

INTRODUCTION

A large picture painted by Hendrick Cornelisz Vroom in 1599, *The Return of the Second Expedition to the East Indies*, all sky, sail, and harbor, heralded a new era in the Dutch world (figure 3). Against the background of the misty forms of the signature steeples and towers of Amsterdam, four towering three-masted ships are swarmed by a flotilla of smaller vessels. On the day depicted, 19 July 1599, church bells rang out and shots were fired in celebration of the return of the second Dutch fleet to the East, and the first considered a success.¹ In the painting, the weather is glorious, with just enough of a breeze for a show of Dutch colors in the many flags and pennants. Boats fill the harbor, some carrying elegant parties and others bearing drunken onlookers. An inscription on the frame declares that the *Mauritius*, the *Holland*, the *Overijssel*, and the *Vriesland*, vessels named for the Stadholder Prince Maurits of Nassau (in office 1585–1625) and for three of the northern provinces of the Netherlands, had “sailed to Bantam to obtain spices.” In the early modern era, Bantam, on Java Island, was the site of one of the principal markets for wares exchanged via robust intra-Asian network trade; to a Dutch audience at the dawn of the seventeenth century, Bantam signaled the East and its wares.

The Portuguese had dominated trade routes to and trade in Southeast Asia from the beginning of the sixteenth century, but the dawn of the seventeenth broke with the Dutch giving the Iberian powers Portugal and Spain, then under a single crown, a run for their money in the pursuit of spices and other valuable goods from the East Indies.² “Having planted trade,” the inscription on the frame of the Vroom painting states, these vessels “returned richly to Amsterdam the nineteenth of July 1599.”³ Although it took some time before the Dutch actually established themselves in the East, great numbers of Dutch fleets would return in the course of the subsequent century, many of them “richly,” from the East and West Indies, and the spoils of Dutch overseas trade would shape the cultural horizon of the provinces on the shores of the North Sea to which they were returned.

During the reign of King Philip II of Spain (ruled 1556–1598) and Portugal (ruled 1581–1598), the persecution of Protestants in the southern “Spanish” Netherlands, also called the “obedient provinces,” resulted in waves of emigration from the south to the north, which brought along considerable wealth and skill.⁴ The 1581 Act of Abjuration declared independence from Spanish rule on the part of the northern provinces bound



3. Hendrick Cornelisz Vroom, *Return of the Second Voyage to the East Indies, under the Direction of Jacob van Neck, the Mauritius, Hollant, Overijssel en Vrieslant*, 1599. Oil on panel, 102.3 × 218.4 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, SK-A-2858.

by the Union of Utrecht, but the king did not acknowledge it. The northern States General, a governing body of representatives of the provinces established in the fifteenth century, then displaced the monarch, initiating the Dutch Republic. Self-governance enabled mercantile ambitions, especially after 1594, when Philip II closed the port of Lisbon to Dutch merchants, prompting the Dutch to seek direct access to trade goods abroad. Over the course of the Eighty Years' War, between 1566 and 1648, the provinces of the northern Netherlands fought for their sovereignty, which, though declared in 1581, was not officially recognized by Spain until 1648, in the Treaty of Münster. This book focuses on the first half of the seventeenth century, when the nascent republic took form in the crucible of global trade and politics.⁵

Trade in the early years of the struggle for independence was conducted abroad in Asia, the East Indies, India, Africa, North America, and the West Indies and involved fierce competition with the Portuguese and Spanish. Political motivations underwrote trade initiatives, which in turn shaped the nation in formation. The new republic came into being alongside the establishment of its joint-stock companies: the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, or VOC) and the West India Company (West-Indische Compagnie, or WIC).⁶ The ships Vroom depicted in 1599 carried over half a million pounds of pepper and hundreds of thousands of pounds of cloves in addition to mace, nutmeg, and cinnamon; returns on investments in that fleet alone have been estimated to be as high as 265 percent.⁷ As Spain and Portugal were well established

abroad by the time the Dutch ventured overseas in pursuit of profit, their encounters with these European powers were often violent. In Vroom's painting, two principal types of three-masted cargo ships are shown, both of which were essential to the VOC: the East Indiaman (in Dutch, *spiegelretourschip*, or simply *retourschip*), with a characteristic flat transom, and the smaller, rounder flute ship (*fluitschip*, or *fluit*). The ships that made the return voyage were often heavily armed; it looks as if cannons on the *fluit* at the right have been fired in celebration (see figure 3; compare figure 104). The dividing line between trade and war was fragile and explosive.⁸ The aim of this book is to show that the formation of the Dutch Republic, recognized as a sovereign state in 1648, was shaped by trade in, consumption of, and profit from those foreign goods known, cherished, and exchanged as "rarities," and to show how paintings, prints, and other artworks supported Dutch claims to ascendancy in the commerce of rarities and dominion over them.

Global trade made Dutch merchants rich and Amsterdam, the foremost city in the Netherlands, into the European port of entry for novel commodities. Porcelain was the most voluminous import from the East, but the trade in pepper, cloves, nutmeg, and mace exceeded it in profitability. Surviving records show that when the VOC ship *Hollandia* returned from Batavia (present-day Jakarta), the VOC's administrative headquarters, in 1627, as much as 70 percent of its cargo was pepper; it also carried other spices, silk, and miscellanea, including porcelain, precious stones, and musk. These proportions are considered representative for the era. Like most VOC vessels, the East Indiaman *Hollandia* was loaded for the return voyage with items sourced from a variety of points of origin and markets in the East. Pepper was transported from Borneo Island, Sumatra (one of the Sunda Islands), and present-day Thailand; nutmeg and mace came from the Banda Islands; and cloves were brought to Batavia from Ambon. The *Hollandia* also transported baled Persian silk, Chinese silk from Taiwan, Japanese copper, saltpeter from the Coromandel Coast, precious stones and musk from Borneo, ginger, and captured porcelain.⁹ To historians of art and material culture, porcelain is the most familiar of an array of trade goods that became available during the first half of the seventeenth century (figure 4; see figures 128–30). Its impact is also written into the establishment of the delftware industry, which continues to this day to produce earthenware in emulation of the foreign forms (figure 5).¹⁰ Current estimates hold that by 1650 the VOC had transported to Europe in excess of three million pieces of Chinese porcelain, a great portion of it captured from the Portuguese, as in the case of the *Hollandia*.¹¹ The familiarity of porcelain, or of tulips—which would not be imported to western Europe until the later sixteenth century but have since become the stereotypical Dutch flower—makes it easy to overlook how shot through with foreign rarities the Dutch Republic was at the time of its emergence.

The VOC merchant and official Jacques Specx, who established the Dutch trading post at Hirado in 1609 and later served as governor-general of the East Indies, retired from the company in 1632.¹² He settled in Amsterdam and lived out his life in a fine house on the Keizersgracht, serving in the last decade of his life as a member of the board of directors of the West India Company. An inventory drawn up after his death in



4. Dutch school, *Domestic Interior with a Family Receiving Visitors*, c. 1630. Oil on panel, 86 × 118 cm. Musée d'art et d'histoire, Ville de Genève, Dépôt de la Fondation Lucien Baszanger, Genève, 1967, inv. no. BASZ 0005.

1652 attests to his substantial wealth. Specx owned a remarkable number of fine things, from jewels of various kinds and copious silverware to the sorts of geographical and nautical images and objects one might associate with his career in the East: a chest filled with maps and drawings of the Indies, maps of Banda and Ambon, a map of Banda-Neira, globes, telescopes—and lacquerware. The substantial number of paintings he left behind is occasionally noted, but scant attention has been paid to the rest of his worldly goods. No fewer than five of the more than eighty artworks listed in the 1652 inventory were attributed to Rembrandt van Rijn, including paintings since identified as portraits of Specx's brother-in-law Philips Lucasz (1635, National Gallery, London) and his wife Petronella Buys (1635, Leiden Collection, New York), *The Abduction of Europa* (1632, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles), and *Christ on the Sea of Galilee* (1633, stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston). In addition, Specx owned landscapes, portraits, and still life paintings credited to Ambrosius Bosschaert, Gerard ter Borch, Govert Flinck, Hendrick Goltzius, Salomon van Ruysdael, and other illustrious artists of the time. But there was more.

While Specx's many paintings exemplify the translation of profit earned in overseas trade into local commodities, his taste ran further afield. In addition to works by Dutch artists whose names populate textbook surveys of the era Specx owned "three large paintings, Chinese."¹³ Distributed over a number of rooms in the house were no



5. Earthenware cup, c. 1660–1670. Delft faience in imitation of Chinese, with false date of 1581. 15. 5 cm (h). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, BK-NM-11091.

fewer than five hundred pieces of porcelain, including porcelain vessels set in silver, numerous pieces of lacquerware, Japanese and Javanese weapons, Turkish carpets, and at least three Japanese robes. Although it is not difficult to imagine Specx at his ease among his precious Asian furnishings, the image of a retired VOC official in a Japanese robe gazing at a Rembrandt painting such as *Christ on the Sea of Galilee* is worth lingering over.¹⁴ Wealth derived from foreign trade nourished patterns of consumption familiar to art historians of the era: Specx's disposable income enabled him to acquire works by some of the most renowned artists of the time. Though overshadowed by conventional conceptions of Dutch aesthetics as focused on local artifacts, the history of investment in the aesthetics

of the foreign or exotic and rare is key: in the seventeenth century, trade and taste were patently intertwined.

The Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie was officially established in 1602 with the support of the representative assembly of the provinces and governing body of the nascent republic, the States General of the United Provinces of the Netherlands, and the Stadholder Prince Maurits of Nassau (figure 6), who assumed power when his father, William I, Prince of Orange, was assassinated in 1584. The VOC incorporated private consortiums (*voorcompagnieën*, or precursor companies) that outfitted individual fleets, such as the one pictured by Vroom, entailing very high risks. The VOC consisted of and was supported by six chambers (Amsterdam, Middelburg, Enkhuizen, Delft, Hoorn, and Rotterdam), each of which delegated members to the oversight committee of seventeen board members known as the Heren XVII (Gentlemen Seventeen). From the time of the initial charter in 1602 through consecutive renewals to the end of the eighteenth century, officers of the VOC were granted diplomatic, military, and judicial powers to operate abroad on behalf of the States General. Their territorial and trade priority was the Indonesian archipelago, the source of spices, the most valuable commodities, and no other Dutch vessel was permitted to sail east of the Cape of Good Hope or through the Strait of Magellan.

From the get-go, printed illustrated accounts describing Dutch expeditions spread the word about these faraway pursuits and the fruits of investment in them. Widespread interest was sparked by the publication in 1596 of *Itinerario: Voyage ofte Schipvaert* (Itinerary: Voyage or Navigation) by Jan Huygen van Linschoten, also known as the Dutch Magellan.¹⁵ A northern Netherlandish merchant who worked for a time in Spain and served the Archbishop of Goa, Vicente da Fonseca, from 1583 to 1588, van Linschoten authored two accounts of travel and trade in East Asia, the *Reys-Gheschrift* (1595) and



6. Michiel Jansz van Mierevelt, *Portrait of Maurits, Prince of Orange*, c. 1613–1620. Oil on panel, 220.3 × 143.5 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, SK-A-255.

the widely read *Itinerario* (1596), and a less well known account of trade along the western coast of Africa and in Brazil, the *Beschryvinghe* (1596), published following his return to the Netherlands in 1592.

The *Itinerario* was almost immediately translated into English (1598), German (1598–1600), Latin (1599), and French (1610). The text describes coastal terrain from Mozambique to Japan and contains a wealth of information about trade throughout East Asia, including sea charts and nautical data that van Linschoten gathered in the employ of the Portuguese.¹⁶ It holds out the promise of wondrous, valuable goods available in the regions described, even as it delineates the scope and coordinates of the Portuguese hold on local trade. The chapter “Of the Iland[s] of Maluco” opens with the names of the Maluku Islands (the Moluccas) and the efforts of the Spanish, prior to the Treaty of Tordesillas, to “have traffique there”; then it describes local produce, the availability of cloves, and birds of paradise.¹⁷ The 1598 English translation of the *Itinerario* recommends itself as “A Worke assuredly very profitable, and commodious for all such as are desirous & curious louers of Nouelties,” holding out the promise for the Dutch of outdoing the Portuguese in the Indies, where trade was “very fruitfull, and yeelding such treasure and rich Merchandize, as none other place of the whole world can afford.”¹⁸ In 1604, the Amsterdam publisher and print seller Cornelis Claesz printed the illustrations to the *Itinerario* with brief accompanying texts as the *Icones, habitus gestusque Indorum ac Lusitanorum per Indiam viventium* (Pictures of the clothes and customs of the Indians and Portuguese living in the Indies).¹⁹ While the descriptions and depictions of local populations, customs, costumes, and markets amount to a form of chorography consistent with the example of sixteenth-century atlases issued in Antwerp, it would be an error to overlook the core mission of the van Linschoten’s publications: to promote traffic and trade in pursuit of profit.

Like van Linschoten, the merchant-voyager Cornelis de Houtman also worked in Portugal and brought state secrets regarding trade to the northern Netherlands. With the backing of the Compagnie van Verre, one of the *voorcompagnieën* established prior to the VOC, he commanded the “First Voyage” by the Dutch to the East Indies, which sailed out in 1595 and returned two years later. Two early accounts—by de Houtman and by the merchant Willem Lodewycksz—vividly describe the venture, papering over the fact that it was fairly disastrous.²⁰ The merchants did not purchase substantial amounts of pepper, angering local rulers, and only one-third of those who sailed out returned, dozens having died of scurvy. The voyage nonetheless gave hope to Dutch upstart merchants who were eager to trade independently of the Portuguese, and the narrative circulated over and again. An English edition appeared in 1598, and Johannes Pontanus recapitulated it in his *Rerum et urbis Amstelodamensium Historia* (History of Amsterdam) in 1611. (Accounts of the Second Voyage, by the fleet depicted by Vroom in figure 3, were also published in Dutch and in English; no paintings of the First Voyage survive.²¹) The cycle of publishing accessible, illustrated, printed editions



7. Petrus Plancius, *Map of the Moluccas with Spices and Wares*, first published 1592, Amsterdam: C. J. Visscher, 1617. Hand-colored engraving, 42.5 × 59 cm. State Library of New South Wales (Safe/M2 470/1617/1).

8. Copy of the title page of *Waerachtigh verhael van de Schipvaerd . . . 1598* (a narrative account of the First Voyage, led by de Houtman) reused as the title page of the account of the Second Voyage, led by van Neck and van Warwijck, in Commelin, *Begin ende voortgangh*, 1646. Etching, 10.8 × 22.2 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, RP-P-OB-75.310.

that were then translated, adapted, and reprinted was repeated ad infinitum over the course of the century, and maps and broadsheets joined the fray.²² The extraordinary map by Petrus Plancius of the rich trade terrain from the coast of China to New Guinea features the very wares for which Europeans sailed east (figure 7): the depiction of nutmegs, cloves, and sandalwoods as large as islands in the map's lower register clarifies the motivation for mercantile ventures into these remote waters. The navigational information on which this map is based was provided by van Linschoten; first printed in 1592 by the prolific publisher Cornelis Claesz, the map was also bound into copies of the *Itinerario*.²³

In 1646, the historian and bookseller Isaac Commelin issued a two-volume account of the VOC, *Begin ende voortgangh van de Vereenighde Nederlandsche Geoctroyeerde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (Origin and progress of the United Netherlands Chartered East India Company). Commelin himself did not travel; he plundered prior publications of individual travelogues for his anonymously published, heavily illustrated history of the company.²⁴ Appealing images were inserted to enliven the individual accounts, as, for example, the print that serves as an ad hoc title page for Commelin's account of the Second Voyage (figure 8). This vignette actually describes the fleet of the First Voyage, as it was first published in 1598 in an account of that fleet's journey. Repurposed by Commelin, it offers the prospect of a peaceful encounter between a local governor (at left) and a Dutch captain (at right). The etching places the governor of Bantam (*Bantam vrbis gubernator*) and de Houtman (the inscription above the Dutch man is surely a mistranscription of *navarchus major*, or admiral), each of them with attendants holding parasols, on equal footing. Local inhabitants process peacefully in the lower register.²⁵ Like this image, Commelin's fabulous allegorical title pages (figures 9 and 10) are products of the Dutch drive to represent foreign trade and travel as an easy trajectory to success. We will return to these figurations of riches, greed, and plunder, but it is important to consider whose story is being told by Commelin and his illustrations. Not only is the narrative thrust out of sync with the actual progress of trade; it is a motivated projection and only one part of the story. Other voices were drowned out, and other places written over by European travel accounts such as are cited here.²⁶

Inspired by the profits derived from trade in the East and stimulated anew by the compulsion to wage war on all possible fronts with the king of Spain, the Dutch state established the West India Company in 1621, following the conclusion of the Twelve Years' Truce with Spain (1609–1621). Structured much like the VOC at home, with a board of directors consisting of nineteen representatives from the five chambers and one from the States General, the WIC had a terrain abroad that included western Africa from the Tropic of Cancer and the Cape of Good Hope; the Atlantic islands; and America. The company was not so successful financially, except by privateering. In the 1620s and 1630s alone, WIC fleets captured nearly six hundred Spanish commercial vessels, most famously with the taking of the richly laden Flota de Indias (Fleet of the Indies, or "Silver Fleet") by Vice-Admiral Piet Hein in 1628.



9. Jacob van Meurs after the Monogrammist PI, title page, Commelin, *Begin ende voortgangh*, vol. 1, 1646. Engraving, 15.5 × 20.5 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, RP-P-OB-75.321.

Piet Hein was widely celebrated by the state as well as by poets and chroniclers on his return from the West Indies in 1628 with the rich loot he overtook in the Bay of Matanzas on the coast of Cuba; the value of the goods was estimated at over 11 million guilders (roughly 300 million euros). Printed broadsheets published at the behest of the WIC describe the drama that unfolded in Caribbean waters and list the loot: in addition to vast amounts of silver, the cargo returned to the Netherlands included silks, indigo and cochineal dyes, sugar, chocolate, and other precious wares (see figures 76 and 77). Not only did Hein's booty represent a symbolic victory over the Spanish, but its immediate economic and military impact enabled the Dutch to continue to fight the Spanish at home and in the West Indies.²⁷ The proceeds of the loot were transferred into war coffers that supported attacks by the Dutch on Portuguese Brazil, and in 1636 the WIC appointed as military commander and governor-general of Dutch Brazil Johan Maurits, Count of Nassau-Siegen. The Dutch maintained a colony in Brazil supported by its con-



10. Jacob van Meurs after the Monogrammist PI, title page, *Commelin, Begin ende voortgangh*, vol. 2, 1646. Engraving, 15.5 × 20.5 cm. Allard Pierson—The Collections of the University of Amsterdam, OF 63 797.

quests of Portuguese outposts on the West African coast, where the Dutch sourced the slave labor for the sugar plantations in Brazil.

After a relatively brief tenure of constant war, and with the WIC virtually bankrupt, Johan Maurits returned to the Netherlands in 1644 and the Dutch ceded their territory back to the Portuguese. The fruits of this violent chapter are well known to art historians and to historians of science: Governor-General Maurits was accompanied in Brazil by the painters Albert Eckhout and Frans Post and the naturalists Georg Marggraf and Willem Piso. The drawings, paintings, and publications that ensued are critical documents of early modern Dutch colonializing ventures, as well as the subject of a vast and exciting bibliography.²⁸ Extending my account of the value of rarities in the Netherlands to include the Atlantic world would cause this book to balloon to unwieldy dimensions. Moreover, my focus is on the formation of the Dutch Republic, a period when trade in the East and with the Islamic world was central and more institutionalized than trade in the West Indies.



11. Spice cellar with the coat of arms of Prince Maurits in the form of a ship, c. 1600. Silver, 17.6 (h) × 24 cm (l) × 319 gr. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, BK-NM-4313.

Dutch mercantile and political institutions were codependent, and their interrelationship fostered and shaped the production and exchange of objects, wares, and works of art (figure 11).²⁹ Especially after the establishment of the VOC, the Dutch entered into official diplomatic and trade relations with Protestant and Islamic powers and other potential allies in their struggle against Catholic Spain and Portugal. In most cases the negotiations bore as much on trade as on political recognition, and in just as many cases these encounters involved the exchange of diplomatic gifts. Negotiations with England and France shifted according to their respective alliances with the Iberian powers; in addition, the Dutch engaged in diplomatic relations with the ruler of Aceh on the island of Sumatra; the sultanates of the Strait of Malacca, Kandy (Sri Lanka), and Siam (Thailand); the Tokugawa regime in Japan; and Moroccan, Ottoman, Mughal, and Safavid rulers and their representatives. Emissaries and missions traveled to and from Southeast and East Asia and to and from the Levant and North Africa bearing missives and gifts, the majority of which were intended to promote access to centers of power in the interest of trade. Writing in the first decade of the seventeenth century, the legal scholar and jurist Hugo Grotius celebrated Dutch engagement in the East Indies: “who among our chief officials has not been implored by the East Indians to lend succor and assistance against the Portuguese?” Merchant-voyagers were not loath to engage in hostilities with locals, but numerous instances of exchange structured early Dutch trade relations in the

East. Indeed, visits to the Netherlands by foreign embassies were apparently so regular as to seem normal and local; Grotius wrote that they had become “so ordinary among the Dutch that wonder has ceased with the cessation of novelty.”³⁰

The emergence of the Dutch state as a global trading power resulted from military engagement and, simultaneously, its diplomatic and mercantile efforts. On his second



12. Elephant parade hosted by Queen Ratu Hijau of Pattani to celebrate the establishment of the Dutch trading post at Pattani, Roelof Roelofs, *Kort ende waerachtigh verhael van de tweede Schipvaerd*, in Commelin, *Begin ende voortgangh*, vol. 2, 1646. Engraving, 13.3 × 16.8 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, RP-P-OB-75.416.

and final voyage to the East Indies, Cornelis de Houtman managed so to offend the Acehnese that a battle broke out with the Acehnese navy, led by the great female admiral, Keumalahayati (Malahayati) who killed the Dutch commander. Subsequent efforts on the part of Dutch merchants to appease the Acehnese sultan preceded a diplomatic mission of his representatives to the Netherlands. A letter patent from Prince Maurits composed in Arabic by the Leiden professor and Arabic scholar Josephus Justus Scaliger was provided to Jacob van Neck, who managed thereby to secure a trading post at Pattani (on the Malay peninsula, now in Thailand). Queen Ratu Hijau (ruled 1584–1616) marked the agreement by organizing a celebratory parade of elephants (figure 12).³¹ Charged interactions with foreign powers were the norm in the early decades of the

republic in formation and served to shape it. The Ottoman sultan Ahmed I (ruled 1603–1617) granted capitulations to the Dutch in 1612, enabling them to trade freely in Ottoman ports and territories, in return for which the States General sent to Constantinople an entire ship laden with gifts.³²

Safavid-Ottoman relations and the alliance of Catholic powers with the Persian Shah ‘Abbas (ruled 1588–1629) played a crucial role in conditioning European-Persian relations. In 1611, the wily ambassador of Shah ‘Abbas to the Christian courts of Europe, Robert Sherley, tried to engage the Dutch but was rebuffed at The Hague, the seat of the federal government, on account of his suspected Spanish allegiances, and in 1626 a mission headed by Musa Beg was disastrous.³³ In the East Indies, the Dutch initially served as pawns in a struggle between native powers and the Portuguese. After the establishment of VOC outposts in the Indonesian archipelago, the Dutch held their own and exercised an often brutal hold on local populations. The two-term governor-general of the VOC, Jan Pietersz Coen, founded Batavia, the largest outpost and headquarters of the Dutch East Indies, in 1619. Engineered by Coen, the slaughter of upwards of fifteen thousand inhabitants of Banda Island in 1621 is the best-known atrocity committed in ruthless



13. Boëtius Adamsz Bolswert, *Byrsa Amsterodamensis*, 1609. Engraving and etching, 43.2 × 60.5 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, RP-P-OB-67.487.
For general queries contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu.



pursuit of trade.³⁴ The facts of slavery and oppression excepted, the adventures and proceeds of such far-flung encounters were conveyed to Dutch and European audiences by way of published travelogues and wares and eagerly consumed by a newly formed clientele of travelers, investors, scholars, and the curious.

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 (the Exchange building) itself, designed by the 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. Early images of the Exchange show a bustling mass of men in the interior courtyard, where trade was conducted. A standard feature of these and later images is the depiction of men in turbans and long robes, anonymous agents of trade with the East, who mingle with European merchants; one early print even shows a man holding a parrot and another an ape (see figure 13). The Amsterdam headquarters of the East and West India Companies, the Oost-Indisch Huis (East India House) and the West-Indisch Huis (West India House), were hubs of commerce and sites of display for all manner of foreign goods. Featherwork from the West Indies, shells from West and East, and paintings of and from foreign sites were exhibited throughout the century.

From the early seventeenth century, Dutch and foreign authors alike celebrated Amsterdam as a hub of commerce in foreign or exotic goods. René Descartes, who lived in Amsterdam during the third and fourth decades of the seventeenth century, wrote to his friend the essayist Jean-Louis Guez de Balzac of the pleasure "of seeing the arrival of the ships here, that bring to us abundantly all the produce of the Indies and everything rare in Europe." What other place on earth, Descartes wondered in the same letter, "could one choose where all the commodities of life and all the curiosities one could wish for were as easy to find as in this city?"³⁵ By way of practices institutionalized by the Dutch East India Company and, in 1621, the West India Company, and at and around the Amsterdam Exchange, seventeenth-century Holland abounded in foreign goods, many of them the object of politically charged exchange and trade.³⁶

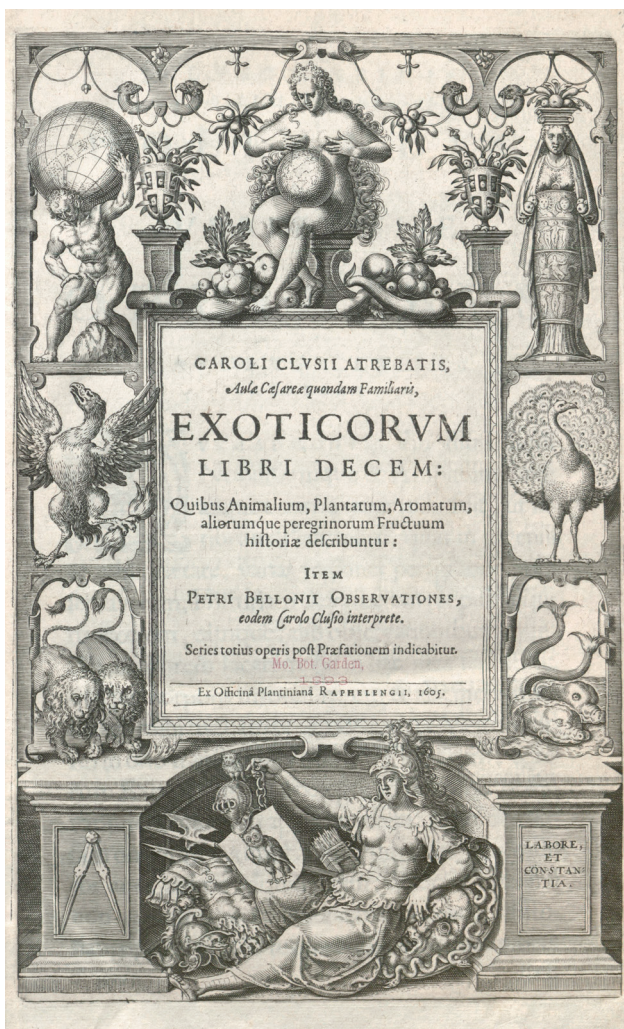
Throughout the sixteenth century, Antwerp was the principal northern European entrepôt for luxury goods traded by the Portuguese abroad—or, as the city fathers put it in 1577, "not only the first and principal commercial city of all Europe, but also the source, origin, and storehouse of all goods, riches and merchandise, and a refuge and nurse of all arts, sciences, nations, and virtues."³⁷ The revolt of the northern provinces took a toll on Spanish power (at the time the Spanish Crown controlled Portugal), and by the first decade of the seventeenth century the emigration of non-Catholics from the southern provinces and the rise of the Dutch as global merchants had placed the United Provinces and Amsterdam firmly on the global map. Nevertheless, Antwerp maintained its fame and appeal as a center of world trade and worldly knowledge. The sheer abundance of market goods and luxury wares depicted by the Flemish artists Jan Brueghel the Elder, Peter Paul Rubens, and Frans Snyders, for instance, speaks amply to the availability

of commodities, also evident in the paintings of collections born of that time and place, such as those by Frans Francken and, later, Jan van Kessel. The Flemish world is the subject of deeply inspiring ongoing research.³⁸ Continuities certainly pertain between the southern Netherlandish and northern Netherlandish appreciation for the exotic: the court of the Archdukes Albrecht VII of Austria (governed 1598–1621) and Isabella Clara Eugenia, regents of the southern Netherlands, and the court of the Stadholder Frederik Hendrik of Orange (in office 1625–1647) and Amalia van Solms in The Hague participated eagerly in the collection and exhibition of rarities, as did many citizens of the respective territories.

The accumulation of worldly goods was not the sole province of the United Provinces; what distinguishes the Dutch Republic, this book asserts, is the politics of the foreign encounters and exchanges at the time of its formation. It was through negotiations with foreign powers and through violence against natives and at sea that Dutch officials abroad and those at home who supported their endeavors secured trade goods and, simultaneously, a place on the world stage.³⁹ Trade enabled by circumnavigation of the globe fed the establishment of Amsterdam as global entrepôt and directly nourished the taste for worldly wares. What is noteworthy is how early in the century the Dutch declared their investment in the sorts of foreign luxury goods they called rarities. While the association of value with the rare, the hard-to-come-by, or the unique is a historical and aesthetic constant, the Dutch made a great deal of their possession and ownership of rarities, which figured in and structured diplomatic exchange, legal theory, and personal practices such as collecting in the early years of the formation of the republic.

A central tenet of this book is that Dutch identity depended on and was structured around encounters with foreign states, belief systems, languages, and wares: the Dutch Republic came into being as a result of and in response to negotiations with foreign powers and exchanges of foreign goods. What made things foreign or exotic? The Greek and Latin terms denote simply “foreignness.” The same holds for early modern Dutch vernacular terms *vreemd* (strange, foreign), *uytheemsch*, and *uwlandsche* (outlandish). The exotic was also signaled in Dutch by the nouns *sonderlingheden* (exceptional or unusual things), *rarityt/-en* (rarity/-ies), and *frayicheden* (fineries) and described as *fray* (appealing, curious).

Fascination with exotic wares was widespread in the Netherlands, and the traces of it are legion. The sheer profusion of outlandish objects and artifacts recorded in pictures, inventories, ships’ registers, literature, and natural history speaks to an abiding interest among the Dutch. In addition to foreign artifacts that made their way into private collections, plant and animal specimens newly available from afar were avidly collected and studied by natural historians and medical professionals. In 1602, in a letter to surgeons and pharmacists traveling with the VOC, Carolus Clusius, a naturalist and the director of the Leiden University garden, distributed guidelines for the collection of goods to be brought back for study and, potentially, medicinal use. Nutmeg, black pepper, white

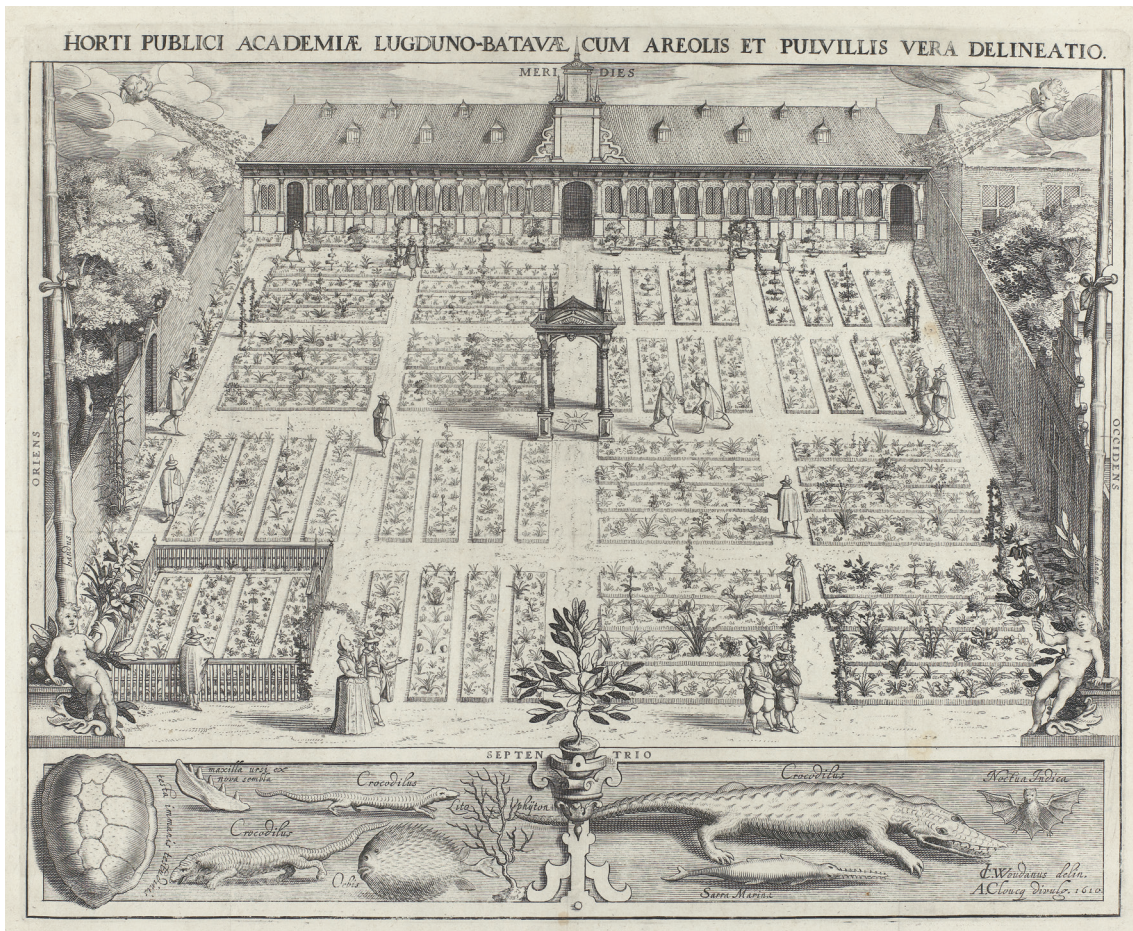


14. Title page, Carolus Clusius, *Exoticorum libri decem*, Leiden: Raphelengius, 1605. Woodcut. Peter H. Raven Library, Missouri Botanical Garden.

pepper, and cotton were among the varieties specifically requested, items that were also the most marketable items brought back from the East Indies.⁴⁰ The impact of commerce on Dutch medicine and natural history and the ways in which travel and trade shifted technological and epistemological practices have been investigated by historians of science over the past decades, and it is impossible to overestimate Clusius's role in these developments during a period when the pursuit of trade was advancing in affiliation with the commodification of knowledge.⁴¹ The publication in 1605 of Clusius's *Exoticorum libri decem* (Ten books of exotics), was a scholarly monument to the impact of mercantile discovery on natural historical investigation. Its contents and the network of correspondents, colleagues, and objects in circulation it captures attest amply to the forms of attention the exotic inspired and sustained in the early years of the Dutch Republic (figure 14).

The public display of exotica in the northern Netherlands was not uncommon. Enabled by the vectors of trade and by contacts and correspondents, Clusius accumulated several hundred tulip bulbs and planted them in the Leiden University garden, in addition to numerous other exotic plants.⁴² Constructed for the education of medical students and the cultivation of specimens for academic consultation, the garden also attracted visitors from

near and far. In 1599, an *ambulacrum* (gallery) was constructed at the northern edge of the garden. To compound the spectacle of the garden itself, maps, globes, and natural specimens were exhibited in the *ambulacrum*. Early inventories record crocodiles, tortoise shells, stuffed penguins, a dried blowfish, prepared birds of paradise, and curious animal parts, including the foot of a cassowary and a walrus penis. Some of these curiosities appear in the lower register of a print that served as a souvenir for visitors (figure 15).⁴³ Nearby, in the university library—another arena for study at the newly founded university that also attracted visitors—a panoramic image of the city of Constantinople by the artist Melchior Lorck consisting of twenty-one pen-and-ink drawings that



15. Willem Swanenburg after Jan Cornelisz Woudanus, *Leiden University Hortus*, with *ambulacrum* at rear and specimens in the collections of the university depicted in lower register, 1610. Engraving, 32.8 × 40.4 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, RP-P-1893-A-18089.

together spanned over 11 meters (figure 16) was prominently displayed.⁴⁴ This massive record of the heart of the Ottoman world was drawn during Lorck's stay in Constantinople in 1555–1559 with the embassy of Archduke Ferdinand I, led by Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, and was donated to the Leiden library in 1598; it is still in the collection there, though no longer on public view. A print of the library issued in 1610 to accompany the souvenir of the garden depicts two men at the far left in the foreground who stand over an unsheathed globe, within easy reach of Lorck's extraordinary prospect, embodying the formulation of geographic knowledge of the world beyond the confines of the United Provinces (figure 17). The Habsburg artist's vista of the faraway Islamic imperial city loomed large in this new space of Protestant study. (The positioning of the men poring over the globe in such close proximity to the monumental drawing in the library implies the triangulation of information for which the Dutch Republic would gain renown later



16. Detail of Melchior Lorck, *Prospect of Constantinople*, showing the artist drawing the prospect with an assistant in a turban holding an inkwell, signed and dated 1559. Sheet 11 of 21. Pen and ink and watercolor on paper, 42.5 × 1127.5 cm in total. Leiden University Libraries (BPL 1758/11).

in the century, when it emerged as the capital of the cartographic world and the preeminent source of exotic geography.⁴⁵) At the far right in the foreground of the image of the library stands a cabinet that housed the collection of Oriental books and manuscripts that Josephus Justus Scaliger bequeathed to the university on his death in 1609.⁴⁶ The Arca Scaligerana (Scaliger's Cupboard) was purpose-built to store this valued collection. Already in the early years of the republic, Dutch encounters with foreign goods, specimens, knowledge, and sites were integral to the formation of scholars and citizens.

Rariteyten (rarities) is a specific category of exotic goods representative of what the Dutch sought out, favored in trade, and made their own in the formative years of the Dutch Republic. Most rarities came from abroad and were obtained in the course of trade and political negotiations with the Islamic world. In trade, collecting, and art, *rariteyten* were especially valued. *Rariteyten* such as silks and jewels and shells and pearls, lacquerware and ivory goods, porcelain, and both live and stuffed birds turn up in inventories, narrative accounts, logbooks, and other documents of the era, as well as in pictures. Rarities were favored elsewhere in Europe, to be sure; the category was in widespread, if imprecise, use. Sir Thomas Roe, ambassador of King James I of England (ruled 1603–1625) to the Mughal Emperor Jahangir (ruled 1605–1627) between 1615



18



19



20

18. Cassowary, salamander, and other animals of Java, with a fleet in the background, first published in Lodewycksz, *D'eerste boeck: Historie van Indien*, 1598; reprinted in Commelin, *Begin ende voortgangh*, 1646. Etching and engraving, 14.5 × 22 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, RP-P-OB-80.262.

19. Cassowary, in Clusius, *Exoticorum libri decem*, 1605. Woodcut. Peter H. Raven Library, Missouri Botanical Garden.

20. Attributed to Crispijn van den Queborn, *Cassowary Brought from the East Indies by Willem Jacobsz and Presented to Prince Maurits*, 1614–1615. Etching and engraving, 30.7 × 20.6 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, RP-P-OB-79.498.



21. Daniel Schilperoort, shell vessel, 1607. Mounted turbo shell, gilded silver, 19 cm (h). Kunstmuseum Den Haag. Acquired with the support of the Rembrandt Association, the Mondriaan Fund, and the Friends of Kunstmuseum Den Haag, obj. no. 1009592.

strange fowle, and was brought aliue to Amsterdam, which after was giuen to the states of Hollande lying in the Hage, and some good fruites, willing vs to sende a man on shore, to see their spices, whereof they said they had great store.⁵⁰ The Dutch text is amply illustrated with more than fifty engravings, one of which shows the bird in question in two views, in the company of several other wondrous animals of the region (figure 18). Indeed, contemporaneous accounts record a cassowary having been exhibited in Amsterdam for several months as a wonder.⁵¹ Clusius published the first illustrated account of a cassowary in his *Exoticorum* (figure 19). From Clusius we learn that the bird made its way from The Hague to the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II (ruled 1576–1612) in Prague, but not before a colored image was made of it from the life, on which Clusius's woodcut was based.⁵² Several engravings also record a cassowary that belonged to the stadholder Maurits, who kept it (and an emu) in his menagerie in The Hague (figure 20).⁵³ The cassowary is at one and the same time a precious gift from ruler to ruler, exchanged in the context of overseas trade; a scientific specimen, observed and recorded by the keenest students of the natural world of the time; a wonder exhibited for a fee in Amsterdam; and

a rarity worthy of collection by nobility. While its supposed ability to ingest hot coals or ice or whole apples was fascinating, its digestive capacities were far from the sole source of interest in the exotic bird. Its novelty and the close association of trade and gift exchange made the cassowary an exemplary item among Dutch *rarityten van dese landen*—the valuable foreign goods they made their own.⁵⁴ The exchange of such goods in the formative years of the new Dutch nation made it a republic of rarities.

By trade, exchange, possession, and art, foreign goods were converted to local wares and, broadly speaking, an aesthetic pertained, a taste for the exotic.⁵⁵ Shells from far-flung shores were avidly collected and often, once imported, set in elaborate, precious metalwork settings by local artisans (figure 21).⁵⁶ The merchant Jan Govertsz van der Aar had his love for shells recorded in an iconic portrait by Hendrick Goltzius



22. Hendrick Goltzius, *Portrait of the Merchant and Shell-Collector Jan Govertsz van der Aar*, c. 1603. Oil on canvas, 107.5 × 82.7 cm. Museum Boijmans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam, obj. no. 3450 (OK). Loan: P. & N. de Boer Foundation, 1960.

(1588–1617) (figure 22).⁵⁷ In his left hand van der Aar holds an exotic *Turbo marmoratus* (green turban shell) nearly as large as his head; the coloring and forms of the nacreous mouth of the shell and its volutes are polished to a silvery opalescent sheen. Several other precious shells, most of them from the Indo-Pacific region, are arranged on the tabletop before him. Van der Aar was passionate about unusual and curious things, including flowers and art and weapons; he was what the Dutch called a *liefhebber* (amateur).⁵⁸ In a 1597 letter to Clusius, from whom he hoped to obtain *iet frays* (something beautiful), van der Aar mentioned his own *fraeyicheyden* (appealing things) and his interest in “various handmade items, various weaponry, maritime things.” His declaration of emotional investment in these items is noteworthy: “I desire things that are rare and appealing and I covet colorful flowers; the rarer they are, the more covetous I am.”⁵⁹ Still life paintings featuring shells and exogenous flowers speak directly to and for the sort of economic and affective investment in rarities that van der Aar embodies (figure 23).⁶⁰

The tulip, native to Central Asia, is surely the most famous instance of an exotic object the Dutch made their own. Tulips are not Dutch but flowers that became, from the Dutch perspective, “rarities of these lands.” Variegated, striated, “flamed” red and white tulips are a set piece of Dutch flower still life paintings, and keen market interest in tulip bulbs is part and parcel of Dutch economic and social and cultural history.⁶¹ Clusius’s *Exoticorum* contains an extensive description of various sorts of tulips, and he cultivated them in the Leiden University garden he directed. Interest soon took hold more broadly, thanks in part to the emergence of a new class of tulip merchants, from specialized Turkish bulb merchants, whose wares were imported by Dutch merchants who purchased them in Constantinople, to the new class of grower-merchants arising around the city of Haarlem; tulips cultivated in the sandy soil of Haarlem reached the gardens of individual *liefhebbers* in substantial numbers in the opening decades of the century. Admiration for the vividly colored, protean flower supported the emergence of a genre of painting devoted to it and other specimens. Flower still life paintings, a great number of which were painted in Middelburg—the capital of the province of Zeeland and the seat of one of the six chambers of the Dutch East India Company—commemorated and helped to stimulate the passion for tulips and other foreign flower varieties. Theirs is a mute language of appreciation for these *rarityeyten*.

In 1611, the poet Philibert van Borssele published *Het Strande* (The beach), an encyclopedic verse poem about shells dedicated to his brother-in-law Cornelis van Blyenburch, a shell collector. The extended title of the poem calls shells “wonders” and describes van Blyenburch as “worthy of all curiosities and an exceptional lover of all such rarities.” The conceit of the artistry of nature animates the book-length poem.⁶² “No tulip I have ever seen compares with these [shells], however curious [*vremd*] it may be,” van Borssele writes. Describing their extraordinary coloring, he concludes that tulips have nothing on the wonder of shells.⁶³ Tulips, shells, turned ivory, paintings, and porcelain were avidly collected and widely praised, often in continuous terms. As Anne Goldgar’s study of tulipmania has taught us, praise for and interest in such curious items were



23. Ambrosius Bosschaert the Elder, *Vase of Flowers in a Window*, c. 1618. Oil on panel, 64 × 46 cm. Mauritshuis, The Hague.

24. (Opposite) Christoffel van den Berghe, *Still Life with Flowers in a Vase*, 1617. Oil on copper, 37.6 × 29.5 cm. Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art. John G. Johnson Collection, 1917.



often harnessed to both market and cultural values. Estimations of worth and value were, especially in the early decades of the century, integral to a society coming into its own.⁶⁴

Porcelain and shells were combined as regularly in still life paintings as they coexisted in inventories or other records of collections; both sorts of exotica were acquired through substantial expense and effort and were highly valued. The Middelburg painter Christoffel van den Berghe painted a *Flower Still Life* that depicts a vase filled to overflowing with exotic and domestic flowers poised between delicate porcelain cups on one side and exotic shells on the other (figure 24). The cups, which nestle against one another in a manner that echoes the placement of the shells, underlining the associations between



25. Remains of the VOC ship the *Witte Leeuw*, shipwrecked in 1613 off Saint Helena; excavated 1976. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

25a. Shards of bowls and lids, before 1613. Porcelain from Jingdezhen, China. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, NG-1978-127-11084-W.

25b. Wan-li rice wine cup, before 1613. Porcelain from Jingdezhen, China, 4.9 cm (h). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, NG-1977-128-W.

their consistency and formal qualities, exactly resemble cups that have been recovered from the wreck of the Dutch ship the *Witte Leeuw* (figures 25a–d). (A VOC ship, the *Witte Leeuw* sank during a battle with Portuguese carracks at Saint Helena, en route from Bantam to Amsterdam in 1613; hundreds of pieces of porcelain and many shells that were not registered officially would later be discovered in its wreckage.)⁶⁵ The composition is a fictional construct, most conspicuously in bringing together flowers that do not blossom contemporaneously, but it is built of elements that numbered among the exotic goods transported, cultivated, and collected in actual contemporaneous practices. Indeed, in among the recovered items from the wreck of the *Witte Leeuw* were a number of shells, at least one of which is precisely the sort, the *Conus generalis*, depicted by van den Berghe.⁶⁶ Remarkably, the official bill of lading for the *Witte Leeuw* lists neither shells nor porcelain: the specimens van den Berghe painted were transported at high risk and as contraband. In addition to being appreciated for their formal qualities, these exotic commodities commanded high prices.

Still life paintings such as van den Berghe's aside, from the perspective of its artistic legacy, the exoticism of seventeenth-century Dutch visual culture is not self-evident. Where it is not understood as a visual technology or scopic regime, Dutch art tends to be seen as a hermetic reflection of Dutch culture unto itself.⁶⁷ Early modern Dutch art continues to be studied and celebrated for the image of seventeenth-century Dutch life it offers.⁶⁸ Consider the vast quantities of prints, drawings, and paintings that celebrate the



25c. Fossilized pepper and porcelain cup, before 1613. Iron and porcelain from Jingdezhen, China, 4.9 cm (height of cup). Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, NG-1977-118-W.

25d. *Conus generalis* shell. 4.8 × 2.0 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, NG-1977-224-W.

places and landscapes and individuals and belongings and seagoing vessels and customs as well as the costumes of the young republic in formation. 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 colonization in the Baltic, the Americas, Africa, the Levant, South Asia, and the East Indies. By the end of the seventeenth century, the Netherlands were suffused with what the historian Benjamin Schmidt has called a “new exoticism”: “a new conception of the exotic world and a new conceit of Europe,” disseminated by the Dutch through publications of “exotic geography.”⁶⁹ The facts of global Dutch trade—that Amsterdam superseded Antwerp in the opening decades of the seventeenth century as the European hub of global trade, that the seagoing vessels conveyed the trade, and that the goods celebrated in still life paintings were the fruits of that same trade—are well known and often cited to account for the personal wealth that enabled so many Dutch individuals to invest in luxury goods such as pictures. Recent art historical and cultural historical studies have explored the cultural traction of foreign wares in Europe generally and the Netherlands in particular and greatly expanded our understanding of the relationship between Dutch global trade and Dutch visual culture.⁷⁰ Building on this literature, I have aimed to offer a new account that is structured around the role of the exotic, and that illustrates how Dutch foreign affairs and financial, aesthetic, political, and artistic investment in luxury foreign wares—*rarities*—in the first half of the seventeenth century shaped the new republic.