Between Court and Company

Dutch Artists in Persia

GARY SCHWARTZ

"Of the 14 stations outside Batavia, Persia … stood at the top, surpassing even Japan."[1] The quotation is from the writings of Hendrik Dunlop, one of the pioneer researchers of the Dutch East India Company in Persia. "These pleasing dividends," his younger colleague David W. Davies wrote,

> caused Jan Pieterszoon Coen to exclaim in November 1627, 'God grant the Company a long and peaceful trade in Persia …' And He was, in fact, graciously pleased to grant a continued high return. For more than a century, the Persian establishments were the most important Company posts on the mainland of Asia.[2]

Persia was an insatiable import market for whatever the Dutch East India Company, the Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC), founded in 1602, had to offer: spices and condiments, foodstuffs, dyes, drugs, metals, steel products, wood, cloth, tobacco, porcelain, Japanese lacquer, and above all silver. Export was limited largely to silk, with smaller quantities of "foa, a dye stuff, and rose-water."[3]

Notice that these lists do not include works of art.[4] This is not an oversight. Dutch-Persian relations lacked many of the features that made for meaningful artistic exchange in Asia. The Dutch were not in charge of territories in Persia, as they were in the Indonesian archipelago, Ceylon, and to a degree the Indian subcontinent. There were no Dutch communities where an artist could set up shop and work for local Dutch patrons, as in the Cape Colony. The Safavid court was receptive to Western art, but it did not espouse it the way the Japanese court did, as a source of knowledge, or the Mogul court, out of curiosity, for status and iconographical support of imperial pretensions. In Isfahan, the Dutch did not encounter anything they recognized as an art world. There were no independent masters and art dealers, only the court precinct devoted to arts and crafts. The shops there produced commissions for the shah, court functionaries, and wealthy tradesmen.

Misunderstanding and Mutual Disdain

The lack of positive stimuli was compounded by the existence of one major negative one. In contrast to the above countries, in Persia the state religion was Islam, in the form of Twelver Shiism. (The term refers to the belief that the last of the twelve divinely ordained imams of Islam is in hiding and will return as the messianic Mahdi.) While this did not deter the Safavids in the seventeenth century from supporting a lively and eclectic production of figurative art, it did spook the governors and high officials of the Dutch East India Company, who showed themselves excessively apprehensive about bringing paintings with human figures to that land. The potential damage this could do, one reads between the lines of their missives, was not worth the risk. Why trade for peanuts in a potentially explosive commodity that could endanger the market in silver, spices, and silk?

The stubborn conviction on the part of company officials in Amsterdam and Batavia that Persians would be offended by images of human beings was a costly misapprehension. It is not as if they lacked information on the matter. The head of the Gamron station, Wollebrant Geleijnsz., wrote the following to headquarters in Batavia on May 9, 1641, concerning an aborted attempt by the Dutch to present some paintings to the shah:

> We are hereby returning the large painting of the sea battle at Gibraltar fought by Admiral Heemskerck as well as [the portrait of] the chief merchant Adriaen van Oostende and various Moors, as a [French] painter formerly in the king's service told us that they would not please the king or be valued at anything close to their price. What he would like are [paintings of] beautiful women, banquets, parties, anything smacking of luxury.[5]

The choice of subject matter seems to point to a reflexive desire to aggrandize Dutch achievements and persons, which may have been part of the problem. Religion was not. The Dutch traveler Cornelis de Bruijn wrote in 1711 something that must have been well known to any resident of the country:

> There is little difference between their religion and that of the Turks, except that the Persians have no aversion to painted images, which one sees in their houses as a matter of course.[6]

The English East India Company had better intelligence on this issue than the Dutch. In 1618, on a list of 101 items considered "vendible" in England, India and Persia, English agents included as number 101, under "particulars … supposed to be most acceptable to present unto the kinge"–that is, Shah 'Abbas I: "Pictures bearing the resemblance eyther of man woman or other creatures beinge drawne to the lyfe are much desired by this king."[7]

This misunderstanding on the part of the VOC must be held responsible in some measure for the low level of artistic interchange between the Dutch Republic and the Safavid Empire. We do not know how it arose, but it might be conjectured that the company directors, known as Heeren XVII, who were based in the Netherlands, took advice concerning trade with Muslim countries from a Dutch theologian who made a major point of the presumed Muslim antagonism to images. In the sixteenth century, Shah Tahmasp may indeed have given expression to this feeling. After decades of supporting and practicing the arts, in 1556 he issued an Edict of Sincere

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1 Dunlop 1930, p. LXXV.

2 Davies 1961, pp. 99–100.

3 Dunlop 1930, p. LXIII.

4 In the index to Dunlop 1930 we find three references to paintings as opposed to hundreds referring to such items as pepper, sandalwood, sappanwood, presents, spices, sugar, tin, and tolls.

5 The Hague, Nationaal Archief, VOC 1135, Gamron, May 9, 1641, Wollebrant Geleijnsz. to Batavia, Governor-general and councillors, fol. 802v.

6 De Bruijn 1711, p. 173.

7 Quoted in Ferrier 1976, p. 214. With thanks to Willem Floor for this reference.

Repentance, dismissing all painters and calligraphers from their court positions. However, it is not likely that the motivation was aniconism, which is not ordained by Shiite Islam. As one recent student of the edict, Abolala Soudavar, put it, "Had there been a Shi'ite prohibition of painting, Ṭahmāsb would have been a master at finding ways to circumvent it."[8] The same author points out that the fact that calligraphers as well as painters were dismissed from royal service casts another light on the matter:

> If painting had been from time to time the subject of religious controversy, calligraphy was not only immune from such controversy but represented Islamic art *par excellence*. Therefore, if Ṭahmāsb expelled calligraphers along with painters, a reason other than religious fanaticism must be sought.[9]

Whatever information the Dutch East India Company was acting on, we seem to be confronted with a case of bending over backwards out of ignorance and exaggerated fear, compounded by commercial defensiveness.

Purchase of Persian art was an even lower priority. If Persian artists showed a degree of interest in Western art and if the Safavid court patronized Dutch artists, European artists and patrons did not reciprocate. The voluminous VOC archives make no known mention of the purchase of even a single work of art in Persia. No sale within seventeenth-century Europe of a contemporaneous work of art from Persia has ever been published, to my knowledge.

The European attitude toward Persian art was put into words bluntly at the very beginning of the seventeenth century by a British visitor to Persia, William Parry. Parry traveled in the retinue of the adventurer-diplomat Sir Anthony Sherley (1565–1636?), whose journey to Persia in 1599 and 1600 he glorified in a book published immediately on his return in 1601. In modernized English, this is what he had to say about learning and the arts in Persia:

> They write from the right side of the paper to the left, like the Turks, contrary to our manner. Their Letter or Characters being so irregular, and (as we would think) deformed, that to us it seemeth the writing of some utterly unskilfull in letters or learning, or as a wilde kind of scribling, that hath therein neither forme nor matter … They have not many Bookes, much lesse great Libraires amongst their best Clarkes. They are no learned nation, but ignorant in all kinde of liberall or learned Sciences, and almost of all other Arts and Faculties, except it be in certaine things pertaining to horses furniture, and some kindes of carpettings and silke workes, wherein they excell.[10]

The only two other European travelers who seem to have commented at all in print on the arts demonstrated the same disdain. In 1686 the Frenchman Jean Chardin brought out an account of his travels to Persia and the East Indies undertaken between 1671 and 1677. Chardin is considered to be the most perspicacious and intelligent of the European writers on Persia from the seventeenth century. His chapter "On mechanick arts and trades" begins thus:

> Before I treat of the *Arts* and *Trades* in particular, I'll make five general Observations with regard to the Subject … The first is, That the *Eastern* People are naturally Soft and Lazy, they work for, and desire only necessary things. All those beautiful Pieces of Painting, Carving, Turning, and so many others, whose Beauty consists in an exact and plain imitation of Nature, are not Valu'd among those *Asiaticks*: They think, that because those Pieces are of no use for the occasions of the Body, they do not therefore deserve our Notice: In a Word, they make no account of the making of good Pieces; they take notice only of the Matter, which is the Reason that their Arts are so little improved; for as to the rest, they are Men of good Parts, have a penetrating Wit, are Patient and Sincere, and would make very skillful Workmen, were they paid liberally.[11]

The first Dutch visitor to pay attention to Persian art did not go into print until 110 years after Parry. The artist Cornelis de Bruijn (1652–1727) expressed grudging admiration for watercolors of small birds painted by a Persian colleague, but when it came to miniature painting, the glory of the Persian Golden Age, he is one and all contempt:

> People of distinction also own books that are handsomely bound and decorated with all manner of figures dressed in their style, as well as hunting scenes, single figures of men and women, companies, animals and birds, depicted in beautiful colors in water color. There were also indecent images, which they like quite a lot. I found books of this kind with a certain distinguished gentleman, but all the painting was poor, flat, stiff and totally lacking in technique. So that there was nothing attractive about it, aside from the pleasing colors. All the sheets were adorned with gold and silver to please the eye.[12]

Acquisition practice is in keeping with this attitude. Not a single Persian item with a provenance from the period of VOC presence in Persia is known (to me) to be preserved in a Dutch museum. The only items of cultural heritage from Persia in Dutch collections are in Leiden University Library: several hundred manuscripts bought in Turkey and Syria by Jacobus Golius in the 1620s and two hundred manuscripts bequeathed to the library in 1665 by Levinus Warner, the Dutch ambassador to the Ottoman Empire in Istanbul.[13] The motive behind these acquisitions was antiquarian, philological, and theological, not interest in contemporaneous or even medieval Persian art. This bias is underlined by the eloquent fact that none of the illustrated travelers' reports on Persia from the VOC period contains a single image of a Persian work of art later than Sassanid times (AD 224–651). A number of Persian miniatures, now lost or unidentifiable, are recorded in Amsterdam collections from the latter seventeenth century

8 Soudavar 1999, p. 51.

9 Ibid.

10 Penrose 1938, p. 79, derived from an edition of Parry's text edited by Edward Denison Ross in 1933.

11 Chardin 1927, pp. 248–49.

12 De Bruijn 1711, pp. 173–74.

13 See the information on the history of the collection on the website of the Leiden University Library: http://media.leidenuniv.nl/legacy/Collectieplan%20BC%20Midden-Oosten%20-%2001-10-08.pdf (accessed November 15, 2011).

Fig. 64

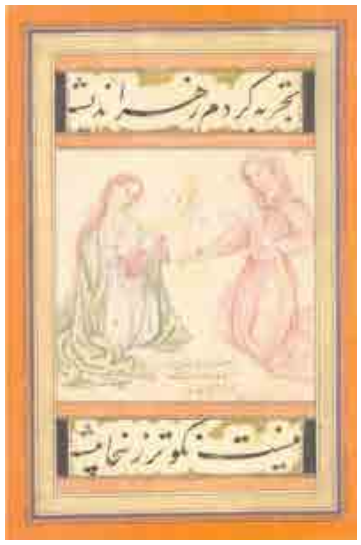

Fig. 65

Fig. 64 Master of the Banderoles, *The Annunciation*, ca. 1450–70, engraving, 19.7 x 16.6 cm (Hamburg, Kunsthalle, 10301)

Fig. 65 Sadiqi Beg (1533/34–1609/10), *Kneeling Woman Approached by a Man*, ca. 1587–1610, pigments on paper, 12.5 x 12.5 cm (Cambridge, MA, Private collection on loan to Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Art Museum, 418.1983)

on, among a far larger selection of miniatures from India and China.[14]

It must be said that when it came to aesthetic prejudice, the Persians were not very far behind the Europeans. "Classical Muslim geographers … divided the world into seven 'climes,' situating Europe in the outer edge, beyond the realm of civilization."[15] In Persian art discourse, Netherlandish art had an undifferentiated place in the "Frankish School," Frankish being the general designation for Europe. In the comparison between Persian and Frankish art the former is always superior, as in these lines from a poem of 1559 by the Shiraz poet 'Abdi Beg:

Painting has seven principles
It is like the sky, which has seven spheres,
The Islamic brightness of the Muslims
has made manifest the faults of the Franks.[16]

14 Lunsingh Scheurleer 1996, pp. 211–30. For an overview of artistic interactions between the Netherlands and Asia, see Emmer/Gommans 2012. They point out, interestingly, that attention for European art can be detected in Asia only in royal courts of comparable level as those of Europe. Whatever interaction between East and West can be detected had vanished by the end of the seventeenth century. (P. 118.)

15 Matthee 1998, p. 220.

16 Quoted in Porter 2000, p. 113.

In David Roxburgh's masterly study of Persian writings on art we find only two passing references to European art, none to Dutch art in particular.[17]

Persian Emulation of Western Art

That is theory. In practice, things were very different. European visitors to Persia followed their taste and ignored local art. In Europe, if any Persian artist ever made it there, it has gone unnoticed in history. That was far from being the case in Persia. Aside from the presence in Isfahan of art and artists from the Caucasus to the Deccan, there was also a respectful awareness of European art and a place in Persian culture for its qualities. This included a strong if intermittent interest in art from the Netherlands. The evidence for this predates the arrival of the Dutch East India Company in the 1620s. A refined and irresistibly charming drawing by the Persian artist Sadiqi (b. 1533/34, d. after 1600) in the Harvard University Art Museums, dated to the 1580s, clearly shows knowledge of an engraving made a full hundred years earlier by an anony-

17 Roxburgh 2001.

Fig. 66

Fig. 67

Fig. 66 Lukas Vorsterman (1595–1675) after Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640), *Return from the Flight into Egypt*, 1620, engraving, 42 x 31.2 cm (London, The British Museum, R, 3.50)

Fig. 67 Muhammad Zaman (fl. 1649–1700) after Lukas Vorsterman after Peter Paul Rubens, *Return from the Flight into Egypt,* September 1689 (Safar 1100), pigments and gold on paper, 14 x 20 cm (Cambridge, MA, Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Gift of John Goelet, 1966.6)

mous Flemish artist known as the Master of the Banderoles (figs. 61 and 62).

The angel of the *Annunciation* in the Flemish print was adapted by the Persian miniaturist without wings, without halo, and without cross. No exact model for the Madonna has been found, but other Annunciate Virgins by that master and his contemporaneous colleagues come close. The words in the banderole are turned by Sadiqi into meaningless signs. The large inscription above and below reads:

> I have gained experience from every single thought
> There is nothing more honorable than generosity.

This would seem to refer to the patron for whom the drawing was made, who is identified in the smaller inscription below the figures:

> These two figures are in the manner of the Frankish masters: drawn while in the service of the one giving asylum to those seeking the right path, the Wonder of the Age, Khvaja Ghiyath Naqshband. Written by the servant [of God] Sadiqi, the Librarian.

Khvaja Ghiyath Naqshband was a many-sided individual, a maker and manufacturer of costly textiles, an artist and poet, an archer, athlete, and connoisseur of the arts. His profession led Gauvin Bailey to connect him to another object with figurative elements derived from the same Flemish print as the painting. The textile collection of the Museo Correr in Venice owns a Persian brocade datable to the year 1603 that shows motifs from Surah 19 of the Koran, Miryam. In this work they do retain halos, in the pointed Persian form.

Naqshband is believed to have died in the mid-1590s, leaving up in the air Bailey's suggestion that the brocade came from his workshop. However, around that time there was a fresh opportunity for Persian artists to learn about Netherlandish art. In 1599 Shah 'Abbas I sent a high-level delegation to the court of Emperor Rudolf II in Prague. There the Persians made contact with the remarkable stable of artists maintained by the emperor, including some of the best Flemish engravers of the day. The mission returned to Isfahan in 1602, but in 1605 Mehdi Quli Bey, the nephew of the chief envoy, visited Prague once more. On that occasion he was portrayed in a print by the Antwerp engraver Aegidius Sadeler (cat. 2). I would speculate that one of the Flemish artists in Prague presented to a member of the Persian delegation old and new engravings that came into the hands of Sadiqi. Whatever the underlying circumstances, certain works by Sadiqi, the patronage of Naqshband, and the portrait by Sadeler, all dating from a brief period at the turn of the seventeenth century, are the most elevated instances known of artistic contact between the Netherlands and Persia.

A more extensive body of Persian work derived from Netherlandish art and other European models is found in the latter seventeenth century in the work of Muhammad Zaman, as in his famous take on a print of 1620 after Rubens of the *Return from the Flight into Egypt* (figs. 63 and 64).

Study of this material, and of our subject in general, has greatly benefited from the work of Amy Landau. One of her most striking conclusions is that the application of Western principles of art in Persia was not a long-term trend in taste or a natural outcome of increased East-West commerce. Rather, its most significant manifestation took place all at once, at a

Fig. 68 Anonymous master, *Hunting Scene*, ca. 1650, wall painting in the *Chihil Sutun* palace, Isfahan

given, rather late moment, after a good century of being honored more in the breach than in the observance. Landau finds in the work of Muhammad Zaman a sharp break with earlier practice, a programmatic favoring of European above traditional Persian aesthetic principles. In her view,

> the unprecedented sophistication of Muhammad Zaman's assimilation of the European artistic tradition, as presented by his manuscript paintings of 1675 and the biblical compositions of the 1670s and 1680s, is the result of historical circumstances specific to the post-'Abbas I epoch.[18]

Those circumstances pertain to certain religious and cultural policies of the often neglected Shah Sulayman and the ways in which they affected the practice of poetry and art in Persia in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. Whether or not that was the driving motivation for Muhammad Zaman's stylistic choices, there is no doubt that his work raises to an unprecedentedly high level the integration of European artistic principles and models in Persian painting. This applies to subject matter of all kinds. Landau rightly stresses the importance of the subjects from the Jewish and Christian Bibles that were ordered from Muhammad Zaman by Shah Sulayman himself in support of his supposition that he might be the Messiah. However, the artist also worked in an identical way on non-religious, even erotic motifs.

Not only miniature but also monumental paintings are known that honored European standards–paintings that were actually painted by European artists. Attested to by travelers' accounts are the murals in the Isfahan reception hall *Talar-i Tavila* and the royal palace in Ashraf on the Caspian Sea, all of them lost. A precious indication of what might have been is

18 Landau 2007.

still preserved in the *Chihil Sutun* banqueting pavilion in Isfahan, the mid-century wall paintings of which aspire to a considerable degree of Frankishness (fig. 65).

Patronage of Dutch Artists in Persia

Their work may be gone, but not the stories of the ten artists from the Netherlands who are known to have worked in Persia in the seventeenth century.[19] During each decade of the half-century between 1605 and 1656, in the heyday of the Safavid dynasty and of the Dutch penetration of Asia, one Dutch artist or another is recorded as being a painter to the shah.[20]

The period concerned lay in the reigns of three successive shahs:

'Abbas I (1571–1629; r. 1587–1629)
Safi (1611–1642; r. 1629–1642)
'Abbas II (1632/33–1666; r. 1642–1666).

A certain number of the artists concerned were given official, well-paid appointments by the shah as well as prominent commissions. Nearly all of them went east as VOC merchants; the company released them grudgingly, for limited periods of time, to the court. Only in one case is the VOC known to have taken the initiative in sending a Dutch artist to Isfahan to work there as an artist (Barend van Sichem, who seems to have died en route in 1638; see below).

Jan Lucasz. van Hasselt

The success over which Jan Pieterszoon Coen was crowing in 1627 was very young, and it owed its origins, unexpectedly, to the influence of an artist because he was an artist. When Huybert Visnich, the first representative of the Dutch East India Company in Persia, arrived at the court of Shah 'Abbas I in Isfahan in 1623 he resumed his acquaintance with a remarkable fellow countryman with great prestige at court, prestige that he owed to his mastery of the art of painting. Jan Lucasz. van Hasselt (b. before 1600, d. after 1653) had come to Isfahan in the cortege of a famous Italian traveler, the Roman nobleman Pietro della Valle (1586–1652), with whom he had "traveled," by his own later statement, "over a period of many years in Italy, Constantinople, Egypt, Jerusalem, Aleppo [where Visnich first met him], Babylon and other places as well."[21] The painter "made portraits in Constantinople and Cairo, and sketches of antiquities; in Isfahan he drew the elephants in the Shah's menagerie and made a portrait of della Valle's Assyrian bride."[22]

"Jan van Hasselt probably arrived in Isfahan in 1617 and was soon taken into the service of the Shah, who gave him the title of ustad naqqash [master painter]," writes Willem Floor, who cites this corroboratory reference: "In 1621 the Carmelites report that a Flemish painter was present at an audience given to them by Shah 'Abbas I." According to della Valle, the shah paid him a princely annual salary of one thousand zecchini, a Venetian gold coin. There is only one reference in the surviving documents to a specific work by Van Hasselt. The English traveler Sir Thomas Herbert (1606–1682), who visited Persia in 1628, wrote of the richest room in the shah's palace at Ashraf on the Caspian Sea:

> The Chamber was Gallery wise, the seeling garnisht with Poetique fancies, gold, and choisest colours, all which seem'd to strive whether Art or Nature should be to a judicious eye more valuable: one *Iohn* a Dutch-man, who had long served the King celebrated his skill, to the astonishment of the Persians and his owne advantage.[23]

To the Dutch East India Company, the fact that this valuable contact person at the Safavid court was a painter was more of a potential embarrassment than anything else. In the numerous references to Van Hasselt in the VOC papers he is often called "painter to the king," but there is only one reference to his art, in a revealing passage from a missive of December 1624 to Visnich from the directors in Amsterdam:

> Several paintings are [among the goods] going to Surat [i.e. company headquarters in India, to which the Persian office reported], but we do not think it a good idea to send any of them to Persia, because there are human figures in all of them. We have moreover been advised in a private writing of January 18, 1624, that you have been helped greatly in attaining your audience and access and opening of trade from His Majesty by a master painter who stands in high favor with the king. For this reason, the aforementioned painter should not be offended on any occasion in any way. If he is a better master than those who made the paintings that are being sent to Surat, then they will not be valued highly in Persia; if they are better, then we will have damaged his reputation with His Majesty by comparison with better work [than his].[24]

The importance of Jan van Hasselt for the establishment of VOC operations in Persia cannot be overstated. By his report, not contradicted by the company, Visnich and his party showed up in Isfahan without letters of recommendation:

> Upon hearing that they carried no papers from their lords and masters, His Majesty was surprised and ordered me to gather complete information. On my account, His Majesty was prepared to treat our friends graciously,… upon which I asked His Majesty to extend to them the same honor and respect he bestowed upon the Portuguese, English, and Italians, and that His Majesty provide them with appropriate lodgings, for which I invested all my good will with the king and his minions, so that those of all the other nations were jealous and sought ways to prevent it. His Majesty acceded to all that I requested and designated a

19 For a summary of the references to other painters than those mentioned here, see Schwartz 2009, pp. 133–52, incorporating the main findings of Leupe 1873 and Floor 1979.

20 Four scholars have reviewed the Dutch artistic presence in Persia in the seventeenth century: Leupe 1873, De Loos-Haaxman 1941, Gerson 1942, and Floor 1979. I am most grateful to Willem Floor for having read and commented on an earlier version of the part of the present text dealing with the Dutch artists in Persia. Any errors it may contain I claim exclusively for myself. The following section is extracted from Schwartz 2009.

21 *Resolutiën der Staten-Generaal, 1630–31*, June 29, 1629, in Dunlop 1930, p. 722.

22 Floor 1979, p. 146.

23 Herbert 1634, p. 169.

24 Dunlop 1930, p. 126, no. 63. This piece of self-defeating bureaucratic defensiveness is cited by De Loos-Haaxman, p. 17, as proof of the high regard in which painters were held by the VOC!

> handsome palace to lodge our newly arrived friends and to allow them complete freedom, at no cost; they reside there to this day [seven years later].[25]

Visnich paid Van Hasselt a fee of one hundred guilders for his initial mediation and worked closely with him for years to come. Van Hasselt's prestige with the Dutch was enhanced considerably in 1625 when the shah included him in an embassy to the Dutch Republic led by the court factor Musa Beg. Della Valle tells us that Shah 'Abbas attached Van Hasselt to the mission in order to recruit more Dutch painters for the Persian court.[26] This would not have been the first time he did so. In 1605, the Haarlem painter Cornelis Claesz. Heda was taken on as painter to Shah 'Abbas by a Persian delegation to the court of Emperor Rudolf II in Prague. (Heda never made it to Persia. His ship was captured by the Portuguese and he was sent to Goa. He ended up working for the Mogul court and the Dutch East India Company in India.[27]) Van Hasselt, who in his own statements never refers to his art, tells it differently: his commission was to aid in expanding trade between Persia and the Dutch Republic. Van Hasselt seems to have regarded his status as master painter to the king of Persia as a springboard to a higher station in life and to greater wealth.

> Visnich wrote a warm letter of recommendation:
> [Musa Beg] has in his company a Dutchman who has served the king as painter for several years, a young man of good name and repute, very favored by His Majesty, named Jan Luyckassen Hasselt. Since I met him previously in Aleppo, I have been eager to employ him in your service.[28]

Musa Beg, however, made a perfect nuisance of himself in the Netherlands. He pestered the States General and the Dutch East India Company for services, favors, and payments while chasing after women and drinking too much. The unannounced mission itself was not *comme il faut* in diplomatic terms, and Musa Beg's behavior made things worse. In 1626 Van Hasselt returned to Persia before Musa Beg and the rest of the delegation in order to tell the shah what was going on. His report was credited and Musa Beg fell into disgrace.[29]
For decades the shah had been attempting to invigorate what he rightly perceived as the underdeveloped trade potential of Persia. He already sold silk to several European partners, who transported it mainly overland to Aleppo, on a caravan route that was not only insecure but also crossed the Ottoman Empire, with which Persia was often at war. With the arrival of the Dutch and their seaborne empire, brilliant new opportunities presented themselves. Soon the company had inland way stations in Shiraz and Lar, supporting the nine-hundred-kilometer land route between Isfahan and the port factory at Gamron, renamed Bandar 'Abbas (Port 'Abbas) in honor of the shah after he and the English East India Company drove out the Portuguese in 1615. From there the armed merchant fleet of the Dutch East India Company had access to all the harbors of the world sea.
The benefits of trade with Persia to the Dutch East India Company and its personnel were phenomenal. Within months, a million-guilder cash stream came into being with no one guarding the banks. Anyone on the shore could dip into it, and all who could did. On paper, respectable bodies such as the Persian Kingdom, the Dutch Republic and the United East India Company were involved in legitimate transactions with each other. On the ground, the individuals working for these bodies were enriching themselves prodigiously at the expense of their masters.
Within seven years after Visnich's arrival in Persia, he and Van Hasselt had built up one of the most profitable businesses in the world and then, in Shakespearean style, they destroyed their own careers. The chief culprit was Van Hasselt. When the head of the VOC factory in Surat, Pieter van den Broecke, saw what riches Visnich was mining, he enlisted Van Hasselt's aid in undermining the position of his colleague, hoping to take his place. "Van den Broecke provided Van Hasselt, who emerged as Visnich's greatest nemesis, with money and a letter of recommendation to the directors, which Van Hasselt seems to have used to malign Visnich."[30] Visnich had indeed engaged in illegal practices, but even worse, he had neglected to cover his tracks. By 1630 Van Hasselt and other conspirators had made Visnich's position so impossible that the founder of the VOC stations in Persia abandoned his post and fled, ending up in Ottoman Iraq, where he was arrested and executed as a spy.[31] He signed his last letter, of Christmas Eve 1630, "in Joseph's pit," that is, betrayed by his brothers, "who need a St. Stephen to pray for them: Lord, forgive them, for they know not what they do."[32]

He was perfectly right. Van Hasselt in fact did not know what he was doing and was busy bringing about his own ruin. In the spring of 1630 he had sailed to Holland with a return fleet commanded by Van den Broecke. He carried with him a letter to the States General from Shah 'Abbas, who however had died in January 1629. Presenting his credentials in The Hague, Van Hasselt claimed that they were respected by the new shah, Safi, as well. He presented his mission "not as a simple legation but as a veritable embassy, and Van Hasselt himself as the resident representing the shah in the Netherlands."[33] He entered into negotiations with the States General concerning new rights for traders of "the Persian nation," a designation that covered himself as well as native Persians. On February 7, 1631, the States General actually passed a resolution providing these rights. That resolution,:in the view of a leading historian of Asian-European relations, Rudi Matthee, was unique in the history of the Dutch Republic:

> In 1631 van Hasselt in fact managed to conclude a treaty with the States General on behalf of the shah, according to which Iranian merchants in Holland received the same

25 *Resolutiën der Staten-Generaal, 1630–31*, June 29, 1630, in Dunlop 1930, p. 724.

26 Floor 1979, p. 146.

27 De Loos-Haaxman 1941, p. 35. At the 2010 conference of Historians of Netherlandish Art in Amsterdam, Rebecca Tucker gave a paper entitled "At Home in Bijapur: Cornelis Claesz. Heda and Dutch Art in India."

28 Dunlop 1930, p. 144, no. 72.

29 Vermeulen 1975–78.

30 Dunlop 1930, p. LXXV.

31 Floor/Faghfoory 2004, pp. 54–64.

32 Dunlop 1930, pp. 360–61, no. 198.

33 Vermeulen 1979, p. 135.

> rights as Dutch merchants in Iran ... This remarkable document [was] the only treaty ever concluded between the Dutch Republic and an Asian power to include bilateral rights.[34]

The treaty was, however, never put into effect. It cut into the turf of the Dutch East India Company, which refused to credit the new arrangements and which from the head office in Amsterdam followed Van Hasselt's doings with antagonistic suspicion. And then came the crunch. In October 1631 new letters arrived from Shah Safi, addressed to the stadtholder and the States General and making no mention whatsoever of Van Hasselt. All credit lost, the painter who probably played the most important diplomatic and commercial role of any Dutch artist of the seventeenth century, a role in which he has been compared to Peter Paul Rubens, met his Waterloo.
After the departure and disgrace of Jan Lucasz. van Hasselt, the Safavid court took on three other Dutch artists as painter to the shah. But they, like Van Hasselt, came to an unfortunate end in typical VOC circumstances: one through disease, one through dissipation, and one through corruption.

Hendrick Boudewijn van Lockhorst

Shah Safi died in 1642 and was succeeded by his nine-year-old son 'Abbas II. His court was initially run by Grand Vizier Saru Taqi, who in 1643 hired a junior merchant of the Dutch East India Company, the painter Hendrick Boudewijn van Lockhorst, for royal service at an annual salary of four thousand guilders. This was about ten times the amount that a painter of reasonable talent would earn at home; in Isfahan it seems to have been the going rate, equivalent to the one thousand zecchini earned by Van Hasselt. (In 1618, 10 zecchini traded at 12.8 ducats of three guilders apiece, making Van Hasselt's retainer 3,840 guilders.)[35] The Dutch East India Company allowed Van Lockhorst to commit to court service for three years, beginning in 1644, after which he was to return to the service of the company. The head of operations in Persia, Carel Constant, wrote to the governor-general in Batavia that the shah was quite pleased with Van Lockhorst's portraits. By 1647, however, when the contract expired, a new team had taken charge that was more struck by Van Lockhorst's misbehavior than by his portraits. No sooner had he reentered company employ than he was arrested. On May 4, 1647, the new men wrote to the directors that they had relieved Van Lockhorst of his functions "because he could not govern himself and during his stay here led such an excessively luxurious and licentious life that he caused considerable damage to the East India Company."[36] Van Lockhorst attempted to escape with his Armenian concubine, but was apprehended and sent back to Batavia. (That he had an Armenian concubine was not in itself misbehavior. Christians were not allowed to have sexual relations with Muslim women in Persia, and the Dutch East India Company tried to keep its servants from marrying; concubinage with Christian women was therefore the relation of first resort.[37])

Van Lockhorst was the fourth Dutch painter in Persia, after Van Hasselt, Van Sichem, and a certain Joost Lampen, who is mentioned once in this function in 1630, and the third to come to an inglorious end. There was a fifth artist whose story was even worse. Juriaen Ambdis was a ship's gunner and painter. He entered the shah's employ in the former capacity in 1648 as did several of his comrades, in order to fight for Persia against the Great Mogul. After the successful battle of Kandahar, 'Abbas discharged them all from service. While the others resumed their duty for the Dutch East India Company, Ambdis decided to stay. No doubt inspired by reports of Van Lockhorst's fabulous earnings, he told one of his fellow gunners that he was staying behind–that is, as the company saw it, deserting–to earn money "with painting and drawing." Failing in that attempt, Ambdis fell almost at once into beggary:

> On March 29, 1649, it was reported that Ambdis had been seen walking alone behind a caravan in Iraq by an Iranian merchant, who had given him three loaves of bread. On May 22, 1650, the Isfahan office of the Dutch Company reported that according to information received from an Armenian merchant from Baghdad, Ambdis had become a Muslim in that city, "which if it is true, will revolt the feelings of all pious Christians," the director commented. This is the last time we learn anything about Ambdis.[38]

Philips Angel

The sixth Dutch painter known to have been in Persia was Philips Angel (b. 1618, d. after 1664).[39] His only known works before then were two etchings in the style of Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn, one of which is signed and dated 1637. Despite his low profile as an artist–none of the standard books on Dutch artists mention him until the late nineteenth century–Angel was a respected figure in the Leiden art world. Not only did he deliver and publish the St. Luke's Day lecture of 1641; in the mid-1640s he also served as undersecretary and then secretary of the local guild of St. Luke.

In 1645 Angel enlisted in the Dutch East India Company and sailed with his wife for Batavia. It was a desperate move–only about one third of those who shipped out east ever returned home–and like nearly all artists who took that step, he was driven to it by financial need. At first, he did quite well. In 1646 Angel is mentioned as a junior merchant and member of the justice council of Batavia. In 1647, on account of his good work and good character, he was recommended for transfer to Persia as the third man on the company team. For unknown reasons the assignment did not go through, but in 1651 he was dispatched to Isfahan. (His wife is no longer

34 Matthee 1999, p. 113.

35 These are approximations in a notoriously difficult field. For the value of the zecchino in Venetian ducats in 1618, see Hocquet 1999, p. 408. For the ratio between (Dutch) ducats and guilders, admittedly in the eighteenth century, see van Zanden/van Tielhof 2009, Appendix 2, note 5.

36 Quoted in De Loos-Haaxman 1941, p. 43.

37 See on this subject Floor 2008, pp. 150–52.

38 Floor 1979, p. 150.

39 The best lexicon entry on Angel, indeed the only complete and reliable one in the art-historical literature, is that by Maarten Wurfbain and Siegfried Kratzsch in Saur's *Allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon*.

mentioned and had apparently died by that time.) According to orders, he was to run the station as second man in Persia, under the head of the Gamron office. However, things did not turn out that way. As bad luck would have it, he was in the company of his superiors when his baggage arrived on the backs of 20 or 22 donkeys carrying not only his personal possessions but also 58 pieces of tin weighing 2,697 pounds and eight sacks of medicinal roots weighing 960 pounds. In order to cover up the evidence for what was obviously unlicensed private trade and to make some extra money, he had charged the bill for the donkeys to the company as moving expenses, at an exorbitant rate.[40] The VOC was used to overlooking considerable infractions of the rules–in fact, everyone in the company was criminalized–but this was just too much. Angel was ordered back to Batavia to stand trial.

At this point Angel's status as an artist paid off. During his journey back to the coast, in shame and sick to boot, a missive from Shah 'Abbas II reached the VOC party. The shah said that he did not learn that Angel was a painter until after he had left Isfahan and that he wished to employ him in that capacity. Whatever the truth of the matter, the company made Angel an offer: either continue on to Batavia to face criminal charges or return to Isfahan as a painter to the shah of Persia. Traveling under arrest with his manservant and his pregnant (by whom we know not) black female servant, in miserable health, Philips Angel faced the choice between a kangaroo court in Batavia or a stint as an artist in Isfahan, a position that had ended badly for all his predecessors. Although Isfahan was considered an unhealthier place than Gamron or Batavia, Angel took the latter option. Returning to the extraordinary Persian capital, he invested more than two thousand guilders in a studio and in 1653 went to work. With the court Angel seems to have got on brilliantly. In addition to a salary of four thousand guilders a year, he was paid six thousand guilders for five paintings of unspecified subjects and presented with a robe of honor. (The VOC preferred to regard this payment not as the purchase price of the paintings but as remuneration for Angel's expenses, to be credited to the company.)

History began to repeat itself. Angel was distrusted by the company; as early as 1654 the new governor-general, Joan Maetsuyker, ordered the head of the Persian region, Dirck Sarcerius, to remove Angel from Isfahan and send him back to Batavia. (This was matched by another company action of the same moment against a painter who had risen in the ranks. In 1654 the directors objected to the advancement in India of Isaac Koedijck, who was doing very well as a merchant, merely on the grounds that he was trained not in commerce but in art.)[41] Because Angel was engaged in large-scale commissions for the shah as well as the chief of the royal slaves, Sarcerius declined to execute the command. Reconstructing these events, Willem Floor remarked rightly:

> Sarcerius and the Governor-general clearly did not realize the advantage they had over other competitors in having a painter in their service, who had the Shah's favour. Any praise of Angel was toned down by Sarcerius although the Shah had written that he was very pleased with him. This impression is confirmed by the Chronicle of the Carmelites where it is stated that: "Nothing could be more useful to the Mission than if we had here a good painter, the Shah taking great pleasure in painting; and in these countries good artists are rare. There is a Dutchman who works for the Company, who has done very little, and yet has received very good rewards, and the Shah has conferred great favours on him."[42]

Angel was able to use his influence at court for the benefit of the Company, but was unable to muster support for himself. He tried to rally resistance to Maetsuyker's order, but to no avail. On July 10, 1655, Angel left Isfahan for Gamron, where he arrived on August 31. There he was treated with contempt by certain company officials, who spread the unlikely story that

> some courtiers [of the shah] plainly told them that the Shah had honoured Angel enormously by giving him twice Dfl. 10,000 not because of the paintings which he presented to him, which amounted only to one item called the "Sacrifice by Abraham" in all these two years, but out of respect for the Company.[43]

Whatever arrangements had been made between the shah, Angel, and the Dutch East India Company regarding payment for his services, these were not sufficiently clear to avoid disagreement. Upon his return, Angel laid a claim before the company for monies he felt were owing to him. In January 1656 the claim was refused, and the company instituted charges against him for illegal private trade.

At the end of July 1656 the widowed artist married a woman from a distinguished family. Maria van der Stel was the daughter of a murdered VOC official and the younger sister of Simon van der Stel, the later founder of Stellenbosch and governor of the Cape. It might have been thanks to this newly acquired attachment to a prominent family that Angel was able to walk away from his contentious company job and take up various positions in the civil government of Batavia, including secretary of the aldermen's chamber. The supposition that he was protected by his marriage finds support in the fact that his relations with the township of Batavia turned sour shortly after the death of Maria on July 6, 1661. On October 21, in the wake of earlier accusations of financial impropriety, Angel was arrested for misappropriating six or seven thousand rijksdaalders. Four days later his goods were sold at auction for 4,242 rijksdaalders, at which point the Dutch East India Company laid a new claim against him for 3,300 guilders for "the expensive studio that he built on his own responsibility in Isfahan in violation of the orders of the director in Persia." In December the Reformed Church of Batavia ejected Angel from Holy Communion, readmitting him conditionally.[44] In 1664 an inventory of Angel's possessions was drawn up in Batavia. He was "lodging"–an apparent euphemism for cohabiting–with the widow Dieuwertje van

40 Hotz 1908, pp. XLI, 199.

41 De Loos-Haaxman 1941, p. 63.

42 Floor 1979, p. 154.

43 Ibid.

44 De Loos-Haaxman 1941, pp. 49–51.

Thije. The meager inventory included nine "paintings of various portraits" of Angel, his deceased wife, his grandfather and children. That is the last record of the man who trod in the footsteps of Jan Lucasz. van Hasselt and Hendrick Boudewijn van Lockhorst. Three painters who were richly paid retainers of the shah of Persia overplayed their hands in their relations with the Dutch East India Company and were brought down low by it.

Philips Angel suffered the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune not only in his lifetime. After his death he was also mistreated, by fellow artists, writers, publishers, and art historians. Precious drawings that he made in Persia and Batavia were published under the names of other draftsmen, painters, scholars, and engravers. For a long time his identity was confused with that of a namesake from Middelburg. It was not until 1949, when Laurens J. Bol studied these issues, that the identity of Philips Angel was cleared up.[45] This is particularly unfortunate because Angel produced some of the most important antiquarian documents of the time. On his way to Isfahan in 1652 with the party of the newly appointed ambassador to Persia, Joan Cunaeus, Angel stopped off in Persepolis. There, on February 10, 1652, he created one of the first drawings of the ancient site to come down to us. That is, it has come down in the form of a print after Angel's drawing, which itself is lost. It is reproduced in François Valentijn's *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën, vervattende een naaukeurige en uitvoerige verhandelinge van Nederlands mogentheyd in die gewesten* (Old and New East India, Containing a Precise and Extensive Report on Dutch Authority in those Territories; 1724–26; fig. 3).

It would be nice to say that Angel's drawings of Persepolis were inspired by the scholarly interests that were manifest in his St. Luke's Day lecture in praise of painting.[46] This however cannot be maintained, in view of damning testimony by the French traveler and art dealer Jean-Baptiste Tavernier. Tavernier claims that Angel told him personally "that he had spent his time poorly, and that the thing [that is, Persepolis] was not worth the effort of being drawn, nor to oblige the interested traveler to take a detour of as much as a quarter of an hour from his route."[47]

Our last reference to Angel in Persia is the kindest one. In a journal entry for 1657, the same Jean-Baptiste Tavernier relates that upon taking leave of Shah 'Abbas II he received as a parting gift "several drawings, of which a few were by himself, since the king had indeed learned to draw from two Dutch painters, one named Angel and the other Lokar [Van Lockhorst] that the Dutch Company had sent to him."[48] 'Abbas was only eleven years old when Van Lockhorst came to Isfahan and eighteen when Angel arrived. It is nice to think of him taking drawing lessons from these Dutch artists and being proud enough of the results to give samples of his work to visiting dignitaries.

Patterns of Patronage

Reciprocity on the part of the Dutch East India Company to the honorable Persian patronage of Dutch artists is not evident from the documents. The company showed its regard for one of the king's painters, Mamet Beg, in its own way. In August 1638 it lent him 40 tomans, about 1,600 guilders, without requesting a receipt, and which it did not expect to be repaid. This piece of petty corruption under the table, recorded in contemptuous innuendo in the books, is paltry indeed compared to the public shows of favor conveyed by the shahs on their Dutch painters.[49]

Table

The hard evidence presented here for royal Persian patronage of Dutch artists may not be extensive. However, it shows that for thirty-one of the thirty-eight years from 1617 to 1655, there was a Dutch painter in royal or high court service in Isfahan. From as early as 1605 to 1655 a certain pattern prevailed in the artistic relations between the Safavid court and the Dutch authorities. During the reigns of Shahs 'Abbas I, Safi, and 'Abbas II, Dutch painters were welcomed at the Safavid court and accorded public signs of high regard. Upon request of the court, individual artists would be allowed by the Dutch to enter royal service, always with strings attached. The relations are put into so many words in this passage concerning the neighboring kingdoms of India from the pioneering study of our subject, two articles by Pieter Arend Leupe in *De Nederlandsche Spectator* from 1873:

> In 1656, while the post of second man [of the VOC station] at Soeratta [Surat] was filled by [the Dutch painter Isaac] Koedijck, [the Great Mogul] Shah Jehan sent a letter to one of his governors, in which he writes of "having heard news about the painters and surgeon (or one with knowledge of the things of nature) of the Hollanders," commanding him to send them to the court at once. The governor informed Director Hendrik van Wijck [of the VOC in Persia, where the personnel were apparently stationed] of the order. Van Wijck was not in the least pleased. In the first place because the [Indian] ruler was disposing over the persons in question without acknowledging him and regarded company employees as being in his service. In the second place because it was usually so difficult to get personnel back again once they had been placed at the disposal of His Majesty. But in order not to offend His Majesty and in view of the [possible] consequences [of refusal], van Wijck, supported by his council, decided to honor the request, stipulating however that the oldest member of the group would go in the capacity of agent [of the VOC] and that he be put in charge of company interests there.[50]

VOC heeldragging is also evident in an instance when the Persian court turned to the company as a source not for

45 Bol 1949; Van der Willigen 1870, p. 70.

46 I committed this error of judgment in Schwartz 2009, p. 141.

47 Quoted in Hotz 1908, p. XCII.

48 De Loos-Haaxman 1941, p. 43, quoting from Tavernier 1676/77, p. 456. There are earlier editions of the journals in English.

49 "Van Adriaen van Oostende, Ispahan, aan Bewindhebbers, Amsterdam, 10 Augustus 1638 … noch sonder noot aen Mametbeecq, Conincx schilder, geleent 40 tomannen–daer weynich van weder comen sal." Dunlop 1930, p. 656, no. 318.

50 Leupe 1873, p. 265. Quoted here as exemplary for the attitude of the Dutch East India Company in such matters in Persia as well as India.

Shah 'Abbas I (1571–1629; r. 1587–1629)	**1605** His envoy to the court of Emperor Rudolf II takes on the Haarlem painter Cornelis Claesz. Heda as painter to the king. Heda never reaches Isfahan. 1617–30 Employs the Dutch painter and draftsman Jan Lucasz. van Hasselt. Among his commissions was the decoration of the royal palace at Ashraf. Extends title ustad naqqash (master painter) to Van Hasselt, bestows favor on him, honors causes pleaded by him. **1625** Sends Van Hasselt on diplomatic mission to the Netherlands led by Musa Beg. **1629** Signs letter to States General giving Van Hasselt status of envoy.
Mulaim Beg, factor to Shah Safi	**1630** Has Joost Lampen paint several pictures in his house.
Shah Safi I (1611–1642, r. 1629–1642)	**1638** Expresses satisfaction to company officials concerning portraits by Dutch painter Barend van Sichem, who is sent by the VOC to work in his service.
Grand Vizier Saru Taqi (in office 1632, assassinated 1645)	**1643** Mediates in hiring of Dutch painter Hendrick Boudewijn van Lockhorst to work for court of young shah, at annual wage of 4,000 guilders.
Shah 'Abbas II (1632/33–1666; r. 1642–1666)	**1643** Takes art lessons from Van Lockhorst. **1652** Intercepts the departure from Persia of Philips Angel, who was being removed to Batavia to face charges from the VOC, bringing him back to Isfahan to work for him as painter and drawing teacher. **1653** Puts Angel to work at 4,000 guilders a year painting palace decorations in Isfahan. Pays Angel 6,000 guilders, according to Angel for five small paintings, according to the VOC money intended for the company. Grants Angel high favor at court. **1655** Upon departure of Angel, presents artist with robe of honor and 100 tomans for watercolors.

Table Persian court patronage of Dutch painters, 1605–55

painters but for paint. On March 15, 1635, the manager of Persian operations, Nicolaes Jacobsz. Overschie, wrote from Gamron to Batavia that the shah had *again* requested that he be sent from the Netherlands sufficient paint to execute portraits of one thousand persons, with brushes in corresponding quantity. The order was not shipped, since in December 1636 the request was taken up again in the general order for 1637:

> For the King of Persia,
> paint for portraits of a thousand persons,
> brushes in the same measure[51]

We have no record of the presence of a Dutch artist at the court during that period. The ruler was the fifteen-year-old Shah Safi, who is reported by the Dutch East India Company to have a taste for the work of Western artists and jewelers. However, we cannot be sure that the order was an expression of artistic interest–say, for creating portraits of courtiers to adorn public buildings. There was another use for portraiture in the pre-photography age in the Middle East. Painted images of wanted criminals were spread around the provinces to help track down fugitives. This would fit in better with what we know about Shah Safi's suspicious and vengeful character. Whatever purpose was intended, the VOC did not rush to help the king of Persia to accomplish it.

51 The Hague, Nationaal Archief, VOC 13473, Generale eisen van Indië, eis van 1636 voor 1637. With kind thanks to Cynthia Viallé for this and the following reference.

Barend van Sichem and the Armenian Connection

There is only one recorded instance when the Dutch East India Company did take the initiative to send an artist to the Safavid court. The effort was aborted by the grim reaper, and on close inspection turns out to have been of service to quite different bodies than company or court. This only adds to its interest for us.

On September 28, 1638, a new director for Persia, Adam Westerwolt, was issued his instructions by the high command in Batavia. After touching on the trade in "rarities," the instructions continue:

> Which is why we are also giving you a certain Barend van Sichem, who is an able draftsman and is reasonable with the brush as well, along with Claes Andriesz. of Amsterdam who can make enamels and set jewels. In the past His Majesty [Shah Safi] has displayed particular appreciation for the work of these artists. You shall offer their services [to him as a present] and thanks to them you will garner as much good will as previously was the case with French and Italian [artists]. The supplies they require will be sent in batches.52

The instruction from Batavia says that work by Van Sichem had reached Safi before 1638, to the marked satisfaction of the shah. The appointment specified in the instruction seems to have been aborted. Westerwolt fell ill and died en route to Qazvin, where the shah was in temporary residence. This seems also to have been the fate of Van Sichem, about whom the documents are further silent, while Claes Andriesz.–as well as Huybert Bufkens, a diamond polisher–does appear in later dispatches.[53]

Willem Floor speculates that Van Sichem may have reached Isfahan alive and have gone to work not for the shah but for the Armenian community. The All Savior's Cathedral and other Armenian churches of New Julfa, across the river and within easy walking distance from Isfahan, are elaborately decorated with cycles of wall paintings illustrating the Bible and the lives of the saints. The authorship of these paintings is a vexed question. Floor's suggestion that Barend van Sichem was involved in their creation fits in well with the known evidence.

In 1950, the English art historian T. S. R. Boase, who visited New Julfa in British military service during World War II, demonstrated that some of the monumental paintings in All Savior's resembled woodcuts by Christoffel van Sichem the Younger (1581–1658) in the first Armenian Bible, published in Amsterdam in 1666 (figs. 66 and 67).[54] Boase noted that the arrangement of the subjects followed the dictates of typology, an age-old Christian interpretive method that links subjects from the Old Testament to passages in the New Testa-

52 Quoted in Leupe 1873, p. 262; Floor 1979, pp. 148–49. I remain slightly concerned over this reading of the case: had the shah expressed pleasure in the work of these specific individuals, or in the talents of European painters and craftsmen in general?

53 Bufkens is buried in the Armenian cemetery in Julfa, outside Isfahan. The Dutch inscription on his gravestone, as photographed in April 2008 by Martine Gosselink, reads: "Here lies buried Huybert Bufkens, in his life [servant] of the Dutch East India Company and diamond cutter in the service of the King of Persia, deceased … 25 December 1658." See also Gosselink 2009, p. 156.

54 Boase 1950.

Fig. 69

Fig. 69 Christoffel van Sichem the Younger (1581-1658), *The temptation of Christ,* woodcut and caption from *Het Nieuwe Testament Ons Salichmaeckers Iesv Christi, mitsgaders d'Epistelen […], verciert met veel schoone Figueren door Christoffel van Sichem,* first published in Antwerp by Cornelis Verschuren and subsequently reprinted in 1646 by Pieter Iacobsz. Paets, p. 11

Fig. 70 Painted wall in the All Saviors Cathedral, with *Temptation of Christ* on left, Isfahan, New Julfa
Abbildungen Aufsatz Axel Langer

Fig. 70

ment. This implies a modicum of theological and iconographical knowledge, knowledge that would have been commanded by the Armenian patriarchate in New Julfa.
Boase assumed that the Amsterdam imprint of 1666 was the source for the imagery in New Julfa. However, the decorations in the church are now dated to between 1645 and 1655, ruling this out. Nonetheless, the connection was real and significant, in a form of which Boase was unaware. The same engravings used in the Armenian Bible were printed earlier by Van Sichem, in a volume of Bible prints entitled *Bibels tresoor* (Biblical Treasury), published in Amsterdam in 1646, making them available as a source for the churches of Julfa. The correspondences were published in 1968 by John Carswell.

What would have been the role of Barend van Sichem? Floor writes that he "was unable to find any family connection between Barend and Christoffel." That connection has since been found by Marten Jan Bok. Barend was baptized in the Nieuwe Kerk in Amsterdam on October 27, 1620, as the son of Christoffel van Sichem the Younger, the maker of the woodcuts. In 1638 he was only eighteen years old, making it unlikely that he was personally responsible for the execution of the mighty vaults and domes in Julfa Cathedral. However, he may well have been the bearer of iconographical models for that project. The edition of 1646 did not come out of thin air. One of the prints is dated 1631, and Christoffel van Sichem is likely to have had the drawings for most if not all of his woodcuts, many of them based on older sources, by the time Barend left for the East. In accounting for the transmission of those images from Amsterdam to New Julfa, there is every reason to take seriously the possibility that Barend van Sichem was the main agent. It is not even necessary to assume that he survived his trip. He may have been bringing prints and drawings for the Armenian community that were delivered there and were adapted and executed by local Christian artists.

If we therefore expand our view of "Persian art" to "art in Persia," the connection between the Van Sichem family and the Armenian community of New Julfa emerges as a key example. With regard to extant survivals, this connection would by far exceed the Dutch East India Company in importance.[55]

Dutch-English Competition in the Arts?

In the arts as well as in diplomacy, the Dutch East India Company was being outflanked in Persia by the British. A striking illustration was the arrival in 1638 of an English delegation bringing a personal letter from Charles I to Shah Safi as well as a (copy of a) portrait of Henrietta Maria by Anthony van Dyck. Forty years later the painting was adapted by Muhammad Zaman in 1675 for a non-portrait image of an Indian princess being visited by Bahram Gur. More amazingly, the same artist created in the early 1680s a painting entitled by Eleanor Sims *Pastiche of the Holy Family and the Trinity, the Angel of the Annunciation, and Charles I in the guise of St. Joseph*.[56] This reminds us that the relatively low regard in which Europeans were held in Persia is due in considerable measure to the fact that no European ruler ever visited the country. A favorite theme in Persian art is the meeting between a shah and the ruler of a foreign land. Those rulers came from neighboring countries, not Europe. Within Europe, the Dutch stood on a lower plane than countries with a proper king, but this is not the only reason why the English had longer staying power in the region, down to Iran in the twentieth century. Shah Sulayman does not seem to have had Dutch painters in his employ. Instead, he turned to the English, requesting in 1668/69 in a letter to King Charles II that he send him "an enameler, a watchmaker, a diamond cutter, a goldsmith, a gunsmith, a painter, and a cannon-maker."[57]

One occasion when the Dutch, by their own account, outdid their European rivals in an artistic endeavor took place in 1636. On November 24 of that year Nicolaes Jacobsz. Overschie wrote the following in a report to the governors in Amsterdam:

> On the 13th of this month the shah [the twenty-five-year-old Safi] was given a triumphal reception, bringing with him many Turkish prisoners from Yerevan, as well as an ambassador from Constantinople and one from Hindustan. The shah extends to him [Overschie], as he does to the Englishmen [in Isfahan], the courtesy to invite him to festive meals. H.M. [His Majesty] begins to take increased interest in affairs of state.
> Like the other foreigners, Overschie had a triumphal arch made. The shah honored the triumphal arch with a visit and Overschie offered H.M. jewels and money to the amount of four thousand guilders, while H.M. also accepted a cup of wine and spent an hour there. He also inquired after the name of His Princely Excellency [Frederik Hendrik; compare this degrading query with the letter from Charles I presented two years later by the British]. H.M. declared that this triumphal arch was the most beautiful of all. The total costs amounted to six thousand guilders, not including the gift. He [Overschie] hopes that this will not be held against him.[58]

Unfortunately, Overschie does not tell who designed and executed the triumphal arch.

Conclusion

Real-life contact between Dutch East India Company officials and the Persians was anything but tender. It was mainly guided by sheer venality and disfigured by thievery and abuse of power, corruption and lying, threats and employment of actual violence on both sides. To paraphrase von Clausewitz, to the VOC warfare was a continuation by other means not of politics but of business.

The terms in which artists of the Persian and Netherlandish cultures received each other's work and each other barely come loose of the prejudgments brought to the arena by members of each group. This impression may be overly influenced by the sparseness of the evidence. It is possible that a minority opinion has been wiped out by time. In Persia, this took place all at once in 1722, when whatever documents might have existed illuminating our subject were thrown into the Zayandeh River in Isfahan, along with the complete Safavid administration, by Afghan invaders.

On the Dutch side, while the Dutch East India Company may not have engaged in patronage of the arts, individual Dutchmen did express admiration for Eastern art. The greatest examples we know were the complimentary gestures of Rembrandt and Willem Schellinks in the 1650s. Rembrandt copied some twenty-five drawings made at the Mogul court of India, motifs that were used by Schellinks for fantasy compositions of oriental glamour. Schellinks also wrote a poem praising the art of the "Benjans" above that of Europe.[59] Because this remarkable explosion of high European regard for Asian art concerned Indian rather than Persian creations, it falls outside the confines of the present article. However, just as Persians did not differentiate between the schools of European art, we may assume that whatever Rembrandt and Schellinks thought about Mogul art would have applied to Persian painting as well, had they seen good examples of it.

55 In a lecture delivered at a NIAS symposium in January 2010, "Reconfiguration of Northern European Sacred Iconographies at the Court of Shah Sulayman (1666–1694)," Amy Landau suggested that the iconographical source for the New Julfa cycles lay in the extremely influential volumes of iconographic models published in the 1590s by the Plantin press in Antwerp, Hieronymus Nadal's *Evangelicae historiae imagines* (1593) and *Adnotationes et meditationes in Evangelia* (1594) as well as other prints and books that Catholic missionaries had been introducing into Asia for over a century. While granting this possibility, I do not believe that it detracts from the significance of the Van Sichems as providers of iconographical and stylistic content to the Armenians of New Julfa.

56 Sims 1983, pp. 76–77 (*Pastiche*) and p. 82, note 20 (gift of English royal portraits). See also Ferrier 1970 for the English gifts to Shah Safi.

57 Quoted in Matthee 1998, p. 236, note 79.

58 Dunlop 1930, p. 590.

59 For Rembrandt's drawings, see Lunsingh Scheurleer 1980. Jan de Hond of the Rijksmuseum introduced Schellinks's poem into scholarly discourse at a seminar of November 2009 at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Studies in Wassenaar.

The sparseness of evidence is however itself a reflection of the fact that artistic exchange is a minuscule phenomenon by comparison with more material forms of commerce. In the marketplace, a certain equality and mutuality are presumed. When a buyer and seller shake hands on a deal, they agree on the value of the items or services concerned. It was hard enough for the Dutch East India Company to achieve workable exchangeability in trading silk and silver. Transactions were complicated by issues of prestige, military considerations, corruption on both sides, European smugness, and the underlying assumption by the Persians that the Dutch were petitioners for favor, bringing tribute to the king of kings. Deals that were made, even royal edicts and resolutions of the States General, were simply thrown out the window at the first setback or the first opportunity to gain an advantage by violating the treaty. Yet business did get done.

When it came to works of art, nothing close even to that defective degree of compatibility was attainable. All other factors aside, there was too large a financial-cultural gap between Dutchmen who would not give a stiver for a Persian painting and Persians to whom European prices for works of art were incomprehensible. Recall the missive of 1641 accompanying a return shipment of paintings that were not offered to the Safavid court because they would not "be valued at anything close to their price." It would have taken a Joseph Duveen to sell Dutch paintings to the Persians for a good price, and none of the Dutch East India Company officials in the country were endowed with his belief in the product, let alone his gifts as a salesman.

If Rudi Matthee is right that "the seventeenth-century travelers … brought with them a set of specific ways of seeing that facilitated the translation and the mediation of difference to the point of engaged empathy,"[60] then the fine arts formed an exception. Of the two cultures, the Persians showed themselves far more open to European values than vice versa. Insofar as art entered Dutch-Persian relations, it can be said to have smoothed over rough edges. In a global perspective on our subject, we could suggest that fine art serves to divert attention from–and therefore make more palatable–the raw interest or hard necessity that otherwise threatens to govern human relations. This may sound cynical, and to some it undoubtedly was. But artists and art lovers who looked beyond the borders of their own upbringing, however few in number they may have been, could be richly rewarded. In the midst of the mutual exploitation of Dutchmen and Persians in the age of the Dutch East India Company, the realm of art gave room, however infrequently it was entered, for imagining, projecting, or experiencing the most personal qualities of the other and oneself.

60 Matthee 2009, p. 140.

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64 **Picture of a Persian Nobleman**
Iran, late 17th century
Oil on canvas; 37.5 x 21.5 cm
Museum Rietberg Zurich, 2013.180

65 **Picture of a Finely Clad Woman**
Iran, late 17th century
Oil on canvas; 375 x 215 mm
Museum Rietberg Zurich, 2013.181

These two small-format oil paintings are traditionally regarded as a pair. The one picture shows a richly clothed Persian in a padded, purple-colored robe or *qaba* with a jerkin-like *kurti* on top. He wears an impressive, sticking-out mustache and a check turban such as was typical of the period of Shah Sulayman (1666–1694). He is shown standing in front of a basin in the inner courtyard of a mosque, which is tiled like a chessboard and has a fountain in the middle.

The woman, by contrast, is shown standing on a bare mountain. She wears a long white skirt and over it a partially pleated red robe as well as a widely cut cloak with drooping sleeves. Her head is covered by a scarf wound round her neck and hair. The exact type of dress shown

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here has not yet been identified, but it is certainly not Persian.

The paint applied in several layers, like the chiaroscuro, tell us that this is the work of a painter schooled in the European tradition. That some of the wet paints were mixed directly on the canvas supports this theory, as does the heightening in thick lead white. Another European feature is the use of predominantly dark colors, and the preference for mixed shades. Persian painters, by contrast, show a marked preference for pure, radiant colors, even when darker hues are required.

It follows that these works could be two of the extremely rare—perhaps even the only—known examples of pictures painted by European painters in Persia. We know from other sources that there were several painters from Europe—most of them from the Netherlands (see Gary Schwartz's essay)—working in the service of the shah. The choice of men and women in Persian, Armenian, or other costumes as a subject is fully congruent with the prevailing taste, as we know from the Persian oils that once hung in the houses of Isfahan (see cat. nos. 139–143).