

Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann and Michael North, eds. *Mediating Netherlandish Art and Material Culture in Asia*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014. 348 pp. ISBN: 9789089645692. €105.00.

The history of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) spans a period of nearly two hundred years that saw its participation with peoples and cultures on four continents. Studies of the Company's interaction with Asia are, thus far, mainly dominated by political and economic perspectives. Taking note of such historiography, the editors of *Mediating Netherlandish Art and Material Culture in Asia* observe that despite the availability of evidence, cultural historians have rarely made the Company's activities the subject of their studies. Since existing studies examine the effects of the Company on art and material culture in Europe, the volume highlights the issue "of the possible Dutch (and more broadly Netherlandish) impact on those areas in which the VOC operated from the Cape of Good Hope to the Sea of Japan" (9).

The volume is the product of international collaboration—the necessity of which is perceivable in the volume's geographical scope—enabled by academic institutions in Europe and the United States. The volume covers regions of VOC activity—the Cape of Good Hope, Persia, (coastal) India, Dutch Ceylon, the Indonesian archipelago, China, Japan—with the fourteen entries being arranged roughly from west to east. The contributions together take account of an impressive range of art and material culture. The chapters—except Peter J.M. Nas' on the hybridity of architecture in the Dutch East Indies from early settlements until its twentieth-century afterlife—focus on the period of the VOC's activity (i.e., 1602–1799). Most chapters take a *longue durée* approach to their regions, material culture or theme of choice, providing a composite picture of the cultural impact of the VOC in its areas of operation.

Chapters 1, 2, 11 and 12 inquire into the artistic-cultural encounters of cultures. Gary Schwartz surveys Dutch and Persian perceptions of "each other's art" and the diplomatic and artistic careers of Dutch artists at the Persian court. Amy S. Landau investigates the "reconfiguration" of Netherlandish biblical prints in Persia, at the court and by the resident Armenian community. In the context of the "Dutch presence in Japan", Matthi Forrer and Yoriko Kobayashi-Sato reconstruct the development of western perspective (Forrer) and the influence of specific western techniques, motifs, themes and artistic theory (Kobayashi-Sato) in Japan, highlighting the role of both Dutch and Chinese print culture.

Michael North and Lodewijk Wagenaar place artistic and cultural practices against the background of prevailing social and ethnic circumstances, highlighting the relatively small size of Dutch populations. North compares his findings on the use of prints and paintings from probate inventories in Batavia and the Cape Colony and places them against existing social divisions and standards of taste. Wagenaar, on the other hand, provides insights into the cultural aspects of the VOC's presence in Ceylon—especially Galle—reflecting in detail on developments in urbanism, sumptuary laws, furniture design, and culinary culture.

Marten Jan Bok's study on Dutch artists in Asia is likely to prove an excellent resource for future research on the topic. An appendix of his contribution provides a list of nearly a hundred artists active in Asia, along with biographical details and directions to other resources. Cynthia Viallé describes the cultural aspect of the VOC's diplomatic gift-giving. She provides a fascinating account of what was an expected, appropriate, or inappropriate gift as well as how recipients transformed their gifts. Looking at South India, Martin Krieger discusses regional and chronological variations in European cemeteries from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth, focusing on Dutch graves and adaptations by indigenous artisans to the needs of a European clientele.

Ranabir Chakrabarti also addresses the situation in India but takes up Dutch architecture and depictions of the land as well as Indian representations of the Dutch.

An important conclusion drawn by several contributors (Bok, Wagenaar, Kaufmann) is that the long-term and even immediate impact of the VOC was, in fact, quite limited in most regions. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann titles his contribution “Scratching the Surface” and finds that the Chinese were not particularly impressed by the tributes brought by the Company—even when compared to the English—although the VOC may well have influenced Chinese craft techniques. The editors propose that analyses of material culture circulations adopt an understanding of their agents as cultural mediators, both in the sense of carriers of physical objects and ideas and of entities that affected these and their transfers. Astrid Erll elaborates on this proposal through a theoretical model for the study of transcultural mediation; nonetheless, she stresses the importance of considering the specificities of case studies.

The volume contains both black-and-white figures and full-colour plates—including some full-page plates—that serve the contributors’ arguments well. Some plates (such as in Chapters 4 and 9) appear, however, to have been mislabelled or incorrectly numbered. Noticeably, for an edited collection, the volume lacks biographical notes on the contributors, which may be useful for readers wishing to familiarise themselves with the authors. Furthermore, the price of this publication seems likely to restrict its access to and, consequently, its justifiable impact upon researchers from the areas that it concerns. Having studied at an Indian university, I am aware of the budgetary constraints of academic institutions in Asia. The publisher might perhaps consider pricing strategies adopted by others who release regional editions that are sensitive to financial circumstances.

This situation is more unfortunate given that the geographical scope and range of material culture discussed, along with the accessibility of the contributions, make this volume essential for those working on the (material) cultural interactions between the Low Countries and Asia. By engaging with matters of trade and diplomacy, the contributions argue for the consideration of cultural-artistic interactions in the broader historiography of the Company and early modern Asia. The strength of the contributions lies in combining historical and art historical research while looking at specific case studies, which also suggests a viable methodology for future analyses. By considering the roles of “receiving” cultures as well as other intermediaries, the volume is successful in promoting a view of material culture as a product of interested engagements rather than one in which any specific cultural entity appears as the leading actor.

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Neilabh Sinha, *Leiden University*

Jonathan Eacott. *Selling Empire: India in the Making of Britain and America, 1600-1830*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2016. ISBN: 9781469622309. \$30.00.

Eacott’s *Selling Empire* represents a new interpretation of the making of a global British imperial system between 1600 and 1830. The author shows India—as an idea, a place, and a source of commodities—to be an essential component in the formulation and development of imperial ambitions and practices across the world. They argue that “Britons sought to sell the idea of empire using ideas about India”, and present India as vital for understanding the imperial system that emerged from ongoing material and metaphorical interaction. In doing so, this book contributes to burgeoning fields of British corporate and imperial history not by further demonstrating the