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The Bentinck family archives

Highlights and suggestions for further research*

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The central question that shall be posed in this article deals with the value of the Bentinck family archives as cultural heritage in general and as a source for historical research in particular. In this context attention shall be paid to the documents that can be considered as the highlights in these archives. Before turning to these research questions, a short introduction of the international character of the Bentinck family, as well as the Bentinck family archives, shall be presented. Special attention is given to the principal figure in these archives Charlotte Sophie Countess von Aldenburg (1715-1800), after her marriage to Count Willem Bentinck van Rhoon (1704-1774) known as Charlotte Sophie Bentinck.

Members of the noble Bentinck family, originally from Guelders, were represented in the knighthood of the Veluwe at least from the fifteenth century onwards and in the knighthood of Overijssel since the sixteenth century.¹ With Hans Willem

* In the autumn of 2016 I completed the digital finding aid of the old and voluminous Bentinck family archives, deposited at the Gelders Archief (Guelders Archives), Arnhem. To promote this archival project in scholarly circles an international symposium was organized at Middachten Castle on 16 November 2016 titled 'The world of the Bentincks, portraits of a European family'. This paper is based on the author's lecture held at this symposium. I would like to thank Hanneke Ronnes (University of Amsterdam and Rijksuniversiteit Groningen) and Daniela Williams (Austrian Academy of Sciences) for their suggestions for improvement, in particular concerning translational errors, on an earlier version of this article.

¹ *Nederland's adelsboek*, LXXIX (1988) 360-364; P. Schazmann, *The Bentincks. The history of a European family* (London, 1976) especially chapter 1.

Bentinck (1649-1707), who in 1689 was rewarded by stadtholder-king William III, Prince of Orange, with several English noble titles and land for his diplomatic and military merits, the Bentinck family moreover gained a place among the English higher nobility. The oldest son from the second marriage of Hans Willem Bentinck with Jane Martha Temple, Willem Bentinck van Rhoon (1704-1774), married Charlotte Sophie Countess von Aldenburg in 1733, thereby further strengthening the cross-border character of the Bentinck family. The international orientation regarding marriage and career was continued by the descendants of Charlotte Sophie and Willem Bentinck. In the nineteenth century, the Bentincks can be considered a true European noble family, at home in the Netherlands, in Germany and in Great Britain.

The Bentinck family archives

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The Bentinck family archives are the jewel in the crown of the extensive collection of archives of noble families kept by the Guelders Archives. They are of great significance, mainly because they contain so many egodocuments, consisting of thousands of personal letters dating back to the fifteenth century. Whereas the historical value and cultural significance of Dutch paintings by Rembrandt or Vermeer is instantly apprehensible, the ‘old masters’ in Dutch archival depots, the unique archives of distinguished noble families like the Bentincks, are oftentimes forgotten. These archival masterpieces should, however, be recognised as valuable cultural heritage and therefore be made more visible to the public. The digitization of the finding aid of the Bentinck family archives – following the scanning process of the documents – is a pivotal step in this direction.

Archives of noble families served a purpose. They are not a collection of random

2 Until 1967 these archives were kept in private custody at the castle of Middachten. The archival history of a major part of these archives, namely the archives of Charlotte Sophie von Aldenburg, was unknown. Research has shown that her descendant Carel Anton Ferdinand Bentinck, Lord of Middachten, purchased these documents in the mid-nineteenth century from the heirs of the illegitimate son of Charlotte Sophie, Charles von Donop, to whom she had entrusted her ‘French correspondence’ and other archival material.

3 For the two grandsons of Willem Bentinck and Charlotte Sophie von Aldenburg, the governors Charles Ferdinand Bentinck (1764-1811) and Henry William Bentinck (1765-1821), see: Gelders Archief, Arnhem (GA), Bentinck/Aldenburg Bentinck family archives (Bentinck), nos 1669-1720, 3360-3367 and passim.

papers, but a paper bulwark, built and rebuilt by generations, with a specific function: to preserve and protect a common family identity.⁴ The Bentinck family archives consist mainly of the personal archives of Charlotte Sophie von Aldenburg (1715-1800), Willem Bentinck van Rhoon (1704-1774) and their descendants until the end of the nineteenth century. Charlotte Sophie, heiress of Varel and Kniphausen in East Frisia and of Doorwerth in the province of Guelders, brought in records of these seigniories. The parents of Charlotte Sophie, Anton II von Aldenburg (1681-1735) and Wilhelmine Marie von Hessen-Homburg (1678-1770), are well represented in the Bentinck family archives. In contrast, there is only a modest amount of archival material regarding the parents of Willem Bentinck.

As a result of the fact that the Middachten estate passed into the hands of the Bentinck family in the midnineteenth century, the archives also contain records of the Middachten estate and of the former inhabitants of Middachten, the families Van Middachten, Van Raesfelt and Van Reede, dating back to the fifteenth century.⁵

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The main protagonist of the Bentinck family archives: Charlotte Sophie Countess von Aldenburg

Charlotte Sophie Countess von Aldenburg, the principal figure in the Bentinck archives, married Willem Bentinck van Rhoon on 1 June 1733. Her life story is well known from two historic novels by the Dutch author Hella Haasse.⁶ Inspired by Haasse, Antje Koolman wrote a study on the Bentinck family, in which she presents a detailed biography of Charlotte Sophie based on extensive archival research.⁷ Recently two excellent biographical articles on Charlotte Sophie have been published too.⁸

In marrying William Bentinck, Charlotte Sophie followed the wish of her parents, especially that of her father Anton II von Aldenburg, although not without aversion. Her mother, a princess von Hessen-Homburg, initially preferred a member of the Ger-

4 A. Baggerman, 'Autobiography and family memory in the nineteenth century', in: R. Dekker, ed., *Ego-documents and history, autobiographical writing in its social context since the Middle Ages* (Hilversum, 2002) 163.

5 Many documents of these families, especially concerning the management of their property, are kept in the archives of Middachten estate, deposited at the Guelders Archives.

6 H.S. Haasse, *Mevrouw Bentinck of Onverenigbaarheid van Karakter. Een ware geschiedenis* (Amsterdam, 1978); eadem, *De groten der aarde of Bentinck tegen Bentinck. Een geschiedverhaal* (Amsterdam, 1982).

7 A. Koolman, *Die Bentincks. Eine niederländische Adelsfamilie in Nordwestdeutschland im 18. Jahrhundert* (Oldenburg, 2003).

8 C. Randig, "'Honnête homme" und "femme des Lumières". Charlotte Sophie Reichsgräfin von Bentinck, geb. Von Aldenburg, Zur 300. Wiederkehr ihres Geburtstags', *Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert*, XL (2016) 15-29; Idem, "'Eine glühende Aristokratin" – Charlotte Sophie Reichsgräfin Bentinck, geb. von Aldenburg, in den Hamburger Jahren (1767-1800)', *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Hamburgische Geschichte*, CII (2016) 17-41.



Charlotte Sophie Gräfin von Aldenburg (1715-1800) (oil painting, painter unknown; coll. Heimatmuseum Vare)

man high nobility.⁹ Before marrying Charlotte Sophie, Bentinck had to buy the title of Count of the Holy Roman Empire in order to be considered as ‘ebenbürtig’.¹⁰ The marriage was a failure and lasted only seven years, but did result in the birth of two sons, Antoine (1734-1768) and Jean Albert Bentinck (1737-1775). In her first novel on *Mevrouw Bentinck*, Hella Haasse, spoke of the ‘incompatibility of characters’: the high-spirited and capricious Charlotte Sophie versus the distant and solid Willem.¹¹ This incompatibility certainly played an important role in the failure of their rela-

9 Possibly illustrative in this respect: Bentinck figures only at the bottom of a list of noble candidates she had made, GA, Bentinck, no. 2140.

10 Willem Bentinck paid 8000 guilders for the nobility diploma, although he personally attached no value to his new title, ‘that silly title’ as he wrote to his mother Jane Martha Temple in October 1732; Koolman, *Die Bentincks*, 27.

11 Perhaps similarities in their characters underly the failure of their marriage as well. Both were opinionated and obstinate and accustomed to enforcing their will.

tionship. Bentinck initially felt attracted to Charlotte Sophie and hoped that he could mend and correct her behaviour as one prunes his wild roses. The reality proved considerably more complex.

Of vital importance in the failing of their marriage was the fact that Charlotte Sophie, as a young girl, had already reserved her love for her cousin Albrecht Wolfgang Graf zu Schaumburg-Lippe (1699-1748) – in every respect the antipode of Willem Bentinck. After the wedding ceremony at Varel, Willem and Charlotte Sophie settled at The Hague. Charlotte Sophie perceived her married life as increasingly oppressive. In the course of 1739 she left The Hague, ostensibly for health reasons and travelled to Bückeburg, where she took residence with her lover Albrecht Wolfgang, who was married to her foster-sister and elder cousin Charlotte Friederike, Princess von Nassau-Siegen.

At the end of September 1739, expecting a child from her lover, she informed Bentinck of her wish to separate. Her negotiation position was weak, especially after Bentinck had been informed of her situation.¹² As a result, the final arrangement of the legal separation of 15 April 1740 was very unfavourable for her.¹³ She was imposed high financial obligations, to be paid from the incomes of her ancestral property. Moreover, she was not allowed to see her legitimate sons, over whom Bentinck acquired custody. Willem Bentinck wrote to his mother, Lady Portland, on 26 February 1740:

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As for myself, I am perfectly well and quite composed, tho' the situation I am in is very disagreeable nay shocking. As I am quite sure I have given no occasion to the usage I have met with, that reflexion makes me quite easy and I have business enough to occupy & divert thoughts. As long as I can preserve the esteem of the Publick, my own approbation and my health, I defy all the wives in the world to make me miserable (...). I have the happiness of having the Children by me and the hopes of bringing 'em up well. In short, I am a great deal better so than if my wife had staid here.¹⁴

Charlotte Sophie did not adhere to the financial arrangements of the separation. This resulted in a prolonged conflict with Willem Bentinck, especially regarding the sovereignty of her ancestral property Varel and Kniphausen. Her relationship with Albrecht Wolfgang – in reality more of a *ménage à trois* with him and his wife – resulted in the birth of two sons: Charles and Guillaume, who were largely brought up by confidants in her service.¹⁵ The separation and idiosyncratic way of life of Charlotte

12 See the statement of Willem Bentinck of 20 February 1740, in which he declares and elucidates that he cannot be the father; Koolman, *Die Bentincks*, 77.

13 GA, Bentinck, no. 51

14 British Library, Egerton Collection 1712: Willem Bentinck to Jane Martha Temple, The Hague, 26 Feb. 1740.

15 Her eldest illegitimate son Karl Wilhelm Wolfgang (Charles) (1740-1813), was officially considered a son of her 'Landdrost' Clamor Johann Georg von Donop, her youngest, Albrecht Wilhelm Carl (Guillaume) (1745-1806?), a son of her valet Johann Weisbrod. Their true identity, however, was no secret; Koolman, *Die Bentincks*, 78.

Sophie did not affect the career of Willem Bentinck van Rhoon negatively. On the contrary, after 1740 he became one of the most influential statesmen in the Republic. The same was true for Charlotte Sophie. For her, the separation meant a turning point. She developed into a remarkable personality, into a ‘bel esprit’, making use of her position as *Reichsgräfin* to find an *entrée* at various courts, where she met the elite of her time. At these courts she advocated her interests and tried to gain support in her legal conflicts with Willem Bentinck.¹⁶

Charlotte Sophie travelled in 1750 to the Prussian court in Berlin. At first, the Prussian king, Frederick the Great, supported her, yet he switched allegiance to Willem Bentinck, who had built up a powerful international network. The Prussian king equally became irritated with Charlotte Sophie. He blamed ‘La Bentinck’ for interfering with his private affairs. In August 1754, he forced her to sign the ‘Berliner Vergleich’ (Berlin treaty), in which she lost the rights on her German possessions in favour of her eldest son Antoine.¹⁷ She was no longer welcome at the Prussian court. Her legal conflicts with Willem Bentinck led to continuous traveling: to Berlin in 1750 and to Vienna in 1755, where she tried to gain the support of Empress Maria Theresa. Charlotte Sophie gradually lost the latter’s favour, formally on account of neglecting the ‘Hofetikette’.¹⁸ Eventually she was banned from court in 1761. According to the Berlin treaty she was not allowed to return to her ancestral possessions Varel and Kniphausen. She found shelter at the castle of Jever, offered to her by Friedrich August, Prince of Anhalt-Zerbst. During her stay in Jever – in relative isolation – she found the opportunity to write ‘feminist’ essays on the necessity of equal rights and the importance of general education (‘éducation générale’) for men and women. The essays were written in the form of letters to an imaginary acquaintance.¹⁹ In the winter of 1767, she left the uncomfortable castle of Jever to settle in the lively Hanseatic city of Hamburg, where she took part and enlivened the cultural life of the elite for more than thirty years.²⁰

At the end of the century the French revolution and its political and military consequences greatly shocked and confused Charlotte Sophie, both ‘grande aristocrate’ – related to the French nobility – and ‘femme des lumières’. She sided with the royalists, at the same time sharpening her vision on the dominant position of men, con-

16 For detailed information on these conflicts and the feudal titles of the seignories Varel and Kniphausen, see Koolman, *Die Bentincks*, 32-41.

17 GA, Bentinck, no. 3029.

18 Geopolitical power relations also played a role: Maria Theresa would provoke the Danish government by siding with Charlotte Sophie, since the Danish supported Willem Bentinck; A. Soprani and A. Magnan, *Une femme des Lumières. Écrits et lettres de la comtesse de Bentinck* (Paris, 1997) 107.

19 GA, Bentinck, nos 1198 and 1200. See, Soprani and Magnan, *Une femme des Lumières*, 179-195; J. Boeijen, H. Bots, P.A.M. Geurts and A.E.M. Janssen, “‘Nostre Misère est generale.’” *Gedachten van Charlotte Sophie Bentinck over de positie van de vrouw*, *Documentatieblad Werkgroep Achttiende Eeuw*, XII (1979) 3-28.

20 Randig, ‘Eine glühende Aristokratin’, note 10.

sidering the revolution a consequence of ‘arrangements masculines’.²¹ Charlotte Sophie died on 5 February 1800. She was buried in the family tomb at Varel. After her death, Charlotte Sophie fell into oblivion. Scholarly interest in her correspondence and ideas only arose again more than a century and a half after her death, when the correspondence of Voltaire was published. His correspondence with Charlotte Sophie was discovered at Middachten castle in 1950.²² Since the 1970s more scholarly studies based on Charlotte Sophie’s correspondence with ‘grands personnages’, as well as with other famous and learned relations, have been published.²³ From then onwards, her correspondence and essays on the position of women became subject of a more thematic research.²⁴

Correspondence of Charlotte Sophie Countess von Aldenburg

The voluminous personal correspondence of Charlotte Sophie Countess von Aldenburg can be considered as the highlight in the Bentinck family archives. More than 25.000 personal letters from and to her have been preserved. Her life covers a great deal of the eighteenth century, her daily correspondence therefore provides a detailed picture of the political and military, as well as cultural and intellectual developments, of this period. As her German biographer wrote:

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In ihrem Geburtsjahr starb Ludwig XIV in Versailles; in ihrem Sterbejahr stand nach einem Staatsstreich Napoléon Bonaparte an der Spitze Frankreichs. Ihre Lebenszeit erstreckte sich über einen Zeitraum, der geprägt war von politischen Wechselfällen und einem Wandel der Wertvorstellungen, der das gesellschaftliche Miteinander ebenso wie die Sicht auf das Individuum veränderte.²⁵

Charlotte Sophie wrote many letters daily. Full of energy, she corresponded with her extensive network in Europe. Her letters were delivered to Berlin and Bremen, Tübingen and Leipzig, Amsterdam and Brussels, London and Paris, Copenhagen and Stockholm, Bern and Geneva, Vienna and Warsaw, Venice and Naples, and Moscow and Sint-Petersburg. The list of names of the nearly thousand correspondents, men-

21 Such ideas she expressed in her earlier correspondence as well, for instance in her letter of 23 January 1756 to Johan Christoph Gottsched: ‘...vous venez de m’arracher la Confession la plus rude vu ma façon de penser, et le mal de mort que je veux à ce Sexe despotique, sensuel, et inflexible qui cause tous les malheurs et toutes les Contradictions de se monde’, GA, Bentinck, no. 610.

22 Th. Bestermann et al., eds, *Les Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire* (135 vols; Geneva-Banbury-Oxford, 1968-1977). Perhaps the interest of scholars in Charlotte Sophie was not evocated in the decades after her death while she in contrast with other ‘femmes savantes’ did not publish her writings, with the exception of her catalogue of coins (GA, Bentinck, no. 1223), which she moreover published anonymously.

23 The titles of these publications are mentioned in notes 30, 31, 34 and 35.

24 Boeijen et al., “‘Nostre Misère est generale’”; Soprani and Magnan, *Une femme des Lumières, 179-198*; Randig, “‘Honnête homme’”.

25 Randig, “‘Honnête homme’”, 16.

tioned in the digital finding aid, reads as a ‘who is who’ of the eighteenth-century European elite.

The letters of the *Reichsgräfin* are all written in French, the *lingua franca* of the European nobility in the eighteenth century. In this century letters provided a self-evident form of communication for the elite and the ‘haute bourgeoisie’. It was novel to use a natural way of expressing oneself and to interpret one’s feelings.²⁶ The act of writing also originated in a strong need to exchange knowledge and ideas, obtained by the eager devouring of books, newspapers and journals.²⁷ As a correspondent Charlotte Sophie was highly valued by her famous and learned contemporaries. Her friend, the philosopher Voltaire, wrote to Charlotte Sophie after a supper with the Prussian king Frederic the Great in Potsdam in 1750: ‘On vous a nommée la Sévigné de l’Allemagne’.²⁸ With this characterization he indicated that she was considered as a ‘femme de lettres’. With Voltaire Charlotte Sophie was united in a close friendship – a ‘communauté d’esprit, d’idées et de goûts’ – that lasted many years.²⁹ This resulted in an extensive correspondence.³⁰ Voltaire was her mentor as well as her intellectual challenger. Apart from Voltaire, Charlotte Sophie corresponded with many ‘grands personnages’. The Bentinck family archives for instance contain her correspondence with Frederick the Great.³¹ The Prussian king characterized her aptly: ‘ce n’est point une femme, dont on peut disposer comme on veut, mais fière et capricieuse au delà de l’imagination’.³²

We leave the European continent to meet another famous correspondent of Charlotte Sophie, Gilbert du Motier, marquis de la Fayette (1757-1834), who as a voluntary fought on the side of the Americans during the War of Independence (1775-1783). In several letters, at the instigation of Charlotte Sophie, De la Fayette gave his views on the military operations and the character of his friend George Washington.³³ Moreover, Charlotte Sophie corresponded with many well-known European scholars and writers such as the French man of letters Laurent Angliviel de la Beau-

26 Charlotte Sophie intended to keep a diary or to write her memoirs, but she never finished these texts, see GA, Bentinck, nos 1171 (fragment of a diary) and 1217 (preamble to her memoirs). Perhaps she completed neither diary nor memoirs because she feared that they would disclose her unconventional life style, see above the name preambule, fol. 1r.

27 Her library, containing 6839 titles, illustrates her many interests; GA, Bentinck, nos 1225-1266.

28 Quoted from Randig, “‘Honnête homme’”, note 11.

29 Quoted from Soprani and Magnan, *Une femme des Lumières*, 9.

30 See: F. Deloffre and J. Cormier, eds, *Voltaire et sa grande ‘amie’. Correspondance complète de Voltaire et Mme Bentinck (1740-1778)* (Oxford, 2003). An important part of this correspondence is kept in the Bentinck family archives, see: GA, Bentinck, no. 1060.

31 GA, Bentinck, nos 1129, 1140 and 2942. A major part of this correspondence is edited: F. Schaer, ‘Charlotte Sophie Gräfin Bentinck, Friedrich der Grosse und Voltaire’, *Niedersächsisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte*, XLIII (1971) 81-121; A. Magnan, *Dossier Voltaire en Prusse (1750-1753)* (Oxford, 1986) 81-146, 365-398.

32 Quoted from Schaer, ‘Charlotte Sophie Gräfin Bentinck’, 92.

33 GA, Bentinck, no. 867, especially his letter to Charlotte Sophie, dated 10 Sep. 1778.

melle,³⁴ the Swiss botanist and physician Albrecht von Haller,³⁵ the French mathematician and philosopher Pierre-Louis Moreau de Maupertuis,³⁶ and the German philosopher and author Johann Christoph Gottsched and his wife, the poet, playwright and translator Luise Adelgunde Victoria Kulmus.³⁷ With this couple, notably with Luise, Charlotte Sophie maintained a close friendship that lasted many years.

In order to illustrate Charlotte Sophie's daily life especially her voluminous correspondence with close relatives and confidants is important. The correspondence of Charlotte Sophie with her mother, Wihelmine Marie princess von Hessen-Homburg (1678-1770), covers a period of nearly forty years.³⁸ Epistolary communication with her grandchildren, in particular with the children of her son Jean Albert Bentinck, resulted in an 'explosion' of writing.³⁹ Charlotte Sophie never lost her keen interest in the world around her and in letter-writing. In September 1799, four months before her death, she wrote to her granddaughter Sophie Henriette Bentinck: 'I shall write, ma chère petite chatte, so long as there is the smallest breath of life in me. When I cannot see, I shall write by touch.'⁴⁰

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The *adversaria*

A special type of documents that can be considered as another highlight in the Bentinck family archives, are the *adversaria*, documents related to literature, music and other forms of entertainment, which provide a colourful picture of the domestic life and leisurely activities of the European nobility in general and their female members in particular.⁴¹ The variety of this type of documents is immense. In the Bentinck family archives voluminous collections of poetry and prose are retained, as well as political satires and banter. Among the various *adversaria* are moreover games such as the 'Pensées diverses sur les Mots' and 'the pleasures of the imagination', in which elements of love and revenge are drawn up.⁴² There is also a stocklist of an imaginary

34 GA, Bentinck, no. 397. See: C. Lauriol and A. Magnan, 'En marge de la querelle entre Voltaire et la Beaumelle. 'Correspondance inédite de la Beaumelle avec la Comtesse de Bentinck'', in J. Proust, ed., *Recherches nouvelles sur quelques écrivains des lumières* (2 vols; Geneva-Montpellier, 1972-1979), II, 19-62.

35 GA, Bentinck, no. 664. See: A. Geurts, J. Hesen, A. Poulise, 'Charlotte Sophie Bentinck et Albrecht von Haller, leur correspondance inédite (1745-1768)', *Lias*, VI (1979) 237-326.

36 GA, Bentinck, no. 847.

37 GA, Bentinck, no. 610. See: K. Goodman, ed., *Adieu divine comtesse. Luise Gottsched, Charlotte Sophie Gräfin Bentinck und Johann Christoph Gottsched in ihren Briefen* (Würzburg, 2009).

38 GA, Bentinck, nos 200-208, 2170-2178.

39 GA, Bentinck, nos 233-268.

40 Charlotte Sophie von Aldenburg to Sophie Henriette Bentinck, 20 Sep. 1799, quoted from A. Le Blond, *Charlotte Sophie, Countess Bentinck. Her life and times, 1715-1800* (London, 1912) 237.

41 GA, Bentinck, nos 1308-1347, 2445-2542.

42 A game in which the players are instructed to specify and elucidate words, given to them by the game-master; GA, Bentinck, nos 2539, 3519.



Wilhelmine Marie princess von Hessen-Homburg (1678-1770) (oil painting attributed to Leonhard Schorer, s.d; coll. House Middachten, De Steeg/Rheden)

shop, where commodities like beautiful feelings or idealistic projects are sold. This last document was created by Charlotte Sophie on the occasion of the marriage of prince Henry of Prussia with her cousin Wilhelmina, Princess of Hessen-Kassel at the Oranienburg castle in 1752.⁴³

The Bentinck family archives contain many boxes with adversaria, produced and assembled as pastime, partly with educational and literary aspirations. A special category are the pen portraits – selfportraits and portraits of close relations and ‘grands personnages’ – especially of members of royal families. Portrayed in words are both the physical features of a person and his or her character.⁴⁴ Charlotte Sophie’s grandmother, Charlotte Amélie de la Trémoille (1652-1732), princess de Tarente, started the extensive collection of ‘Portraits’. At the tender age of six, she wrote her own self-portrait.⁴⁵ Most portraits have been collected and made by Charlotte Sophie’s

⁴³ GA, Bentinck, nos 1333, 3518.

⁴⁴ For more information on written portraits, see Randig, “Honnête homme”, 20-25.

⁴⁵ Randig, “Honnête homme”, 20.

mother, Wilhelmine Marie princess von Hessen-Homburg.⁴⁶ Her daughter was twelve when she created her self-portrait, which was much admired.⁴⁷

Conclusion

Within the scope of this article there was only room for discussing a few highlights from the Bentinck family archives. Especially the correspondence of Charlotte Sophie Countess von Aldenburg, consisting of more than 25.000 personal letters, received attention. The digital finding aid of the Bentinck archive now makes it possible to pose numerous new research questions. The correspondence of Charlotte Sophie provides a detailed insight into her network in enlightened Europe. Based on her complete digitized correspondence with nearly a thousand personal relations, an analysis of her correspondence network can be conducted, in line with the project *Mapping the Republic of Letters*.⁴⁸ Another possible subject is a comparative analysis of the ideas of Charlotte Sophie as a 'feministe avant la lettre'. Her views on women's rights as expressed in her letters and essays can be compared to those of other, mainly aristocratic proto-feminists and 'femmes de lettres' of her time, such as the British Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762), the French-Swiss Madame de Staël (1766-1817) and the Dutch Belle van Zuylen (1740-1805). Hella Haasse has touched on the relationship between Charlotte Sophie Bentinck and Belle van Zuylen,⁴⁹ but the final word about these two *grandes dames* with a Dutch connection has not been said. The digital finding aid of the Bentinck family archives in Arnhem and the digitized documents such as the correspondence of Charlotte Sophie provide a unique and online searchable entry into these and many other new study areas.

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⁴⁶ GA, Bentinck, nos 2476-2519.

⁴⁷ GA, Bentinck, no. 2479.

⁴⁸ Mapping the Republic of Letters; republicofletters.stanford.edu/casestudies/index.html (accessed 9 Oct. 2018).

⁴⁹ H. Haasse, 'Dubbelportret. Een en ander over de biografie, al dan niet literair', in: eadem, *Uitgesproken, opgeschreven. Essays over achttiende-eeuwse vrouwen* (Amsterdam, 1996) 71-118.

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