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The Flourishing of Belgian Ornamental Tiles and Tile Panels in the Art Nouveau Period

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Introduction

When in 1893 - the year of the construction of the Hôtel Tassel by Victor Horta and of the personal residence of Paul Hankar - the Art Nouveau architecture in Belgium started to flourish², the Belgian ceramic industry and the tile industry in particular had undergone very important developments during the foregoing decades.

The modern ceramic industry which gradually emerged around 1850 in Belgium alongside traditional production, as had happened in England, Germany and France, was to a great extent due to the Boch family who introduced many innovations from England to the ceramics industry on the Continent. They already owned factories in Germany and Luxemburg, and for political and economic reasons decided to set up a ceramic factory in the newly independent Belgium in 1841. Actual ceramic production started in 1844. To meet competition from England, the Boch family introduced many technical innovations in their Kéramis factory in La Louvière³.

Dust pressed ceramic floor tiles

After introducing the dust pressing technique for wall tiles at the Villeroy & Boch factory in Septfontaines in 1846, the Boch family started to experiment from 1852 onwards in Mettlach in order to produce next to these dust pressed wall tiles - an English invention patented in 1840 by the engineer Richard Prosser and developed further by the ceramist Herbert Minton - also 'encaustic' or inlaid floor tiles in the new

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² For an overview of the Belgian Art Nouveau architecture in general: Françoise DIERKENS-AUBRY & Jos VANDENBREEDEN, *Art Nouveau in Belgium: architecture & interior design*, Tielt, Lannoo, 1991 (also available in French, German and Dutch).

³ See on Boch Frères La Louvière: *150 Ans de création et de tradition faiencières. Boch-Kéramis, La Louvière 1841-1991*, La Louvière, 1991 & Ludovic RECCHIA, *Collection Boch, Le souffle de Prométhée*, Morlanwelz, Kéramis-Centre de la Céramique/Musée royal de Mariemont, 2010.

technique⁴. Shortly afterwards, the production of inlaid tiles to English examples though not in plastic clay as in England, but in the innovative dust press technique was started in La Louvière in 1861. The first dust pressed stoneware floor tiles made by Boch Frères won a medallion at the World Exhibition in London in 1862. The inlaid floor tiles first made at La Louvière and after 1862 in Louvroil near Maubeuge in France became an enormous commercial success⁵.

The immediate success of these ceramic floor tiles can be partly explained by the fact that they met a growing demand. New types of buildings, mostly public, like railway stations, hotels, town halls, court houses, libraries, post offices, banks, museums, theatres, public baths and toilets, hospitals, sanatoriums, schools and boarding schools, demanded not only visually attractive, but also affordable, standardized, durable and easily cleaned building materials. Demands that were perfectly well met by the tile industry because of ever developing production methods and diversification of products offered.

The success of Boch Frères quickly gave rise to the emergence of many rival factories in Belgium⁶ and Northern France⁷. The most important stoneware floor tile factories in Belgium around 1900 were the Carrelages Céramiques de Chimay, Maufroid frères & soeur founded in 1879 which continued from 1912 as the S.A. La Céramique de Bourlers, anc. Usine Maufroid; the S.A. Compagnie Générale des Produits Céramiques de Saint-Ghislain set up in 1881; the S.A. des Carrelages et Produits Céramiques de Chimay à Forges-lez-Chimay, a firm that won with Victor Poulet as director a medal at the International Exhibition of 1885; the S.A. Compagnie des Produits Céramiques de Saint-Remy and the Société Générale de Produits Réfractaires et Céramiques de Morialmé which were both probably founded in 1898; the later S.A. Manufactures Céramiques d'Hemixem, Gilliot Frères at Hemiksem near Antwerp which had an enormous floor tile production after 1904; the S.A. La Céramique Nationale, from 1904 onwards strongly connected to the Poulet firm at Forges-lez-Chimay and from around 1910 working as a completely independent entity with a newly built factory at Welkenraedt and the S.A. La Nouvelle Céramique Amay founded in 1907.

⁴ See for the development of the dust pressed wall and floor tile in England and Germany, as well as in Belgium, France and the Netherlands: Mario BAECK, Ulrich HAMBURG, Johan KAMERMANS e.a., *Industrial Tiles. Industrielle Fliesen. Industriële Tegels. Carreaux Industriels 1840-1940*, Boizenburg, Hasselt, Otterlo, 2004.

⁵ Thérèse THOMAS, *Die Rolle der beiden Familien Boch und Villeroy im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert. Die Entstehung des Unternehmens Villeroy & Boch*, Doktorarbeit, Saarbrücken, Villeroy & Boch, 1974, p. 180.

⁶ Mario BAECK, "The Industrial Tile in Belgium. Die industrielle Fliese in Belgien. De industriële tegel in België. Le carreau industriel en Belgique", in M. BAECK e.a., *Industrial Tiles...*, p. 65-92.

⁷ Mario BAECK, "The Industrial Tile in France. Die industrielle Fliese in Frankreich. De industriële tegel in Frankrijk. Le carreau industriel en France", in M. BAECK e.a., *Industrial Tiles...*, p. 93-118.

In addition to these floor tile factories there were a few earlier established factories, which made fireproof fireplace tiles, floor quarries and tiles for other forms of heavy use. Important in this field were the factory of Louis Escoyez in Tertre, set up in 1842; the S.A. de Produits Réfractaires et Céramiques de Baudour and Utzschneider, Jaunez et Cie in Jurbise, established in 1876 by Charles Michelet after he had gained the necessary experience with Sarreguemines from 1865 onwards and had also founded a similar factory at Wasserbillig (Luxemburg).

In all of the factories mentioned above the range of distinct Art Nouveau motifs was not very large⁸. For Boch Frères in 1901 only a dozen model numbers in the new style were presented to the public, against many hundreds of others available in a variety of Neo-styles. In 1908, the Art Nouveau style had further extended to 19 motifs (Fig. 1). However, three of the designs offered in 1901 were no longer included in this later catalogue. It makes clear that some of these designs had a very limited success. It is also clear that production of models in a new style could only start when there was a sufficient large demand to be expected to gain back the important investments for the necessary metal moulds, stencils etc. Therefore, it does not astonish that in the Boch catalogue of 1929, at a time the Art Nouveau style as 'avant garde' had already come to an end for some 20 years, three Art Nouveau motifs were still currently available. Once the investments to produce a new model were done, the design could easily remain in production without any further costs as long as the moulds didn't need repair and as long as there remained a certain demand by the general public.

A close examination of a large amount of Belgian ceramic floor tile sales catalogues of the period 1880-1940 learns that the same tendencies apply to all the other Belgian floor tile factories.

At Maufroid frères & soeur in Bourslers there is only one floor tile design in Art Nouveau style known for the period before 1905. In this factory the range of designs gradually expanded to not more than seven Art Nouveau floor patterns in 1914. While the 1905 catalogue of the Compagnie Générale des Produits Céramiques de Saint-Ghislain contains not a single Art Nouveau motif, this is no longer the case in 1906. In this year, no less than 20 different designs in the new style were offered. Next to floral motifs we also find some more abstract and geometric Art Nouveau designs. In the known series of catalogues of the S.A. Carrelages et Produits Céramiques de Chimay of Forges-lez-Chimay the first Art Nouveau designs appear around 1905-1906. In total we count seven different pattern numbers, but two of these are offered in different colours so that it makes only five different designs. In the *Album 1* of the S.A. La Céramique Nationale in Welkenraedt we find around 1910 a wide range of about 35 different floor tile designs in the new style, many of them available in different colour schemes. It is probably the widest range of Belgian Art Nouveau floor tile designs

⁸ The research on the development of Belgian floor and wall tile designs in the Art Nouveau style is based on an extensive study of more than 100 sales catalogues of all the main Belgian tile factories published over the years 1880-1940. These catalogues have been found in institutions and private collections in Belgium, Holland, France, Germany, U.K., USA, Uruguay etc.

offered by a single factory, but even then this remains very modest compared to the total of available designs.

At the S.A. Compagnie des Produits Céramiques de Saint-Remy the ratio of Art Nouveau motifs is limited to one on 48 floor designs before 1905 and to six on 48 designs in the years before 1914.

Much larger was the part of Art Nouveau patterns at the Société Générale de Produits Réfractaires et Céramiques de Morialmé. Again, a wider range of Art Nouveau designs is only offered after 1905. Some of these designs are closely related to models offered by La Céramique Nationale in Welkenraedt and Sand & Cie of Feignies in northern France.

The rather modest amount of Art Nouveau motifs developed from 1904 onwards by the Manufactures Céramiques d'Hemixem, Gilliot Frères from Hemiksem remains nearly unchanged until the 1920s.

With only 14 designs in the Art nouveau style on a total of 130 presented in the *Album A et B* from ca.1907, the amount of modern designs produced by the S.A. La Nouvelle Céramique in Amay is hardly significant.

Worth mentioning is also the fact that even tile factories that were only established after the First World War still presented a few designs in the then 'old fashioned' Art Nouveau style. Thus we find in the first *Album* of the S.A. La Céramique Moderne in Rebaix-lez-Ath some striking Art Nouveau motifs. Not surprisingly, these designs are more abstract or geometric than floral.

In the catalogues of the firms that produced fireproof fireplace tiles, floor quarries and tiles for other forms of heavy use, there are hardly any Art Nouveau motifs to be found. Only Louis Escoyez of Tertre had just one design in a floral Art Nouveau style for fireplace tiles on offer.

Although the majority of the stoneware floor tiles have patterns that dominantly meet with the Belgian taste, almost every firm exported a significant part of their production, and this not only to neighbouring countries. So the S.A. La Nouvelle Céramique of Amay, founded in 1907, could list around 1931 dozens of work references for different types of buildings including schools, monasteries and churches, banks, hotels, department stores, theatres, laboratories, factories or railway stations and in such diverse countries as the Netherlands, the Dutch East Indies, France, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Switzerland, Spain, the Canary Islands, Cuba, Mexico, England and Ireland, Canada, Australia and British India.

The ceramic wall tile

The intense interest in historic examples of past architecture which fuelled the European Neo-Gothic movement also affected Belgium in the mid nineteenth century and was not only responsible for the success of the decorated industrial floor tile. Wall tiles also received an important boost.

Initially this stimulated production echoing traditional blue-and-white delftware tiles. Boch Frères in La Louvière made with certainty from 1887 onwards, and perhaps even

earlier, large quantities of such hand painted and transfer printed tiles⁹. The notable Faïencerie de Nimy, founded in 1787, which had adopted mechanised processes since 1851 under the direction of Mouzin, Lecat & Cie, put dust pressed wall tiles on the market with a variety of transfer printed designs in different colours and styles¹⁰. In addition to Neo-Gothic or Neo-Renaissance designs, tiles influenced by Persian or eastern art also came quickly onto the market. This ran parallel with a growing appreciation for polychromy in architecture. An appreciation nurtured by several influential buildings at World Exhibitions, famous archaeological discoveries, and special architectural competitions as that of the 'Cercle de l'Art Appliqué à la Rue' in Brussels in 1895¹¹.

All these developments made it possible that industrial wall tiles in Belgium from 1895 onward were used on a grand scale, particularly in connection with Art Nouveau architecture. In addition to making standard use of tiles in the interior, unique or custom made tile panels were installed on the façades or in porches or niches of houses¹².

The leading architects and designers of Belgian Art Nouveau - Henry van de Velde, Paul Hankar, Victor Horta and Gustave Serrurier-Bovy - very quickly showed interest in the use of architectural ceramics, although in different degrees.

Henry van de Velde made several tile designs. However, none of them is produced by Belgian manufacturers. In the late 1890s Van de Velde designed three different models of plastic stoneware wall tiles for the French ceramist Alexandre Bigot. One of these models was used in a frieze in one of the exhibition rooms to a design of Van de Velde at the International Art Exhibition in Dresden in 1897¹³. He also made use of Bigot tiles in some of his earlier projects as in his Bloemenwerf table and in some of his fireplaces. Other tile designs from around the same time are known from publications as the French-German art magazine *L'Art Décoratif* of October 1898, although it is not known if they were put into production. Furthermore, four wall tile designs commercialized by the well-known German firm of Villeroy & Boch at Mettlach are attributed to Van de Velde¹⁴. In addition, during his stay in Weimar Van de Velde worked together with the

⁹ See the sales catalogues of Boch Frères from 1887 onwards, kept in several public and private collections, as partly listed in *Boch Frères S.A. 1841-1966*, La Louvière, 1966, p. 91-93.

¹⁰ See the sales catalogue of the Faïencerie de Nimy of around 1900 kept at the Winterthur Museum Library (available at archive.org/details/carreauxderevete00soci - consulted 30.04.2013).

¹¹ In the jury for this competition we find many famous Belgian painters, sculptors and architects amongst whom also Victor Horta. See *Emulation*, new series, vol. 5, 1895, col. 1 vv.

¹² See for an extensive overview with many photographs: Mario BAECK & Bart VERBRUGGE, *De Belgische Art Nouveau en Art Deco wandtegels 1880-1940*, Brussel, Ministerie van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap, afdeling Monumenten en Landschappen, (M&L-cahier, 3), 1996. A synthesis of this work can be found in Hans VAN LEMMEN & Bart VERBRUGGE, *Art Nouveau Tiles*, London, Laurence King, 1999, p. 54-63. (This book is also available in German under the title *Jugendstil-Kacheln*).

¹³ Pattern numbers 11, 12 and 94 in the Bigot catalogues of 1900 and 1902. For the use of pattern number 12 see Y. BRUNHAMMER e.a., *Art Nouveau Belgium France*, Houston, exhibition catalogue Institute for the Arts, Rice University, 1976, p. 158, cat. nr. 203.

¹⁴ Margit EULER, *Studien zur Baukeramik von Villeroy & Boch 1869-1914. Fliesen aus der Mosaikfabrik in Mettlach (1. Teil). Terrakotten aus der Terrakottfabrik in Merzig (2. Teil)*,

Ransbacher Mosaik- und Platten-Fabrik situated in Ransbach (Westerwald) for a series of encaustic floor tile designs¹⁵.

Paul Hankar - one of the advocates of the sgraffito technique in Belgium - worked for the short living Compagnie Générale des Céramiques d'Architecture specializing in architectural ceramics. He completed in 1898-1899 the plans for their shop in Brussels. It seems possible that the wall tile designs which are kept in his archives were also made for this company¹⁶. Hankar, just as Van de Velde, also made use of architectural ceramics in some of his fire places.

Victor Horta on the contrary seems not to have made any wall or floor tile designs for any of his projects. Indicative for his absence of interest in this field is the fact that for the kitchen of his own house in Elsene/Ixelles he used very traditional wall and floor tile patterns out of the Boch Frères catalogue. However, Horta showed himself at the same time very innovative in the use of architectural ceramics by cladding his dining room walls with white glazed plaques or bricks. For one of his later projects, the Innovation in Antwerp in 1909-1910, Horta made extensive use of architectural ceramics for the complete exterior of the building. They were made by the English firm Doulton¹⁷.

The interior decorator Gustave Serrurier-Bovy exhibited a chimney with very decorative glazed wall tiles at the salon of the Libre Esthétique in 1896¹⁸. For some of his furniture he made use of plain tiles by Boch Frères. For some of his other objects he worked together with the Manufacture de Céramiques Décoratives de Hasselt¹⁹.

One of the Belgian architects who contributed very much to the use of tiles and architectural ceramics was the versatile but more traditionalist architect and decorator Alban Chambon. Already in 1895, for the project of the Palais d'été-Pôle Nord in Brussels, Chambon made use of tiles and tile panels supplied by Vermeren-Coché of Brussels²⁰. A year later Chambon designed for the Brasserie-Restaurant La Terrasse in Ostend a very striking interior in which several colourful decorative tile panels by the French firm Faiënerie de Sarreguemines were integrated in walls of glazed brick

Inauguraldissertation zur Erlangung der Doktorwürde, Bonn, Rheinischen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, 1994, p. 58-60, 93-95 and 222-224. The tile designs bear the pattern numbers 794, 795, 796 and 797.

¹⁵ A copy of this small catalogue with the indication "Musterzeichnungen nach Entwürfen Professor Henry v.d. Velde in Weimar" is kept in a private German collection.

¹⁶ François LOYER, *Paul Hankar et la naissance de l'Art Nouveau*, Bruxelles, A.A.M., 1987, p. 427.

¹⁷ Michèle GOSLAR, *Victor Horta 1861-1947. L'Homme-L'Architecte-L'Art Nouveau*, Bruxelles, Fonds Mercator, 2012 p. 430-436. (also available in Dutch)

¹⁸ Jacques-Grégoire WATELET, *Serrurier-Bovy. De l'Art Nouveau à l'Art Déco*, Bruxelles, Atelier Vokaer, 1986, p. 23. The same or a similar chimney is also depicted in *Art et Décoration*, vol. 4, 1898, p. 81.

¹⁹ Mario BAECK, "Gustave Serrurier-Bovy en de Manufacture de Céramiques Décoratives de Hasselt", *Verzamelaars Unie Hasselts Keramiek. Nieuwsbrief*, nr. 30, November 2012, p. 2-3.

²⁰ Jean-Paul MIDANT, *La fantastique architecture d'Alban Chambon*, Bruxelles, AAM Editions, 2009.

manufactured by the Leeds firm Farnley²¹. Even more influential was his work at the Kursaal in Ostend in the years 1899 until 1908. For this very important project Chambon worked together with Doulton - just as Horta - and with the German manufacturer Lamberty-Servais of Ehrang, a firm strongly assisted for this project by the Belgian engineer and ceramist Henri Baudoux, one of the pioneers of the Belgian tile industry, as we will see further on²². Chambon also collaborated with the leading French ceramic manufacturer Emile Muller of Ivry near Paris²³.

Other leading figures in the Art Nouveau movement as the artists Ghisbert Combaz, Georges Lemmen and Alfred William Finch made some designs for tiles that were either shown at leading art exhibitions or published in the artistic magazines of the time. The painter and sculptor Ghisbert Combaz made several tile designs of which some were executed by Emile Muller at Ivry²⁴ and others by the Belgian glass painter Raphael Evaldre²⁵.

The painter and decorative artist Georges Lemmen made some designs for tiles in his characteristic linear style that attracted some international attention through their publication in *L'Art Décoratif* and its German counterpart *Dekorative Kunst*²⁶. Closely resembling the traditional Flemish pottery tile are some tiles by the painter Alfred William Finch who was one of the first Belgian artists to be attracted by the decorative arts. He learned more about the production of ceramic objects during his stay at Boch Frères in La Louvière in the years 1890-1893, and later in Virginal and Forges, before starting to work for the Iris factory in Finland²⁷.

Although these leading figures of the Belgian Art Nouveau movement all showed some interest in the use of architectural ceramics, it is mainly in the work of the younger and

²¹ This interior was depicted in the influential portfolio *La décoration ancienne & moderne. Architecture, ferronnerie, mobilier, décoration murale, motifs d'architecture (extérieurs et intérieurs)*. Publication artistique faite sous la direction de M. Farges architecte, (Paris), Aulanier & Cie, s.a., vol. 6, plate 92.

²² For the impact of Chambon's projects on the Belgian seaside architecture see: Mario BAECK, "Een feest van kleur: keramische geveldecors in Blankenberge en Oostende tijdens de belle époque" in Marc CONSTANDT, Dirk DECOSTER, Norbert POULAIN (ed.), *Lifestyle en Erfgoed: de wooncultuur van de toerist tussen 1870 en 1940*, (Interbellum-cahier 22-23), Gent, Interbellum, 2012, p. 64-85.

²³ In the 1904 *Catalogue n° 2: Construction et Décoration Architecturale* of this firm twelve designs of Chambon are presented. It are elements for friezes (catalogue numbers 119, 120, 123), for ceilings (numbers 337, 338, 339, 340, 341), a monumental column and fountain design (without number) and balusters (model 1, 2 and 3).

²⁴ In the 1904 *Catalogue n° 2* of Emile Muller we find the frieze 115 with salamanders which is also illustrated in the *Revue des Arts Décoratifs*, vol. XIX, 1899, p. 106 with extensive comments on p. 111 as it was presented at the Salon de Libre Esthétique of that year. In the same catalogue we find a model for wall tiles with the pattern number 329 without mentioning it was designed by Combaz.

²⁵ Tile designs of Combaz are illustrated in *Art et Décoration*, vol. 3, 1898, p. 97. More tile designs are published in the catalogue: *Fin de Siècle. Combaz, JO, Livemont. De verzameling L. Wittamer-De Camps*, Brussel, ASLK, 1991, p. 68-70.

²⁶ These designs can be found in *L'Art Décoratif*, vol. 12, 1899, p. 256 vv. and in *Dekorative Kunst*, II, vol. IV, 1899, p. 236. See also Roger CARDON, *Georges Lemmen (1865-1916)*, Antwerpen, Pandora, 1990, p. 197.

²⁷ See: A.W. Finch 1854-1930, Brussel, Gemeentekrediet/K.M.S.K.B., 1992, p. 52 with an image of a tile panel from 1892; p. 204-206 with several tiles of ca. 1896-97 and p. 214 with a tile made ca. 1897-1902.

less well known architects working all over the country in the modern style that one can see abundant use of tiles, tile panels and architectural ceramics. It is their interest in the use of this material that made the growth of a local wall tile industry possible, as an industrial production needs a sufficiently large and constant demand. For the production of tile panels this was clearly only the case shortly after 1900²⁸.

One of the founders of Belgian industrial wall tile production was without doubt Henri Clément Baudoux, founder in 1893 of the Manufacture de Céramique de Cureghem-lez-Bruxelles, Baudoux & Cie. Shortly afterwards this firm gained a major award at the World Exhibition in Antwerp in 1894. The next year, with an eye to quick expansion, capital and material was put into the newly founded S.A. Manufacture de Céramiques Décoratives, Majoliques de Hasselt²⁹. This transfer gave Henri Baudoux and his business partners Arille de Gallaix and Célestin Helman immediately a much better position in the then booming sector of the ceramic tile industry that flourished in this period due to the favourable economic climate.

The range offered by the Majoliques de Hasselt was large and the techniques diverse. The Hasselt designs for standard tiles in the 'style esthétique' or Art Nouveau appear in general to be highly characteristic. Many decorative tile panels were executed to designs by professional artists such as Fernand Toussaint and Jacques Madiol who worked also for the Helman factory (Fig. 2). It brought the firm some international exposure as its products were on show in the prestigious Berlin Hohenzollern-Kunstgewerbehaus of Wilhelm Hirschwald, which got them in 1899 also a photograph in the leading art magazine *The Studio*.

The artistic and commercial success of the Hasselt factory inspired other entrepreneurs. In 1897 the architect and land surveyor Célestin-Joseph Helman - just like Baudoux a shareholder in the Majoliques de Hasselt - set up the sales office Maison Helman Céramiques d'Art in Brussels³⁰. From 1902 onwards his own tile production was started, and after the construction in 1906 of a new factory at Sint-Agatha-Berchem, Helman quickly became one of the leading Belgian manufacturers of tile panels, decorated in the

²⁸ This is demonstrated in a detailed study of the evolution of the building styles in the seaside resort Blankenberge where impressive tile decorations are only to be found starting from 1903, see: Mario BAECK & Pol VANNESTE, "Het gebruik van polychrome bouwkeramiek in de kuststad Blankenberge 1890-1925", *M&L Monumenten en landschappen: tweemaandelijks tijdschrift*, 23, nr. 5, 2004, p. 25-63.

²⁹ On the Cureghem and Hasselt factory and the later career of Baudoux see: Mario BAECK, *Ravissant. Hasseltse bouwkeramiek uit de belle époque 1895-1954*, Hasselt, VUHK, 2005 with further bibliographic references and a complete reproduction of the most important sales catalogues of both firms.

³⁰ Mario BAECK, "Maison Helman Brussels: the early years", *Friends of Terra Cotta*, March 2010, p. 3-7 and Mario BAECK, "Helman - Brussel & Sint-Agatha-Berchem. Helman - Bruxelles & Berchem-Sainte-Agathe", in Mario BAECK, Marc LOGGHE, Anne PLUYMAEKERS, Norbert POULAIN (ed.), *Belgische art deco keramiek. Céramiques de l'Art Déco en Belgique*, Torhout, Museum Torhout Aardewerk/Andenne, Musée de la Céramique, 2011, p. 43-49. A rare sales catalogue of this firm is kept at the Winterthur Museum Library and is accessible in a digitized form at archive.org/details/maisonhelmancera00mais - consulted 30.04.2013. Another sales catalogue belongs to the collection of the Museum of Oudere Technieken in Grimbergen and is also accessible in a digitized form at www.mot.be/w/1/files/RCB/RCB030201.pdf - consulted 30.04.2013.

characteristic ‘cuerda seca’ line technique, with many spectacular realisations in all parts of the country and in many countries abroad.

Also in 1897, Georges Gilliot in Hemiksem near Antwerp laid the foundation of the exceptionally successful floor and wall tile factory S.A. Manufactures Céramiques d’Hemixem, Gilliot Frères, a firm with an enormously varied output of dust pressed wall tiles and tile panels³¹. The firm saw rapid expansion. A catalogue from ca. 1913 mentions a daily output of no less than 250.000 tiles of which 35.000 were floor tiles, 135.000 undecorated and 55.000 decorated wall tiles. This made Gilliot one of the largest tile factories on the European continent. A significant part of the production - both standard tiles, tile panels and building ornaments executed in a variety of techniques - shows typical art nouveau features (Fig. 3). Several designs are the work of H. Bonnerot. The majority of the work was, however, anonymous. The style of the Gilliot tiles is very recognizable. The floral Art Nouveau dominates, though the geometric style is also present.

Many more factories and workshops were active in the ensuing years. The S.A. Produits Céramiques de la Dyle in Wijgmaal near Leuven, produced dust pressed wall tiles under the brands Le Glaive and Belga from 1908³². Also the Faïenceries des Pavillons in Florennes set up in 1911³³; the S.A. Faïenceries de Bouffioulx founded in 1922³⁴ and the S.A. La Céramique de Herent established in 1923 were important large-scale manufacturers.

The already mentioned floor tile factories S.A. Compagnie Générale des Produits Céramiques Saint-Ghislain, Société Générale de Produits Réfractaires et Céramiques de Morialmé and S.A. La Céramique Poulet (ancienne firme V. Poulet & sœur) from Forges-lez-Chimay also offered dust pressed wall tiles for sale in their catalogues. All companies, even those founded in the 1920s, introduced many striking Art Nouveau designs on the market.

A slightly different firm was the porcelain factory of Vermeren-Coché in Brussel-Elsene, which had emerged in 1852 after a take-over of the factory of Christophe Windisch founded in 1830. This firm offered moulded architectural ceramics in ‘grès cérame’ or semi-porcelain and one-off products designed by the sculptor Isidoor De Rudder³⁵.

³¹ Mario BAECK, “Manufactures Céramiques d’Hemixem Gilliot & Cie, Hemiksem. Manufactures Céramiques d’Hemixem Gilliot & Cie, Hemixem” in Mario BAECK e.a. (ed.), *Belgische art deco keramiek...*, p. 62-70.

³² Mario BAECK, “S.A. Usines de la Dyle - Wijgmaal bij Leuven. S.A. Usines de la Dyle - Wygmael près de Louvain” in Mario BAECK e.a. (ed.), *Belgische art deco keramiek...*, p. 71-75.

³³ See for this and other rather small firms: Mario BAECK, *Gevloerd & betegeld. De Belgische tegelindustrie van art nouveau tot seventies*, S.L., Stichting Kunstboek, 2012.

³⁴ Mario Baeck, “S.A. Faïenceries de Bouffioulx” in Mario BAECK e.a. (ed.), *Belgische art deco keramiek...*, p. 250-257.

³⁵ Jean LEMAIRE e.a., *Faïence et porcelaine de Bruxelles*, Bruxelles, Editions Racine, 2003, p. 147-163.

The firm J. Parentani & Léon Champagne in Tubize, made architectural ceramics and tiles from 1893 onwards using designs by notable architects and sculptors like Léon Govaerts and Juliaan Dillens. However, they never used the dust press technique and their short lived production was, with the collaboration of Jean Parentani, from 1896 until 1902 partly continued by the S.A. La Majolique based in Brussels and Emptinne near Ciney³⁶.

In West-Flanders where traditional techniques and motifs remained for a long time very popular, a stylistic innovation can also be seen around 1900. The Kortrijk Pottery founded in 1898 by the engineer Pieter Jozef Laigneil gained some commercial success with pressed tiles in traditional red and yellow pottery clay with attractive Arts & Crafts and Art Nouveau motifs to designs by Victor Acke, Jozef De Coene, Karel Noppe and Joseph Viérin. In these tiles the rustic character of the pottery is reconciled with a sophisticated design³⁷.

In addition, the availability of ready-made glazes made possible the emergence of a number of small firms who decorated tile blanks. In Antwerp the Atelier van Decoratieve Kunst Gussenhoven & Van Wijck realized some tile panels. Best known is the Maison Guillaume Janssens of Sint-Agatha-Berchem near Brussels. The striking façade of his own home - the eclectic villa Marie-Mirande, Avenue de Selliers de Moranville 11, Sint-Agatha-Berchem, in 1912 -1913 built to a design by architect Victor Tinant - is entirely clad with decorative glazed tiles and thus forms to potential customers a true sample of different possibilities and styles.

The evolution outlined above makes clear that after 1895 the ceramic wall tile industry in Belgium flourished. This was only possible due to the favourable economic climate because a large-scale use of tiles was relatively expensive. This is why the great majority of surviving installations can be found in the houses of the upper middle classes or in buildings with very specific building programs like bakeries, fishmongers, restaurants and the like or on the façades of commercial buildings where the use of tiles proved either to be hygienic or commercially advantageous.

It is furthermore remarkable that all tile manufacturers did not adhere to specific artistic fashions but offered products in all kinds of styles in their catalogues. The designers working for the tile factories clearly made an extensive use of ornament books, art and architecture magazines, portfolios, product catalogues of other tile factories, and of posters and other graphic works by leading artists that were available to them. This is very obvious at Boch Frères in La Louvière, where various designs of the Frenchman Maurice Verneuil are used in the standard tile production. At Gilliot in Hemiksem the work of the Czech Alphonse Mucha was copied. Thus, the tile panel 'La

³⁶ Mario BAECK, "S.A. La Majolique, Bruxelles et Emptinne et l'usine Parentani & Champagne à Tubize" in *Céramiques de l'Art nouveau en Belgique*, Andenne/Torhout, Musée de la Céramique-Museum Torhouts Aardewerk, 2009, p. 45-48, also available in Dutch.

³⁷ Mario BAECK & Marc LOGGHE, *Tegels in Poterie Flamande (1890-1940)*, Torhout, Stadsbestuur-Museum Torhouts Aardewerk, 2006.

parure' presented in the firm's catalogue is directly derived from Mucha's 'Zodiaque' from 1896. Another design directly taken from Mucha is a tile panel dating from ca. 1912 located in Mortsel near Antwerp. This panel depicts an elegant female figure that symbolizes autumn. It is a very faithful copy of the original Mucha lithography from 1900. There is only some difference in colours and the design of the frame. It is more than significant that Mucha's signature is not integrated in this copy³⁸.

In many cases the quality of many tile projects from the Art Nouveau period is due to an occasional involvement of prominent Belgian artists and architects. One of the best examples can be found on the façade of the former Brussels department store 'Grande Maison de Blanc', Kiekenmarkt 20-32, built in 1897 to plans by the architect Oscar François³⁹. Here we find an exceptional ensemble of tile panels designed by the famous poster artist Privat Livemont - also personally active as a maker of sgraffito - and executed at Boch Frères in La Louviere (Fig. 4). Because the painting of ceramic tile panels required special technical skills, it is almost certain that these panels were not painted by Privat Livemont himself. They were probably executed by the versatile artist Georges De Geetere, artistic director of Boch Frères at that time, who with certainty painted some additional panels for the later extension of the same building.

If we look at the total production of wall tiles and tile panels in the Art Nouveau style in Belgium, it is clear that, partly under influence of symbolism and theosophy, the Belgian industrial tile designs around 1900 were to a large extent dominated by flowers and plants with sinuous lines and a symbolic sense as there are the sunflower, rose, orchid, iris and lily, poppy, lotus and water lily, chrysanthemum and thistle. Next to flowers and plants we also find ornaments inspired by animals of different sorts. Particularly popular is furthermore the elegant woman with long and loose hair. In addition to the elegant sinuous lines of what is generally called the floral Art Nouveau, from 1900 onwards a much more geometric and abstract style, inspired by the work of the Scottish architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh and related to work of the Vienna Secession and the Dutch 'Nieuwe Kunst' can be found in the Belgian wall tile production, as it is also the case in the floor tile production.

Advertisements and catalogues of various wall tile manufacturers show that these Art Nouveau designs remained popular to the end of the 1920s. A gradual change in taste with Art Deco and Modernism and outside factors like the Great Depression and rising labour costs brought around 1930 the production of the labour intensive decorated tile that was once so popular to an end.

The Belgian Art Nouveau tile, an international success

³⁸ For an illustration of this last panel in confrontation with the original Mucha design see: Mario BAECK, *Schoonheid uit klei en cement. Vloer en wandtegels in de provincie Antwerpen*, Antwerpen, Openbaar Kunstbezit Vlaanderen/Dienst Erfgoed provinciebestuur Antwerpen, 2008, (Erfgoedgids 7), p. 89.

³⁹ See: Mario BAECK, "Het Grande Maison de Blanc - 12 art nouveau tegelpanelen - een reproductieproject van Paul Kenens", a report that is available at www.academia.edu/2471102 - consulted 30.04.2013.

The presence at various World Fairs was for most of the Belgian tile factories of vital importance because it was there that international professionals and the general public could become acquainted with the quality and range of their tiles and tile panels. The many awards gained at these international exhibitions strongly supported the export of their products, and for a small country as Belgium export was vital for the industry⁴⁰. The wonderful lithographed trade catalogues of the Belgian tile manufacturers were very effective to convince potential clients all over the world. Through the many colourful images a foreign customer could get a good idea of what was on offer. Finally, a network of foreign sales representatives increased significantly the export opportunities. In the archives of Gilliot Hemiksem for instance, we can find information on their French sales representative G. Martin in Paris as well as on their representatives M. Penalosa de Acevedo in Madrid and M. Verdussen in Rio de Janeiro. The Helman firm on the other hand was represented in Buenos Aires by the Compañia Comercial Sud.

Thanks to all this the export of Belgian tile manufacturers in 1907 could be estimated for wall tiles to about one third of the total production of nearly 20 million pieces per year. For floor tiles the export is then estimated to about a fourth of the total yearly production of 'encaustic' decorative stoneware tiles⁴¹.

This rather important overseas trade was undoubtedly greatly stimulated by the fact that building materials frequently were used as ballast for ships sailing out from Antwerp. For the trade to Latin America it is known that floor and wall tiles were massively loaded.

Because of the importance of their international activities most Belgian tile factories registered their trademarks internationally. Given the enormous importance of the export and starting from around 1900, Belgian tiles were usually provided at the back not only with a trade mark, but also with the indication of origin 'Made in Belgium' in order to meet the many foreign customs regulations.

The international success of the Belgian Art Nouveau tile is also made visible by the fact that many Belgian tile designs were copied by tile manufacturers in Portugal, Spain and even Japan, just as was the case for English tile designs⁴².

The tile panel design 'Electricité' by Jacques Madiol for Helman Céramiques was adapted in 1907 by the Portuguese tile artist M. Quiriol for the exterior decoration of the

⁴⁰ On the export of Belgian floor and wall tiles see: Mario BAECK, "Vloer- en wandtegels, een verhaal van import en export. Thema-artikel voor de website Open Monumentendag Vlaanderen" available at www.academia.edu/349061/Vloer- en wandtegels een verhaal van import en export - consulted 30.04.2013.

⁴¹ Marcel DE MEESTER, *Les industries céramiques en Belgique*, Bruxelles, J. Lebègue & Cie, 1907, p. 119 en 105.

⁴² For the influence of English tiles on the Spanish and Portugese production see the research of Hans van Lemmen and on the Japanese production that of Chris Blanchett as presented at the international conference 'Stoke and beyond' held in 2011. Slides of these presentations are to be seen at www.tilesoc.org.uk/conference/exporting-stoke-2011/exporting_stoke_programme.htm - consulted 30.04.2013.

well-known Animatografia do Rossio building in Lisbon⁴³. 'Iris', another tile panel design by Helman - also in use by the Manufacture de Céramiques Décoratives de Hasselt that shared the copyrights on this design - was adapted by the Cerâmica Artística Arcolena⁴⁴. A tile panel with a sailing ship in 1912 painted by Licínio Pinto for the Fábrica da Fonte Nova is very close to a standard tile design by Gilliot⁴⁵. Several other tile designs of Gilliot, La Dyle at Wijgmaal and Boch Frères were copied by the Fabrica Cerâmica das Devezas Antonio Almeida da Costa & Ca⁴⁶. A design of the Société Générale de Produits Réfractaires et Céramiques de Morialmé was produced by the Cerâmica Lusitânia⁴⁷. Finally, the Real Fábrica de Louça en Sacavem Gilman & Ca seems to have copied at least one Gilliot design.

In Spain Gilliot designs were copied by the firms of Viuda de Segarra Bernat in Castellon and Hijos de Justo Vilar S. en C. of Valencia. Designs of Gilliot as well as some of Boch Frères were copied by Dominguez Hno y Trigo of Valencia and still present in their 1967 catalogue also by Azulejos Cedolesa Cerámica Dominguez de Levante S.A. of Manises and Onda, Valencia. The firm Luis Vila Hijo copied at least one design made by the S.A. La Céramique Poulet of Forges-lez-Chimay.

For Japan we find many parallels between the production of Gilliot and La Dyle of Wijgmaal and those of Fujimiyake Ceramic Co, Danto and other firms as we can also find in Taiwan buildings many original Belgian tiles used next to Japanese copies of European designs⁴⁸. It illustrates well the importance of the Belgian Art Nouveau tile production well beyond Europe.

⁴³ Antonio José de Barros VELOSO & Isabel ALMASQUE, *O Azulejo Português e a Arte Nova. Portuguese Tiles and Art Nouveau*, Lisboa, Edições Inapa, 2000, p. 40, fig. 5 and p. 119.

⁴⁴ A.J. B. VELOSO e.a., *O Azulejo Português e a Arte Nova...*, p. 84, fig. 49b.

⁴⁵ Antonio José de Barros VELOSO & Isabel ALMASQUE, *A Arte Nova nos Azulejos em Portugal. Coleção Feliciano David - Graciete Rodrigues*, Aveiro, Câmara Municipal, 2011, p. 114-115, fig. 63.

⁴⁶ A.J. B. VELOSO e.a., *O Azulejo Português e a Arte Nova...*, p. 67, fig. 30a for the Gilliot and La Dyle copy, p. 67, fig. 29 c and p. 39, fig. 4 for the Boch Frères copies.

⁴⁷ A.J. B. VELOSO e.a., *O Azulejo Português e a Arte Nova...*, p. 98, fig. 69.

⁴⁸ Hung-Chi MIAO (ed.), *Condensing time and light into ceramic : old tiles from Taiwan and the Netherlands*, Taipei, Taipei County Yingge Ceramics Museum, 2003, p. 107 - plate 25, p. 130, p.154-155.