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Citation

De Meyer, M. J. C. (2021). Chaos en beheersing: the life of Henri Asselberghs and his friendship with Jean Capart. In W. Claes, M. Eyckerman, & D. Huyge (Eds.), *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* (pp. 309-362). Leuven: Peeters.
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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

CHAOS EN BEHEERSING:
THE LIFE OF HENRI ASSELBERGHS
AND HIS FRIENDSHIP WITH JEAN CAPART

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*Je moet es naar die meneer Asselberghs gaan,
die is zijn hele leven directeur van het Spoorwegmuseum geweest
en tegelijk is hij een vermaard egyptoloog. Is dat niet wat voor je?
Piramiden en rookpluimen?*¹

*In 1961 Henri Asselberghs published a pioneering study on the concepts of chaos versus control in Predynastic and Early Dynastic iconography. This book appears to have come out of the blue, with Asselberghs not having published on this early period of Egyptian history before, and him not being a professional Egyptologist, but rather the director of the Railway Museum in Utrecht, the Netherlands. Based on archival sources, the life and career of Asselberghs are reconstructed, which form the context for the genesis of his *Chaos en beheersing*. Special attention is paid to Asselberghs' relationship with Belgian Egyptologist Jean Capart, with whom he struck up a friendship that would last a quarter century.*

Chaos en beheersing. Chaos and control. These are probably the only Dutch words that sound familiar to every researcher dealing with Predynastic and Early Dynastic Egypt, regardless what their native tongue may be. In 1961 Henri Asselberghs (1887–1980; Fig. 1) published his magnum opus on the art and iconography of early Egypt under this title, which ranks among the few studies in Dutch that held their ground in the world of Egyptology (Asselberghs 1961; see also the comments by Hendrickx 1996: 412).² Yet

¹ “You should go see this Mr. Asselberghs, he has been the director of the Railway Museum his entire life and, at the same time, he is a renowned Egyptologist. Is that not something for you? Pyramids and smoke plumes?” (Dendermonde, M., 1958. Tussen koningsgraven en rookpluimen: Egyptologie, de grote liefde van ex-spoorman Henri Asselberghs, *Wekelijks bijvoegsel van Het Parool* 18 October 1958, vol. 18, no. 4225: 1). Most of the cited newspaper articles can be consulted online at www.delpher.nl. All quoted passages in this article are rendered in their original language, but an English translation of the Dutch passages is provided in the footnotes. Transcripts of letters are reproduced exactly as found, including any possible typographical or grammatical errors in the original texts.

² While Asselberghs' analysis is now often inevitably outdated, the book is still used for its catalogue and extensive list of illustrations, as was commented upon recently by Ludwig Morenz “Einen bis heute wichtigen Überblick zu den Bildquellen mit guten Fotografien bietet Henri Asselberghs, *Chaos en Beheersing*, 1961” (Morenz 2014: 99).

Asselberghs was not a ‘professional’ Egyptologist: he never held a post in the field, and apart from *Chaos en beheersing*, most of his other Egyptological publications have fallen by the scholarly wayside.³

Chaos en beheersing. Two words that could equally apply to the jubilant of this volume, who always works methodically despite an appearance of chaos. My first encounter with Stan dates back to 1995, when he taught an overview course at KU Leuven on pottery from the Predynastic to the Roman Period. Being a young student at the time and not familiar with the ‘ins and outs’ of ancient Egyptian ceramics, my memories of that course are more in the vein of chaos than control. Since then, our paths have kept on crossing. This happened mainly in the excavation house at Dayr al-Barshā, where Stan not only joined us on many occasions, but where he also joined many a potsherd. On paper, we collaborated on royal beards and bovine iconography (Hendrickx *et al.* 2015), and it gives me great pleasure to dedicate this contribution to him, not in the least because he also likes to dabble in local railway history (Hendrickx 2019).

Asselberghs and Hendrickx have a thing or two in common as well. Apart from their obvious mutual interest in Predynastic and Early Dynastic iconography, both held a day job outside of Egyptology, while at the same time publishing in the professional circuit. While Hendrickx has formed the minds of many a young art student with an above average focus on Egyptian archaeology at the PXL Hasselt, Asselberghs was the director of the *Spoorwegmuseum* (Railway Museum) in Utrecht, the Netherlands. Both men also did groundbreaking work on the concepts of chaos versus control in early Egyptian art, for which Brémont⁴ recently named them together in one sentence (see e.g. also Baines 1993: 63; Linseele *et al.* 2007: 2087; Raffaele 2010: n. 13, 43, 60; Vanhulle 2018: 174, n. 18). Hendrickx himself recognises Asselberghs’ at the time pioneering insights in this regard when he writes:

“Similar to the representations of dogs, the Lycaon does not actually hunt on the palettes. He is nevertheless to be considered the “controlling” element on the palettes, especially compared to the chaotic animal world on the palettes themselves, for which the Hierakonpolis palette is the most obvious example. The symbolic aspects of this have already been recognised in the past, with a first major breakthrough by Asselberghs (1961: 166–192)...” (Hendrickx 2006: 740).

³ He mainly published in *JEOL* and always in Dutch; see the bibliography of Asselberghs attached at the end of this article. A bibliography of Asselberghs up until 1935 is included in van Wijngaarden 1935: 20.

⁴ “Building on such pioneer works, these concepts have then been reasserted in a number of major Egyptological works that include Henri Asselberghs, Krzysztof Ciałowicz, and Stan Hendrickx in Predynastic studies, and, for Dynastic Egypt, Barry Kemp or Jan Assmann.” (Brémont 2018: 1–3).



Fig. 1. Portrait of Henri Asselberghs
taken in Egypt in 1930 at Hollandia Studio, Cairo
(© Francis Asselberghs).

But who was Henri Asselberghs? Little about him is known, and apart from a short *in memoriam* published in Dutch after his death on 21 April 1980, at age 93 (Heerma Van Voss 1980),⁵ he vanished without a trace in the Egyptological literature. However, in the framework of the EOS Project ‘Pyramids and Progress: Belgian expansionism and the making of Egyptology, 1830–1952,’ two files of correspondence between Henri Asselberghs and Jean Capart surfaced in the archives of the Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels (RMAH) and the Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth (FÉRÉ). These letters document a long-lasting friendship and mentorship between Capart and Asselberghs, which formed the starting point to reconstruct some of Asselberghs’ life and career in Egyptology. Additional archival documents—some of which came into the possession of the author through a sale by a Dutch antiquarian bookstore and which are referred to here as ‘private collection’—and conversations with several of his grandchildren flesh out the story. In particular, I would

⁵ Heerma van Voss also provided the information on Asselberghs in Bierbrier 2019: 23.

like to warmly thank Christophe, Francis, Brigitte, and Victor Asselberghs for their willingness and enthusiasm to share stories and photographs of their grandfather with me.

Destined for trains, but with a passion for Egypt

Johannes Jacobus Matheus Henri Marie Asselberghs,⁶ as was his full name (also written in Dutch as Jan Jacob Matheus Hendrik Maria), was born on 19 February 1887 in the station house of Grubbenvorst-Lottum⁷ (Fig. 2), where his father Petrus Johannes Victor Asselberghs was the first station manager. Trains and railways were thus ingrained in Henri since childhood, but his father had other ambitions for him. He sent his son to grammar school in Venlo, a two hour walk along the railway tracks each way, in hopes of steering him into a different direction. It was to no avail, and after several jobs in the Dutch railways, Henri was appointed in 1927 as the first director of the newly established *Spoorwegmuseum* in Utrecht (Dendermonde 1958). This position gave him the opportunity to combine his passion for trains with that for historical research, which he used to build up the museum's collection⁸ and publish about it.⁹ He remained in this function until his retirement on 31 July 1953, having considerably helped the museum grow into the popular attraction that it still is today (www.spoorwegmuseum.nl). This was recognized in 1954 when Queen Juliana granted him the silver *Erepenning voor Verdiensten jegens Openbare Verzamelingen* (Honorary Medal for Merits toward Museum Collections), also known as the *Museummedaille*, one of the oldest distinctions in the Netherlands.¹⁰ Asselberghs received this medal on 5 November 1954 during the inauguration ceremony of the *Spoorwegmuseum* at its new location in the Maliebaanstation in Utrecht ([Anon.] 1954). In 1952

⁶ Asselberghs spells his own name as Asselbergs, without an h, up until about 1930. From 1930 onwards the h is added and his name changes into Asselberghs, also on official letterhead. The reason for this name change is not known. For the sake of consistency, his name is spelled as Asselberghs throughout this article, since this seems to be the official spelling. It is also how it already occurs on his marriage certificate of 1918 (<https://www.openarch.nl/rat:17db93a4-3865-11e0-bcd1-8edf61960649>, accessed 28/06/2020).

⁷ This station in the province of Limburg was built in 1883 and remained in use until 1938. In 1920 it was renamed to Lottum station, and the building was demolished in 1973.

⁸ "The collection, which at the time of foundation consisted of a small number of objects, has in the course of years grown, by the unremitting toil and flair of the Director, Henri Asselberghs, to be an imposing display giving a clear picture of the growth of railways in Holland" (De Bruyn 1957).

⁹ A select bibliography of Asselberghs' publications on the history of the Dutch railways can be consulted on p. 361–362.

¹⁰ <https://www.vriendennsm.nl/nl/historie/68-historie-slides/43-opening-nieuw-spoorwegmuseum-1953> (accessed 10/06/2020).



Fig. 2. Henri Asselberghs photographed at the Lottum train station in 1959, where he was born more than seventy years before (© Francis Asselberghs).

Asselberghs had already been decorated as *Ridder in de Orde van Oranje-Nassau* (Knight in the Order of Orange-Nassau).¹¹

Asselberghs remained active in the museum as an advisor for several years after his retirement, resulting in his official farewell dinner only being celebrated on 7 January 1960 (Figs 3–4). One year later, on 1 February 1961, his daughter Marie-Anne (nicknamed Mimi) became the director of the *Spoorwegmuseum*.¹² While she had already joined the museum staff as her father's assistant in 1937 at age 17, this did not mean that she necessarily wanted to follow in his footsteps. “Maar ja, het was crisis! Je had niet veel te kiezen,”¹³ she later stated in an interview (Vlietstra 1984). In fact, it was only at the farewell dinner for her father in 1960 that she first heard what was in store for her, when J. Lohmann, the President-Director of the *Nederlandse Spoorwegen* (Fig. 3), told Henri that he had two surprises for him: one was a gift (a wallet), and the other was the news that his daughter would become director the following year after the retirement of De Bruyn (Lammers 1975). Nobody had asked her, but she did not refuse, and just like her father she held on to her post until her

¹¹ <https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/onderzoeken/index/nt00435/16ebd056-d2d8-11e8-828a-00505693001d> (accessed 14/06/2020).

¹² In between the directorships of Henri and Marie-Anne, two brief terms were filled by W.R. Blankert (1 August 1953–31 May 1955) and F.F. De Bruyn (1 June 1955–31 January 1961) (personal communication, Tuur Verdonck, *Spoorwegmuseum* Utrecht).

¹³ “But well, it was crisis! You did not have much to choose.”

retirement in 1984. In 2013 she passed away at age 93, also just like her father (Van Steenberghe 2013; Weterings 2018). The Asselberghs family thus put its stamp on the Dutch railway museum for over half a century.

While the *Spoorwegmuseum* was Henri Asselberghs' daytime job, his evenings were devoted to Egyptology. In an interview with him that appeared in Dutch newspaper *Het Parool* on 18 October 1958 (Fig. 5), when he was 71 years old, Asselberghs reflects on his career and his life (Dendermonde 1958).



Fig. 3. Group portrait at the farewell dinner for Henri Asselberghs on 7 January 1960 at Huize Molenaar (Korte Nieuwstraat 6) in Utrecht.

From left to right: M.-A. Asselberghs, H.G.J. Schelling (architect), J.J.M.H.M. Asselberghs, J. Lohmann (President-Director of the *Nederlandse Spoorwegen*), L.M.J. Asselberghs-Verhulsen, D.F. Lunsingh Scheurleer, F.F. de Bruyn (Director of the *Spoorwegmuseum* since 1 August 1953), A.D. de Pater, and J.D.M. Bardet

(© Collection *Spoorwegmuseum*, Utrecht; photo nr. 15117).

Without any surviving personal diaries or other autobiographical documents, this interview offers a rare first-hand glimpse into his experiences. He relates how his fascination for history in general already started at a young age. Then one day, in the early days of World War I, when the German mark was devaluating, he managed to buy a copy of the German edition of Breasted's *A History of Egypt* (1905) on the cheap (Breasted 1910), forming the start of his lifelong passion for Egypt.

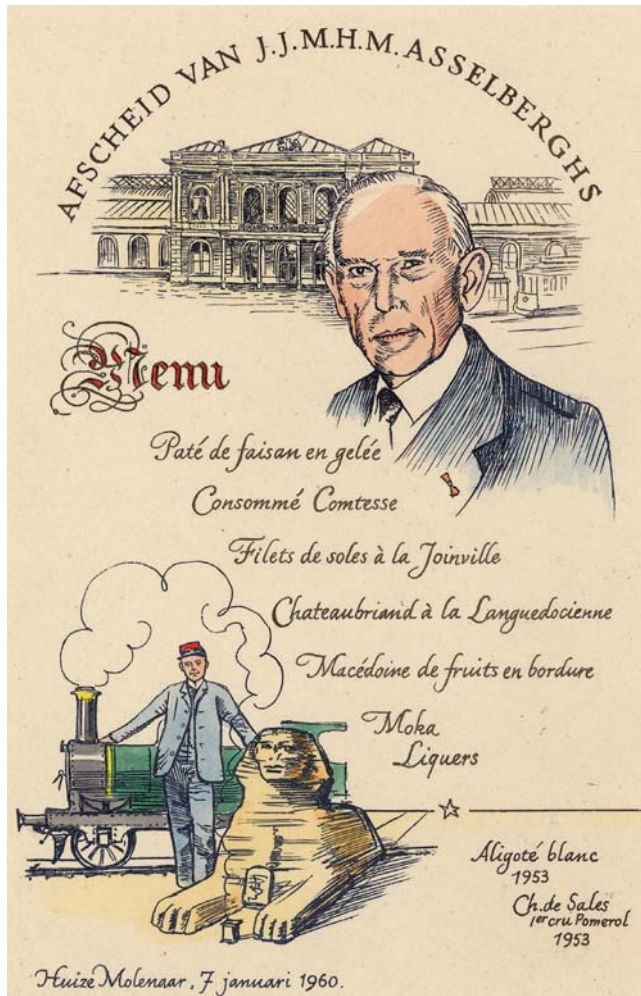


Fig. 4. Menu of the farewell dinner for Henri Asselberghs on 7 January 1960, honouring his double passion in railways and ancient Egypt by depicting the sphinx alongside a locomotive (© Collection Spoorwegmuseum, Utrecht).



Fig. 5. DENDERMONDE, M., 1958. Tussen koningsgraven en rookpluimen: Egyptologie, de grote liefde van ex-spoorman Henri Asselberghs. *Wekelijks Bijvoegsel van Het Parool* 18 October 1958, vol. 18, no. 4225: 1.

Asselberghs as a family man

Before diving into Asselberghs' Egyptological activities, a brief word about his personal life is in order. On 1 July 1918, Asselberghs married Ludovica (Louise) Maria Joanna Verhulsen (1896–1977), a Belgian born in Antwerp (Fig. 6). Together they had five children: the eldest was daughter Marie-Anne (1919–2013), followed by three sons: Victor (1920–1973), Erik (1923–1971), and Edgar (1925–2005) (Fig. 7). Their last child, born much later, was again a daughter, named Caecilia Maria Johanna (1939–2012), who suffered from epilepsy after a juvenile illness (Fig. 8). Marie-Anne spent her life looking after her younger sister Caecilia, and neither sister ever married. The three sons were all married and had children of their own.

While originally from Lottum in the Netherlands, Asselberghs moved to Belgium and lived for several years in Essen (old spelling: Esschen), Handelsstraat 3, close to the Dutch-Belgian border. This address is perhaps not coincidentally located right across the railway station of Essen. In 1926 the family moved back to the Netherlands, where they lived in the Potgieterstraat 40 in Utrecht. They moved one last time, at the end of 1935, to the Prof. Leonard Fuchslaan 6, also in Utrecht, which remained Asselberghs' home until his death. It is there that in a room upstairs he had his study, where he would retreat into the world of Egyptology after hours.



Fig. 6. Henri Asselberghs and his wife Ludovica (Louise) Verhulsen, possibly taken on the occasion of their engagement (© Christophe Asselberghs).



Fig. 7. The Asselberghs family in Essen, 31 May 1925. From left to right: Henri, Erik, Marie-Anne, Victor, and Louise holding baby Edgar (© Francis & Christophe Asselberghs).

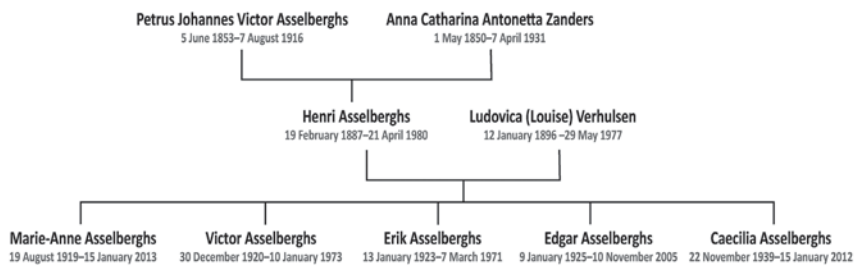


Fig. 8. The Asselberghs family tree.

The following biographical sketch of Henri Asselberghs inevitably remains riddled with lacunae, to a large extent due to the unfortunate fact that his personal archive and library were dispersed and partially auctioned off when the family house was emptied and sold after the death of his daughter Marie-Anne in 2013.¹⁴ Only a small portion of it remains with the family and with the author.

¹⁴ The auction house was Peerdeman in Utrecht, but no records of the sale survive (personal communication, Herman Peerdeman).

DOG, EES, and DMG

The earliest trace of Asselberghs setting foot in the professional world of Egyptology is with his membership of the **Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft** (DOG), which he initiated in 1921 as is deduced from membership cards and correspondence with the DOG (private collection; Fig. 9). Unfortunately, no correspondence of Asselberghs has been preserved in the archives of the DOG, which suffered damage during World War II,¹⁵ but a few exchanges with Bruno Güterbock¹⁶ are preserved in the private collection. It is clear that Asselberghs became a member of the DOG because of his interest in the Amarna Period and his eagerness to read about the work of the DOG at that site. While the exchanges with Güterbock are generally of a purely professional nature, comments on the state of the world sometimes inevitably sneak in, for instance, when Güterbock writes:

“Für Ihre guten Wünsche für mein unglückliches Vaterland sage ich Ihnen besonderen Dank. Gerade in diesen trüben Tagen tut jede freundliche Stimme aus dem Auslande dem Herzen eines Deutschen wohl!”¹⁷

Güterbock was probably referring to the occupation of the *Ruhr*, which France and Belgium initiated during that month in response to Germany not fulfilling the reparations agreement after WWI. The year reports of the DOG show that Asselberghs remained a paying member until 1940, when WWII forced him to renounce most of his memberships (cf. *infra*). In 1959 he renewed his DOG membership, intending it to be for only that year as is clear from a letter he wrote on 10 August 1960 to Kurt Hartmann, the treasurer of the DOG. Conceding to one more year as a paying member in 1960, he wrote:

“Alles geht leider zu Ende. Innerhalb dieser Woche werde ich Ihnen noch einmal den gewünschten Betrag durch Postanweisung übermachen. Das muss dann unwiderruflich der Schluss sein.”¹⁸

In 1922 Asselberghs also initiated his membership of the **Egypt Exploration Society** (EES), as is clear from its Annual Report of that year (Egypt Exploration Society 1923: 22). He kept this running for four years but did not renew in 1926. In 1934, however, he picked up the membership again, possibly because of the EES' work at Amarna, which at that point was to a large extent funded by the Brooklyn Museum at the initiative of its then advisory curator of the Egyptian Department, Jean Capart. In 1940 he was forced to give up this membership again due to the outbreak of WWII (cf. *infra*), but the 1945 Annual

¹⁵ Personal communication by Joachim Marzahn (09/09/2018), whom I thank for verifying this.

¹⁶ For Bruno Güterbock and his thirty year career at the DOG, see Raulwing 2020.

¹⁷ Bruno Güterbock to Henri Asselberghs, 12 January 1923: private collection.

¹⁸ Henri Asselberghs to Kurt Hartmann, 10 August 1960: private collection.

Report mentions him on p. 8: "Additions to the Library include books and pamphlets presented or sent for review and war-time arrears of Continental exchanges. The thanks of the Committee are due to the following: Mr. Henri Asselberghs...". After the war, he joined the EES for two more stretches, between 1947–1950 and 1955–1958.

In either 1922 or 1923 Asselberghs furthermore became a member (#2162) of the **Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft** (DMG), as is evident from the *Mitgliedernachrichten* ([Anon.] 1923: xv). He continues to be mentioned as a member in several further *Mitgliedernachrichten* (1926, 1930, 1931, and 1936), but is never listed among the *Ausgetretenen*. However, the DMG understandably had problems during and after WWII ([Anon.] 1945–1950) and it is suspected that Asselberghs terminated his membership at the start of the war, as he also did with his other memberships.

Translating Tutankhamun

Like with many an Egyptological calling, Tutankhamun had something to do with Asselberghs' growing interest in Egyptology. It is here that we enter the correspondence between Capart and Asselberghs kept in the archives of the



Fig. 9. DOG membership card of Henri Asselberghs for the year 1921 (private collection).

RMAH. The discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun by Howard Carter in November 1922 prompted Belgian Queen Elisabeth to travel to Egypt in February 1923 to be present at the opening of Tutankhamun's burial chamber (Bruffaerts 1998). Belgian Egyptologist Jean Capart was her guide, who also reported in detail to various journals and newspapers worldwide about their most unusual journey. These letters were collected in Capart 1923 (published by Vromant & Cie in Brussels, 121 p., 12 pl.), which almost instantly became a worldwide bestseller. Undoubtedly cashing in on the Tutmania that engulfed much of the world since the discovery of the intact royal tomb, this book was quickly translated into several languages.¹⁹ The first Dutch translation of the book appeared already in 1924 and was produced by none other than Henri Asselberghs (Capart 1924, published by Van Munster's Uitgevers-Maatschappij in Amsterdam, 147 p., 16 pl.).²⁰ This edition includes four extra plates compared to the original French edition, as well as three extra letters sent by Marcelle Werbrouck²¹ to Belgian newspaper *Le Soir*. Asselberghs wrote a foreword, in the stately archaic Dutch that he mastered so well, and that is typical for all of his publications. This small sample may serve as an illustration:

“Toen de telegraphen nog 't eerste nieuws van Carter's ontdekking over de wereld rondtikten heeft de groote Koningin der Belgen den beroemden hoogleeraar en onvermoeiden werker in 't Cinquantenaire-Museum te Brussel, bij zich ontboden en hem gevraagd Haar gids te zijn naar Bibân-el-Molûk. Van deze unieke daad is dit boek de vrucht.”²² (Capart 1924: 8–9).

Asselberghs and Capart

The first contact between Capart and Asselberghs goes back to 1922, at least from what can be gathered in archival sources. On 7 November 1922 Asselberghs thanked Capart for his invitation to the exhibition on Champollion at the Cinquantenaire Museum (Capart 1922), and replied that he would come to Brussels to visit the exhibition on 12 November.²³ At that time, Asselberghs was living in Essen, in the province of Antwerp, and thus not in the Netherlands.

¹⁹ An overview of the translations is presented by J.-M. Bruffaerts in the preface of the recent re-edition (Capart 2018: 16).

²⁰ An entirely revised version of *Tout-Ankh-Amon* appeared in 1943, which was translated into Dutch by B. Lindekens in 1944 (see Bruffaerts in Capart 2018: 23–28).

²¹ For a biographical sketch of Marcelle Werbrouck, see Bruffaerts 2018.

²² “When the telegraphs announced the first news of Carter's discovery to the world, the great Queen of the Belgians summoned the famous professor and tireless worker at the Cinquantenaire Museum in Brussels and asked him to be her guide to Bibân-el-Molûk. This book is the fruit of this unique act.”

²³ Correspondence between Asselberghs and Capart in the archive of the RMAH. Up until the end of 1924 this is kept in a file with Capart's personal correspondence (folder H. Asselberghs), while letters between 1926 and 1959 are kept in the archive of the Fondation Égyptologique Reine Elisabeth (FÉRE). Generally only one side of the correspondence is preserved, being Asselberghs'

A week later, on 15 November 1922 and after he had just met Capart in person in Brussels, Asselberghs wrote again to Capart to send him a copy of his three-part article *Amenofis IV* (Asselberghs 1922a–c), as well as three photos of the bust of Nefertiti which he had acquired during a visit to Berlin. About the former, Asselberghs cautions Capart “qu’il ne s’agit que d’un ouvrage d’un débutant,”²⁴ and in effect this was the first time that he published on an Egyptological topic.²⁵ While the reply of Capart is not preserved, a letter by Asselberghs dated 30 November 1922 makes it clear that although Capart thought favourably of the article, there were also some differences in opinion that he hoped to discuss in person. Asselberghs furthermore mentioned his forthcoming article in *ZÄS* about his ideas on an Amarna Period relief preserved at the Louvre (Asselberghs 1923a). He closed the letter with:

“Etudiant pendant les derniers mois la préhistoire en général, je serais très heureux si Vous pourriez m’indiquer le titre d’un ouvrage traitant spécialement et à fond l’Egypte paléolitique.”²⁶

This is the first indication of Asselberghs’ interest in prehistoric and predynastic Egypt. Several more exchanges took place between Asselberghs and Capart in that same year, sometimes merely through postcards, but generally on the topic of the Amarna Period. It appears that Asselberghs went to the RMAH in Brussels rather frequently, both to visit with and talk to Capart, as well as to use the library. The fact that at the same time when they were conversing about the Amarna Period, the tomb of Tutankhamun was being explored by Carter, must have made for stimulating discussions.

letters to Capart and other members of the FÉRÉ. Copies of the replies are only rarely preserved.

²⁴ Henri Asselberghs to Jean Capart, 15 November 1922: Capart archive, folder H. Asselberghs, RMAH.

²⁵ These three articles on Akhenaten even received a (fairly tongue in cheek) review in *JEA* by H.R. Hall, Keeper of Egyptian Antiquities at the British Museum, which is not devoid of British nationalist sentiments: “The author makes no pretence to first-hand research on the subject, and he naturally follows popularly accepted views of the more sensational kind with regard to that weird “individual” (which he certainly was!) Akhenaten. He is occasionally somewhat old-fashioned as to his authorities, quoting Lieblein, for instance, as of equal authority with modern writers. But in other cases he is quite up to date, and we notice with pleasure that he refers with interest and goodwill to our excavations at El-‘Amarnah and their publication in this *Journal* although he considers that the work of the Germans was “jammerlijk onderbroken” there by the world-war. We may take exception to “jammerlijk”: our excavators can do the work quite as well as the Germans, although we may regret that the Germans were unable to go on with it. By the way, when Mr. Asselberg (sic) says, referring to the fate of the El-‘Amarnah tablets: “het meerendeel dezer tafeltjes bevindt zich thans in Berlijn terwijl de overige hoofdzakelijk terecht kwamen in de musea van Cairo en Londen,” he really exalts the horn of Berlin to a greater height” (Hall 1924: 188).

²⁶ Henri Asselberghs to Jean Capart, 30 November 1922: Capart archive, folder H. Asselberghs, RMAH.

In early 1923 Capart was otherwise engaged, travelling to Egypt with Queen Elisabeth and Crown Prince Leopold to attend the opening of the burial chamber of Tutankhamun (Bruffaerts 1998), and the correspondence with Asselberghs only picks up again in early 1924. Capart's heavily publicised trip to Egypt must have incited Asselberghs even more to travel there himself, since he wrote to Capart on 22 January 1924:

“Je n'ai aucun mérite; je le sais; mais j'ai une immense désir de voir un jour l'Egypte. Vous me comprendrez. Je ferais tout pour atteindre ce but. N'existe-t-il un moyen que je vous accompagne—n'importe en quelle qualité—lorsque vous partirez pour votre expedition? Si vous pourriez prendre une decision favorable à mon égard, je tacherais d'obtenir la correspondance d'un journal où une périodique hollandaise, ce qui soulagerait peut-être le coté économique.”²⁷

Clearly Asselberghs was inspired by Capart's letters to the press and he seems to have wanted to play a similar roll in Dutch media (cf. *infra*). Asselberghs' desire to be involved in Egyptology and his interest in the Amarna Period, made him a likely candidate to translate Capart's 1923 book, and on 1 February 1924 Asselberghs wrote to Capart:

“Je me suis mis à la traduction de votre très joli petit livre “Toutankhamon” dont je viens de terminer le 1^{er} chapitre.”²⁸

However, finding a publisher for this translated book in the Netherlands turned out not to be an easy feat, and the manuscript was turned down several times, much to the frustration of Asselberghs. But on 26 June 1924 he proudly announced to Capart that Van Munster's Uitgevers-Maatschappij in Amsterdam had agreed to publish the book in an edition of 1500 copies. The work that Asselberghs invested in the translation and publication of *Tout-Ankh-Amon* led to an important personal realisation that would have a strong impact on the course of his life. In that same letter Asselberghs wrote:

“Un des éditeurs, auquel j'avais présenté le manuscrit m'a répondu que si j'étais Dr. ou Prof., je n'aurais eu aucune difficulté pour l'édition d'un livre pareil. Cela m'a fait réfléchir.”²⁹

He continues with a long explanation about his desire to study Egyptology at Leiden University, and asks Capart for support in this endeavour. Since it gives an insight in the struggles of an amateur without a proper degree to gain acceptance in the world of academia at that time, this passage is quoted here in full:

²⁷ Henri Asselberghs to Jean Capart, 22 January 1924: Capart archive, folder H. Asselberghs, RMAH.

²⁸ Henri Asselberghs to Jean Capart, 1 February 1924: Capart archive, folder H. Asselberghs, RMAH.

²⁹ Henri Asselberghs to Jean Capart, 26 June 1924: Capart archive, folder H. Asselberghs, RMAH.

“Hier j’ai été à Leyde afin de m’orienter nettement sur la question de l’admission à l’université. Voici ce que j’ai appris. Il existe en Hollande un règlement des études universitaires contenant des conditions spéciales pour des étudiants n’ayant pas fait les humanités et qui manquent l’occasion de se préparer aux hautes études par la voie ordinaire.

Concernant mon cas, il paraît qu’il existe une possibilité que je sois admis aux études des lettres par une résolution spéciale du Ministre et après ce qu’on appelle un “colloquium (sic) doctum.” Président de la commission permanente pour des cas analogues est Prof. Dr. J. Huizinga, Witte Singel 74, Leyde. C’est à lui qu’il faudra m’adresser afin d’obtenir une solution.

Hier, cherchant à rencontrer le Dr. Boeser³⁰ qui était en congé pour quelques semaines, j’ai parlé le Dr. van Wijngaerden, qui m’envoyait au Prof. Thierry. Ce professeur m’a avisé (sic) de me mettre en relation avec vous avant d’écrire officiellement au Prof. Huizinga. Si vous pourriez donner un avis favorable, se rapportant à mon instruction générale comme à la valeur de mes études déjà faites en matières savants et égyptologiques, cela donnerait une impression des plus excellentes. On ne me connaît absolument pas à Leyde.

Il y a plus de 20 ans, j’ai fait 4 ans du gymnase, c.a.d. les deux classes inférieures, 6^e et 5^e avec latin et grec, les suivantes 4^e et 3^e sans les langues classiques. Si maintenant je devrais recommencer da capo, afin d’obtenir d’abord mon diplôme de gymnase je n’en verrais plus la fin. Mais si on voudrait m’admettre p.e. à condition d’un an d’études énergiques en latin et grec je l’accepterais avec plaisir ; dusse je faire ces études avant l’admission à la faculté, ou bien en même temps que les autres études.

Monsieur Capart, si vous avez la conviction que je pourrais participer avec succès aux hautes études des lettres en matière d’archéologie égyptienne, je vous serais très reconnaissant si vous vouliez communiquer votre opinion au Prof. Dr. Huizinga à qui je me propose d’écrire dans quelques jours.

Votre avis, qui a la plus grande autorité à Leyde, m’étant favorable, je crois bien réussir et je veux vous assurer qu’une fois admis je ferais tout pour obtenir une promotion qui m’a paru jusqu’à ce moment même, au delà de toute espérance.”³¹

It is not known whether or not Capart actually wrote to Leiden in favour of Asselberghs, but the fact that the latter kept him updated on the progress in a letter dated 14 December 1924, suggests he did. More importantly, the student registration card of Asselberghs preserved in the Leiden University archives shows that he was indeed admitted to the university.³² He registered and paid for the academic years 1925–1926, 1926–1927, and 1927–1928, each year for “1 les” (one course) at the cost of f50, which was a substantial amount of money at the time. On 4 February 1926 Asselberghs wrote to Capart, after having received the first volume of the *Chronique d’Égypte*: “Mon étude va

³⁰ For the cast of characters in Egyptology at Leiden University at that time, see Kaper 2014: 41–44.

³¹ Henri Asselberghs to Jean Capart, 26 June 1924: Capart archive, folder H. Asselberghs, RMAH.

³² I thank Mart van Duijn of the Leiden University Archives for verifying this information.

bien. Elle me coûte toutes mes heures libres!”³³ Only about a decade later, on 27 November 1936, did he take and successfully complete the *Candidaats-examen* for *Egyptische Taal en Letterkunde* with Adriaan de Buck, at the cost of f60, as is noted on his student registration card (see also [Anon.] 1936a).

The Dutch translation of *Tout-Ankh-Amon* was finally published at the end of 1924, when Capart was touring the United States of America for the first time in his life (De Meyer 2021). Asselberghs tried to see Capart off for his first transatlantic journey, as he wrote in an undated letter:

“Quand je savais à quelle heure vous partirez le 7 Octobre (à Anvers sans doute) je tacherais de venir vous serrer la main avant votre départ pour l’Amérique.”³⁴

The correspondence between the two men continued across the continents, and on 27 January 1925 Capart sent Asselberghs a postcard from Boston to congratulate him with the birth of his son Edgar, and to ask him to send a copy of the translated *Tout-Ankh-Amon* to Marcelle Werbrouck, who at that time was in Luxor (Fig. 10). Meanwhile, Asselberghs seems to have promoted the Dutch translation of the book through a lecture tour to local associations. For instance, on 28 March 1925 he spoke about “Het graf van Tut-Anch-Amon en de cultuur, die het vertegenwoordigt”³⁵ for the *R.K. Onderwijzeressenbond* and the *R.K. Onderwijzersbond* at Helmond, the Netherlands ([Anon.] 1925a). He spoke about the same topic on 18 May 1925 for the *R.K. Bond van Spoor- en Tramwegpersoneel ‘St. Raphaël’* at Roosendaal, the Netherlands ([Anon.] 1925b); and on 16 March 1926 to *den Geschiedkundigen Kring* at Bergen op Zoom, the Netherlands ([Anon.] 1926).

The *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* and other Dutch newspapers

During the 1920s, Asselberghs’ early writings were often published in local magazines which sometimes were of a religious nature, such as *De Katholiek* (Asselberghs 1922a–c) or *Romen’s Aankondiger*, a magazine from Roermond (Asselberghs 1925a–b; 1926a). He almost exclusively wrote about the New Kingdom, not shying away from commenting upon links between the ancient Egyptian civilisation and the biblical world (e.g. Asselberghs 1923b, 1929b–c). An exception is his scholarly article in *ZĀS* (Asselberghs 1923a), which is also the only article he ever published that was not in Dutch.

Asselberghs regularly published reviews of Egyptological books in Dutch newspapers, most often in the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*. To this end, he

³³ Henri Asselberghs to Jean Capart, 4 February 1926: FÉRE archive, folder H. Asselberghs, RMAH.

³⁴ Henri Asselberghs to Jean Capart, ‘samedi soir’ (probably in September 1924): Capart archive, folder H. Asselberghs, RMAH.

³⁵ “The tomb of Tutankhamun and the culture that it represents.”



Fig. 10. Postcard of Jean Capart to Henri Asselberghs congratulating him with the birth of his son Edgar, sent from Boston on 27 January 1925 (private collection).

seems to have actively requested review copies from authors and publishers, as is evident in a 1927 letter from Georg Steindorff as editor of the *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*:³⁶

“Ich habe an F.A. Brockhaus, den deutschen Verleger Carter’s, geschrieben und gebeten, Ihnen ein Rezensionsexemplar des Buches zur Besprechung im Literarischen Beiblatt des „Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant“ zu übersenden. Ich hoffe, dass er diesen Wunsch erfüllen wird. Würden Sie ev. auch die 2. Auflage meiner „Blütezeit des Pharaonenreichs“ (Leipzig–Bielefeld 1926) an gleicher Stelle anzeigen?”³⁷

The book of which Steindorff speaks (Carter 1927) did indeed receive a review by Asselberghs in the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* of 17 December 1927 (Asselberghs 1927c). A postcard by Eduard Meyer to Asselberghs dated 1 May 1928 (private collection) suggests he too arranged for one of his books to be sent to Asselberghs, most likely Meyer 1928. Asselberghs refers to this book

³⁶ Steindorff was editor of the *ZDMG* for ten years before being asked to resign in 1933 (Cap-pel 2016: 72; Gertzen 2016: 361).

³⁷ Georg Steindorff to Henri Asselberghs, 10 April 1927: private collection.

in a *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* article he wrote about Akhenaton in preparation of the open-air spectacle (*openluchtspeel*) ‘Ichnaton’, which was the opening performance of the 1928 Summer Olympics in Amsterdam that year (Asselberghs 1928b).³⁸

Several publications of the FÉRÉ were also reviewed by Asselberghs. In 1927 he wrote a lyrical reflection about the *Chronique d’Égypte*, at that time still a new journal in the world of Egyptology (Asselberghs 1927b). The opening paragraph of this article illustrates how Asselberghs cherished his time spent at the Cinquantenaire Museum, perhaps with a melancholy brought on by his then recent move to Utrecht, much further removed from Brussels than when he was still living in Essen.

“Hoe graag verwijlt ’s mensen geest waar lieve herinneringen en oude sympathieën hem nooden! Ik denk aan het rustig-voornamelijk Cinquantenaire-Museum in Brussel, toch betrekkelijk maar een bescheiden hoekse in den zuid-vleugel van het grootsch-opgevatte Jubel-paleis, welks indrukwekkende zuilenboog den statigen ingang vormt van de vriendelijke Avenue de Tervueren; aan de sfeer van intimiteit vol prettigen prikkel tot werken, zooals ze heerscht in de rijke bibliotheek, telkens wanneer ik er te komen placht vol stralende goud-warme namiddag-zon geladen; en wijd-open naar allen kant van lenteweelderig uitzicht over park en geboomte; de bibliotheek nu van de “Fondation”. En als vanzelf zie ik het beeld verschijnen van den altijd charmant-welwillenden, altijd rusteloos-actieven heer Jean Capart, den oprichter en verdienstelijken directeur der Fondation.” (Asselberghs 1927b: 7).³⁹

In 1930 a lengthy review of Capart & Werbrouck 1930 appeared by his hand, (Asselberghs 1930a), and in 1933 he wrote a glowing review of Jacques Pirenne’s *Histoire des institutions et du droit privé de l’ancienne Égypte I : Des origines à la fin de la IVe dynastie* (Asselberghs 1933b), both in the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*. Much later, in 1944, he reviewed Pierre Gilbert’s *Le classicisme de l’architecture égyptienne* in *BiOr* (Asselberghs 1944a). The attention that Asselberghs thus drew to the FÉRÉ, and the free publicity he gave it in the Netherlands, was undoubtedly appreciated by Capart.

³⁸ ‘Ichnaton’ was performed for the first time by the *Utrechtsch Studenten Corps* in 1926. For a detailed history of this play, see Van Dijk 2010, with a mention of the performance for the 1928 Olympics on p. 79.

³⁹ “How gladly the human spirit dwells where sweet memories and old sympathies need it to! I am thinking of the quiet-distinguished Cinquantenaire-Museum in Brussels, a relatively small corner in the southern wing of the grandly conceived Jubilee Palace, whose impressive colonnade forms the stately entrance to the friendly Avenue de Tervueren; of the atmosphere of intimacy full of pleasant stimulus to work, as it prevails in the rich library, every time I used to come there loaded with radiant gold-warm afternoon sun; and wide open to all sides of lush spring views over park and trees; the library now of the “Fondation”. And naturally I see the image appear of the always charming-kind, always restless-active Mr. Jean Capart, the founder and meritorious director of the *Fondation*.”

Several book reviews by Asselberghs in Dutch newspapers may, however, never be recognised as such, since reviews were sometimes published without the name of the author. A case in point is the review he most likely wrote of Ludwig Keimer's *Die Gartenpflanzen im alten Ägypten* (Keimer 1924), which was published anonymously in the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* of 23 December 1924 ([Anon.] 1924b). A clipping of this review was wedged into Asselberghs' personal copy of Keimer 1924, along with a clipping of Keimer 1926 (private collection). Another review that has all the markings of Asselberghs' style and subject matter is, for instance, [Anon.] 1930. Whether or not these articles were actually of his hand, may remain impossible to ascertain.

Sometimes Asselberghs himself comes to the rescue. Asselberghs 1933b only surfaced thanks to a comment in a postcard he wrote to Capart:

"Je vous envois en même temps un article (dans le Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant du 3 de ce mois, Avondblad A) sur le livre de Pirenne. Malheureusement on a mutilé tout à fait cet article en le coupant à 4 endroits!"⁴⁰

In a letter to Heinrich Schäfer dated 15 February 1941, Asselberghs thanks him for the ZÄS article in which an overview of Schäfer's bibliography is published (Bothmer & Przybylla 1939), and he mentions that he has reviewed no less than seven of Schäfer's publications (Asselberghs 1926b; 1928a; 1929a; 1929d; 1930; 1931; 1937). He concludes with:

"Wie viel Freude und Gewinn hat mir allein schon das Studieren und Besprechen dieser zum grossen Teil riesigen (vor allem im geistigen Sinne) Werke gegeben!"⁴¹

1930s: travels, conferences, and exhibitions

In early 1930 Asselberghs finally made a trip to Egypt, presumably his first one. Hardly anything is known about this voyage, but a few photos have survived in the family archives, such as one of him posing in front of the Sphinx at Giza (Fig. 11). It comes as no surprise that he would have travelled there over land, by train, rather than by boat, and he describes this journey from the Netherlands to Egypt lyrically in a three-part article published in a fairly obscure Dutch magazine: *Het veilig spoor: Propagandablade van de Vereeniging van Geheelonthouders onder Nederlandsch Spoor- en Tramwegpersoneel*⁴²

⁴⁰ Henri Asselberghs to Jean Capart, 6 March 1933: FÉRE archive, folder H. Asselberghs, RMAH.

⁴¹ Henri Asselberghs to Heinrich Schäfer, 15 February 1941. I thank Gertraude Fiebelkorn, granddaughter of Heinrich Schäfer, for sending me a copy of this letter, the original of which is kept at the Stadtarchiv Hannover.

⁴² "The safe track: Propaganda magazine of the Association of Total Abstainers among Dutch Rail and Tramway Personnel."

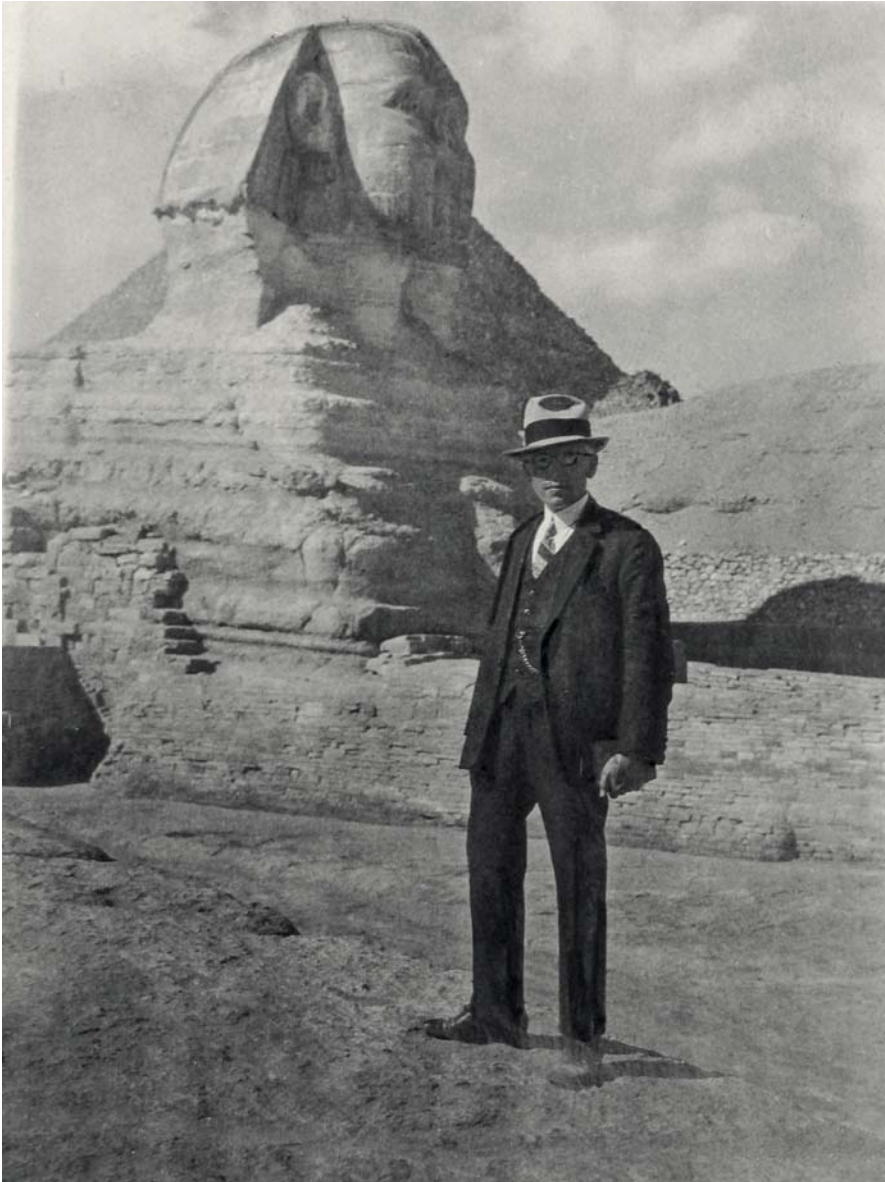


Fig. 11. Henri Asselberghs in front of the sphinx at Giza, dated to February 1930 in his handwriting on the back of the photo. He adds: "Op den voorgrond mijn persoontje op den rand voor de afgraving (je ziet het aan de schaduw die plotseling afbreekt)"⁴³ (© Christophe Asselberghs).

⁴³ "In the foreground my person on the ridge of the escarpment (you can see it by the shadow that suddenly breaks off)."

(Asselberghs 1931a–c). He crossed from the European continent into Asia at the Bosphorus and writes with admiration about the brand-new trains of the Turkish railways.

“Gloednieuwe D-treinen van de Turksche Staatsspoorwegen, samengesteld uit het beste Duitsche en Zweedsche materieel dat er bestaat; locomotieven van Henschel & Sohn in Cassel, niet minder krachtig dan de nieuwste machines van de Ned. Spoorwegen. Keurige slaapwagens en restauratie-rijtuigjes! En die treinen worden uitstekend bediend, door bekwaam personeel, uiterst voorkomend en netjes in de kleren. Mein Liebchen, was willste....”⁴⁴ (Asselberghs 1931b: 6).

The tantalizing comment “als ik nu, bladerend in mijn reisnotities, mijn herinnering laat gaan en terugdenk aan dien tocht door Klein-Azië...”⁴⁵ (Asselberghs 1931b: 6) makes it clear that he must have kept a diary of the journey, which is now unfortunately lost. Asselberghs also refers to his voyage to Egypt in a letter to Marcelle Werbrouck dated 9 July 1930:

“En réponse à votre aimable invitation je regrette beaucoup ne pouvoir pas participer à la Semaine Egyptologique à Bruxelles au cours du mois de Septembre prochain. Au commencement de l’année j’ai fait un voyage en Egypte, ce qui a épuisé tous mes jours de vacance.”⁴⁶

Despite the lack of holiday time, he seems to have found a way to participate in the first *Semaine égyptologique et papyrologique de Bruxelles* (14–20 September 1930) anyway, since he writes to Capart on 2 September 1930:

“Voulez-vous me faire parvenir le programme officiel de la Semaine Egyptologique. Je voudrais y assister, ne fût-ce que pendant un ou deux jours.”⁴⁷

He is effectively listed as a participant in *CdÉ* 6 (1931): 189. In the same *CdÉ* volume, on p. 20, Asselberghs is also mentioned for the first time as a *membre adhérent* of the FÉRE, a membership he keeps up throughout the 1930s and during WWII as well (cf. *infra*). In 1935 Asselberghs participated in the second *Semaine égyptologique et papyrologique de Bruxelles* (7–13 July 1935), as is mentioned in the *CdÉ* 11 (1936): 21.⁴⁸ Already at the beginning of the

⁴⁴ “Brand-new D-trains of the Turkish State Railways, composed of the best German and Swedish material that exists; locomotives of Henschel & Sohn in Cassel, no less powerful than the newest machines of the Dutch Railways. Neat sleeper cars and dining cars! And those trains are excellently served, by competent personnel, extremely courteous and neatly dressed. Mein Liebchen, was willste....”

⁴⁵ “If I now, leafing through my travel notes, let my memories roam and think back to that journey through Asia Minor....”

⁴⁶ Henri Asselberghs to Marcelle Werbrouck, 9 July 1930: FÉRE archive, folder H. Asselberghs, RMAH.

⁴⁷ Henri Asselberghs to Jean Capart, 2 September 1930: FÉRE archive, folder H. Asselberghs, RMAH.

⁴⁸ For these *Semaines égyptologiques*, see Bruffaerts 2013: 227–229.

conference, on Monday 8 July, he wrote a postcard home to his wife Louise and their children to inform them that he would stay away longer than expected:

“Beste Lou en Kinderen,
Ik kom jullie even vertellen dat het wel vrijdag morgen zal worden eer ik thuis kom. Tot nog toe gaat alles goed, maar donderdag is er nog een uitstap naar Waterloo, Mariemont enz. waarheen tante Jeanne ook zal meegaan. In Antwerpen alles goed.
Hartelijke groeten,
Vader”⁴⁹

In 1931 Asselberghs participated in the 18th International Congress of Orientalists, held at Leiden between 7 and 12 September ([Anon.] 1932: 256). That same year he also formed part of the committee that organised an exhibition at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam about Egyptian and Near Eastern objects in private collections in the Netherlands, 4 October–15 November 1931 ([Anon.] 1931a; [Anon.] 1931b: 6). This committee consisted mainly of university professors (including A. de Buck and F.M.Th. Böhl at Leiden), but also included the private collector Frits Lugt. The latter lived in Maartensdijk, close to Utrecht, and he possessed a number of Egyptian antiquities in his large private collection (Stuart 2010). Asselberghs sent the catalogue of the exhibition to Capart, whose attention was particularly drawn to a head of Ramses II wearing the *khepresh* crown, of which the catalogue mentions that it greatly resembles the head of the well-known Ramses II statue in the Museo Egizio in Turin, inv. C. 1380 ([Anon.] 1931b: 48, no. 284, with figure). The name of the owner is not mentioned in the catalogue, but correspondence between Asselberghs and Capart makes it clear it was in the possession of the Lugt family:

“La tête de Ramses II appartient à M. F. Lugt à Maartensdijk (près d’Utrecht). Seulement, il y a une question de famille et M. Lugt aimerait que vous lui avertissiez avant de publier son nom quelque part. (...) M. Lugt me dit qu’il se tient à votre disposition quant à toute information désirée au sujet de la tête.”⁵⁰

This head was in fact in the possession of Lugt’s father-in-law, which explains why Frits Lugt did not want to have his name associated with it in print (for the fate of the head, see Stuart 2010: 10). Nevertheless, after Asselberghs had sent the catalogue to Capart, the latter decided the exhibition was worth a trip to Amsterdam, which he scheduled on 11 November 1931.

⁴⁹ Henri Asselberghs to Louise Verhulsen, 8 July 1935: private collection. “Dear Lou and children, I have come to tell you that it will be Friday morning before I get home. So far so good, but on Thursday there will be an excursion to Waterloo, Mariemont, etc. to which aunt Jeanne will also come along. Everything is fine in Antwerp. Best wishes, Father.” Aunt Jeanne is Jeanne Verhulsen, the sister of Henri’s wife Louise; see further in n. 59.

⁵⁰ Henri Asselberghs to Jean Capart, 23 October 1931: FÉRE archive, folder H. Asselberghs, RMAH.

Five years later, in 1936, Asselberghs was again involved with an exhibition, this time at the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden (RMO) in Leiden. A short newspaper entry ([Anon.] 1936c) relates how Asselberghs donated to the RMO his collection of plates that appeared in 'The Illustrated London News' between November 1922 and June 1932 and that documented the excavations in the tomb of Tutankhamun. This collection was exhibited over the summer together with objects from the collection and books related to Tutankhamun.

Ex Oriente Lux and NINO

On 22 May 1933 the Dutch *Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Gezelschap 'Ex Oriente Lux'* (EOL) was inaugurated in Leiden (Kampman 1947; Veenhof 2008) and Asselberghs was involved from the start. Already in the second volume of the journal *Jaarbericht van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Genootschap 'Ex Oriente Lux'* (JEOL) he is named as corresponding member (JEOL 2 (1934): 56); and the lecture that he held in 1933 at the 7^e *Congres van het Oostersch Genootschap* in Leiden was published in the first volume of the series *Mededelingen en verhandelingen van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch genootschap 'Ex Oriente Lux'* (MVEOL) alongside contributions by A. de Buck, W.D. van Wijngaarden, and other eminent academics (Asselberghs 1934a). In this lecture he elaborated on a relief that was featured in the previously mentioned 1931 exhibition at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam about Egyptian and Near Eastern objects in private Dutch collections. This relief from the mortuary temple of Sahure shows an Egyptian sailor climbing in the rigging of a ship, and the comments by Asselberghs clearly show that Jean Capart and Heinrich Schäfer were his main influences.⁵¹

Between 1933 and 1940 Asselberghs was responsible for the section *Egyptische Archaeologie* in JEOL, which from JEOL 3 onwards was generally divided in A. *Opgravingen* (excavations) and B. *Verdere Publicaties/Boekbesprekingen* (other publications/book reviews). In the first section Asselberghs wrote yearly contributions in which he presented an overview of the most remarkable discoveries in the field during the past year, while in the second section he reviewed newly published books (Asselberghs 1933a; 1934b; 1935a; 1936a; 1938a; 1939a; 1940a). After 1940, when most archaeological expeditions came to a halt with the outbreak of World War II, he switched perspectives and in JEOL 8—the first JEOL volume that appeared during WWII—he sketched a history of Egyptology up until WWI (Asselberghs 1942b).

⁵¹ Years later, on 5 March 1940, Asselberghs wrote to George A. Reisner at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston asking about a relief from the tomb of Nekhebu at Giza that also shows a sailor climbing the rigging of a ship (MFA 13.4349.4). I am grateful to Peter Der Manuelian for providing me with this reference.

This was followed up in *JEOL* 9, in which he continued the story for the inter-war period (Asselberghs 1944b). In this article Asselberghs paid special tribute to Capart and the way in which he put ancient Egypt on the map in Belgium:

“Een land dat geheel nieuw op den voorgrond trad, is België, waar de belangstelling voor alles wat het Oude Egypte betreft sinds het einde der vorige eeuw in Jean Capart een ongeëvenaarden gangmaker vond. De Egyptische afdeeling van het Cinquenaire museum in Brussel kwam onder hem tot vollen luister en de in 1923 kort na de ontdekking van Toet-anch-amon's graf door hem gestichte Fondation égyptologique Reine Elisabeth is de eerste mij bekende instelling, die zich uitsluitend op Egypte specialiseert. Aan haar initiatief is in België alles, maar ook daarbuiten héél wat te danken dat anders achterwege zou zijn gebleven.” (Asselberghs 1944b: 54).⁵²

After the end of WWII Asselberghs wrote one more *JEOL* article (Asselberghs 1949–1950)—which is in fact a review of three books on pyramids—before focusing on his magnum opus *Chaos en beheersing*. After its publication in 1961, and thus also after his official retirement from the *Spoorwegmuseum*, Asselberghs reinvented himself once again. Between 1965 and 1976 he published four articles in *JEOL* focusing on various topics in ancient Egyptian religion, culture and art (Asselberghs 1965–1966; 1969–1970; 1971–1972; 1975–1976).

Apart from publishing in *JEOL*, Asselberghs sometimes also lectured for EOL at various locations throughout the Netherlands. On 12 March 1935 he spoke at the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden about “Egyptische reliëfs en hun ontstaan in verband met techniek en kleur”⁵³ (*JEOL* 3 (1935): 60), about which a report was published in the *Algemeen Handelsblad* ([Anon.] 1935). Two years later he spoke on a similar topic (“Over de vervaardiging van reliëfs in de mastaba's”)⁵⁴ in Nijmegen on 13 February 1937 and in Amsterdam on 17 March 1937 (*JEOL* 5 (1937–1938): 474). He also lectured outside of the EOL circuit, for instance, already in August 1924 he had lectured at Antwerp during the *Kunsthistorische Week* on the topic “Over individualisme in de Egyptische beeldkunst” ([Anon.] 1924a).

When *Ex Oriente Lux* celebrated its ten-year jubilee on 25 September 1943, Asselberghs attended the event. A photograph of the attendees shows Asselberghs standing all the way at the back, elevated above the crowd, next to J. Zandee (Fig. 12).⁵⁵ The first ten years had been good ones for EOL, and

⁵² This passage was quoted in French in *CdÉ* 41 (1946): 16. See also Bruffaerts 2013: 232, where Asselberghs is erroneously identified as the director of EOL.

⁵³ “Egyptian reliefs and their creation in relation to technique and colour.”

⁵⁴ “On the manufacture of reliefs in mastabas.”

⁵⁵ This photograph was also published in the EOL 75 year jubilee volume of *Phœnix: Bulletin uitgegeven door het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Genootschap 'Ex Oriente Lux'* 54.1 (2008): 1, but Asselberghs is not named in the caption.



Fig. 12. Ten year jubilee of Ex Oriente Lux, with Asselberghs standing all the way at the back, elevated above the crowd, next to J. Zandee, 25 September 1943. Asselberghs' professor at Leiden University, Adriaan de Buck, was also present (second row, behind the little girl in white) (© NINO Leiden).

the organisation was thriving, as is described by Kampman in the MVEOL volume that appeared on the occasion of the jubilee (Kampman 1947). However, in the 1950s the membership dropped and EOL faced other challenges as well (Veenhof 2008: 14–19). Asselberghs became one of the members of a committee created to evaluate the activities and publications of EOL, and to make recommendations for reforms (*JEOL* 13 (1953–1954): 266–267).

In the meantime, the *Stichting Nederlandsch Archaeologisch-philologisch Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten* (NAIN, in 1955 changed into the *Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten*, NINO) had been created in 1939 at Leiden (Van Zoest & Berntsen 2014), and Asselberghs published twice in its journal *BiOr* (Asselberghs 1944a; 1945a). He kept a subscription to *BiOr* until 1961, the same time when he was forced to give up all his other memberships and associations as well. On 28 February 1962 he wrote to A.A. Kampman, the Director of the NINO:

“Ja, U zult wel denken: daar is hij weer! Maar er zijn nu toch verschillende redenen die mij nopen U mede te delen dat ik mijn abonnement op *BiOr* met het reeds ontvangen laatste nummer van Jaarg. XVIII (1961) definitief wil laten eindigen.

(...) Ook wilde ik mijn lidmaatschap van de ‘Vereeniging tot bevordering der kennis van de Antieke Beschaving’ per 31 December 1961 laten aflopen. Het gaat alles niet zonder pijn, maar het moet.”⁵⁶

Corresponding member of the DAI

In 1936 Asselberghs became a corresponding member of the *Deutsches Archäologisches Institut* (DAI), something that did not go unnoticed in the Dutch press. [Anon.] 1936b writes:

“Aan den heer J.J.M.H.H. Asselberghs, directeur van het Nederlandsch Spoorwegmuseum te Utrecht, is de hooge wetenschappelijke onderscheiding te beurt gevallen door het *Archaeologisches Institut des Deutschen Reiches* benoemd te worden tot corresponderend lid van dat instituut. Deze onderscheiding moet volgens het Instituut beschouwd worden als een blijk van waardeering voor het werk, dat de heer Asselberghs ter bevordering van de oud-Oriëntaalsche wetenschap verricht heeft en als een erkenning van de fijnzinnige studies, welke de heer Asselberghs op dit gebied heeft gepubliceerd.”⁵⁷

He was nominated for this honour in 1935 by Heinrich Schäfer, Director of the Egyptian Department of the *Staatliche Museen in Berlin*, as is recorded in a letter preserved in the archive of the DAI.⁵⁸ While it is clear mainly from circumstantial evidence that Asselberghs and Schäfer must have known each other quite well, this letter gives some insight into their relationship which, according to Schäfer, must have started somewhere in the mid 1920s.

“Für die Mitgliederwahlen, die in der ordentlichen Gesamtsitzung der Zentraldirektion im Jahre 1936 zur Verhandlung kommen sollen, erlaube ich mir, die folgenden beiden Ernennungen zu korrespondierenden Mitgliedern vorzuschlagen:
1. Herrn Dr. W.D. van Wijngaarden, Konservator der ägyptischen Abteilung des Reichsmuseums für Altertümer in Leiden. (...)
2. Herrn Henri Asselberghs, Direktor des Spoorwagen-Museums (sic) in Utrecht. Ich kenne Herrn A. seit mehr als zehn Jahren und habe ihn als einen feinsinnigen Menschen und durchaus ernst zu nehmenden Kenner ägyptischer Kunst und Kultur

⁵⁶ Henri Asselberghs to Arie A. Kampman, 28 February 1962: NINO archive, Leiden. I thank Carolien van Zoest for granting me access to this archive. “Yes, you will probably think: there he is again! But there are now several reasons why I am forced to inform you that I definitively want to end my subscription to BiOr with the latest issue of Vol. XVIII (1961), which I already received. (...) I also want to end my membership of the *Vereeniging tot bevordering der kennis van de Antieke Beschaving* on 31 December 1961. All of this does not go without pain, but it must be done.”

⁵⁷ “Mr. J.J.M.H.H. Asselberghs, director of the *Nederlandsch Spoorwegmuseum* in Utrecht, has been awarded the high scientific distinction of being appointed by the *Archaeologisches Institut des Deutschen Reiches* as corresponding member of that institute. According to the Institute, this award should be considered as a token of appreciation for the work carried out by Mr. Asselberghs for the promotion of ancient Oriental science and as an acknowledgement of the fine studies published by Mr. Asselberghs in this field.”

⁵⁸ I warmly thank Isolde Lehnert for alerting me to this file, and Martina Düntzer for providing me with scans of its contents.

hochschätzen gelernt. Für die Art, wie er diese seine Neigung betätigt, ist bezeichnend, dass er seit langen Jahren auf seinen jährlichen Erholungsurlaub verzichtet hat, um dafür alle Woche einmal nach Leiden zum Hören von Vorlesungen fahren zu dürfen. So ist er denn auch angesehener und geschätzter Mitarbeiter in den Kreisen, die sich die Verbreitung der Kenntnis von antiker, besonders altorientalischer, Kunst zur Aufgabe gemacht haben. Literarisch hat er sich zu seinem Bedauern neben seiner anstrengenden dienstlichen Arbeit nur durch Buchbesprechungen betätigen können, die aber in Form und Gedanken fast immer ausgezeichnet sind. Auch er ist ein guter Freund deutscher Art.

Heil Hitler!

H. Schäfer”⁵⁹

Asselberghs is indeed listed as a new corresponding member in the *Jahresbericht des Archäologischen Instituts des Deutschen Reiches für das Haushaltsjahr 1936/37* ([Anon.] 1937: 1). As was discussed before, Schäfer regularly sent offprints of his publications to Asselberghs, and the latter reviewed them for the *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant*. Asselberghs’ ideas and writings on art history were heavily influenced by Schäfer (cf. *infra*). A comment in Asselberghs 1961: xi makes it clear that the two men met in person as well, although no details are known about such encounters.

The war years

Schäfer’s signature is a stark reminder that World War II is upon us. That the effects of this war were severe and far-reaching in Belgium and in the Netherlands, is also clear in the few surviving letters between Asselberghs and Capart and Werbrouck from this period. In 1940 Asselberghs was forced to give up all of his professional memberships, but he kept his subscription as *membre adhérent* to the FÉRE going as long as possible, perhaps out of loyalty to Capart. On 22 October 1940 he wrote to Capart:

“Les circonstances me forcent de terminer définitivement la plupart de mes contributions aux sociétés savantes, même à celles de mon pays. Pour l’an (1940–)1941 la Fondation sera la seule association à la quelle (sic) je peux me permettre encore cette année-ci de contribuer. Afin d’éviter des frais je prierai (sic) ma belle-sœur, mademoiselle J. Verhulsen,⁶⁰ Antiquaire à Anvers, de vous virer ma souscription

⁵⁹ Heinrich Schäfer to the President of the DAI, 13 December 1935: DAI Berlin, Archiv der Zentrale, Biographica-Mappe Henri Asselberghs. In the ‘j’accuse’ letter of Georg Steindorff Heinrich Schäfer is listed as one of three that are not discussed, in the case of Schäfer because he was too old at that point to play a roll in post-war Egyptology (Schneider 2013: 185–187). The use of ‘Heil Hitler’ as a greeting does not necessarily signify personal political convictions. For the use of this greeting, see Ehlers 2012 (I thank Thomas L. Gertzen for this reference).

⁶⁰ Jeanne Verhulsen, the sister of Asselberghs’ wife, was quite the free spirit in her days. E. Asselberghs 1997: 65–66 paints a portrait of his flamboyant aunt, whose antique shop in Antwerp was named ‘Ye Olde Curiosity Shop.’ An Italian count, Riccardo Martinelli, had proposed to her to marry him in the late 1920s, but on the boat to Italy she met John Sulayman, an Egyptian who had studied at Oxford and who was on his way back to Cairo. It was love at first sight, and

de membre adhérent pour l'exercice 1940/41, s'élevant comme vous m'écrivez à 14 belgas. L'année passée, ayant aussi contribué à la Bibliothèque égyptologique, je regrette cependant infiniment de devoir vous prier de ne me considérer plus comme participant dès ce moment, réduit à la nécessité comme je me vois de retrancher partout où il est possible et même où il ne l'est pas."⁶¹

The war would soon hit the Asselberghs family even much closer to home. Their three sons fled the country in order not to be incorporated into the German war machine. The story of their journey was written down and published over fifty years later by one of the sons, Edgar Asselberghs, offering occasional glimpses into the life of the Asselberghs family during the war (E. Asselberghs 1997).⁶² The first son to leave was Erik, who fled the occupied Netherlands in 1942. His two brothers, Victor and Edgar, inspired by their brother's actions, did the same in the following year. However, after an initial attempt to leave the Netherlands, Victor and Edgar were already quickly forced to briefly return home. Edgar Asselberghs recounts:

"We kwamen thuis op de dag van de zilveren bruiloft van onze ouders, het leek wel of we zo maar even voor die gelegenheid teruggekomen waren. Ik herinner me nog hoe mijn moeder daar stond op het tuinpaadje bij de schuur, een aluminium vergiet met tomaten in haar handen, mager, in een dunne, gebloemde zomerjurk, haar grijzend haar gevlochten in een knot. Ze schrokken toen ze ons zagen. (...) Daags tevoren was er politie aan de deur geweest om te informeren waar wij gebleven waren. Mijn vader had ons als vermist opgegeven en de agent had hem aangeraden er dan maar voor te zorgen dat we ook vermist bléven, want er zou zeker een opsporingsbericht in het politieblad komen. Daarna was hij met een blik van 'we begrijpen elkaar' verdwenen. Hij had zijn plicht gedaan." (E. Asselberghs 1997: 17).⁶³

Their second attempt to flee the Netherlands was successful, and after many peregrinations through France, they arrived in Spain. Erik's fate was far worse

Jeanne decided to sail on to Port Said and marry John instead of Riccardo. However, she was not one to fit into a traditional Egyptian marriage, and her mother-in-law also did not approve of her son's choice, so eventually she left John and Egypt, and fled back to Belgium with the help of the wife of the German consul. Despite the unsuccessful outcome of the marriage, this episode must have had an effect on Henri Asselberghs, since he accompanied Jeanne on some of her travels to Egypt, although exact details of the voyages are no longer known (personal communication, Christophe Asselberghs).

⁶¹ Henri Asselberghs to Jean Capart, 22 October 1940: FÉRE archive, folder H. Asselberghs, RMAH.

⁶² The introduction to the book is by Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands.

⁶³ "We arrived home on the day of our parents' silver wedding anniversary, it seemed as if we had just come back for the occasion. I remember my mother standing there on the garden path by the shed, an aluminium colander with tomatoes in her hands, skinny, in a thin, floral summer dress, her greying hair woven into a bun. They were startled when they saw us. (...) The day before there had been a police officer at the door to find out where we had gone. My father had reported us missing and the officer had advised him to make sure that we would also remain missing, because there would certainly be a search warrant in the police bulletin. He then left with a look of 'we understand each other' on his face. He had done his duty."

than that of his brothers, ending up in concentration camp Miranda de Ebro, a Spanish camp maintained by the Franco regime. This was an experience from which he never really recovered (E. Asselberghs 1997: 84–85; 118). Victor and Edgar were also captured in Spain, but were liberated in autumn 1943, then sent on to Lisbon, and finally to England in January 1944 where they ended up in the Royal Netherlands Brigade Prinses Irene. They landed in Normandy in August 1944, where they fought against the Germans. From there on out they made their way north towards Belgium and eventually also back to their home country. All three sons made it back to the Netherlands alive at the end of the war and were decorated with the *Kruis van Verdienste* (Cross of Merit). Edgar later on also became *Officier in de Orde van Oranje-Nassau* (Officer in the Order of Orange-Nassau).

On 7 May 1945 the brothers were in the parade to celebrate the liberation of Utrecht:

“Utrecht, wat was ik opgewonden toen we binnen reden, de Biltstraat, de Wittevrouwenbrug, de Voorstraat. Tussen al die blijde, juichende mensen hoopte ik mijn vader, moeder of zusters te ontdekken, maar ze waren er niet bij. Toen de colonne een ogenblik tot stilstand kwam, zag ik een oude schoolvriend, Paul, zwaaiend en roepend. Het lukte hem om bij onze carrier te komen. Mijn handen schuddend zei hij dat thuis alles in orde was, iedereen had het overleefd. Ik gaf hem stukken chocolade, ‘boiled sweets’ en sigaretten mee en hij beloofde onmiddellijk mijn ouders te gaan vertellen dat hij mij gezien had. En verder trokken we weer.” (E. Asselberghs 1997: 115).⁶⁴

Several days later—it is not specified when exactly—the moment finally arrived when the entire family was reunited (Fig. 13):

“De volgende dag zagen we alledrie, Erik, jij en ik, kans om naar huis te gaan. Jij had een legerauto ‘geleend’. Hoe Erik gekomen was, weet ik niet meer, ik had een lift gekregen. Voor het eerst zagen we onze ouders en zusters en ook wijzelf elkaar terug. Vader was niet veel veranderd, wat ouder, zijn rug wat meer gekromd. Moeder was broedmager. Wat wordt er allemaal verteld bij zo’n weerzien? Mijn geheugen laat me in de steek en dat is geen uitvlucht. Natuurlijk hadden ze het thuis erg moeilijk gehad. Voedseltekort was het grootste probleem geweest, vooral vanaf de laatste winter. Maar daar werd niet lang over gesproken, alles was nu toch voorbij? Ma vertelde dat ze na ons vertrek een joods meisje in huis hadden verborgen. Op een dag was de buurman op bezoek gekomen, hij had gehoord dat wij alledrie in Spanje waren. ‘Uw zonen’ had hij gezegd, ‘zijn door andere mensen geholpen en beschermd. Wilt U niet een joods meisje in huis nemen?’ Ze hadden

⁶⁴ “Utrecht, how I was excited when we drove into the Biltstraat, the Wittevrouwenbrug, the Voorstraat. Among all those happy, cheering people I hoped to discover my father, mother or sisters, but they were not there. When the motorcade stopped for a moment, I saw an old school friend, Paul, waving and shouting. He managed to get to our carrier. Shaking my hands he said that everything was fine at home, everyone had survived. I gave him pieces of chocolate, ‘boiled sweets’ and cigarettes and he promised to immediately go tell my parents that he had seen me. Then we moved on.”

het gedaan. Daisy was in het gezin opgenomen, drie dochters in plaats van twee. (...) Pa, de boekenwurm, helemaal niet gewend zwaar werk te doen, had in de winter hout gekapt en bomen gezaagd. Eén keer was hij bijna gepakt, toen hij kolen zocht tussen de stenen langs de spoorbaan. ‘De machinisten gooiden wel eens een schep kolen uit de locomotief om de mensen te helpen.’” (E. Asselberghs 1997: 116).⁶⁵



Fig. 13. The Asselberghs family in May 1945, reunited after the liberation. From left to right: Marie-Anne, Louise, Victor, Caecilia on Erik's lap, Henri, and Edgar (© Christophe Asselberghs).

‘Daisy’ was the nickname of Debora Henriëtte Kattenburg (1916–1995), and the description of her as ‘a Jewish girl’ is slightly misleading, since she was a

⁶⁵ “The next day all three of us, Erik, you and I, saw an opportunity to go home. You had ‘borrowed’ an army car. I do not remember how Erik got there, I had gotten a lift. For the first time we saw our parents and sisters and each other again. Father had not changed much, a bit older, his back a bit more curved. Mother looked scrawny. What is said at such a reunion? My memory fails me and that is not an excuse. Of course they had had a hard time at home. Food shortage had been the biggest problem, especially since last winter. But this was not talked about for very long, it was all over now, was it not? Mother said that after we left they had hidden a Jewish girl in the house. One day the neighbour had come to visit, he had heard that all three of us were in Spain. ‘Your sons’, he had said, ‘have been helped and protected by other people. Do you not want to take a Jewish girl into your house?’ They had done it. Daisy had been taken into the family, three daughters instead of two. (...) Dad, the bookworm, not at all used to doing heavy work, had cut wood and sawed trees during the winter. Once he was almost caught looking for coal between the stones along the railway track. The train drivers sometimes threw a shovel of coal out of the locomotive to help people.”



Fig. 14. Wedding photo of Debora 'Daisy' Henriëtte Kattenburg (center) and Bernard van Hessen (right) on 7 January 1941 at the synagogue of Bussum, the Netherlands. On the left stands Walter Kattenburg, a cousin of Daisy, who was killed at Auschwitz on 15 April 1944 (© Joyce Bergman).

27 year old married woman by the time she was taken in by the Asselberghs family in May 1944. Fig. 14 shows her on her wedding day, 7 January 1941, with Bernard van Hessen. A handwritten account by Daisy about her war experiences—kindly made available by her daughter Joyce Bergman—describes her time with the family as follows:

“Door de van Loons⁶⁶ kwam ik bij de Asselberghs in huis. Dat is altijd een warme vriendschap, nee meer, een gevoel van verwantschap, een familieband gebleven. Bij hen bleef ik tot Koninginnedag, 31 Augustus 1944. Papa was een eeuwige optimist en een mieterse vent. Moeder Louiske een warme lieve vriendin, met d'r voeten op de grond. Als Papa lekker eten kreeg, niet veel, maar perfect klaar gemaakt en verder met rust gelaten in zijn studeerkamer, tussen zijn boeken, dan was hij happy. Hij is Egyptoloog en spreekt of leest zelfs Hebreeuws.”⁶⁷

⁶⁶ The van Loons were the neighbours of the Asselberghs family, living at Leonard Fuchslaan 5 in Utrecht.

⁶⁷ “The van Loons brought me to the Asselberghs house. That has always remained a warm friendship, no, more, a sense of kinship, a family bond. I stayed with them until Queen's Day, 31 August 1944. Papa was an eternal optimist and a great guy. Mother Louiske was a warm dear friend, with her feet on the ground. If Papa got good food, not much, but perfectly prepared and

Daisy also made sketches about her life in the Asselberghs house. Fig. 15 shows her drawing of 'Papa' Henri's study upstairs, and the accompanying notes also make it clear that as long as he was surrounded by his books and had good food available, he was perfectly content.

Daisy survived the war, and her time with the Asselberghs family was clearly a happy one, a shelter from the harsh reality of the world around her. Her brother Dick Kattenburg was not so lucky. He was arrested on 5 May 1944 and deported to Auschwitz, where he was killed in September that same year, at age 24. A brilliant violinist and composer, his works were rediscovered by Joyce Bergman in 2004 and have since come back to life.⁶⁸

Years later, on 5 August 1992, Henri and Louise Asselberghs were posthumously recognised as Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem (file nr. M.31.2/5383/2), and a ceremony to honour them was held at the synagogue of Bussum on 7 September 1993.⁶⁹ Gutman *et al.* 2004: 70–71 describe this episode as follows:

"In 1943, Debora Henriette (born Kattenburg) and Bernard van Hessen, a young couple with false papers attesting to an 'Aryan' ancestry, were forced to leave their hiding place. Through her friends in Tuindorp, Utrecht, Jeanne Coolsma put the couple in touch with the Asselberghses, a Catholic family. Henri, an Egyptologist, and Louise had five children. Their three sons were fighting with the Allied forces and their two daughters, Marie Anne and Cecilia, lived at home. Over time, Marie Anne and Debora developed a very special relationship. Debora also described Louise as a good mother and friend. Debora and Bernard stayed with the Asselberghs family until the liberation."

This statement is however not entirely correct, since Bernard never stayed with the Asselberghs family, and Daisy only arrived with them in May 1944.

Despite the personal hardships, even during the war years Asselberghs continued to work on his Egyptological publications. In 1942 he published *Beeldende Kunst in Oud-Egypte*, a small booklet on Egyptian art aimed for the general public, written at a time when not many popular scientific books about ancient Egypt were yet available in Dutch (Fig. 16). A second edition already appeared in 1943. His interest in the early periods of ancient Egyptian civilisation shines through in this publication, which led Marcelle Werbrouck to comment in her short review: "Nous regrettons cependant que, dans ce petit livre, une grande place ait été faite aux débuts, ou plutôt à ces périodes primitives bien peu pharaoniques" (Werbrouck 1943: 259). Another criticism by Werbrouck, "Pourquoi le livre des *Dessins ébauchés* de Marcelle Baud n'est-il

was left alone in his study, between his books, he was happy. He is an Egyptologist and even speaks or reads Hebrew."

⁶⁸ A short biography and his music list are available at <https://www.forbiddenmusicregained.org/search/composer/id/100003> (accessed 18/10/2020).

⁶⁹ <https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/pdf-drupal/netherlands.pdf> (accessed 30/07/2020).

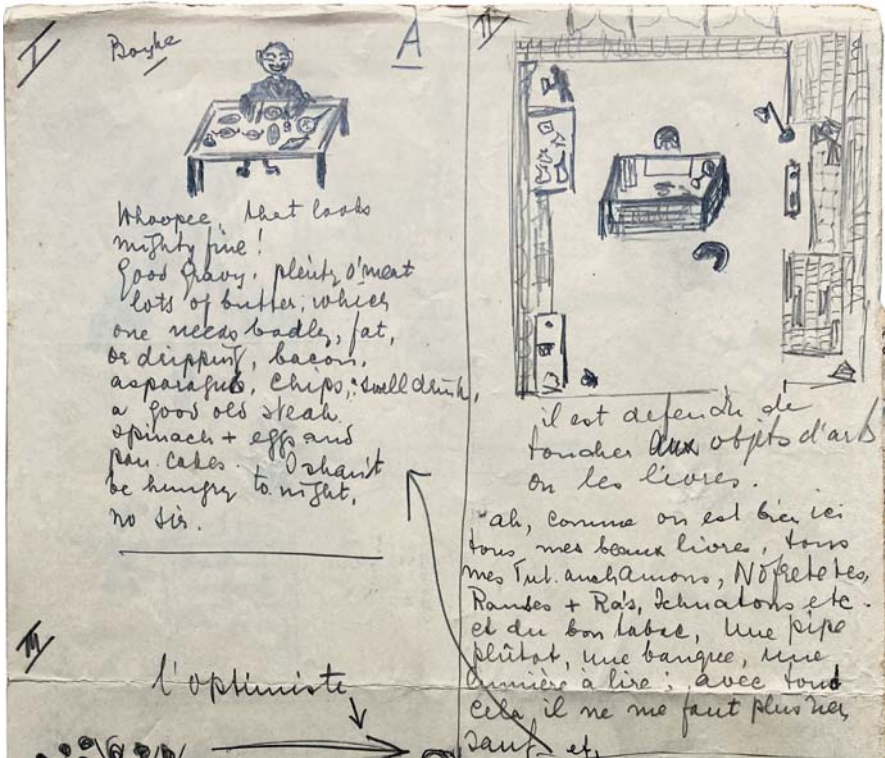


Fig. 15. Notes and sketches by Daisy about her time in hiding with the Asselberghs family in 1944 (© Joyce Bergman). On the top left Henri is depicted sitting at a table full of food, on the right his study upstairs is sketched.

The accompanying texts read:

I

Whoopee, that looks mighty fine !
 Good gravy, plenty o' meat, lots of butter, which one needs badly, fat, or dripping,
 bacon, asparagus, chips, a good old steak, spinach + eggs and pan
 cakes. I shan't be hungry tonight, no sir.

II

Il est defendu de toucher aux objets d'art ou les livres.
 Ah, comme on est bien ici
 Tous mes beaux livres, tous mes TutanchAmons, Nofretetes, Ramses + Ra's,
 Ichnatons etc. et du bon tabac, une pipe plutôt, une banque, une lumière à lire : avec
 tout cela il ne me faut plus rien, sauf...

pas utilisé (...)?” (Werbrouck 1943: 259) is addressed in correspondence between Asselberghs and Werbrouck:

“Quant à votre frappant reproche de ne pas avoir utilisé le livre des *Dessins ébauchés* de Marcelle Baud : un de mes défauts consiste à ne pas étudier des livres qui ne m'appartiennent pas.”⁷⁰

This is a shortcoming for which he may be readily forgiven, writing during the war without access to an Egyptological library nearby. He continues:

“S'il y a moyen, faites me parvenir, je vous prie, un exemplaire de cet ouvrage, dont je vous paierai le prix après la guerre. Je voudrais l'utiliser pour une 3^e édition éventuelle.”⁷¹

Werbrouck did indeed send him Baud's book, but a third edition of *Beeldende Kunst* never saw the light of day, despite the fact that Asselberghs clearly planned one. In a letter to Capart sent on 13 June 1945 by Victor Asselberghs on behalf of his father, he writes: “Pour la 3^e édition révisée de mon petit livre “Beeldende Kunst in Oud Egypte”, à paraître à bref délai, j'aurais besoin des photos originaux suivantes (...)”, followed by a list of images he would like to obtain. He ends the letter on a personal note, saying:

“Nous avons survécu les temps de misère sans trop de dommages. Nos trois fils échappés en 1942 et 1943 en Angleterre sont rentrés sains et saufs.”⁷²

In another review of *Beeldende Kunst* by C. Kern the typical exuberant writing style of Asselberghs is commented upon:

“In onze taal bezitten we sedert korten tijd het hierboven aangekondigde werkje van den Utrechtschen geleerde H. Asselberghs, een der geestdriftigste liefhebbers van de Egyptische kunst in het heele land. (...) Asselberghs heeft in zijn technisch verbluffend goed uit de pers gekomen boekje, dat aan het slot van een keur van toelichtende afbeeldingen is voorzien, een vlotte uitbundige schets van het geheel van de Egyptische kunst willen geven. Beide eigenschappen van zijn teekening in geschrift, strooken zoo volkomen als men zich maar kan voorstellen, met de voor prozaïsch welhaast te dichterlijke gaven van den auteur als schrijver. Op buitengewoon geestdriftigen toon wordt de lof der Egyptische kunst gezongen, en worden de lijnen, waarin de grootschheid van haar monumenten besloten ligt, als het

⁷⁰ Henri Asselberghs to Marcelle Werbrouck, 21 September 1943: FÉRE archive, folder H. Asselberghs, RMAH.

⁷¹ Henri Asselberghs to Marcelle Werbrouck, 21 September 1943: FÉRE archive, folder H. Asselberghs, RMAH.

⁷² Henri and Victor Asselberghs to Jean Capart, 13 June 1945: FÉRE archive, folder H. Asselberghs, RMAH. The return address listed on this letter is:

Pte. 4148

Vic. Asselberghs

II Unit

Royal Netherlands Brigade “Prinses Irene”

B.L.A.

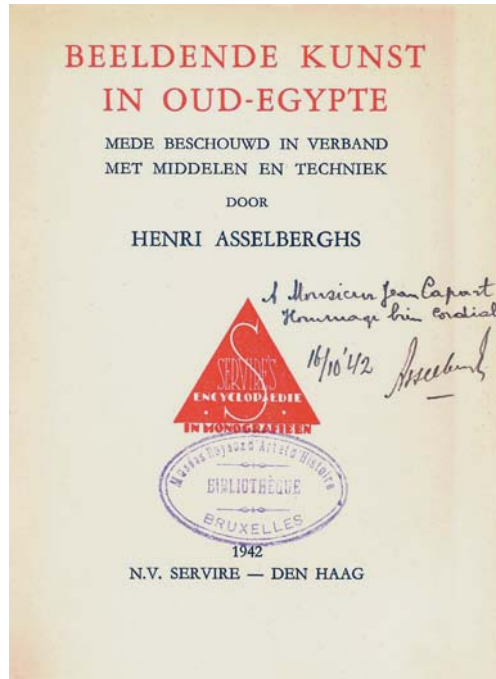


Fig. 16. Copy of the first edition of ASSELBERGHS, H., 1942. *Beeldende Kunst in Oud-Egypte mede beschouwd in verband met middelen en techniek*. Den Haag, with dedication by the author to Jean Capart, 16 October 1942 (© Library of the RMAH Brussels).

resultaat van moderne aesthetiseerende ontledingen, getrokken. Het is juist dit zeer zuiver aangevoeld, maar soms beslist buiten de schreef gaand enthousiasme, dat het gansche karakter van Asselberghs' uiteenzettingen bepaalt. Overal hoort men denzelfden hyper-geestdriftigen toon."⁷³ (Kern 1944: 72).

Kern moreover criticizes Asselberghs for being too loyal to Heinrich Schäfer's interpretation of Egyptian art, and his comments, written in the heat of WWII, perhaps betray some anti-German sentiments:

⁷³ "In our language we have recently come to possess the aforementioned work by the Utrecht scholar H. Asselberghs, one of the most enthusiastic lovers of Egyptian art in the whole country. (...) Asselberghs has in his booklet, that technically came off the press astonishingly well, and that has been provided with a good selection of explanatory illustrations at the end, wanted to give a smooth exuberant sketch of the whole of Egyptian art. Both characteristics of his descriptions in writing align, as perfectly as one can imagine, with the almost too poetic talent of the author as a writer of prose. The praise of Egyptian art is sung in an extraordinarily enthusiastic tone, and the lines in which the grandeur of its monuments is contained are drawn as the result of modern aesthetising dissections. It is precisely this purely sensed, but at times decidedly out of line enthusiasm, that defines the entire character of Asselberghs' expositions. Everywhere one hears the same hyper-spirited tone."

“Het wil alle verschillen tusschen onze eigen- en de Egyptische visie op kunstzinnig gebied, zeer fraai beredeneerd, naar modernen en—nimmer uit te schakelen!—Duitschen trant van denken onder spiegelgladde woorden brengen. Op die manier sluipt ook vaak iets van het problematiserende dat het Duitsche denkvermogen nu eenmaal heeft, in de wereld van de beeldende kunst in het oude Egypte binnen. Nu komt speciaal dit streng onderzoekende, en zoo systematisch mogelijk begrenzende en omschrijvende van Schäfer’s wetenschappelijke methode, mijns inziens zoo nu en dan wel eens wat ongelegen in de Egyptische kunst.”⁷⁴ (Kern 1944: 73).

Asselberghs also kept up his Egyptological correspondence during the war, notably with German colleagues. One letter to Heinrich Schäfer is preserved, which he wrote on 15 February 1941 in reply to receiving some offprints of Schäfer’s publications.

“Als ich an einem Abend in (sic) Januar von meiner Arbeit heimkehrte erkannte ich sofort den auf den (sic) Tisch liegenden Briefumschlag an seine (sic) von Ihnen geschriebene (sic) Anschrift. Auch die Widmung auf die (sic) darin enthaltenen Sonderdrucke (sic) zeigte dieselbe mir wohlbekannte Handschrift. Dass ich Ihnen nicht früher antwortete wird dadurch erklärt, dass fast alle von uns, auch ich selbst, inzwischen kürzer oder länger mit Grippe zu Bett lagen, jetzt aber wieder genesen sind. Nur die kleine Caecilia liegt noch mit Encephalitis im Krankenhaus; hoffentlich wird auch sie aber behalten bleiben.
Es hat mich sehr gefreut wieder einmal etwas von Ihnen zu hören. Wir haben immer nur Gutes und Freundliches von Ihnen erfahren. Wir werden das niemals vergessen und zu Aller Zeit uns Ihrer in Dankbarkeit und Freundschaft erinnern (sic).”⁷⁵

On 19 August 1940 he wrote a letter to Hermann Junker with philological questions about the latter’s newly published *Götterlehre* (Junker 1940). Known as the ‘Shabaka Stone’, this inscription dating to the 25th Dynasty records the Memphite theology, and Asselberghs made a Dutch translation of the text (Fig. 17). The draft of Asselberghs’ letter is preserved, and after one and a half pages of philological questions and ideas, he ends with:

“und nun, am Ende, will ich doch hoffen nicht allzu dummes gesagt zu haben; bin ich ja erst Ägyptologe abends in freier Stunde! Schreiben Sie mir aber, lieber Herr Junker, einmal genau bitte was Sie zu meinem Vorschlag denken.”⁷⁶

Only a very brief reply is preserved from Junker, written on 21 September 1940, in which he thanks Asselberghs for his comments.

⁷⁴ “It wants to smoothly articulate all the differences between our own and the Egyptian vision of art, very nicely reasoned, in accordance with the modern and—never to be eliminated!—German way of thinking. In doing so, something of the problematising way that German thinking tends to have, often creeps into the world of the visual arts in ancient Egypt. Now in particular this strictly investigative, and as systematically as possible limiting and describing way of Schäfer’s scientific method, is, in my opinion, from time to time somewhat inappropriate in Egyptian art.”

⁷⁵ Henri Asselberghs to Heinrich Schäfer, 15 February 1941 (see n. 41).

⁷⁶ Henri Asselberghs to Hermann Junker, 19 August 1940: private collection.

The post-war years

The last trace of correspondence between Asselberghs and Capart is a postcard dated to 15 May 1946, in which Asselberghs writes:

“Je regrette infiniment ne pouvoir pas assister à votre conférence prochaine de mardi 21 mai. Dimanche prochain je partirai pour Faulx (Namur) où je resterai quelques jours chez ma belle-sœur. Peut-être mon épouse sera présente. Je voudrais connaître les résultats de l'expédition d'El Kab après une nouvelle

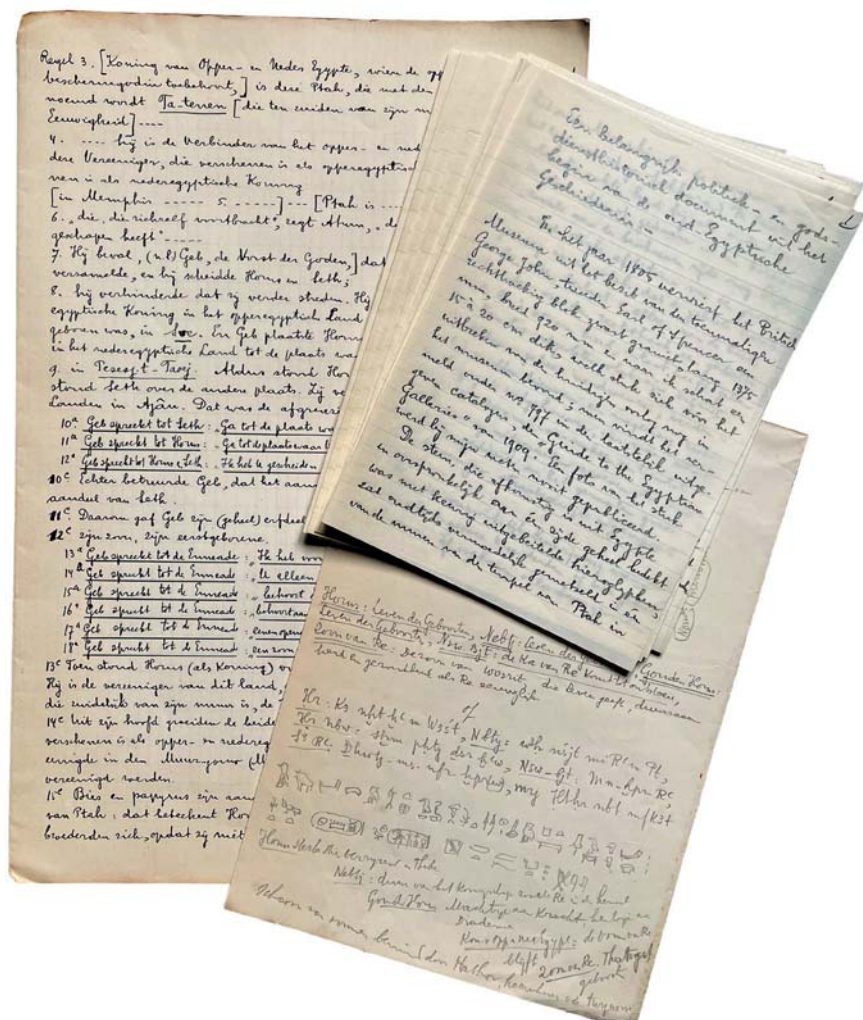


Fig. 17. Handwritten notes by Henri Asselberghs on the Shabaka Stone (private collection).

sensationnelle dans un de nos journaux d'il y a deux ou trois mois, qui parlait d'une incendie désastreuse à l'hôtel au Caire.⁷⁷ J'ai une nouvelle de notre ami M. Jozef Janssen du 25 avril nous disant qu'il se trouve (se trouvait) à l'Hôpital français après une chute dans le tombeau d'Eje à El Amarna. Espérons qu'il guérira vite!"⁷⁸

After the death of Capart on 16 June 1947, the correspondence between Asselberghs and the FÉREÉ nevertheless continued. In a copy of a letter dated to 1 February 1949, Arpag Mekhitarian thanks Asselberghs and his wife for having given him a place to stay in their home during a visit to the Netherlands. The relations between Mekhitarian and the Asselberghs family must have been amiable, as he writes:

"Rentré sans aucun contretemps de mon voyage en Hollande, je tiens à vous remercier bien cordialement, ainsi que Madame Asselberghs et votre charmante famille, de l'accueil si gentil que vous m'avez fait lors de mon passage à Utrecht. La promenade que vous m'avez fait faire à travers la ville a été pour moi des plus fructueuses et elle m'a rappelé les excursions si instructives que nous avons faites ensemble l'été dernier à Chartres."⁷⁹

Asselberghs' post-war membership of the FÉREÉ may have seen some interruptions. No membership lists were published in the *CdÉ* 20 and 21 (1945–1946) due to difficulties in communication during the war, and in *CdÉ* 22–24 (1947–1949) only new members are listed, not complete membership lists, making it unclear whether Asselberghs continued his membership without interruption. However, in *CdÉ* 24 (1949): 183 Asselberghs is listed as a 'new member', suggesting that there was indeed a temporary break in his FÉREÉ membership. In *CdÉ* 25 (1950): 188 he is listed as *membre effectif*, but this was the last year in which complete membership lists were published in *CdÉ*. The final termination of his FÉREÉ membership is a long drawn-out process, which starts on 30 January 1954 when he writes to Mekhitarian:

"Je viens de faire porter à votre compte à l'Amsterdamsche Bank à Leyden la contre-valeur de frs. B. 200.– comme payement de ma cotisation de membre effectif de la Fondation pour l'an 1954. Vu qu'à partir le 1^{er} Mars prochain je prendrai ma retraite aussi comme directeur du Spoorwegmuseum, je regrette ne pouvoir plus continuer mon adhésion l'année prochaine."⁸⁰

⁷⁷ See Bruffaerts 2013: 237 for this incident.

⁷⁸ Henri Asselberghs to Jean Capart, 15 May 1946: FÉREÉ archive, folder H. Asselberghs, RMAH.

⁷⁹ Arpag Mekhitarian to Henri Asselberghs, 1 February 1949: FÉREÉ archive, folder H. Asselberghs, RMAH.

⁸⁰ Henri Asselberghs to Arpag Mekhitarian, 30 January 1954: FÉREÉ archive, folder H. Asselberghs, RMAH.

However, later that year he writes:

“L’année passée je vous avais écrit concernant la Fondation, que vu ma retraite comme directeur du Musée des Chemins de Fer, je comptais que mon adhésion se terminerait fin 1954. Je viens maintenant de recevoir la nomination comme adviseur du musée surdit pour l’an 1955 et je suis heureux de pouvoir vous communiquer que je compte continuer mon adhésion à la Fondation encore cette année-ci.”⁸¹

The last communication of Asselberghs that is preserved in the FÉRE archives dates to 13 January 1959, in which he finally puts an end to his membership for good:

“Ayant l’intention de quitter à la fin de l’an 1959 définitivement mon musée, je désirerais me voir inscrit pour cette année encore une fois comme membre effectif de la Fondation Reine Elisabeth.”⁸²

Just like with his DOG membership which he briefly renewed in 1959 after a long hiatus (cf. *supra*), Asselberghs seems to have deliberately wanted to mark the end of his professional career with these memberships. But that did not mean Asselberghs stepped out of Egyptology: his most important work would still have to appear.

Chaos en beheersing

While the vast majority of Asselberghs’ publications had dealt with the New Kingdom, often with a focus on the Amarna Period, for his magnum opus he chose to work on Predynastic and Early Dynastic Egypt. In 1961 his *Chaos en beheersing* was published as the eighth volume of the series *Documenta et Monumenta Orientis Antiqui*, with a foreword by Jacques Vandier (Asselberghs 1961: ix–x) instead of the intended Adriaan de Buck, who had passed away on 28 October 1959, shortly before the completion of the manuscript. Vandier writes that Asselberghs had been interested in the topic for thirty years, and Asselberghs himself mentions a quote by Heinrich Schäfer about decorated Predynastic palettes that sparked his interest early on: “Man sollte sie einmal in einem Heft zusammen herausgeben” (Schäfer 1919: 15). Through his relationship with Capart, he was also familiar with the latter’s ideas on early Egypt (Capart 1904, with a revised and translated version in Capart 1905) and his work on Predynastic palettes (Capart 1908). However, the immediate catalyst to take up the work seems to have been Schott 1951 (Asselberghs 1961: xi–xii). And so, in the decade between 1950 and the publication of *Chaos en beheersing* in 1961, during which he also retired as director of the *Spoorwegmuseum*

⁸¹ Henri Asselberghs to Arpag Mekhitarian, 27 December 1954: FÉRE archive, folder H. Asselberghs, RMAH.

⁸² Henri Asselberghs to Arpag Mekhitarian, 13 January 1959: FÉRE archive, folder H. Asselberghs, RMAH.

(1953), he did not write any articles for *JEOL*, but focused on the research for his book instead. For the publication of the book Asselberghs received a subsidy of the Dutch Research Council, then named the *Nederlandse Organisatie voor Zuiver-Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek* ([Anon.] 1960; Asselberghs 1961: xiii).

In his introduction, Asselberghs thanks only three people by name (Asselberghs 1961: xiii), the first one naturally being Adriaan de Buck, his then late professor at Leiden University, who had nevertheless read, commented upon, and approved of the manuscript. Secondly, he thanks Louis (Ludwig) Keimer, from whom he received numerous photographs of unpublished (fragments of) objects, many of which had been hidden in private collections up until that point, and which he was allowed to include in his book. This at the time substantial collection of fresh material gave a new impetus to the study of Predynastic and Early Dynastic iconography (see also the comments by Godron 1963: 260). Asselberghs (1961: xiii) mentions that he had hoped to discuss this material in person with Keimer during a visit the latter made to the Netherlands in 1955, but since he was forced to cut his trip short, this never happened (for this trip, see Keimer 1955). Despite the fact that no correspondence between the two men is preserved, it is likely that Asselberghs and Keimer knew each other for a long time. The 1924 review of Keimer's *Die Gartenpflanzen im alten Ägypten* ([Anon.] 1924b) was probably written by Asselberghs (cf. *supra*), and the latter also refers to correspondence with Keimer (Asselberghs 1961: 175, n. 7; 201, n. 1). Moreover, four books with the ex-libris of Asselberghs ended up in Keimer's library which now forms the core of the library of the *Deutsches Archäologisches Institut in Kairo*.⁸³ All four books are early travel accounts (18th and 19th centuries), the collection of which was one of Keimer's passions (Lehnert 2013). It is unfortunately not known how, when, or why these books from Asselberghs went to Keimer.

The third person whom Asselberghs thanks, is Jozef Janssen, "die, in een zeer vroeg stadium al, reeds veel van het nog embryonnaire concept doornam en wiens voortdurende aanmoediging met het werk door te gaan, 'er een boek van te maken', uiteindelijk mede voor het eind-resultaat verantwoordelijk is"⁸⁴ (Asselberghs 1961: xiii). Written in Asselberghs' typical archaic Dutch, this study is in fact an amalgamate of several studies, among which the ones about the Gebel el-Arak knife and the Predynastic palettes are the most important ones. It is mainly the almost forty pages long English summary (Asselberghs 1961: 256–293) and the catalogue with a large collection of at that time often unpublished images that has made its way into the scholarly literature, and for

⁸³ I thank Isolde Lehnert and Heike Schmidt for this information.

⁸⁴ "...who, already at a very early stage, went through much of the still embryonic concept and whose constant encouragement to continue the work, 'to make a book out of it', is ultimately partly responsible for the final result."

which the book continues to receive acclaim.⁸⁵ But native Dutch speakers have a significant advantage in reading the book in its original language: ‘Rising Intellect’ as the translation for the title of Chapter 6 hardly does justice to the poetic subtlety of ‘Kruiend Brein.’

Asselberghs dedicated his book to the memory of Jean Capart and Heinrich Schäfer, both deceased by then, “die sinds den aanvang van de twintiger jaren mijn liefde voor Egypte inhoud en gestalte gaven.”⁸⁶ At the end of his career he thus graciously showed his gratitude to these two Egyptologists and friends who had encouraged him since he had first started on his path in Egyptology.

Several reviews appeared of Asselberghs’ book, certainly with critical notes, but mostly of a favourable nature, earning him recognition in the scholarly community. It is perhaps exactly because he was an outsider in Egyptological academia that he was able to approach the topic from a less traditional angle. T.G.H. James writes:

“Dr. Asselberghs, who has for many years studied this period with care and with the depth of interest of a true scholar, may appear to interpret these documents with greater confidence than some Egyptologists would allow, but his line of general argument is sound and full of interest.” (James 1962: 164).

The longest and most in-depth review was written by G. Godron, who not only comments on Asselberghs’ book, but also uses it as a jumping off point to discuss some of his own views and opinions. He concludes:

“Ma conclusion sera brève. Le texte de *Chaos en Beheersing* nous donne un état des questions à jour sur quelques-uns des problèmes essentiels de la préhistoire égyptienne et nous devons remercier son auteur de ce travail de mise au point. Mais ce livre est bien davantage. C’est désormais à lui qu’il faudra recourir pour étudier manches de couteaux et palettes préhistoriques, puisque, par le soin apporté à son album, M. Asselberghs nous a fourni un des futurs classiques de l’archéologie dans la vallée du Nil.” (Godron 1963: 261).

The brief review by M.J. Mellink does not go into the actual subject matter of the book, but instead criticises more formal aspects and the structure of the publication:

⁸⁵ For instance, only recently Hendrickx *et al.* 2020: 132 commented on the quality of Asselberghs’ illustrations in the context of a history of the visualisation of the Hunters’ Palette: “That drawing was reused by Henri Asselberghs (1887–1980) (1961: 182, fig. 22), who combined it with photos of the entire palette, the Louvre fragment and a detail of the latter (id.: pl. LXV–LVII, fig. 122–124). The last photo was certainly the best photo of a detail published up to that time (Fig. 15). This is not a surprise, because Asselberghs aimed at publishing the best possible quality of illustrations.” A case in point that supports the latter statement is that in the catalogue of the exhibition ‘Dawn of Egyptian Art’ that was on view at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 2012, the iconic Narmer Palette was still illustrated with photographs taken from Asselberghs 1961 (Patch 2011: 10–11). I thank Wouter Claes for these references.

⁸⁶ “...who gave meaning and shape to my love for Egypt since the early twenties.”

“The basic problem about this book seems to be the uncertainty for whom it was written. The text is often addressed to the beginner and provided with explanations redundant to the Egyptologist; yet the nature of the subject matter is not kept general enough for the layman and many questions of detail are of interest to the specialist only.” (Mellink 1963: 213).

The final review that appeared, by W. Kaiser, is likewise brief, and ends with:

“Auch ohne diese grundsätzlich wünschenswerte sachliche Breite kann die Bereicherung, die der Ägyptologie durch die ausgezeichnet dokumentierte Arbeit Asselberghs’ erwachsen ist, jedoch zweifellos kaum überschätzt werden.” (Kaiser 1964: 140).

Post scriptum: ex-libris

Asselberghs built up a sizeable personal library throughout his lifetime. Although this library has not survived as a single collection but was dispersed after the death of Mimi in 2013 (see n. 14), some of his books occasionally appear on the second-hand market and have found their way into various libraries and collections all over the world.⁸⁷ They are clearly recognisable by his ex-libris, of which there are two versions (Fig. 18). An older version was a simple stamp, in which his name is still spelled as Asselbergs (see n. 6). Then in 1934 or 1935 he had a more artistic ex-libris designed and printed, about which he wrote in a letter to Capart:

“Un de mes amis⁸⁸ a dessiné pour moi un ex-libris. J’ai le plaisir de vous offrir ci-inclus deux specimen: l’un, colorié à la main, est réservé à des livres comme p.e. “Documents” I et II; l’autre est le type ordinaire. Trouvez vous qu’ils sont réussis?”⁸⁹

Encircled by a cartouche, he chose a passage from the Great Hymn to the Aten in the tomb of Ay at Amarna, likely because the Amarna Period had always been a great interest of his. The translation of the hieroglyphs, circumventing the cartouche, is given as “Eyes are on beauties until thou settest.”⁹⁰

⁸⁷ For instance, one of his books ended up in the Institute of Fine Arts Library of New York University: <https://archive.org/details/derportrtkopfd00borc/page/n5/mode/2up> (accessed 01/10/2020). I thank Bart Hellinckx for this reference.

⁸⁸ This friend was Hermanus Gerardus Jacob Schelling (1888–1978), an architect for the Dutch railways (Konrad & Pamminer 2014: 26–27). Asselberghs must have known him well from his professional life as director of the Railway Museum, and Schelling was in fact also present at the farewell dinner for Asselberghs in 1960 (see Fig. 3, second from the left). His monogram (an S in a circle) can be observed at the bottom of the ex-libris (Witte 1993: 101). Note that the designer was erroneously identified as Adrianus Hermanus Schelling (1887–1945), also an engineer and amateur graphic designer, in Vanlathem & Oost 2013: 7.

⁸⁹ Henri Asselberghs to Jean Capart, 26 February 1935: FÉRÉ archive, folder H. Asselberghs, RMAH.

⁹⁰ A more correct translation would have been: “Eyes are on (thy) beauty until thou settest”, referring to the setting sun (Simpson 2003: 283, line 13). In fact, Asselberghs had himself already



Fig. 18. Ex-libris of Henri Asselberghs, on the left the older stamped version, and on the right the newer printed version, both in colour and monochrome (© FÉRE archive, RMAH Brussels).

Asselberghs' own sunset came on 21 April 1980, and he was laid to rest at the St. Barbara cemetery in Utrecht in the same grave as his wife, who had passed away three years before him. In his obituary his name is followed by these four distinctions:

Oud directeur Nederlands Spoorwegmuseum (Former director of the Dutch Railway Museum)

Ridder in de orde van Oranje-Nassau (Knight in the Order of Orange-Nassau)

Drager van de Museummedaille (Bearer of the Museum Medal)

Corresponderend lid van het Duits Archeologisch Instituut (Corresponding Member of the German Archaeological Institute)

“Merkwaardig van Egyptologen heb ik altijd gevonden, dat er zoveel museumdirecteuren uit zijn voortgekomen”⁹¹

It is difficult to ascertain whether Asselberghs thought of himself in the first place as the director of the Railway Museum with a passion for Egyptology on

translated this line as such in Asselberghs 1922b: 396 (“Alle oogen zijn gevestigd op Uwe schoonheid, totdat Gij ondergaat”).

⁹¹ “I have always found it odd about Egyptologists that so many museum directors have come from them,” Marie-Anne Asselberghs, in an interview upon her retirement (Vlietstra 1984).

the side, or as an Egyptologist who happened to work at the Railway Museum. Regardless, despite the fact that Egyptology never was his profession, and while working a full and demanding daytime job as a museum director, Asselberghs managed to play his role within Dutch Egyptology during the mid-twentieth century. He published in scholarly journals, attended scientific conferences, got involved with exhibitions, took up the study of Egyptology at Leiden University, became a member of several professional organisations including corresponding member of the DAI and EOL, corresponded internationally with Egyptologists, and also actively contributed to the popularisation of science by giving lectures and writing numerous articles for Dutch newspapers and magazines. His main interests lay with the New Kingdom, more particular the 18th Dynasty and the Amarna Period, and potential links with the Bible. He was heavily influenced by art historical studies, predominantly from the German branch of Egyptology, which clearly shines through in his own publications. In conclusion, the words of Vandier still ring true:

“L’auteur, sans être égyptologue de métier, a su, par sa patience, par sa volonté et par son courage, devenir un spécialiste et un spécialiste qui a apporté quelque chose à la science; qu’il en soit remercié et félicité, et qu’il trouve, dans son travail toutes les satisfactions qu’il mérite.” (Asselberghs 1961: x).

Acknowledgements

This research was made possible thanks to the funding of EOS Project 30885993 (Pyramids and Progress: Belgian Expansionism and the Making of Egyptology, 1830–1952) by the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO) and the Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique – FRS-FNRS. Many people have helped in this research along the way. In the first place I warmly thank Henri’s grandchildren Christophe, Brigitte, Francis, and Victor Asselberghs, as well as Joyce Bergman, the daughter of Daisy Kattenburg. For discussions and supplying various types of information, I thank Wouter Claes (RMAH), Isolde Lehnert (DAIK), Luc Limme (FÉRE), Martina Düntzer (DAI Berlin, Archiv der Zentrale), Peter Der Manuelian (Harvard University), Julia Viani Puglisi (Harvard University), Carolien van Zoest (NINO), Stephanie Boonstra (EES), Joachim Marzahn (DOG), Thomas L. Gertzen (FU Berlin), Hana Navrátilová (University of Reading), Tuur Verdonck and Evelien Pieterse (*Spoorwegmuseum* Utrecht), Stefan Derouck (KU Leuven Library), Mart van Duijn (Leiden University Archives), Nina van den Berg (International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam), Gertraude Fiebelkorn, Bert Verrept, Bart Hellinckx, and Rob Demarée.

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