

Abstracts

The discovery of Antiquity Politics of identity among the nobility of the Burgundian-Habsburg Low Countries

Rob van der Laarse

It was at the imperial courts of Maximilian I in Vienna and that of his daughter Margaret of Austria in Mechelen at about 1500, that the cult of the antique was linked with a cult of lineage. Although many nobles in the empire seemed to have copied this courtly model, it is argued that the search for a Batavian antiquity represented the hybrid position of the Low Countries' high nobility. In spite of their transnational role as an imperial caste of governors and war lords with possessions and offices all over Europe, the emperor's Knights of the Golden Fleece still possessed a strong power base in their regional homelands. Thus their integration in Habsburg renaissance culture and politics was not a one-directional but multidirectional process. As demonstrated, the early modern renaissance policy not only throws new light on the meaning of art and the intermediality of humanist texts, images and objects; it also offers a new perspective on the political culture of seventeenth-century 'men of power'. These dynastic politics of the past related feudal status awarded according to the priority of one's house and lineage to a new imperial priority of rank awarded by the court. In the wake of Huizinga cultural historians have too much opposed chivalry and courtesy, stressing the decline of the first after the rise of the latter. Thus both the Ritter-renaissances of the early fourteenth and late fifteenth centuries have been looked upon as no more than chivalresque pleasure of courtiers, while the 'chivalresque-courtly renaissance' might be better understood as the outcome of the acculturation of new regional knight-hoods (with a remarkable long staying power) into the imagined community of the Burgundian-Habsburg imperial nobility. In other words, the knight was as much a renaissance invention as the courtier.

Nobility and *memoria* in a late medieval village in Holland

Kees Kuiken and Aleid van Poelgeest

Medieval necrological sources from Dutch rural parish churches are extremely rare. Two 'parson's registers' of the village of Koudekerk on Rhine near Leiden reveal the memorial culture of three groups of villagers: the nobility proper (*ridderadel*), the closely related landed gentry (*welgeborenen*) and commoners, mostly farmers and peasants (*gemene buurlieden*). The local elites at Koudekerk seem to have been obsessed with status (*fama*) as much as with death and salvation (*pietas*). In the parish church, the number of candles lit during memorial services appears to have indicated social status, nine being the standard for the 'illustrious' nobility. In the case of the Van Tol family, these numbers appear to correlate with their social ups and downs. In comparison with other villages, Koudekerk appears rather unique in its limitation of

memorial services to four times per year. The local nobility (especially the dominant Van Poelgeest family) had a limited say in these matters. The parish priest was not appointed by them but by the counts of Holland, who also established a memorial chantry in the Koudekerk church for the courtesan Aleid van Poelgeest († 1392). The Poelgeests in turn outsourced part of their memorial services to institutions in the nearby town of Leiden. The demography of the rural nobility and gentry in the county of Holland can be studied in a tax register of 1423-1424. In Koudekerk, the percentage of 'well-born' inhabitants (including both knights and gentry) is estimated around 50%; in Voorburg, another village where a memorial register was preserved, it is calculated at 11%. These percentages are in line with the share of nobles and gentlemen in the memorial registers, although many 'well-born' in the tax register are not on the fifteenth-century memorial lists.

The attitude of the Polish nobility towards Protestantism in Poland-Lithuania in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries

Sibbe Jan Visser

This article focuses on the role of the nobility in the reformation movement in Poland-Lithuania. The new religion in the Polish empire was adopted by the lower nobility, the *szlachta*, in an attempt to gain more privileges and freedoms. A majority of the Protestant nobles adhered to Calvinism (and not to Lutheranism, the Bohemian Brotherhood or Antitrinitarianism), given that the teachings of Calvin came nearest to the aspirations and the self-assuredness of the nobles. The struggle of the *szlachta* to abolish the jurisdiction of the bishops was successful in 1562. Freedom of religion was legislated in 1573. However, collective efforts by the king, the magnates and the Catholic clergy were the death-knell for the Protestants. The Socinians were the first victims of the Catholic Reformation. Expelled from Poland in 1660, they found support from kindred spirits in the Dutch Republic.

The language of luxury goods Consumption and the English country house, c.1760-1830

John Stobart

Luxury is central to the material culture of the country house and to many conceptualisations of the elite. Commentators from Adam Smith to Werner Sombart to Arjun Appadurai have distinguished luxury as a particular form of consumption, drawing a close link between luxury, status and honour. But luxury is both a slippery and relative term: a category that is contingent upon time and space, as well as culture and wealth, and one that was contested by contemporary commentators as well as modern scholars. Whether seen as 'social valuables', characterised by such things as cost and specific processes of acquisition, or as 'incarnated signs', which carried much broader meanings and associations, language is central to the ways in which luxury was understood, communicated and valued by elite consumers. This paper explores the ways in which the semiotics and language of luxury were deployed through key media relating to the consumption of luxury goods in the country house: bills for goods bought by elite consumers, and sales catalogues for post-mortem auctions of their contents. I argue that the ways in which goods were described and understood was central to their definition as luxuries and to their consumption by elites. Importantly, these conceptions and meanings appear to have remained constant whether goods were new and fashionable, or old and being offered second hand. Refinement, politeness and honour remained central to the lexicon of luxury.

Admiration and aversion The German officer as an ambivalent example for his Dutch counterpart

Ben Schoenmaker

This article deals with the question of how Dutch military writers viewed their German colleagues, whose prestige had increased significantly after the victorious war against France in 1870-1871. Their opinion of the German officers was mixed. On the one hand, they praised their military knowledge, admired their strong sense of honour and they were jealous of their high standing in society. On the other hand, they disapproved of the aristocratic haughtiness of the German officer corps and the tendency of its members to look down upon their civilian countrymen. They also denounced its institutional conservatism, which denied the fruits of liberalism. Therefore, for the Dutch officers, most of whom were attached to their liberal rights and liberties, the German colleagues, despite their impressive reputation, did not serve as attractive role models.

Arvid Järnefelt, the Finnish Tolstoy A radical social reformer and a nobleman

Marja Vuorinen

This article deals with the testimony of a Finnish nobleman, Arvid Järnefelt (1861-1932), the nineteenth century noble way of life, and how this relates to his life's work as a radical social reformist. Despite his high birth Järnefelt was a dedicated egalitarian and an original social theorist, who expressed his ideas in various literary works. In Järnefelt's novels he programmatically criticised the nobility for exploiting the people and envisaged a more democratic future. Because of his political bias he was critical about the allegedly luxurious, selfish and spiritually empty noble lifestyle. Nevertheless, in his semi-biographical *Novel of my parents* (1928-1930) he presented an unusually full and detailed, and perhaps even nostalgic, rear-mirror view on a way of life that was fast becoming a thing of the past. This article seeks to deep-read Järnefelt's work and to assess its semiotic, discursive and ideological content against the backdrop of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Intellectuals of noble descent and the reinvention of aristocratic identity in Germany and Austria, 1918-1939

Dina Gusejnova

This article explores the changing notion of aristocratic identity in German and Austrian circles of elite sociability between the two World Wars. The central case study is the work, social circle, and influence of the vitalist philosopher Hermann Keyserling, a celebrated author of the interwar years. His ideas are emblematic of the sense of crisis that affected dispossessed nobles from Central and Eastern Europe after the abolition of the nobility in the new post-imperial republics. My contention is that the turn of nobles after World War I towards intellectual activities, such as publishing, provided them with an important medium through which they could transform aristocratic identity into new forms of political authority. The role of nobles in shaping new forms of aristocratic identity opened up connections between social, literary, and governmental debates about social hierarchy from post-imperial Europe to Europe during the German expansion under National Socialism.

VIRTUS 18 (2011)

How the lord of the manor disappeared from Ruurlo The local position of a noble family in an eastern Dutch village

Vincent Sleebe

This article deals with changes in the position of the nobility at a local level in the eastern part of the Netherlands during the last two centuries, by examining the history of the Van Heeckeren family in the village of Ruurlo. After the establishment of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in the beginning of the nineteenth century, this family rose to high political power by occupying governmental positions, and to considerable wealth by accumulating vast areas of land both within the community and in other parts of the region. Due to its position, it also exerted a large informal influence in local affairs. However, in the course of the twentieth century the nobility lost its influence in society, while rising costs and diminishing returns made its financial position considerably weaker. As a consequence, many families, including the Van Heeckerens, had to sell their estates to local governments or environmental trusts.

