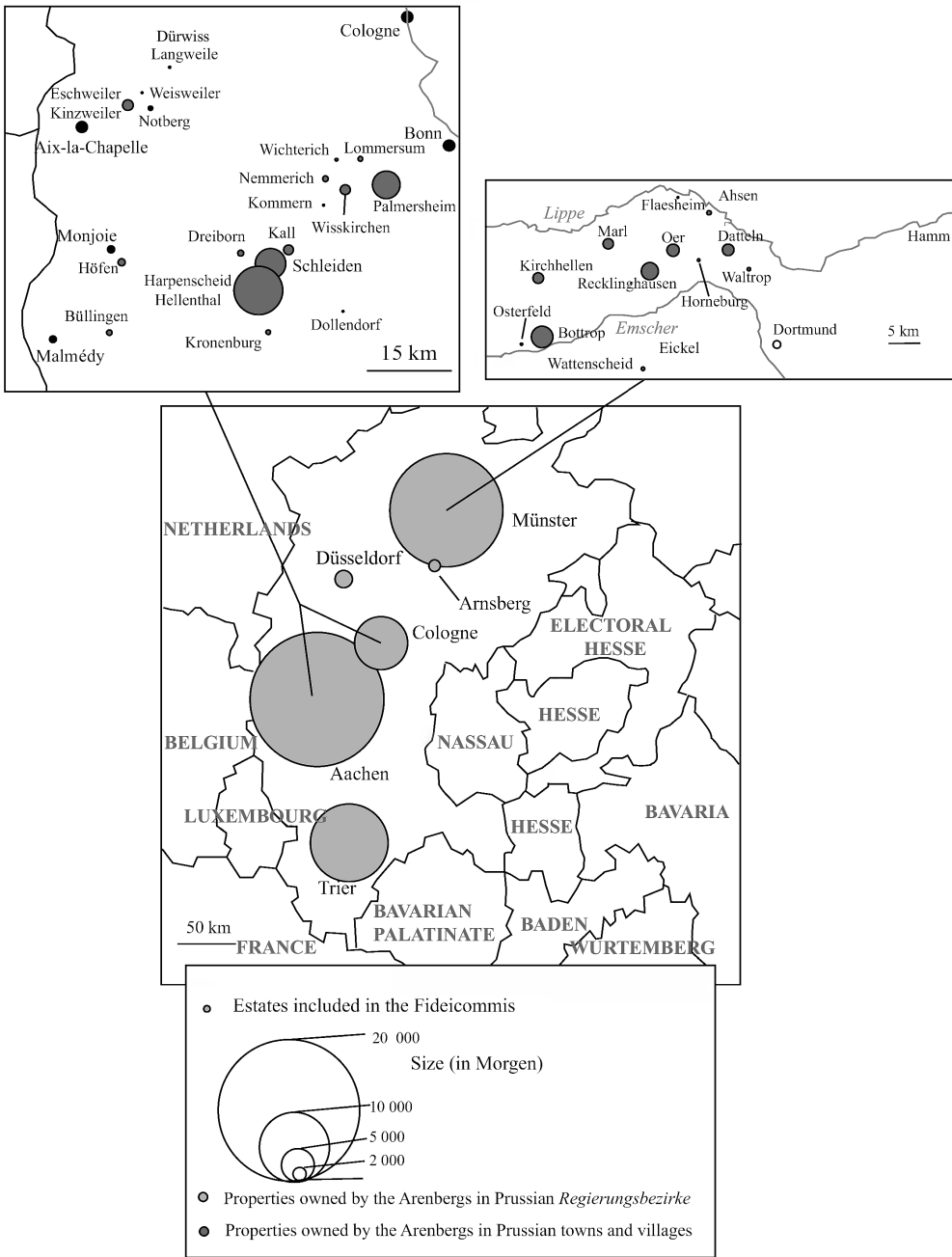


none of them tried to be naturalized whereas they lived in Vienna several months a year close to their Austrian families-in-law. As individuals, they thus perpetuated the traditional ideal of noble supranational identity.

Their behaviour was emblematic of the elder branch of the House of Arenberg, which was more ambivalent in terms of national identity and self-definition – it is ambiguously said to have been ‘German-Belgian’. Duke Prosper-Louis was a pragmatic man: he had been traumatized by the Napoleonic experience and wanted above all to lead a peaceful life in his Brussels palace, but also set great store by his social position and dynastic rights. In the 1820s, he treated King William I of the Netherlands considerably and strengthened his position as a mediatized prince (*Standesherr*) in the kingdoms of Prussia and Hanover. He particularly kept partial sovereignty rights in his former duchy across the Rhine, including honorific privileges, the patronage of schools and churches, the appointment of the judges and of the local administration, tax exemptions and the *regale* – which was to provide his family with huge amounts of money when coal mines were discovered in the *Ruhrgebiet*. In 1830, Duke Prosper-Louis was momentarily sounded out about becoming the first king of Belgium, but he withdrew discreetly into his German estates and only came back to Brussels after Leopold I’s accession, immediately giving up his former Orangism, contrary to many Belgian noble families.²² Nevertheless, from the 1840s, his main ambitions were con-

²² J. Stengers, *Histoire du sentiment national en Belgique* (Brussels, 2000) 220-223.

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The Arenberg 'Familienfideikommiss', 1857

centrated on the other bank of the Rhine: not only did he appreciate King Frederic-William IV of Prussia's conservatism, but he had the foreboding that the *fideicommiss* system (which was founded in 1854)²³ and his German coal mines would enable his family to retain a prominent position among the European aristocracy. Whereas they felt that their social supremacy was vividly jeopardized by bourgeois competition in the kingdom of Belgium (they refused to ask for letters patent confirming their nobility to Kings Leopold I and Leopold II), the Arenbergs were more and more attracted to the hierarchical and traditional societies that prevailed in Central Europe. However, this germanization remained incomplete and dissociated from the German unification, as the ducal family was austrophile and did not appreciate Bismarck's hegemony – all the more so since the latter wanted to suppress the mediatised princes' privileges. The half-autonomy of the duchy of Arenberg was thus abolished in 1873-1875. Moreover, the *Kulturkampf* aggravated the tensions between Duke Engelbert-Auguste d'Arenberg – who was a faithful supporter of Ludwig Windthorst, the leader of the Center party – and the Iron Chancellor. A phase of appeasement occurred in the 1890s, partially thanks to the friendship between Prince François d'Arenberg – who was an MP in the Reichstag – and Chancellor Bernhard of Bulow.²⁴ It contributed to the young Duke Engelbert-Marie's support of William II's regime. One of the richest men of Germany – and even in Europe²⁵ – thanks to his coal mines and his regale, the Duke became a close friend of the imperial family and spent more and more of his time in Berlin or Nordkirchen. World War I was to clarify his ambivalent position between Germany and Belgium. Not only did the Arenbergs face anti-German actions during the first weeks of the war,²⁶ but they were also involved in political intrigues and multiplied blunders during the German occupation. For all these reasons, they were regarded as traitors by many Belgians. In 1919, all their possessions in Belgium were impounded – and finally most of them sold – by the Belgian state, thus putting an end to a multiseular dynastic settlement in the Southern Netherlands.

Despite their variety, these strategies of national integration reveal to what extent each generation of the House of Arenberg tried to adapt to changing circumstances and opportunities without giving up its aristocratic identity. However, the behavior of its members was not only guided by pragmatism: it also reflected a dynastic *ethos* as well as an attachment to the monarchic institutions and to Roman Catholic intransigence. However, it also revealed an acceptance of the process of democratization, as the House of Arenberg's priority was to keep the upper hand on the political world and not to be marginalized. Reinventing notability at a local scale proved to be an efficient tool for the perpetuation of aristocratic power.

Local settlements: reinventing notability

Even if they could not be resident landlords in each of their numerous castles or estates, the Arenbergs remained concerned with local matters and the perpetuation of

²³ Private Archives of the House of Arenberg (Edingen), Honours 103, Family statement, 1854.

²⁴ B. Prince von Bülow, *Denkwürdigkeiten* (4 vol.; Berlin, 1930-1931), II, 258.

²⁵ *Le Figaro*, 7 June 1905.

²⁶ *Le Soir*, 5 and 19 Aug. 1914.

their authority through delegates such as their stewards and forest wardens. These mediators embodied the permanence and continuity of their presence in rural societies. Sometimes, they also exercised municipal functions as aldermen or mayors of the villages where their employers were the main landowners.²⁷ Most of the time, such functions were neglected by the Dukes and Princes themselves, except in the French branch: Princes Auguste and Pierre d'Arenberg were thus successively aldermen in Ménetou-Salon from 1870 to 1919, as it was an informal condition to claim a seat in the *Conseil général* – or in Parliament – according to the Republican *cursus honorum*. In a democratized regime, local settlements largely conditioned electoral victories for the traditional elites: Auguste d'Arenberg's vote-catching practices proved to be efficient until he retired from parliamentary life in 1902. As a conservative, he was supported by the clergy and the landlords of his constituency; but he was also popular among the workers of the military workshops of Bourges because he regularly defended their interests in Parliament and was on good terms with high staff officers, which was profitable to military commissions. An intermediary between his electors and Parisian decision makers, he also encouraged the image of a gentleman farmer by presiding over the committee for the agricultural meetings (*comice*) of Bourges from 1884 to 1905, and thus had the opportunity to deliver one of those agrarian speeches which were characteristic of *fin de siècle* Melinism. Finally, he patronized many local associations – including contingency funds and mutual-credit societies – and supported the development of agricultural trade-unionism which had been created with the 1884 Waldeck-Rousseau Act. This patronage reinvented the solidarity and cooperation between noblemen and countrymen, and also completed the traditional special relationship between the nobility and the Roman Catholic Church. It thus proved to be an efficient tool for adapting to secularizing societies: whereas the elder branch of the House of Arenberg could stick to its clerical line insofar as the Churches remained prominent institutions in social action in Germany and Belgium until World War I, the French Princes had to give up such an uncompromising stance if they did not want to be marginalized.²⁸ Despite their nostalgia and reluctance, they had understood that this adaptation to diverging contexts was the condition for perpetuating a form of aristocratic supremacy in modernizing societies.

Conclusion

The example of the House of Arenberg reveals the ambiguity of aristocratic multiterritoriality in the nineteenth century. It was a prestigious inheritance, reflected large-scale patrimonies and networks, and provided numerous opportunities, but it also created tensions and incompatibilities. If they wanted to take advantage of it, aristocrats such as the Arenbergs had to make strategic choices: giving proof of their national loyalty and patriotism, but also strengthening their local positions to become promi-

²⁷ A good example is provided by the Belgian family de Wouters, who gave the House of Arenberg two general administrators and some stewards who also exerted political functions in areas where the ducal family had large estates: H. Douxchamps, *La famille de Wouters d'Oplinter-Bouchout* (Brussels, 1994) 475-478.

²⁸ B. Goujon, 'Re-inventing Seigneurial Charity in 19th Century Europe. The Example of the Dukes and Princes of Arenberg', in: I. Brandes and K. Marx-Jaskulski, ed., *Armenfürsorge und Wohltätigkeit. Ländliche Gesellschaften in Europa, 1850-1930/Poor Relief and Charity. Rural Societies in Europe, 1850-1930* (Frankfort, etc., 2008) 187-200.

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ment notables. World War I was to be a major crisis for them: ambiguity was not possible anymore, along with the tradition of serving kings or dynasties without any consideration of nationality. It is no surprise that most of the members of the German-Belgian branch – who had so long refused to choose between the two countries and stuck to their conservative lines – took refuge in Switzerland in 1918. Most of their descendents still live or, at least, spend much of their time there. For the Arenbergs as well as for so many wealthy families investing all around the world, having a cosmopolitan *habitus* and looking for a discreet, convenient and elitist extraterritoriality, the Helvetian haven was to be – and still is – a privileged destination during the twentieth century although the tradition of secret bank accounts has recently been called into question and the competition of other tax havens is constantly getting stronger in a globalized world.