Private Domain, Public Inquiry
Families and Life-styles in the Netherlands and Europe, 1550 to the Present

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The lavish life-style had its consequences. In the last year of her life the Baroness van Wassenaer spent more than ten thousand guilders on household expenses and on taxes. At her death she was nearly bankrupt. She mortgaged her land for a private loan of fifty thousand guilders from another inhabitant of The Hague, Adriaen van Heeteren. Bankrupt or not, her funeral gave her all the honour due to her standing. Sixteen funeral attendants and sixteen porters accompanied her coffin. In the main coach a weeping lady, hired for fourteen guilders, created the appropriate atmosphere of mourning.\(^{29}\)

The French Revolution ruined the life of Jan Frederik Hendrik de Drevon de Montague, Master of Horse to the Prince of Orange. He served also as chamberlain to the Stadholder, with a fee of a thousand guilders a year. After the flight of the Orange family to England he received no money. A baron who administrated the finances of the Court told him that the Prince had no more money. In addition to this misfortune his wife left him, and he had to pay 2500 guilders to support her. As a consequence of his financial problems his household was austere. He had only one domestic servant, and all his silverware went to the pawnshop or to his wife. Only a gold ring and a silver watch with an insignia constituted a remembrance of better times. His clothes were worn and his apartment resembled a bachelor's room with little furniture. Only paintings of horses, his own portrait on horseback, a plaster portrait bust and a stuffed pheasant reflected his previous life-style.\(^{30}\)

At the end of the eighteenth century the special characteristics of the noble life-style in Holland disappeared. The number of noble families diminished and it is difficult to find traces of a material culture in noble households different from the life-style of the rich bourgeois families. As many mixed marriages also took place in the eighteenth century, we can conclude that the social identity of the nobility no longer played an important role in the social life in The Hague.

A Never-ending Story?

The first results of the research on the social identity of the nobility as visualized in the material culture, demonstrate that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, noble households had special characteristics based on traditional noble virtues. Thus despite the process of aristocratization among rich bourgeois families, a distinct noble life-style existed in this period. Only at the end of the eighteenth century did the differences between the nobility and the rich bourgeois in The Hague nearly disappear, but not for long. In the nineteenth century, a revival of the noble life-style can be found, based on another philosophy, after the creation of a new nobility by King William I.

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29 The hiring of a weeping lady is very unusual in Holland. It is the first time I have found a reference to this profession.

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To present-day (art) historians, ethnologists and anthropologists who study material culture, the theoretical approaches put forward by Erving Goffman and Pierre Bourdieu offer an important framework. Both have paid attention, each from his specific 'angle of incidence,' to the role which social and cultural aspirations play in people's behaviour. Interpreting the different ways in which people present themselves to others in everyday situations, Goffman uses the metaphor of the theatre, with a front stage and a back stage. He describes how people - albeit subconsciously - endeavour to project an image as favourable as possible by concealment 'behind the scenes' of activities or objects which could be regarded unfavourably. The status-enhancing pursuits are actively displayed in the public domain or, as Goffman states, the façade, where props form the entourage or décor. The choices one makes in creating the façade are determined by the wish to belong to a group and to distinguish oneself from other groups. As Bourdieu has stated, this striving for social and cultural distinction, followed by imitation of trend setters, forms an important factor for the dynamics within a society.\(^{3}\) As far as material culture is concerned, the wish to consume reaches further than gratification of personal needs. In order to gain respect some people, for instance, turn to conspicuous consumption, which primarily aims at the symbolism of one's wealth.\(^{4}\)

Recent publications in the field of material culture and patterns of group behaviour researched on the basis of probate inventories, have shown that the use of these symbolic anthropological concepts opens up ways to introduce important themes and questions.\(^{5}\) Most studies, however, emphasize diffusion processes and the ownership of innovations. Questions concerning both the origins of objects mentioned in probate inventories and the re-use of objects have until recently been ignored. Little is known about the influence of inheritances and legacies on the
composition of individual possessions. Which part of the estate under study was in fact bought by the testates themselves? Moreover, concentrating on novelties and changes in fashion, one tends to neglect the special importance which old, well-used objects can have for their owners.5

In private (family) life these objects could be important because of the memories attached to them, or because they were regarded as a symbol of close family ties and the existence of family traditions. In his work Culture and Consumption (1988) the anthropologist McCracken makes us aware of the role of ‘old’ family pieces in the representation of status to the outside world. The patina, the gloss of old age on the objects, functions as a bearer of important information. To the observer this can be the visible ‘proof’ of someone’s status. The greater the patina on objects, the longer the owner had enjoyed high status. It allows the observer to read the duration of a family’s possessions.6 It is precisely in such open societies as the Dutch Republic that patina can function as a tangible proof of ‘old prosperity’, as a kind of gatekeeper, barring pretenders and admitting those who belong.6

An explanation for the fact that historians have paid little attention to these aspects of material culture can be found partly in a one-sided use of sources. Tracing long-term developments in the introduction or diffusion of innovations, the more or less uniform inventories lend themselves easily to computer analysis. Asking more specific questions such as those concerning the importance of patina, large-scale operations yield less information, however. Yet these are subjects which merit particular attention when we are trying to gain an insight into the social and cultural differences in the use and perception of household goods. Closer scrutiny of specific inventories and the investigation of other sources might bring us a step further. Wills, especially, form an important source: pre-eminently they give an impression of the special value which some objects could have for an individual person or family. Finally they make us aware of the fact that the possession of consumer goods in a household by no means has to reflect the expenditure pattern of the owner(s).

This article studies both innovation processes and social (heritage) practices connected with one household item, namely the linen cupboard, celebrated in a seventeenth-century poem:

Come along, Dutch maiden, make yourself at home
Behold, linen neatly piled as high as mountains
Expensive laces, all kinds of satin
Which shine brighter than the stars

5 In England some research has been done in this field. See for example Amanda Vickery, ‘Women and the world of goods. A Lancashire consumer and her possessions’ in: Brewer and Porter, Consumption and the world of goods. For the Netherlands see Henk Nicolai, ‘De genealogie van het voorwerp. Dierbare voorwerpen en familiecollecties bij de kamer en in Makkum’ in: Bronenland, dorst en Ichthys, Kasteel en maatschappij, 285-316.

6 G. McCracken, Culture and consumption. New approaches to the symbolic character of consumer goods and activities (Bloomington 1988) especially chapter two: “Every dream in our thoughts”. Patina and the Representation of Status before and after the Eighteenth Century’, 31-43.

This poem illustrates effectively the position of the linen cupboard in well-to-do households in seventeenth-century Holland. The household treasures, textiles, under and outer garments, jewels and sometimes family records were kept in this important piece of furniture. Aside from its contents, the cupboard itself was often of substantial value. When it was adorned with marqueterie and wood carving, its value could rise considerably. The cupboard was an important status symbol: the more impressive the cupboard, the richer the owner. The sort of cupboard considered beautiful could differ greatly depending on time and place, as well as social group; while changes in fashion provided new styles and new kinds, the linen cupboard could serve generation after generation and thus win a special place in family memories. The linen cupboard can therefore be regarded as a typical example of a traditional piece of furniture being on the one hand an item subject to the need for joining the mainstream in fashion and new styles, while on the other being connected with fixed memories.

In examining probate inventories and wills, I will try to establish what changes can be observed in the field of storage furniture and what place the linen cupboard as a status symbol had in seventeenth and eighteenth-century household practices. The investigation concentrates on three small agglomerations, each with a population of about three to five thousand inhabitants. Maassluis represents the west coast and Doesburg and Oirschot the eastern and southern peripheries, respectively, of the Dutch Republic. Although the towns are comparable as to their number of inhabitants, each of their social hierarchies were very different. I will try to show in what way this influenced the innovation and diffusion processes of different types of storage cupboards.

One of the most difficult problems involved in researching the possession and use of furniture on the basis of such written sources as inventories and wills, is the word-object question. The choice of words, and the accuracy of the people who made the inventory, define the image(s) that one can make of an object. Mostly the description is brief and gives us no information on different styles or regional characteristics. Research by art historians into the development of fashion and style
in furniture can offer important information in this respect. On the basis of probate inventories research has also been carried out by historians and ethnologists into the trends and social differences in the possession of furniture. In the Netherlands there is one serious drawback caused by the dominance of the urban and ‘Hollando-centric’ character of past research. We scarcely know anything about the domestic culture in the border regions and the smaller rural villages of the Dutch Republic.

The Locations

The first place to be examined is the fishing village of Maassluis in South Holland. The mainly Dutch Reformed population consisted for the main part of well-to-do people whose prosperity was based on the fisheries. The number of inhabitants shows a significant rise especially during the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century. Until the last decades of the eighteenth century, when a reduction in fishing led to a great economic decline, Maassluis was known as one of the largest and most prosperous villages of South Holland. Of all the probate inventories examined, the Maassluis cluster counts as by far the richest. With the exception of some small properties belonging to poor seafarers, the sources bear witness to great wealth. As we shall see, this does not mean however that the inhabitants of Maassluis were eager to spend their money on new or fashionable household goods.

In contrast to Maassluis the small market and garrison town of Doesburg had a greatly differentiated population. A broad middle class of specialised craftsmen and shopkeepers shared the town with town-dwelling farmers, large landowners, army officers and a garrison of soldiers, which changed in size over time. The walls of the fortress formed a tangible border to the surrounding countryside, where simple agricultural labourers and small farmers lived alongside some wealthy noblemen.

The final village to be examined is Oirschot in Brabant. Here the economy was based on agriculture. The small farmers supplemented their income by such activities as weaving and cloth making. The majority of the population was Roman Catholic. Living in the Generaliteitslanden governed by The Hague, the local administrative elite was usually made up of Dutch Reformed officials and clergymen. The arrival of newcomers from the North did not mean that the previous role of the local Catholic patricians and clergy came to an end. Together with a few rich Roman Catholic brewer families, they too formed an influential social elite.

Some hundreds of inventories are held for these three places; they were made by notaries, aldermen, or the testators themselves. A first glance at the inventories shows how large the regional and local differences in welfare were inside the Republic. The possession of household goods of more than two hundred items was the norm for the inhabitants of Maassluis, while the inventories of an average farmer in Oirschot often did not contain more than a few basic goods, such as a bed and bedding, a table, some chairs, pots and kettles, some pewter spoons, fireplace accessories, a spinning wheel and some agricultural implements. Next to these the richer inventories of the Oirschot elite form a distinctly different group. The Doesburg inventories present a more diffuse image. To make possible a meaningful comparison between the three places, the inventories selected are divided into three groups. The first group contains inventories of mainly poor craftsmen and small farmers, leaving less than sixty-five items of household goods. Next to these we distinguish a second consumer group consisting mostly of small independent entrepreneurs such as shopkeepers and craftsmen, whose inventories listed sixty-five to two hundred items. Finally, in the third group we bring together wealthy businessmen and notables with more than two hundred household items.

This rough classification does not do justice to the social stratification and the position of the testators within the local community. Factors such as profession, fortune, income, family ties and career also played an important role. The chosen classification does however have the value of drawing attention to certain points, and will be used only for this.

As to religion, the population was mixed. The large majority were Dutch Reformed but there were also significant congregations of Roman Catholics and Lutherans. As a member of the Hanseatic League, Doesburg had been an important town. However, the increasing silt ing up of the Yssel, and competition from the more favourably situated towns of Zutphen and Dortmunder, caused Doesburg’s importance as a trade centre to decline in the seventeenth century, with prosperity decreasing accordingly. During the period 1650-1800 the population was regularly confronted with economic setbacks. The French occupation of the town in 1672 was the lowest point.

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11 Counting the household items, clothing has been excluded as it was not consistently catalogued in Oirschot and Doesburg.
Table 8.1. The dataset. Number of selected inventories according to town, period and wealth-group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town</th>
<th>1650-1699</th>
<th>1700-1749</th>
<th>1750-1774</th>
<th>1775-1799</th>
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<td>47</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesburg II</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesburg III</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maassluis I</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maassluis II</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maassluis III</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Remarks: I = ‘poor’ (< 65 household goods)  
II = ‘average’ (65-200 household goods)  
III = ‘rich’ (> 200 household goods)  
* = 1750-1799  

Source: PJ Meertens-Instituut Amsterdam

In early-modern Europe textiles were very costly consumer goods. The relatively high price which had to be paid for linen made it an important status symbol; the size of the stock of linen, partly given as trousseau, could be regarded as one of the main indicators of prosperity. Outer and under-garments and household textiles were kept in widely differing ways: in baskets, boxes, chests, trunks and cupboards, in cupboard-beds, on pegs, on clothes-horses, or between kitchenware and victuals. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries important changes in the storing of textiles took place. However, the question remains of how far such innovations were also a ‘must’ for the inhabitants of provincial towns and villages. To obtain an impression of the extent in which patterns of change were followed in Maassluis, Doesburg and Oirschot, we will card-index some changing processes with the help of inventories.

Firstly we will try to establish at what moment the chest – in the late Middle Ages the most important piece of furniture for storing linen – had to make way for the linen cupboard. Secondly, we will take a look at the process of diffusion for one special type of linen cupboard, the cabinet. The stately cabinet with drawers in the under frame and two doors in the upper frame is generally considered as a typical piece of Dutch storage furniture. Introduced in the second half of the seventeenth century by the dignified citizens of the Dutch cities, its use also spread through the border regions such as Flanders and West Münsterland.

Changes in the types of wood used for the linen cupboard also command our attention. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries oak, sometimes veneered, had been used in combination with other types of wood such as ebony. At the end of the seventeenth century oak would be replaced by the lighter-coloured walnut. It was only for the pieces of furniture which were veneered that oak continued to be used consistently. Dark types of wood, such as ebony, did not fit in well with the desired ‘lighter’ interiors. These types of wood therefore disappeared from the more fashionable households. After 1750 walnut was replaced in its turn by mahogany, which had begun to be imported from England by 1720. When were these new kinds of wood introduced into the households represented by our sample? Finally, the diffusion process of two important novelties for the storage of household textiles and clothes will be looked at more closely, namely the wardrobe (kleerkast) and the chest of drawers (kastel of commode). What effect did the introduction of such novelties have on the status of lesser fashionable household items?

In propounding this type of question we are repeatedly confronted, in the inventories, with somewhat intriguing descriptions which reflect the attitude of the author of the inventories. We find for example an old-fashioned Couderwetse linen chest listed in Doesburg (1788) and an old-fashioned oak cupboard mentioned in Maassluis (1753) and in Oirschot (1780). Moreover, in two Doesburg inventories references are made to a peasant’s trunk (boerenkist) (1798 and 1805).

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The inventories of Maassluis and Doesburg

The inventories of Maassluis and Doesburg (and Oirschot, to which we will turn later) show that chests were present in almost every household during the whole period. The inventories for Maassluis (most of which are catalogued room by room, and also give the contents of storage furniture) show that during the seventeenth century as well as at the end of the eighteenth century linen, clothes and blankets were kept in chests. The status of the chest however changed, although more slowly than one might expect. The twenty-five late-seventeenth-century probate inventories including chests, which also give a division by room, show that a chest was present in the 'best' room in nineteen cases. Its role diminished during the third quarter of the eighteenth century. Only three of the thirty testators whose possessions were divided by room, had a chest in the best room or, using Goffman's terminology, the façade territory.

In almost all Maassluis room-by-room inventories of both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it is easy to find a linen cupboard with contents as described in the poem quoted above. As an important status symbol the cupboard was usually given a place in a pre-eminently façade area such as the front room or hall (voorhuis). If this part of the house served as a shop, the cupboard was placed in the central living room. The linen cupboard was clearly visible to every guest, reflecting the prosperity of the owner or of his ancestors. Nearly every linen cupboard had a decorated pair of cups and pots on top. Many sheets, shirts, bonnets and coats as well as silver and gold valuables were stored in these cupboards. It was in this cupboard that gold or silver-mounted bibles and psalm books were found.

A closer look at the way in which the household treasures were stored confronts us with some questions which need further investigation. We see for example that the linen was carefully stored, given the details of the different types of textile enumerated. Every pile was covered with a small cupboard cloth. Moreover it appears that in households with two large linen cupboards, one often comes across comparable numbers of shirts, sheets, sleeves, bonnets and other clothes. Regarding this equal distribution of items it seems plausible to presume that, during marriage, a distinction remained between the trousseau (cupboard and textiles?) brought in by each partner at the time the household was set up.

The Doesburg inventories offer - because of their manner of presenting facts - less information concerning position and use of the chest and the linen cupboard. Only twenty room-by-room inventories, practically all from well-to-do families, have been preserved in Doesburg. These inventories show no notable differences from those in Maassluis as far as the status and the use of the chests and linen cupboards is concerned. The relatively large number of trunks and chests in the Doesburg inventories is striking, however. Part of the explanation for the presence of more chests and trunks in Doesburg might be found in the influence of the neighbouring

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13 In Roman Catholic households, Catholic religious such as rosaries, silver crucifixes, packets of 'saints' and 'agnus dei' could often be found in the linen cupboard.
German territories where these traditional pieces of storage furniture remained important well into the nineteenth century. Another possible explanation is offered by the fact that Doesburg, as a fortress town, had a garrison. The military, transitory professionals, would have found it more practical to keep their possessions in transportable chests and trunks than in large cupboards. In the inventories left behind by (ex-) army officers who were resident in Doesburg, a relatively large number of chests and trunks appear in both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As we will see, some of these town dwellers, however, also owned novelties such as the (large) cabinets, walnut and mahogany cupboards, chests of drawers and wardrobes.

Wishing to know how fashion-conscious our testators were, we can take a look at the diffusion of the cabinet. Two problems have to be mentioned however. Firstly, some cabinets might have been catalogued as *kast* (cupboard). Most notaries, however, appear to have been rather precise in cataloguing the storage furniture; several inventories list both (linen-) cupboards and (linen-) cabinets. Secondly, there were several types of cabinets, including the small cabinets for curiosities introduced in the sixteenth century. This problem seems not to be too serious for the room-by-room inventories, since the contents of the cupboards are mentioned.

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The first cabinets mentioned in Maassluis are in modest households, respectively those of a fisher (1705: 146 items), a statesman (1706: 50 items/116 objects) and a block maker (1721: 182 items/582 objects). As far as the first half of the eighteenth century is concerned we see that out of thirty-four ‘average’ inventories five mention a cabinet; in the ‘rich’ inventories four out of seventeen mention one.14 In the second half of the eighteenth century the cabinet appears to have been a more or less customary piece of storage furniture, especially for people belonging to the ‘rich’ consumer group. Nearly one in two rich testators owned a cabinet at the end of the eighteenth century. Of the people belonging to the poor and average consumer group, less than twenty per cent possessed one.

At roughly the same time as its appearance in Maassluis, the cabinet appears in Doesburg inventories with a first mention of a walnut cabinet owned by a descendant of the rich aristocratic family Haeck (1719). Comparing the percentage of cabinet owners in Maassluis and Doesburg there appears to be an important difference. In contrast to the position in Maassluis, the ownership of a cabinet seems to have been mandatory, both for the members of the Doesburg elite and for average consumers; in the last quarter of the eighteenth century eighty per cent of the (sixteen) ‘rich’ inventories in Doesburg included a cabinet. In Maassluis during this period less than half of the ‘rich’ inventory testators possessed one. In Doesburg some rich people even had four or five cabinets; nobody in Maassluis had this many. Of the average testators in Doesburg, even one in three had a cabinet, while in Maassluis the ratio was one to five.

The relatively frequent presence of the cabinet in Doesburg demands an explanation. Such an explanation might be that the Doesburg inhabitants could express strong awareness of an urban identity in such a stately piece of furniture. However, we do not know what the Doesburg cabinets looked like in reality. We have to be careful here. In only a single instance did a Doesburg author of an inventory find it worthwhile to describe a cabinet with some elaboration; this is in an inventory of 1787 which refers to a ‘fine veneered walnut cabinet on an under-frame with a flat top’ and ‘a cabinet with a high top and with drawers in the lower part.’ The average price of twenty-four guilders reached at public sales seems to have been rather high compared to other household furniture.15 For Maassluis we have no accurate information on prices. Of the fifty-seven cabinets mentioned in our sample, nineteen pieces turn out to be painted however, and thus were most probably made of a cheaper type of wood. Among the smaller cabinets, more often present in average inventories (from 1692 in a total of twenty-five inventories), most were painted as well.16

As mentioned above, important changes took place during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the type of wood used for linen cupboards and cabinets. For the majority of the inhabitants of Maassluis and Doesburg however, oak remained the most customary type of wood for the linen cupboard throughout the period. References to cupboards inlaid or veneered with precious types of wood are found only rarely, either in the inventories of the fishing village in Holland or in those of the small fortress town in Gelderland.17 Mahogany, which would become fashionable after 1750 in cities like Amsterdam, appears for example only in four probate inventories in Maassluis. It is first mentioned in 1777 in the case of a very wealthy gentleman farmer who owned a house in the centre of Maassluis as well as a large farm near Vlaardingen. In addition to ‘modern’ pieces of furniture such as cherry-wood chairs, he owned a small mahogany tea box. The only person to possess a mahogany cabinet was the rich widow Hester van Waij, who died in 1788. In Doesburg, the only mahogany cupboard is a sideboard mentioned in an inventory of a public sale in 1779.

Comparing the types of wood mentioned in both samples, the most significant difference appears to be the number of references to walnut. At the beginning of the eighteenth century walnut appears in some of the richer Maassluis inventories. The inventory of a doctor’s possessions (1720) is the first in which a walnut cupboard is mentioned, followed by a reference to a walnut cabinet in the household of a commissioner (1721). Especially from 1750-1775 does walnut seem to have consolidated its position in Maassluis interiors: in this period, out of the ‘average’ testators one in five had such a cabinet. Among the ‘rich’ testators, more than fifty per cent each had a walnut cupboard or cabinet in his/her house at that time. During the last quarter of the eighteenth century the number of mentions declines again in this group to thirty-two per cent. In addition to a walnut cupboard, several people in Maassluis had other types of walnut furniture in their homes, for example chairs, tables, watch stands, hat and coat stands and tea racks.

The ownership of walnut furniture in Doesburg was limited to a relatively small group, consisting of three lawyers, a church minister, a surveyor, a burgomaster, a shopkeeper, a lieutenant-colonel and a notable man living on his private means.

15 All small cabinets were excluded from the analysis. Small cabinets for Maassluis: 1700-1750: poor: zero; average: 1732 oak with ebony inlay; 1733, 1754 and 1756 painted cabinets, 1744 walnut cabinet (inlaid); rich: 1720 small cabinet for spices in a doctor’s household, 1725 oak with ebony inlay, 1739, 1757, 1759 and 1765 painted cabinets, 1746 walnut cabinet (inlaid); rich 1720 small cabinet for spices in a doctor’s household, 1725 oak with ebony inlay, 1739, 1757, 1759 and 1765 painted cabinets, 1746 walnut cabinet (inlaid); rich.

16 The prices reached are attached to thirty-eight of the cabinets listed: mininlUm three guilders; maximum 225 guilders. The cabinet of the Haeck-family, mentioned earlier, was sold at a public sale for thirty-seven guilders. In the Doesburg inventories only eight times is any mention made of a walnut cabinet: 1700: 1702, 1705, 1732; poor: zero; average: 1732 oak with ebony inlay; 1733, 1754 and 1756 painted cabinets, 1744 walnut cabinet (inlaid); rich: 1720 small cabinet for spices in a doctor’s household, 1725 oak with ebony inlay, 1739, 1757, 1759 and 1765 painted cabinets, 1746 walnut cabinet (inlaid); rich.

17 In eighteenth-century Delft Wijzerbeek-Oldtius also found most cabinets painted. Wijzerbeek-Oldtius, Actier de goederen van Dijl, 196.
If we look more closely at their inventories it becomes evident that this group also possesses other status symbols of a "modern" and luxurious nature. Thus, apart from a cupboard inlaid with walnut in one of the living rooms of the lawyer Warnink and his wife in 1750, one finds a small table with four drawers, also inlaid with walnut, a clock, a set of twelve chairs with an armchair, a mirror with a gilt frame, seven paintings and a small lacquered wooden tea tray. Unlike most of the Doesburg residents but just like those in Maassluis, this family also owns a rather extensive collection of porcelain, displayed on a chest of drawers. A comparable possession is noted in the inventory, drawn up in 1753, of the possessions of the church minister Van der Spijck and his wife Catharina de Baas. In the best room stood a walnut cabinet worth sixty guilders, in which the linen and silver were kept. Moreover we find here, again, twelve best chairs, a side table with porcelain displayed on it, seven paintings and a large mirror. Here the long-case clock stands in the entrance hall.

As far as the diffusion of fashionable pieces of furniture among the Doesburg elite is concerned, the second-hand market seems to have played an important role. A public auction in Doesburg in 1793 may illustrate this. At this auction many "fashionable" pieces of furniture and small household goods were sold, such as a mahogany buffet (the one which is mentioned above, sold for fifty-five guilders), a mahogany writing table, a sofa and several carpets. The testator was the Amsterdam textile merchant Weddelink who had married a descendant of the wealthy Linteloo family from Guelderland in 1782. Weddelink's textile business was established in one of the main streets of Doesburg, where several of its leading residents lived. Together with other members of the Doesburg elite they formed the main part of the buying public. Public sales apparently offered this aristocracy a cheap means of acquiring fashionable furniture (possibly coming from Amsterdam). The fact that the furniture had been used was no deterrent. Incidentally, the composition of the buying public at these public sales was in no way exceptional. At the other public sales also mentioned in the Doesburg sources, the elite was very well represented. Pending research into the market in second-hand goods in the Dutch Republic, one could state that there existed in a provincial town like Doesburg a very lively trade, in which people of all social groups participated for one reason or another.

During the second half of the eighteenth century two new pieces of furniture for storing textiles were to appear: the chest of drawers and the wardrobe. Both the chest of drawers and its nineteenth-century successor, the commode, are rather low pieces of furniture. Actually, as the English term indicates, what we are talking about here is a chest with drawers. Both in Maassluis and in Doesburg the occurrence of the chest of drawers is widespread. In the period 1750-1755 in Maassluis a chest of drawers can be found in just over half of the "large" inventories. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century about seventy per cent of the less rich Maassluis residents each had one in his or her home; in the third quarter of the eighteenth century as many as seventy per cent of all testators. One of these was the widow Wilhelmina, who died in 1761. Despite her modest means (her possessions were estimated at less than three hundred guilders and her living space consisted only of a kitchen and a loft), she owned a (painted) chest of drawers with some small linen, and an oak cupboard in which she kept both porcelain and clothes.

In Doesburg, too, the chests of drawers were spread over different sections of the population. After a first mention in 1761 of a mirror table (spiegeltafel) with drawers, in an inventory of a shopkeeper, we find it often both in average and in wealthy households. An explanation for this is easily found. The chest of drawers took up little room and was well suited for the displaying of dinner and tea sets. Furthermore it was a readily affordable piece of furniture. In the inventories and sales in Doesburg the average price was six-and-a-half guilders.

What were the considerations that played a part in the acquisition of a second important innovation: the wardrobe in which to hang clothes? This is more difficult to determine. A complicating factor here is that we cannot at present be sure exactly when, and in which region, the wardrobe began to be used. Some historians put its introduction at the beginning of the seventeenth century, others at the end of the eighteenth century. A possible explanation sometimes given for the latter alternative is the changes that occurred in the kinds of material used for clothes, among them the heavy, crease-sensitive cotton. In interpreting our sources, we come up against the word-object problem. For example, the word bangstaat could equally well mean a wardrobe in which to hang clothes or a cupboard for porcelain, hung against the wall. A second problem is that the description kleerkast which often appears in the inventories of Doesburg throughout the period could refer either to a wardrobe in which to lay clothes or to one in which they were hung. Assuming that the custom of hanging clothes was a late eighteenth-century phenomenon, we must conclude that the word kleerkast gradually changed meaning, the word bangstaat occurs only sporadically in Doesburg. For the probate room-by-room inventories from Maassluis, we can be more certain. In view of the diffusion of the wardrobe in Maassluis, the moment of introduction of this kind of cupboard would have to be put back to the beginning of the eighteenth century. Meanwhile, in the middle of the eighteenth century it became fairly widespread. It was also found, albeit sporadically, in the less wealthy households. Evidently, the arrival of the chest of drawers and of the hanging wardrobe certainly did not mean the demise of the large linen cupboard. In most households...
we find both, not infrequently the linen cupboard was situated in the hall, and a chest of drawers in the living room. The wardrobe was usually to be found in a less important place such as the corridor or the attic. Not all clothing was kept in this cupboard. Usually one group of clothes hung there while the remaining dresses, coats, skirts and other outer garments were put away in the drawers of the linen cupboard. In households where both a large linen cupboard, a wardrobe and a chest of drawers were all present, it seems that there was often a clear difference in the use of the various kinds of cupboards: the chest of drawers was used for the more common household linen, the wardrobe for the daily outer wear, and the large linen cupboard for storage of the trousseau and other valuables. Both the chest of drawers and the wardrobe seem to have been regarded as practical innovations rather than as important status symbols. Thus it is not surprising that, in the nineteenth century such storage furniture would soon become typical bedroom furniture.

Oirschot

As regards the distribution of ‘expensive’ and ‘new’ cupboards the position is fairly clear-cut, as far as it concerns the less prosperous part of the Oirschot population. In both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the more costly linen cupboards – veneered or inlaid with ebony or walnut – as well as cabinets, were beyond the reach of most people in Oirschot. The majority of the inhabitants of Oirschot owned one or two cupboards, most of which were used for the storage of food (mention is often made of schapniet, etenskast or etenskasten) rather then household textiles and clothes. Since the quantity of textiles owned by the majority of the Oirschot people was relatively small, the absence of linen cupboards like the ones we saw in Maastricht and Doesburg is hardly surprising. Only a couple of peasants in the middle of the eighteenth century possessed what may have been more costly linen cupboards. One of these was a ‘large oak cupboard with four pillars, four doors and three drawers.’ The other was a ‘large cupboard with four drawers and four stocks.’ In the average inventories a few wardrobes (kleerkasten) and two linen cupboards make their appearance in the third quarter of the eighteenth century. Almost every inhabitant of Oirschot – either poor or rich – owned at least one big chest, besides one or two (food) cupboards. Unfortunately we do not have many Oirschot inventories which provide evidence on the status and use of these chest. One of the few inventories available concerns an average Oirschot farmer in 1659. His inventory is an excellent example of the multi-functional use of storage furniture. He possessed a ‘large oak cupboard with four pillars, four doors and three drawers.’ The other was a ‘large cabinet inlaid with ebony or walnut – as well as cabinets, were beyond the

As far as the eighteenth century is concerned, the same variety can be found. The position and use of storage furniture in the Oirschot castle called De Vlierden, where the Roman Catholic Baroness Anselmina de Draeck died in 1752, show great similarity to what we have seen in connection with the seventeenth-century notables. The Baroness’ clothes were kept in the bedroom in a ‘large chest mounted with iron in the manner of a trunk.’ There was also ‘an enamelled cabinet with a drawer, on top of which were a large goblet and five glasses with a little brown teapot.’ This was probably the cabinet of which Anselmina was thinking when she made her will some years before she died. In it she bequeathed the cabinet to her cousin Mrs. Van Broumelen: ‘as a remembrance the small cabinet with the three pieces of China which usually stand on it.’ In the front room stood a wainscot (very thin split oak, HD) cupboard containing some of the maids’ possessions.

The notable lady Cornelia Theodora Vos, who died in 1750, also kept some of her clothes and household linen in a chest, but this time it was found in the attic.

24 Van Vorst tot Voorst, Tussen bodem en baroktijd, 131.

25 Cabinet: In 1752, a cabinet is mentioned for the first time, in an inventory for a baroness. Henceforth the cabinet is listed four more times in the Oirschot sample: all cabinet owners belonging to the elite. The possession of a chest of drawers is also limited to a couple of rich testators. After an early listing in the inventory of the bailiff of the Kempen county from 1651, walnut is mentioned four times in surviving inventories.

Moreover, the manner in which these clothes were put away does not point to daily use. In the chest were stored a ‘black mantle in a piece of paper,’ a ‘piece of uncut linen’ and a ‘rug in a parcel’ next to some sheets, pillow cases, serviettes, shirts and handkerchiefs. The room in which the lady died contained cupboards, such as a chest of drawers; a small china cabinet; a writing table (bureau); and a cabinet, containing a collection of household linen, underwear and clothes similar to the contents of the inventories of well-to-do people from Maassluis and Doesburg.

The probate inventory of the Oirschot administrator Leonard de Marcq, who died in 1786, also mentions various cupboards and cabinets, some of which were inlaid and veneered. No mention is made of new kinds of wood such as mahogany; oak is still predominant. One of the oak cupboards is described as old-fashioned (an addition which also appeared in a Maassluis inventory). This inventory, like those of the Baroness and the notable lady Vos, shows a culture barely connected to that of the average inhabitants of Oirschot, but the furniture of this Oirschot elite does not appear to be fashionable, however.

Quite another picture emerges when we look at the inventory of Rear Admiral van Gennep who died in Oirschot in 1791. His inventory reminds us in many ways of one for Weddelink, a man originally from Amsterdam. It included various mahogany pieces such as a commode and a sideboard. A hasty glance at his other possessions makes it clear that this captain’s life-style had little in common with that of his fellow villagers; for example mention is made of several Smyrna carpets and a mantelpiece clock. He shared a preference for the newest trends in fashion mainly with people who lived in cities or in a town like Doesburg, where one was allowed to call oneself a burgher and where, now and then, an inhabitant from Amsterdam brought in novelties.

Family Pieces

The importance of further research into the acquisition and the possession of used furniture and other household goods has already been mentioned. Apart from lists of public sales, probate inventories from subsequent generations of one family can also offer interesting information on this subject. They show us how important the transfer of possessions from one generation to the other has been. Unfortunately they are scarce. In some of the Oirschot inventories, goods from the parental home were distinguished from those acquired during a marriage. These inventories are especially interesting because they show that chests and cupboards often came from family property. The furniture which Alegonda de Leest, for example, brought with her upon her marriage in 1760, consisted of an oak chest, a small food cupboard with three doors and a small cupboard with two doors. These came from her parents. The parents of her husband, Jan Hendrix, gave an oak chest. No more pieces of furniture for storage were added to this couple’s simple property during the marriage except a coffee pot and some linen. The wealthier Lucia Schippers from Oirschot received from her parents ‘the oak cupboard standing in the room’ in 1766 as well as a sum of four hundred guilders as trousseau. Her husband brought with him a glazed cabinet from his parental home. A bed, a bolster, six newter dishes and a small cupboard were added during the course of marriage.

Wills can also provide insight into the influence of inheritances on the composition of the domestic goods within a household. If we also look at the objects promised to beloved relatives by way of legacy, and thus having – whether to the one who bequeaths them or to the receiver – a special meaning, we note that cupboards were often bequeathed together with precious jewels and textiles (the contents of the linen cupboard!). The last wills of the wealthy patrician family Hoogwerf are a good illustration of this. From 1766 Abraham Hoogwerf was busy deciding how he would bequeath his goods. All his shirts (fourteen pieces), the sheets (sixteen pieces), pillow cases (twenty-six pieces) and a small silver pen case with small pens, were bequeathed to his grandson. The remaining household goods went to Abraham's three children. The son received the option on the (long-case) clock, with three porcelain platters (valued at seventy-five guilders), while he was also allowed to have (for seventeen guilders) the large mirror and 'six chair cushions decorated with yellow flowers.' Daughter Maartje received the option on the porcelain cupboard upon which stood porcelain cups (valued at 27.15 guilders). Finally, daughter Lynsbeth received the option on a 'large walnut cupboard in the kitchen with the pair of Japanese porcelain cups and pots' (valued at fifty-eight guilders). The maid servant received some linen and four hundred guilders. After Abraham's marriage to his housekeeper in 1767 these arrangements underwent some changes. This happened again in 1768. Abraham then noted that Dirkje Hoogwerf should receive his 'teak cupboard with the cups on it.' Besides the arrangements recorded by a notary, it soon became clear that Abraham had written down further instructions in a booklet. According to this, Jacob Hoogwerf was to receive a copper weight and Abraham's black cloth dress coat, and his son-in-law Arij Roos 'the screen in the kitchen.' Some time later Abraham also stated that he bequeathed to Jacob Hoogwerf a silver chafing dish, to Arij Roos a silver teapot and to Gideon Kouwenhoven two silver tea caddies.

We see the same deliberate division of the heritage by other members of the Hoogwerf family. Abraham's daughter Lynsbeth, mentioned above, and her husband Arij Roos, made their will in 1761 naming her brother, sister, and cousin as their heirs. The maidservant was given the cabinet with porcelain cups. The widow Hester van Waij, connected to the Hoogwerf family by Abraham's first marriage, began to make her will in 1773. Not only did she arrange her funeral, she also stated that none of her goods should be sold: everything had to be divided among her friends.28 She also stipulated that 'Captain Hoogwerf should have priority to decide between the cabinet in the front room or two or three paintings.' The Hoogwerf family may have been an exception in the care they took over their wills,
but they were not the only people who considered cupboards as valuables which ought to remain in good hands. Many Maassluis residents — even if they could pay for a new cupboard — also preferred the cupboards which had been used by their ancestors to modern ones. For instance, Annetje Verhey bequeathed 'the black ebony cupboard in the downstairs room' in 1717 to her son as well as the house with the grocery shop and other real property. Jan Boelhouwer was allowed to buy 'the cupboard with porcelain cups upon it' from the estate of his mother Jannetje Soeting in 1728 for seventy guilders. The bequest of these latter objects may be more tied to economic factors in less wealthy families. The fact that the cupboard was given a separate place in the will underlines the importance of this piece of furniture as a family object.

Conclusion

This article has used inventories and wills as the basis for evidence of storage cabinets for linen and clothes, in three small locations in the Dutch Republic, and from different points of view. If we look at the ownership and the 'status' of chests and cupboards within the context of the local social relations, we find a complicated pattern of social-cultural dynamics embodying both continuity and change.

We have seen that the arrival of the linen cupboard did not necessarily mean the end of the chest. We have also seen that the introduction of the chest of drawers and the wardrobe in their turn did not 'threaten' the large linen cupboard, despite their practical advantages and the fact that they cost less: the chest of drawers is smaller and clothes can be hung without creasing in the wardrobe. Furniture, however, does not only have a practical function; there are also symbolic meanings and emotional values connected with it.

We have to be careful when establishing fashion consciousness on the basis of probate inventories. The reserve of Maassluis citizens concerning the acquisition of innovations like the cabinet is, however, significant. In spite of the fact that many wealthy businessmen and tradesmen in this village were able to buy expensive pieces of furniture, the dissemination of these novelties was limited. A possible explanation may be found in the stormy development of Maassluis. Confronted with a growing number of wealthy newcomers, it was perhaps more important for the 'old' families of Maassluis, who often still maintained close ties with the agricultural mother village of Maasland, to express their identity through traditional pieces of furniture than to buy new, fashionable cupboards.

For the inhabitants of Doesburg the ownership of such an urban status symbol as the cabinet may in turn have been important because of the memory of the rich trading past of this Hanseatic town. Finally we see that the cabinet was the exclusive property of the socially and culturally differentiated elite in Oirschot. For some members of this elite the ownership of precious cupboards was part of a life-style which was closely tied to that of citizens in the Dutch cities. As a group the elite clearly distinguished themselves from their less wealthy fellow villagers for whom luxury furniture was normally unattainable.

How far the significance of the linen cupboard is subject to change in the context of place, time and social group, becomes even clearer if we look at the results of similar research into Weesp, a small town near Amsterdam.29 There we see that the cabinet, mainly possessed by rich townspeople in the eighteenth century, soon lost much of its significance as a status symbol at the beginning of the nineteenth century. New types of linen cupboards were introduced. They were, however, no longer given a place in the living room, but in a more private room such as the bedroom. The cabinet then became a prominent piece of furniture in farmers' houses, where it was to be found in the 'best room.'

Changes in the ownership and use of storage furniture were not as radical as we tend to presume: in early modern households the 'lifetime' of these durable consumer goods could and in fact did span several generations. This could be for reasons of economy, but it could also be because of private memories attached to the pieces and the importance of family tradition in public life. The examples given in this article show the need to incorporate records on marriage customs and heritage practices into the study of material culture.

29 Van Koolbergen, 'De materiële cultuur van Weesp en Weesperkarspel'. Jeroen van Staveren, Aspekten van de materiële cultuur van Weesp en Weesperkarspel in de negentiende eeuw (internal report PJ. Meertens-Instituut Amsterdam 1990: 71-89. Compare also: Schuurman, Materiële cultuur en levensstijl.}