

Lost in Translation

Exoticism in Early Modern Holland

CLAUDIA SWAN

While content and language form a certain unity in the original, like a fruit and its skin, the language of the translation envelops its content like a royal robe with ample folds. For it signifies a more exalted language than its own and thus remains unsuited to its content, overpowering and alien.

Walter Benjamin, 1923

“All the curiosities one could wish for”

The Early Modern Era, also known as the “Age of Discovery,” saw the introduction to Europe of an array of foreign goods—spices, botanical and zoological specimens, coffee and tea, porcelain and other artifacts, precious textiles, ethnographic goods, and other curious items—in greater quantities and variety than ever before. Most of these exotic wares arrived by way of trade networks and were eagerly acquired and exchanged by merchants, consumers, scholars, nobility, and artists alike. The influx of foreign goods made its mark on and off the stage, at home and in semi-public institutions; likewise, pictures, poems, and a variety of publications across the continent offer evidence of widespread interest in exotica.¹

1 The literature is vast. See, for example, Lach 1965–77; Pollig 1987; Sievernich/Budde 1989; Bergvelt/Kistenmaker 1992; Jardine 1996; Seipel 2000; Jackson/Jaffer 2004.



Fig. 45 Boëtius Adamsz. Bolswert (ca. 1580–1633), *Byrsa Amsterodamensis*, 1609, etching and engraving, 43.2 x 60.5 cm (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, RP-P-OB-67.487)

The Dutch Republic played a prominent role on the global stage in the seventeenth century; the northern Netherlands were suffused with foreign wares. Exotica from the East had traveled overland for centuries by the time the Dutch East India Company, the *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC), founded in 1602, and the West India Company (WIC), founded in 1621, secured trade routes formerly controlled by the Spanish and the Portuguese, bringing the Dutch to prominence as global merchants, and the capital of the Dutch Republic, Amsterdam, to prominence as the European port of entry for so many spectacular and profitable new commodities. From the early seventeenth century, Dutch and foreign authors alike celebrated Amsterdam as a hub of commerce in wonders and foreign or exotic goods. René Descartes, who lived in Amsterdam during the third and fourth decades of the century, marveled at the copious goods exchanged in the city. He wrote to his friend the essayist Jean Louis Guez de Balzac of the pleasure

à voir venir icy des vaisseaux, qui nous apportent abondamment tout ce que produisent des Indes, & tout ce qu'il y a de rare en l'Europe ... Quel autre lieu pourroit-on choisir au reste du monde, où toutes les commoditez de la vie, & toutes les curiositez qui peuvent estre souhaitées, soient si faciles à trouver qu'en celluy-ci?²

2 Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, eds., *Oeuvres de Descartes*, 11 vols. (Paris, 1897), vol. 4, *Correspondance*, no. 33, pp. 202–4, May 15, 1631.

The opening in 1611 of the Amsterdam exchange, modeled on London's Royal Exchange and Antwerp's Bourse, fortified the city's role as a hub of trade connected to all parts of the globe, principally by water. The Beurs itself, designed by City Architect Hendrick de Keyser, was situated on the dam for which the city is named, with direct access to the water by which so many goods were conveyed to it for sale and purchase. The earliest images of the exchange, prints published in order to celebrate its existence, show a bustling mass of men in the interior courtyard, where trade was conducted. These images feature men in turbans and *entari*, agents from the Middle East, mingling with the Dutch and other European-dressed merchants (fig. 45). By way of practices institutionalized by the VOC and WIC at and around the Amsterdam exchange, seventeenth-century Holland abounded in exotica.³

From the perspective of its artistic legacy, the exoticism of seventeenth-century Dutch visual culture is not immediately evident. By and large, Early Modern Dutch art continues to be celebrated and studied for the image of seventeenth-century

3 See, *inter alia*, Ailly et al. 1944–50, vol. 2 (1947): *Beschouwingen over de Opkomst en den Bloei des Handels in de Gouden Eeuw*, pp. 65–120; Jonker/Sluyterman 2000, esp. Chapter I, “The Unfolding of a Commercial World Empire, 1550–1650,” pp. 14–71; and Lesger 2006.



Fig. 46 Claes Jansz. Visscher (1587–1652) and Pieter Bast (1570–1605), *Profile View of Amsterdam*, 1611, etching and engraving with letterpress containing woodcut vignettes, 25.6 x 115.4 cm (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, RP-P-AO-20-22-1)

Dutch society and life it offers.⁴ Dutch art tends, that is, to be understood as a hermetic reflection of Dutch society and life onto itself. Consider the vast quantities of pictures—prints, drawings, and paintings alike—that celebrate the places and landscapes and individuals and belongings and sea-going vessels and customs as well as costumes of the young republic in formation (see, for example, fig. 47) At the same time it is an incontrovertible and important fact that Dutch trade acquired global dimensions in the seventeenth century, and that the Dutch were actively engaged in trade and sometimes colonization in the Baltic, the Americas, Africa, the Levant, South Asia, and the East Indies. The facts of global Dutch trade—the

fact that Amsterdam superseded Antwerp as the European hub of so much of it; the fact that the sea-going vessels made the trade and that the goods celebrated in still-life paintings were the fruits of that same trade—are often enough cited in passing, primarily to account for the personal wealth that enabled so many Dutch individuals to invest in the pictures that became so legion and so emblematic of Early Modern naturalism. Recent art-historical scholarship has begun to call attention to the relationship between Dutch global trade and Dutch painting.⁵ Building on this literature, this essay aims to exoticize the conventional image of Dutch culture—and to account for the role of exotica in the making of the Dutch Republic.

Exotica such as Persian or Turkish clothing, textiles, and arms, Brazilian featherwork, birds of paradise, lacquerware,

4 This is a truism of the study of Dutch seventeenth-century domestic paintings. Although they are not understood as literal, unmediated representations of the home sphere, they are consulted and appreciated for the orderly and homogeneous impression they make. See, for example, Westermann 2001b and Fock 2001.

5 Especially, for example, Berger Hochstrasser 2007 and Brook 2008.



products carved of ivory, lustrous shells, tulips, porcelain, bezoar stones, coconuts and other compelling, rare, and costly items brought from the East Indies, Central Asia and the Levant, and the New World to the West populate Early Modern Dutch material and artistic culture, although the role of exotica in the formation and identity of the young republic is not often remarked. Much of the discourse—pictorial and textual accounts alike—of encounters with foreign lands and people naturalizes the accumulation by the Dutch of the products and other goods obtainable in those exotic locales. This is nicely illustrated by a portrait of the city of Amsterdam rendered in a 1611 print that combines a profile view of the city and its harbor with a lengthy explanatory text and individual vignettes of landmarks of the city (fig. 46).⁶ The text is a paean to a city still in formation, characterized as a global

trade hub. “The widely renowned capital of trade of the entire world, Amsterdam,” is depicted as a new Antwerp; invoking Demosthenes’s description of Athens, the text calls the city the “sun and soul” of all of Europe. People from all parts of the world feel compelled to “send or present in person their price-less wares to Amsterdam, as if to a world-renowned empress.” The presentation of gifts to the maid of Amsterdam pictured above the text embodies this dynamic. The personification of the global entrepôt sits atop a throne of poles, the piles on which the city is built in the morass it occupies. She holds a ship in one hand and the crest of the city in the other, as she receives delegations of “all the principal peoples of the world.” The text suggests where trade might be improved and revels in itemizing the fruits of where it is booming. The litany of goods from the East Indies includes: “silk, precious gems, pepper, ginger, cinnamon, cassia, nutmeg, and other spices along with countless herbs and roots ... sent from Java to Amsterdam.” It is “so great that one can hardly articulate it or

6 Bakker et al. 2007, fig. I.

describe it credibly.” This verbal cornucopia extends to imports from Africa and Brazil as well Madeira and elsewhere in Spain and the Mediterranean and Turkey: “silk, damask, velvets, Caffa and other such artfully woven cloths ... fine bombazine, glass drinking cups, Venetian mirrors, bezoars etc. come here from Turkey, Italy, and other southern lands.” (The turbaned man at the far left of the composition [no. 18] is identified in the key to the image as Persian. Although there is no mention in the text of Persian goods, the key specifies that the “Tartar [no. 17] and the Persian with a laden camel bring gemstones, oriental pearls, the medicinal bezoar stone, many silks, balsam oil, and incense.”) The list also includes tin and lead and other goods from England, Prussian items, milk and cheese and eggs from more local regions; it is as replete with data as the image it qualifies, where a wide variety of figures enact the trade described. In fact, Amsterdam is a city made of goods, many of them exotic. No intermediaries or agents mediate the transfer of goods, since trade is represented as a direct function of the desire of the various peoples and nations assembled to present their goods and wares: the maid of Amsterdam sits among the various goods like an idol among remains of devotional rites. The text of the print concludes, “In sum, everything that is necessary for the maintenance of the body and for the amusement of the spirit is here so abundant that you could say that God’s merciful blessing, the very cornucopia or horn of plenty, is being poured down on us.” No wonder Descartes had so little trouble finding “all the commodities and all the curiosities one could wish for.”

What follows is a series of observations on the exoticism of Dutch culture in the formative years of the Dutch Republic. The widespread presence of exotica in what is conventionally understood as a homogeneous material culture, and some of the meanings of the exotic, are the central topic of this essay, which presents select transactions and figures of the exotic that were characteristic of Early Modern Dutch culture. Although this essay touches on Dutch-Persian relations, peoples and clothing of the Near East were often identified as “Turkish.” There are relatively few instances of Dutch-Persian exchange in the early decades of the seventeenth century, where the focus of this essay lies. Moreover, one of the defining features of the exotic in the Early Modern Era was the lack of specificity about points of origin or geographical identity.

Peppercorns in the Closet

There is perhaps no more quintessentially representative figure of early seventeenth-century Dutch politics than Johan van Oldenbarnevelt (1547–1619), lawyer and statesman, who fought on behalf of Willem van Oranje or William the Silent—the Father of the Fatherland, nominal founder of the Dutch Republic—and who then served as right-hand man to Stadtholder Maurits. In 1619, Van Oldenbarnevelt was tried for treason and publicly executed—a show trial and a politically motivated turn on the part of the stadtholder that also secured Van Oldenbarnevelt’s place as a martyr-hero of the Dutch Republic. Van Oldenbarnevelt played a key role in almost every political development in the early seventeenth

century, including the establishment of the Dutch East India Company in 1602. Until his death by decapitation in the Binnenhof in The Hague in 1619, he lived very well, in a massive home in the heart of The Hague.⁷

Shortly after Van Oldenbarnevelt was executed, a household inventory was drawn up recording the contents of his grand home.⁸ The inventory features numerous very fine examples of conventional Dutch furnishings—many paintings and maps, chests for linens and other household goods, tables and chairs, a mirror in an ebony frame, silver, more silver, and books. It also encompasses numerous foreign goods. In addition to a “small box containing twelve bezoar stones,” one of the master bedrooms contained “a bed with Indian hangings and a mantelpiece cloth made of the same.” Many of the rooms surveyed contained at least one item described as Indian, such as “a headboard of Indian wood,” “a piece of figured Indian satin,” “a lacquerware Indian box.” In another room a large leather trunk with metal latches held “a large Indian spread,” “the cap of a tent made of Indian cloth,” and “an Indian box and an Indian cloak.”

In its use of the adjective “Indian,” Van Oldenbarnevelt’s inventory resonates with many other Dutch inventories featuring exotica, such as, for example, the inventory of the home of “Skipper” Willem IJsbrantsz. Bontekoe, perhaps the most famous of seventeenth-century VOC travelers. Bontekoe’s narrative account of his eastern travels on behalf of the Dutch East India Company, first published in 1646, is still a classic.⁹ Bontekoe’s household goods encompassed countless “oostindisch” items—textiles and boxes, lacquerware and mother-of-pearl confections, and an East Indian box containing a variety of precious objects, beginning with a coconut set in gilt silver, in the form of a shell, all qualified as “East Indian.”¹⁰ Individual types of porcelain dishes are enumerated, and he had a “turcx cleed,” a Turkish (or Persian) carpet, laid on the table. While Van Oldenbarnevelt’s earlier inventory cites “Indian” objects, nothing is designated “East Indian,” as in Bontekoe’s. The distinction is negligible. By and large, designation of provenance was not important when it came to exotic goods. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the term “Indian” bespoke foreignness without specifying place of origin.¹¹ Confusion (or displacement) abounded. Sir Thomas Roe, ambassador of King James I of England to the Mogul emperor, Jahangir, between 1615 and 1618, wrote: “I thought all India a China shop, and that I should furnish all my Friends with rarieties.” (Indeed, there was lots of porcelain on the market in Goa, and in use as well—some of it Persian fakes.)¹² Roe’s

7 The standard biography is Jan den Tex, *Oldenbarnevelt*, 5 vols. (Haarlem, 1960–72). On Van Oldenbarnevelt’s home on the Kneuterdijk, see E. T. Jansen, *Grote Haagse huizen ten tijde van prins Maurits (ca. 1585–1625)*, M.A. thesis (Utrecht University, 2011).

8 “Inventaris van de Goederen van Oldenbarnevelt, opgemaakt 16 mei–23 juli 1619,” in *Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, Bescheiden betreffende zijn Staatkundig Beleid en zijn Familie 1570–1620*, 3 vols., ed. S.P. Haak and A.J. Veenendaal (The Hague 1934–67), vol. 2 (1962), pp. 490–519.

9 Bontekoe 1646.

10 Archiefdienst Westfriese Gemeenten, Notarieel Archief 2094, March 15 and 21. See Schram-van Gulik 1994.

11 Keating/Markey 2011.

12 Finlay 2010, p. 238.



Fig. 47 Pieter de Hooch (1629–1684), *Interior with Women at a Linen Chest*, oil on canvas, 1663, 70 x 75.5 cm (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, SK-C-1191)

use of the term “rarieties” is symptomatic: foreign derivation, whether actually Chinese or Indian or Persian, for example, was of a sort, and of a desirable, exotic sort.

Did Van Oldenbarnevelt ever sport Indian clothes? Not likely, notwithstanding the presence of an Indian cloak among his goods. His own clothes conform to expectations: the inventory enumerates a predictable, goodly assortment of clothing befitting a statesman of the time: a velvet cloak lined with plush velvet, a mourning cloak, and two black cloaks as well as other fine items of men’s clothing. His clothes closet was one of two in the upstairs hallway. It contained four cloaks as well as other items of men’s clothing. The other closet in the hallway was a linen chest. As attested by such pictures as Pieter de Hooch’s painting *Interior with Women at a Linen Chest* (1663), which represents a domestic transaction of a near sacred sort, the linen chest amounted to the sanctum sanctorum of seventeenth-century Dutch households (fig. 47).

Aside from the pillows and bedclothes and curtains in Van Oldenbarnevelt’s linen closet, the last item listed is “a sack of pepper.” The variety of exotic goods around his home and the likelihood that Van Oldenbarnevelt slept on a bed hung with Indian silks significantly alter the conventional, staid image of a luxurious Dutch home in 1619. The evidence of domestic interior paintings, taken to be so many reflections of the interior spaces in which they were hung, falls short of rendering the exoticism of Dutch culture. The pepper tucked away among precious linens in Van Oldenbarnevelt’s closet is but one of many instances of the exotic among his goods. According to an appendix of the inventory that describes the contents of Van Oldenbarnevelt’s prison lodgings, where he waited out his sentence prior to his death by execution, the great statesman ate there from Chinese porcelain dishes.

Downstairs in Van Oldenbarnevelt’s home, several images are listed as hanging in one of the smaller formal rooms.



Fig. 48 Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn (1606–1669), *Man in Oriental Costume* (“*The Noble Slav*”), 1632, oil on canvas, 152.7 x 111.1 cm (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of William K. Vanderbilt, 1920, 20.155.2)



Fig. 49 Jan Lievens (1607–1674), *Man in Oriental Costume* (“*Sultan Soliman*”), ca. 1629–31, oil on canvas, 135 x 100.5 cm (Stiftung Preussische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg, GK | 884)

Among maps of the seven provinces and other regions of the northern Netherlands and a picture of Adam and Eve, there hung “a painting of a Turk.” In all likelihood, “Turk” is shorthand for an individual wearing a turban, such as were common throughout the Ottoman and Safavid Empires at the time. Pepper stashed among the linens; a painting, among many Dutch pictures, of a Turk: the exotic is right at home here. Pictures of unidentified individuals designated as Turkish turn up elsewhere, too, in the era. The published 1640 inventory of Peter Paul Rubens’s Antwerp collection lists a “portrait d’un homme habillé en Turcq.” When, in 1676, a few years after the death of Johannes Vermeer, an inventory was drawn up of the contents of his family’s house in Delft, it recorded not one, but “two Turkish heads, painted.”¹³ We may never know what painting of what Turk Van Oldenbarnevelt

13 *Spécification des Peintures trouvées à la maison mortuaire du feu Messire Pierre Paul Rubens* (Antwerp, 1640), no. 120; see Muller 1989, p. 120. On this entry in particular, which Muller associates with Rubens’s portrait of de Respaighe, cf. Hans Vlieghe, review of Jeffrey M. Muller, *The Artist as Collector*, in *Simiolus* 20 (1990/91), pp. 299–301, at p. 300. Vermeer’s inventory also lists Turkish clothes: “Een Turxsen brouck, Een Turxse mantel vanden voorn. Sr. Vermeer, Een swarte Turxe mantel.” See Van Peer 1957.

owned, or who was dressed “en Turcq” in the painting in Rubens’s home, or whether one of the Turkish heads in Vermeer’s house is the *Girl with a Pearl Earring*.¹⁴ It is one of the identifying features of the exotic that its identity is generic.

Turckse tronies

The pictures of Turks or “en Turcq” listed in the inventories of painters and statesmen’s homes resonate with so-called *Turckse tronies*—an image type that Rembrandt and his peer and competitor Jan Lievens produced in significant numbers in the years around 1630.¹⁵ Rembrandt and Lievens worked together in Leiden in these years, before Rembrandt established himself in Amsterdam where, during the 1630s, he garnered acclaim and profit as a portrait painter. *Turckse tronies*, etched and painted, are lavish explorations of foreignness or exoticism localized in costumes, in turbans and sashes and jackets

14 See Liedtke 2000, “The ‘tronies,’” pp. 242–45.

15 See Hirschfelder 2008. On Rembrandt in particular, see Ackley 2003, pp. 92–100; Van der Veen 1997.



Fig. 50



Fig. 51

of the sort that were worn in Ottoman Turkey and Safavid Persia alike (figs. 48–50).¹⁶ These are well-known and amply published works, whose allure remains captivating. They are also problematic works, as they seem not to adhere closely to either documentary or imaginary formulae. “As a young artist,” writes Clifford S. Ackley, “Rembrandt created a cast of imaginary characters, pressing into service his own features as well as those of his models ... Rembrandt transformed objective studies from life into exotic images of oriental potentates, old soldiers, and venerable wise men.”¹⁷ General consensus

16 A 1665 Amsterdam inventory (Frederick Alewijn) lists a “turcx tronij van Rembrant”; see Hirschfelder 2001, p. 87.

17 Ackley 2003, pp. 92–94.

Fig. 50 Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn (1606–1669), *De derde oosterse kop* (The Third Oriental Head), after a print by Jan Lievens (1607–1674), 1635, etching, 15.6 x 13.4 cm (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, RP-P-1961-1164)

Fig. 51 Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn (1606–1669), *Abraham and Isaac*, 1645, etching and drypoint, 15.7 x 13 cm (London, The British Museum, F.4.45)

holds that Rembrandt and Lievens were motivated by the need to be able to represent biblical and historical events, for example, in the guise of credible and legible characters—and that these works came to be appreciated for their artistry. The status and significance of these works is complex indeed. While the Dutch term *tronie* refers to the face, and generally speaking Netherlandish painted *tronies* are restricted to the head and torso, the term is also used to describe studies of figure or physiognomy that served the production of the most highly praised form of painting, history or narrative painting. The *tronie* is an anonymous format, devised for adaptation to the contingencies of history painting. But in the case of *Turckse tronie*s, the costume renders these pictures identifiable, at least to some extent. If portraits convey identity, *tronies* are characterized by non-identifiable specificity, and in the case of the *Turckse tronie*s, this is doubly so: these are identifiably foreign, exotic, Turkish or Persian figures, and at the same time unidentifiable as individuals.

Writing in 1629/30, the statesman and poet Constantijn Huygens praised a *Turckse tronie* by Jan Lievens that is presumed to be Lievens’s gloriously painted *Oriental Man* in Potsdam (fig. 49). Huygens wrote: “My prince owns a picture of a Turkish sort of nobleman, done from the head of some Dutchman.” This and other paintings he mentions are praised for their “inestimable value and unrivalled artistry.”¹⁸ In the eighteenth century, Lievens’s *Oriental Man* was attributed to Rembrandt and the subject identified as the sixteenth-century Ottoman Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent. Huygens, however, readily identified the picture he described as a quasi-Turk (although a noble one) with the head of some Dutch fellow. Huygens was a man who lived by his word: a secretary to the stadtholder and a poet, he did not traffic in ambiguity, either by profession or vocation. Art historians, however, remain

18 “Est apud Principum meum Turcici quasi ducis effigies ad Batavi cuiuspiam caput expressa...” J. A. Worp, “Fragment eener autobiografie van Constantijn Huygens,” *Bijdragen en Mededelingen van het Historisch Genootschap* 18 (1897), pp. 1–122, at p. 79. The full text is available in English as “Constantijn Huygens on Rembrandt and Lievens (from his autobiography, c. 1630),” in Van de Wetering/Schnackenburg 2001, pp. 396–99.

35 **Abraham Casting Out Hagar and Ishmael**

Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn (1606–1669)
Amsterdam, 1637
Etching; 12.6 x 9.5 cm
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, RP-P-OB-56

36 **Three Oriental Figures (Jacob and Laban?)**

Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn (1606–1669)
Amsterdam, 1641
Etching; 14.4 x 11.4 cm
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, RP-P-1962-57

37 **Man with Turban and Staff**

Unknown pupil of Rembrandt
Netherlands, between 1643 and 1700
Etching after a drawing by Rembrandt;
13.8 x 10.8 mm
Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, RP-P-OB-226

38 **Man in Oriental Costume**

Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn (1606–1669)
Amsterdam, 1632
Etching; 11 x 8 cm
London, The British Museum, F,5.97

In addition to the engravers of costume prints, many artists took an interest in oriental dress,

which occasionally included Persian garb.

Among the most impressive examples of this are two sheets from the Costume Book of Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) now held by the British Museum (figs. 24 and 25, p. 65). The Persian figures depicted there—a horseman, a nobleman, and a flute-player on one, and two young men, a maid-servant, and a young woman on the other—are clearly drawn from Persian miniatures. This is evident not just from the figures' poses and the accurately reproduced details of their costumes, but also from Rubens's own handwritten instructions with regard to the colors, which match exactly those used in Persian miniature painting. The painter could have encountered such miniatures through Toby Mathew and George Gage, two acquaintances of Sir Robert Sherley, who visited him in Flanders in 1615.

Rubens's younger contemporary Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn also took an interest in oriental dress. While he is known to have studied miniatures from Mogul India, no conclusive proof of his having had any direct contact with Persian pictures has been uncovered to date. Yet Rembrandt's works are full of details identifiable as "Persian," even if his chief concern is less with sartorial than with "atmospheric"

accuracy—in which respect he was surprisingly similar to those Persian painters who painted European men. His primary aim was to create an oriental "look," which in those days was understood to reflect a "considered engagement with the historical sources" —at least according to Philips Angel in his *Lof der Schilder-Konst* of 1642. Exactly what is meant by this is perhaps best exemplified by two etchings by Rembrandt.

The central figure in *Abraham Casting Out Hagar and Ishmael* (cat. 35) is the only one clad in oriental dress. The figure is that of Abraham himself, who is wearing a knee-length, tunic-like robe with a decorative hem, bound round the waist with a sash. On top of this he has a fur-lined cloak with a wide fur collar, secured with a metal cloak pin.

The scenery in *Three Oriental Figures* (cat. 36) is much the same, as is one of the figures, who is dressed in almost exactly the same way as Abraham. Of particular interest here is the man on the far right, whose fur cap could indeed be Persian in origin and who crops up a third time in an etching by an unknown pupil of Rembrandt's. With the exception of the right tunic tab, which here is tucked into the sash just as it is on Abraham de Bruyn's prints, the outfit is almost exactly the same. The same figure crops



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up a third time in an etching by an unknown pupil of Rembrandt (cat. 37). The garb is almost identical, except that here, as in Abraham De Bruyn's engravings, the right tunic tab is tucked into the sash.

Although Rembrandt's "Persians" tend to be identifiable on the basis of their knee-length robes and fur-lined cloaks, there is at least one notable exception to be found among his juvenilia. This is a study for the 1627 history painting—regrettably now lost—of *David before Saul with the Head of Goliath*; the small preparatory oil painting, which belongs to Basel's Öffentliche Kunstsammlung (G 1958.37), shows an equestrian figure remarkably similar to the drawing of a Persian horseman in Rubens's Costume Book. As Rembrandt is also known to have modeled at least one work on an engraving by Lukas Vorsterman after Rubens's *Adoration of the Magi* of 1621, it is not inconceivable that in his younger years at any rate, he shared Rubens's historicist leanings and set great store by the historically accurate reproduction of Persian costumes. Clad in the aforementioned tunic and cloak made of gold brocade and sporting a turban embellished with heron feathers, the figure of King Saul, by contrast, sets the "Persian" or rather the "orientalizing" tone that

was later was to become typical of Rembrandt and which is expressed most exquisitely in the figure of the *Oriental Man* of 1632 (cat. 38).

Rembrandt's contemporaries and pupils, incidentally, similarly abide by this essentially generic mode of representation. *The Man in Oriental Costume* (fig. 49, p. 106) painted by Jan Lievens (1607–1674) between 1629 and 1631, for example, shows the same standard set of features for characterizing a Persian: in other words a tunic, a cloak, and a turban with a heron's feather attached at the side. The same is true of Gerbrand van den Eeckhout (1621–1674) and his depiction of *Boaz and Ruth* of 1651 (Kunsthalle Bremen) and of the *Esther* cycle of Aert de Gelder (1645–1727)—to name but two examples. These younger painters, however, having seen the artful—albeit fantastical—way in which Rembrandt wound his turbans, tried hard to reproduce turbans in the Persian manner. Just as for the Persian painter, the European served primarily as a foil of himself, so for the Dutch and Flemish painters of the seventeenth century, the Persian or "Oriental" represented the remote "other."

Lit.: Broos 1999, p. 96; Goetz 1938a and 1938b; Ingrams 1974, p. 194; Lettieri 1980; Slatkes 1983, p. 17.



37



38

committed to individuating the identity of the subject of this painting and others like it—largely by way of the costume. Walter Liedtke has, for example, written of Rembrandt’s *Man in Oriental Costume* (fig. 48), formerly known as “The Noble Slav”:

There is abundant artistic and historical evidence supporting the conclusion that Rembrandt’s dignified old sman, with his voluminous garment of figured silk, his bejeweled turban and multicolored scarf, his pearl earrings, and a large pendant bearing a Turkish or “Saracen” crescent, would have been recognized in the 1630s as a Turkish “prince” or sultan, despite the familiarity of his face.¹⁹

In light of the evidence of Rembrandt’s so-called *Oriental Self-portrait* (ca. 1631, Musée du Petit Palais, Paris) or of the *portrait historié* of a young member of courtly circles in The Hague, *A Young Scholar (Prince Rupert of the Palatinate) and His Tutor (Eli Instructing Samuel)* by Rembrandt and Gerard Dou (J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles), it seems as if the identity of the costume and the identity of the persons represented need not be in conflict. It has been suggested that Rembrandt’s Paris self-portrait in oriental costume—in which the subject wears a silk robe or *entari*, a silk sash as a belt, a multicolored turban with a feather ornament, and a mantle of either fur or velvet—is identical with a painting sold in 1705 as “Rembrants conterfeytsel, op zijn Persiaen, door hem geschildert.”²⁰ This description raises two questions that continue to haunt the literature on the *Turckse tronies* by Rembrandt and his contemporaries. The first is: Are Rembrandt’s oriental pictures geographically and/or culturally specific in terms of the costumes? What, that is, are the referents to which the costume, the arms, the ornament refer? Secondly, are such pictures by-products or even direct products of history painting, the noblest form of painting and a genre that required specificity of references? Several scholars have speculated as to whether Rembrandt’s Paris self-portrait was intended as a self-portrait or as a study of a type, or even as a “one-figure history piece.”²¹ Liedtke suggests that for a contemporary observer of around 1635, the exotic identity of the turban, sash, and other ornamentation bedecking the *Man in Oriental Costume* (“*The Noble Slav*”) held sway over the local physiognomy. By contrast, Emilie Gordenker has proposed that the rhetoric of dress in such pictures is crucial and that the meanings of dress may be purposefully ambiguous. Referring to the costume in Rembrandt’s *Man in Oriental Costume* (“*The Noble Slav*”) and other paintings, for example, she notes that there is considerable variation on the theme of oriental splendor, and concludes that Rembrandt “used costume to locate the figure in a fictional realm, very much of his own invention, neither recognizably Dutch nor even of a specific Eastern location, without adding any reference in the background of the picture.”²² This approach studies a variety of sources for the identification of the referents that Rembrandt and his contempo-

raries used—from artistic renderings of “Orientals” and printed costume books to lived experience—and is notably productive in assessing the significance of the exotic in artistic iterations. It also avoids the frustration and witlessness of literal translation. The ease with which Huygens recognizes the integration of the exotic and the indigenous is crucial: Lievens’s picture depicted “a sort of noble Turk, done from the head of some Dutchman.” That is, contemporary (Early Modern) accounts allow for greater elasticity in matters of identification than do most current accounts, bent on translating images into identifiable terms and referents.

Ethnographic Eclecticism

Seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish images of figures in Turkish or Persian or otherwise exotic costume abound: from early Rembrandt etchings and paintings, history paintings and self-portraits alike, to portraits by other artists, painted or in print, to such iconic images, whose costume we easily look past, as Vermeer’s *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. (It is of interest, in connection with exoticism, that this painting was formerly known as *Girl with a Turban*.²³ The girl’s costume is striking for the time: she wears a tied bicolor turban that hangs loose, and a giant pearl earring, one of the rare and sought-after pearls procured in the East, hangs from her left earlobe—a precious item, in contrast with her simple smock. In spite of its exoticism, costume seems about the least salient feature of this painting, given the intensity of its fictive presence. And yet, it is constitutive: it is by way of her costume that she is known.) The analysis of exotica in artistic culture has shown that curious foreign goods often make cameo appearances in narratives driven by biography, stylistic development, and/or the social conditions of the making of art.

Exotica such as the turbans and other oriental accessories that appear in figure studies and historical narratives by Rembrandt and Lievens, for example, are usually described as ornamental punctuation. Rembrandt and Lievens were aspiring history painters, for whom the long ago of biblical and mythological subject matter could most convincingly be rendered in the guise of the far away, and who put exotic dress to local use.²⁴ Rembrandt’s collection, an inventory of which was drawn up when he declared bankruptcy in 1656, famously contained exotica such as turbo shells, tortoise shells, woven baskets, in addition to Turkish shoes, clothing, and armor—and much more. Accounts of Rembrandt’s exotica—like accounts of Dutch exoticism writ large—usually take the form of centripetal histories, highlighting the absorption and adaptation of foreign objects to local use.²⁵ While scholars have noted that the variety and number of objects Rembrandt owned is not reflected in his works—in other words, it is not possible to match his goods one-to-one with representations—nonetheless the impetus to analyze the foreign clothing and textiles and arms as so many studio props

19 Bruyn et al. 1982–, vol. 2, A 48; Liedtke 2007, vol. 2, no. 142, pp. 554–64.

20 Bruyn et al. 1982–, vol. 4, p. 317.

21 Ibid., p. 182.

22 Gordenker 1999, p. 92.

23 Broos 1987, no. 66, pp. 390–94.

24 See principally Slatkes 1983.

25 Scheller 1969; Boogart 1999.



Fig. 52 Peter Paul Rubens, *Head of Cyrus Brought to Queen Tomyris*, ca. 1622/23, oil on canvas, 205.1 x 361 cm (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, William I. Koch Gallery, 41.40)

runs strong. Likewise, much of the literature on the topic presupposes that the works function as reliable records, either of the objects and costumes depicted or of prior images of the same. This is a restrictive standard to which to hold these artists and their exotic works.²⁶ In the case of the “Persian”, a striking image of a hybrid figure, the elaborate feather-topped fur hat, ample robe, figured silk garment, pendulous pendant, sash, and boots emerge as a convincing assemblage more by the cocky pose and credible girth and gravitas of the figure—effects of Rembrandt’s rendering—than by the integrity or accuracy of the costume (cat. 38). This is clearly a figure of the exotic rather than an ethnographically pertinent and identifiable record: as in the Lievens painting that Huygens noted, here, too, the figure combines quasi-Persian features with a Dutch physiognomy.

The early exploratory etchings and gorgeous paintings by Rembrandt and Lievens of quasi-exotic types adhere to the practice of dressing the past in exotic or foreign costume. As

Leonard Slatkes has suggested, Rembrandt may have believed that exotic elements, which he could have experienced or copied from images he studied, “preserved accurate costume and social details directly descended from biblical times.”²⁷

Many of Rembrandt’s own works bear this out: *Judas Repenting*, the 1629 painting Huygens cited as evidence that Rembrandt had “captured the trophy of artistic excellence from Greece and Italy,”²⁸ is built around a gesture—a supreme artistic feat, writes Huygens—that is rendered identifiable by the costumes of the other figures in the temple (and the thirty coins). His etching of *Abraham and Isaac* (fig. 51) is also a case in point, demonstrating that Rembrandt adhered to the long and venerable tradition of representing the biblical past by way of the distant East. The exotic headgear in so many fifteenth-century Flemish paintings and in so many Early Modern Christian pictures, including prints by Martin Schongauer, Albrecht Dürer, and Lucas van Leyden, signal other

26 See for example De Winkel 2006, esp. pp. 169–70.

27 Slatkes 1983, p. 67.

28 Quoted in Worp 1891; see Van de Wetering/Schnackenburg 2001, p. 396.



Fig. 53 Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn (1606–1669), *St. John the Baptist Preaching*, grisaille painting, 62.7 x 81.1 cm, 1634/35 (Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Gemäldegalerie, 828K)

populations, figures of the past or of the non-Christian world. The works of Dürer, a formidable exemplar of what Heather Madar has called proto-Orientalism, combine attention to specific recognizable features of the Ottoman “other” with aspects that are clearly fabricated: “Dürer’s Turks are composite creations.”²⁹

Where Rembrandt incorporated exotica in his *tronies* and/or his history paintings, he also followed in the footsteps of his Flemish colleague Peter Paul Rubens, whose artistic relationship with Turkey and Persia has been the subject of close analysis.³⁰ Rubens engages this tradition in such large-scale paintings as his *Head of Cyrus Brought to Queen Tomyris* (ca. 1622/23), a complex studio production replete with many and various foreign costumes whose theme is Persian/Central Asian royal rivalry (fig. 52).³¹ Rubens and his scholar brother were deeply interested in ancient costume and in Peter Paul’s case, at least one observer marveled at the archaeological precision; the French virtuoso and antiquarian Nicolas Fabri de Peiresc greatly admired Rubens for his “esatezza ... in esprimere gli habiti antiqui.”³² In the first decade of the seventeenth century, Rubens compiled a book of sketches of foreign and historical

costumes; the contents of his Costume Book range around the globe and through time, and include studiously annotated and remarkably animate drawings of the dress of Burgundian nobility and German burghers as well as Turkish and Persian figures. It has been demonstrated that his Persian figures derive from miniatures imported to Europe: they must have been at least as curious or fascinating as the costumes in them.³³ Rubens also relied on prints, and in this regard he actively participated in a widespread phenomenon—the study of costume, local and foreign, contemporary and ancient. As in the many published costume books of the later sixteenth century, so too in Rubens’s Costume Book “interest in the exotic fashions of the East” coincided with “a concern for one’s own national past, including its costumes.”³⁴ Rubens adapted costume studies to paintings of biblical and historical narratives. In the painting of *Queen Tomyris*, Rubens combines references to the medieval (local) past with the ancient Near East: the queen wears Burgundian costume and her attendants are fitted out in a variety of exotic—Persian, Muscovite, Polish—garb. Kristin Lohse Belkin, who has written amply about Rubens’s costume studies, attributes the commingling of styles and modes to Rubens’s “preference for adapting and transforming the most diverse influences ... he united costumes from various countries and centuries to create an

29 Madar 2011, p. 161.

30 Ingrams 1974; Otto Kurz with Hilde Schueller Kurz, “The Turkish Dresses in the Costume-Book of Rubens,” Ch. 15 in Kurz 1977; Lohse Belkin 1980. Recently, on Rubens and the exotic, see Schrader 2013.

31 Sutton 1993, no. 24, p. 284.

32 Lohse Belkin 1980, p. 52.

33 Ingrams 1974.

34 Lohse Belkin 1980, p. 54.

overall exotic effect”³⁵—as did Rembrandt in, for example, *Belshazzar’s Feast* (1635, National Gallery of Art, London) or the *Wedding Feast of Samson* (1638, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden). In 1642, Philips Angel, a fellow painter, noted of the *Wedding Feast of Samson*: “You can see in it how that keen intelligence, by thinking hard about the actual way the guests sit (or in this case recline) at table, showed it very nicely: the ancients used small beds on which to lie, not sitting at table the way we do today, but lying on their elbows the way the Turks still do in that part of the world.”³⁶

What did the Dutch—and Dutch artists in particular—know about what “the Turks still do in that part of the world”? Especially if we understand “the Turks” as all denizens of Central Asian territories through which overland travelers passed on their way to India, this is a huge, complex topic, which I raise here only briefly. It must be said at the outset that the Dutch were more familiar and engaged with Ottoman than with Persian contacts. This may have been an effect of relatively limited trade opportunities with Persia (silk, principally) and the relative diversity of goods available via Ottoman trade channels, and it must certainly have had to do with political alliances and allegiances across the European map, a web that conditioned all of the Netherlands’ forays into global trade. While engaged in a war of independence against Spain that would endure until 1648, the nascent Dutch Republic entered into official diplomatic and trade relations with the Ottoman Sultan Ahmed I in 1612.³⁷ The Safavid Shah ‘Abbas made fruitless efforts to engage with the Dutch—in 1611, his ambassador Robert Sherley was rebuffed at The Hague on account of suspected Spanish allegiances and in 1626 the mission headed by Musa Beg was basically disastrous.³⁸ Trade was nonetheless conducted between the Netherlands and Persia, but never as widely or as profitably as in other parts. Safavid-Ottoman relations and the alliance of Catholic powers with Shah ‘Abbas played a crucial role in conditioning European-Persian relations, of course. (The Safavid court reached out to Protestant European powers in the 1610s only after securing a peace treaty with the Ottomans, for example.)

By way of all of their various and pliable networks, the Dutch came into contact with the material culture and the peoples and the costumes and the customs of vast territories beyond the Netherlands, advancing *histoires croisées* that have left significant traces in the visual arts. In relationship to the Levant and Central Asia, some of the major pictorial evidence of these encounters include Pieter Coecke van Aelst’s sixteenth-century series of woodcuts, *Les Moeurs et Fachons de Turcs*, which together forms an imposing frieze fifteen feet in length. Printed in 1553, Coecke van Aelst’s visually compelling and grandiose panorama of Turks in action in Constantinople—the frieze contains all sorts of daily routines, up to and including burial, and is dominated by the procession of the sultan through the city—broke ground that gained familiarity

over the following century. From 1598 on, one of the largest and most detailed images of Constantinople ever drawn—Melchior Lorck’s 1559 eleven-meter-long *Prospect of Constantinople*—was exhibited in the Leiden University Library. Images of the Levant and its inhabitants were accessible, if not abundant, in the northern Netherlands. While his portraits of Sultan Süleyman were printed during his lifetime, in the mid-sixteenth century, Lorck’s designs for woodcuts of Turks and their monuments were published posthumously, in the 1620s, and they joined an ongoing conversation among costume books printed throughout Europe that featured denizens of the Orient. Portraits of Persian ambassadors to the Christian courts of Europe circulated in the first decade of the seventeenth century (cat. nos. 1–5, pp. 26–28) and, around 1620, Rubens and Van Dyck executed portraits of Europeans in Turkish and Persian costume (figs. 54; 40 and 41, pp. 96–97).³⁹ Taken together, these images demonstrate the advanced degree of familiarity within the Netherlands with images of Near Eastern, Levantine exotic types, and variations on them. They are important points of reference in considerations of exotic pictures by Rembrandt and his contemporaries—but this is not to say that they should be construed as sources.

“Ethnographic eclecticism” is a phrase coined by Paul Vandenbroeck in his analysis of the conflation of “American” attributes and artifacts—featherwork skirts, headdresses, and body ornaments—with non-American places and peoples.⁴⁰ The term suits Rembrandt’s exotic pictures, in which turbans and other Near Eastern accessories signify the oriental/biblical past but without the rigor of ethnographic study. While I see this eclecticism as a positive feature, and one worth examining because it compounds our understanding of how exotic or eclectic Dutch culture was, other scholars have coded Rembrandt’s eclecticism negatively. For some, Rembrandt’s use of exotic costume and ornament signals weakness: Rembrandt is accused of having had a penchant for dressing up, for fantastical costume. Another refrain in recent scholarship holds that his is a marred or inadequate ethnographic impulse: he stops short of going all the way, where all the way entails a committed, accurate image of foreign people, their customs and costumes. Gary Schwartz writes:

Rembrandt was typical in his casual interest in foreign cultures of his own time. He liked to collect weapons, musical instruments and curiosities from the Orient, but he did not devote serious attention to these items or the cultures from which they came. When exotic characters showed up in the streets he was willing to grab a sheet of paper and draw a Moor or a Pole or a Turk, but his efforts of this kind cannot be called serious contributions to the study of foreign peoples.⁴¹

Costume historian Marieke de Winkel has contributed a great deal to our knowledge of who wore what when, with particular regard to Rembrandt. Her approach to Oriental costume in his paintings, however, basically deems the works insignifi-

35 Ibid., p. 56.

36 Slatkes 1983, pp. 13–17; cf. Schwartz 2006, p. 111 (translation altered); and De Winkel 2006, pp. 193–94.

37 De Groot 1978.

38 On Sherley in The Hague, see Wilhelm Baudartius, *Memoryen ofte Cort Verhael...* (Arnhem, 1624), fol. 667. See also Matthee 1999.

39 Otto Kurz, “Künstlerische Beziehungen zwischen Prag und Persien zur Zeit Kaiser Rudolfs II. und Beiträge zur Geschichte seiner Sammlungen,” Ch. 14 in Kurz 1977.

40 Vandenbroeck 1992, p. 395; expanded on by Mason 1998, pp. 24–25.

41 Schwartz 2006, p. 296.

cant—either because we cannot identify the figures represented or because the costume is not authentic. De Winkel notes that, “notwithstanding the occasional use of real exotic accessories, Rembrandt’s oriental costumes do not give the impression of being very authentic, as a whole.”⁴² Rembrandt’s grisaille painting of *St. John the Baptist Preaching* features an array of varied costumes and headgear—from a feather headdress at the left to a turban at the far right that looks as if it is poised on the head of a black African (fig. 53). Rembrandt’s biographer Arnold Houbraken praised “the natural rendering of the facial features and the variety of the attire” in this picture. Houbraken also wrote that “several of [Rembrandt’s] pupils have told me he sometimes sketched a figure in ten different ways before committing the same to the panel; and could spend as much as one or two days to arrange a turban to his liking.” De Winkel writes: “Though Houbraken assures us that Rembrandt spent his days arranging turbans, they do not look as if they have been painted from life and are not depicted convincingly.”⁴³ By invoking ethnographic eclecticism, I mean to suggest that precise identification of the figures represented, as it is signaled by their costume, is not necessary. To counter an approach that equates identity with costume and that requires that artistic interventions be ethnographically motivated or coherent, we might further explore the status and significance of the exotic.

Outlandish without Origin

In 1605, the renowned naturalist Carolus Clusius, then director of the Leiden University Garden, published *Exoticorum libri decem*, a compendious account of animals, plants, spices, and ethnographic items from the Indies, Africa, and the Americas.⁴⁴ In the opening pages, Clusius elaborates on the differences between the *Exoticorum* and his prior work, the *Rariorum Plantarum Historia* of 1601. Whereas, he explains, he had examined and collected specimens that feature in the earlier book on foot, abroad, in the course of his travels, he undertook the study of exotic objects under very different conditions: “Now, in my old age [he was 79 in 1605], when due to my bodily weakness I can scarcely walk ... I have applied my mind to the observation of those plants and other things that are brought from foreign parts.”⁴⁵ The conditions of observing, studying, and appreciating the exotic differed fundamentally from, for example, the medically-motivated study of fresh specimens at hand propagated by natural history of this time. One applied one’s mind to what was exotic, observed it, studied it—but not with an eye to practical or use value. This is, in other contexts, key to its value.

42 De Winkel 2006, p. 255.

43 Ibid., pp. 202–203.

44 *Exoticorum libri decem, quibus animalium, plantarum, aromatum, aliorumque peregrinorum fructuum historiae describuntur* (Ten Books of Exotica: The History and Uses of Animals, Plants, Aromatics, and Other Natural Products from Distant Lands) (Leiden, 1605). The volume includes descriptions and woodcuts of plants, animals, resins, and other objects from the New World, Asia, India, and Africa, as well as Clusius’s translations (previously published) of da Orta, Acosta, and Monardes. See Van Ommen 2009.

45 Clusius 1605, fol. 2v.

Clusius uses the terms “exoticus” and “peregrinus” to describe the sorts of goods compiled in the *Exoticorum*; both terms amount to a declaration of distant origin.⁴⁶ In the period under discussion, the term “exotic” meant nothing more or less than “foreign.”⁴⁷ And where place of origin is designated, it tends to be as general as “Indian” or “Chinese”—either of which could have meant the other, as in Sir Thomas Roe’s account of Goa, quoted above, or Turkish. The exotic frequently revealed learned ignorance. As Ann Goldgar has shown in her fine study of tulipomania, the pursuit of “strangeness” or novelty also applied to an aesthetics of natural exotica, as exemplified by early seventeenth-century efforts to find, procure, or transmit “something strange.”⁴⁸ Strangeness and novelty animate the cultivation and collection of tulips, for example, in the early decades of the seventeenth century, and a measure of ignorance pertained to that which was desirably strange. A colleague sent various items to Clusius including a branch of dates, six large and eight small creatures he pulled from the hull of a ship returned via Africa, a large bird’s beak (the beak was said to be larger than the bird itself, which did not, however, survive the voyage), a pineapple, and “a fruit or plant unknown to me, not knowing what it is.”⁴⁹ “Novelty, exoticism, foreignness, unfamiliarity” are among the qualities most sought after by enthusiasts of tulips. As Goldgar points out, the strangeness of the tulip to Early Modern eyes—“a strange and outlandish plant” (Rembert Dodoens); “foreign to us & a stranger” (Jean Franeau); “strangers unto us”; “out-landish flowers” (John Parkinson)—is difficult to reconcile with their seemingly intrinsic Dutchness to ours.⁵⁰

We gain a good impression, at the remove of a textual account, of what a private collection abundant in exotica might have encompassed from the catalogue of the Leiden pharmacist Christiaen Porret’s collection, which was sold at auction in 1628. The title page of the catalogue describes the objects Porret owned as “Exceptional items or curiosities and rare naturalia [*Sinnelickheden*] ... Indian and other foreign conches/shells/terrestrial and sea creatures/minerals/and also strange animals; as well as some artfully made handicrafts and paintings / which Christiaen Porrett [sic], Pharmacist of late / assembled in his *cunsteamer*.”⁵¹ Like the phrases on the title page, the entries in the catalogue vacillate between categories in ways that seem unstable and bewildering. Porret’s collection contained exceptional, curious, rare, and foreign items that ranged from shells and sea creatures to animals and minerals—and art as well. The catalogue opens with vessels of semi-precious stone; an ivory lathe-work tower of enclosed spheres; a spiral staircase in ivory; a Persian cloth in the form of a turban; a large Persian belt of blue silk, perfumed; several Indian objects; a sketch of Prince Maurits; and an oblong

46 Florike Egmond, “The Exotic World of Carolus Clusius,” in Van Ommen 2009, p. 7.

47 Keating/Markey 2011.

48 Goldgar 2007, Ch. 1, “Something Strange.”

49 Ibid., p. 25.

50 Ibid., p. 38.

51 See Swan 2004.

agate; and closes with a long series of entries describing water-color renderings of animals, plants, and flowers. What became of the amazing range of objects listed under 719 headings in the printed catalogue is unknown, although it is not beyond the realm of plausibility that the young Rembrandt, then still a resident of Leiden, was among the buyers. The text of the auction catalogue makes clear that Porret collected on a scale compatible with the signal collections of the era—the cabinets of curiosities assembled throughout Europe by nobility, natural historians, and virtuosi alike, from Catherine of Austria, Queen of Portugal, to all of her Habsburg family members, for example, in the sixteenth century, and from the John Tradescants in London to Rudolf II in Prague and Rembrandt in the seventeenth century.

Hardly a single Early Modern collection worthy of the name *raritytenkabinet* or *Wunderkammer* did not contain a variety of novel, strange, curious, foreign—which is to say exotic—items. Dutch collectors avidly acquired exotic, wondrous goods from the many regions in which the Dutch traded, and beyond. The exotic—also signaled in Dutch by the nouns *sonderling-heden* and *rarityten*—or items described as exotic—*uytheemsche*; *uwtilandsche*; *vreemd*—occupied a limbo or no man’s land between knowledge and ignorance, between nature and economy, between local and remote. In these respects, such objects and the category of the exotic they inhabit resonate with preternatural philosophy and its objects, as described by Lorraine Daston in her account of “Preternatural Philosophy.”⁵² Daston shows that what was beyond nature was not unnatural, and that the objects of preternatural philosophy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries resembled very closely the contents of *Wunderkammer* and cabinets of curiosity: “almost all of the naturalia displayed in the cabinets also featured prominently in the coeval treatises on preternatural philosophy.”⁵³ The practice of preternatural philosophy seems particularly relevant to Early Modern Dutch exoticism: they share a rhetoric and vocabulary, and are both suffused with wonder.

Rarityten van dese Landen

Early Modern witnesses attest—in literature, in works of art, in collections, in account books, and elsewhere—to the allure of the exotic, to its incandescent and immeasurable value. On the one hand, where it occurs in the seventeenth century in Latin or vernacular form (*vreemd* or *uytheemsch* in Dutch) the term “exotic” signifies no more or less than foreign origin. On the other hand, the term and objects associated with it carry an aura of unfamiliarity capable of evoking wonder. In further defining the exotic, a related term that occurs in Early Modern Dutch accounts of exotica may be useful. This term is *rarityten van dese landen*, literally, “rarities of these lands” or, more loosely translated, “indigenous exotica.” *Rarityten van dese landen* occurs in Dutch state documents dated 1612, where it aptly describes the goods sent as a diplomatic gift. These

were the myriad costly, elaborate, exceptional, and locally produced objects and items presented by the first ambassador of the emerging Dutch Republic to the Ottoman Sultan Ahmed I in Constantinople in that year, 1612.⁵⁴ “Rarities of these lands” points to the wondrous nature of the items—they are rarities or curiosities—at the same time that it declares them familiar and local. This phrase describes the refined wares available on the Dutch market, of which the city of Amsterdam in particular was very proud—as in the 1611 *Profile View of Amsterdam* (fig. 46), for example, and in later practices.

In 1638 the exiled queen mother of France, Maria de’ Medici, visited Amsterdam. To the local government, her visit marked and permitted the celebration of the ascendancy of the city to the status of a world capital. Aside from the internal politics of the visit and the lively fact that she entered the city in a boat in the guise of the Roman goddess of the Earth accompanied by four lions (an old man dressed as Neptune met her, in the company of Mercury, god of commerce), what is of immediate interest is the first visit she made to a local institution. The first public institution she visited was the headquarters of the Dutch East India Company, where the burgomasters took her on the morning of her second day in Amsterdam for a presentation of what might qualify as “rarities of these lands [the Netherlands].” *Medicea Hospes*, the published description of her state visit by the Dutch poet Caspar Barlaeus, is nothing short of a paean to the Dutch trade sensibility and to the aesthetics of the exotic.⁵⁵ Barlaeus’s account opens with a poem about trade in the East Indies and then recounts:

When the Queen entered the courtyard was spread with precious textiles and in the great chamber the Investors had laid out a sizable banquet that was not only gratifying to the tongue but also aromatic and pleasing to the eye ... The Company could not have [fêted her] in a more suitable manner: they presented dishes to Her Majesty, or fictive dishes, from the Indies and only made in those lands ... Here there were ... the fruits and plants of the Persians, Arabians, Moluccans, Japanese, and Chinese, served in large porcelain serving basins, arranged on a long table, the strangeness [*vreemdigheid*] of which delighted the Queen. Arrayed on the table were round and long pepper, beautiful to behold, mace, and three kinds of nutmeg, one in its shell, one wrapped in mace, and one preserved, which showed how fruitful the Moluccan islands are. Cinnamon and cassia, piled on top of one another, showed that they came from the East. There were bowls filled with cloves, with masses of raw and undyed Persian and Chinese silks. The whiteness of the borax struck the eyes, and the scent and smell of benzoin the nose. Musk, styrax, sandalwood, indigo, and many other pigments lay in special saucers. This feast for the eyes also contained dragon’s blood and cakes of resin of mace, and Gutta Gamba as yellow as gold, which shone among the

52 Daston 2000, Ch. 1, “Preternatural Philosophy.”; as distinct from Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150–1750* (New York, 2001).

53 Daston 2000, p. 19.

54 See Swan 2013.

55 The *Medicea Hospes, sive descriptio publicae gratulationis* was published simultaneously in Latin and in French in 1638, and translated into Dutch in 1639; Caspar Barlaeus, *Blyde Inkomst der Allderdoerluchtigste Koninginne, Maria De Medicis* (Amsterdam, 1639), pp. 615–17.



Fig. 54 Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), *Nicolas de Respaigne*, 1616–18, oil on canvas, 205.5 x 119.5 cm (Kassel, Museumslandschaft Hessen Kassel)

other dishes. Incense and myrrh from Saba, once used by pagans as offerings to the gods, were used here as offerings to the Goddess of France's sense of smell. Cubebs, rhubarb, sugar, saltpeter, from which dreadful gunpowder is made, all lay in their places. She was even served lacquer, a wax that is made by bees, precious oils of *macis*, nutmegs, and candied and regular ginger. Medici's eyes were stunned and she imagined, seeing and sensing the exotic and unusual [*uitheemsche en ongewoone*] banquet, that she was a guest of the Indians, the Moluccans, the Persians, Arabians, Japanese, and Chinese. Such daily fare as pheasant, bream liver, and partridge, and wild swine, and other *recherché* delicacies that the tongue seeks out to gratify the palate could not compete with this feast.

In short, here at the headquarters of the state trading company, the wonders of the East were displayed and celebrated as commodities and as *sinnelickheden*—that odd term that occurs in the title of the Porret auction catalogue. The rarities and curiosities the Dutch had made their own by way of trade were presented as offerings.

Rarieteyten van dese landen or indigenous exotica is also a useful oxymoron for coming to terms with Dutch and Flemish Orientalism in the visual arts and in particular with *Turckse tronies*. Other paintings I would recommend for inclusion in this category—other *rarieteyten van dese landen*—include the sumptuous 1618 portrait by Rubens of the Flemish merchant Nicolas de Respaigne (fig. 54); and the gorgeous pendant portraits of Sir Robert and his wife Lady Teresia Sherley, which Anthony van Dyck painted in Rome in 1622 (figs. 40 and 41).⁵⁶ De Respaigne, a Flemish merchant who conducted trade in Venice, is wearing Turkish garb and a cloth tied on his head in the manner of the ambassadors of the Safavid Shah 'Abbas; an ample *entari* and the trousers and slippers signal the Levant, as does the carpet. De Respaigne's 1647 testament records "sijne turcxse cleederen, bogen, bijlen ende die andere bijgevoegde turcxse rariteyten" and bequeaths to his widow "his Turkish portrait made by Rubens."⁵⁷ As recorded in this portrait, de Respaigne's identity is hybrid—he is an indigenous foreigner. Translated into a foreigner by his costume and in this portrait, de Respaigne subsequently underwent a further translation. In Rubens's painting of *Queen Tomyris* (fig. 52), the group of male onlookers at center includes a figure whose forms and disposition echo those of de Respaigne. Not only, in other words, is the original identity, point of origin, or provenance of the clothing lost in translation, but de Respaigne's identity hardly defies the translation of his likeness into a distant, biblical bystander.

Sherley is another complex figure, whose personal history and portraits Gary Schwartz explores in his essay "The Sherleys and the Shah" in this book. An Englishman who became ambassador of Shah 'Abbas to the Christian courts of Europe, he is an indigenous foreigner, or foreign native.

Like *Turckse tronies*, these portraits present hybrid figures, their identities a pastiche. Costume performed or comprised identity in Europe in the sixteenth century, and physiognomy

⁵⁶ See, for example, Hall 1998.

⁵⁷ See Vlieghe 1987, no. 129.

was understood, particularly in the arena of portraiture, as a legible form of individuality. Huygens calls the head of the Lievens picture he describes that of “some Dutchman.” Even the elaborate attributes, the magnificent turbans, the silk scarf or sash, the heavy mantle do not render the *tronies* Oriental. They’re still and always some Dutch guys, lost in translation. Such men, not unlike de Respaigne and Sherley, are foreign to themselves. This is an effect of their exotic costume, which changes them but does not alter their identity. One is reminded of Walter Benjamin’s comparison, in “The Task of the Translator” (1923), of the conformity of language to content in an original—he likens the relationship to that of fruit and its skin—with “the language of the translation,” which “envelops its content like a royal robe with ample folds.”⁵⁸

Conclusion

This paper presents a few cases of the place and role of exotica (*rarityten*, or curiosities) in the early years of Dutch global exploration and trade. A fragment of an incipient biography of Early Modern Dutch exotica, this paper has looked at how *rarityten* (exotica) were described and at how they were known or indeed unknown. In many cases the exotic was not knowable, identifiable, readily classifiable, or otherwise responsive to the pressures of Early Modern epistemology. In the Dutch cases I have surveyed, trade enables the cultivation of a taste for the exotic and trade also suffuses the rhetoric of exchange in exotica. The combination of an aesthetic of novelty and wonder with the desires born of the market is the key to the exotic sensibility.

Notwithstanding the popular conception of Dutch culture as uniform and hermetic—as Dutch—it seems to me crucial to acknowledge that it was hardly homogeneous. Consider the Indian silks on Van Oldenbarnevelt’s bed, the peppercorns in his linen closet. I have tried to trace this pattern of exoticism entwined with the local by way of costume, among other things. While the temptation to associate costume with identity along the lines of the proto-ethnographic impulses and products characteristic of many Early Modern authors runs high, it does not go far. The significance of the exoticism of the *Turckse tronies* and of other indigenous exotica threatens to be obscured in the light of attempts to prove identity—especially on the basis of costume. It threatens, that is, to be lost in translation.

58 Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” in *Illuminations* (New York, 1968), p. 75.