

Ottoman-Dutch cultural ties

Version 2011

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In 2011, SICA (the predecessor of DutchCulture) produced a comprehensive mapping of the Turkish cultural field. This mapping was written by local experts and edited by Teike Asselbergs and Chantal Hamelinck. The mapping was produced as a means to promote cultural exchange between the Netherlands and Turkey and as a starting point of the year 2012, which marked 400 years of Dutch – Turkish diplomatic relations. The mapping was supported and produced in close co-operation with the Dutch public funds.

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This chapter deals with the cultural relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Netherlands in the widest sense, and provides both a general introduction and a number of more specialized short texts dealing with specific subjects for those who are interested. Each entry has a bibliography, listing the most important publications on the subject for further reading.

Introduction

The Ottoman Empire (ca. 1300-1922) was for a long period one of the dominant forces in the Middle East, North Africa and South-Eastern Europe. From 1453 onwards the Ottoman sultans ruled over a vast empire from their capital, Istanbul. Contacts with Europe sometimes had the character of military confrontations, but also witnessed periods of peaceful co-existence. However, throughout this at times eventful history there were also cultural relations between the Ottoman Empire and Europe, which resulted in exchange and mutual influence. In 1612 the first Dutch ambassador traveled to the Ottoman Empire in order to establish direct diplomatic relations, especially since they had a common enemy: Spain. While the Ottomans hoped to conclude a political and military alliance with the upcoming naval power of the Netherlands, the Dutch – as an upcoming economic power – were especially interested in direct relations for commercial reasons. Interestingly, even before the establishment of official diplomatic relations between the Netherlands and the Ottoman Empire in 1612, there had already been contacts between the Dutch and Ottomans on various levels: Dutch pilgrims travelled through Ottoman lands on their way to Jerusalem, merchants frequented Ottoman ports in the Levant (under foreign flags), and already in the 16th century individual diplomats, travelers, artists and scholars from the Netherlands visited lands belonging to the Ottoman Empire for various purposes. In general we can say that especially these groups – diplomats, merchants, travelers, artists and scholars – played an important role in cultural contacts between both countries throughout the Ottoman period. News, knowledge and information about the Ottoman Empire reached the Netherlands directly via these groups, although the indirect route via other European countries (Venice, Austria, France) that often maintained more close relations with the Ottoman Empire was important as well. Until the late 18th century, Ottoman diplomatic practice did not allow for Ottoman ambassadors to reside in foreign countries. Instead the Ottomans used envoys for incidental missions. As a consequence, the Ottomans were (initially) more dependent on indirect sources for their knowledge and information about the Netherlands than the Dutch were. Over time contacts between the Dutch and Ottomans have led to interesting forms of cultural exchange and influence. These cultural contacts between the Netherlands and the Ottoman Empire materialized on various -often interrelated and overlapping- levels:

Dutch diplomats, merchants, travelers, artists and scholars who visited the Ottoman Empire produced written and visual information about the Ottoman Empire, the Ottomans, and the Ottoman culture (documents, reports, travelogues, drawings, paintings). This category also includes Dutch (re-)use of such information (for texts or visual art), as well as the use of products of Ottoman culture without ever having visited the Ottoman Empire themselves (for instance Ottoman carpets and clothing in 17th-century Dutch paintings).

The Dutch who settled in the Ottoman Empire, and formed small communities in Istanbul and Izmir, contributed to Ottoman “Levantine culture” in various forms (for instance in churches and cemeteries, residential architecture, painting)

Products of Ottoman culture - documents, manuscripts, objects of art/material culture - came to the Netherlands and ended up in archives, libraries, private- and museum collections. Sometimes these objects influenced Dutch culture (for instance carpets, ceramics and tiles, and their ornamentation).

Ottoman cultural phenomena and the objects belonging to these phenomena came -usually indirectly- to the Netherlands and were (first adapted and then) incorporated into Dutch culture (for instance coffee culture). Some of these cultural phenomena even returned to the Ottoman Empire in their Dutch form, being reintroduced in Ottoman culture (for instance flower bulbs in horticulture).

Products of Dutch culture came, directly or indirectly, to the Ottoman Empire. Sometimes these objects influenced Ottoman culture, as can be seen in for instance tiles and their ornamentation.

In general, diplomats and merchants played the most important role in the direct contacts between the Ottoman Empire and the Netherlands. Dutch-Ottoman relations throughout the Ottoman period were mainly commercial relations; diplomacy served these economic relations and cultural exchange or influence was often an unintended – but often very interesting – by-product of these contacts.

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Diplomatic and economic relations

The National Archives in The Hague contain rich collections of documents both of Ottoman and Dutch origin, documenting the Ottoman-Dutch relations. Apart from the archives of the foreign office, embassies, and consulates, the National Archives also have numerous private archives from Dutch families who had ties with the Ottoman Empire (for instance De Hochepeid; but also private archives of Dutch ambassadors). Inventories are available.

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Dutch communities in the Ottoman Empire

Since the establishment of official relations in 1612, Dutch diplomats and merchants started to settle in the Ottoman Empire, mainly in the most important commercial centers such as Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara and Aleppo. These Dutch communities were usually very small. However, with the emergence of Izmir as the main commercial hub of the Ottoman Empire in the 17th century, the Dutch community in this city started to grow and began to play an important role in the city's economic life. Some important Dutch families were Van Lennep, and De Hochepped. These merchant families formed the Dutch (often protestant) part of the Levantine community of Izmir and had their own hospital-church and cemetery. The Dutch consulate was often housed in the (private) residence of the consul in the area around the (in)famous Frenk Caddesi. Most rich families had summer residences outside Izmir, where they also stayed in times of (plague) epidemics. The Van Lennep and De Hochepped families owned important collections of paintings, indicating their high status in gâvur Izmir society. The Dutch community in Istanbul was smaller and consisted mainly of the ambassador and a number of (often related) merchant families, who sometimes also functioned as officials in the embassy.

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Turkish and Ottoman Language and Culture

The study of the Turkish language and culture is an important scholarly tradition in the Netherlands. The origins of Dutch Turcology go back to the 17th century, when Turkish was for the first time studied (next to Arabic and Persian) at Leiden University. This tradition continues until today, and Leiden University now is the only university in the Netherlands with a specialized program of Turkish Studies. The department is one of the biggest in Europe (outside Turkey) and attracts students from all over the world, even including Turkey. The fact that Middle Eastern languages were studied at Leiden University from the late 16th century onwards also led to the establishment of various manuscript collections in Leiden University Library. One of these important collections is the Turkish manuscript collection. This collection has recently been catalogued in its entirety. A substantial part of the Middle Eastern collection (ca. 1000 manuscripts) was gathered by the Dutch diplomat-scholar Levinus Warner (1619-1665) during his stay in Istanbul.

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Visual arts

From the late 15th century onwards artists from the Netherlands depicted Ottomans, and scenes from the Ottoman Empire, in their work. These works were often (re)produced for printed books. Dutch libraries, archives and museums have large collections of drawings, gravures (Marius Bauer), paintings, and books (Cornelis de Bruyn) with Ottoman subjects (ranging from single gravures or drawings to illustrated travelogues and complete costume books). A small number of diplomats also made interesting drawings in personal notebooks. By far the best known collection of paintings was made by Jean-Baptiste Vanmour for the Dutch ambassador Cornelis Calkoen (nowadays to be found in the Rijksmuseum). Other important collections of paintings belonged to the Van Lennep and De Hochepped families in Izmir, and to other Dutch diplomats. Two of the more interesting paintings are the panoramas of Ankara and Izmir (to be found in the Rijksmuseum and Tropenmuseum). The rich collections of Dutch libraries and museums also contain famous works by non-Dutch artists, such as Melchior Lorck (Panorama of Istanbul, Leiden University Library).

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Carpets

From the 15th century onwards carpets from the Ottoman Empire were exported to Europe as luxury products. From the 17th century onwards, in the Golden Age, Ottoman carpets became very popular in the Netherlands as a form of conspicuous consumption by the Dutch (merchant) elite. As such these carpets were not only used in interiors, but also appeared in paintings. However, they were usually not used on the floors, but on tables. Turkish carpets were simply too expensive to use on floors. These depictions form an important source for the dating of certain carpet types and even individual carpets. The prestige of Turkish carpets eventually led to the production of handmade, but also industrial imitations in the Netherlands under the name Smyrna carpets. Dutch Smyrna carpets were named after a specific Turkish carpet type with bold designs which from the 17th century was imported via Izmir. The tradition of using Turkish-style carpets (not real ones, but cheap imitations!) on tables still exists in the Netherlands. In traditional Dutch cafés (bruin café) one can still find this type of carpet on the tables. This can be considered as an interesting case of “gesunkenes Kulturgut”: something which started as a status symbol (17th century) in the course of time fell victim to its own popularity and ended as something inferior and old-fashioned. In spite of their evident quality even real Turkish carpets never recovered from this image problem: both Persian and Turkish carpets are no longer very popular in the Netherlands. However, as a cultural phenomenon this fall from grace is very interesting. Even though carpets mainly came from the Ottoman Empire to Europe, there is also an example of tapestry going to the Ottoman Empire. In 1617 the Dutch authorities gave grand vizier Halil Pasha six very expensive wall tapestries as a token of gratitude for his role in the establishment of the official relations in 1612. The tapestries were made by the famous Delft tapissier François Spiering. As far as known is this the only case of tapestries sent from Holland to the Ottoman Empire. The Rijkmuseum recently bought two tapestries by Spiering at an auction in Paris.

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Textiles & Clothing

Already in the earliest publications that deal with the Ottoman Empire, we find depictions of inhabitants of various origins wearing "Ottoman" clothing. So-called "Costume Books" were especially popular in the 16th until 18th centuries. In the 17th century "Oriental dress" was frequently used in Dutch painting (often in Biblical scenes). In the 17th century the first real Ottoman garments must have arrived in the Netherlands, bought for instance by travelers and merchants. In the 17th and 18th centuries raw materials and various cloths (cotton, silk, mohair) were by far the most important goods of Dutch-Ottoman trade. In the 18th century fashion a la turque (part of European rococo turquerie/turquiserie) also reached the Netherlands and various garments of Turkish origin became popular among the rich. Nowadays Ottoman textiles form a source of inspiration for modern Dutch designers who use various décors (çintamani etc.) for new designs and products. The Textile Research Centre in Leiden has a rich collection of clothing from the Middle East, including Turkey.

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Ceramics & Tiles

Because of mutual influences, ceramics and tiles form one of the most important meeting points of Turkish and Dutch culture. In the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, ceramics from the Middle East, including Ottoman products mainly from Iznik, became increasingly popular in Europe and were collected by both museums and rich private collectors. This fascination for Ottoman ceramics also reached the Netherlands, where in the late 19th and early 20th century various factories (De Porceleyne Fles, Rozenburg, Zuid-Holland, Arhemsche Faiencefabriek) started to produce ceramics inspired by the shapes and decors of Ottoman ceramics. It is interesting to note, however, that already as early as the 17th century depictions of "Turks" (mainly sultans and horsemen) were used as ornaments on Dutch tiles. From the late 17th century onwards Dutch tiles also started to have influence on the ornamentation of tiles made in Kütahya and Istanbul. In the 18th century, especially during the rule of the sultans Mahmud I, Osman III, Mustafa III and Abdülhamid I large quantities of Dutch tiles with fashionable baroque-rococo decors were imported for use in imperial buildings such as the Topkapı Palace.

Tulip vases can be considered as one of the most fascinating ceramic products. The reason is that not only the tulip, but also the tulip vase belongs to the shared cultural heritage of both countries. Modern designers, like for example Lotte van Laatum, and ceramists in both Turkey and the Netherlands are often inspired by this phenomenon, creating modern tulip vases and thereby combining the shared rich heritage of both cultures.

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Architecture & architectural decoration

The Dutch communities who lived in the Ottoman Empire often built their own houses. The best known of these are the houses and summer houses of the Dutch Levantine families in Izmir and the surrounding villages (Bornova, Seydiköy/Gaziemir, Buca, Hacilar). Most/all of these houses are lost, but drawings and photographs exist. The Dutch community in Izmir also had its own hospital-church complex, and both the church as well as the cemetery still exists. An important building for the Dutch community in Istanbul is the present consulate-general complex (formerly the embassy) which also houses a church. Since the community in Istanbul did not have its own cemetery, members of the Dutch community in Istanbul were often buried in one of the (protestant) cemeteries of Feriköy. In Istanbul there is also a famous building which was commissioned by a Dutchman: the Botter Apartmanı on Istiklal Caddesi. This building in art nouveau style was designed by Raimondo d'Aronco for the Dutch tailor of Sultan Abdülhamid II in 1900.

“The Turk” is also used in the decoration of architecture in the Netherlands. A number of buildings in the Netherlands have sculpted depictions of Ottomans (heads of Ottomans: “The Turkish Head”). One example of such a building is the monumental house “In den vergulden Turk” (“In the Gilded Turk”)(1673) in Leiden.

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Garden architecture

In the 18th century “Turkish” kiosks became highly fashionable rococo features in European gardens (follies). In the Netherlands such a garden kiosk was usually called a “Turkse tent” (Turkish tent), although the building usually did not resemble a Turkish tent at all. Thus, the expression “Turkish tent” was rather deceptively used for garden pavilions in general. Although a number of tent-like constructions are known to have existed, more often “Turkish tents” resembled a Chinese pagoda (Tatar-style) or were simply in a European style but decorated with some “Turkish” elements like crescents. Dutch “Turkish tents” were part of the much wider 18th-century European phenomenon of turquerie/turquoise. In the 19th century the Turkish style went out of fashion in the Netherlands and was replaced by an oriental style in which Moorish (Alhambra) and Moghul (Taj Mahal) elements played a more important role.

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Horticulture

Even before the establishment of official diplomatic relations in 1612 with the Ottoman Empire, various plants originally from the Ottoman Empire came to Europe, and also reached the Netherlands. Most of these were introduced in the second half of the 16th century, although new plants were also introduced in later centuries. The most famous introduction is the tulip, which over time developed into a symbol for both Turkey and the Netherlands. As early as 1613 –less than 50 years after the introduction of the bulb in Europe– Dutch tulips were given as a present to Sultan Ahmed I. The increasing popularity of the tulip in the Netherlands eventually led to the infamous tulip mania of 1637. Apart from the bulbs and the flowers themselves, tulips also became an important ornament on various objects such as Dutch tiles and ceramic objects. Another 16th century introduction was the hyacinth. This flower initially led an inconspicuous life in the Netherlands, but in the late 17th century and early 18th century became extremely popular in Europe, resulting in a true hyacinth mania in the 1720s and 1730s. This (double) Dutch hyacinth also returned to the Ottoman Empire in the 1730s and resulted in a small Ottoman hyacinth mania. Dutch hyacinths were exported to the Ottoman Empire throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. For both the Dutch and the Ottomans these bulbs formed an important aspect of their culture (both as a plant and as an ornament in art).

Turkey is still an important country for horticulture, especially because there are rich flora and horticultural relations between Turkey and the Netherlands. These relations are (economically) relevant, not in the least because of the immense importance of Dutch flower and plant trade. Turkey will also participate in the 2012 Floriade in the Netherlands.

Further reading

M. Roding & H. Theunissen (eds.), *The Tulip: A Symbol of Two Nations*, Utrecht-Istanbul 1993.

M. Roding & S. Segal, *De tulp en de kunst*, Zwolle 1994.

O. Wijnands, „Tulpen naar Amsterdam: plantenverkeer tussen Nederland en Turkije“, in H. Theunissen, Annelies Abelmann & Wim Meulenkamp (eds.) Topkapı & Turkomanie. Turks-Nederlandse ontmoetingen sinds 1600, Amsterdam 1989, 97-106.

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