VIRTUS

21 | 2014

Simon Unger and Jaap Dronkers

Do you really need a castle?

Material inheritance and noble status symbols in present-day society*

Castles are status symbols commonly associated with the European nobility. Yet only a minority of nobles still owns a castle, an original family house, or landed possessions. Nonetheless, other forms of material family inheritance, such as family silver, paintings, and furniture do remain in the possession of many Western European noble families. In this article, the importance of such material inheritance as part of a means to maintain a continuous identity and socio-economic prominence in present-day society shall be assessed.

In line with the 'modernization theory', it has been articulated that traditional European elites – that is, the aristocracy and the nobility – have lost their position in the social hierarchy and have been socio-economically integrated into the bourgeoisie.[1] However, in recent studies, the European nobility has been found to continue possessing a strong advantage in achieving elite positions within society, although its legal status has been remarkably weakened ever since the nineteenth century. For instance, Dutch nobles remain overrepresented in prominent social positions; they

---

* All correspondence to the second author. We thank the Nederlandse Adelsvereniging (the Dutch Nobility Association) for access to data from their 2005 survey conducted among Dutch nobility. We also thank one of the anonymous *Virtus* reviewers for his/her useful comments.

1 This assumption of the disappeared nobility has most clearly been formulated by D. Cannadine in his book *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven-London, 1990). Equally, D. Lieven, *The Aristocracy in Europe, 1815-1914* (Houndmills, 1992) and H. Reif, *Adel und Bürgertum in Deutschland. Entwicklungslinien und Wendepunkte im 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 2001) discuss a disappearance of European nobility.

www.virtusjournal.org | print ISSN 1380-6130

are found throughout the economy, politics, military and civil service.[2] Saint Martin reached a similar conclusion for the far more fragmented French nobility, which has enjoyed no legal position since 1872.[3] Therefore, it appears that the aristocracy and nobility step out of the developmental pattern implied by the modernization theory.

The question posed in this article is whether the prominent position the nobility still holds within Dutch society may be explained by its traditional culture, including its traditional material inheritance. In other words: is there a connection between, on the one hand, family heritage made manifest in traditions, historical objects, real estate or landed possessions, and on the other, the twenty-first century position of the Dutch nobility? Is it a sign of societal failure of nobility to abandon landed possessions or, on the contrary, did successful nobles move to the cities?

We have considered taking various approaches to our research question. Most obviously, family houses and landed estates are worth considerable financial value, just as are family silver, paintings, and jewelry. In part, the nobility's contemporary financial situation can be explained by wealth and assets inherited from previous generations. However, this cannot account for all socio-economic peculiarities of the Dutch nobility: unlike a difference in wealth, a difference in income clearly cannot be explained only by financial inheritance.

In this context, the exact relation between material inheritance and financial performance will be analyzed: traditional heritage might be related to wealth; however, it may also engender noble identity – possibly more relevant. The question is whether such a distinctive identity and culture can be sufficient explanatory factors underlying financial success or failure. For example, it may be stipulated that noble identity works to engender social networks within the nobility, which, in turn, may be helpful in their members achieving social and economic success. However, it also might be possible that noble class-consciousness and noble networks are more prevalent in rural, traditional environments than in modern cities shaped by bourgeois culture and meritocratic values, and thus contribute less to social and economic success.

Further, it could be theorized that the conservation of identity and heritage may hinder nobles in integrating into an essentially bourgeois society, thereby modernizing their social capital. According to 'modernization theory', contemporary Western societies are involved in a process of ever-increasing rationalization. This widely accepted theory is based on the assumption that traditional cultures gradually disappear and give way to a rationalized, characteristically bourgeois form of living. The modernization theory assumes that class differences are leveled by our present-day

2 H.J. Schijf, J. Dronkers and J. van den Broeke-George, 'Recruitment of members of Dutch noble and high-bourgeois families to elite positions in the 20th century', *Social Science Information*, XLIII (2004) 435-475; J. Dronkers, 'Declining homogamy of Austrian-German nobility in the 20th century? A comparison with the Dutch nobility', *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, XXXIII (2008) 262-284.

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

capitalistic, meritocratic culture. In line with this theory, one could argue that nobles must adapt to modern times in order to be financially successful. Hence, it could be posited that both traditionalism and noble status symbols have declined in importance and might even be counter-productive to nobles in their achieving success in modern-day society.

Modernization theory: background and debates

Historical studies on the development of the European nobility throughout modernity are numerous. Among them, notable historians such as Dominic Lieven and Hans-Ulrich Wehler suggest that the history of nobility basically ends with the Second World War.[4] Their theses are mostly consistent with the modernization theory, culminating in the dissolution of the nobility as a social class amid the phenomenon of a growing bourgeoisie. In this theoretical framework, modernization is defined through an ongoing process of ever-more pervasive rationalization. In the tradition of the American sociologist Talcott Parsons, two generations of sociologists have stressed the importance of societal change and have regarded reactionary forces (often simplistically equalized with the old nobility) as necessarily hindering, even precluding rational development.[5]

From the perspective of American modernization theory of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, the European nobility could easily be counted among the 'backward peoples', as they allegedly shared a 'modernization deficit'. Given the traditional power status of the nobility, this view might seem absurd, but it is reminiscent of nineteenth-century German liberals, who had ridiculed the ruling nobility as an 'exotic Indian tribe'.[6] A list of cultural critics of the nobility could be extended to early social historians, such as Lujo Brentano, Gustav Schmoller, or Max Weber, for whom the nobility merely was 'a group which clung to backward traditions (...) in opposition to the industrial and democratic dynamic'.[7]

The position of the nobility in contemporary societies has rarely been researched beyond single-family case studies (for example, the Dutch family of Wassenaer by Kuiper and the German family of Bernstorff by Conze).[8] 'For a long time, the nobil-

4 Lieven, *The Aristocracy in Europe*; H.-U. Wehler, *Europäischer Adel, 1750-1950* (Göttingen, 1990).

5 See, for example: H. Bernstein, 'Modernization theory and the sociological study of development', *Journal of Development Studies*, VII (1971) 141-160; B. Brugger and K. Hannan, *Modernization and Revolution* (London, 1983); N. Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future. Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore, 2003).

6 See Heinrich Laube (1833). Quoted in S. Malinowski, 'Their favorite enemy. German social historians and the Prussian nobility', in: S. Müller and C. Torp, eds, *Imperial Germany Revisited. Continuing Debates and New Perspectives* (Oxford, 2013) 141.

7 Malinowski, 'Their favorite enemy', 141.

8 Y. Kuiper, 'Van heerlijkheid naar familiestichting. Van Wassenaers (van Catwijck) in de 19de en 20e eeuw', in: H.M. Brokken, ed., *Heren van stand. Van Wassenaer, 1200-2000. Achthonderd jaar Neder-*

ity was more a by-product of historical research than a carefully examined object of study'.[9] In contrast, the sociological focus has always been on the bourgeoisie as a driver of modernization and social change, and it has ignored any diversity within the nobility (age of nobility, source of wealth, military relations, business, civil service). All too often, the tendency has been to reduce European aristocracies to stereotypical images stressing the social homogeneity of the 'landowning class', which was bound to disappear in a modern society. This sociological assumption of homogeneity and the triumph of modern society have even led some historians to describe the decline of the nobility in the twentieth century as a teleological process of an 'economic death struggle'.[10]

However, sociological studies of recent years have shown that the nobility still forms a sociologically relevant group distinct from the bourgeoisie. In the Dutch case, the most outstanding indicator of the nobility's social relevance is its undiminished access to elite positions. Even compared with the high bourgeoisie, nobles are proportionally overrepresented in high-level political, economic, or official positions. Even more important, the likelihood of gaining access to such a position did not diminish over the course of the twentieth century.[11] Most Dutch studies on political influence only repeat the sociological stereotypes about nobility and bourgeoisie, without any empirical evidence. Yet during the twentieth century, the Dutch nobility changed its spheres of influence from the public sector to culture and business, thus becoming less visible but no less relevant.[12] Hence, partly via this shift, Dutch nobles succeeded in retaining their social relevance. For example, it has been argued that nobles who are engaged in knightly orders and noble associations have greater chances to gain elite positions. Simultaneously, a university degree nearly triples the likelihood of belonging to a knightly order, indicating that modern scholastic achievements are a positive factor in membership selection, instead of a negative one. Traditional noble culture seems to foster a noble's ability to pursue a successful career in modern society. By the same token, members of the Dutch nobility have increased their univer-

landse adelsgeschiedenis (Zoetermeer, 2001) 201-243; E. Conze, *Von deutschem Adel. Die Grafen von Bernstorff im 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 2000).

9 Malinowski, 'Their favorite enemy', 142.

10 See, for example: C. Torp, *Max Weber und die preußischen Junker* (Tübingen, 1998). Weber's views are almost directly adopted by Hans Rosenberg; see, for example: H. Rosenberg, 'Die Pseudodemokratisierung der Rittergutsbesitzerklasse', in: idem, *Machteliten und Wirtschaftskonjunkturen. Studien zur neueren deutschen Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Göttingen, 1978) 83-101.

11 J. Dronkers and H. Schijf, 'The transmission of elite positions among Dutch nobility during the 20th century', in: E. Conze and M. Wienfort, eds, *Adel und Moderne. Deutschland im europäischen Vergleich im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Köln-Weimar-Wien, 2004) 65-82; J. Dronkers, 'Has the Dutch nobility retained its social relevance during the 20th century?', *European Sociological Review*, XIX (2003) 81-96.

12 J. Dronkers and H. Schijf, 'Van de publieke naar de culturele of economische sector? Een vergelijking tussen de Nederlandse adel en het patriciaat in de twintigste eeuw', *Virtus. Jaarboek voor Adelsgeschiedenis*, XI (2004) 104-117.

sity enrollments considerably, more or less in line with the patrician families.[13] Thus, the Dutch nobility has been highly successful in modernizing its 'social capital'.

The social distances between Dutch nobles as a social group can be measured by the prevalence of marriages among nobles. If the Dutch nobility had become socially irrelevant – as would be suggested according to modernization theory – homogamy among nobles should not be disproportionally high. In contrast, it has been found that the chance of nobles to find a noble partner is 23 times higher than for non-nobles.[14] Moreover, the higher the noble's title is, the greater his or her chance of finding a noble spouse, suggesting that higher noble titles retain their relevance, even in modern society.[15] These outcomes clearly contradict the modernization theory, based on the disappearance of traditional cultures. Apparently, noble social structures persist and remain relevant, at least for the most personal of life decisions.

To this day, nobility is a social institution of hereditary character in the Netherlands. In contrast to the United Kingdom, it is notable that few new noble titles were awarded during the twentieth century. To a certain extent, the Dutch nobility is socially set apart from the rest of its society. For example, knightly orders are an exclusively noble form of social organization. In Europe, there exist three knightly orders (which claim to date to the medieval crusades) that still have Dutch branches: two Protestant (the Teutonic Order/Order of Brothers of the German House of Saint Mary in Jerusalem and the Knights Hospitaller) and one Catholic (the Sovereign Military Order of Malta). In the Netherlands, the Teutonic Order admits only Dutch Protestant males and requires that both parents come from lineages that were noble before 1795, while the other two orders require just a noble title. Moreover, there are regional noble associations in the Netherlands, the so-called *Ridderschappen*, which require a traditional family link to the respective region as a membership criterion. These regional orders comprise the *Ridderschappen* of Noord-Brabant, Gelderland, Utrecht, Overijssel, Friesland, and Zeeland, although some have been re-established after a long break.[16]

In conclusion, nobility remains a sociologically relevant characteristic in the Netherlands that influences social outcomes. Despite the influx of successful bourgeois families ennobled in the nineteenth century, at least parts of the earlier nobility adhere to a noble identity and thus form a distinct social category manifest in knightly orders and noble associations.

13 Schijf et al., 'Recruitment of members'.

14 Dronkers, 'Declining homogamy', 262-284.

15 J. Dronkers and H. Schijf, 'Huwelijken tussen adel en patriciaat: een middel om hun elitepositie in een moderne samenleving in stand te houden?', *De Nederlandsche Leeuw*, CXXII (2005) 144-155.

16 F.K.M. Nispen tot Pannerden and J. Dronkers, 'Van politiek orgaan tot "zedelyck ligchaam", 1850-2012', in: C.O.A. Schimmelpenninck van der Oije et al., eds, *Adel en ridderschap in Gelderland. Tien eeuwen geschiedenis* (Zwolle, 2013) 299-318.

Castle Het Nijenhuis near Diepenheim in the province of Overijssel, 2014. The property is first mentioned in the late-fourteenth century. The manor (*havezate*) and current castle were acquired by the father of Rutger Jan Schimmelpenninck (1761-1825), grand pensionary of the Batavian Republic, in 1799, and are still owned by his descendants *(photo Sylvia Dorsman)*

Hypotheses

Based on the premises outlined above, concerning the present societal position of the nobility, what is the role of traditional noble material possessions, both movable and immovable, in present-day noble culture? Can the nobility retain its social relevance, as a result of its traditional material inheritance, that sets it apart from the bourgeoisie? Two hypotheses are conceivable.

The first hypothesis is based on the idea that noble culture is preserved and bequeathed to subsequent generations through traditional material inheritance, such as landed possessions, old real estate, or works of art. Certain material possessions are of considerable financial value and represent assets that set the nobility apart from the rest of the society. Hence, according to this first hypothesis, the success of the Dutch nobility may be explained – at least in part – by its material inheritance. The reason may be twofold: not only may material inheritance be of financial value, but it may also carry a certain cultural inheritance that distinguishes its owners from others in society. For instance, many noble families own historical documents, such as genealogies and bibles, that are of personal cultural value.

According to our first hypothesis, *nobles preserving traditional heritage should be economically more successful than modernized and urbanized nobles who have abandoned such heritage*. In line with this hypothesis, we may assume that those nobles still owning a castle or their original family house perform better in society than those who do not. Similarly, traditional noble culture is highly related to landownership. This leads to the assumption that those nobles who abandoned their traditional heritage, sold their old landed estates, and moved to the cities are economically less successful than those who retained their heritage.

The second hypothesis is based on 'modernization theory'. In alluding to this theory, the nobility's success may be explained by the phenomenon of nobles abandoning their noble identity and instead integrating into a rationalized modern bourgeois society. Underlying this second hypothesis is the idea that traditional noble identity and modern, liberal capitalism are incompatible. In this context, the term 'bourgeoization of the nobility' has been coined.[17] Hence, paradoxically, the nobility's success may be explained by its having adopted a new, essentially non-noble, bourgeois mentality. According to this second hypothesis, the nobility has been able to retain its social relevance, because it modernized its social and intellectual capital. In essence, this means that traditionally noble material possessions and cultural heritage hinder noble integration into modern society. Therefore, *we may expect to find that those nobles who abandon material inheritance achieve greater success than those preserving such an inheritance*.

At first glance, both hypotheses appear mutually exclusive, even antipodal. Whereas the second hypothesis accords with the modernization theory, the first hypothesis stands in opposition to it. However, both hypotheses focus on the nobility's attitude towards modernity. In both cases, the nobility's success is explained by its degree of integration into modern culture. For this reason – regardless of the initial hypothesis – the analytical focal point must be noble identity in present-day Dutch society. In fact, both hypotheses possibly give an oversimplified account of the nobility's development during the twentieth century. They account for phenotypical cases of nobles who either fully integrated into the bourgeoisie or who preserve an exclusively noble identity. However, the reality is expected to be much more complex, nu-

17 Schijf et al., 'Recruitment of members'.

anced, and not as clearly delineated: nobles may, for instance, preserve their identity in certain domains, but adapt bourgeois attitudes in others. In theory, the preservation of historical material inheritance does not necessarily preclude the possibility of adapting to modern times and habits. Therefore, one might also expect to find no clear relation between the nobility's attitude towards traditional noble heritage and its present-day financial success. Hence, in order to adequately explain the apparent success of Dutch nobles, another approach might be more fruitful. In this context, theories of networking ought to be considered. Per definition, nobility in the Netherlands of the twenty-first century is almost exclusively a social category which does not allow for social mobility. Thus, it may be speculated that noble associations and clubs may offer networking platforms far more beneficial for a successful career than any financial advantages gained through material inheritance.

The NAV survey: sociological characteristics and descriptive statistics

Quantitative data from previous studies were largely limited to comparing noble with patrician families, using genealogical data. By their nature, such data do not allow for studying opinions, mindsets, and ideologies. With our research presented in this article, our intent is to offer insights into internal structures and mechanisms characteristic to the Dutch nobility to better explain Dutch nobles' success in present-day society. For this purpose, we use a 2005 survey questionnaire offered by the Dutch Nobility Association (Nederlandse Adelsvereniging, hereafter NAV)[18] consisting of 293 questions answered by 430 Dutch nobles.[19] As the survey contains private and confidential information, all data have been kept anonymous. The NAV – founded to promote the interests of the Dutch nobility and to help impoverished nobles – took the initiative to conduct this survey among the Dutch nobility, who are not necessarily NAV members, and gave us permission to conduct a secondary analysis of this questionnaire's data, which is unique for its detailed questions about nobility, not only in the Netherlands but also in Europe.

The dataset includes information on basic demographic variables, such as sex, age, religion, urbanization, education, and family status. It also includes economic information on annual income, overall financial assets, educational levels, and professions, as well as social and political attitudes. Furthermore, the data capture information concerning material possessions, such as family houses, castles, silver, furniture, and signet rings, along with historical documents, such as bibles or genealogies. In addition, information is available on noble networks. Finally, participants in the

---

18 We thank the Dutch Nobility Association (NAV) (adelsvereniging.nl) for making these data available for scientific analysis.

19 F.F. baron de Smeth van Alphen, 'Adel in Nederland: niet meer zichtbaar, wel merkbaar. Resultaten van de enquête onder de leden van de Nederlandse adel, november 2005', *Virtus. Jaarboek voor Adelsgeschiedenis*, XIII (2006) 7-42.

study indicated how often and under which social circumstances they had contacts with other nobles.[20]

The NAV survey: selectivity and representativeness

The initial aim of the NAV survey was to gain an overview of both the socio-economic composition and the internal structure of the Dutch nobility. Although a maximal degree of representativeness was sought, the NAV survey exhibits a certain inherent bias. That the survey was conducted by the NAV hints at its members being overrepresented among the respondents. Naturally, nobles who are interested in topics of nobility and for whom nobility is a form of social self-identification were more willing to participate in such a study. That they completed the questionnaire necessarily reveals a degree of interest and involvement on their part concerning matters of nobility. This bias must be kept in mind when assessing whether Dutch nobles remain conscious of their background. In the discussion about a subsumable noble identity, we certainly must assume that, on average, the NAV-questionnaire respondents were considerably more class-conscious than the Dutch nobility overall.

This overrepresentation of class-conscious nobles and NAV members bears with it some significant side effects. For instance, those who responded to this study are relatively old, with the average age of the respondents older than fifty years. In addition, more than twice as many men as women completed the questionnaire. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that, on average, the NAV survey respondents are richer than the Dutch nobility as a whole is.

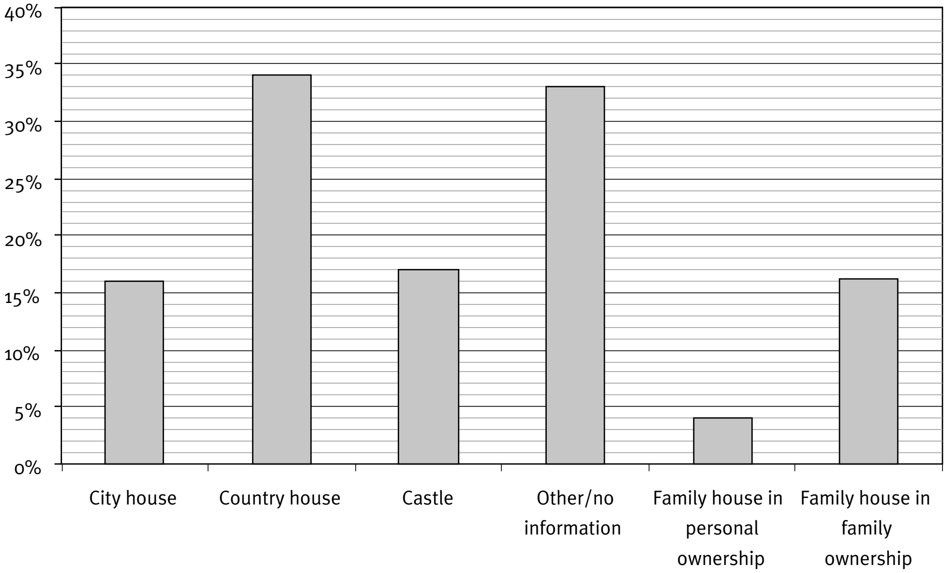
Material noble inheritance

The focus of this article is on variables giving information concerning material noble inheritance and living conditions. Very roughly, these variables may be ordered into two groups: first, the possession of material property and, second, the level of importance nobles assign to such kinds of property. For instance, we have information on whether respondents still own their original family house, that is, the house on the family's ancestral land. Similarly, there are variables measuring how much importance nobles attach to such traditional material possessions.

Figure 1 shows the proportions of the architectural types of historical family houses (columns 1-4) and the present-day ownership status of these houses (columns 5-6). Only four percent of the respondents still own their original family house. Sixteen percent of such houses remain in family ownership. Note that these variables indirectly provide information on whether the respondent is the head of his/her re-

20 See, for further information about these variables: S. Unger and J. Dronkers, 'Why and how does the Dutch nobility retain its social relevance?', *Virtus. Jaarboek voor Adelsgeschiedenis*, XIX (2012) 83-102.

FIGURE 1 ARCHITECTURAL TYPES AND PRESENT-DAY OWNERSHIP STATUS OF ORIGINAL FAMILY HOUSES AND CASTLES



Source: own computation, based on the NAV sample.

spective family or whether (s)he belongs to a side branch. It was and still is common practice that the family land with the original family house is inherited by the oldest son of the main branch of the family who thereby also assumes the symbolic function of head of the family, a practice known as primogeniture. However, note that a negative answer to this first variable does not necessarily imply the respondent belongs to a side branch. For instance, it may well be that the family became impoverished and was forced to sell the house or sold the original family house in order to move elsewhere. Therefore, there is a complementary variable, which determines whether the original family house is still in possession of other family members (family house in family ownership). With the help of this variable, we may determine with some plausibility whether a respondent belongs to a side branch of his/her family.

Moreover, it has been assessed whether the original family house was or is a city house, a country house, or a castle. Sixteen percent of the respondents come from families that originally owned a city house, thirty-four percent from families who originally owned a country house, seventeen percent from families who originally owned a castle, and the rest either could not give us this information or declined to do so. By means of this information, we gain indicators on whether respondents come from old medieval and *ancien régime* families, or whether they belong to families that joined the nobility in more recent centuries. Families from the former group typically own or owned castles, whereas those from the latter, who were ennobled in the nineteenth century, typically originated from rich trade cities in Holland and obtained a country house.

Apart from material and landed possessions, the NAV questionnaire also aimed to assess what level of importance nobles assign to such possessions and whether such a heritage is a defining element of their noble identity. Thus, there are questions about why our respondents conceive of themselves as nobles and how they relate this identity to their material property. For example, is the possession of a family house or land essential for their self-definition as nobility? Similar questions have been asked with regards to landed possessions, family silver, traditional family furniture, jewelry, and family paintings. Thus, our data also capture the importance assigned to movable property. These variables allow for an analysis as to what extent noble class-consciousness is linked to traditional material possessions.

Material inheritance and financial success

The purpose of this subsection is to analyze whether any statistically evident relation is apparent between material heritage and present-day financial success in the NAV sample. We do this with the help of linear regression analyses. We measure financial success by means of data on annual income and tax classes (dependent variables).[21] The use of two different dependent variables, income and tax class, allows for differentiating between nobles currently engaged in successful careers (income) and rich nobles who inherited more significant assets (wealth). In addition, we make use of nine variables related to material heritage (independent variables): 1) personal ownership of the original family house; 2) family house in ownership of a member of the wider family; 3) family landownership; 4) importance attached to land; 5) personal importance attached to family silver; 6) personal importance attached to family furniture; 7) personal importance attached to family paintings; 8) personal importance attached to family jewelry, for example, signet rings, et cetera; and 9) personal importance attached to books of genealogy and other historical documents.

Table 1 shows linear regressions (ordinary least square, or OLS) that measure the effects of material heritage on present-day annual income and total financial wealth among Dutch nobles. Concerning the regression analyses relating to annual income, only very small or no significant effects could be found. Landownership had a significantly positive effect on annual income in a regression analysis without control variables. However, once controls, such as sex, age, family status, and education were added, this effect diminished to an insignificant level. Landownership is not related to high annual incomes among members of the nobility.

21 Tax classes provide an ordinal categorization of the financial wealth distribution. These tax class data contain total financial assets, including fixed assets, such as real estate. Income is an ordinal variable, not a logarithm transformation, due to its distribution in the NAV sample.

Table 1 Standardized marginal effects of traditional noble material heritage on annual income and financial wealth

	OLS income (without controls)	OLS income (with controls)	OLS tax class (without controls)	OLS tax class (with controls)
Personal family house ownership	-0.084 (0.392)	-0.042 (0.372)	0.038 (0.493)	0.039 (0.563)
Family house in family ownership	0.002 (0.187)	0.012 (0.167)	0.110** (0.267)	0.118** (0.265)
Landownership	0.111** (0.063)	0.039 (0.048)	0.186*** (0.104)	0.102* (0.116)
Importance land	-0.062 (0.065)	0.001 (0.063)	0.016 (0.099)	-0.005 (0.101)
Importance family silver	-0.038 (0.092)	-0.108 (0.089)	-0.029 (0.127)	-0.109 (0.139)
Importance family furniture	0.082 (0.109)	0.097 (0.098)	0.109 (0.148)	0.137 (0.164)
Importance family paintings	0.006 (0.086)	-0.004 (0.083)	0.025 (0.122)	0.006 (0.121)
Importance jewelry	-0.073 (0.467)	-0.028 (0.460)	-0.079 (0.625)	-0.045 (0.986)
Importance genealogy	0.082* (0.428)	0.066* (0.335)	0.078*** (0.309)	0.070** (0.494)
R^2	0.023	0.255	0.042	0.171
Observations	347	331	337	321

Source: own computation, based on the NAV questionnaire.
Notes: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. Robust standard errors in parentheses.
Controls used in columns 2 and 4: year of birth, sex, marital status/family status, number of children, religion, religiosity, religious upbringing, education, education of both parents, occupational status, occupational status of partner.

However, landownership does bear significantly positive effects across all specifications of tax class, that is, total financial assets or wealth. This effect withstands the introduction of more than a dozen wide-ranging control variables. Landowning nobles are richer than nobles who do not own land.[22] This, however, may be regard-

22 However, this relation is not obvious given the mercantilist, bourgeois origin of many Dutch noble families; their wealth might be unrelated to landownership.

ed as a truism: while landownership may allow nobles to retain their wealth, it is also a sign of wealth in itself, depending of the mortgage level. In this context, the direction of causality remains unclear. As landownership does not increase annual income, but is related to financial wealth, this suggests that land is typically inherited. In this sense, it is reasonable to assume that landownership is not a causal, explanatory factor underlying the financial success of the Dutch nobility per se, but rather, a side effect. The effect of landownership on financial wealth might be endogenous.

Similarly, the ownership status of original family houses is unrelated to annual income (no significant effects). However, as in the case of landownership, it is positively related to general financial wealth (tax class). Interestingly, the effect is not manifested through personal ownership of the family house, but rather through ownership in the wider family. Again, questions about the direction of causality and the relation of cause and effect must be raised. Are families rich *because* they maintained their family houses and castles? Or do rich families simply happen to be able to afford the maintenance costs of such historical property? Given that significant effects of family house ownership could only be observed on tax class, but not on annual income, the latter supposition seems more plausible. Family houses are part of the historical heritage of historically rich families, but we can only state that the ownership of such property is related to successful financial performance.

The regression analyses also included a number of independent variables related to movable property, such as family silver, furniture, paintings, or jewelry. No significant coefficients for these variables have been observed in any specification. The attitude of nobles towards such movable material inheritance cannot explain how possessing such objects aids in their owners' retaining their twin positions of prominent social status and financial success. The preservation of family silver, family paintings, traditional furniture, and other possessions cannot predict a high annual income.

However, across all specifications, significant positive effects have been found regarding the importance attached to genealogies. Unlike all other forms of material possessions listed in this analysis, historical books of genealogy do not represent financial values. Instead, the possession of a genealogy represents a personal and cultural value. That nobles who attach great importance to such historical genealogies earn more and have greater financial assets than do other nobles hints at the object's role in understanding noble identity and its attendant culture. In this context, it may be speculated that simply being in possession of a noble identity may enhance financial success. This complex relation is discussed in more detail in the following sections. At this point, it is sufficient to stress that we are observing not merely an obvious correlation between financial wealth and the possession of valuable material goods, but rather a correlation between income, wealth, and cultural capital of nobility. A strong, significantly positive correlation between the importance attached to books of genealogy and both income and wealth could be observed, which clearly demonstrates how the meaning of traditional material heritage reaches deeper than does the inheritance of mere financial values. A distinction between financial and cultural material capital must be made.

In conclusion, *neither the first nor the second hypotheses previously outlined in this paper could be confirmed*. The relation between material inheritance and financial success remains unclear. We could observe a correlation between landownership and financial wealth, but no significant correlation between landownership and income. Similarly, strong, positive correlations could be observed between family house ownership (in the family, but not in person) and financial wealth. However, no such correlation could be shown with annual income. Therefore, it must be assumed the relation between the possession of valuable material goods and properties, and wealth is a mere correlation that does not allow for any speculation about underlying causality. Moreover, as no significant effects on annual income could be shown, it can be assumed that the possession of traditional material inheritance does not causally improve present-day financial performance in any direct way. Our findings contradict the first hypothesis, which posited that traditional material possessions might explain financial success. However, as there is no negative correlation either, our observations equally contradict our second hypothesis and the modernization theory. Hence, our results hint that other, nonmaterial factors must be of greater relevance in explaining the Dutch nobility's financial success.

In this context, there are interesting results regarding the possession of genealogy books. This variable turned out to be the only one exhibiting consistently positive and significant effects across all specifications on both annual income and financial wealth. Notably, a genealogy is not an object of considerable financial value, but, rather, one imbued with cultural and personal significance. Hence, possessing one demonstrates no correlation between being rich and possessing valuable objects. Yet according to our interpretation, it does indicate a correlation between financial success and cultural capital. The purpose of the next section is to explore both the nature and the meaning of such cultural capital, and, in particular, the role of material inheritance in forming noble identity and culture.

Material inheritance and noble identity

To analyze the relation between material inheritance and noble cultural identity, we make use of the same variables as in the previous subsection. As dependent variables, we make use of the following: 1) membership in an exclusively noble association (for example, knightly and religious orders, *Ridderschappen*, et cetera), and 2) frequency of contacts to other nobles.

Table 2 shows logit regressions measuring the marginal effects of material inheritance variables on noble association membership (in columns 1-2) and linear regressions (OLS) measuring the effects of material inheritance variables on the self-reported frequency of contacts among nobles (in columns 3-4). These analyses demonstrate that personal family house ownership increases the frequency of contacts among nobles. The positive effects observed in these regressions withstand the introduction of more than a dozen wide-ranging control variables, including sex, age, family status, religion, and education. In addition, we observed that nobles attaching great importance to landownership have more contacts to other nobles outside their family.

Table 2 Standardized marginal effects of traditional noble material inheritance on social measures of noble identity

	Logit noble association membership (without controls)	Logit noble association membership (with controls)	OLS contacts to other nobles (without controls)	OLS contacts to other nobles (with controls)
Personal family house ownership	0.131 (0.134)	0.038 (0.144)	0.157*** (0.177)	0.115*** (0.229)
Family house in family ownership	0.215*** (0.076)	0.209** (0.083)	0.093* (0.142)	0.074 (0.134)
Landownership	0.060** (0.028)	0.028 (0.035)	0.042 (0.052)	0.077 (0.059)
Importance land	-0.046* (0.028)	-0.049 (0.035)	0.110* (0.049)	0.142** (0.049)
Importance family silver	0.119*** (0.041)	0.081 (0.050)	0.127 (0.070)	0.046 (0.069)
Importance family furniture	0.008 (0.050)	0.007 (0.064)	0.081 (0.078)	0.070 (0.081)
Importance family paintings	0.062 (0.044)	0.025 (0.054)	0.076 (0.063)	0.038 (0.65)
Importance jewelry	-0.284** (0.124)	-0.262 (0.160)	0.035 (0.279)	0.020 (0.388)
Importance genealogy	0.048 (0.196)	0.071 (0.195)	0.034) (0.499)	0.043 (0.462)
(pseudo-) R^2	0.063	0.189	0.135	0.272
Observations	358	342	353	338

Source: own computation, based on the NAV questionnaire.
Notes: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. Robust standard errors in parentheses
Controls in columns 2-4: year of birth, sex, marital status/family status, number of children, religion, religiosity, religious upbringing, education, education of both parents, occupational status, occupational status of partner.

Furthermore, we also observed that members of families that still own original family houses are more likely than other nobles to join exclusively noble associations, such as (religious) knightly orders. Again, the marginal effects observed in this regression remained positive and significant after introducing control variables. We also observed that landownership and the importance attached to family silver have a positive effect on the probability of noble association membership. However, the significance of these effects diminished after introducing control variables.

In sum, we observed clear evidence that noble material culture is strongly related to noble identity and class-consciousness. Noble identity is upheld, preserved, and bequeathed to subsequent generations in relation to hereditary material objects that hold traditional and symbolic importance for noble history. In particular, we have found that nobles owning original family houses, including castles and country houses, maintain more contacts with other nobles outside their family than do nobles who do not possess such historical estates. Similarly, we have found nobles belonging to families that preserved their original family houses are more likely to join noble associations, such as knightly and/or religious orders. Given this evidence, we posit that the preservation of traditional material inheritances, and historical real estate in particular, plays a pivotal role in the development of noble social identity and culture.[23] Moreover, we also posit that material culture is related to the formation of social networks within the nobility. The purpose of the next subsection is to show how such networks, in turn, engender career opportunities and how these may lead to higher income and, ultimately, greater wealth.

Noble networks and financial success

The purpose of this subsection is to assess the potential effects of networking within the nobility and how these may lead to enhanced income or financial potential. This can also be understood as an assessment of the indirect effects of material inheritance on financial success via the formation and the preservation of noble identity and culture.

Table 3 shows linear regressions (OLS) measuring the effects of noble networking and social identity on present-day financial success. As shown in Table 2, noble identity is indicated by a proxy, that is, membership in an exclusively noble association, such as a religious order or a *Ridderschap*. Noble networking is indicated by the self-reported frequency of contacts held by nobles to other nobles outside their own family. As shown in Table 1, success is indicated by annual income and tax class data. Our results clearly confirm that networking factors are related to noble financial success. The effects of contacts within the nobility on annual income are almost as powerful as control variables, such as sex and education.

However, the frequency of contacts with other nobles is the only variable having strong, significantly positive effects on *both* annual income *and* total wealth across all specifications. Therefore, networking and social relations may be regarded as the prin-

23 According to our data, noble material culture also affects the way nobles educate and socialize their children. In noble families that assign great importance to traditional material possessions, the topic ‘nobility’ is of more importance for the education of the children. Parents regard family silver, the original family house, and family furniture as important, and they speak more often with their children about their noble ancestry than do parents who assign little importance to material heritage (not shown in these regressions).

Table 3 Standardized effects of measures of noble networking and identity on present-day financial success

	OLS income (without controls)	OLS income (with controls)	OLS tax class (without controls)	OLS tax class (with controls)
Frequency of contacts to other nobles	0.187*** (0.060)	0.180*** (0.066)	0.322*** (0.087)	0.313*** (0.092)
Membership to a noble association/ order	0.019 (0.127)	0.016 (0.134)	0.067 (0.202)	0.031 (0.207)
Control: sex/female	-0.258*** (0.140)	-0.206*** (0.176)	-0.080 (0.202)	0.009 (0.243)
Control: educational level	0.226*** (0.046)	0.218*** (0.048)	0.051 (0.060)	0.090* (0.062)
Control: educational level of the parents	-0.033 (0.091)	-0.023 (0.094)	0.032 (0.137)	0.081* (0.134)
R^2	0.221	0.279	0.148	0.224
Observations	399	378	386	367

Source: own computation, based on the NAV questionnaire.
Notes: *** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$. Robust standard errors in parentheses.
Controls in columns 2-4: year of birth, sex, marital status/family status, number of children, religion, religiosity, religious upbringing, education, education of both parents, occupational status, occupational status of partner, urban/rural living environment.

cipal factor in relation to the financial success of the Dutch nobility.[24] Thus, it may be concluded that social contacts within the nobility might be an important channel driving the socio-economic particularity of the Dutch nobility, regarding income and wealth.

In our previous paper, we showed that members of knightly orders are financially more successful than non-members: It has been found that successful, rich nobles are proportionally overrepresented in noble associations.[25] The question is whether this observation is a mere correlation or whether there is any underlying causality. For instance, it has been argued that noble associations serve as regional networking platforms. Our regression results suggest that order membership, although positively correlated with both wealth and income, is not an explanatory factor in itself.

24 As coefficients are standardized, they allow for direct comparison. The coefficients of the frequency of contact to other nobles are much higher than any of the coefficients observed on family houses and material heritage in Table 2.

25 Unger and Dronkers, 'Why and how does the Dutch nobility', 83-102.

Evidently, order membership is highly correlated with the frequency of contacts between nobles: Every member of a noble association will naturally have contacts to other nobles. Table 3 clearly shows it is the frequency of contacts to other nobles, not membership in a noble association in itself, which predicts financial success within the sample.

That the coefficients of noble association membership are close to zero and insignificant does not contradict our first article's findings. It simply shows that contacts to other nobles matter, regardless of the channel through which they may have been established. It is not the religious knightly order or the *Ridderschap* that makes its members richer, but rather the practice of members in such organizations meeting other nobles and maintaining social relations.

It is widely established that social contacts increase income potential across all social groups. In this sense, the observation that the nobility forms no exception is

hardly surprising. It is not only close friendship or strong family bonds that are pivotal in this mechanism. Instead, one must also consider weak ties in the form of acquaintances that nobles develop when attending regional nobility meetings, conferences, and balls, or within noble associations. Granovetter has explained in his theory on networks how weak ties between individuals who hardly know each other manage to allow people to form stable communities offering support and protection.[26] Equally important, he showed that individuals connected through weak ties may increase their chances of becoming financially successful: social contacts across socio-economic borders can help one find a good job. Noble associations and knightly orders can serve as builders of weak ties among nobles, extending beyond the public sector.[27]

In conclusion, nobles maintaining harmonious and frequent relations with other nobles experience, on average, greater financial success. This might be explained by networking theories. It is crucial not to misinterpret such links between nobles as an organized, homogeneous network structure. Instead, networking can also happen on a much more casual and informal basis via weak ties and acquaintances. Also, for nonnobles, it is always helpful to know rich and influential individuals! The advantage parlayed by many nobles might be simply that they know more people like themselves.

In the previous section, we showed that both the existence and the prevalence of noble networks and social relations within the nobility are closely related to cultural and material inheritance. It has been shown, for example, that nobles who still own original family houses maintain more contacts with other nobles than do nobles who have abandoned their material inheritance. In this sense, the causal relation between factors of networking within the nobility and financial success can be understood as an indirect effect of preserving traditional material inheritance. Material inheritance

26 M. Granovetter, *Getting a Job. A Study of Contacts and Careers* (Chicago, 1995).
27 Dronkers and Schijf, 'Van de publieke naar de culturele of economische sector?'.

fosters cultural identity, which, in turn, is a prerequisite for both noble socialization and developing social networks. Ultimately, it is networking that enhances financial success.

Conclusions

In this article, the role of material inheritance and material culture in the contemporary development of the Dutch nobility has been analyzed. We considered both immoveable possessions in the form of land or real estate as well as movable possessions, such as family silver, paintings, and traditional furniture. The primary aim of our research was to discover whether the nobility's traditional material culture is in any way related to its present-day financial and societal success.

Our research has shown that preserving a traditional noble material inheritance cannot predict the nobility's financial success in modern society. Although the possession of traditional inheritance, such as family houses, castles, or land is highly correlated with financial wealth, no such correlation with annual income could be found. Therefore, we argue that no causality underlies this relationship. It is not surprising that rich nobles possess historical objects and real estate of considerable financial value, but they are not rich *because* they own such an inheritance. Therefore, our first hypothesis based on the idea of this type of causal relationship was rejected. However, neither have we found any negative correlation between material inheritance and financial success. Therefore, the second hypothesis was equally rejected.

This study's findings clearly demonstrate that the success of the nobility cannot be reduced to a simplistic explanation, based on the idea that nobles have always been privileged, due to their financial and material inheritance. Wealth acquired through inheritance forms only part of the story. In short, *you do not need a castle*. Instead, our data support the claim that networking among nobles is the most important factor underlying their exceptional and ongoing success. The frequency of contacts between nobles is one of the best predictors of financial success besides standard control variables, such as education and sex. On average, nobles who enjoy many social contacts with other nobles have a higher annual income and a higher tax class than do nobles who have few such contacts with other nobles. Thus, we have demonstrated that networking within the nobility may be responsible for noble success.

While only simple correlations between material inheritance and financial wealth could be shown in this article, we did determine that preserving such an inheritance, including land and real estate, greatly influences noble socialization and identity formation. In particular, a number of material factors, such as land or family house and castle ownership, are highly indicative of the frequency of social contacts among nobles. Similarly, nobles preserving material inheritance are more likely to join exclusively noble associations than are nobles who have abandoned such traditional material possessions. Therefore, we conclude that preserving historical inheritance plays a vital role in fostering noble identity and passing it on to subsequent generations. The focus on inherited material possessions certainly distinguishes noble from bourgeois culture.

Ultimately, we found that the socio-economic particularity of the Dutch nobility vis-à-vis other social groups, including the bourgeoisie, might be explained by networking among nobles. In this respect, noble class-consciousness transmitted via material inheritance is of key importance, because it forms the cultural basis of noble networks. Maintaining contacts with other nobles is stunningly useful in modern society: the frequency of contact with other nobles via knightly orders, in private meetings, or for work-related purposes is positively related to financial income and wealth. Nobles maintaining many such contacts are more successful than those who do not. Respondents engaged in noble networking tend to experience both a more pronounced noble identity and greater financial success than nobles who do not maintain such contacts.

In this article, we present results that appear to be linked to a sociocultural pattern, namely, preserving traditional material inheritance enhances noble identity and cultural socialization. Nobles preserving material inheritance, including land, houses, and castles, are more likely to establish and to maintain social bonds with other nobles. The formation of such networks, in turn, proves to be a very real advantage on the labor market. Thus, the socio-economic advantage and particularity of the Dutch nobility may be considered an indirect effect of noble identity and culture. This identity, in turn, is defined and developed to a considerable extent by the nobles' preservation of their historical cultural and material inheritances. Although no direct causal link between material inheritance and financial success is evident in our data, we may well speak of indirect effects through this forming of networks, based on a shared culture, history, and identity.

Discussion: wider implications and caveats

Are the results of this study representative in a wider European context? The Dutch nobility is, by majority, of a younger origin than the German, the Belgian, the French, or the Austrian. Similarly, as many Protestant patricians were ennobled in the nineteenth century, the Dutch nobility is historically more urban-based than landed. Therefore, it must be stressed that the Dutch nobility typically possesses less inheritance in the form of castles, houses, and land than do its central European counterparts. Due to the fact that a large part of the Dutch nobility stems from patrician merchant families, the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Dutch nobility were much more intertwined, both culturally and economically, with the bourgeoisie. The most outstanding characteristic of the Dutch nobility is its predominantly civil (*noblesse de robe*) nature, rather than a military (*noblesse d'épée*) or landed one. Accordingly, the Dutch nobility has always reflected a strong civil bias. This may explain why the Dutch nobility was not even mentioned in Lieven's reference work on the European aristocracy in the nineteenth century.[28]

---

28 Lieven, *The Aristocracy in Europe*.

Hence, it can be assumed that traditional material culture and class-consciousness is less pronounced in the Netherlands than it is Germany, Austria, or Belgium. This means it could be objected that studies about other countries would have yielded very different results. Insofar, we cannot state with complete assurance whether this study's findings concluding that the Dutch nobility still forms a socio-economically distinct class are indeed transferable to an even greater degree to other European societies. Accordingly, it seems probable that cohesion and networking within the nobility is stronger in Germany and Austria than in the Netherlands. In this sense, the correlation between noble financial success and networking might be even stronger in these countries; however, to date, no statistical data have been collected for this field of research.

The great advantage of any research on the Dutch nobility is the relative absence of nation-specific particularities, compared with other European nobilities. In the last three hundred years, Dutch history was not deeply affected by major socio-economic caesuras, such as revolutions or great wars. In that sense, the Dutch nobility remained economically untouched by the Napoleonic period, the 1848 revolution, or the two World Wars. Hence, it is much easier to analyze than its European counterparts, and the results yielded may be considered representative for the European nobility at large. In contrast, in France, a distinction between Napoleonic and pre-revolution nobles must be made. Moreover, many individuals claiming French noble heritage have been in exile since the French revolution, which hinders any effective socio-economic statistical analysis of the French nobility. In Germany, the Prussian nobility lost its landed properties after the Second World War when the German population was expelled from Prussia, Silesia, and Pomerania. Therefore, the Protestant German nobility is considerably poorer than its southern Catholic counterpart.[29] Similarly, Austrian nobles originating from Bohemia, Hungary, Moravia, Rumania, or Yugoslavia were also expropriated.[30] Moreover, in Austria, nobles have been forbidden to bear their titles since the downfall of the Habsburg monarchy. The absence of revolutions, expropriations, and other caesural historical changes therefore makes the Dutch nobility an ideal subject of study. Accordingly, it is legitimate to claim that our findings regarding the explanatory value of networking is by and large quite likely representative on a European level.

The main caveat of our research lies in the selectivity bias of our sample. The respondents of our sample were relatively old and wealthy. Those nobles who participated in this NAV survey indicate they are interested in the topic of *nobility* and may identify with the idea of a noble background. Thus, there is a bias inherent in the nobles who responded to and returned the questionnaires, and we believe the results presented in this article should be interpreted with that cautionary note in mind.

29 E. Conze, ed., *Kleines Lexikon des Adels* (München, 2005).

30 G. Walterskirchen, *Adel in Österreich heute. Der verborgene Stand* (Vienna, 2007).

Simon Unger and Jaap Dronkers

Do you really need a castle?

Material inheritance and noble status symbols in present-day society

This article analyzes the role of traditional material inheritance in present-day noble culture and identity formation. The aim is to explain how an anachronistic social category like ‘nobility’ can retain its relevancy in a modern society. Noble material inheritance includes both movable and immovable goods and possessions. Underlying the quantitative analysis presented in this paper is a sample of 430 Dutch nobles collected by the Nederlandse Adelsvereniging (the Dutch Nobility Association). We show a strong connection between indicators of material inheritance and variables measuring the frequency of social contacts among nobles, that is, networking. In turn, variables measuring the intensity of noble networking are strongly associated with higher incomes and financial wealth. We find that the frequency of social contacts among nobles is positively related to financial success. Accordingly, we may also speak of *indirect* effects of noble material inheritance and cultural identity on present-day financial performance.

Professor Jaap Dronkers at present holds the chair of international comparative research on educational performance and social inequality at Maastricht University. He has published on the causes and consequences of unequal educational and occupational attainment, changes in educational opportunities, effect-differences between public and religious schools, the educational and occupational achievement of migrants from different origins and in various countries of destination, the linkages between school and the labor market, the effects of parental divorce on children, cross-national differences in causes of divorce, education of Dutch elites, and European nobility.

Maastricht University, Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market | ROA, Tongersestraat 53, 6211 LM Maastricht, the Netherlands – j.dronkers@maastrichtuniversity.nl

Simon Unger is a graduate student at the University of Oxford and wrote this article as a research project at Maastricht University while pursuing his bachelor study, during which time, Jaap Dronkers was supervisor of the project. The first product of this project was Unger and Dronkers, ‘Why and how does the Dutch nobility retain its social relevance?’, *Virtus. Jaarboek voor Adelsgeschiedenis*, XIX (2012) 83-102.

University of Oxford, United Kingdom – simon.unger@seh.ox.ac.uk

VIRTUS 21

VIRTUS

21 | 2014

9 789087 045203