

# Preserving and Perpetuating Memory at the Musée Nissim de Camondo

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This article investigates the complex layering of historical and memorial references at the Musée Nissim de Camondo in Paris as it has evolved from private residence to an increasingly open public museum. Built between 1911 and 1914 for an important collection of eighteenth-century furnishings and decorative arts, the house took on a commemorative function following the death of the founder's son, Nissim, for whom the museum was named. Over the last century, through the vicissitudes of history, revised narrative priorities and changing approaches to museum presentation, this house-turned-museum has become a site of historical representation focused as much on the twentieth century and the Camondo family as on the period of its original inspiration. This article explores that transition, attending to the museum's founding memorial goal in the wake of World War II, the tragic demise of the Camondo family, and shifting perspectives on French history.

KEYWORDS house museums, authenticity, memory, Paris, World War II, eighteenth-century decorative arts

The Musée Nissim de Camondo, although relatively small and highly specialized, offers something for nearly everyone. Connoisseurs of the decorative arts, devotees of *Downton Abbey*, and tourists on the trail of Jewish history can all engage with this beautiful house-turned-museum set against the quirky Parc Monceau in northwestern Paris (Figure 1). Its multifaceted charms serve it well in an era in which house museums are suffering and professionals in the field fret over how to stay interesting, relevant, and in business.<sup>1</sup> For scholars concerned with how museums produce meaning, the complexities of the Musée Nissim de Camondo are equally intriguing. Built between 1911 and 1914, the hôtel de Camondo originally served as a family residence and the frame for a valuable private collection. In subsequent decades, due to an array of personal, historical, and museological circumstances, the hôtel (as this genre of elite urban townhouse is known<sup>2</sup>) took on new roles, first as a public museum dedicated to eighteenth-century French decorative arts and, most recently, as a house museum offering



FIGURE 1 Interior, Musée Nissim de Camondo.

*Photo: the author*

tantalizing glimpses into the life of the Camondos, the wealthy Parisian family that built it. The complexity of this transition — from residence as site of display to decorative arts museum as a space for examining domestic life — is the subject of this article, which focuses in particular on strategies of presentation, realms of authenticity, and the harnessing of historic sites to both personal and communal memory.

This investigation is rooted in a comparison of the historic hôtel de Camondo and the early years of the museum, as documented in family records and catalogues, with the Musée Nissim de Camondo as it appears today.<sup>3</sup> The founding mission of the museum is both a useful place to begin these comparisons and a helpful frame for understanding the transitions at the core of this study. The author of that mission, Moïse de Camondo (1860–1935), was the scion of a prominent Jewish family that had emigrated from Istanbul to Paris in the late 1860s to build its banking house. Styled by some the ‘Rothschilds of the East’, the Camondos brought with them a tradition of philanthropy, modernist sensibilities, and a longing for social integration that all came to bear on Moïse’s collecting and

his eventual gift of a museum to the French nation.<sup>4</sup> This gift — including its basic motives of memorialization and preservation — are spelled out in his will, dated 1924:

Wishing to *perpetuate the memory* of my father Count Nissim de Camondo and that of my unfortunate son, Lieutenant Pilot Nissim de Camondo, killed in aerial combat on 5 September 1917, I bequeath my house such as it is at the time of my death to the Musée des Arts Décoratifs. My house is to be given the name Nissim de Camondo, the name of my son for whom this house and its collections were intended. With this bequest to the State of my house and the collections it contains, it is my wish to *keep together as a whole* the work to which I have devoted myself: the recreation of an 18th-century artistic residence. To my mind this reconstruction should serve to keep in France, in a setting created specially for this purpose, the most beautiful objects that I have been able to gather of this decorative art which has been one of France's glories, during the period I have loved above all others.<sup>5</sup>

Although his collection has been kept together, the memories that have been perpetuated are more complicated than Moïse could have imagined.<sup>6</sup> Because moments of display and habitation coexisted at the hôtel de Camondo, the transition from private collection to public museum was graduated rather than linear. Similarly, over time, forms of memory and memorialization — both intimate and communal — were layered in ways that complicate the site's significance, particularly in the wake of the Holocaust and the destruction of the Camondo family.<sup>7</sup> Finally, recent decisions to open up and lay bare the workings of the house, from the mechanical novelties of the kitchen and butlery to the residents' private bathrooms, have shifted the focus of the visitor and redefined the very subject matter of the museum.<sup>8</sup> In a fascinating turn of signification, Moïse's 'recreation' of an eighteenth-century residence is valued today in large part because of its status as a state-of-the-art early twentieth-century home.

These intricacies make the Musée Nissim de Camondo a rich site for the investigation of several important museological issues. First among them is the complicated, variable relationship between objects and audiences that different moments and modes of presentation produce, since the objects have remained relatively fixed while the audiences have changed quite notably. Critical to this discussion is a consideration of authenticity as it defines the house and its contents but also as it has itself been redefined by recent curatorial interventions. Shifting planes of authenticity, in turn, impact the ways that the past is constructed at the museum and that viewers — historical and contemporary — are invited to engage with it. Indeed, the most vibrant question may concern *which* past is on view, or how the various pasts evident at the museum are and will continue to be negotiated. Attention to theories of memory, community, and place, topics of particular interest to French philosophers of history,<sup>9</sup> can help make sense of the web of meanings apparent today at the Musée Nissim de Camondo. At the same time, this elegant and deceptively simple 'artistic residence' has much to contribute to an understanding of the role museums and historic houses play in shaping our visions of the past.

## The hôtel de Camondo and its occupants

The hôtel de Camondo sits on one of two plots of land on the Rue de Monceau purchased by the Camondo family in 1870, soon after arriving in Paris. Moïse's father, Nissim, settled in a house at no. 63 with his wife Elise Fernandez and their only son; his uncle, Abraham de Camondo, moved into the adjacent property, which he eventually handed down to his son, Isaac (1851–1911), also an only child. The Monceau district, populated by bankers, industrialists, and other members of an emerging class of moneyed elite, was a newly fashionable place to live. To purchase a home there was seen as a step toward integration into proper Parisian circles.<sup>10</sup> In 1891, Moïse married Irène Cahen d'Anvers, daughter of an established family of Jewish financiers and best remembered today as the subject of Renoir's portrait of 'Little Irene'.<sup>11</sup> The couple had two children, Nissim, born in 1892, and Béatrice, born two years later, but their marriage faltered when Irène took up with an Italian count, leading to a very public divorce in 1902.<sup>12</sup> Moïse received custody of the children and, as a devoted father, freely indulged their passions for riding and sport as well as his own for cars, horses, and collecting.

Between 1911 and 1914 his attention centered on the property on rue de Monceau, where he oversaw the construction of a new residence at no. 63, the site of his childhood home. This hôtel, or urban townhouse, designed by the architect René Sergent as a technologically updated imitation of the Petit Trianon at Versailles, was not only a fully modern residence where Moïse moved with his now adult children in 1914, but also a meticulously constructed setting for his growing collection of eighteenth-century French furnishings and decorative arts. Just a few years earlier Sergent had completed an 'exhibition mansion' on the stylish Place Vendôme for the Duveen Brothers, major art dealers whose clients included Henry Clay Frick, Andrew W. Mellon, Samuel H. Kress, and on occasion Moïse himself.<sup>13</sup> The Duveens were known for their lavish showrooms, and Sergent based his design of their Paris office on the Petit Trianon, apparently a suitable setting for stoking the fantasies of wealthy collectors. Moïse's own architectural commission was thus dually inspired, by an eighteenth-century palace and a historicizing Parisian gallery. In these intricacies we can already glimpse the layering of references — past and present, authentic and imitative — that characterizes and complicates the museum today.

An up-to-date eighteenth-century setting suited Moïse's collecting interests. After some early years dabbling in various art forms, guided by his cousin Isaac<sup>14</sup> and by Charles Ephrussi, co-owner and chief editor of the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*,<sup>15</sup> Moïse turned in earnest to the decorative arts of eighteenth-century France with a particular emphasis on the era of late Louis XV (Transition style) and Louis XVI. Various scholars have suggested that this focus was not accidental but grew out of a need to assimilate into society by proving allegiance to France and recognizing a key moment in its artistic patrimony, the one Moïse 'loved above all others'.<sup>16</sup> Certainly he could be forgiven for tying his cultural interests to a desire to blend in. These were the years surrounding the Dreyfus Affair (1897) and the anti-Semitic tendencies that it brought to the surface.<sup>17</sup>

Among the derisive voices of the period were those of the literary Goncourt brothers, Edmond and Jules, who chronicled and critiqued upper-crust Parisian

life. Beginning in the 1880s, their criticisms, that earlier had had the air of gossip, became more vicious and paranoid.<sup>18</sup> But the general theme of ‘the Jew’ as impervious to true beauty and obsessed with riches runs consistently through their work. Michel Winock argues that the unique contribution of the Goncourts to the rhetoric of French anti-Semitism lay in tying it to aesthetics and art-for-art’s sake: Jews were ‘the personification of bad taste’ and of cultural pursuits driven by money.<sup>19</sup> Notably, the Goncourts were also great promoters of the eighteenth century, praising its artistic production as exemplary of French skill and chastising their co-nationals for having neglected it.<sup>20</sup> Their essays and monographic studies, collected and published as *L’Art du 18ème siècle*, helped fuel growing interest in this period and a related collecting trend in which Moïse was a dedicated participant.

These two tendencies of the Goncourts — the anti-Semitic and the pro-eighteenth century — converge in a criticism leveled at Moïse’s father, the elder Nissim, and his American mistress, Alice Thal de Lancey, who owned a pavilion at Louveciennes formerly in the possession of Madame du Barry, mistress of Louis XV. In 1882, Edmond de Goncourt commented on the ‘ironic interior of Louveciennes, where Mme de Lancey lives today and where the banker Camondo replaces Louis XV’.<sup>21</sup> The snide tone of Goncourt’s remark indicates that he found a (Jewish) man of commerce ensconced in an aristocratic eighteenth-century French estate to be a troublesome appropriation of cultural symbols. The same tendencies ominously foreshadow events of the 1930s and ’40s, when Moïse’s gift of ‘decorative art which has been one of France’s glories’ was soon followed by the deportation of the Camondo heirs to Auschwitz. The failure of this quintessentially French collection, gifted to France, to aid the Camondo family in their efforts to assimilate into French society, is the most bitter of ironies.

It is interesting, thus framed, to consider Moïse’s homage to the eighteenth century more closely. His new residence was both a home and a setting for his impressive and growing collection. Within it, the collection played two distinct roles: objects to be lived in and among, and objects to preserve, protect, curate, and display for others. Although a very private man intent above all on spending time with his beloved children, Moïse was involved in several prominent artistic associations of the day, including the Amis du Louvre and the Union centrale des Arts décoratifs, the latter of which he also served as vice-president.<sup>22</sup> It is clear that he intended his home also as a venue to display his collection to the members of these groups — not a museum, but a private showcase for precious furniture and art objects. According to Marie-Noël de Gary, Moïse intended the house as ‘the setting of his own family history’.<sup>23</sup> This turn of phrase is suggestive for the weight it gives to performance, to which we will return in conclusion, and for the related implication that the two functions of the house — daily living and the staging of its contents — are not easily separated, either physically or conceptually.

### **Manners of display and modes of authenticity**

A closer look at the so-called Porcelain Room underscores this complexity, specifically in the intricate and evolving dialogue that exists between objects,



FIGURE 2 Porcelain Room, Musée Nissim de Camondo.

*Photo: the author*

audiences, and presentation (Figure 2). Adjacent to the formal dining room, this is where Moïse stored his nearly comprehensive collection of Sèvres tableware from the Buffon series,<sup>24</sup> decorated with images from the eighteenth-century naturalist's multi-volume illustrated encyclopedia.<sup>25</sup> A simple room lined with glass-faced cabinets and a window onto the park, it resembles a pantry intended for functional storage. But the Buffon service, unlike many of Moïse's historic pieces, was never used for dining — he was concerned that it was too fragile. Instead the dishes are lined up in orderly fashion so that this relatively modest pantry partakes of the most traditional exhibitionary rhetoric, namely a taxonomic series laid out for comparative contemplation. Similarly, the pantry cabinets function like museum vitrines, remaining protectively closed and prioritizing visual access.<sup>26</sup> Moïse enjoyed lunching alone here, thus activating an otherwise passive space — by actually dining in a room dedicated to a static presentation of dining ware, 'living' in a domestic space built around museological strategies. In catalogues today, the Porcelain Room is sometimes shown set with Moïse's small table, further glossing its significance by layering a suggestion of life back onto a room that can also be read as a museum-within-a-museum.

Moïse's engagement with the display of his collection was itself fluid and subject to change. Although he always intended to share the collection with visitors to his home, it was the family tragedy referenced in his will that apparently turned him toward the idea of eventually transforming the house into a public museum. As that document indicates, Moïse's son, the younger Nissim, was killed while serving in the French air force during World War I. Nissim's death tore Moïse apart and turned him ever more inward; increasingly, he spent time alone, in his home and his study, focusing on the objects that brought him solace. During this period, Moïse's approach to living with historic artefacts seems to have hardened: he became more rigid in how he grouped and presented objects and less willing to

sacrifice unity of presentation to family needs.<sup>27</sup> But unlike his cousin Isaac who utilized a relatively clinical, taxonomic form of display, Moïse continued to favour an integral, mimetic approach that involved the recreation of environments, in his case late eighteenth-century spaces for receiving guests, socializing, and dining.<sup>28</sup>

Although it is tempting to see this approach as the natural one for a residence, it is also valuable to locate it also within a broader framework of display practices, specifically those descended from Alexandre du Sommerard at the Musée de Cluny where an installation evocative of a larger past was favoured over a linear genealogy of style. There, as Stephen Bann indicates, furniture, paintings, and porcelain worked as synecdoches to evoke ‘an historically authentic milieu’, an impression further enhanced by the period-appropriate setting.<sup>29</sup> By the early twentieth century, period rooms and related installations were gaining popularity as a museological strategy for presenting and interpreting the domestic arts. Scandinavia had led the way, for it was there that Artur Hazelius — after touring folkloric tableaux of costumes and scenery to, among other places, the 1878 Paris Exposition — set up his innovative ethnographic museum at Skansen and launched an important international trend.<sup>30</sup> Kate Hill argues that the taste for such rooms in Britain can be tied to a shifting hierarchy in which some of the terms for remembering the past were loosened to include broader perspectives (embracing the home, domestic objects, and women), a more experiential form of presentation, and a notion of history that engaged personal memory alongside traditional narratives.<sup>31</sup> Although there is no reason to believe Moïse theorized the presentation of his collection in these terms, they can help us understand the complexity of his hôtel as it shifted from ‘lived space’ to ‘museum space’. At the hôtel de Camondo, these functions existed in flux and overlapped, even as the approach to installation itself did not change. The house was a home, but also an invocation of another era; it was filled with the life of Moïse’s family while conjuring up, in precise detail, the era of Louis XVI. As someone who was self-conscious in his display practices, Moïse was surely influenced by the synecdochic mode described by Bann even as he was creating a house to be lived in, in the present.

Bann’s framework can also help explain the meanings invested in the museum today, where the environment created by Moïse embraces not only the world of Louis XVI but also that of Moïse de Camondo himself. This shift, in part simply a factor of time passing, has been enhanced by changes made in the 1990s when museum officials and curators decided to open up new areas of the house to the public. One can now visit the three gleaming bathrooms used by Moïse and his children, private spaces that exemplify early twentieth-century ideals of hygiene and cleanliness; the butler’s pantry equipped with a sophisticated water sterilizing device; and the kitchen, with its massive Cubain range and rotisserie ovens (Figure 3). Visitors move smoothly between Moïse’s reconstruction of an eighteenth-century manor and a house that evokes life in Paris circa 1930, but Bann’s terms underscore the semiotic intricacies that are actually at work. Today, the range, rotisserie, sinks, and bathtubs are synecdochal connections to the era of Moïse, just as he intended his collection to evoke that of Louis XVI. Those backstage elements, once present to support the main attraction, are now the most

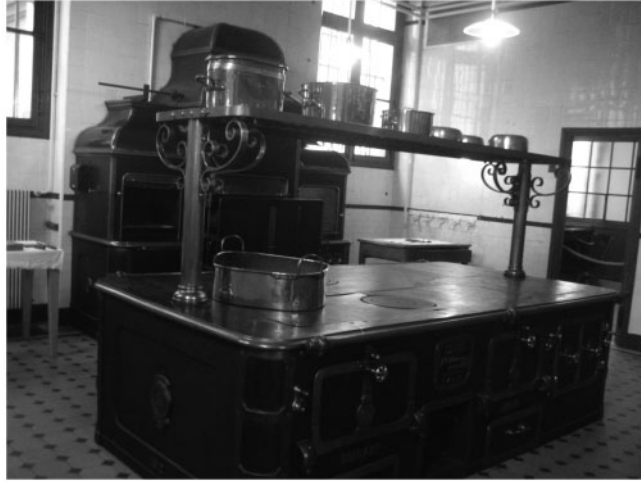


FIGURE 3 Cubain range, kitchen, Musée Nissim de Camondo.

*Photo: the author*

powerful evocations of the past found at the Musée Nissim de Camondo. They are not assemblages, recreations, or imitations, but artifacts true to what they claim to be (though removed from that reality through their reinvention as exhibit). In 2014, the most authentic aspect of the museum is not Moïse's '18th-century residence' but his magnificent late Belle Epoque mansion, in all its early twentieth-century particularities.<sup>32</sup>

The notion of authenticity has become a touchstone of museum studies, critical especially to understanding house museums and other sites that have been adapted to a museum function. Siân Jones identifies two primary lines of thought in this field.<sup>33</sup> The first, that she terms the materialist, understands authenticity to be inherent in an object and is associated with modernist outlooks. The second, or constructivist, concentrates on how notions of authenticity are produced and is characteristic of a post-modern age that resists fixity and is increasingly detached from the past. Although he was essentially a materialist focused on original objects, it is helpful to examine Moïse as a collector through a constructivist lens. Despite his dedication to creating a historically precise display environment and his great interest in provenance, he was willing to sacrifice the pedigree of an individual object for the sake of the ensemble. For example, the showy wrought-iron balustrade of the main staircase is a copy of a late eighteenth-century exemplar in Toulouse, commissioned when he was unable to find an appropriate original.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, when he ran short of period-appropriate bronze fixtures, Moïse had reproductions made, so that some are the 'real thing' and others are not.<sup>35</sup> He permitted copies of upholstery in the style of Louis XVI and imitation rococo mounts on authentic eighteenth-century Chinese porcelains, in homage to French tastes of that period; alterations were made to paneling removed from a neoclassical apartment in order to fit his drawing room.<sup>36</sup>



David Lowenthal, a key theorist in the constructivist vein, provides useful terms for working through the complex relationship to the past that Moïse fashioned through objects and how that relationship has changed over time.<sup>37</sup> While an ‘authentic’ object — an original, from a historic period and true to that form — was for Moïse the ideal collectible, it was often impossible to acquire. He was guided in his installations in part by what Lowenthal terms ‘genuineness’, in which larger evocations take precedence over absolute loyalty to originals. Ironically, it is the *hôtel de Camondo* itself — a twentieth-century emulation, to adopt Lowenthal’s terms — that is most critical to this evocation, more even than the many authentic collectibles that fill it. For unlike Moïse’s fellow connoisseurs, the average visitor to today’s museum is unaware of which among those objects is true to the eighteenth century and which is not. It is the setting, itself an artifice, that most persuasively conjures up that past; at the same time this artifice, in its nitty-gritty twentieth-century realities of vents and pipes and circuitry, is the most genuine object on view today.

Authenticity is complex. It might be said that Moïse allowed more play with it than do today’s curators who, in honouring the terms of his will, are set on maintaining the house and collection as they were when he died. The exceptions to this rule are few and made in the interest of visitor safety or object preservation. Some carpets have been rolled up at the corners or in a few cases removed for easier passage, and vitrines now protect Sèvres biscuit sculpture groups in Moïse’s bedroom. When curators accepted the donation of a single oil sketch by Jean-Baptiste Oudry to complete an existing set of eight, they offset it in a distinctively shaped frame so that this addition to the collection, something forbidden by the terms of the will, remains (subtly) identifiable as such.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, the walls of Moïse’s private retreat on the third floor, the Blue Drawing Room, have been allowed to fade from their original colour to a greenish teal — a fact pointed out by guides and in printed catalogues.<sup>39</sup> In this rare case, notably in the more intimate quarters of the house, time has not been frozen but has been allowed to have some impact on an otherwise pristine installation. This nod to temporality stands out in a structure that, for the most part, looks just as it did in Moïse’s own day.

Such attention to the preservation of the whole, demanded by Moïse’s will, inevitably gives priority to the collection as an ensemble rather than to the individual objects in it, and this in turn leads to the creator of that collection, Moïse himself. The stories told today at the *Musée Nissim de Camondo* about the form of his house and the objects that fill it are all refracted through the lens of biography.<sup>40</sup> We learn from audio tours, guides, and catalogues that Moïse preferred the symmetrical installations that are found throughout the house.<sup>41</sup> Tales of provenance often centre on his detective work in tracking down the mate to an object he already owned. And for those rare pieces that are out of place chronologically, the collector’s personal story or changing taste is brought in as an explanation.<sup>42</sup> Environmental installations like that at the *Musée de Camondo* can transform objects from specimens to relics, from types representing a historical era to particular objects of personal history. Stephen Bann describes similar transformations at the *Musée de Cluny*, where ‘each object gave access to the

milieu and the living historical characters with whom it had once been identified, through a process that was ultimately grounded in the myth of the resurrection of the past'.<sup>43</sup>

## Forms of remembrance, communal and familial

Today at the Musée Nissim de Camondo that past slips continuously back and forth between the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries. Indeed, more often than not visitors are directed to look *through* the era of Louis XVI and onto that of Moïse, or to see the earlier era through Moïse's eyes. The trace of the collector's hand, the implied memory of its literal, indexical relationship to the collected objects, is a case in point.<sup>44</sup> Moïse attended closely to the historic owners of his objects, valuing that connoisseurial stamp of approval but surely also the intangible aura of knowing that an object had been handled by a count or a queen — such as the extraordinary pair of petrified wood vases that comes from Marie-Antoinette's private rooms at Versailles.<sup>45</sup> For today's curators, however, the hand of Moïse is equally potent. It is present in their discussions of his acquisitions and quite literally in the installations themselves, still true to Moïse's own arrangements. We are on occasion even reminded of specific gestures and the collector's handling of objects. Thus, the text accompanying a photograph of an eighteenth-century desk set out for work reads, 'Moïse de Camondo wrote his letters on this table on which he placed one of the many photographs of his son Nissim'.<sup>46</sup>

Alongside this attention to his relationship with objects and his tastes as a collector is a growing interest in Moïse's personal story and that of his family. This tendency has been organic and incremental, beginning at the point sometime not long after 1917 when Moïse decided to build a 'souvenir room' (or memorial room) to the two lost Nissims, grandfather and son, in his son's study on the third floor of the house. It contained hunting scenes, family photographs, and a portrait of the elder Nissim by Carolus-Duran, and was accessible only to a very small and intimate set of guests. Thus, alongside historically evocative period rooms and the taxonomic presentation of porcelain, Moïse was also constructing a site of nostalgia, in which personal memories were articulated through furnishings and pictures. At the museum's formal opening in 1936, the souvenir room was the only portion of Nissim's private apartments accessible to visitors. It was also the only space to focus overtly on the family, through photographs and other objects of a sentimental nature.<sup>47</sup> The goals for this space presage those articulated in Moïse's will — preservation and memorialization — although its private nature must be distinguished from the more public commemorative discourse of a museum.

Over time, and particularly in the last two decades, the Musée Nissim de Camondo has focused increasingly on the lives that were lived at no. 63 rue de Monceau. This is apparent above all in the decision of the mid-1990s to restore and open up to public view previously hidden areas of the house. Alongside objects of prestigious provenance from Versailles, the palace of the Louvre, and various eighteenth-century chateaux and hôtels, visitors now admire the butler's sinks (zinc for porcelain and glass, copper for copperware), the dumb waiter and warming oven, the elevator (updated from compressed air to electric power in



FIGURE 4 Moïse de Camondo's bathroom, Musée Nissim de Camondo.

*Photo: the author*

1929), the automated call box, and the elegantly appointed bathrooms — blue tile for Moïse (Figure 4), green for Nissim, and yellow for Béatrice. While these glimpses behind-the-scenes of a great manor are fascinating and instructive, we can be quite sure such transparency goes far beyond anything Moïse ever intended. His goal was to 're-creat[e] an 18th-century artistic residence' and so to allow visitors to be transported to that particular historical moment. The inner workings of his highly sophisticated manor, its circuitry, venting, plumbing, and built-in vacuum system, were intentionally tucked away behind a Petit Trianon-inspired veneer.<sup>48</sup> Likewise, none of his personal effects, including linens, silverware, and kitchen utensils, were preserved or included as part of the collection (in today's installations these items have been replaced by replicas, further complicating the question of authenticity).<sup>49</sup>

As Marie-Noël de Gary puts it, 'Exploring behind closed doors often means having to break a taboo'.<sup>50</sup> One wonders what Moïse would think of the museum today, with its new emphasis on the mechanics of his house and, by extension, his private life. There is indeed a corollary here: as we look into what Moïse ate, the newspapers and journals he read, which firm cleaned his linens, and where he purchased shoes for his staff, we are drawn into the details of the man's daily existence that is compellingly documented in the records of his faithful staff, the butler Pierre Godefroy and the long-time family assistant, Léonce Tédeschi.<sup>51</sup> Museum guides — live, audio, and in the form of catalogues — draw our attention to these vivid particulars. So too does the museum installation where, in the study papers and blotters are neatly stacked on his desk, and in the dining room we might see the table set for a luncheon with the Club des Cent, complete with the menu served to guests on 9 June 1933 (Figure 5).<sup>52</sup> Like ethnographic dioramas, these displays move us from the material traces of the everyday into an 'an historically authentic milieu' and a way of life.



FIGURE 5 Dining table set for the Club des Cent, Musée Nissim de Camondo.

*Photo: the author*

From here it is a small step to the larger story of the Camondo family and the tragic fate of Moïse's daughter, Béatrice, her husband, Léon Reinach, and their two children, Fanny and Bertrand. After being arrested in 1942 and detained at the Vichy internment camp at Drancy, all four were sent to Auschwitz, none of them to return. By that time, the Musée Nissim de Camondo had been open nearly six years, and so this family history had no bearing on its original conception or content. Today, however, visitors are reminded of the story from the moment they walk through the arched entry to the front courtyard. There a simple plaque acknowledges the fate of Moïse's last descendants.<sup>53</sup> Inside the museum, the tragic conclusion of the Camondo story is allowed to wait until the end of the visit, on the third floor, where it is part of a new installation in Moïse's dressing room dedicated to the history of the family from its arrival in Paris through to the Nazi deportations. A film, a case with mementos such as photographs, brushes, and other personal effects, and an illustrated family tree (that shows, without commentary, the end of the family line) are the first overt, object-based references to personal family history encountered in the museum. Appropriately, curators placed this memorial space adjacent to the one Moïse himself dedicated to his father and son, so that explicit attention to family stories are displaced to the end of the visit and located within the private spaces of the house.

And yet despite the deferral of this installation to the end of the museum's itinerary, any visitor who has read the opening plaque or knows the history of the Camondo family feels the ghosts of the 1940s at every turn.<sup>54</sup> As a result, matters that would otherwise be quotidian details or simple facts of history are imbued with a sense of impending tragedy. One is tempted to wonder, for example, about the guests at that Club des Cent luncheon of 1933, who they were, and what they did and did not do as the political winds shifted and Moïse's heirs came under growing threat. It is difficult not to see this homage to 'one of France's glories', this

gift to a nation that less than a decade later betrayed the giver, through a veil of loss. And as we learn about the sadness that overtook Moïse's own life — a story that unfolds at varying rates depending on a visitor's individual experience<sup>55</sup> — a mood of mourning pervades a space that, at the same time, radiates the material glory of an earlier, historic era.

These layers of resonance greatly complicate the meaning of the museum.<sup>56</sup> Marie-Noël de Gary links its present form and ambitions directly with the founding mission:

Moïse de Camondo had an *educational purpose* in bequeathing his mansion and collections. His life's work has now been fulfilled beyond his wildest dreams. Far more than a lesson in decorative art, his vision of an art of living at the dawn of the 20th century remains. His house-museum continues to be, in its full respect for its collector-founder, a testament to the customs of the aristocratic bourgeoisie between the wars, when the world was affected by profound upheavals.<sup>57</sup>

But her interpretation of Moïse's mission sounds quite contemporary, borrowing heavily from that of the present-day museum. Education is not a term that Moïse uses or eludes to in his will; perpetuation and preservation were his guiding concepts. And although perpetuation was understood in part as familial, directed at setting down not just the memory of the eighteenth century but that of the Camondos themselves, it is difficult to imagine that this intensely private man anticipated the public parading through his bathroom and admiring his butler's sinks, or that he envisioned an official catalogue of his glorious collection concluding, humbly: 'The silverware was cleaned and kept in the second butlery on the mezzanine floor above'.<sup>58</sup>

This is not to criticize the museum, which is exquisitely maintained and engagingly innovative in its interpretations. Curators are successfully avoiding 'petrification' of Moïse's collection and the death of the house museum by calling on the life of the collector himself.<sup>59</sup> Rather, it is to underscore and examine the transformations that have and continue to take place there. The Musée Nissim de Camondo still does what Moïse hoped for, but not as he intended. A museum conceived as a carefully constructed homage to the eighteenth century given in honour of a lost son is today a window onto the early twentieth century and a shrine to the family that occupied it. Among the various matters at issue in this transition — matters museological and related to the demands and desires of contemporary audiences — is that of history, memory, and nostalgia and how the past is (re)produced for present-day audiences. The work of Pierre Nora, who theorized the symbolic meaning ascribed to *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) in the making of French identity, is a useful guide in exploring these relationships. In its most basic form, Nora's theory postulates history as the outcome of a present increasingly detached from the past. In this scenario, *lieux de mémoire* and official histories replace lived memories and the deep, personal associations they carry.

This thesis is quickly complicated when applied to actual sites like the hôtel-turned-Musée de Camondo. Moïse, with the confidence characteristic of the modern era, used evocative installation techniques to recreate a distant past in the present. For him, recreation was a reliable vehicle to authenticity, and so it made

perfect sense to live a twentieth-century life in a faux-eighteenth-century manor — no interpretative filter was required. Today these terms have shifted, and the authentic house of 1914 has become a symbol of that era, a Norian *lieu de mémoire*. The simple act of converting the house to a museum was a first step in this transformation, but the metamorphosis was fully realized when museum staff also put the workings of the house on view: thus, the authentic came to stand for itself. For Nora, this is a characteristic gesture of the present age, an ‘age of commemoration’ that desperately seeks to brace itself against the unstoppable march of time by singling out, naming, preserving, and interpreting historical sites.<sup>60</sup> It is also characteristic of museums, and museum theory continues to have much to gain from close attention to Nora’s work.<sup>61</sup>

The extensive commentary on Nora’s oeuvre makes clear another aspect relevant to the Musée Nissim de Camondo: the changing interpretations we find there are in keeping with a larger move in France away from official, Republican history and toward a less linear, more fragmented view of the past.<sup>62</sup> Commemoration, through musealisation, can make history out of what was daily life — the realm of a cook, a butler, or a wealthy man in his private quarters. But far from freezing the past into a rigid and monolithic narrative, these historical subplots introduce previously unheard voices into the chorus of national recollection, complicating a glorious French past with more quotidian and less heroic tales. It is this framework of history and memory that allows the butler’s silverware to intrude on Moïse’s porcelain and the tragedy of the Holocaust to cast its shadow over the brilliance of this eighteenth-century collection.<sup>63</sup> Moïse himself opened the door to these complications when he created a shrine to the younger Nissim within the larger space of his ‘artistic residence’, allowing multiple forms of display and remembrance to overlap.

These observations return us to the origins of his cultural activities and the notion that a great collection of quintessentially French art might help pave the way to broader assimilation for a Jewish émigré from Istanbul. The two wishes expressed in Moïse’s will — for perpetuation of the family memory and preservation of the collection — demonstrate that assimilation into Parisian society was indeed a goal and that affirming ties to France was a priority. Although in the starkest terms his efforts failed to integrate and protect the Camondo family, the vicissitudes of history and of historical display have in some sense allowed these wishes to be fulfilled. Increasingly the Camondo family is the subject of the museum, just as the collection itself is receiving ever greater care.<sup>64</sup> Thus, there is no need for officials to feel they must justify their work by translating Moïse’s ambitions into the modern language of the museum professional, in which education trumps all other goals. By embracing and updating the evocative mode of historical installation and overlaying it with the rhetoric of the memorial shrine initiated by Moïse, the Musée Nissim de Camondo has reinvented itself in Moïse’s own terms.<sup>65</sup> Narratives of personal and family history rest alongside those of French cultural genius; today they even outweigh them.

## Conclusion

The metaphor of performance, articulated by de Gary in her description of the house as a ‘setting of [Moïse’s] own family history’, appropriately encapsulates the semiotic complexities identifiable at the hôtel de Camondo, from its days as a residence to its current incarnation as a museum. The suggestion, drawing on a key trope of Nora, is that, even at its foundation, when the building’s primary function was to serve as a home, representation triumphed over reality. What was initially a stage for displaying the eighteenth century was also a place for the Camondo family to demonstrate devotion to France and its heritage: official and personal presentation co-existed from the start. The familial narrative took on greater importance with the death of Nissim and the furnishing of a memorial shrine by Moïse, which formalized the display of personal memories alongside grander historical commemorations. In 1936, when the house itself became a museum, it was perhaps inevitable that the Camondo family would assume a larger role in its narrative. This part of the story has been accentuated recently by the display of mechanical systems and working quarters, as well as by acknowledgment of the family’s brutal extinction. Rather than marking a linear transition from collector’s home to house museum, the history of the Musée Nissim de Camondo is one of layered presentational modes, intertwining subjects, and shifting historical touchstones. It is an authentic locale that represents what it once was. This is the ultimate museological gesture, and at the Musée Nissim de Camondo it is masterfully performed.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Cary Carson, ‘The End of History Museums: What’s Plan B?’, *The Public Historian*, 30 (2008), 9–27. The situation in Paris, with its deep museum culture and vast audiences, may not be so dire. The Musée Nissim de Camondo also benefits from its affiliation with Les Arts Décoratifs, a consortium of museums descended from the Union centrale des Arts décoratifs and managed by the Minister of Culture. Judging by its fine condition during my visit of January 2012, it is faring quite well.
- <sup>2</sup> The hôtel, or *hôtel particulier*, was a form of elite domestic architecture popular from the mid-sixteenth century until circa 1800 (Robert Neuman, ‘Hôtel particulier’, in *Oxford Art Online*, <<http://www.oxfordartonline.com>> [accessed 11 June 2013]). Its development parallels patterns of social change in France, and its adoption for use by the Camondos speaks to the historical complexity of the institution they created. I use ‘hôtel’ to refer to the physical structure itself, initially a private residence that also displayed a collection and later a public museum of decorative arts with increasingly pronounced domestic overtones.
- <sup>3</sup> My observations on the present-day installation of the Musée Nissim de Camondo come from a series of visits made to the museum in January 2012, during which I benefitted from the museum’s signage, audio tour, official guides, and very helpful guards. I have also profited immensely from the museum’s recent publications, which are rich in photographic, archival, and methodological material (see Note 8, below).
- <sup>4</sup> This history is thoroughly examined in Sophie Le Tarnec and Nora Şeni, ‘From Istanbul to Paris’, in *The Camondo Legacy: The Passions of a Paris Collector*, ed. by Marie-Noël de Gary and trans. by David Wharry (London: Thames and Hudson, 2008), pp. 22–55.
- <sup>5</sup> As translated in de Gary, *The Camondo Legacy*, frontispiece; my emphases. I would like to thank Jennifer P. Kingsley for her thoughts on the importance of this document to the present study.
- <sup>6</sup> On the forces that tug at collections and the varying fates they suffer, see Dario Gamboni, ‘The Art of Keeping Art Together: On Collectors’ Museums and Their Preservation’, *Res:*

- Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 52 (2007), 181–89. One cannot help but wonder what would have become of the house and collection had the premature death of the younger Nissim not prompted this gift — particularly given the fate of the Camondo family in World War II.
- <sup>7</sup> Pierre Nora, ‘Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*’, *Representations*, 26 (1989), 7–24. Nora’s larger collective project was published in three volumes as *Les lieux de mémoire* (1984–92).
- <sup>8</sup> Along with these activities came a flurry of publications to which I am greatly indebted. In addition to de Gary, *The Camondo Legacy*, these include Nadine Gasc and Gérard Mabilie, *Le Musée Nissim de Camondo* (Paris: Musées et Monuments de France, 1991); Sylvie Legrand-Rossi, *The Nissim de Camondo Museum*, trans. by David Wharry (Paris: Les Arts Décoratifs, 2009); and Jean Messelet et al., *Musée Nissim de Camondo: Catalogue des collections* (Paris: Union centrale des Arts décoratifs/Réunion des musées nationaux, 1998).
- <sup>9</sup> Including most notably Pierre Nora and his predecessor, Maurice Halbwachs. See also the useful overview by Nancy Wood, ‘Memory’s Remains: *Les lieux de mémoire*’, *History and Memory* 6 (1994), 123–49.
- <sup>10</sup> De Gary, *The Camondo Legacy*, pp. 31–32.
- <sup>11</sup> ‘Little Irene’ is presently in the E.G. Bührle Collection in Zurich, a converted villa where a portion of Emil Georg Bührle’s private collection now resides. The painting was confiscated by the Nazis in 1942 but later returned to the sitter, from whom Bührle purchased it in 1949; see the website of the Foundation E. G. Bührle Collection, <<http://buehrle.ch/collector.php?lang=en&t=4>> [accessed 11 June 2013].
- <sup>12</sup> Legrand-Rossi, *The Nissim de Camondo Museum*, p. 8.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13. Sergent also designed the Seligmann gallery, another spot frequented by Moïse; see François Lover, ‘A Mansion in the 18th-Century Style’, in de Gary, *The Camondo Legacy*, pp. 57–79 (p. 66).
- <sup>14</sup> A patron of both art and music, Isaac was particularly dedicated to the artists of his day, including Edgar Degas, Edouard Manet, and Claude Monet. On his death in 1911, he willed his collection to the Louvre, which did not display contemporary art, on the condition that it be accepted in its entirety and hung together for 50 years (Tarnec and Şeni, ‘From Istanbul to Paris’, pp. 38–41). Today it is a key component of the Impressionist canon and of the masterpieces at the Musée d’Orsay, a gift that was apparently long unacknowledged (Edward J. Ahearn, ‘Monceau, Camondo, *La Curée, L’Argent*: History, Art, Evil’, *The French Review* 73 [2000], 1100–15 [p. 1111]) but now receives mention at the entry to the renovated fifth-floor galleries.
- <sup>15</sup> Ephrussi and his family are the subject of the fascinating recent book by Edmund de Waal, *The Hare with Amber Eyes: A Family’s Century of Art and Loss* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010). The Ephrussi and Camondos were neighbours on the Rue de Monceau and shared many interests and experiences. According to Bertrand Rondot, Charles Ephrussi ‘appear[s] at every important moment in [Moïse’s] life’; see Rondot, ‘Building a Collection’, in de Gary, *The Camondo Legacy*, pp. 81–115 (p. 81).
- <sup>16</sup> Pierre Assouline, *Le Dernier des Camondo* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), p. 29; Lover, ‘A Mansion in the 18th-Century Style’, pp. 62–63; and also de Waal, *The Hare with Amber Eyes*, p. 99, with a similar claim regarding Charles Ephrussi. A tendency in contemporary scholarship, which itself merits further consideration, is to marvel at the interest that this man, ‘born on the shores of the Bosphorus’ (de Gary, *The Camondo Legacy*, p. 21) showed in the art of his adopted country — as if this were an inherently peculiar inclination.
- <sup>17</sup> On the depths of anti-Semitism in French cultural production, even in the works of eventual allies like Emil Zola and with particular relevance to the Camondo family, see Ahearn, ‘Monceau, Camondo, *La Curée, L’Argent*’.
- <sup>18</sup> Jules died in 1870, but Michel Winock identifies similar anti-Semitic themes in the brothers’ early, shared works as well; see his ‘L’antisémitisme des Goncourt’, in *Les Goncourt dans leur siècle. Un siècle de ‘Goncourt’*, ed. by Jean-Louis Cabanès et al. (Villeneuve d’Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2005), pp. 193–202.
- <sup>19</sup> Winock, ‘L’antisémitisme des Goncourt’, p. 202 (my translation).
- <sup>20</sup> Marc Fumaroli, ‘Le ‘siècle’ des Goncourt ou le XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle réhabilité’, in Cabanès, *Les Goncourt dans leur siècle*, pp. 17–28.
- <sup>21</sup> Entry dated 3 June 1882; *Edmond and Jules de Goncourt: Journal, mémoires de la vie littéraire, 1851–96*, ed. by Robert Ricatte (Paris: Fasquelle and Flammarion, 1956, reprinted 1989), vol. 2, p. 943.
- <sup>22</sup> Legrand-Rossi, *The Nissim de Camondo Museum*, p. 23. The Musée des Arts décoratifs, which eventually became the beneficiary of his house and collection, was overseen by the UCAD.



- <sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 21.
- <sup>24</sup> He assembled this set through diligent research and pursuit. The only known service to be more complete belongs to the Queen of England; see Edouard Roditi, 'A Grand Obsession: How the Count of Camondo Turned a Private Passion into a New Versailles', *Art & Antiques* 10 (1987), 74–80 (p. 79).
- <sup>25</sup> It is not a coincidence that this, the most 'taxonomic' space in the house, is associated with the work of the Comte de Buffon (Georges-Louis Leclerc), director of the Jardin du Roi and a naturalist closely associated with Enlightenment approaches to study that gave rise to this sort of museum display. His illustrated *Histoire Naturelle*, which eventually ran to 36 volumes and was not completed until 1804 (Buffon died in 1788), was an ambitious encyclopaedia of the natural world that examined, among many other things, issues of scientific ordering and classification; Janet Browne, 'Georges-Louis Buffon', in *Encyclopedia of Life Sciences* <<http://www.els.net/WileyCDA>> [accessed 7 June 2013].
- <sup>26</sup> De Waal, *The Hare with Amber Eyes*, pp. 65–66, in his discussion of Charles Ephrussi's netsuke, observes that a 'vitrine for the collector was very different than for a modern museum visitor: rather than serving as a barrier, it could be opened to provide access'. On passive viewing and the isolating of the senses, namely vision, as a museological strategy, see Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 57.
- <sup>27</sup> Rondot, 'Building a Collection', p. 115.
- <sup>28</sup> Compare the photos in *ibid.*, p. 82.
- <sup>29</sup> Bann's comparison of the taxonomic displays set up by Alexandre Lenoir and the environments created by Alexandre du Sommerard in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Paris provide useful insights into these differing approaches; see his 'Historical Texts and Historical Objects: The Poetics of the Musée de Cluny', *History and Theory*, 17 (1978), 251–66 (p. 257).
- <sup>30</sup> Hazelius was reacting to perceived threats to traditional ways of life stemming from industrialization; see Edward N. Kaufman, 'The Architectural Museum from World's Fairs to Restoration Villages', reprinted in *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, ed. by Bettina Messias Carbonell (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2004), pp. 273–89 (pp. 278–79). For a study of exhibition modes related to the period room, including habitat groups in natural history museums, see Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 'Objects of Ethnography', in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Politics and Poetics of Museum Display*, ed. by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), pp. 386–443 (p. 401).
- <sup>31</sup> Kate Hill, 'Collecting Authenticity: Domestic, Familial, and Everyday "Old Things" in English Museums, 1850–1939', *Museum History Journal*, 4 (2011), 203–22. Hill's interpretation turns on gender, and it is interesting in this regard to note that Moïse, after the death of his son, chose not to will his collection to his surviving child, a daughter, but to convert it into a museum.
- <sup>32</sup> It is also an appealing era, as suggested in Woody Allen's film *Midnight in Paris* (Sony Pictures Classics, 2011) that explores related themes of nostalgia and historical memory as tied to place.
- <sup>33</sup> Siân Jones, 'Negotiating Authentic Objects and Authentic Selves: Beyond the Deconstruction of Authenticity', *Journal of Material Culture*, 15 (2010), 181–204. See also *Why Fakes Matter: Essays on Problems of Authenticity*, ed. by Mark Jones (London: British Museum Press, 1992).
- <sup>34</sup> The original, at the Hôtel Dassier in Toulouse, was created by Joseph Bosc around 1780; Legrand-Rossi, *The Nissim de Camondo Museum*, p. 8.
- <sup>35</sup> Rondot, 'Building a Collection', p. 93.
- <sup>36</sup> On the upholstery and panelling, see Legrand-Rossi, *The Nissim de Camondo Museum*, pp. 30–35; on the vases, Rondot, 'Building a Collection', p. 90.
- <sup>37</sup> See in particular ch. 6, 'Changing the Past, in his *The Past is a Foreign Country*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 263–362.
- <sup>38</sup> The museum is extremely careful to note this sketch as an addition both in guided tours and in publications; Legrand-Rossi, *The Nissim de Camondo Museum*, pp. 47–49, repeats the fact twice in two pages.
- <sup>39</sup> Legrand-Rossi, *The Nissim de Camondo Museum*, p. 51, notes that the walls have 'yellowed with time'. Roditi, 'A Grand Obsession', p. 80, compares the current gleam of the house to its 'sorry condition' of several decades ago, when it was marred by faded silks, cracked inlays, and a veneer of grime.
- <sup>40</sup> Anne Higgonet's complex and provocative exploration of collectors' museums as self-portraits reveals both the typical and atypical features of the Musée Nissim de Camondo, which might be considered a self-portrait of an

- unintentional type; see 'Self-Portrait as a Museum', *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 52 (2007), 198–211 (pp. 201–03).
- <sup>41</sup> The museum has few labels, so interpretation is found predominantly in these forms. De Gary, *The Camondo Legacy*, p. 126. As Olivier Aaron puts it, 'one might even call this a museum of pairs [...] Their owner had a fanatical love of symmetry'; see 'The Rebirth of the Musée Nissim de Camondo', trans by P. S. Falla, *Apollo*, 126 (1987), 33–37 (p. 37).
- <sup>42</sup> For example a rococo desk purchased 'before he moved to Rue de Monceau, where his taste for neoclassicism came to the fore'; Legrand-Rossi, *The Nissim de Camondo Museum*, p. 56. Notably, Moïse tended to place these aberrations to stylistic unity in his private quarters, as is the case with this desk.
- <sup>43</sup> Bann, 'Historical Texts and Historical Objects', p. 259.
- <sup>44</sup> An 'index', in Charles Peirce's influential schema of signs, is characterized by its real, physical connection to an object; see *The Collected Papers of Charles Sander Peirce*, ed. by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, vol. 2, bk 2, *Speculative Grammar* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931), chs 2 and 3.
- <sup>45</sup> Moïse bought these from the dealer Jean Seligmann in 1935 with a provenance stating that they were 'believed to have been in Marie-Antoinette's boudoir at Trianon'; Legrand-Rossi, *The Nissim de Camondo Museum*, p. 36.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2. On indexicality in collectors' museums and the relationship of their contents to relics see Gamboni, 'The Art of Keeping Art Together', p. 184.
- <sup>47</sup> Le Tarnec and Şeni, 'From Istanbul to Paris', pp. 53–54. As with all objects on display in the museum, Moïse's will indicates that the photographs were not to be moved; Higonet, 'Self-Portrait as a Museum', p. 203.
- <sup>48</sup> De Gary, *The Camondo Legacy*, p. 275. Her book is rich with details on the service areas of the home and its workings, and I am indebted to it here; see in particular pp. 252–64.
- <sup>49</sup> Legrand-Rossi, *The Nissim de Camondo Museum*, p. 23. Moïse left instructions for maintaining the house as a museum. These read curiously like advice to a house-sitter, with directions on how to manage the central heating and awnings and what to do with the potted laurels in the winter; reproduced in de Gary, *The Camondo Legacy*, p. 273.
- <sup>50</sup> De Gary, *The Camondo Legacy*, p. 245.
- <sup>51</sup> A rich record of these transactions survives; Legrand-Rossi, *The Nissim de Camondo Museum*, pp. 25–26.
- <sup>52</sup> This was how the table was set during my visit in January 2012, in a small installation (or 'evocation', as the label text described it) entitled 'La table dressée'. It included detailed information about the tableware as well as a complete menu.
- <sup>53</sup> Placed beneath a larger plaque explaining the founding of the museum and its dedication to the memory of Nissim, this plaque reads: M<sup>me</sup> Léon Reinach/née Béatrice de Camondo/ses enfants Fanny et Bertrand Reinach/derniers descendants du donateur/et M. Léon Reinach/déportés en 1943–1944/sont morts à Auschwitz.
- <sup>54</sup> Some commentators have criticized the museum for downplaying this history, connecting it with French reticence regarding complicity with the Nazis. In a 2008 review, Duncan Fallowell protested that 'The Camondo Museum remains incomplete; it requires a small additional room, very quietly done', to acknowledge this history. I too have been struck by these silences and omissions, although I would note a move in the right direction, including the addition of an installation along the lines of Fallowell's recommendation. However, the direct connection between the France that accepted Moïse's great gift and the France that allowed deportation of his descendants less than a decade later has yet to be articulated. See Fallowell, 'Beauty and Terror', *New Statesman*, 137 (2008), 56–57 (p. 57).
- <sup>55</sup> In a tour I took with a guide, for example, I learned more about the family story earlier in my visit than I did when I was relying on the audio guide.
- <sup>56</sup> Stephen Greenblatt's exploration of resonance in museums helps explain the tremendous power of the Musée Nissim de Camondo; see 'Resonance and Wonder', in Karp and Lavine, *Exhibiting Cultures*, pp. 42–56.
- <sup>57</sup> De Gary, *The Camondo Legacy*, p. 280; my emphasis.
- <sup>58</sup> Legrand-Rossi, *The Nissim de Camondo Museum*, p. 61. The museum's director, Béatrice Salmon, acknowledges that opening these portions of the house is one of the very few 'adjustments' staff has made to the terms of Moïse's will, which intended the 'inventory and arrangement as definitive'; cited in *ibid.*, p. 3.
- <sup>59</sup> On the pitfalls on canonicity and stifling historicity, see Ivan Gaskell, 'History of Images', in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. by Peter Burke (University Park,

PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), pp. 178–82.

<sup>60</sup> Peter Carrier, ‘Places, Politics and the Archiving of Contemporary Memory in Pierre Nora’s *Les Lieux de mémoire*’, in *Memory and Methodology*, ed. by Susannah Radstone (Oxford: Berg, 2000), pp. 37–57.

<sup>61</sup> Among the scholars who have engaged Nora’s texts in their investigation of museums, particularly as these illuminate the question of controversial history exhibitions, are Susan A. Crane and Neil Harris.

<sup>62</sup> Wood, ‘Memory’s Remains’.

<sup>63</sup> Susannah Radstone contends that the Holocaust further complicated an already complex

understanding of memory that had arisen in the nineteenth century; see ‘Working with Memory: An Introduction’, in her *Memory and Methodology*, pp. 5–6.

<sup>64</sup> On the renovations and funds raised to support them, see Olivier, ‘The Rebirth of the Musée Nissim de Camondo’, and Roditi, ‘A Grand Obsession’.

<sup>65</sup> Edourd Roditi, whose family was close to the Camondos and shares a similar history, wrote in warm terms about curatorial work to uncover personal material in the archives and transfer mementos to the museum. He clearly saw this as a fitting approach for the museum-as-memorial; see ‘A Grand Obsession’.

## Notes on contributor

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