

STUDIES IN EARLY MODERNITY IN THE NETHERLANDS

Edited by Judith Noorman and Feike Dietz

Objects, Commodities and Material Cultures in the Dutch Republic

Exploring Early Modern Materiality
Across Disciplines

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Press

Objects, Commodities and Material Cultures in the Dutch Republic

Studies in Early Modernity in The Netherlands

Studies in Early Modernity in the Netherlands explores the lively and diverse histories of the Northern and Southern Low Countries from the sixteenth until the eighteenth century. The series is multidisciplinary in nature: it provides innovative research on politics, religion, arts, literature, economics, knowledge, colonial expansion, warfare, as well as on the intersection of these different topics. The series also has a special interest in transnational and comparative perspectives on the history and culture of the Netherlands. It welcomes groundbreaking studies both on the period's better-known individuals and episodes (e.g. Rembrandt, Dutch Revolt) as well as less prominent, neglected, voices and perspectives (e.g. female, Jewish or Black histories).

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*Edited by
Judith Noorman and Feike Dietz*

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Acknowledgements

Amsterdam, boasting an abundance of rich archives, art collections, and seventeenth-century architectural marvels adorning its streets and canals, has long drawn historians specializing in Dutch art, culture, and history. The city offers a wealth of sights and academic activities alike. Today, Amsterdam and the Netherlands more broadly host a myriad of historical societies, journals and communities, vying for audiences and submissions. One such community is the University of Amsterdam's ACSEM – the Amsterdam Centre for Studies in Early Modernity. This interdisciplinary research group brings together scholars from various disciplines – History, Art History, Literature, Book Studies, Technical Art History – who specialize in the early modern era. While most active members hail from the University of Amsterdam, the programme attracts colleagues from elsewhere within and beyond the Netherlands.

This volume is the culmination of a two-year lecture series organized by ACSEM, and its realization owes everything to the invaluable contributions of the ACSEM community. Some of its members have provided lectures and/or essays, while others have offered new perspectives and posed critical questions that have greatly enriched this book. Working in such a vibrant, tightly knit network of specialized colleagues is a delight and a privilege, as we hope this book once more proves. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to everyone within the ACSEM community who aided us in myriad ways large and small. Special acknowledgement goes to Marleen Puyenbroek, who served as the ACSEM administrator from 2021 to 2026 while pursuing her PhD at the University of Amsterdam.

We extend our gratitude to Henk van Nierop and Lia van Gemert, former Directors of ACSEM's predecessor, the Amsterdam Centre for Studies in the Dutch Golden Age. In 2000, Henk van Nierop was tasked with establishing an interdisciplinary research centre specifically focused on the seventeenth century in the Netherlands, then commonly referred to as the Dutch Golden Age. His successor, Lia van Gemert, diligently continued the work that fostered a sense of community, holding monthly gatherings and advocating for inclusivity in our midst. The profound impact of her retirement coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought the Amsterdam Centre within inches of its life. However, a new name and an online presence, along with an updated lecture series and a new teaching program, sparked a resurgence. Today, we are resilient and thriving once again, our revival made possible by the current ACSEM community as well as the work of our predecessors.

As always, producing a book takes a village and this one is no exception. Our deepest appreciation goes to our twelve esteemed authors, who diligently adhered to strict author's instructions and directions, addressing key questions about interdisciplinarity, object-oriented research and other methodologies. Special acknowledgement is due to Irene van Rossum, the Publishing Director at Amsterdam University Press, and Jim Gibbons, who expertly edited the manuscript. We highly recommend his services. Finally, we are indebted to the Thijssen Schoute Stichting and the Amsterdam School of Historical Studies for their generous financial support, which facilitated the production of this book.

Finally, we are proud that our book is the 33rd publication in the book series Amsterdam Studies in Early Modernity. Formerly known as the Amsterdam Studies in the Dutch Golden Age, the series is a collaboration between Amsterdam University Press and the Amsterdam Centre for Studies in Early Modernity. Books in this series explore the lively and diverse histories of the Northern and Southern Low Countries from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. The series is multidisciplinary in nature: it presents innovative research on politics, religion, arts, literature, economics, knowledge, colonial expansion, and warfare, as well as on the intersection of these different disciplines. Many of these subjects appear here, because this volume brings together a wide range of scholars that includes scholars who have already published in the book series or have served on its Editorial Board.

We hope this book will serve as a tangible reminder of the lively and extensive community dedicated to studying Early Modernity at the University of Amsterdam. Buoyed by the success of the aforementioned teaching program – the Art and Media major of the Bachelor's degree in Global Arts, Culture and Politics – and by the growing participation of students and budding scholars in our events, we confidently look towards the future and expect that the best days of the Amsterdam Centre for Studies in Early Modernity still lie ahead of us.

Judith Noorman, Director ACSEM 2021-2024

Feike Dietz, Co-Director ACSEM since 2024

1 Introduction

Objects, Commodities and Material Cultures in the Dutch Republic Exploring Early Modern Materiality Across Disciplines

Feike Dietz and Judith Noorman

Abstract

The introduction to the volume demonstrates that material cultures of the Dutch Republic are studied in various disciplines, such as art history, economic history and religious history. This book, resulting from the collaborations between scholars working in different fields, brings these strands together. Their essays narrate the lives of objects that have been invisible or marginalized in current scholarship. In the wealth of methodological and disciplinary variation displayed by these essays, five dimensions of objects come to the fore: the artistic, commercial, knowledge, memorial and spatial dimension of objects. Together, the essays demonstrate that an object-oriented, interdisciplinary approach offers the opportunity to work towards a multilayered and in some cases more inclusive perspective on the early modern Netherlands.

Keywords: material turn; early modern objects; Dutch Republic; interdisciplinary collaborations

As Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello have recently stated, material culture is ‘one of the most fertile areas of collaboration’.¹ Thanks to similar advancements in studies on early modern materiality, *Objects, Commodities and Material Cultures in the Dutch Republic* proceeds from the assumption that historical objects – and their material, cultural and social contexts and

1 Gerritsen et al. 2021, 10.

impacts – should be viewed in an interdisciplinary way and require knowledge and methodologies from various scholarly disciplines. This volume emerged out of conversations and collaborations between scholars with expertise in the histories of the arts, religion, literature, books, architecture, theatre, seafaring and other forms of knowledge more broadly. Together, these scholars here unravel a wide-ranging collection of material objects and commodities related to the early modern Dutch Republic: they focus on shells and bones, on books and monuments, on mullers and measuring instruments. Their essays, always taking a particular object or commodity as a point of departure, narrate the lives of objects that have sometimes been invisible, marginalized or even untraceable in scholarship about early modernity. They also invite us to ask new questions about the early modern material world and its significance for both our historical understanding and our methodological approaches. The objects function as our guides, helping us to unsettle the boundaries between disciplines and to trace new voices and narratives of the early modern Dutch Republic. In so doing, our collaborative approach has yielded novel insights into the artistic and commercial dimensions, the knowledge and memorial functions and the spatiality of early modern objects, all of which will be described in this introduction. First, however, we position our project within the state of scholarship on material culture in general.

The Material Culture History of the Netherlands

Our use of ‘material culture’ in this volume follows the very broad definition of the term provided in the *Routledge Handbook of Material Culture in Early Modern Europe* (2017):

the things with which people interacted, the spaces in which they did so, the social relationships which cluster around their associations – between producers, vendors and consumers of various kinds – and the way knowledge travels around those circuits of connection.²

Early modern objects and their interactions with people, societies and cultures are what ‘material culture history’ takes as its subject.³ This sort

² Richardson et al. 2017, 4.

³ Handbooks and companions on early modern material culture are: Gerritsen et al. 2021; Richardson et al. 2017a; Richardson et al. 2017b; Findlen 2013; Hamling et al. 2010; Klein et al. 2010; O'Malley et al. 2007.

of scholarship addresses ‘patterns of consumption through the social life of finished goods’ as well as ‘the life and vibrancy of matter itself’.⁴ Material culture history can be considered an interdiscipline that has developed within the larger ‘material turn’ in the humanities, which shifted attention to ‘the ways things and society co-produce each other’.⁵ Although recognizable as a subfield for at least the last 15 years, ‘material culture history’ profits from historiographical backgrounds and methodologies from different fields that have taken a growing interest in objects and materiality during the past half century.⁶

In the field of sociocultural history, first of all, the introduction of ‘history from below’ and the rapidly expanding study of consumerism have continuously destabilized ‘the primacy of the written account in the historical discipline’⁷ and have been a driving force behind a flourishing research strand focusing on daily lives and objects, often with regard to the cultures of nonelite and female people.⁸ Although socioeconomic historical research on consumption often primarily analyses the large-scale developments and global dynamics affecting consumer goods rather than the goods themselves, there is also a current of research focusing on the affective and formative impact of goods on people.⁹ Such types of affective functions of objects have also been studied in the field of religious history, which in recent decades has given growing attention to the material cultures of religion.¹⁰ The history of literature and books, in turn, saw the emergence of historical approaches focusing on the materiality of the book, the material traces left by readers and the material and performative circumstances in which literature has functioned.¹¹ In art history, the very definition of ‘art’ has become fluid due to the sustained pressure of gender studies, global perspectives and other topical influences. The discipline has become increasingly interested in visual cultures beyond the fine arts, the affective relationship between objects

4 Rublack 2013, 44.

5 Hodder 2012, 1. Groundbreaking studies on the material turn in the humanities are: Bennett et al. 2010; Olsen 2010; Candlin et al. 2009; Miller 1998; Appadurai 1986.

6 Richardson et al. 2017b offers a very good overview of this historiography; we are indebted to their synthesis.

7 Gerritsen et al. 2021, 10.

8 Richardson et al. 2017b; Gogging et al. 2009; Burman et al. 2019; Phillippy et al. 2009; Saelens et al. 2023.

9 Welch 2009; Rublack 2010; Rublack et al. 2021; Jones et al. 2001; Burghartz et al. 2021; Berg et al. 1999; Berg 2003; Berg 2015.

10 Houtman et al. 2012.

11 Chartier 1994; Anderson et al. 2002; Fleming et al. 2010; Brayman Hackel 2005; Smith 2012; Maguire et al. 2017.

and users, the process of creating objects and the materiality of objects.¹² Challenging new strands of research were developed that concentrated on the intersection of art history and the history of science and technology, with scholars attempting to understand how early modern artisans developed new products and knowledge through their hands-on work and a physical interaction with different types of materials.¹³ Historians of science have pointed to the dependence of human beings on material things since the groundbreaking work on the air-pump advanced by Shapin and Schaffer (1985), who unravelled how the air-pump ‘allowed new things to be seen’ and, as such, illustrates how ‘human and thing co-constitute each other’.¹⁴

Objects, Commodities, and Material Cultures in the Dutch Republic specifically focuses on material cultures of the Dutch Republic, which are relatively underrepresented in handbooks and companions on early modern material culture. However, the Dutch Republic, known as an early consumer society and famous for its exhaustive production of books, works of visual art and scientific instruments, can scarcely be understood without careful attention to objects.¹⁵ Although an overarching perspective is lacking, an esteemed tradition of scholarship has highlighted the everyday lives, household objects and consumption patterns of early modern people from the Netherlands. Scholars working in this tradition, profiting from the emergence of inventories and egodocuments as fruitful historical sources, often concentrated on the material culture of elite and aristocratic circles, but they also developed new perspectives on people from the lower classes.¹⁶ More recently, scholars in socioeconomic and cultural history have focused on the commodification of paintings and books in the Dutch Republic,¹⁷ as well as the physical spaces, such as shops and bourses, in which the distribution and trading of goods were organized.¹⁸ A growing body of research has been investigating the Dutch share in the international exchange of goods, unravelling the vital role of global exchange for the production of knowledge as well as the slavery practices that were developed and maintained to facilitate the

12 See, for example: Ingold 2010; Klein et al. 2010; Feeser et al. 2012; Cook 2022.

13 Klein et al. 2007; Roberts et al. 2007.

14 Shapin et al. 1965. Quote: Hodder 2012, 15–16.

15 On the Dutch Republic as an early consumer society: Leemans et al. 2021. On the Dutch Republic as a centre for the production of art objects and books: Rasterhoff 2017.

16 Dibbets 1998; Helmers 2002; Lunsingh Scheurleer et al. 1986–1992; Schuurman et al. 1994; Schuurman et al. 1997; De Vlieger-De Wilde 1980; Van der Woude et al. 1980; Wijzenbeek-Olthuis 1987; De Kruif 1999.

17 For an overview of these trends, see: Honig 2023.

18 Leemans 2021; Lesger 2020; Raux 2018; Montias 2002; Li 2023.

international trade in goods.¹⁹ Other scholars have directed their attention towards the role of objects and materials in religious experiences,²⁰ memory practices,²¹ or the household.²² The materiality of knowledge is highlighted in scholarship on artistic recipes, scientific instruments, maps and atlases, while the materiality of reading has been studied on the basis of readers' notes and manuscripts.²³

The important researchers engaged in such efforts often position themselves within the context of a specific discipline, such as economic history, art history or religious history. *Objects, Commodities, and Material Cultures in the Dutch Republic*, instead, brings these disciplinary strands together. The essays in this book cover a long history of the Dutch Republic, ranging from early-seventeenth-century sea battles (Van Netten's essay on objects celebrating the Battle of Gibraltar in 1607) to scientific developments in the late-eighteenth-century Enlightenment (the essay by Van Deinsen and Dietz on the graphometer and its impact on female authorship), while a long-term perspective on the muller as an artists' instrument brings us up to the nineteenth century (Stols-Witlox's essay on the muller). Most essays focus on the seventeenth-century Republic – famous for its economic growth and unparalleled artistic production and consumption – aiming to unravel the material dimensions of this particular century's artistic developments, political warfare and everyday life.

Interdisciplinary Collaborations

None of the scholars brought together in *Objects, Commodities and Material Cultures in the Dutch Republic* identify themselves as 'material culture historians', but they are rooted in scholarly disciplines that have been unavoidably affected by the material turn of recent decades. These scholars initiated this book project out of curiosity: What happens when we collectively push early modern objects to the centre of our interdisciplinary research? This scholarly challenge was developed within the University of Amsterdam's Amsterdam Centre of Studies in Early Modernity (ACSEM), one of the largest academic communities of early modernists, with special expertise in the arts,

19 Dijkstra 2022; Weststeijn 2020; Lemire 2018; Dupré et al. 2011; Bass et al. 2021; Van Gelder 2011; Brock et al. 2022; Leuker et al. 2019.

20 Mudde 2018; Ivanic et al. 2019; Verheggen 2006.

21 Pollmann 2017; Van Deinsen et al. 2015.

22 Noorman et al. 2022.

23 Lehmann 2012; Stols-Witlox 2017; Van Netten 2022; Visser 2017; Visser et al. 2019.

history and cultures of the Dutch Republic. The centre, originally founded in 2000 and relaunched in 2021, facilitates interdisciplinary exchange among scholars in order to broaden perspectives on early modernity (see Acknowledgements). Spurred by this ambition, this book aims to reflect on the dynamics between material culture history and interdisciplinary research. What is the significance of interdisciplinarity for material culture history, and, vice versa, what is the impact of material culture history on the boundaries of academic fields? Does the object-based approach change the way we value individual disciplines? Do objects enrich the perspective on individual fields and the questions they address? Do they, for example, highlight new historical activities, phenomena or individuals that until now have been invisible?

To explore these questions, ACSEM director Judith Noorman organized a monthly Object Colloquia Series, which ran for two years. At these gatherings the authors – often but not always working at the University of Amsterdam – were able to discuss their works-in-progress and issues of interdisciplinarity with the ACSEM community. This book collects a selection of object studies that were presented and discussed over the past two years. Some of the essays are fundamentally team efforts: Hanneke Grootenboer, Cynthia Kok and Marringje Pajmans joined forces to develop a multivocal perspective on shells; Lucas van der Deijl and Weixuan Li together investigated the position of Govert Bidloo's anatomical atlas *Anatomia Humani Corporis* (1685) in Amsterdam's cultural industries; and Lieke van Deinsen and Feike Dietz explored the relationship between the graphometer and a book of poetry in the later eighteenth century. Other essays profited from the contributions of co-presenters during the Object Colloquia Series: Djoeke van Netten (essay on material monuments) presented together with Jeroen van der Vliet (curator of the Scheepvaartmuseum). The essays by Saskia Beranek and Judith Noorman are based on in situ lectures with objects present in the room: Beranek spoke at the Prinsenhof in Delft, which was hosting an exhibition on Amalia van Solms at the time, while Noorman's lecture on blue paper was combined with a pop-up exhibition of her design at the Rijksmuseum. Typical of the work of ACSEM's community, this book is the product of interdisciplinary collaborations within and beyond the University of Amsterdam.

Thanks to its collaborative character of many of the essays, this book has been written at the intersection of different disciplinary approaches and combines a variety of historical sources and methodologies. In line with Gerritsen and Riello's assumption that 'there is no single way of engaging with material culture' and thus 'there cannot be a unified and

universal methodology',²⁴ we use close reading methods (Van Deinsen and Dietz), hands-on reconstructions (Stols-Witlox) or digital network analysis (Van der Deijl and Li) to study a wide variety of sources and objects: natural as well as artistic objects, visually oriented maps as well as text-dominated pamphlets, published books as well as manuscripts, archival documents as well as portraits. All essays take as their respective points of departure at least one central object, often unravelling the vital connections between different objects (see e.g. Van Netten's essay, which reflects on how objects refer to each other). All the authors discuss the impact of objects on people who lived and worked in the Dutch Republic, reflecting how objects and their materiality have invited us to develop new perspectives on the early modern Dutch Republic and will continue to do so, both within individual disciplines and across them. Thanks to the wealth of sources, objects and methodological perspectives, the volume challenges the borders of the academic disciplines that have traditionally organized humanities scholarship.

Dimensions of Objects

In this wealth of methodological and disciplinary variation, we can distinguish five dimensions or functions of objects that are discussed in the different essays. First and foremost, we approach objects from an *artistic* perspective: what is the role of objects in artistic practices? Maartje Stols-Witlox explores how the muller – an instrument to grind pigments into paint – was actually handled, and how it impacted the production of paintings during the long early modern period. Hanneke Grootenboer, Cynthia Kok and Marringje Paijmans demonstrate how different resources extracted from shellfish were used as artist materials, like mother-of-pearl produced by oyster shells used in ornamental inlay. Judith Noorman focuses on the artistic uses of blue paper, hypothesizing that many artists chose this type of paper in the service of artistic innovations. Such explorations align with broader interest in the material making of, as well as the technological processes behind, artistic products.²⁵ In Noorman's essay, we follow the material 'life' of blue paper from the Atlantic, where West India Company ships transported logwood from Central America, to various places in the Netherlands: the workhouses and papermills where blue paper was created out of logwood, and the studios where artists used this paper for their drawings.

24 Gerritsen et al. 2021.

25 Cook 2022.

In these aforementioned essays on shells and blue paper the *commercial* dimension of the objects is vital: oyster shells and logwood became important trading products because of their aesthetic qualities and the artistic opportunities they opened up. The complex intermingling of the artistic and commercial functions of objects is also central to the essay on Govert Bidloo's anatomical atlas *Anatomia Humani Corporis* (1685): there Lucas van der Deijl and Weixuan Li demonstrate how artistic and commercial interests interacted in the production of this atlas, and unravel the entanglement of the city's cultural industries (theatre, literature, visual arts).

Third, the *knowledge* function of objects also plays a role in several respects: essays unravel the knowledge transmitted by objects (see the essay Van Netten on objects as news media and the essay by Van Deijl and Li on the atlas as a performance of medical knowledge), or rather the way objects impacted the thinking of people who engaged with them (see the essay by Grootenboer et al., approaching the shell as a 'thought-thing'). The essays discuss objects in relation to medical knowledge (Van Deijl and Li) scientific knowledge (Van Deinsen and Dietz) and experiential knowledge (Stols-Witlox), which is transferred between people and can be reconstructed by methods of 're-doing'. In the essay by Van Deinsen and Dietz, the graphometer is considered as a drawing instrument that not only originated from state-of-the-art scientific developments at the time but also created new knowledge about people's faces and characters and determined what could be seen. In sum, several essays in this volume demonstrate how objects have allowed people to see, know and understand things, even as they also restricted these knowledge processes.

Fourth, essays unravel the *memorial* function of objects: Van Netten demonstrates how monuments (graves, paintings, medals, pamphlets) shaped the commemoration of military conflicts and created 'heroes', Van Deinsen and Dietz reveal how a portrait created by the graphometer influenced the remembrance of the portrayed person, and Gabri van Tussenbroek highlights the memorial function of the VOC's boardroom.

Fifth, this book reflects on *spatiality*, for instance in the essays by Van Tussenbroek (focusing on the spatial and material dimension of the VOC boardroom) and Van Netten (analysing how news was transmitted from place to place by means of media objects). Saskia Beranek explores the dynamics between an object (Amalia van Solms's balustrade) and a space (the Huis ten Bosch, where Van Solms lived). She demonstrates that Van Solms's balustrade literally divided space, and as such organized groups of audiences: those allowed to look beyond the balustrade were confronted with different paintings than those who only entered public spaces. The

balustrade's spatial dimension is also analysed in another way: Beranek unpacks the global trade in luxury goods hidden behind this object. The global movement of objects is also treated in Noorman's essay on blue paper and Grootenboer, Kok and Pajmans's work on shells. These discussions align with the current trend in material culture history to view objects and consumption from a global perspective.²⁶

Our Objects and Their Fruits

This volume's approach to the Dutch Republic from the perspective of objects and materiality provides certain methodological as well as historical insights. It demonstrates that an object-oriented perspective on early modernity endorses the efforts by scholars to challenge the borders of the academic disciplines that traditionally organize our scholarship. This interdisciplinary cross-pollination, in its turn, enabled us to expose voices and stories that have been unheard or underexposed. The volume reveals narratives about women (Beranek; Van Deinsen and Dietz) as well as the role of male prisoners in workhouses (Noorman). The object-oriented perspective also enriches our understanding of the Dutch Republic, as it provides knowledge about the material and creative processes behind the sources or stories that have traditionally been central to our research: it unravels the labour needed to produce objects (Van Deinsen and Dietz; Noorman; Stols-Witlox; Grootenboer, Kok and Pajmans), the voices entangled in cultural memory (Van Netten) and the material organization behind buildings (Van Tussenbroek; Beranek). Although objects seem at first sight to be stable and fixed, they are in some sense always changing and moving – in the words of Ian Hodder, material things are 'just stages in the process of transformation of matter'.²⁷ The material transformations and (geographical, temporary or social) movements hidden behind our objects sometimes functioned as mechanisms of power and oppression, as we see for instance in the case of shells (Grootenboer, Kok and Pajmans) and of blue paper (Noorman). In sum, an object-oriented, interdisciplinary approach offers scholars the opportunity to work towards a multilayered, critical and in some cases more inclusive perspective on the early modern Netherlands. As a result, the Dutch Republic emerges as a place where social stratification weighed heavily on society and the opportunities available to its people, let alone

26 E.g. Gerritsen 2016; Gerritsen et al. 2016.

27 Hodder 2012, 4–5.

outsiders; but we can also see that it was a place where objects could cross social, economic and cultural boundaries. Such boundary-crossings have allowed us to string together new histories of individual objects and to make unexpected connections between various places and people from all walks of life.

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