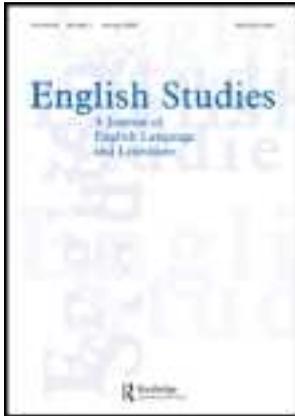


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Merchants' Homes and Collections as Cultural Entrepôts: The Case of Joachim de Wicquefort and Diego Duarte

Marika Keblusek

This essay explores the role of early modern merchants' private residencies as cultural and intellectual entrepôts. Focusing on the homes of Amsterdam merchant Joachim de Wicquefort and his Antwerp colleague Diego Duarte, it is evident that these loci similarly functioned as semi-official spaces for people to meet and communicate. Conversations about art and books, in relaxed and private surroundings, often led to other discussions – for example about politics, commerce or religion. The privacy of the home and its collections thus ensured visitors an informal, protected atmosphere, where a shared language of cultural pursuits – of music, art, literature – could be exploited to forge other, politically charged, bonds. The presence and exchange of valued material objects – collections of books, curiosities and artworks – played an instrumental part in this process.

In March 1638, Petrus Cunaeus, professor at Leiden University, reproved his learned friend Caspar Barlaeus for preferring to stay the night at the house of a local merchant, Matthys van Overbeke, rather than with him. Cunaeus voiced his contempt in quite conventional terms: van Overbeke was “a servant of Mercurius”, who could “barely appreciate scholars”.¹ Other friends of Barlaeus had uttered similar concerns, for example the poet and magistrate Pieter Cornelisz Hooft, who in 1636 believed that he traced van Overbeke's negative influence in Barlaeus' speech, likening his recent arguments to the hair-splitting of merchant quarrels.² Years before, in 1625, Constantijn Huygens —secretary to the Prince of Orange and a formidable poet in his own right— had simply denounced Matthys van Overbeke as “rich but common”.³ The Dutch learned community, then, apparently had no

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¹Blok, 62, Cunaeus to Barlaeus, 11 March 1638.

²Quoted in Lunsingh Scheurleer and Fock, 307.

³Worp, ed., *Briefwisseling*, no. 265, Huygens to Jacob van der Burgh, 11 May 1625.

patience with men like van Overbeke, deeming them intellectually inferior because of their commercial activities.⁴

Matthys van Overbeke was indeed a famously wealthy man, whose fortune rested on the trade in English cloth and skins, and on his wife's two inherited mines in German territories.⁵ He had been born in Cologne, in 1584, a son of refugee Protestants from the southern Netherlands. In 1613, he had married Agatha Soliers in Frankfurt, a woman with a similar émigré background. The couple moved to Amsterdam in 1620, and settled permanently in Leiden later that year. They bought a house on the main Leiden canal, the stately Rapenburg, a few doors down from the university, and also renovated and expanded an old estate in the nearby countryside, Oud-Kalslagen, which boasted beautifully arranged gardens. A description by the English traveller William Brereton from 1634 evokes the riches of the "spacious gardens, mighty great orchards and store of fishponds".⁶

Despite his friends' criticisms, Barlaeus did not waver in his commitment to van Overbeke. Apart from dedicating several poems to him and his wife, he gathered every week, together with some six or seven other scholars, at the merchant's mansion on the Rapenburg to discuss religious matters.⁷ He was also a regular guest at Oud-Kalslagen, whence he wrote in 1636, for example, how staying there helped him to overcome his grief caused by the recent death of his wife. In a telling letter, Barlaeus honoured van Overbeke "as a friend, not as a protector. If I come away from him a little richer every time, it is the reward for the work I took with me. Rome used to have maecenas, our Holland lacks them. Perhaps he imitates the gods who sold their gifts only in exchange for labour".⁸ An interesting characterisation: van Overbeke is explicitly named a *friend*, a term commonly used in the early modern period to refer to family or (close) acquaintances with whom one kept up a relationship supplying mutual favours and support.⁹ Internationally active merchants in particular depended on "friends" within their families to construct reliable networks of representatives abroad.¹⁰ Thus, a "friendly" relationship goes beyond the one between a protector (or patron) and his client, which suggests a more unilateral, and certainly more hierarchical, alliance. Van Overbeke, we can deduce from Barlaeus' phrasing, must have been more than the host of a weekly humanist *salon* or someone who could offer a much needed rest in the countryside. On the contrary, he appears to have been respected as a humanist in his own right.

A closer look at his activities does indeed reveal a man highly interested in intellectual and cultural matters and things. He financed several foreign students in Leiden (and offered them a place to live in his house) and corresponded with scholars

⁴de Vries, 125–33, on the (self-) image of merchants and the changing attitude towards commerce in early modern Amsterdam. See also Jacob and Secretan, *passim*.

⁵Biographical details on van Overbeke's Rapenburg mansion in Lunsingh Scheurleer and Fock.

⁶Quoted in Lunsingh Scheurleer and Fock, 305–6.

⁷Worp, "Caspar," 243, Barlaeus to Episcopius, c.1628.

⁸Quoted in *ibid.*, 184.

⁹Kooijmans, *passim*.

¹⁰Kebulsek, "Introduction," 14, and literature there quoted; Kebulsek, "Mercator," *passim*.

abroad, amongst whom was Georg Calixtus, a Lutheran theologian in Helmstedt. Yet van Overbeke was renowned in the first place for his library and his collection of antiquities (mostly Roman coins) and paintings. According to contemporary eyewitness accounts—inventories and catalogues have unfortunately never been found—the walls of his Rapenburg mansion were hung with work by Peter Paul Rubens, Willem van de Velde, Roelant Savery, Jan Porcellis and Sebastiaen Vrancx.¹¹ The core of the library was formed in 1634, when van Overbeke bought some fourteen incunabula with illustrations by Albrecht Dürer and Lucas van Leyden which had originally belonged to the famous humanist library of Willibald Pirckheimer, from the Imhoff family.¹²

It was precisely the riches of the van Overbeke collections which made Constantijn Huygens rethink his first, rather disdainful attitude towards the merchant; in 1630, he asked Barlaeus for an introduction so that he could see the library and art gallery.¹³ Huygens' initial, negative opinion, motivated by an apparent equation of commercial wealth with commonness, is remarkable because of the circles he later moved in. He must have changed his opinion in the intervening years, meeting other wealthy traders with intellectual and cultural interests and talents. Certainly, from the 1630s onwards, Huygens himself counted several merchants amongst his friends, including Joachim de Wicquefort (1596–1670) in Amsterdam and Diego Duarte II (1612–91) in Antwerp.

Both successful and wealthy merchants, Wicquefort and Duarte had much in common: not only did they occasionally partner in business, but they were also members of the same cultural and intellectual European networks. Both men were avid collectors of art, curiosities and books, and dabbled in writing themselves. Like the van Overbeke mansion in Leiden, their respective houses seem to have functioned as a meeting-point for a large, loosely connected group of people, consisting of members of the international elite, artists, scholars, poets and musicians. As such, their homes became an “entrepôt” for the cultural and intellectual transfer of ideas and objects. In this essay I will discuss the concept of early modern merchant houses as cultural entrepôts, taking the Wicquefort and Duarte cases as a starting point.

Joachim de Wicquefort

Huygens and Wicquefort may first have known (of) each other through their respective services to Frederik Hendrik, Prince of Orange. As the prince's secretary, Huygens must have been well aware of the financial transactions Joachim de Wicquefort and his brothers Jan and Jasper (or Gaspar) were involved in on behalf of the Orange treasury. Certainly between 1631 and 1634, the Wicquefort company acted as financial intermediary, bank and occasional messenger for the

¹¹Buchelius, 96–7.

¹²Lunsingh Scheurleer and Fock, 307–9, 470. In 1640 van Overbeke's widow auctioned off his library; in 1642 the paintings were sold publicly.

¹³Worp, *Briefwisseling*, no. 482, Huygens to Barlaeus, 1 January 1630.

Orange family.¹⁴ Originally, the company had also included their father, Gaspar de Wicquefort senior (or Wickevoort, his preferred spelling), a wealthy Amsterdam merchant, who had been born in Antwerp, but had fled the southern Netherlands as a Protestant émigré. Settling in the commercial centre of the Dutch Republic, Gaspar bought a house close to the Amsterdam Exchange, and quickly integrated in the local Lutheran community. Three of his sons joined his firm, while two others established themselves as independent merchants; all his daughters married into merchant families as well. The one exception was his fourth son, Abraham, whose colourful career as political and cultural agent, spy and historian merits a full-length biography.¹⁵

The commercial ties between the Wicquefort family and the Prince of Orange, however, did not necessarily lead to a closer, personal contact between Huygens and Joachim—on the contrary; considering the way Huygens looked down on van Overbeke, it is unlikely their friendship resulted from these transactions. Yet as in the van Overbeke case, Barlaeus acted as an intermediary between the two men. Shortly after moving to Amsterdam, Barlaeus introduced Wicquefort in a letter to Huygens in lyrical terms, praising him as a “man of culture and taste, a collector of Roman coins and antiquities, and otherwise virtually the only man with whom [Barlaeus was] on intimate terms in Amsterdam”.¹⁶ Apparently, these words impressed Huygens favourably—the remark on Wicquefort’s collections may have done the trick—for he then engaged the merchant in more cultural assignments both for the Prince of Orange and for himself. The first task Joachim undertook on behalf of Frederik Hendrik, in 1634, was orchestrated by Huygens, and concerned the acquisition of two life-size statues by the Antwerp sculptor Artus Quellinus. Depicting *Mars* and *Venus*, they were meant for the newly constructed gardens at the prince’s estate in Honselaarsdijk, south-west of The Hague. Whilst Huygens had negotiated the commission, Wicquefort was trusted with the financial logistics, paying out 326 Flemish pounds to Quellinus and overseeing the wrapping, packaging and sending of the finished artworks.¹⁷

In November 1634, Huygens wrote a short note to Wicquefort, thanking him for purchasing some books “that have come from far away” on his behalf, while acknowledging in a letter to Barlaeus the many things Wicquefort had already done for him. Yet theirs was not a one-way relationship: a rather extensive letter in early December 1634 refers to Huygens’ intermediary services for Wicquefort, whose two previous letters “on the state of your affairs” the secretary had presented to the States General. In return, Huygens enlisted the merchant for support in his latest enterprise:

¹⁴National Archives, The Hague (hereafter: NA), Nassause Domeinraad, Financial Accounts, inv. 1040, fols. 205, 206v, 207; inv. 1041, fols. 227, 228v, 229r, 230r; inv. 1042, fols. 221r–v, 223r–v, 225r, 226r; inv. 1043, fols. 211v, 213r.

¹⁵For biographical information on the Wicquefort family: Vulsmā-Kappers. On Abraham, for example: Bruin, 493–505; Keblusek, “Book Agents,” 104–7; “Embassy.” Most literature on him focuses on only one aspect of his multi-faceted career.

¹⁶Blok, 87.

¹⁷NA, inv. 1043, fols. 223v, 224r; Theuerkauff, 317.

the design and building of a private mansion on the Plein in The Hague. For this well-documented project, Huygens closely cooperated with the innovative architect Jacob van Campen, a collaboration heralding the beginning of the so-called Dutch Classicist Style.¹⁸ For their design, they needed to consult the works of Vitruvius and his commentators, and of Juan Bautista Villalpando, on the Temple of Jerusalem. Well aware of “your beautiful universal curiosity”, Huygens wanted to know whether Wicquefort was aware of any Spanish books on the subject of Vitruvian architecture, and also asked if he could borrow the copy of Villalpando Wicquefort was said to own. (Exactly a year later, the merchant sent a copy, which he had purchased for Huygens via his contacts in Rome.) Again, it is evident from Huygens’ correspondence that their connection was based on reciprocal respect and favours. Stressing his indebtedness, he included little poems in his letters and promised to send Wicquefort a copy of Nicolas Tassin’s recently published plans of Paris, if he did not own the book already. Clearly, their shared interest and, in Huygens’ case, passion for architecture was to prove the starting point for a fruitful personal involvement.¹⁹

Although Huygens does not mention explicitly the Wicquefort book and art collection, these were clearly brought up in Barlaeus’ introduction as strong incentives for getting to know the merchant. As with van Overbeke, we only get a glimpse of what Wicquefort owned through contemporary visitors’ descriptions and scattered archival references, since no detailed inventories have survived.²⁰ In 1636, during his visit to Amsterdam, Wicquefort and Barlaeus introduced the French diplomat Charles Ogier to the city’s main publisher, Willem Jansz. Blaeu, and later took him to see the merchant’s collection. Noting an abundance of antiquities (notably coins and medals), exotic curiosities “from India” and paintings, Ogier focused on what he thought was the absolute highlight: fifteen Greek books published in Nuremberg, illustrated with drawings by Albrecht Dürer.²¹ In 1639, Barlaeus took the antiquarian Arnoldus Buchelius on a tour of major Amsterdam art collections, including the famous gallery of Gerard Reynst (another wealthy merchant with international connections) and the antiquarian cabinet of Wicquefort. After a tour given by his wife—Wicquefort himself being absent—Buchelius noted in his diary the many antiquities he had seen, especially coins and medals.²² Because of his brother’s

¹⁸Huisken, Ottenheim, and Schwartz, eds., *passim*.

¹⁹Worp, *Briefwisseling*, no. 1038, Huygens to Wicquefort, 5 November 1634; no. 1043, Huygens to Barlaeus, 29 November 1634; no. 1046, Huygens to Wicquefort, 5 December 1634; no. 1053, Huygens to Wicquefort, 30 December 1634; no. 1070, Huygens to Wicquefort, 31 January 1635; no. 1088, Huygens to Wicquefort, 8 March 1635; no. 1509, Wicquefort to Huygens, 11 December 1636.

²⁰Sincere thanks to Jaap van der Veen, who kindly shared with me his Wicquefort material. This collection figures in my current research project, *Mercator Sapiens*, on merchants, collectors and collections.

²¹K. Ogier, 294, 300. Interestingly enough, in December 1636, Sir Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundell purchased from Wicquefort via the artist Daniel Mytens—who acted as his occasional art agent—six books by Dürer for five hundred guilders; the transaction was finalised in March 1637. Five of them may well be identified with the Dürer volumes of drawings and writings in the British Museum, London: Springell, 109 (identifying Wicquefort as Ficefort).

²²Buchelius, 96–7.

enthusiastic stories, François Ogier visited the “precious” collection in 1644, then about to be moved to the new Wicquefort residence in The Hague. Characterising him as an “homme illustre ... un honnête homme”, Ogier praised his host’s exquisite taste apparent from all the “curiosities, medals, agates, engraved stones, vases, crystals, objects from the East and West Indies. But the most esteemed piece is one of *Adam and Eve*, about a foot high, in wood, a sculpture so beautiful and perfect one could easily attribute it to Michelangelo. It is valued at 20,000 francs”.²³

The role of collections in forging and strengthening personal, intellectual and political bonds has been frequently referred to in recent scholarship.²⁴ The Wicquefort galleries were probably exploited in a similar, but unilateral way, with the merchant acting as client/host and the visitor as patron. Yet his home also welcomed friends and personal acquaintances, thus functioning as a meeting-point in networks of a bilateral nature, a platform for the exchange of ideas, favours, services and material objects.²⁵ The Amsterdam poet Joost van den Vondel, dedicating his latest play *Joseph in Dothan* (1640) to Joachim de Wicquefort, alluded to many convivial evenings spent at his home discussing literary and other matters, surrounded by objects from the collection:

We present this youngster [i.e. the play] to your hospitality and home, which is used to welcoming all that is honest and honourable; and in which poetry finds a welcoming place, surrounded by other treasures like selected books, letters, statues, paintings, medals, prints, drawings and other material objects, with which your home is as richly furnished as it is sweetly open to all decent souls,²⁶

while explicitly asking him for advice, corrections and suggestions for later editions. The poet-magistrate Pieter Cornelisz Hooft, whose castle in Muideren became well known as the *locus* of literary get-togethers including Huygens, Vondel, Barlaeus and others (including, occasionally, Wicquefort himself), discussed these meetings in his many letters to Wicquefort and mused about reading poetry with him.²⁷ Undoubtedly, they engaged in political discussions as well: Wicquefort had

²³F. Ogier, 36. These may be identified as the “Two little figures of Adam and Eve, wood, very curious (peculiar),” valued at a high price of 750 guilders, in an inventory of some of Wicquefort’s belongings: Municipal Archives, The Hague, Notarial Records, inv. 293, fols. 75–6, 9 May 1653.

²⁴Meadow, passim; Keblusek, “Mercator.”

²⁵The exchange of objects (books, fruit, perfume, *exotica* and flowers) is evident from the extant correspondence with, among others, Barlaeus, Huygens and Hooft. Not much is known about Wicquefort’s interest in gardening, apart from his sending seeds (bulbs?) of rare tulips to Justus Daniël Kessel in Durlach. Having visited Wicquefort in 1632, Kessel had already received plant seed, and sent three antique coins in return. See Dutch Economic-Historical Archives (NEHA) Amsterdam, Special Collections, 564, Kessel to Wicquefort, 1637. For the mercantile interest in the collecting of botanical objects, see Goldgar, 55, 69.

²⁶Vondel, A3r, 11 October 1640. In his dedication, Vondel also referred to the extreme closeness of Barlaeus’ and Wicquefort’s friendship, picturing Barlaeus “as a sword of philosophy, that hangs daily by your side.” (Ibid.)

²⁷Tricht, ed., no. 1026, Hooft to Wicquefort, 1 July 1640. In 1642, Barlaeus informed Huygens of a festive gathering where Hooft and Wicquefort were to be present, celebrating a wedding by “philosophising, joking and dining in the manner of poets; we will divide the parts: one will play Cupid, the Other Playfulness, a third one Youth” (ibid., no. 1124, Barlaeus to Huygens, 11 November 1642).

established himself has a valuable political informer and kept his friends up to date with what was going on in Europe. Also, he introduced them to foreign sovereigns, brokered political favours and advised on the right phrasing of noble titles to use for dedications in their books.²⁸

In the 1640s, Wicquefort moved to The Hague, taking his collections with him. His growing responsibilities as political representative, news agent and resident for the Landgrave of Hesse-Cassel, the Duke of Kurland and other European princes, made him gravitate towards the political centre of the Dutch Republic.²⁹ In his lodgings at the prestigious Lange Voorhout, he reserved at least three rooms for his treasures: one for his books, one for his paintings, and a third one filled with curiosities, antiquities and sculptures.³⁰ Whether The Hague residence resumed the socialising function of Wicquefort's Amsterdam home is unclear; Huygens, for example, certainly may have visited him there, but no references to formal or informal gatherings are known. However, his country estate Huis ter Kolve in Wassenaar, close to The Hague, quickly established itself as a place to visit for Barlaeus, Hooft and other members of this literary and scholarly network. Again, in this informal atmosphere, current affairs were discussed, favours brokered and sometimes political players were introduced to each other. Thus, Wicquefort's residences both in Amsterdam and The Hague were instrumental, albeit nearly invisible, intellectual and political platforms.³¹

Diego Duarte

Some members of Wicquefort's social set were also familiar guests at the Duarte residence on the prestigious Meir in Antwerp. Joachim de Wicquefort himself may have looked up Gaspar and Diego Duarte II when passing through the city, but there is no proof for that. He certainly knew the family, primarily because he sometimes did business with them. In 1641, he acted as intermediary in a transaction which involved Gaspar Duarte and another merchant named Arnold Lundi for a delivery of jewels to the Prince of Orange, which were to be a bridal gift to the prince's future daughter-in-law, the English princess Mary Stuart. Three years later, he purchased a diamond ring from Gaspar Duarte for five thousand guilders, again a present from Frederik Hendrik to Mary.³²

²⁸*Ibid.*, *passim*.

²⁹Joachim de Wicquefort may have been introduced to diplomatic assignments through his brother Abraham. His first political report as Resident to the Landgrave of Hesse-Cassel dates from 1632; he acted as agent to Duke Bernhard of Saxe-Weimar between 1636 and 1638, sent political reports to Sweden from 1651 to 1654, was appointed to the council of the Duke of Kurland in 1655 and became Resident of the Dukes of Braunschweig-Lünebrug-Celle and of Mecklenburg-Schwering in the late 1650s.

³⁰Municipal Archives, The Hague, Notarial Records, inv. 208, p. 283, 25 May 1651.

³¹Mentioned in Tricht, for example no. 1083, Hooft to Wicquefort, 27 August 1641; no. 1084, Barlaeus to Hooft, inviting him to come spend time at Ter Kolve, 13 September 1641; and no. 1089, Hooft to Wicquefort, 16 September 1641, thanking him for some peaches and a peach tree.

³²NA, Ordonnantieboeken, inv. 993, fol. 46, May 1641: Gaspar Duarte is mentioned as the supplier of a large number of jewels and diamonds in 1641, for the staggering amount of forty-eight thousand guilders. For the

The Duarte firm mostly dealt in high-end jewels, diamonds, pearls and other valuable luxury items, and their dealings often introduced them into courtly and aristocratic circles. Although the family's precise origins are not known, its members certainly belonged to the group of "New Christians", Portuguese Jews who had been forced to convert to Christianity in the late fifteenth century and to leave their country, and had settled all over Europe.³³ Diego Duarte I (1544–1626), probably a young child when his father emigrated to Antwerp, became a successful trader in precious stones and jewels there, and his son Gaspar (1584–1653) continued both his business and his interest in cultural matters after Diego's death. His professional network stretched all over Europe, with ties to such commercial centres as Paris, Amsterdam, Hamburg, London and Vienna.

Constantijn Huygens was a frequent visitor to the Duarte home. His acquaintance with the family probably began in the 1640s, when he exchanged letters with Gaspar, then head of the family. They discussed several things: the purchase of jewellery for Princess Mary, the sending of music and other favours.³⁴ From the late 1640s onwards, a firm friendship developed, with Huygens making several visits to the Duarte residence and Gaspar's children returning the favour (Gaspar never made it to The Hague). In 1653, Gaspar died, and his eldest son Diego took over the family business, as well as the house on the Meir. Soon, the Duarte home became a meeting-point for a loosely connected group of people, both Flemish and foreign, who all shared a passion for music. This musical "circle" consisted, among others, of the Duarte children, Diego and his three sisters Leonora, Francisca and Catharina, Constantijn Huygens and his children, the Dutch poet Anna Roemers Visscher, music lover Johannes de Haze, members of the English royalist refugee community, such as William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, his wife Margaret Lucas, Duchess of Newcastle, Colonel William Swann and his wife Utricia Ogle (a distant cousin of Cavendish), and Béatrix de Cusance, Duchess of Lorraine.³⁵

The Duarte residence not only opened its doors as a musical *salon*, but it also functioned as an art gallery. Like his father and grandfather, Diego was an *amateur*, a "liefhebber" and avid collector of paintings and other works of art—and he may occasionally have traded in them as well. The Duarte art collection is far better documented than the one assembled by Wicquefort, due principally to a catalogue which was drawn up by Diego himself in 1682, which listed not only names of artists and descriptions of paintings (a total number of two hundred) but sometimes also their provenance and the price he had paid. (In 1693, the remaining collection was sold off by Diego's cousin and heir.³⁶) Of outstanding quality, the

1644 transaction: *ibid.*, fol. 257, 25 June 1644. See also Worp, *Briefwisseling*, no. 2677, Duarte to Huygens, 24 March 1641.

³³For a biographical background of the Duarte family: De Paepe, "Den heer Jacobi Duartes"; "Diego Duarte II."

³⁴Worp, *Briefwisseling*, no. 2677, Duarte to Huygens, 24 March 1641; Rasch, "The Antwerp Duarte Family," 418; Maufort, 941–60; Rasch, ed., *Driehonderd brieven*.

³⁵On this circle: Rasch, "The Antwerp Duarte Family"; De Paepe, "Diego Duarte II." On Béatrix de Cusance: Huysman and Rasch, eds.

³⁶Dogaer, 195–221; Samuel, 305–24.

gallery boasted two paintings by Raphaël (one of which had been bought for twenty-two hundred guilders from Dom Emanuel, Prince of Portugal), four by Andreas del Sarto, two Tintoretts, sixteen paintings by various Italian masters, eleven works by Rubens and eleven by Van Dyck (one of which depicted the Countess of Northumberland and Utricia Ogle), as well as work by Jan Porcellis, Adam Elshauer, Pieter Brueghel (both father and son), Quinten Matsys, Hans Rottenhamer, Holbein, Cornelis Poelenburgh and other Dutch masters. Its fame extended well beyond Diego's circle of (musical) acquaintances; it became an attraction for prominent travellers to Antwerp to go and see—again, as was the case with the Wicquefort collection. Famous visitors who described their impressions included the Swedish architect Nicodemus Tassin and Balthasar Monconys, a French diplomat. Constantijn Huygens Jr. visited the Duarte residence several times when military campaigns brought him to the South. Noting his views on the collection in his diary entry for 11 June 1676, he described several paintings which drew his attention, such as a *Peasants' Fair* by Brueghel (estimated at a thousand francs); a portrait of the Earl of Southampton by Holbein and, in a small cabinet, a piece by Rottenhamer with lots of nude figures, “the best I ever saw of that master”. Unfortunately, what with other visitors using the “Grand Cabinet”, perhaps to discuss political matters, Huygens was not able to see everything.³⁷ He returned several times to Duarte's house to look at the paintings and on occasion was taken by his host to view other collections.³⁸

Diego Duarte also shared his artistic expertise to advise other collectors on possible purchases, and his home address seems regularly to have been used as a mailing address, facilitating cultural and political exchanges. When he wanted to leave Antwerp for Holland, Nicolas Lanier, Master of the King's Music to Charles I and an *amateur* and art dealer in his own right, asked Huygens in March 1646 to procure him a passport “for myselfe with two cases of paintings and one servant”, to be addressed to him at the house of “Mr. Dewarte”.³⁹ In January 1659, when she was staying in The Hague, Béatrix de Cusance ordered the Antwerp art dealer Matthys Musson to leave his letters for her at the Duarte residence.⁴⁰

It has been suggested that Duarte exploited his collection, like his love for music, as a means to carve out a place for himself in the Antwerp social and cultural elite world.⁴¹ In the informality of his home, he could receive guests and manifest himself as a *connoisseur* of pictures—an equal interlocutor. Thus, the non-aristocratic “servant of Mercurius” could elevate himself to the level of aristocratic *amateurs*. Combining their social aspirations, commercial intuition, experience abroad and

³⁷Huygens, 101. The visitors were a “mr. le Pr. and the State Pensionary.”

³⁸*Ibid.*, 142.

³⁹Worp, *Briefwisseling*, no. 4295, Nicholas Lanier to Huygens, 16 March 1646.

⁴⁰Denucé, 200. Like many other merchant addresses, the Duarte residence was used as a “fixed” and trusted “post office,” see *Calendar*, IV, 95: James [Diego] Duarte forwards a letter by the English ambassador in Paris, Sir Richard Browne to Sir Edward Hyde.

⁴¹De Paepe, “Diego Duarte II,” 182.

international networks, wealthy merchants like Duarte or Wicquefort especially seem to have sought out collecting as a way to establish themselves—even if they could not always shed their professional instincts.⁴²

Conclusion: The Idea of *Mercator Sapiens*

Barlaeus' defence of his friend Matthys van Overbeke against the condescending remarks of fellow humanists was a matter of course. In 1632, he gave the inaugural speech at the opening of the Amsterdam Athenaeum, a “university” aimed in particular at the education of local merchants' sons. Entitled *Mercator Sapiens*—the Wise Merchant—Barlaeus promoted the union of trade and philosophy (or commerce and arts) in an adaptation of Martianus Capella's *Marriage of Mercury and Philology*.⁴³ He claimed merchants would be most successful commercially when they would also immerse themselves in serious scholarly work. Explicitly referring to the gathering and distribution of intellectual capital, Barlaeus must have been equally inspired by the collecting interests of men like van Overbeke and Wicquefort (both of whom may have been the *Mercator Sapiens*' model). Barlaeus stressed the importance of trade routes for the dissemination of objects, ideas and information, which confirms the crucial role of merchants in the process of early modern cultural transfer.⁴⁴

Recently, research into the dynamics of cultural exchange has shown that merchants in particular played a crucial role as cultural and political brokers.⁴⁵ Their lodgings in foreign cities—the so-called *fondaco* or “nations”—can be understood as sites of both commercial and cross-cultural trade, creating “social topographies of exchange, emulation and innovation”.⁴⁶ An assessment of the role of merchants' private residences as cultural and intellectual entrepôts has not been undertaken as yet, but it is evident from individual cases that these *loci* similarly functioned as semi-official spaces for people to meet and communicate. Conversations about art and books, in relaxed and private surroundings, often led to other discussions—about politics, commerce or religion. The privacy of the home and its collections thus ensured the visitor an informal, protected atmosphere, where a shared language of cultural pursuits—of music, art, literature—could be exploited to forge other, politically charged, bonds. The presence and exchange of valued material objects—collections of books, curiosities and artworks—played an instrumental part in this process.

⁴²Floerke, 164, quoting Samuel Sorbière: “The Dutch [merchants] sort of trade in art; they invest a lot of money in buying art, to get even more out of it. The good pictures are part of their estates, and there are few that cannot be sold or exchanged.”

⁴³Barlaeus, *passim*; Secretan, ed., *passim*; Cook, 68–73; Keblusek, “Commerce,” 298–9.

⁴⁴This theme will be further developed in my research project *Mercator Sapiens*.

⁴⁵Calabi and Keene, *passim*; Gelder, 174–84; Gelder and Mijers, eds.; Keblusek, “Mercator.”

⁴⁶Calabi and Keene, 348.

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