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The *Collection de Ramaix*

The diplomatic corps, noble status and the reappraisal of Delftware

The history of collecting is, over a long period, self-evidently also the history of the nobility. From the early modern period onwards, royal houses and members of the nobility collected artefacts, valuable manuscripts, *naturalia* and other objects. Their collections underlined their power and wealth; they strengthened not just a cultural, but also a social identity. As a result, for centuries collections had the potential to serve as what Éric Mension-Rigau and Bruno Dumons have called ‘a space for self-definition’ for the nobility (*un espace d’autodéfinition de la noblesse*).¹ In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries this exclusive connection lost its self-evident character. Collecting now also became a practice of new social groups – of bankers, businessmen and industrialists – who used collections of paintings and other objects to highlight their recently acquired position. Their fortune was considered to be the sole safeguard of the exclusivity of these collections. The role of the old *collectionneurs nobles* seemed to be over; the era of the bourgeois *collectionneurs* had dawned.²

This essay will show that the history of collecting over the past two centuries has been more complex than a mere changing of the guard. The nobility also continued

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- 1 É. Mension-Rigau and B. Dumons, ‘Conserver l’identité nobiliaire dans la France contemporaine’, in: D. Lancien and M. de Saint-Martin, eds, *Anciennes et nouvelles aristocraties de 1880 à nos jours* (Paris, 2007), 221-43.
 - 2 An interesting recent case study of the nobility’s response to this shift is offered by J.A. Vígara Zafra, ‘New strategies in art collecting amongst the Spanish nobility in the later nineteenth century. The case of the 3rd Duke and Duchess of Fernán Núñez’, *Journal of the History of Collections* 30 (2018), 419-31.

to collect – even more: for newly ennobled families too, artistic and other collections remained an important means of enhancing their status. For those who had noble aspirations or had only recently achieved such aspirations, collecting art, weapons, silverware, coins and other valuable objects was a means not only of gaining higher social status, but of legitimising their ascent. For this reason, the nobility continued to play an important role in the history of collecting in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; and conversely, these prestigious collections could also confer on the noble class – in all its diversity – a strength and vitality that ‘decline and fall’ historiography has tended to be too emphatic in denying that it had.³

We will focus in particular on the De Ramaix family.⁴ Active in the Belgian diplomatic corps in the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, this family built up a valuable collection of Delft faïence to express its noble aspirations. Maurice (1850-1918) and Gaston (1878-1937) de Ramaix did not merely show that the nobility continued to collect: *Delfts porcelijn* was also their entrance ticket to the nobility. In the hands of this family, newly ascended to the nobility in the 1880s, collecting was a cultural practice that included a social dynamic. The extensive family archive that has been preserved in the State Archives in Arlon and by the King Baudouin Foundation in Brussels among other places can be used to analyse this process in detail.⁵

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A Roman count in The Hague

The young diplomat who was sent to The Hague in 1882 to serve as first secretary of the Belgian legation was born in Sint-Joost-ten-Node near Brussels in 1850 (fig. 1). Maurice de Ramaix’s family was wealthy. Moreover, in a country where the ideological antitheses around a number of major political issues were growing more pointed, it was of an unmistakably Catholic character. Napoléon de Ramaix and Pauline van der Meersch thus gave their son not only a religion, but also a sense of social engagement and a political creed. For the time being, however, Maurice de Ramaix remained primarily a servant of the Belgian government. He was to stay in The Hague for four years, until 1887.

3 D. Cannadine, *The decline and fall of the British aristocracy* (New Haven-London, 1990).

4 P. Janssens and L. Duerloo, *Armorial de la noblesse belge*, volume 3 (Brussels, 1992), 295.

5 This essay is mainly based on archival research in Arlon, State Archives, BE AÉA, *Fam. de Ramaix* (521-2971) (Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*) and in Brussels, King Baudouin Foundation, *Dossier Kasteel van Grune* (Brussels, KBF, *Grune*). In addition, a number of smaller archival fonds in Belgium and the Netherlands were consulted. I am indebted for their assistance with this research to Didier Amaury, Robert D. Aronson, Marieke de Baerdemaeker, Anne de Breuck, Etienne Burnotte, Isabelle Carpentier, Joachim Derwael, Sébastien Dubois, Joseph Estié, Herman van Goethem, Jean-Marie Guilbert, Marie Guilbert, Marie d’Hueppe, Françoise Iweins, Francis Lederer, Errol Manners, Rob Michiels, François Moreau, David de Ramaix, Luc Tayart de Borms, Karel Velle and Luc de Walque. I also am grateful to Ilja van Damme, Ulrike Müller, Gerrit Verhoeven, the editorial board of *Virtus* and the anonymous reviewers for their comments on a first version of this essay.

Fig. 1. Portrait of Maurice de Ramaix as senator, 1904 (Arlon, State Archives, AÉA, *Fam. de Ramaix* (521-2971), R3: *Généalogie & documents*, 4)



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De Ramaix's diplomatic career had started in 1871. After a brilliant performance in the diplomatic examination in 1874, he had climbed the hierarchical ladder, moving up step by step in *la Carrière*. At a time when economic diplomacy was of prime importance for Belgium, he had already held various posts before his appointment in The Hague: Paris (at the time of the Commune), Istanbul, Vienna and Berlin, with the customary periods in Brussels between foreign postings.⁶ The young diplomat had a reputation in the corps as ambitious and intelligent,⁷ and this impression was confirmed in The Hague: when he left his post in 1887, the ambassador wrote to the Minister of Foreign Affairs that in De Ramaix he had lost an active, diligent and universally popular colleague.⁸

6 For the diplomatic career of Maurice de Ramaix, see the personnel files in Brussels, Diplomatic Archives of the FPS Foreign Affairs, Pers. Ext 274 and 402.

7 See the examiners' report on the diplomatic examination, 20 May 1874, in Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R3: *Généalogie & documents*, 4.

8 Brussels, Diplomatic Archives of the FPS Foreign Affairs, Pers. Ext 274: Baron J. d'Anethan to J. de Riquet de Caraman, Prince de Chimay, 11 March 1887.

During the years of De Ramaix's posting there, The Hague was experiencing explosive growth, with a great deal of new, cheap construction work.⁹ However, the diplomatic circles in which he moved held on to their traditions, including the prominent presence of the nobility: the Belgian legation led by Baron Jules d'Anethan consisted almost exclusively of nobles. In this respect, it followed a general trend in Belgian diplomacy, in which, despite the spread of democracy in society, there was in fact a process of 're-aristocratisation' at the end of the nineteenth century. Perhaps it is going too far to speak of the corps being a 'stronghold of the nobility', but it is certainly true that from the mid-1880s the nobility (again) formed a high proportion of Belgian diplomatic staff.¹⁰

De Ramaix did not belong to this noble contingent. Pope Leo XIII had, it is true, bestowed on him the hereditary title of Roman count (*comte romain*) in 1880, perhaps as a reward for the family's generous financial support for the cult of the Blessed Sacrament,¹¹ but the value of this title was seen as limited as it was not recognised outside the Vatican. De Ramaix, though proud of the title, realised this. He later expressed concern about the use of this – foreign – title in Belgium: could it be used there at all?¹² In short, the diplomat in The Hague lacked the noble status that was so common in his professional setting. This marked the starting point in a process of aristocratisation.

Marriage could help provide the desired prestige. In 1877, De Ramaix married Cécile de Meester, the eldest daughter of a Catholic politician from a noble family from Antwerp who became a senator a few years later. Her illness and untimely death in 1882 had caused him to postpone his departure to The Hague. In 1884 he was married for a second time to Marie Suermondt, who came from a distinguished and wealthy family in The Hague. The family's prestige derived in part from the country house in which it lived: Huize Boschlust, located in the district of Bezuidenhout, was built in the 1830s by Minister of the Colonies Johannes van den Bosch, bought

9 K. Stal, 'Ruimtelijke ontwikkeling', in: T. de Nijs and J. Sillevius, eds, *Den Haag. Geschiedenis van de stad*, volume 3: *Negentiende en twintigste eeuw* (Zwolle, 2005), 11-55. See also the collective biography J.H. Furnée, *Plaatsen van beschaafd vertier. Standsbesef en stedelijke cultuur in Den Haag 1850-1890* (Amsterdam, 2012).

10 M. Auwers, *The island and the storm. A social-cultural history of the Belgian diplomatic corps in times of democratization, 1885-1935*, doctoral dissertation University of Antwerp (2014), 132-4; this is nuanced in G. Leenders, 'Bolwerk van de oude adel? Een kwantitatieve benadering van de adellijke tegenwoordiging in het Belgische diplomatieke corps (1840-1940)', *BMGN. Low Countries Historical Review* 131 (2016), 52-76.

11 See the papal letter (23 April 1880) in Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R3: *Généalogie & documents*, 4. For the circumstances in which the title was granted: Grune, Personal documentation of Luc de Walque, *Grune Histoire III: Fragments généalogiques de la famille de Ramaix* (1873 and supplemented to 1908), 28-31. See in general P. Janssens, 'Vaticaanse eerbetoen aan leden van de Belgische adel in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw', in: C. Gietman et al., eds, *Huis en habitus. Over kastelen, buitenplaatsen en notabele levensvormen* (Adelsgeschiedenis, 15) (Hilversum, 2017), 287-99.

12 Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R12: Bundle 3.

by Prince Alexander in 1845 and inherited by Queen Anna Pavlovna after his early death. It was from her that Cornelis Suermondt, a member of a wealthy Rotterdam family of wine merchants, bought the house in 1851.¹³ His daughter's marriage to the Belgian diplomat was a society event, including witnesses from the royal entourage.¹⁴

The couple lived in a mansion on Javastraat, in the quiet and fashionable embassy district, near the square where the monument to '1813' had been unveiled just a decade and a half earlier. This was a good base from which to participate in the 'brilliant life' that the – mostly noble – diplomats led in the court capital, without distinction of nationality. While it was widely acknowledged that this diplomatic socialising was somewhat stuffy (the arrival of large international organisations in around 1900 livened things up in particular), there was undeniably also a strong *esprit de corps* in The Hague.¹⁵

Many of these diplomats surrounded themselves with *objets d'art*: furniture, paintings, silverware, glassware. These also included the ceramics which had been produced in large volumes in the many factories in Delft (as well as in a number of other cities in the Dutch Republic) in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and which had triumphed artistically across Europe.¹⁶ This faïence was collected for its ornamental quality, but also because it was regarded as a luxury product that could enhance the owner's status. Moreover, displayed at suitable locations in the salons and other rooms of the owner's home, it could serve as a conversation starter during receptions.

The collecting of Delftware had a long history, originating in the highest social echelons. It was the princesses of Orange – foremost among them being Amalia of Solms, since 1625 the wife of Frederick Henry, Prince of Orange – who were the first to collect porcelain. Rather than Delftware, they were interested in Asian porcelain, which was brought to the Dutch Republic by the Dutch East India Company. Such porcelain had already previously been kept in cabinets of curiosities, but the princesses of Orange displayed it in the interiors of their houses and palaces. Chinese and Japanese porcelain, sometimes combined with lacquerware, was an exotic product whose rarity gave the court culture a richer character and that also demonstrated to visitors that its owners had the (military) power needed to bring precious objects of this kind from faraway places to Europe.¹⁷

13 P. Wandler, *Haagse Huizen van Oranje. Vier eeuwen paleizen en huizen van de Oranjes in en om de Residentie* (The Hague, 1982), 96-8.

14 The Hague, Municipal Archives, *Archief Burgerlijke Stand*, 0335-01/673 (deed of 26 November 1884) and Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R3: *Généalogie & documents*, 4.

15 Chr. Nigten, 'Den Haag als nationaal en internationaal centrum', in: De Nijs and Sillevis, eds, *Den Haag*, III, 112-5. For the term 'brilliant life' and the nature of that life: Auwers, *The island and the storm*, 58-63.

16 See for example Christine Lahaussais and Antoinette Faÿ-Hallé, *La faïence européenne au XVII^e siècle. Le triomphe de Delft* (Paris, 2003).

17 F. Diercks, 'Oranjeprinsessen als keramiekverzamelaars', in: S.M.R. Lambooy, ed., *Koninklijk Blauw. Delfts aardewerk van Willem en Mary* (Delfts aardewerk. Geschiedenis van een nationaal product, 6)

In the last quarter of the seventeenth century, William III and Mary II Stuart shifted the attention from Asian porcelain to Delft Blue, which had acquired a more refined character as a result of new technological developments. For their residences in the Dutch Republic and England, including the newly acquired ‘Koninklijke Loo’, they often ordered spectacular pieces from the most important factories of the time, ‘De Grieksche A’ and ‘De Metaale Pot’. They placed these pyramidal vases, lidded pots and flower baskets in the state rooms and gardens of their palaces to give them a regal allure, but also to reinforce their dynastic ambitions.¹⁸ By doing so, William and Mary turned *Delfts porcelijn* into a coveted collector’s item that stood for wealth and social prestige. It became an indispensable element in the interiors of eighteenth-century bourgeois homes.¹⁹

110 By 1840, however, after a steady decline over three-quarters of a century, the Delftware industry had disappeared. Of the more than thirty factories that had existed about 1700, only one remained. In the mid-1860s, though, interest in ‘old Delftware’ began to grow again. Collectors, museum curators and scholars interested in the history of European ceramics would rediscover seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Delft pottery in the following decades.²⁰ The first steps in this revival were taken in France, where the work of the Delft potters of the seventeenth (and eighteenth) century was placed on a level with that of the great Dutch painters of the Golden Age. Interest soon grew in the Netherlands too – and The Hague became the centre of a new collecting tradition, based on august and remote antecedents.

This collecting tradition was initiated by the exhibition of historic Delftware that was organised in Delft itself in 1863 – two decades before De Ramaix arrived in The Hague. The exhibition generated considerable interest and led to Delft faïence collections being formed again for the first time in diplomatic and noble circles in The Hague. The Austrian envoy Baron Ferdinand von Langenau may have been the first of these collectors, but the most important was Baron Charles Antoine Edouard de la Villestreux, second secretary of the French legation in The Hague. This young diplomat collected no fewer than 250 pieces in a few years.

(The Hague-Apeldoorn-Zwolle, 2020), 13-35. For a broader view: J. van Campen and T. Eliëns, eds., *Chinese and Japanese porcelain for the Dutch Golden Age* (Zwolle, 2014).

18 A.M.L.E. Erkelens, *Delfts Porcelijn van koningin Mary II. Ceramiek op Het Loo uit de tijd van Willem III en Mary II* (Apeldoorn-Zwolle, 1996); Lambooy, ed., *Koninklijk Blauw*; K. Duysters, ‘Aziatisch porselein en Delfts aardewerk op Het Loo’, in: A.-D. Renting, ed., *Paleis Het Loo. Een koninklijk huis* (Zwolle, 2022), 143-52. See also M.S. van Aken-Fehmers, ed., *Vazen met tuiten. 300 jaar pronkstukken* (Delfts aardewerk. Geschiedenis van een nationaal product, 4) (Den Haag-Zwolle, 2007).

19 See the many examples in C.W. Fock, ed., *Het Nederlandse interieur in beeld 1600-1900* (Zwolle, 2001).

20 For the revival of ‘old Delftware’, see: F.T. Scholten, ‘Delfts aardewerk, een reputatiegeschiedenis’, *Mededelingenblad Nederlandse Vereniging van Vrienden van de Ceramiek* 140 (1990), 5-11; J.D. van Dam, ‘Van onbekend en onbemind tot zeer gezocht en peperduur. Delftse faïence in de negentiende eeuw’, *Vormen uit Vuur* 145 (1992), 4-13, and Idem, *Delfts aardewerk. Een proeve tot her-ijking*, doctoral dissertation Catholic University Nijmegen (2004), 30-61.

When De la Villestreux was assigned to a new diplomatic post in Florence in 1869, he sold most of his collection to John F. Loudon, who, as a retired colonial entrepreneur, could afford to purchase the expensive faïence. The collection thus remained in The Hague, and Loudon expanded it to 550 pieces in the years that followed.²¹ In 1877 the collection was catalogued by Henry Havard, a French exile who had ended up in The Hague after the Paris Commune and now moved in circles there that were aristocratic and wealthy, but also artistic. In 1878 Havard – after much archive work – published his *Histoire de la faïence de Delft*, an extensive study subsequently regarded as a pioneering work.²² This contributed to the fame of Delftware, which had a strong presence at the exhibition on ‘retrospective art’ that was held in Amsterdam in 1883.

When De Ramaix took up his post in The Hague, there was therefore a great deal of interest there in the old Delft pottery, which had considerable prestige due to its association with royal and noble collectors. In 1886, as part of his professional duties De Ramaix wrote an extensive report on Dutch industry, *La Néerlande industrielle, considérée au triple point de vue de la production, de l’exportation et de l’importation*, in which ceramics were also discussed.²³ The old Delft factories, De Ramaix realised, had disappeared. The report spoke highly of the one factory that had survived the decline, *De Porceleynse Fles*: Joost Thoof and Abel Labouchere had taken significant steps since 1876 to restore the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century tradition. By contrast, De Ramaix regarded as a failure the attempt by the Tichelaar brothers in the Frisian village of Makkum to imitate ‘old Delftware’ and thus breathe new life into the applied arts market: the imitation was *assez grossière* (‘rather crude’). There were other ceramic products besides the (imitated) Delft pottery, *La Néerlande industrielle* noted. De Ramaix was hesitant about the work of the Rozenburg factory, established in The Hague in 1883: this was an artistic experiment, in which the search for an individual style was still ongoing. His judgement about the ‘ordinary’ ceramics from sources such as the factories of Maastricht was clearer: not very original, but cheap and therefore widespread.²⁴

21 Th.H. Lunsingh Scheurleer, ‘De collectie John F. Loudon veertig jaar in het Rijksmuseum’, *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 4 (1956), 91-5; D. de Hoop Scheffer, ‘Het Rijksmuseum en zijn begunstigers’, in: *Het Rijksmuseum 1808-1958*, special issue *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 6:3-4 (1958), 94-5; and J.D. van Dam, ‘De collectie John F. Loudon, een bijzondere schenking uit 1916’, *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 40:3 (1992), 232-9. See also C.A. Drieënhuizen, *Koloniale collecties, Nederlands aanzien. De Europese elite van Nederlands-Indië belicht door haar verzamelingen, 1811-1957*, doctoral dissertation University of Amsterdam (2012), 99-158.

22 J. Tollebeek, ‘Henry Havard en Delft. Over de rol van een Franse balling in een Nederlandse renaissance’, *Vormen uit Vuur* 245 (2021), 2-19 and 39-41, and Idem, ‘The genesis of a national product. Henry Havard and the renewed interest in Delftware, 1850-1920’, in: M. Brolsma et al., eds, *Networks, narratives and nations. Transnational approaches to cultural nationalism in modern Europe and beyond* (Amsterdam, 2022), 167-85.

23 Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix, R6, Généalogie & documents*, Annexes 6: M. de Ramaix, ‘Légation à la Haye. Rapport N° 137’, *Recueil Consulaire* 59 (1887), 45-247, especially 79-86.

24 There is some literature about the ceramic producers mentioned by De Ramaix. On ‘De Porceleynse

All these products – from Thoof and Labouchere's *De Porceleyne Fles* to the Maastricht factories of the entrepreneurial Regout family – were newly manufactured. When compiling his report, however, De Ramaix also turned his thoughts to the old Delftware of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Of course, an overview of contemporary industry in the Netherlands did not require an outline of this original production, but the author lamented the fact that so little was left and that what remained could only be seen in museums and private collections. De Ramaix was clearly aware of the value of historic Delftware, '*cette faïence légère, claire, ornée de belles couleurs et revêtue d'un émail merveilleux dont le secret est perdu*'.²⁵

Noble campaigns

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In the diplomatic circles of The Hague, De Ramaix had acquired noble aspirations and a taste for the artistic riches that were common there, including the recently rediscovered Delft pottery. When he left the Netherlands in 1887, his professional future suddenly looked uncertain. An appointment in Saint Petersburg turned out to be out of the question,²⁶ and a mission to Tehran came to nothing due to health problems and led to a clash with the Minister and the Department of Foreign Affairs. As a result, De Ramaix's diplomatic career petered out in 1890, although he was awarded the title of Honorary Envoy.²⁷ However, he continued to travel, from the Caucasus to Algeria, Morocco and Egypt.²⁸

De Ramaix set out with renewed zeal to achieve noble status. Three things were required, it seemed: a title, an ancestry and a castle. The first was obtained by De Ramaix in 1888, when King Leopold II accepted him into the Belgian peerage.²⁹ This

Fles': M.-R. Bogaers, K. Gaillard and M.-L. ten Horn-Van Nispen, *De Porceleyne Fles. De wedergeboorte van een Delftse aardewerfabriek* (Utrecht-Antwerp, 1986); T.M. Eliëns et al., *De Porceleyne Fles* (Delftware. History of a National Product, 3) (Zwolle-Delft, 2003); J. van Erkel, *De Koninklijke Porceleyne Fles. Royal Delft* (Amersfoort, 2016) and B. Verbrugge, *De vernieuwende keramiek van De Porceleyne Fles 1891-1914. Berbas, Reflet métallique, Jacoba, Porselein biscuit en sectiel* ('s-Hertogenbosch, 2021). On the Tichelaar brothers, *inter al.*: P.J. Tichelaar and C. Polder, *Gebakken schilderijen. Friese keramische platen 1870-1930* (Leiden, 1998); P.J. Tichelaar, *Tichelaar Makkum 1700-1876* and Idem, *Tichelaar Makkum 1868-1963* (Fries aardewerk, 3 and 4) (Leiden, 2004). On Rozenburg, *inter al.*: T.M. Eliëns, *T.A.C. Colenbrander (1841-1930), ontwerper van de Haagse Plateelbakkerij Rozenburg* (Zwolle-Den Haag, 1999); Y. Brentjens, *Rozenburg. Plateel uit Haagse kringen (1883-1917)* (Zwolle-The Hague, 2007). On the Maastricht factories, *inter al.*: A. Knotter, ed., *Keramiekstad. Maastricht en de aardewerkindustrie in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw* (Zwolle-Maastricht, 2016).

25 Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R6: *Généalogie & documents*, Annexes 6: M. de Ramaix, 'Légation à la Haye. Rapport N° 137', *Recueil Consulaire*, 59 (1887), 79-80.

26 Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R3: *Généalogie & documents*, 4.

27 See the extensive file in Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R11: *Perse*.

28 See, *inter al.*, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, RP-F-Foo92: *Reisalbum met 80 foto's van Egypte*, Bonfils, 1898.

29 See the *lettres patentes* (24 May 1888) in Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R1: *Généalogie & documents*, 1 and R3: *Généalogie & documents*, 4.

overcame the problem of the unsatisfactory papal recognition as a Roman count, and De Ramaix could move unabashed in noble circles, in Belgium at any rate. At the same time, it was not an unmitigated success, as De Ramaix was only raised to the untitled peerage. From now on he could style himself 'jonkheer' (*écuyer*); he was not a knight, baron or viscount.

Thus, the concerns that had existed about the use of the title of Roman count (in Belgium) persisted. In the newspapers, De Ramaix read criticism of the *Nobles de fantaisie et Nobles de fraîche date*: a horde of Belgians, it was said, who had made their fortune, suffered from excessive self-regard and therefore wished to appear to the public to be something that in reality they were not. De Ramaix kept the clippings.³⁰ It made the longing for a noble history and lifestyle – an ancestry and a castle – even stronger; these things formed the core of the 'noble habitus' that De Ramaix wished to make his own.

The purpose of the intense genealogical activity organised by De Ramaix was clear: to provide him with origins in the remote past while avoiding dispute as far as possible. It was thus about heritage, but also about continuity, an uninterrupted chain of generations that succeeded each other and provided a foundation for a noble identity. This historiographical process of noble self-fashioning had already started earlier. Genealogical searches for the family had been conducted in 1871, but had resulted, according to De Ramaix in 1885, in a very incomplete family tree that offered little certainty. He therefore had the work that had been done in the 1870s continued by another genealogist.³¹ In 1939, one of his sons described the outcome of these efforts as *assez fantaisiste*.³²

In the meantime, De Ramaix had also started conducting genealogical research himself from The Hague, enlisting the help of, among others, the staff of the State Archives.³³ He wished to associate himself with eminent families and in this way created a noble labyrinth in which his own family gained a place.³⁴ He collected more and more documents, supplemented them painstakingly, had them bound in large files and then filed them in the family archives. The genealogical documents became the guarantee of the family's noble identity and thus had to be preserved and handed down as something of great value. As early as 1886 De Ramaix prepared an en-

³⁰ Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R12: Bundle 3.

³¹ Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R1, *Généalogie & documents*, 1: J.S.F.J.L. de Herckenrode, *Recherches généalogiques concernant la famille De Ramaix de Sémirancourt* (1871) and J. de Buisseret, *Fragments généalogiques de la famille de Ramaix* (1873), and the material in R1: *Généalogie & documents*, 2 and R2: *Généalogie & documents*, 1 and 2.

³² Grune, Personal documentation of Luc de Walque, *Grune Histoire III*: letter from Amaury de Ramaix (1 February 1939) in *Fragments généalogiques de la famille de Ramaix*.

³³ *Inter al.* Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R2, *Généalogie & documents*, 1: M. de Ramaix to Deputy State Archivist Ch. Piot, 8 October 1885.

³⁴ See the examples in Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R4: *Généalogie & documents*, Annexes 1 and 2, and R5: *Généalogie & documents*, Annexes 3.



Fig. 2. The castle at Grune in Maurice de Ramaix's album *Château de Grune 1895* (privately owned)

velope for his eldest son, which, according to the inscription, contained *Papiers de famille confidentiels et de la plus haute importance*. The envelope was closed with seven seals.³⁵

The castle came in 1890 (fig. 2). In that year, De Ramaix bought a seventeenth-century *château* at Grune near Nassogne in the Belgian Ardennes, which also included a farm and other outbuildings.³⁶ He thus acquired a summer residence in the countryside. This was in addition to the spacious *hôtel* that he continued to occupy in Antwerp, on the corner of Leopoldlaan and Nerviërsstraat (near the statue of Boduognat), for after his departure from The Hague in 1887, he had returned to the city of his first wife and her family, despite his own Brussels roots. The Antwerp *hôtel* would always remain his legal primary residence.

³⁵ Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R12: Bundle 3.

³⁶ Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R13: *Domaine de Grune, titres de propriété*, II (deed of 25 September 1890). On the castle: L. de Walque, *Grune. Notice historique. Le village, la seigneurie, la paroisse, au fil du temps [...] (Grune)*, 1999), 17-23.

The castle in Grune had long been inhabited by the same noble family, before passing into different hands in the nineteenth century. De Ramaix bought it from Jules Pety de Thozée, a member of the Chamber of Representatives and collector of art and antiquities who had run into financial difficulties. He went on to restore and enlarge it in 1894, also creating an English park (a process that happened at other castles in the Ardennes at around the same time, such as the Château de Bioul, which was bought in 1896 by the Au Bon Marché entrepreneur François Vaxelaire and renovated in 1906). This turned De Ramaix into a real lord of the manor. In 1901 he commissioned a portrait of himself by Benjamin Constant for the large salon. In the meantime, the castle estate had been extended through a series of purchases of forests and fields.³⁷

In the village itself, which had just under five hundred inhabitants in 1900, De Ramaix and Marie Suermondt were received with awe in their first summer at Grune.³⁸ Like the castle's previous occupant, De Ramaix became mayor. From his own funds he helped strengthen the village's Catholic character: he had a Catholic school built – just a few years after the so-called *Schoolstrijd* or 'Battle of the Schools' (the strife on the 'soul' of the child between the different ideological groups in Belgium) – and financed an extension to the church, receiving his own gallery in the choir in return.³⁹

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Genealogical enquiries and a life as a lord of the manor gave Jonkheer de Ramaix the noble status he craved. They were tools that others also used to obtain – or maintain – that status. De Ramaix's contemporary Arthur Merghelynck, for example, was of noble birth, but married 'below his station'. He went on to devote his entire life to genealogical research and carried on restoring his *fief-manoir* in Beauvoorde near Veurne until it exuded the seventeenth-century Flemish Renaissance from every pore. No one was allowed to question his status, even though he went through life with the daughter of a small farmer.⁴⁰

De Ramaix, meanwhile, was no longer leading the life of a diplomat. After the unfortunate end of his diplomatic career in 1890, he had turned to politics, during a period of Catholic dominance on the national level. Antwerp, convincingly liberal, was

37 See the legal documents in Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R13-17.

38 For testimonials to the festive reception in the village: Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R7: *Généalogie & documents*, Annexes 7. For the size of the population: Arlon, State Archives, BE AÉA, *Archives de la commune de Grune*, doss. 157: *Budgets 1890-1899*.

39 De Walque, *Grune*, 27 and 42 (see the documents in Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R7: *Généalogie & documents*, Annexes 7 and R15: *Domaine de Grune, titres de propriété*, IIIB). On the 'Battle of the Schools' in Nassogne: J. Duchamps, 'L'enseignement primaire et les écoles à Nassogne de 1820 à 1920', *Saint-Hubert d'Ardenne. Cahiers d'Histoire* 4 (1980), 215-42.

40 See *inter al.* J. Tollebeek, 'Het verleden in de negentiende eeuw. Arthur Merghelynck en het Kasteel van Beauvoorde', *Verslagen en Mededelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* (1999-1), 107-47; *Idem*, 'De historische wereld van Arthur Merghelynck. Over het "familiale verleden" van de negentiende-eeuwse adel', in: E.O.G. Haitsma Mulier, L.H. Maas and J. Vogel, eds, *Het beeld in de spiegel. Historiografische verkenningen. Liber amicorum voor Piet Blaas* (Hilversum, 2000), 227-44 and Arthur Merghelynck, *Passies van een edelman* (Beauvoorde-leper, 2008).

and remained his base, and he became involved in the Meeting Party,⁴¹ taking an interest in what he saw as social injustices; in the press he was referred to as ‘a popular nobleman’ who also advocated social reform in publications.⁴² He combined this social engagement with sympathy for the ‘Flemish cause’: ‘I am a Fleming, gentlemen, born and bred on Flemish soil and proud of it’, as he put it in 1892.⁴³

In that year, De Ramaix was first elected to the Chamber of Representatives. Ten years later, in 1902, he became a senator, a position he retained until his death. He was ambitious: in 1896 he only narrowly missed being appointed Foreign Minister, the position going instead to Baron Paul de Favereau.⁴⁴ He was known as a man who acted from a sense of duty, *au-dessus des préoccupations de combinaisons et de calculs*.⁴⁵ Local matters in Antwerp kept him busy, and he was a member of all kinds of political, cultural and social circles and associations. However, he also followed colonial economic policy closely: he was a *congolâtre* who defended the King’s imperialism in Parliament, supported colonial companies and was involved in several exhibitions on Congo.⁴⁶

His diplomatic experience and expertise in international trade relations led in 1894 to De Ramaix becoming general secretary of the *comité exécutif* of the Universal Exhibition that was held in Antwerp in that year.⁴⁷ In that spectacle, in which multiplicity and diversity were central, Delftware also featured. A separate room was set aside for ceramics in the Dutch pavilion. However, it was located right next to the large Machine Gallery, and only contemporary industrial ceramics for the construction industry were displayed there: tiles, pipes and roof tiles produced by exhibitors who were listed in the catalogue in the ‘Mineralogy’ section, alongside the producers of glass- and crystalware, raw and processed metals and so on. Apart from this, space was only provided for the imitations of the ‘old Delftware’ of the Tichelaar brothers, which had received a lukewarm appraisal in De Ramaix’s report of 1886.⁴⁸

41 On the birth of the Meeting Party: L. Wils, *Het ontstaan van de Meetingpartij te Antwerpen en haar invloed op de Belgische politiek* (Antwerp, 1963). On the liberal character of Antwerp: K. Vannieuwenhuyze, *Aangedaan van statuomanie. Het Antwerps stadsbestuur en zijn politieke greep op de stedelijke ruimte (1830-1914)*, doctoral dissertation University of Antwerp (2018).

42 See the report in the *Allemandblad* of 18 May 1892 (reprinted in the *Gazet van Antwerpen* and *De Vrijheid*, 21 May 1892) in Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R6: *Généalogie & documents*, Annexes 5. De Ramaix’s publications included *La réforme sociale et économique en Europe et dans les Etats-Unis de l’Amérique du Nord* (1889) and *La question sociale en Belgique et le Congo* (1891).

43 Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R7: *Généalogie & documents*, Annexes 7.

44 See the clipping in Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R3: *Généalogie & documents*, 4.

45 Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R6, *Généalogie & documents*, Annexes 5: ‘Mort du sénateur comte de Ramaix’, *Métropole* (16 September 1918).

46 B. Cleys, ‘Catholic missionaries and the production of Kasai as a colonial landscape’, in: V. Viaene, B. Cleys and J. de Maeyer, eds, *Religion, colonization, decolonization in Congo, 1885-1960 / Religion, colonisation et décolonisation au Congo, 1885-1960* (Leuven, 2020), 119. With Edward Poffé, De Ramaix published *Beschaving en rijkdom van Belgisch-Congo* (‘Civilisation and Wealth of the Belgian Congo’) in 1894.

47 See the extensive file in Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R6: *Généalogie & documents*, Annexes 5.

48 Antwerp, FelixArchief, *Archief Wereldtentoonstelling Antwerpen, 1894*, nos. 325-159, 325-311, 325-391.

Of course, that did not mean that tradition was absent. In a society in which modernisation had set the tone in many areas, but at the same time had caused uneasiness, attention was often turned to the past, which was seen as both glorious and simple. At the Universal Exhibition of 1894, this was most obviously the case in ‘Old Antwerp’, a sixteenth-century version of the city.⁴⁹ Members of the *haute bourgeoisie* could stay in ‘old’ houses there with historical period rooms during the exhibition.⁵⁰ Thus the Antwerp collector and connoisseur Fritz Mayer van den Bergh and his mother Henriëtte spent six months in *De Drie Koningen*, a house on the market square in ‘Old Antwerp’. There, the secretary of the *comité exécutif* encountered the old Delftware that he knew from his time in The Hague. A five-piece garniture, a number of plates and a dish were arranged on the mantelpiece on the ground floor. These were accompanied by a pair of blue and white cows, made by Johannes van Duijn of *De Porceleynse Schotel*,⁵¹ an iconic example of eighteenth-century Delftware.

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A collection of Delftware

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Delft Blue was increasingly regarded in the Netherlands as a ‘national product’: a product that expressed the national character and belonged to the Dutch cultural canon. In the applied arts, the new ‘old Delftware’ enjoyed increasing popularity, while at the same time calls became increasingly common for historical pieces of Delftware to be returned – a restitution – from foreign collections and museums to the Netherlands, where they belonged. Around the turn of the century, Delftware was considered an inalienable national possession, which was reproduced in all kinds of new, but often also historically inspired forms.

Despite this process of nationalisation and democratisation, which would continue in the ensuing decades, in the years around 1900 the old seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Delft pottery remained a product that the elite could use to distinguish themselves. Pieces by *De Grieksche A*, *De Metaale Pot* and other factories were sought after and prices in the antiques trade and at auctions continued to rise. As a result, an international collecting community grew, extending as far as the United States, which was highly aristocratic in character and focused on social prestige. Havard’s refusal to make available a popular Dutch translation of his standard work from 1878

325-392 and 325-1211, and *Tentoonstelling Antwerpen 1894. Officieele Catalogus van de Nederlandse Afdeeling* (Amsterdam, 1894), 21-22 (and 34-37).

49 A.K.L. Thijs, ‘Oud Antwerpen 1894, een burgerlijke droomwereld’, in: Jan-Lodewijk Grootaers and Mandy Nauwelaerts, eds, *De panoramische droom. Antwerpen en de wereldtentoonstelling 1885, 1894, 1930* (Antwerp, 1993), 259-69.

50 On the importance of period rooms in the historical culture of the past two centuries: S. Costa, D. Poulot and M. Volait, eds, *The period rooms. Allestimenti storici tra arte, collezionismo e museologia* (Bologna, 2016).

51 U. Müller, *At home in a museum. The story of Henriëtte and Fritz Mayer van den Bergh* (Veurne, 2021), 86-92 and 101-11.

was symptomatic. When an Amsterdam publisher asked him to do so in 1907, he successfully argued instead for an extensive and, above all, luxurious adaptation of the French original; *La céramique hollandaise*, as it was now entitled, appeared in 1909. The old Delftware remained exclusive property.

In the Netherlands, this twofold tendency had royal endorsement, resuming the tradition established by William and Mary in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. In 1887, King William III donated his collection of historic Delftware to *De Porceleyne Fles* as study material, but also in recognition of the factory's efforts to revive this national product and give it new popularity.⁵² By contrast, four years earlier, in 1883, with his wife Emma he had viewed the Loudon collection at the latter's home in The Hague, expressing admiration for what the happy few were able to collect.⁵³

118 In the meantime, a new generation of collectors had also emerged, again mainly (though not exclusively) in aristocratic circles in The Hague. A.H.H. van der Burgh, Baron W.F.K. Verschuer (in Arnhem) and Jonkheer Victor de Stuers were its leading figures. Their collections were extensive and had specific emphases. The collection of Van der Burgh, who also conducted archive research into Delftware, equalled that of Loudon in size. Baron van Verschuer exceeded it by far: he collected 800 pieces, including a special series of red Delft teapots made between around 1677 and 1730.⁵⁴

A collecting tradition around old Delft faïence had also arisen in Belgium (and in the Lille area of northern France), again, especially in aristocratic circles. Its pioneer was Frédéric Fétis, a lawyer and professor who was active in the Brussels museum world. Fétis had been collecting pottery since 1869, although he did not confine himself to Delftware, and he also produced an acclaimed catalogue of the ceramics collection in the *Porte de Hal* in Brussels.⁵⁵ Part of Fétis's Delftware collection (which contained an impressive number of extremely valuable black pieces) was acquired after his death by Baron Albert Evenepoel. This Brussels art lover went on to

52 Van Erkel, *De Koninklijke Porceleyne Fles*, 24-5 and M. Smit and S. Lambooy, 'Royal Delft. Van Willem en Mary tot Willem-Alexander en Máxima', in: Idem, eds, *Koninklijk Blauw*, 249-51.

53 R.D. Aronson and C. Ariaans, 'John F. Loudon's Collection', in: Idem, *Below the glaze. Delftware in short stories*, volume 2 (Amsterdam, 2020), 179.

54 T.M. Eliëns, 'Mr. A.H.H. van der Burgh: een negentiende-eeuwse verzamelaar', in: M.S. van Aken-Fehmers et al., *Delfts aardewerk. Geschiedenis van een nationaal product*, volume 1 (The Hague-Zwolle, 1999), 9-11; [K. Duysters,] *Delfts aardewerk uit de collectie van Museum Arnhem. De verzameling van W.F.K. baron van Verschuer*, special issue *Vormen uit Vuur*, 229 (2015) (for the red teapots: 32-41).

55 F. Fétis, *Musée royal d'antiquités et d'armures. Catalogue des collections de poteries, faiences et porcelaines (Moyen-Age et Temps Modernes)* (Brussels, 1882) (for the Delftware collection: 45-9). For the acclaim, see *inter al.* the review in *L'Art moderne. Revue critique des Arts et de la Littérature* 2 (1882), 194-6; see also L. Nys, *De intrede van het publiek. Museumbezoek in België 1830-1914* (Leuven, 2012), 243-4. For a biographical sketch of Fétis: G. Gouellain, 'Préface', in: *Catalogue des faiences anciennes des diverses fabriques françaises, hollandaises, belges, espagnoles, italiennes, orientales, allemandes, danoises, suédoises, etc. [...] composant l'importante collection de feu M. Frédéric Fétis de Bruxelles* (Paris, 1887), 7-16; for Fétis's Delftware pieces, see this catalogue, 33-42.

Fig. 3. A small blue and white openwork Delftware bowl with chinoiserie from the *Collection de Ramaix*, circa 1670 (private coll.)



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assemble a collection that exceeded the Loudon collection in both size and quality. His collection also included a number of ceramic pieces from Arnhem and Rotterdam.⁵⁶

At the end of the nineteenth century, Fétis and Evenepoel were followed by a second generation of ceramic collectors in Belgium. This new collecting community included the likes of Fernand Maskens, Gustave Vermeersch and Count Louis Cavens (who is the focus of another article in this special issue).⁵⁷ De Ramaix now joined this community. He had become acquainted with Delft pottery as a diplomat in The Hague, had described and assessed the new production, and had seen old pieces again at the Universal Exhibition in Antwerp. His noble aspirations had taken shape in admission to the peerage, assurances of distinguished ancestry and a castle that had by now been restored. The *Collection de Ramaix* of Delftware would add a new element to this, yet another performance of ‘noble habitus’ (fig. 3).

It is difficult to estimate the exact size of this collection, which would become famous among collectors. De Ramaix used different property marks – a red wax seal and various labels – but also did not affix any property mark to a number of pieces, and the eventful history of the collection and of its distribution and dispersal makes it hard to delineate. Nor is it easy to say where De Ramaix bought his pieces. Around the turn of the century, there was an international network of antique dealers for Delftware – The Hague, Brussels, Paris, London, Berlin – and it also regularly came

56 A brief outline of this collection is provided in V. Montens, ‘The Evenepoel Collection at the Art & History Museum in Brussels’, in: R.D. Aronson and C. Ariaans, *Delftware Collections*, volume 1: *Exotic delicacies, flower vases & menagerie* (Amsterdam, 2021), 86-7.

57 On Cavens see: C. Gauthier, ‘Aux origines des collections du Musée de la Ville. Le cas de deux mécènes, Louis Cavens et Jules Vandevoorde’, *Cahiers bruxellois. Revue d’Histoire urbaine – Brusselse Cahiers. Tijdschrift voor Stadsgeschiedenis* 48 (2016), 185-206.

up at auction houses such as Drouot, but the exact provenance of collections (such as that of the Roman Count Charles Lair⁵⁸) remains difficult to trace.

As far as antique dealers are concerned, De Ramaix certainly bought from local businesses such as Van Herck in Antwerp, who was known to be very influential in shaping tastes and preferences in the world of antiques.⁵⁹ Did he also buy internationally? He will certainly have got to know the antique dealers in The Hague from his time there. In the years when De Ramaix was attached to the Belgian legation, there were some thirty ‘antiquities merchants and shops’ (in addition to the ‘art dealers’), a number of whom also sold Delftware.⁶⁰ When the collection of antique dealer Joseph Monchen was auctioned off by Frederik Muller in Amsterdam in 1907, it too was found to feature plenty of Delftware, including a large, lidded vase by Jacob Wemmersz. Hoppesteyn, a pair of multicoloured parrots and a spittoon. Monchen may have offered such pieces for sale earlier.⁶¹

120 Did De Ramaix buy at auctions? It is certainly possible. His papers include the catalogue from the auction of the extensive art collection of the Catholic senator, diplomat and horticulturist François de Cannart d’Hamale in 1890. At this five-day auction, held in the deceased’s house in Mechelen, an extensive collection of European faïence was sold in addition to Chinese, Japanese and European porcelain. Among this was forty lots of Delftware, including chargers, plates, jugs and vases. De Ramaix certainly showed an interest in the collection of a man with whom he must have felt a professional and political affinity.⁶²

The question of *what* De Ramaix collected can be answered with more certainty. An annex to the 1920 marriage contract of his son Gaston provides the necessary information (in addition to less detailed lists that have been drawn up in the recent past with a view to the distribution and sale of a number of items).⁶³ It shows that De Ramaix preferred Delft Blue from the last quarter of the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century, in accordance with the standard set by Havard in 1878: the

58 See Chr. Lahaussais and A. Fay-Hallé, *Une collection d’exception. Les céramiques du Château-Musée de Saumur* (Dijon, 2017), 8-13 (on Delftware: 210-29).

59 This is clear from the label (‘Van Herck – 210 fr – 1903’) on the Delft Blue puzzle jug from 1737 that was sold at the Rob Michiels auction house in Bruges on 6 December 2019.

60 *Adresboek voor ’s-Gravenhage, Scheveningen, Loosduinen, Rijswijk en Voorburg* 33 (1884-1885), unpaginated.

61 *Catalogue de la collection d’antiquités formée par M.-Joseph Monchen à La Haye* (Amsterdam, 1907), 1-6 (see the copy, supplemented with prices, from the F. Lugt Library in The Hague, RKD – Netherlands Institute for Art History, no. 200708542).

62 Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix, R12, de Meester bundle, Geelhand-de Terwagne: Catalogue de porcelaines, faiences, objets d’art, curiosités, orfèvreries, monnaies, bois sculptés, buis, bronzes, meubles artistiques, livres concernant les arts, tableaux formant le cabinet bien connu de feu M. de Cannart d’Hamale, sénateur* (Mechelen, 1890), 31-3. The bundle also contains a biographical brochure about the deceased, written by Victor van Hoorenbeeck (1890).

63 Brussels, KBF, *Grune: Annex to the marriage contract of G. de Ramaix and M.-L. Descantons de Montblanc* (concluded on 4 May 1920), 6 May 1920.

further the eighteenth century progressed, the clearer it became that the *grande époque* of Delftware was over. The pieces De Ramaix went for were at once simple and subtle, not complex or ‘bizarre’. Within these parameters, diversity prevailed: the *Collection de Ramaix* included – among other items – plates, bowls, baskets, fruit tests, candlesticks, a teapot, tulip vases, brush backs, a piggy bank, spittoons and, of course, a garniture.⁶⁴ They were made at factories such as *Het Moriaanshoof*t, *De Grieksche A*, *De Metaale Pot* and *De Dubbelde Schenkan*.

A prominent place in the collection was occupied by the plaques. De Ramaix owned a whole series of these *porceleyne schilderijen* (‘porcelain paintings’). They had diverse decorative schemes: bouquets, armorials, landscapes, pastoral scenes, genre scenes, chinoiserie, historical or historicising subjects, Biblical scenes. Thus, a pipe-smoking Turk appeared next to the Last Supper.⁶⁵ Unlike the pieces just mentioned, these plaques were often multicoloured, some in Cashmere style, and others in Kakiemon style; the shape and dimensions varied.⁶⁶ It is clear from the 1920 document that many of these pieces were expensive.

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The collection contained a number of more valuable pieces, so that the overall quality was above average. These pieces included an exceptional dish, dating from around 1680, by Jacob Wemmersz. Hoppestejn with a scene from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (the myth of Diana and Actaeon), a pair of large oval wine coolers by Adrianus Kocx of ‘De Grieksche A’ dating from around 1690 and a pair of salt bowls with Chinese scenes (and pseudo-Chinese characters), also by Adrianus Kocx, dating from around 1700.⁶⁷ De Ramaix also owned, for example, a blue-and-white spittoon from the first half of the eighteenth century with exotic scenes from the tobacco harvest, and an unusual blue-and-white box with polychrome chestnuts, whose exact function remains unclear, made by ‘De Porceleyne Byl’ in the eighteenth century.⁶⁸

The most striking piece in the collection, however, was a blue and white bird cage from around 1720, which was recently sold at Aronson in Amsterdam (fig. 4). Such

64 On the popularity of these Delft ornamental display sets: R.D. Aronson and B. Abraham, *In the eye of the beholder. Perspectives on Dutch Delftware* (Amsterdam, 2011), 64-6: “‘Tot Oogen Lust en Pronkery’ – Dutch Delftware garnitures”. See more generally: P.F. Ferguson, *Garnitures. Vase sets from National Trust houses* (London, 2016).

65 Both of these plaques were auctioned at Michiels on 6 December 2019.

66 On Delft plaques, see the short outline by Chr. Lahaussais, ‘De decoratieve wandplaat. Een in de achttiende eeuw begeerd wanddecor’, in: Idem, ed., *Delfts aardewerk* (Brussels-Amsterdam, 2008), 156-61 and R.D. Aronson and S.M.R. Lambooy, *Dutch Delftware. Plaques: a blueprint of Delft* (Amsterdam, 2008-2009). For an interesting set of examples: Guy Blazy, *Les plaques en faïence de Delft* (Saint-Omer, 1989).

67 R.D. Aronson and C. Ariaans, *Tulips, oysters and choux pastry. Recent acquisitions* (Amsterdam, 2022), 8-9; R.D. Aronson, C. Ariaans and S. Serra, *Nijstad Collection. Highlights from the Morpurgo Collection and other recent acquisitions* (Amsterdam, 2017), 38-41 and R.D. Aronson, C. Ariaans and S. Serra, *Tangible memories. The Mr. & Mrs. H.C. Bout Collection, the Gaston de Ramaix Collection and other recent acquisitions* (Amsterdam, 2018), 35-7.

68 Auctioned at Michiels on 3 February 2018 and 6 December 2019.



Fig. 4. A Delft Blue bird cage with yellow birds, one of the showpieces of the *Collection de Ramaix*, circa 1720 / circa 1760 (private coll.)

birdcages were rare; Evenepoel also had one in his collection. De Ramaix's piece was decorated in part with floral motifs and chinoiserie representations, and testified in particular to the fascination with exotic animals, including birds, in the early modern Republic, where the Dutch East India Company supplied animals for the new menageries. However, bird cages at the time also had various symbolic – including erotic – meanings. The piece by De Ramaix owed its exceptional character in part to the addition – in around 1760 – of four yellow birds in the previously empty cage, enhancing the desired *trompe l'oeil* effect.⁶⁹

The purchase of this bird cage shows that De Ramaix's preference for (relative-ly) early blue and white pottery from Delft was not exclusive: the collection also con-

⁶⁹ Aronson and Ariaans, *Delftware collections*, I, 3 and 71-5. In the 1920 document, the piece's value was estimated at 2000 francs, making it the most valuable piece in the collection together with the garniture (2500 francs). For Evenepoel's piece: J. Helbig, *Faïences hollandaises XVIIe – XVIIIe – début XIXe s.*, II: *Pièces non marquées* (Brussels, n.d.), 131 and 133.

tained a number of moulded pieces, often polychrome, from the second half of the eighteenth century. An example of this was a small tureen by *De Dubbelde Schenkan*, the lid of which represented a plaice, with carefully modelled scales and fins, and with a handle in the shape of a crayfish on the back.⁷⁰ Such pieces illustrated the development of style and taste in the course of the eighteenth century. The penchant for the spectacular that they sometimes reflected contrasted with the reserve usually attributed to the De Ramaix family.

De Ramaix thus built up a collection of art objects. This put him on the same level as the noble diplomats he had known in The Hague and the eminent families from the genealogical networks he had constructed. His Delftware collection both stimulated his social ascent and brought it into view. Thus, art gave the new nobility in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the longed-for prestige. De Ramaix's collection also illustrated the role that the *collectionneurs nobles* continued to play in the history of collecting.

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A bohemian in London

Maurice de Ramaix died in 1918. Since 1913 he had led a withdrawn existence at Grune Castle, in poor health and disconnected from politics by the Great War.⁷¹ At that time, the historic Delftware was already finding its way into museums, which of course said much about its status. Part of Fétis's collection had already been acquired by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London in 1887. Van der Burgh bequeathed his collection to the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague, where it was actually housed in 1904. In 1911, the Evenepoel collection found a home in the Royal Museums of Decorative and Industrial Art (in 1912 renamed the *Musée du Cinquantenaire*) in Brussels. Finally, Loudon's collection – and hence too De la Villestreux's – entered the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam in 1916. The noble collections assembled in the previous decades thus became the basis of the major museums' faïence collections.

The *Collection de Ramaix* did not go to a museum. After Maurice de Ramaix's death, it was divided between his four children: Gaston, Marie and Amaury from his marriage to Cécile de Meester and Hedwige from his marriage to Marie Suermondt. The eldest son, Gaston, was born in Brussels in 1878. He now assumed the title of Roman count, and – especially in his later years – presented himself as such. He also inherited his father's taste for collecting.

Like the first Roman count, Gaston de Ramaix had become a diplomat. The corps he joined had by now acquired a more democratic character, but the De Ramaix case shows how diplomacy remained a matter for noble families in the first half of the

⁷⁰ Aronson, Ariaans and Serra, *Tangible memories*, 104.

⁷¹ See Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R10, *Notes de Gaston de Ramaix à Londres en 1914-1918*: M. de Ramaix to G. de Ramaix, 30 August 1916.

twentieth century: under the approving eye of his father, Gaston's brother Amaury held diplomatic posts in Berlin, Bucharest, Lisbon and elsewhere.⁷² Gaston's career started in 1902, when he was admitted to the corps as an *attaché de légation*. After a first post in Berlin, he went to Mexico in 1906. These were formative years that De Ramaix would always remember: he studied the country's economy, was impressed by its cultural diversity and decided to marry the young American Grace Bell, although this ultimately came to nothing.⁷³

In 1909 De Ramaix relocated to London. He would have preferred to go to Rome, but an attempt – with the help of his father – to gain an appointment there had failed. Nevertheless, London was an interesting and important posting: the city was more attractive to many diplomats than, for example, Paris or Vienna, while the Belgian colonial and other interests, looked after under the leadership of the experienced Count Charles de Lalaing at the heart of the British empire, were considerable. Due to the war, De Ramaix remained in London for ten years, much longer than customary, during which time he ascended the diplomatic ladder. In 1917 there was talk of an appointment in Peking.⁷⁴

De Ramaix enjoyed life in the international diplomatic milieu in London, as his father had done in The Hague, but he combined this professional sociability with the exploration of the city's artistic circles. Foremost among these were the artists whom, initially at least, he met as a diplomat: the Belgian painters and other artists who had gone into exile in England (and Wales) as a result of the war in their own country.⁷⁵ This artists' colony included the visual artists Emile Claus, Jules de Bruycker, Ferdinand Giele, Julien Celos and Victor Rousseau and the composer and cellist Maurice

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72 For the diplomatic careers of Gaston and Amaury de Ramaix, see the personnel files in Brussels, Diplomatic Archives of the FPS Foreign Affairs, Pers. Ext 273, 397 and 1311. For Gaston's career, see also: Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R10: *Carrière Diplomatique I* and *Carrière Diplomatique II* folders. For the shifts (and conflicts) in the Belgian diplomatic corps during this period: M. Auwers, 'Les tensions au sein du corps diplomatique belge à la veille de la Conférence de la Paix', in: M. Dumoulin and C. Lanneau, eds, *La Belgique et les traités de paix. De Versailles à Sèvres (1919-1920)* (Brussels, 2021), 41-53. More generally: V. Genin, M. Osmont and Th. Raineau, eds, *Réinventer la diplomatie / Reshaping Diplomacy. Sociabilités, réseaux et pratiques diplomatiques en Europe depuis 1919 / Networks, practices and dynamics of socialization in European diplomacy since 1919* (Brussels-Paris-Bern, 2016).

73 See the documents and photos in Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R8, showing that De Ramaix continued to give lectures (*avec projections*) on 'Le Mexique pittoresque et artistique et ses races anciennes' until the 1930s. For his affair with the *jolie blonde*, a niece of the inventor of the telephone, see the confidential communication from De Ramaix's superior in Mexico (20 June 1908) in Brussels, Diplomatic Archives of the FPS Foreign Affairs, Pers. Ext 1311.

74 Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R10: *Diplomatie Londres* and *Notes de Gaston de Ramaix à Londres en 1914-1918* folders.

75 C. Verdickt, 'Belgian Artists in Wales, 1914-1918', in: O. Fairclough, R. Hoozee and C. Verdickt, eds, *Art in exile. Flanders, Wales and the First World War* (Antwerp, 2002), 51-77 and Idem, 'My heart is sore about brave Belgium. Artistic exodus: Belgian refugee artists in Great Britain during the Great War', in: I. Rossi-Schrimpf and L. Kollwelter, eds, *14/18: Rupture or continuity. Belgian art around World War I* (Leuven, 2018), 111-24. See also more generally A. Carre et al., *14/18. Belgische kunstenaars tussen ballingschap en melancholie* (Elsene, [2015]).

Dambois. De Ramaix supported them in their needs in a country where there was great solidarity with ‘brave little Belgium’. In return they gave him guidance on art and the art trade, pointing out interesting opportunities to him.⁷⁶

But De Ramaix also spent time with other artists in London before and during the War. These included the unconventional Victoria Sackville-West, one of the seven illegitimate children of British diplomat Lionel Sackville-West and Spanish dancer Pepita de Oliva, the popular writer Hall Caine and Gwladys Robinson, Marchioness of Ripon, who had been closely associated with Oscar Wilde (*A Woman of No Importance* was dedicated to her in 1893), as well as the Russian dancer and choreographer Vaslav Nijinsky and his compatriot the impresario Sergei Diaghilev.⁷⁷ In this modern world, De Ramaix was not only a diplomat, but also a bohemian.

Mise-en-scène in the castle

The death of his father at the end of the war marked a turning point in De Ramaix's life: he exchanged the cosmopolitan and contemporary bustle of the metropolis for a withdrawn existence focused on the past. The son now succeeded the father. Just as Maurice de Ramaix had not left the castle in Grune in the last years of his life, Gaston de Ramaix now chose this same castle, deep in the Ardennes, over the townhouse he owned in Brussels. Grune became his primary residence from an administrative viewpoint in 1921.⁷⁸ The bohemian now became the lord of the manor, the Roman count who was treated with respect in the village, where he saw to the building of a parish hall.⁷⁹

De Ramaix also became a family man. When his brother Amaury married in 1916 (to a Dutchwoman born in Paris), his father thought the time was right to give him some marriage advice. He assured him – De Ramaix was approaching forty – that it was not too late to get married, but above all urged him to choose carefully: it was better to marry a woman who was experienced than one who was too young.⁸⁰ Four years later, in 1920, rather than the American woman from Washington De Ramaix married the high-born Marie-Louise Descantons de Montblanc, who was fifteen years his junior. She came from a Catholic noble family which was politically active. The couple went on to have seven children (fig. 5).

De Ramaix's professional career now also changed direction. Immediately after

⁷⁶ See the correspondence between De Ramaix and these artists that was sold at the auction house Morel de Westgaver (Brussels) on 20 October 2018.

⁷⁷ See also the correspondence sold at Morel de Westgaver on 20 October 2018.

⁷⁸ Arlon, State Archives, BE AÉA, *Archives de la commune de Grune*, RPG 10: *Registre de la population, Année 1921*, fol. 111.

⁷⁹ De Walque, *Grune*, 29-30 (see also Grune, Personal documentation of Luc de Walque, *Grune Histoire II*).

⁸⁰ See Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R10, *Notes de Gaston de Ramaix à Londres en 1914-1918*: M. de Ramaix to G. de Ramaix, 4 June 1916.



Fig. 5. Photograph of Gaston de Ramaix with his two sons, Arnould and Paul, in the park at Grune castle, undated (*Brussels, King Baudouin Foundation, coll. Grune*)

the war, he was entrusted with a diplomatic mission to Prague to strengthen ties with the authorities of the new Czechoslovak Republic. This was his last foreign posting. From 1919 he only held positions in Brussels, not as a politician like his father, but at the Foreign Ministry. He was variously chief of staff to the minister and head of the General Directorate of Politics and Trade. When he was offered the post of ambassador in The Hague in 1926, he turned it down: family and business interests required him to remain in Belgium.⁸¹ Three years later, health problems forced him to resign at the age of just over fifty. His diplomatic career was over.

In Grune, De Ramaix developed his own version of the preoccupations that had long been characteristic of the nobility. There was his interest in nature: the count loved his estate and his park, which not only gave him status, but also peace. And there was also the past: like so many noblemen (and noblewomen), De Ramaix devoted himself to history, traditions and the historical heritage. In the 1930s, as an amateur historian, he conducted research into various aspects of local and regional

⁸¹ Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R10, *Carrière Diplomatique II*: G. de Ramaix to Minister of Foreign Affairs E. Vandervelde, 21 October 1926.

history. This led to a series of minor publications – the author himself referred to them as *miettes*, ‘crumbs’ – in *La Croix de Nassogne et de Grune* and to an edition of a lost medieval charter.⁸²

But De Ramaix’s own family history was of even greater interest to him. This too was a recurring fixture in the mental repertoire of the nobility and remained so in the twentieth century. The importance of the family had been impressed upon De Ramaix by his father, who in the dark war years wrote to him, when he was still in London, twice and with great emphasis, what amounted to a statement of final wishes: do not forget that money (*l’argent*) can be gained and lost, but that blood, family and parents (*le sang, la famille, les parents*) are never lost.⁸³ This expressed a lived hierarchy of values which was intended to form the basis of a social division: the *no-blese* differed fundamentally from the *nouveaux riches*. However, it also showed how quickly – in barely one generation – the new *jonkheren* felt themselves to be the representatives of an old nobility.

Gaston de Ramaix was convinced. With the help of archivists, he continued his father’s genealogical research, displaying an almost obsessive zeal in his attempt to trace the French branches of the family, for example.⁸⁴ With equal precision, he collected everything that documented what had happened to the family in his own time. Birth cards, marriage announcements, school reports, certificates, diplomas, menus, newspaper clippings and obituaries were all collected in a family archive, which also included monumental albums of family photos.⁸⁵ Such an archive, curated by the family itself, was an important institution in the world of the nobility. It was the object of repeated consultation.

As well as history, there was art, which had given the family a noble status. The contemporary artists whose acquaintance De Ramaix had made in London had disappeared from view, just as the parties of the Marchioness of Ripon were mere memories. What remained was the collection of Delftware that De Ramaix had inherited from his father – the candlesticks, the plaques, the birdcage. It is unclear whether the new lord of the manor added further to this in the 1920s and 1930s. A family of seven children imposed financial constraints and the old Delft faïence remained expensive. In any case the *Collection de Ramaix* (or at least this part of it) was not sold. When Gaston de Ramaix died, the Delftware pieces in the declaration of estate were valued at a substantial total of 25,000 francs.⁸⁶

At the same time as this estate declaration, an inventory of De Ramaix’s posses-

⁸² See the material in Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R8.

⁸³ See Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R10, *Notes de Gaston de Ramaix à Londres en 1914-1918*: M. de Ramaix to G. de Ramaix, 4 June 1916 and 30 August 1916.

⁸⁴ See the material in Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R8 and R9.

⁸⁵ See the material in Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix*, R3, R4 and R8.

⁸⁶ Brussels, KBF, *Grune: Déclaration de succession de Messire Gaston de Ramaix – Château de Grune*, 24 December 1937.



Fig. 6. The diningroom in the castle at Grune, with several Delftware pieces, in Maurice de Ramaix's album *Château de Grune 1895* (privately owned)

sions was also drawn up at the time of his death. This document provides a detailed overview of the pillars of the family's wealth: the bonds, shares and other securities and real estate. The inventory also includes a description of the contents of the castle in Grune, room by room. This makes it possible to gain insight into the arrangement of the Delft pieces – an important point, as is clear from the carefully considered placement of such pieces in the state apartments and other public and private rooms of William and Mary, for example. De Ramaix seems to have arranged his Delftware collection in a concentrated fashion. The description lists pottery in two rooms: the castle's *salon d'entrée*, where Delftware was also displayed in specially designed furniture, and the large salon looking out onto the park.⁸⁷ These were probably the most representative rooms of the *château* (fig. 6).⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Brussels, KBF, *Grune: Inventaire succession de Messire Gaston de Ramaix – Château de Grune*, 12 August 1937.

⁸⁸ However, photographic material in several albums (Brussels, KBF, *Grune* and privately owned) sug-

However, De Ramaix did not only have Delftware on display. He combined this with a large collection of drawings and prints produced in both the Southern and Northern Netherlands between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. These were mainly biblical and mythological scenes, genre pieces and landscapes. Maurice de Ramaix had already bought such drawings and prints, in large numbers, and his eldest son inherited a considerable number of them. The annex to the marriage contract of Gaston de Ramaix and Marie-Louise Descantons de Montblanc which was mentioned earlier and which dates from 1920, two years after the death of Maurice de Ramaix, mentions 130 drawings and watercolours worth 3000 francs and over four hundred prints worth 4000 francs.⁸⁹

Gaston de Ramaix expanded this into a fine collection. The drawings included work by artists such as Hendrick van Cleve III, Hans Bol, Marten de Cock, a follower of David Vinckboons and Jan Michiel Rijsbrack.⁹⁰ Pieter Bruegel the Elder was among the artists represented in the prints, with examples from his long collaboration with the Antwerp publisher Hieronymus Cock.⁹¹ The collection gave De Ramaix something of a reputation among other collectors, in the museum world and among researchers. The Austrian art historian Erica Tietze-Conrat, who herself published on Renaissance art and on drawings of the Venetian School, mentioned him in her diary.⁹²

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The combination of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Delftware with early modern drawings and prints, together with furniture and other objects in the castle interior, was intended to make possible a *mise-en-scène*, to evoke and recreate a world from the past. In fact, the collections were supposed to bring about a re-enactment, a reliving of the past in all its fullness, separately from – and perhaps sometimes at odds with – the contemporary world. This turned the Delftware collection into more than a collection of expensive and sought-after artworks whose purpose was to burnish the family's reputation. The pieces from the *Collection de Ramaix* were also a crucial element in the assemblage of a historical world, anchoring the noble prestige that was aspired to in a tangible and persuasive reality.⁹³ De Ramaix created his own 'Golden Age' in Grune.

gests that a few pieces of Delft faïence were also displayed in the castle's dining room, for example.

⁸⁹ Brussels, KBF, *Grune*: Annex to the marriage contract of G. de Ramaix and M.-L. Descantons de Montblanc (concluded on 4 May 1920), 6 May 1920.

⁹⁰ See the sales of drawings from the collection of Gaston de Ramaix at Sotheby's (New York) on 29 January 2014 and at the Henri Godts auction house (Brussels) on 9 December 2014, 17 March 2015, 16 June 2015 and 22 March 2016.

⁹¹ V. d'Haene et al., *InDRUKwekkend. Nieuwe topstukken uit het Brugse Prentenkabinet* (extra no. *Museumbulletin*) (Bruges, 2017), 30-3.

⁹² E. Tietze-Conrat, *Tagebücher (1937-1938)*, volume 2: *Mit den Mitteln der Disziplin*, ed. A. Caruso (Vienna-Cologne-Weimar, 2015), 48. In 1935 De Ramaix acted as vice president of the section 'Gravures – Manuscrits – Livres et Reliures' of the Brussels World Exhibition.

⁹³ See A. Dion-Tenenbaum and A. Gay-Mazuel, eds, *Revivals. L'historicisme dans les arts décoratifs français au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 2020).

He was not exceptional in this, however. Other collectors also sought to present a world from the past with their faïence collection. They built historic period rooms (as had happened on a large scale in ‘Old Antwerp’ at the Universal Exhibition of 1894), in which they and their guests imagined themselves to be in the past. The Danish architect and art collector Jørgen Wilhelm Frohne, for example, had already shown his predilection for such historical *mises-en-scène* in his home in Copenhagen, where he combined his extensive collection of Delftware and German stoneware with old furniture, silverware and other historical artworks to create settings from which the contemporary age was almost completely excluded.⁹⁴ In the case of De Ramaix, this fondness for *mise-en-scène* contributed to a high degree to the legendary status that his Delftware collection acquired.

130 But how extensive was this *mise-en-scène* in Grune castle? Did it really create the ‘Golden Age’ there? De Ramaix’s staging was definitely much less insistent than, for example, the neo-Gothic *Gesamtkunstwerk* created by Baron Charles van Caloen together with his wife Savina de Gourcy Serainchamps in Loppem near Bruges in the 1860s. This Catholic, strictly religious politician did not assemble his Christian medieval world in an existing castle, but had a brand new ‘medieval’ castle constructed. Every element in it – every room, every piece of furniture, every painting, every stained-glass window, every chandelier, every fireplace tile – contributed to a complete illusion. Van Caloen therefore did not collect any Delftware or other historical pottery (although he did have a small collection of early modern stoneware and several eighteenth-century Delftware and Frisian pieces). He preferred to have a Bruges craftsman make coffee cups with typical Puginian motifs, which corresponded in all points to the ‘medieval’ aesthetic. Everything had to radiate the same ‘medieval’ spirit, and nothing was allowed to break the illusion.⁹⁵

De Ramaix’s Delftware collection could not create such a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, not even in combination with drawings and prints from the same period. The castle interior remained heterogeneous in character, blending historical objects, traditional bourgeois furniture and modern comforts. In short, the interior was eclectic, a term that had already been used by a visitor in 1913 to characterise the interior of Maurice de Ramaix’s Antwerp *hôtel*.⁹⁶ What came about in Grune was not the homogeneous recreation of a world from the past, but what has been referred to in the context of the Museum Mayer van den Bergh in Antwerp as a ‘historical-atmospheric’ spirit.

94 U. Houkjær, *Tin-glazed earthenware from the Netherlands, France and Germany 1600-1800. Catalogue of the Collection Designmuseum Danmark* (s.l., 2016), 32-4. For Frohne’s ceramics collection: A. Pabst, *Den keramiske Samlung Frohne i København* (Copenhagen, 1902).

95 V. van Caloen, J.F. van Clevén and J. Braet, *Het Kasteel van Loppem* (Oostkamp, 2001) (for the cups by the glass artist Samuel Coucke: 87 and 102-3; for the ceramics, see the contribution of S. Vandenberghe on the applied arts in Loppem, 197-9).

96 Arlon, SA, *Fam. de Ramaix, R6: Généalogie & documents*, Annexes 5: R. d’Artois, ‘Comte Maurice de Ramaix’, *Le Constitutionnel*, 28 June 1913.

Henriëtte Mayer van den Bergh had created a place in 1904 where the art collection of her son, who died young, could be displayed in rooms in which historical accuracy was less important than a sense of ‘authenticity’.⁹⁷ Grune was steeped in the past.

Coda: Set adrift

Gaston de Ramaix’s death in 1937 ushered in the slow decline of this noble world that had been built up over two generations with history and art. The new war that broke out several years later initially forced the widow and her seven children to flee. Subsequently, in the cellars of the castle occupied by German soldiers and officers, they were compelled to lead what one of the daughters described in her diary – with one of the family’s customary religious metaphors – as ‘a life in the catacombs’.⁹⁸ At the end of the war, in 1945, the unthinkable happened: the castle was hit by shells and then set on fire; the same diary described it as a *vision dantesque*.⁹⁹ The result was catastrophic: the castle was left in ruins.¹⁰⁰

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For decades, the life of the De Ramaix family was then dominated by the castle’s restoration, which took place with the financial support of, but sometimes also in protracted arguments with, the *Dommages de Guerre aux Biens* service of the Ministry of Reconstruction.¹⁰¹ The *comtesse* ruled in an often authoritarian manner, while the family groaned and grew impoverished under the task of restoration.¹⁰² After the death of Marie-Louise Descantons de Montblanc in 1986, her son Paul de Ramaix, born in 1929, came to the fore. The early death of his older brother had made him the next Roman count. He too lived on in Grune, accompanied in the summer by two of his sisters, who then moved into an apartment in the rebuilt gatehouse. When Paul de Ramaix, who remained a bachelor, died in 2016, the castle was left to the King Baudouin Foundation.

The *Collection de Ramaix* had survived through all this. At the start of the war, the precious and of course fragile pieces had been brought to safety in time.¹⁰³ The collection subsequently remained in the family. When the *comtesse* died, it was divided among the five surviving children, but an important part of it remained in Grune,

⁹⁷ Müller, *At home in a museum* 125.

⁹⁸ Brussels, KBF, *Grune*: H. de Ramaix, *Offensive des Ardennes. Notes de Guerre. 16 décembre 1944-16 janvier 1945*, entry for 27 December 1944.

⁹⁹ Brussels, KBF, *Grune*: H. de Ramaix, *Offensive des Ardennes. Notes de Guerre. 16 décembre 1944-16 janvier 1945*, entry for 5 January 1945. Cf. also the diary of a witness in Grune, Personal documentation of Luc de Walque, *Grune Histoire II*: R. van der Straten Waillet, *Sous l’occupation allemande durant l’offensive ‘Von Rundstedt’*, entry for 5 January 1945.

¹⁰⁰ See *inter al.* the photographic material in Brussels, KBF, *Grune*.

¹⁰¹ For the difficult restoration process, see the many documents in Brussels, KBF, *Grune* and Arlon, State Archive, BE AÉA, *Archives Dommages de Guerre*, doss. 7027719 and doss. 7027721.

¹⁰² In this connection see the telling letter from Gaston de Ramaix’s eldest daughter Denyse to her mother, 12 February 1956, in Brussels, KBF, *Grune*.

¹⁰³ See Brussels, KBF, *Grune*: abbé Parmentier to M.-L. Descantons de Montblanc, 26 July 1940.

and Paul de Ramaix also bought new Delftware pieces. Unlike his father, he did not arrange the collection in a concentrated way in the castle. On the contrary, he spread the pieces over several rooms (from the hall to the billiards room), while his two sisters also displayed the pieces they had inherited in their apartment in the gatehouse.

But the world in which the *Collection de Ramaix* in Grune continued to exist was changing rapidly, and the collection's function and meaning were altering with it. Its origins lay in the need to acquire noble status, but the Delftware pieces now increasingly represented the desire to preserve an old, disappearing world – or the memory of it. In the face of the powerlessness to rebuild the family castle, the Delft pieces were able to maintain their enchanting quality: in a modern, materialistic world, their patina evoked an era of beauty and distinction. Thus, they remained what the editors have called in their introduction to this special issue 'symbolically charged material markers' – not, however, of a new cultural practice or of recently acquired social capital, but of a nostalgic attempt to shore up the owners' aristocratic world. Ironically, this happened at a time when the most important Delft Blue collections were being built up by wealthy industrialists. In the Netherlands, Loudon's successors included Anton Philips and Frederik Hendrik Fentener van Vlissingen.

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This development could not be stopped in Grune either. After the death of Paul de Ramaix, the last Roman count, the Delft faïence was further divided up within the family and dispersed. Pieces offered for sale by family members found their way by various routes into the art trade in Belgium, Northern France, the Netherlands and England, from where they entered other private collections. The drawings and prints collected by Maurice and Gaston de Ramaix were also set adrift, bringing to an end a long cherished noble tradition that belonged to a world that had run out of steam and seemed at odds with its own time.

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Dossier Aristocratic collecting practices in Belgium and the Netherlands (ca. 1780-1950)

Aristocratic collecting practices in Belgium and the Netherlands (c. 1780-1950).

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