



Edited by
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Arenberg

BREPOLS

ARENBERG: PORTRAIT OF A FAMILY, STORY OF A COLLECTION

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On the jacket

(front) Anthony van Dyck, *Equestrian Portrait
of Albert of Ligne, Prince of Arenberg and Barbançon*,
before 1629? (detail). Oil on canvas, 305 × 226 cm.
The Earl of Leicester, Holkham Estate, Norfolk;
(back) Kehinde Wiley, *Duc d'Arenberg (Duke of
Arenberg)*, 2011. Oil on canvas, 275 × 230 cm.
Private collection © Kehinde Wiley.
Courtesy of Sean Kelly, New York

Frontispiece

Charles of Arenberg (1550–1616) in an album
containing eighteen portraits of the Arenberg and
Croÿ families, c. 1600 (detail). Leather binding,
gouache, watercolour and ink on parchment,
372 × 232 × c. 13 mm. Private collection

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Preface

This publication on the occasion of the exhibition of the art collection of the House of Arenberg is much more than a beautiful book about the exceptional works, collected from across the world, that belonged to and were connected with the Arenberg lineage. The exhibition reaches beyond the walls of M – Museum Leuven and Leuven University Library. A range of cultural, artistic and historical initiatives seeks to direct the attention of as broad a public as possible to the building blocks of European identity, which have been piled one upon another over the centuries. The successful completion of this project is in largest part thanks to the inspiration, effort and dedication of Duke Leopold of Arenberg, his family and his staff.

The Arenberg lineage played an exceptional role in Europe, especially in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They did this by exercising political and cultural influence across large parts of the European continent. The university town of Leuven was not the least of the places that benefited lastingly from the support of the Arenberg family; and continues to benefit today. Arenberg Castle and the surrounding park, put to good use by the KU Leuven as a university campus, is one of the most impressive instances of this.

The Arenbergs were leaders in cross-border multiculturalism; co-operation across Europe was facilitated by transforming multiculturalism into interculturalism. This social task is exceptionally topical again today. The Arenbergs were integrating Europe before there was any thought of a European Union. The trans- and multinational influence of the Arenberg family with its many branches provides historical evidence that borders were never absolute.

Furthermore, the chapter of European history that the current exhibition and the accompanying publication illuminate has an important bearing on how we make sense of our past, and of ourselves. Events, certainly historic events, also have their meanings. Our focus here is on a period of time that is significant because it underlines that Europe is not only a geographical continent but also a human society in search of common

values. European values are strongly emphasized today, in part because they are so appealing.

L'occident n'est pas un accident is more than a historical observation. It is also an inspiring message. And this quality goes back to valuable attempts undertaken by enlightened minds and determined pioneers in our own European past. That is a story in which the Arenbergs played an important role. Four principles turned out to be particularly significant for the future. A first priority was the promotion of sufficient sense of community among the common people. This, through trial and error, would eventually lead to the growth of democratic institutions. Secondly, the fundamental principles of the rule of law gradually needed licking into shape. Then free trade, a market economy and the free movement of people had to be promoted at a European level. And finally, care had to be taken for the quality of life, the battle against poverty, the organization of education – including higher education – and supporting culture in all its expressions. In this last regard, a number of Dukes and Princes of Arenberg made themselves particularly useful. Centuries ago they were providing materials that now help to shape the European model.

Our world is now becoming a village under the pressure of successive scientific and technological discoveries, inventions and developments. Great opportunities present themselves, but also challenges and a need to adapt that requires both social and individual effort and sacrifices. Building walls may seem like a way to preserve one's way of life, but is in fact self-mutilating, and even self-destructive. The history of the Arenberg family, by contrast, shows open-mindedness and an orientation to the future.

It is to be hoped that this exceptional exhibition will not only be a stepping-stone but also a signpost pointing us towards a true and closer Europe, a fatherland to love.

Professor Emeritus Mark Eyskens
Minister of State
Chair of the Arenberg Foundation

7 From the Battle of Heiligerlee to the Act of Cession

Arenberg During the Dutch Revolt



The House of Arenberg consolidated its power and position in the Low Countries in the second half of the sixteenth century during the tumultuous episode of the Dutch Revolt. That conflict had its origins in the long drawn-out battle over the position of ruler and religion in sixteenth-century society as a whole. In the Low Countries, however, the particular sources of discord were the policies of the Catholic monarch and overlord Philip II. The stake in the widely-supported Revolt was twofold. The first area of contention related to the relative importance of the Netherlands, the northernmost part of the vast Spanish Habsburg Empire 'on which the sun never set'. The second was the Catholic monarch's hardline policy towards Protestantism within the boundaries of his many territories. In that context, Henk van Nierop has argued forcefully, every noble house in the Netherlands was forced to choose between King and Church on the one hand and Protestantism and privileges on the other.¹ In practice, the Revolt caused noble families not so much to plump for this side or that as to carefully balance pros and cons. Since both Catholic and Protestant nobles defended their own social privileges and the peculiar position of the Netherlands, the result was a virtually endless series of noble coalitions. Those changing alliances of leading political and military elites made the conflict especially unstable. Moreover, most noble families had territories or connections in neighbouring France or the Holy Roman Empire, so that the issues of war and peace were negotiated both within and beyond borders.²

This chapter focuses on the House of Arenberg, which had hereditary lands in the Netherlands, the Empire and France. It begins with the Battle of Heiligerlee in 1568, which older historiography cites as the start of the Dutch Revolt and the Eighty Years' War as this was the rebels' first victory under the flag of the Prince of Orange. It ends thirty years later in 1598 with the Act of Cession, by which Philip II, approaching the end of his life, hoped – in vain – to achieve peace in the Netherlands. The Act, which settled the troublesome Low Countries on his daughter Isabella at her marriage to Albert, Archduke of Austria, accorded the Netherlands an exceptional position under Spanish Habsburg rule. The three decades in between would prove crucial to the deeper rooting of the House of Arenberg in the Spanish Habsburg Netherlands.

APPARENT NEUTRALITY

Scions of the transregional Arenbergs were destined, sometimes unwillingly, to play an important role in the Battle of Heiligerlee fought on 23 May 1568. That was particularly the case for Jean of Ligne (1525–1568), knight of the Golden Fleece and Count-Consort of Arenberg through his marriage to the wealthy heiress and wily schemer Marguerite de La

¹ Family portrait of Charles of Arenberg and Anne of Croÿ with the first five of their twelve children. The princely count lays his hand on the head of his eldest son, Philip, who holds a crossbow and quarrel. Anthony, who in later life will be known as Father Charles of Brussels, sits on his mother's knee. To their right are Charles, Alexander and Ernestine. This is a typical aristocratic family portrait, set in a sumptuously appointed room with a loggia-like extension. There is particular stress on the Arenberg-Croÿ alliance. The AC monogram of husband and wife, Arenberg-Croÿ (or Anna-Carolus) is integrated into the furnishings from the curtains to the bedcoverings. Anne's lozenge-shaped coat of arms (Croÿ-Renty) adorns the head of the magnificent four-poster bed: Charles's arms (Arenberg-Marck-Ligne-Barbançon), encircled by the collar of the Order of the Golden Fleece, is above the archway. Still more crests and collars of the order can be seen in the stained-glass roundels in the windows. The painting's traditional attribution to Frans Pourbus II (1569–1622) is presently the subject of debate.

Anonymous, c. 1593. Oil on canvas, 227 x 223 cm. KU Leuven, Art Collection, ARS014

7.4 Marck-Arenberg (1527–1599).³ Before, during and after the wave of iconoclasm that swept through the Netherlands in 1566 his political influence had been rather small: despite begging for it, he was never granted access to the king, for instance.⁴ As a knight of the Golden Fleece he censured the military resistance of his old rival the Prince of Orange, but, concerned for both his estate and the state, he did put his name to the protest against the arrest of Counts Egmond and Horne. As Stadtholder of Groningen, he was personally charged by Philip II with aiding the establishment of new bishoprics in the northern provinces.⁵ In that same capacity he was ordered in 1568 by the Duke of Alva, Governor of the Netherlands, to repulse the rebel armies that were threatening to invade Groningen near Winschoten. His tactical decisions with the cavalry were less than brilliant: Jean of Ligne,^{7.5} Count of Arenberg, was killed on the battlefield and the subsequent lack of coordination led to the defeat of the royal troops.

For Jean's widow Marguerite and his eighteen-year-old son and successor Charles (1550–1616) this was an extremely precarious time, though both would later invoke the Battle of Heiligerlee with striking regularity as the ultimate proof of the loyalty of their house to the Spanish crown.⁶ Jean had left debts that could not be cleared, even with Alva's extra compensations. Owing to complex clauses in the marriage contract, Charles's succession as Count of Arenberg was also in doubt, especially as Marguerite continued to administer the Arenberg domains as dowager countess. To make matters worse, Orange's troops rampaged through the County of Arenberg causing maximum damage in revenge for the death of the prince's brother Adolf at Heiligerlee. And so, helped by carefully nurtured

2

Met de voeten opwaerts gelijk honden ... Hanging feet up 'like dogs': a gruesome illustration, with gallows and wheel, of the early religious wars in the Low Countries.

From Lambertus Hortensius of Montfoort, *Het boeck van den oproer der weder-doooperen, eerst int Latijn beschreven ende ghedruckt tot Basel ...*, Enkhuizen: Jacob Lenaertsz Meyn, 1614. Private collection



3

Jean of Ligne in the robes of a knight of the Order of the Golden Fleece.

Anonymous, 17th century. Oil on canvas, 192 x 114 cm. KU Leuven, Art Collection, AR5001



contacts in Brussels and Vienna, Marguerite did her utmost to ensure that Charles received important commissions without being weighed down by debts or fines. A year later, for instance, he left for the court of France to convey to the king and his mother the congratulations of the governor in Brussels on their defeat of Protestant armies. And a year after that he was given command of his own royal troop, a so-called *compagnie d'ordonnance*, a kind of standing army.⁷

While the heads of other eminent noble houses from the same region, such as Nassau, Egmond, Croÿ and Lalaing, assiduously sought advancement during the Revolt, the Arenbergs were more wary, at least at first, preferring to operate behind the scenes to safeguard their position on various fronts. Marguerite was constantly on the move,

4

Marguerite de La Marck was reputed to be an astute estate manager and shrewd businesswoman. In this portrait she wears a conspicuous piece of devotional jewellery – a magnificent rosary whose small beads (the Hail Marys) are coral and large beads (the Our Fathers) are gold-mounted pearls. Deeply religious and a firm upholder of the Faith, the duchess did not remain insensitive to the witch-craze that gripped seventeenth-century Europe.

Josse Pieter Geedts, after a contemporary portrait, 1818. Oil on canvas, 194 x 114 cm. KU Leuven, Art Collection, AR5004





5
The Battle of Heiligerlee, 1568.
Heiligerlee holds a significant place in the history of the Dutch Revolt. The battle marked the start of the Eighty Years' War, the conflict between Spain and Orange, when the rebels came up against the royal army for the first time. The Dutch defeated the Spanish, who were led by Jean of Ligne, Count of Arenberg and Stadtholder of Groningen and Friesland. On the side of the insurgents, Adolf of Nassau was killed – his death is commemorated in the fourth verse of the Dutch national anthem. Jean of Ligne also fell. Tradition has it that his collar of the Golden Fleece was presented to William of Orange, the leader of the Revolt, as a trophy. In reprisal for the Spanish defeat the Duke of Alva beheaded twenty nobles in the Brussels marketplace, including the Counts Egmond and Horne.

Alexander Tielens after Frans Hogenberg, c. 1900. Oil on canvas, 72 × 96 cm. KU Leuven, Art Collection, AR5048



6
The islands of Terschelling and Griend in the Wadden Sea, 1545.
Arenberg possessed the lordship of Terschelling and Griend between 1560 and 1615. The coat of arms in the top left corner is a mix of historical elements and the mapmaker's fancy. The references to the quartered coats of arms of the Kingdom of Castile and León and the Duchy of Burgundy in the upper register are historical. Below are the arms of Friesland, to which Terschelling and Griend belonged. Friesland was part of the Habsburg Netherlands, which explains the top half of the coat of arms. Among his many positions, Jean of Ligne was also the Stadtholder of Friesland.

Watercolour on paper, 87 × 111 cm. The Hague, Nationaal Archief, Kaartcollectie Binnenland Hingman, 3044

7.6 personally managing her estates or obtaining compensation for losses sustained as the result of sequestrations. In particular she was keeping an eye open for a suitably qualified bride for Charles. Though he might not yet carry sufficient political weight for his youthful voice to be heard in matters of war and peace, the new head of the family could hardly complain about a lack of access to the rulers of his time. In 1570 he was sent to accompany the prospective wife of Philip II to the Spanish court; two years later, returning from Madrid, he made an obligatory detour to the court of France to congratulate the king and queen on the birth of a daughter; and in 1573 he was off again, this time to the Holy Roman Empire to announce to the emperor and imperial princes the new governorship of Luis de Requesens.⁸ And when Don Juan of Austria succeeded Requesens as governor, Charles, who had meanwhile notched up several smart military achievements, once again undertook a mission to the imperial court, stopping over at the family schloss in Arenberg more than once en route. Necessarily, therefore, Charles and his mother Marguerite spent too little time in the Netherlands to claim a leading role in state affairs. Nonetheless, their family and diplomatic expeditions produced other rewards. In April 1576, the emperor raised Arenberg to *Reichsgrafschaft*, an imperial or princely county with a seat and a vote in the Imperial Diet, the Holy Roman Empire's pre-eminent deliberative body composed of three colleges – clergy, imperial princes, and cities. Charles's letters to the Spanish Habsburg governors, written in fluent Spanish, repeatedly underlined his position as a *criado*, a courtly servant of Philip II.

SUPPORTING FARNESE

Arenberg's entrance onto the political stage in the Netherlands came later than expected. This might have had something to do with the new governor Alexander Farnese's (1545–1592) initial distrust of him. While Charles was in the Holy Roman Empire, his royal soldiers had gone over to the rebel side, albeit without their commander's permission. All of which gave Farnese the impression that Arenberg's main concern was keeping his own family interests in order, and that he did not want to get mixed up in the conflict while staying on his own sovereign territory outside the Netherlands. This was a common tactic among noblemen: in 1568, the Prince of Orange had apparently relinquished his stadtholder's office because he had family affairs in the Empire to attend to, and in the same period the Croÿ family members used their possessions in France so as to escape worse.⁹ Early in the conflict Marguerite also thought it wiser to keep a distance from the battlefield in order to avoid rebel sequestrations. Charles of Arenberg tried to redeem himself by passing on letters from the rebellious States General to the royal governors. And he repeatedly emphasized his family's service at Heiligerlee and the parlous state of the Arenberg possessions in the Netherlands as a result of the war. Although he failed to be appointed to the stadtholdership in Groningen and Friesland in 1580, from 1582 Farnese increasingly called on his services, first as colonel of cavalry at the Siege of Oudenaarde and then as an envoy to the Diet of Augsburg, in which he took part in his own right and on behalf of Philip II.¹⁰

Finally, between 1584 and 1590, Charles of Arenberg began to play a modest but important role. In 1584, while on a military mission to relieve Cologne, he was one of the few nobles in the Netherlands to receive the collar of the Golden Fleece, as his father had. In 1585 he assisted Farnese at crucial moments in the fall of rebel Antwerp, dismantling a rebel warship, for instance, and ultimately helping the governor to take the city. In 1587 he was given command of the Siege of Sluis, and was subsequently named governor of that town. In that period Farnese also recommended that, as the second-most capable soldier, he should be given a coordinating role at the Netherlands end of preparations for the Spanish Armada. Instead, he became the foremost royal ambassador. Early in 1588 he



7
Alexander Farnese, Duke of Parma and Governor of the Netherlands.

After Otto van Veen, first half 17th century. Oil on canvas, 191 × 112 cm. KU Leuven, Art Collection, AR5013

entered into peace negotiations with Elizabeth I's envoys in Broekburg (now Bourbourg, France). For both sides, however, peace talks were simultaneously a sop and an opportunity for covert espionage.¹¹ In 1590, Charles again followed Farnese when he was sent by the king to campaign in France, though not before receiving in Namur the ambassadors sent by the emperor to negotiate for peace.¹² By repeatedly being deployed on the battlefield and at the negotiating table, at the Brussels Collateral Councils and in the field at Sluis, Charles of Arenberg became the consummate all-rounder. In any case the praise of his character meant that he was seen as reliable; in Spain, nobles from the Netherlands tended to be regarded as altogether too fiery. Thanks to his widespread territories he could remain reasonably autonomous in the contest between factions at the Brussels court.

It was during this heady period that Charles, now thirty-six, finally married. In her search for a potential spouse, his mother had first considered partners such as Louise of Vaudemont (1553–1601), who married Henry III of France, and Sibylla of Cleves-Jülich-Berg (1557–1627), daughter of a family who, like the Arenbergs, united a number of territories with imperial immediacy. In 1587 Charles married Anne of Croÿ (1564–1635), the eldest daughter of Philip, 3rd Duke of Aarschot, who had sought to be seen as a protagonist in the Revolt. This marriage – often portrayed as a 'love match' in the family historiography – served both parties well: the House of Arenberg could extend southwards, with property on both sides of the Franco-Habsburg border, and the House of Croÿ gained a potential solution to the marital problems of the childless heir, who lived separately from his Protestant wife. Charles and Anne produced twelve children, ten of whom – five sons and five daughters – survived childhood.¹³

When Philip II was making early preparations for the Act of Cession, his final effort to end the Revolt through dynastic concessions, Charles of Arenberg also became involved as a mediator, though not all Philip's Spanish advisers were equally positive about him.¹⁴ The honours granted to him in that period by the respective governors, including a position as *gentilhombre de la cámara* (gentleman-in-waiting) in 1596, chiefly served to bind Charles even more closely to the Spanish crown. He was also a diplomat in the Franco-Spanish peace negotiations held in Vervins, where he met Henry IV of France, from whom he would purchase the seigniorship of Enghien. As is shown elsewhere in this book, Charles of Arenberg would continue to triumph, especially under the archdukes. In the years 1599–1600 he became a member of the Council of State, head of the Admiralty, and the archducal court's Grand Falconer – a ceremonial but highly prestigious office.

Thus the three decades between 1568 and 1598 were pivotal years for the House of Arenberg in the Netherlands. Fate certainly lent a helping hand by preventing Charles's premature death on the battlefield or elsewhere and by granting him a particularly fruitful marriage. His diplomatic and, later, his military talents ensured that he worked his way up to becoming a trusted counsellor of Philip II and of the archdukes. Given his canny conduct in the 1570s, however, when he made the most of the opportunities of his transregional possessions, he cannot simply be branded a pawn of Spanish Habsburg authority. Thanks to his many possessions inside and outside the Netherlands, the Princely Count of Arenberg could determine his own course, far from the black and white caricatures that historians have too often projected onto noble protagonists in the Dutch Revolt.



8

The meaning of the numerous details in the Arenberg family portrait is not always immediately obvious. The exotic pet parrot perched on the windowsill emphasizes the family's status, illustrating their luxurious lifestyle but also symbolizing marital fidelity. Charles of Arenberg's marked interest in botany is signified by the detailed depiction of some twenty different flowers. Conspicuous in the oriel window is a draped catafalque, perhaps an allusion to one of the children who failed to survive.

Detail of fig. 7.1

- 1 Van Nierop 1999.
- 2 Soen 2012.
- 3 Maes-De Smet 2006.
- 4 Gevers 2008, 121–22; Simancas, Archivo General, *Secretaría de Estado*, 530, s.f.: Jean of Ligne to Philip II, 22 August 1566.
- 5 London, British Library, Ms. Add. 15938, fol. 1: Philip II to Jean of Ligne, 12 April 1567.
- 6 Brussels, AR, *Papiers de l'État et de l'Audience*, 1721/1 in letters to Don John in the autumn of 1577 or in the various letters to and from Farnese mentioned hereafter.
- 7 The company of ordonnance was a precursor of the standing army in France.
- 8 Simancas, Archivo General, *Estado*, libro 79, fol. 7: instructions to Charles of Arenberg regarding his mission to the French court, 24 November 1572; Madrid, Instituto Valencia de Don Juan, *Envío 67*, doc. 243: instructions to Arenberg regarding his mission to the Holy Roman Empire, s.d. [1573–74].
- 9 Soen 2017.
- 10 Brussels, AR, *Papiers de l'État et de l'Audience*, 1420, s.f., states that on 29 October 1577, although the Count of Arenberg remained loyal to Don Juan, he was not in his vicinity. Brussels, AR, *Papiers de l'État et de l'Audience*, 192/1, fol. 40 the Count of Arenberg is recommended to Farnese and the king as a *gentilhomme de qui sa*

- Majesté peult confier et employer en charges principales; the payments in 1582 of his sueldo as colonel of cavalry are recorded in Simancas, Archivo General, Contaduría Mayor de Cuentas, Segunda Epoca, 844, s.f.*
- 11 Parker 1998, 212–13; Brussels, AR, *Papiers de l'État et de l'Audience*, 587/2, s.f.: *Vredeverhandelinge tuschen de Coninck van Spaeynen ende de Coninghinne Elisabeth Van Enghellant tot Oostende ende Bourbourgh 1588* and other documents stress Charles of Arenberg's role.
- 12 Simancas, Archivo General, *Secretaría de Estado*, 600, fol. 155: Alexander Farnese to Philip II, 18 December 1591.
- 13 The start of this marriage was worked out by Marini 2006.
- 14 Simancas, Archivo General, *Secretaría de Estado*, 612, fol. 114: giving his opinion to the new governor Albert, Esteban de Ibarra writes that Charles of Arenberg seemed rather weak in relation to his status but that he was skilful in royal service: he chiefly acted to earn 'money' in order to maintain his many children.