

Birds of paradise for the sultan

Early seventeenth-century Dutch–Turkish encounters and the uses of wonder

CLAUDIA SWAN

Claudia Swan is Associate Professor of Art History at Northwestern University in Evanston, IL (US).

c-swan@northwestern.edu

Abstract

This article describes and analyzes the first diplomatic gift presented by the States General of the Netherlands to the Ottoman Sultan Ahmet I in 1612/1613. The extensive and very costly assortment of items was presented to the Sultan in gratitude for capitulations, permitting the Dutch access to Ottoman ports and therefore direct access to trade in the Levant and Mediterranean. This paper describes the diplomatic gift, a long-neglected episode in Dutch material cultural history, and looks in particular at the role that wonder and wonders played in structuring this remarkable encounter between the fledgling Dutch Republic and the Ottoman court.

Keywords: Cornelis Haga, Dutch–Turkish relations, Ottoman court, Ahmed I, diplomatic gift, gifts, wonder, Hendrick de Keyser, Willem Kick

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Introduction

In the first decade of the seventeenth century, well in advance of the official establishment of the Dutch Republic in 1648, the States General of the Netherlands and the Stadholder Prince Maurits engaged in diplomatic relations with a variety of rulers outside Europe, including the Kings of Siam and Morocco, the Japanese Shogun, and the Ottoman Sultan.¹ The convergence of political interests was variably motivated by Dutch-Spanish conflict (Morocco, Turkey, and the Netherlands shared a common enemy), trade interests (throughout Siam, Japan, North Africa, the Levant), and/or a combination of the two. The celebration in 2012 of 400 years of Dutch-Turkish relations commemorated the successful negotiations between the first Dutch ambassador to the Porte Sublime in Constantinople, Cornelis Haga (1578–1654), and Khalil Pasha, Admiral of the Ottoman navy and insider at the court, on behalf of the States General and Sultan Ahmed I (1590–1617, r. 1603–1617).² In July 1612 the Netherlands received beneficial concessions in the form of capitulations (*ahidnames*), permitting Dutch merchants to trade openly in and via Ottoman ports.³ In subsequent years, the Dutch established consular posts in such vital ports as Thessaloniki, Athens, Gallipoli, Izmir, Aleppo, Sidon, Tunis, and Algiers. Like the encounters with other foreign potentates,

1 See *inter alia* K. Zandvliet (ed.), *Maurits, Prins van Oranje*, Amsterdam, Zwolle 2000, p. 337–381.

2 See K. Heeringa, *De Eerste Nederlandsche Gezant bij de Verheven Porte*, Utrecht 1917; I. van der Vlis and H. van der Sloot, *Pionier & Diplomaat in Constantinopel*, Amsterdam 2012. Haga, a Dutch lawyer who cut his diplomatic teeth in Sweden in the first decade of the century, was the States General's response to the encouragements made principally by the Admiral of the Ottoman navy Khalil Pasha to send an ambassador. Conditions, Khalil Pasha believed, were ideally suited to the establishment of a Turkish-Moroccan-Dutch alliance against their mutual enemy Spain.

3 See B. Ari, *The First Dutch Ambassador in Istanbul. Cornelis Haga and the Dutch Capitulations of 1612*, PhD dissertation, Bilkent University, Turkey 2003. On trade capitulations in general, see A. H. de Groot, 'The Historical Development of the Capitulatory Regime in the Ottoman Middle East from the Fifteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries', in: *Oriente Moderno* 83.3 (2003), p. 575–604. See also M. Bulut, *Ottoman-Dutch Economic Relations in the Early Modern Period 1571–1699*, Hilversum 2001.

which involved the exchange of valuable goods as gifts – brought by the Moroccan embassy to the Hague in 1605, sent by the Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu to Maurits in 1609, and exchanged with the Siamese king in 1608 and 1609 – so too negotiations with the Ottoman Sultan entailed presentations, made by the Dutch to the court in Constantinople. The diplomatic gift presented on behalf of the States General of the Netherlands to Sultan Ahmed I in 1613 is the subject of this article.

In May 1613, Cornelis Haga oversaw the ceremonial presentation of a vast array – a shipload – of goods to Sultan Ahmed I on behalf of the States General of the Netherlands. The year between Haga's arrival in Constantinople and the audience granted by Sultan Ahmed I in May 1613 was punctuated by encounters between Haga, agents of the Sultan, and the Sultan himself, and smaller material gestures. The history of early diplomatic encounters between the Ottoman Sultan and the Netherlands has been carefully studied. Ottoman historian Alexander de Groot's groundbreaking study *The Ottoman Empire and the Dutch Republic* offers a thorough account of the initial chapters of Dutch-Turkish contact, recently amplified by Bülent Ari's dissertation on the 1612 negotiations.⁴ Concerning the 1613 gift, in 1883 archivist Nicolas de Roever published an account of its contents in the initial volume of the journal *Oud-Holland*: 'Een vorstelijk geschenk' contains a wealth of documentary information, distilled from primary sources.⁵ De Roever describes the gift as a compelling instance in the history of the decorative arts and of trade, two crucial areas of Dutch achievement. Recently, historian of Islamic art Hans Theunissen has investigated the gifts presented to Sultan Ahmed I in the context of the ongoing negotiations, offering crucial insight into the terms according to which they were received at the Ottoman court.⁶ Over the course of time, more attention has been paid to the diplomatic relations that motivated the presentation than to the gift itself; and the specialization within the fields of (diplomatic) history, art history, and history of the decorative arts has blunted the impact of de Roever's study, which roves across such fields. Numerous considerations beyond the recent quadricentennial celebrations support extended study and analysis of the shipload of goods that Haga presented to the Sultan in May 1613. The goods, foods, and riches that were transported to the Ottoman court represent the reach of Dutch trade in the early seventeenth century; embody the finest Dutch craftsmanship available in Amsterdam, Haarlem, and elsewhere in the country; and speak to the role of material culture in political and transcultural self-representation, in this case of the fledgling Dutch Republic vis-à-vis 'the Turk'.

4 A.H. de Groot, *The Ottoman Empire and the Dutch Republic. A History of the Earliest Diplomatic Relations, 1610-1630*, Istanbul 1978; 2nd ed. Leiden 2012; see also Ari, *The First Dutch Ambassador in Istanbul*.

5 N. de Roever, 'Een vorstelijk geschenk. Een blik op de vaderlandsche nijverheid in den aanvang der zeventiende eeuw', in: *Oud Holland* 1 (1883), p. 169-188.

6 H. Theunissen (ed.), *Topkapi & Turkomanie. Turks-Nederlandse ontmoetingen sinds 1600*, Amsterdam 1989; H. Theunissen, 'De lange reis van China naar Istanbul. Chinees porselein uit Amsterdam op de dis van de sultan', in: *Keramika* 20. 2 (2008), p. 20-27.

As an episode in the history of Dutch material culture, this gift is exemplary of transcultural exchange; the proximate relationship between trade and diplomacy and gifts; and the status of the exotic in the early modern Netherlands and beyond. This paper describes the gift, a long-neglected episode in Dutch material cultural history, and looks in particular at the role that wonder and wonders played in structuring this remarkable encounter between the fledgling Dutch Republic and the Ottoman court. The contents of the cargo ship the *Zwarte Beer* approximate in many regards the contents of early modern collections of wonders, *Wunderkammern* or cabinets of curiosities; early Dutch accounts of the receipt of the gift emphasize the wondrous nature of the objects presented and specify even that the Sultan regarded such exotica with great admiration, or wonder. The gift comprised woven, painted, printed, lacquered, and mounted things; worked and traced and carved and bound things; lavishly crafted and otherwise wondrous things, some of them natural, some of them edible, some scientific, all of them expensive, many locally produced, by artisans in Amsterdam and Haarlem, by noblewomen in Gelderland, by painters and booksellers and harness-makers in The Hague; and many things too from the east, obtained along the trade routes that by 1612 had for a decade already been effectively controlled by the Dutch by means of the Dutch East India Company, established in 1602. All of these and other sorts of things were made, sold, stolen, exchanged, collected, represented in paintings and drawings by and for citizens of the fledgling Republic. The state gift Haga presented in 1613 is but one example among many, of the uses of material culture by the Dutch in the world.

The remains of the gift

In March 1612 Cornelis Haga arrived in Constantinople with a limited retinue and a complex brief from the States General. There, in the early years of the Dutch Twelve Years' Truce with Spain, he rapidly secured the favor of trade capitulations for the Dutch – that is, permission from the Sultan to trade legally and without penalty in Ottoman territories. In addition, he initiated negotiations on behalf of Dutch prisoners in North Africa.⁷ Haga was granted an initial audience with the young Sultan Ahmet at Topkapi Palace on May 1, 1612, on the occasion of his arrival. This elaborate ceremonial occasion is described at length in a Dutch pamphlet printed the same year, which declares rather triumphantly that ‘all Turks were very pleased by the friendship and alliance secured between the Sultan and our lands’.⁸ An alliance is declared, a friendship that in turn will unlock valuable trade routes, and one that guarantees freedoms that, as per the pamphlet, are ‘the best and most secure’, never before granted anyone else, and

⁷ See de Groot, *The Ottoman Empire and the Dutch Republic*.

⁸ *Wærechtich verhael, Belanghende de aenkomste tot Constantinoplen/van den Ambassadeur der Edele Moghende Heeren Staten Generael van de Vereenighde Nederlanden ...*, [Alkmaar] 1612, fol. 5r. The pamphlet also appeared in English, one year later: *A True Declaration of the arrival of Cornelius Haga; (with others that accompanied him) Ambassadour for the generall States of the united Netherlands, at the great Citie of Constantinople*, London 1613.

that ‘far exceed those enjoyed by the French, the English, and the Venetians’.⁹ A year later, in the spring of 1613, the Dutch gift arrived. This shipload of objects conveyed gratitude to a ‘friend’ and ally, while the presentation of a lavish gift also complied with the expectations of the Ottoman court. The major negotiations had been completed, and the Dutch were on their way to establishing factors and consuls in the Levant and the Mediterranean, from Aleppo to Tunis.

An official inventory of the Dutch gift, *Inventaris van de goederen ende presenten, die van wege H.H.M. sijn gesonden naer Constantipolen, om te presentieren aen den grooten heer ende de Bassas, Anno 1612*, is preserved in the National Archive in The Hague. This list describes the objects presented to Sultan Ahmed and his court as ‘goederen ende presenten’ and ‘goederen ende fraeyicheden’; in other related state documents they are referred to as ‘*rarieteyten van dese landen*’.¹⁰ Ninety-three crates or chests containing a vast array of Dutch and foreign goods were transported aboard the vessel the *Zwarte Beer*, whose captain Dirck Pieterszn Proost set sail from Enkhuizen in November 1612 and reached Constantinople in May 1613. The cargo included textiles, furniture, pewter work, prints, maps, atlases, butter, cheese, meat, gin, tulip bulbs, telescopes, lacquerware, ivory lathework, embroidered gloves, porcelain, and other ‘*rarieteyten*’.¹¹ That the Dutch presented indigenous, local goods – textiles, furniture, atlases, butter, cheese – stands to reason, in particular in the context of establishing trade relations with the Ottomans. Presenting such exotica as Chinese lacquerware and porcelain may have been intended as a demonstration or guarantee of the might of the Northern Netherlands in global trade. The spectacular nature of many of the individual items and the extent of the gift, on which the States General spent roughly 25,000 guilders, attest to awareness of the splendor of Ottoman ritual and in Ottoman gift exchange of the time.¹²

In addition to the inventory drawn up by the States General, other records of the gift include itemized receipts for the objects and published accounts of the Dutch–Turkish encounter. The early historian of the Republic Willem Baudartius included in his 1620 chronicle a list of some of ‘the presents with which Haga honored the

9 Ibidem.

10 Nationaal Archief, The Hague, Staten-Generaal, 1.01.02, inv.nr. 12593.9, Secrete kas Turkije: ‘Stukken betreffende de afrekeningen terzake van de geschenken vanwege de Staten-Generaal in 1612 naar Turkije gezonden’. Also published in K. Heeringa and J.G. Nanninga, *Bronnen tot de geschiedenis van den Levantschen handel 1590–1826*, 4 vols, The Hague 1910, vol. 1, p. 266–274.

11 See Heeringa and Nanninga, *Bronnen tot de geschiedenis van den Levantschen handel 1590–1826*, p. 273–274. The butter and cheese accounted for a significant number of cases: 7 ‘*quarteelen*’ contained 3138 pounds of Edammer cheese in 406 pieces and nos. 42–84 in the list of 93 cases contained butter. On early accounts of Dutch telescopes, see H. Zuidervaart, ‘The “invisible technician” made visible. Telescope making in the seventeenth and early eighteenth-century Dutch Republic’, in: A.D. Morrison-Low, S. Dupré, S. Johnston and G. Strano (eds), *From Earth-Bound to Satellite. Telescopes, Skills and Networks*, Leiden, Boston 2012, p. 41–102. Dr. Zuidervaart suggests that the mention of ‘3 *Brillen om verre te sien*’ in the list of goods purchased and presented in 1612/1613 is among the earliest Dutch records of telescopes.

12 See, for example, descriptions in Haga’s ‘Memoriael’ of 1612 of the funeral of one of the Sultan’s daughters; also Heeringa and Nanninga, *Bronnen tot de geschiedenis van den Levantschen handel 1590–1826*, p. 254.

Turkish Emperor'. The objects listed by Baudartius include: 'A long ivory staff, artfully carved, decorated with flowers'; 'a large wooden lantern very artfully carved, which alone cost over 500 guilders ... it was gilded with ducat gold *all'antica* and contained a brass candelabra with twenty lamps'; 'a very large and costly lacquerware chest, beautifully gilded, made in China'; 'another large lacquerware chest, beautifully gilded, made in Amsterdam'; 'a very beautiful large brass candelabra'; 'a lacquerware writing desk'. In addition, numerous pieces of beautiful porcelain, featherwork boxes, and birds of paradise are itemized, as is their value. Also listed are: an incised gilt harness for the Sultan's oldest son; beautifully made vessels of mother-of-pearl; a parrot enclosed in crystal in such a way that one cannot see how it came to be there; beautifully incised and gilded swords; pieces of fine Dutch linen, very costly; several ebony chairs covered in purple velvet embroidered in gold; satin cloths, in various colors, and very long; mother-of-pearl vessels with gilt silver feet; some very precious embroidered gloves; a spiral staircase and other things artfully turned in ivory; and beautiful vessels of rock crystal.¹³ Baudartius also mentions 'various other delights ... in addition'. This is a magnificent understatement. From other extant accounts, it is known that the Dutch ship transported a vast selection of the highest quality textiles – velvets and satins and silks, in addition to the ells of linen listed; a total of 879 pieces of porcelain; sixteen chairs in all; two salted oxen in four barrels; a variety of cooking utensils; some Dutch gin; portraits of Prince Maurits and his brother Hendrick of Nassau; prints and maps and atlases and books, including eleven books by Calvin and the Atlas Mercator bound in red velvet as well as printed portraits of rulers on red satin in wooden frames; butter, over 3000 pounds of Edam cheese; and several sets of elaborate armor, including an enameled harness. These additional items are listed in the register of goods and presents and accounted for in the surviving receipts. The register contains a sub-section listing the '*gentillessen ende fraeijgheden*', delicacies and delights, such as gold and silver medals, ivory models of spinning wheels and staircases, embroidered gloves, three telescopes, two hundred tulip bulbs, four turbo shells in filigree on ivory feet, and other shells in silver. The 1612 Dutch gift was vast, though judging by accounts of Islamic courtly gift practices, and Safavid-Ottoman exchanges, for example, perhaps not exceptionally so.¹⁴ The contents of the gift spanned the gamut from *naturalia* (such as the birds of paradise) to *artificialia* and from indigenous to exogenous products in much the same way that early modern collections, especially of the sort identified as *Wunderkammern*, did.

13 On the early negotiations with Constantinople, see E. van Meteren, *Historie der Nederlandscher gheschiedenissen, van ... 1566 tot 1612 ...*, Amsterdam 1618, fol. 667r.; W. Baudartius, *Memorien, ofte korte verhael der ghedenckweerdigste geschiedenissen van Nederlandt ...*, Arnhem 1620, fol. 18r.-v.; see also fol. 13r.; W. Baudartius, *Memoryen ofte Cort Verhael ...*, Arnhem 1624, p. 188–189.

14 See L. Komaroff (ed.), *Gifts of the Sultan. The Arts of Giving at the Islamic Courts*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, New Haven, London 2011; spec. A. Cutler, 'The Enduring Present. Gifts in Medieval Islam and Byzantium', p. 79–90.

The Dutch gift that filled the hold of the cargo ship the *Zwarte Beer* does not survive, except as a ‘gift on paper’.¹⁵ None of the individual items given is known to survive – neither in the Topkapı Palace treasury nor at the Sultan Ahmed Mosque, the Blue Mosque, which was under construction at the time and for which the great lantern was intended.¹⁶ The great lantern was designed and manufactured by the Amsterdam city architect Hendrick de Keyser, who built the wooden support. The brass candelabra it housed was delivered by Hans Rogiers, and it was gilded in turn by David Colijn; the Muscovy glass and lamps and candles were supplied by yet other craftsmen.¹⁷ Receipts made out by artisans, merchants, and agents record purchases whose total price was nearly 25,000 guilders, a rather astronomical sum. (The current purchasing power of 25,000 1612 guilders is roughly €350,000.) The insurance policy made out by the captain of the *Zwarte Beer* also survives, as do unpublished accounts of the diplomatic encounter with the Ottoman court. But just as the 3138 pounds of Edam cheese were likely dispersed, as court favors and by the force of time or climate, so too the other objects presented will have been passed along, redistributed, stored away in remote locations, or otherwise surrendered to the contingencies of court life and to the sway of dispersal – as in the case of the lengths of very fine linen, which one traveler’s account claims were used to make skirts and tabards by the Sultana and other women of the seraglio.¹⁸

‘Rariteyten van dese Landen’

Much remains to be said of the great lantern, a fascinating instance of an object intended for use in a foreign setting (a Turkish imperial mosque). That it was intended for the Sultan Ahmed Mosque is clear from a letter to the States General dated September 1612 from Lambert Verhaer, a jeweler who acted as purchasing agent to the States General in assembling the gift. Verhaer played a critical role in the assemblage of the gift: a Flemish jeweler who was resident in Constantinople, he offered his expertise and service in purchasing appropriate items. In his letter of September 1612, he recommends that the Sultan be supplied with ‘*einige varieteyten van desse landen*’ and proposes ‘that a great

¹⁵ V. Groebner, *Liquid Assets, Dangerous Gifts. Presents and Politics at the End of the Middle Ages*, translated by P. E. Selwyn, Philadelphia 2002, pp. 10–11.

¹⁶ Heeringa and Nanninga, *Bronnen tot de geschiedenis van den Levantschen handel 1590–1826*, p. 260.

¹⁷ The receipts are preserved in NL–HaNA, Staten-Generaal, 1.01.02, inv.nr. 12593.9, *Secrete kas Turkije*; see also de Roever, ‘Een vorstelijk geschenk (n. 5)’, p. 182–183, and Heeringa and Nanninga, *Bronnen tot de geschiedenis van den Levantschen handel 1590–1826*, p. 270. The total cost of the lantern was just over 1230 guilders.

¹⁸ Ernst Brinck, in a notebook preserved in the Streekarchivariaat Harderwijk, oah 2039, p. 47: ‘*Dit was bij den Grand Sig.r ende bij de Sultana seer aengenaem, ende wierden van de dames in het seraglio overrocken ende tabbaerde daer van gemaect*’. On textile as a gift exchanged among Ottomans, and garments as robes of honor, see H. Reindl-Kiel, ‘Ottoman–European Cultural Exchange. East is East and West is West, and Sometimes the Twain Did Meet. Diplomatic Gift Exchange in the Ottoman Empire’, in: C. Imber and K. Kiyotaki (eds), *Frontiers of Ottoman Studies. State, Province, and the West*, 2 vols, London, New York 2005, vol. 2, p. 113–124, spec. p. 113.

lantern be made for use in the new mosque which the Great Lord [the Sultan] is now having built'. Verhaer also proposed that the fine chairs, upholstered in velvet, would go over well at the court, as would some 'of those tapestries that are made in Delft' along with 'several large pieces of porcelain, also some quartz crystal vases, some fine linen cloths costing six to eight guilders per *ell*, some fine brass candelabras such as are used here in the churches and in grand homes, some harnesses, some turned ivory works, some beautiful shells, and other such things'. Verhaer adds, in the final line of his letter, that 'also in favor there are all beautiful colors of velvet, and satin – damask or plain are both desired'.¹⁹ The similarities between Verhaer's recommendations in this letter and the list of items purchased in the months preceding December 1612, when the *Zwarte Beer* – carrying Verhaer as well as the objects – set sail, are striking. Verhaer, named '*commis*' to the '*orateur*' Haga, was crucial in translating political need and will into material form, by negotiating the selection and the production of the gifts purchased in Amsterdam and in Haarlem in late 1612.²⁰ In an official instruction from the States General dated 8 December 1612, Haga was reminded of the value of his negotiations to date and of the nature of Dutch expectations for continued contact and commerce with the Ottomans. The trade capitulations were cited as being of great import, as were the liberation of slaves and the establishment of consuls in the Levant, and the States General acknowledged 'the fine success of [Haga's] legation' and 'the fine work, diligence, and dexterity that he had shown, in the service of our country'.²¹ As for the gift underway at the time this letter was written, it is specified that the States General intended and desired that Haga 'should share and distribute all of the gifts [itemized in the included inventory] in such a way as to honor our land and that we may receive thanks for them'.

Why did the Dutch give so many varied items, some of them distinctly local – Edam cheese; prints of the Stadholder; atlases; textiles and linens; telescopes – and so many of them foreign? As an object intended to gratify the Sultan with specific reference to his ongoing projects in Constantinople, the de Keyser lantern offers an interesting example of the effort to translate local production to foreign interests. But why, in the case of the mounted, worked shells or the birds of paradise did the Dutch give exotica, highly sought after and expensive unique objects that defied placement? It is of some interest that Baudartius's 1624 account of the gift concludes with the statement that: 'These presents were very welcome and greatly appreciated and were considered much more valuable than if they had just been so many vessels and beakers of gold and silver. Because silver and gold beakers and cups that the Turks receive, they bring straight to the Mint and make money of them'.²²

19 Heeringa and Nanninga, *Bronnen tot de geschiedenis van den Levantschen handel 1590–1826*, p. 260–261.

20 Verhaer is a fascinating figure, about which much remains to be said. He is described as '*commis*' in the Resolutions of the States General dated 29 October and 17 November 1612; see Heeringa and Nanninga, *Bronnen tot de geschiedenis van den Levantschen handel 1590–1826*, p. 262.

21 *Ibidem*, p. 264, citing NL–HaNA, Staten–Generaal, 1.01.02, inv.nr. 12.593.9.

22 Baudartius, *Memorien* (n. 13), 1620, fol. 18v.: 'Hier waren noch eenige andere fraeyicheden by ghevoecht. Dese presenten zijn uyt der maten willecom ende aengenaem gheweest/ende veel weerdiger gheacht/dan of het alle-gaer vaten

Salomon Schweigger, a Protestant chaplain who traveled with the Hapsburg ambassador to Constantinople in the 1570s, wrote a travelogue (published in Nuremberg in 1608) that tells of a less well-fated gift of state to the Sultan. Schweigger describes the Ottoman response to the lavish outlay of Hapsburg gifts in an account tinged with a sense of loss.²³ These gifts were tribute, the so-called *Türkenverehrung*, though Schweigger makes a point of calling them not tribute, but a ‘present’. He enumerates the many thousands of *Taler* donated to various prestigious members of the Sultan’s court and then lists a formidable array of objects, clockwork and/or automata, cabinets, dishes and vessels. About their fate he complains: ‘Although these credenzas and silverware are all exquisitely made, and are of much greater value than the metal, the gold and silver, this is not how these people see it/they hold it all in great awe, but I am told that they melt it all down again and make coins or money from it. The beautiful clockworks that the Sultan has received over the years are piled up in a large chamber; they are destroyed by rust and some are sold off, and he has them changed around, bringing new ones to the chamber and when he has used one for some time, has it taken away, and so on’.²⁴ Schweigger bemoans the fact that the nature of the goods presented to the Sultan changed when they were relinquished: the ‘*köstlicher Arbeit*’ was melted down, the clocks rusted. Wonder (*‘diese Leuten...verwundern sich zwar’*) and the Sultan’s appreciation for the clocks are no match for indifference or mercenary compulsion (*‘so lassen sie es alles wider schmelzen’*; *‘etlich werden verkaufft’*).²⁵

Without rehearsing the historiography of gift-giving as ethnographic or historical event, it may be useful to comment on the dynamics of gifts and gift-giving, and to suggest considering the 1613 Dutch gift in the specific and relatively unstudied context of the diplomatic gift. At the outset of a fine, brisk survey of Marcel Mauss, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Maurice Godelier’s theories of the gift, historian Valentin Groebner has recently suggested that gifts ‘possess seductive power, eloquence, and the capacity to transform social circumstances ... an effective gift is thus one that evokes ambiguity’.²⁶ Groebner’s analysis of the ‘rhetorical form [of the gift] and the rules of the

en koppen van louter Gout en Silver gheweest waren. Wat de Türcken krijghen van Silveren ofte Goudene bekers of koppen/die laten sy strax in de Munte brengen/ende gelt daer van maken’.

23 S. Schweigger, *Ein Neue Reyßbeschreibung auß Teutschland nach Constantinopel und Jerusalem ...*, Nürnberg 1608, p. 61–62.

24 Ibidem: ‘Ob wol diese Credenz und Silbergeschirr alles zumal von sehr köstlicher Arbeit/die wol höher möcht geacht werden/dann das Metall/das Gold oder Silber/so gilt es doch nichts bey diesen Leuten/sie verwundern sich zwar drüber/aber wie man mich bericht/so lassen sie es alles wider schmelzen/und machen Münß oder Gelt daraus/die schönen Uhrenwerk soll der Sultan in einem grossen Gemach auff einem hauffen stehn haben/die ihm von vielen Jahren her seyn zukommen/die verderben von dem Rost/etlich werden verkaufft/bißweilen lest er abwechseln/und ihm eines derselben ins Gemach stellen/wenn ers nun ein gute Zeit gebraucht/lest ers hinweg thun/und ein anders herfür bringen/und also fort’. See also Reindl-Kiel, ‘Ottoman-European Cultural Exchange’ (n. 18), p. 118.

25 Schweigger is clearly attached to the objects after they have been transferred, unable to grant them whatever reception they receive. This has something to do with Schweigger’s critical stance vis-à-vis Islam and Turkish customs, evident throughout his travelogue as elsewhere in his work.

26 Groebner, *Liquid Assets, Dangerous Gifts* (n. 15), p. 1. This ambiguity he traces through the records of gifts, the only surviving traces, while also calling attention to the social practices by which gifts are named

game of representation' is incisive, although the participants that he brackets out of his account are precisely the sorts in play in the case of the 1613 Dutch gift: states, nations, empires.²⁷ Anthony Cutler, in an essay on late antique, Byzantine, and early Islamic diplomacy and exchange, has declared that diplomatic gifts have 'been consigned by historians to that special *oubliette* where they keep the evidence they consider unhelpful to the understanding of political and economic events'.²⁸ Cutler's genial analysis calls attention to what we might think of as the specific gravity of diplomatic gifts. Likewise, recent studies in diplomatic history and on the agents of diplomatic negotiations offer new ways of thinking about the exchange of information and goods and, for example, *negozi* as the dynamic of early modern diplomacy and trade alike.²⁹ Like the gifts Schweigger discusses and whose fate he bemoans, the Dutch presents were made in the spirit of affirming diplomatic and political relations – and specifically, in the case of the Netherlands, relations bearing on trade. The range of goods presented by the Dutch, however, far exceeds those items presented by the Hapsburg emperor. The Dutch gift extended well beyond currency (one chest was filled with 5,000 '*Hollandse daelders*') and vessels (897 pieces of porcelain, in addition to numerous lacquerware vessels and drinking vessels made of shells and horns), to include butter and cheese. It may have fulfilled standard expectations that numerous valuable items be presented; it also contained local products of Dutch industry and agriculture (textiles, furniture, butter, cheese). The Dutch gift represented more than local production: it included such highly sought after exotica as birds of paradise (eight in all) and a large Chinese chest. The '*rarityten van dese landen*' also included hybrid works such as lacquerware vessels made by Willem Kick in Amsterdam in the manner of East Indian lacquerware, presented alongside Chinese lacquerware from the east.³⁰ There is something wondrous about the range and kinds of goods that comprised this Dutch gift.

Indeed, the '*rarityten van dese landen*' given to Ahmed I in 1613 oscillate in kind and nature in a way that echoes the categories of objects in early modern *Wunderkammern*. A specific local case in point is the collection of the Leiden apothecary Christiaan Porret (1554–1627), whose *Cunstsamer* was sold at an auction in 1628.³¹ Porret's collection

and labeled. He also stresses the ambiguity and multiple meanings of gifts, as well as the ability of gifts to 'underline the autonomy of giver and recipient'.

27 Ibidem. See also N. Zemon Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France*, Madison (WI) 2000, 'Introduction'; and, on rarity and gift-giving, see also A. Goldgar, *Tulipmania, Money, Honor and Knowledge in the Dutch Golden Age*, Chicago 2007, p. 56–57 and F. Egmond, 'Precious Nature. Rare Naturalia as Collector's Items and Gifts in Early Modern Europe', in: R. Rittersma (ed.), *Luxury in the Low Countries. Miscellaneous Reflections on Netherlandish Material Culture 1500 to the Present*, Brussels 2010, p. 47–65.

28 A. Cutler, 'Significant Gifts. Patterns of Exchange in Late Antique, Byzantine, and Early Islamic Diplomacy', in: *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 38 (2008), p. 79–101.

29 See, for example, M. Keblusek and B. Noldus (eds), *Double Agents. Cultural and Political Brokerage in Early Modern Europe*, Leiden, Boston 2011.

30 See R. Baarsen, 'Kistjes van Kick? Hollands lakwerk uit de vroege 17de eeuw', in: *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum* 56 (2008), p. 12–27.

31 See C. Swan, 'Collecting Naturalia in the Shadow of Early Modern Dutch Trade', in: L. Schiebinger and C. Swan (eds), *Colonial Botany. Science, Commerce, Politics in the Early Modern World*, Philadelphia 2004, p. 223–236.

offers a pertinent example of the sorts of objects acquired, like the Dutch gift, in the Northern Netherlands in the first decades of the seventeenth century from voyagers returned from the East, jewelers and merchants, artisans, and others who trafficked in luxury goods and exotica. The title page of the 1628 auction catalogue, the only extant record of the collection's span at the time of Porret's death in the previous year, describes the objects Porret owned as '*Sonderling-Heden oft Rariteyten ende Wtgelesen Sinnelickheden van Indiaensche ende ander wtheemsche Zee-Horens/Schelpen/Eerd ende Zee-gewassen/Mineralen/ende oock vreemde Gedierten; mitsgaders eenighe constichlijk ghemaecte handwercken ende schilderijen*'.³² Like the phrases on the title page, the 719 entries (many of them for multiple items) that describe the contents present a vacillating, shifting array of sorts of objects – from natural resins to highly worked shells and nuts and from Chinese ink to Levantine weaponry – some of which are local, some exotic, all of which seem likely to have been costly and few of which are clearly useful. Porret's *Cunstcamer* 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 sketch of Prince Maurits, and an oblong agate; and closes with a long series of entries describing watercolor renderings of animals, plants, and flowers. What became of the amazing range of objects listed in the printed catalogue is not known, but the extent to which Porret's collecting interests resonate with other contemporary investment in the exotic is evident from the text alone. The *register* or list contains itemized descriptions of such foreign objects as shells from the Straits of Magellan; 'two mother-of-pearl fishing rods from the Straits of Magellan'; hundreds of shells in all sizes and shapes and colors, including at least one 'mother of pearl shell, carved and painted'. A 'covered nut from the Indies' is listed in the company of a 'covered head, from a fruit from the Indies'; either of these may have been a coconut with elaborate decoration. Another page of the Porret inventory lists a large piece of white coral, painted red and gilded; a couple of beaks of birds from the Indies; a 'Bird's nest in a red drawer, with five or six little birds very beautifully constructed of feathers in all colors', as well as a number of foreign pieces of cloth and clothing. There are entries for green eggs of the emu; Indian and Chinese inks; lacquer work; Hungarian and Turkish shoes; a blowfish; a large crocodile and a small crocodile;

³² One copy survives in the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie in The Hague and another in Dresden. See F. Lugt, *Repertoire des Catalogues de Ventes Publiques Intéressant l'Art ou la Curiosité. Première Période vers 1600-1825*, The Hague 1938, number 2.; E.W. Moes, 'De sonderling-heden oft rariteyten ende wtgelesen sinnelickheden van Christiaen Porret', in: *Leids Jaarboekje* 2 (1905), p. 93-100, introduces the collection and the collector; other biographical information is to be found in H.A. Bosman-Jelgersma, 'De lotgevallen van een apothekersleerling in het 17de-eeuwse Leiden', in: *Leids Jaarboekje* 79 (1987), p. 62-81. The auction of Porret's collection is mentioned in passing in B. van den Boogert et al. (eds), *Rembrandt's Treasures*, Zwolle 1999 and in R. van Gelder, 'De wereld binnen handbereik. Nederlandse kunst- en rariteitenverzamelingen, 1585-1735', in: E. Bergvelt and R. Kistemaker (eds), *De wereld binnen handbereik. Nederlandse kunst- en rariteitenverzamelingen, 1585-1735*, Amsterdam 1992, p. 15-38. Cf. E. Bergvelt et al. (eds), *Schatten in Delft. Burgers Verzamelen, 1600-1750*, Zwolle 2002.

and drawers and drawers filled with resins, stones, minerals, and fruits – no doubt many of them from afar.

The presence of so many foreign or exotic objects in Porret's collection is not surprising. Within the context of early modern collections designated *raritytenkabinetten* or cabinets of curiosities or *Wunderkammern*, exotica played a central role. As Eric Jorink has recently observed, summarizing a very long line of scholarship, 'the collections of curiosities from the Old and the New World filled the most erudite minds in Europe with wonder. Time and again we come across the crucial role that the 'marvels of nature' (*Wundern, merveilles, mirabilia, miracula*) played in the intellectual culture of the seventeenth century. All of these words are etymologically related and can all be derived from the Latin *mirari* (to wonder, ask oneself, want to know) and *mirus* (wondrous, extraordinary).³³ Indeed, hardly a single collection worthy of the name *raritytenkabinet* or *Wunderkammer* did not contain a variety of novel, strange, curious, foreign – which is to say exotic – items.

Like Porret's *Cunstcamer*, the Dutch gift contained a great number of curious or exotic items – '*rarityten*' – and even included objects described by the evocative if perplexing phrase '*rarityten van dese landen*', which suggests something on the order of local or indigenous exotica. The term and the category '*rarityten*' – whether translated as curiosities or exotica – pertains to any and all early modern collections known as *Wunderkammern* or cabinets of curiosity. Another element of the contents and presentation of the Dutch gift that resonates with the history of such collections has to do with display. As numerous historians of early modern collecting have suggested, the manner of display characteristic of collections such as Porret's and other medical professionals' or others, up to and including the vast collection of Emperor Rudolf II, for example, and yet others north and south of the Alps, was associated with autopic experience as much as prestige. Likewise, in the case of diplomatic gifts, sensory experience exemplified by the category of wonder and display are also crucial. Indeed, following a pointed critique of Mauss's cause and effect model of gift-giving and a rebuttal of the inevitability of reciprocity, Cutler recommends 'emphasis on the role of gifts as objects of display', and stresses the importance of the display of diplomatic gifts – a feature common to all of the gifts and givers he studies, and to the Constantinopolitan receipt of the Dutch gift as well. Cutler stresses the potency of diplomatic gifts' 'sign value'.³⁴ According to the Dutch chronicler Baudartius, Haga 'presented to the Turkish Emperor gifts that were exhibited publicly and for all the world to see,

33 E. Jorink, *Reading the Book of Nature in the Dutch Golden Age, 1575-1715*, translated by P. Mason, Leiden 2010, p. 5.

34 Cutler, 'Significant Gifts' (n. 28). See also M. Harbsmeier, 'Gifts and Discoveries. Gift Exchange in Early Modern Narratives of Exploration and Discovery', in: G. Algazi, V. Groebner and B. Jussen (eds), *Negotiating the Gift. Pre-Modern Figurations of Exchange*, Göttingen 2003, p. 381-410. Harbsmeier cites numerous instances from early travelogues of gifts exchanged in advance of trade relations, where donations or gifts were given in order to obtain trust and friendship, but endowed with a force or awe that was geared to dominance or at the very least competition in a trade economy.

under a long gallery, and they were all individually carried by attendants, from the smallest to the largest of them, according to the custom of these lands in order to amplify the display, as it is held in great esteem that many attendants carried the gifts, taking them in an orderly procession exhibiting them one by one to the Great Ruler or Turkish Emperor'.³⁵

Birds of paradise for the sultan

The crucial role display played for all parties to the Dutch gift is borne out by the birds of paradise, which also exemplify the exoticism of transcultural objects. Eight specimens were purchased: in all likelihood originally purchased from Arab traders in the Moluccan islands, they were sold by the Amsterdam merchants of Chinese porcelain Haijnderijck Jaecopsen and Femmetgen Rutghers to Lambert Verhaer, purchasing agent to the States General, shipped off, and in turn presented to the Sultan in Constantinople. The bird of paradise was a highly prized specimen among early modern collectors, and considered a natural wonder. The myth of the bird of paradise held that the bird remained perpetually in flight. This myth is a confection derived from the fact that most specimens imported to Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries arrived minus their feet, which were hacked off in order better to preserve the dried carcass. The bird's glorious and awe-inspiring plumage was first viewed in Europe in the 1520s; Portuguese merchants brought the first specimens to the west, from Banda to Lisbon. A highly prized item throughout Europe, by the end of the sixteenth century, the bird of paradise became the hallmark of an excellent collection. Notwithstanding the fact that numerous accounts, Aristotle's and Antonio Pigafetta's among them, specified that the bird of paradise does have feet, they were thought to remain in perpetual flight, in endless ascent toward the sun, well in to the later seventeenth century. Their value was compounded by the fact that early accounts told of their having been presented to the Spanish king and/or to his expeditions as tribute, often along with spices. An account dating to the 1520s describes a gift of five of them, along with some cinnamon, nutmeg, mace, and cloves. It states that the Moluccans 'hold these [birds] to be celestial, and even when they are dead they never corrupt or smell. Their plumage is of diverse and very beautiful colors, they are the size of turtledoves, and have a very long tail, and if one of their feathers is plucked, another grows, even when they are dead. The kings take them into battle, and believe that if they have them with them they are

³⁵ Baudartius, *Memorien* (n. 13), 1620, fol. 13r. This is Baudartius' description of the presentation of gifts at the initial audience in the Topkapı Palace in 1612; the second, extraordinary audience took place in Scutari when the shipload of Dutch gifts had arrived, in 1613, and Baudartius lists a number of gifts but elides the description of the pomp and circumstance, as the event followed the standard protocol and the meal and scale of the initial audience were not repeated in 1613, given the location. For the second, extraordinary audience see Baudartius, *Memorien*, 1620, fol. 18r.-18v.

safe and invincible'.³⁶ The naturalist Carolus Clusius, Director of the Leiden University garden from its establishment in 1593 until his death in 1609 and a widely renowned natural historian published an account of the bird of paradise in his 1605 compendium, *Exoticorum libri decem*, along with two woodcuts of locally available specimens.³⁷ Clusius attempted to secure his own specimens on the Dutch market but was thwarted by an agent for the Emperor Rudolf II, whose collection contained several specimens in varying states. In 1609, the final year of his own life, Clusius's friend and neighbor in Leiden, Justus Scaliger, bequeathed two birds in his possession to the naturalist – this valuable bequest came to Clusius months before his own death.³⁸

These exotic creatures were hard to come by and highly prized. Though available for purchase, they were costly; their value was as consistent a feature of descriptions of the birds as was their supposed perpetual flight. The Dutch captain Jacob van Neck (1564–1638) wrote in 1600 that these birds, with their '*uytnemende schone veren*', could be exchanged for such precious items as mirrors.³⁹ The birds transported to Constantinople did not fly, to be sure, but they ascended en route – in value. The Amsterdam merchants who sold birds to the purchasing agent for the States General charged thirty-one guilders per piece. Baudartius's account of initial gifts presented in 1612 mentions 'three birds of paradise, valued at two thousand *daalders*, which the Sultan regarded with amazement'.⁴⁰ As we know from the extant receipts that three such birds actually cost just under a hundred guilders, the Sultan's amazement seems to have increased the value exponentially, at least according to Baudartius, whose information is derived from accounts by Haga's secretary Ernst Brinck (1582–1649).⁴¹ At one and a half guilders each, 2000 *daalders* is equivalent to 3500 guilders, thirty-five times their 1612 market value. This is projected value, reflecting the expectation on the part of the Dutch beholder that the Sultan valued the objects he received at these rates. (It is worth pointing out that the projected value of the birds echoes the arc of actual profits made in these very years, in Amsterdam, on such exotic merchandise as pepper and cloves.)⁴²

36 P. Mason, *Before Disenchantment. Images of Exotic Animals and Plants in the Early Modern World*, London 2009, p. 135. See the excellent discussion in B. Ogilvie, *The Science of Describing. Natural History in Renaissance Europe*, Chicago 2006, p. 248–252.

37 C. Clusius, *Exoticorum libri decem: quibus animalium, plantarum, aromatum, aliorumque peregrinorum fructuum historiae describuntur: Item Petri Belloni observationibus ...*, Leiden 1605, 'Manvcodiata' and 'Paradisea Avis', p. 359–363; see Ogilvie, *The Science of Describing*, p. 251.

38 K. van Ommen, with F. Egmond, *The Exotic World of Carolus Clusius*, Leiden 2009, p. 95–96.

39 R. van Gelder, 'Paradijsvogels in Enkhuizen', in: R. van Gelder, J. Parmentier and V. Roeper (eds), *Souffrir pour parvenir. De wereld van Jan Huygen van Linschoten*, Haarlem 1998, p. 30–50, p. 45.

40 Baudartius, *Memorien* (n. 13), 1620, fol. 13r: 'Voor eerst drie Paradys voghels, die-men schatte op twee duysent Daalders, die de Keyser met groote verwonderinghe aengesien heeft'.

41 Ibidem, fol. 18r: 'Ernst Brinck ... die my in het beschrijven deser Türckscher reyse met sijne memorien ende neerstige aen-teeckeningen seer geholpen heeft'.

42 See D.A. Irwin, 'Mercantilism as Strategic Trade Policy. The Anglo-Dutch Rivalry for the East India Trade', in: *Journal of Political Economy* 99 (1991), p. 1296–1314.

Conclusion

The Dutch gift of 1613 was many things – and also a gesture of self-representation in a political sphere by way of material culture. Much remains to be said about it, and about its place in the material and mercantile and artistic and diplomatic world of goods. One important aspect of the gift that this article has aimed to highlight is the exoticism or the wondrous rarity of many of the objects presented in the course of the initial Dutch diplomatic and trade negotiations with the Ottoman court. Lorraine Daston has compellingly described the conception of ‘rarity [as] an artefact of an ethnocentric European perspective’.⁴³ Daston writes of the ‘unmistakable resemblance between the objects of preternatural philosophy and the contents of the *Wunderkammer* and cabinets of curiosity stocked during the same period’. As this article has aimed to show, the objects presented to Sultan Ahmed I by the States General in 1612/1613 echo those in such collections, and trade is a further binding mechanism. The close if not unmistakable resemblance between the objects of trade, diplomatic presents and goods, and the exotic is exemplified by the gift of birds of paradise to the Sultan. In addition, the Dutch gifts to the Sultan offer novel means of accessing the histories of local artisanal and mercantile and collecting practices in the Netherlands. They occupy a longer history of the culture of trade in the Dutch Republic. And these gifts are fascinating instances of the transcultural lives of early modern objects. The goods presented to Sultan Ahmed I, like many others exchanged in these decades among potentates around the globe, demonstrate that state or diplomatic gifts played a critical role in enabling commerce: wondrous wares guarantee the circulation of valuable goods; and awe-inspiring gifts ensured the ebb and flow of valuable trade.

43 L. Daston, ‘Preternatural Philosophy’, in: L. Daston (ed.), *Biographies of Scientific Objects*, Chicago 2000, p. 15–41. See also L. Daston and K. Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150–1750*, New York 1998, spec. p. 146–172.