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The Unseen World of Willem Schellinks: Local Milieu and Global Circulation in the Visualization of Mughal India

Jos Gommans and Jan de Hond

*You marry your eloquent rhyme to the fluent brush,
making paint and letters speak to the eye and ear.*

Gerbrand van den Eekhout about Schellinks¹

I Introduction

Until recently, the artist Willem Schellinks (1623–1678) was perhaps most widely known for the topographical drawings he made while traveling through France and Italy. Art historians also knew him as a painter of Italianate landscapes, winter scenes and history paintings such as the *Attack on Chatham*. It is only in recent years that interest has grown in a curious subgenre within his oeuvre: a small number of works with Indian subjects. Although we now know that the artist used original Mughal miniatures in the making of these paintings, their iconography and possible meanings are still shrouded in mystery. This essay does not claim to offer a conclusive explanation for these Indian paintings, but we do hope to demonstrate that Schellinks' interest in and knowledge of Mughal India extended much further than only these enigmatic paintings. In the following, we suggest that, partly due to his many European travels, Schellinks had at his disposal hitherto unsuspected information channels about India. We also show that he engaged

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in other art forms to give expression to his fascination for the India of his day. From this close study of Schellinks' artistic milieu, we are able to see European visual representations of the Orient in a rather different light.

Travels

Little is known about Willem Schellinks' education and early life. We know that he was born in Amsterdam on 2 February 1623.² His father Laurens Schellinks was a tailor from Bree, a small town in the southern Netherlands, who by 1609 had settled in Amsterdam and set up business there. In 1646, at the age of 23, Willem left for France. His traveling companion was his friend Lambert Doomer, a painter who had already built up something of a reputation, and whose initiative it was to make this journey. Both artists made topographical drawings along the way, and Schellinks kept a journal.³ Following Schellinks' return, he applied himself to Italianate landscapes in the style of Jan Asselijn (1610–1652), despite never actually having visited Italy; he would only have occasion to do that some ten years later. In 1661, accompanied by Jacques Thierry (1648–1709), the then just 13-year-old son of a wealthy Amsterdam merchant, he embarked on his Grand Tour, which would last some four years. The travel journal that he kept reveals him to be a man of broad cultural interests who enjoyed something of a reputation as an art connoisseur.⁴ The painter mingled with great ease among the European artistic and cultural elite, affording him access to far-famed collections of paintings and other art. His tour began with a visit to England, where Jacques' father was born and still retained commercial interests. From there they traveled to France, mainland Italy, Sicily and Malta. Their return trip took them across the Alps and the German states, before their arrival back in Amsterdam in August 1665. In the years that followed he was largely occupied with the development and elaboration of his travel drawings for Laurens van der Hem (1621–1678), a wealthy lawyer who had assembled an immense collection of documents, maps, prints and topographical drawings that he included in his version of the *Atlas Maior* by Joan Blaeu.⁵ Some authors have suggested that maybe Schellinks undertook a third journey, since he has a number of drawings and paintings to his name that take as their subject the Dutch admiral Michiel de Ruyter's famous 1667 sea battle against the British at Chatham on the Medway.

A small number of works with Indian subjects stand out within his wider oeuvre. These paintings and drawings are all the more striking for the fact that the artist never visited an Asian country on any of his extended sojourns abroad. The known works comprising this group are five paintings and two drawings. All the paintings take Shah Jahan as their subject. Two of them, now in the collections of Musée Guimet in Paris (Figure 16.1) and the Victoria & Albert Museum in London (Figure 16.2), depict Shah Jahan watching as his four sons parade past him seated on animals or in a palanquin formed of female figures.⁶ Looking at the sky in the paintings we see apparitions of Shah Jahan's predecessors: his grandfather Akbar and his father Jahangir. To this day, the relationship between the two paintings remains a mystery. The two scenes appear initially to mirror one another, but first impressions can be deceptive.⁷

And what about the relationship of these two paintings with that other, more conventional one (Figure 16.3), that also features Shah Jahan and his four sons, this time on a hunting party?⁸ In the landscape (left) a fight between two imposing land animals is depicted: a rhinoceros pushes his horn in the belly of an elephant. A similar drama takes place in the air. There a falcon pounces upon a heron. The heron, however, raises his head and impales the bird of prey with his beak. Both animal battles occur in Indian art, but since Schellinks had never been to India



Figure 16.1 Willem Schellinks, *Shah Jahan and his Four Sons*, Musée Guimet, Paris.

himself and could only have had a limited knowledge of Indian painting, we can safely assume that he has not taken these motives from Mughal art.⁹ Both motives were also known in Europe. For example, the fights can be found in the emblem book of Joachim Camerarius, *Symbolorum et Emblematum* (1590–1595). Above the image of a warring falcon and heron stands the motto *Exitus in dubito est*, meaning that the outcome of war is always uncertain.¹⁰ In Camerarius we also find a reference to the battle between elephant and rhinoceros. Not the fight itself, but the preparation – the rhinoceros sharpens his horn on a rock – is the subject of the emblem. The associated motto is *Non ergo revertar inultus* (I will not return unavenged). In the text the prowess and perseverance of the rhinoceros is praised. He tries to push his horn in the elephant's belly, knowing if he does not succeed immediately, the elephant will kill him. The rhinoceros therefore only returns victoriously, or dies fighting. What the two fights have in common is that both adversaries die so that ultimately no victory can be celebrated: war has only losers. Hence, the message about the uncertainty and uselessness of war in the Schellinks' painting may ominously refer to the horrifying carnage that is in the offing: the Mughal war of succession, to be discussed below.

Shah Jahan's sons are absent from a fourth painting that was auctioned in 1985 at Sotheby's in London, and shows the emperor in discussion with two Easterners as they enjoy an outdoor meal while being entertained by musicians and female dancers.¹¹ The fifth and final painting depicts Shah Jahan seated on a rug and beneath a parasol, accompanied only by a black servant.



Figure 16.2 Willem Schellinks, *Parade of the Sons of Shah Jahan on Composite Horses and Elephants*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

The whereabouts of this painting is no longer known. Finally, the British Museum owns a preparatory drawing for the aforementioned painting of the imperial hunting party and recently, a sketch came to light, depicting “An Indian Yogi Tied to a Palm Tree,” now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art New York.¹²

It is the combination of an aesthetic and iconographical appreciation of Indian painting that makes Schellinks such a rare case in the history of European painting. What explains the particularity of Schellinks’ works? We know that the artist used original miniatures as sources for his paintings: the curious composite animals doubtless have their origins in depictions on Indian miniatures.¹³ Schellinks did not faithfully mimic them, however. He chose instead to model his main subjects on these figures, which he rendered in accordance with the traditional Western convention: they are fully three-dimensional, replete with light–dark effects placed in an accurate rendering of an architectural or landscape setting. The result is a remarkable combination of a small number of faithfully rendered and often highly detailed protagonists, with imaginary



Figure 16.3 Willem Schellinks, *Hunting Scene with Shah Jahan and his Sons*, Museum of Islamic Art, Doha.

minor characters that have a vaguely exotic appearance set in a very clearly Western interior or exterior. To lend the scene a somewhat more “Oriental” flavor, he finally added a selection of Orientalist clichés such as an elephant or a palm tree.¹⁴

Although it remains unclear from where Schellinks obtained his examples and precisely which miniatures he used, it is obvious that he must have seen the same series of Mughal miniatures Rembrandt copied in the 1650s.¹⁵ Recent research indicates that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Dutch Republic served as the European locus for trade in Indian miniatures.¹⁶ The Dutch East India Company (VOC) imported to the Netherlands surprisingly large quantities of miniatures, some of which were produced specifically for the Western market. These were prized in Europe primarily for the historical, ethnographic or religious information they contained; the French physician and numismatist Charles Patin, who visited the Dutch Republic in 1672 and saw miniatures there, wrote: “Through these [Indian and Chinese paintings] we discover the most secret particulars of the stories, the way of life and the religion of the country.”¹⁷ Rembrandt and Schellinks appear to have been the only two artists who not only appreciated the aesthetic qualities of this Indian art form, but also incorporated the miniatures into their own work.¹⁸

II Schellinks and the Sister Arts

Willem Schellinks was a poet as well as a painter. His written work is to be found mainly in a number of anthologies and *liederenboeken* (song books).¹⁹ Many of Schellinks' poems appeared under a variety of nommes de plume many of which were a play on his surname. A *schellinkje* was a coin with a value of six *stuivers*, or pennies, giving rise to names such as W 6 Stuyvers, Srewynts Seks, Six Soucx and Sis Sou.²⁰ Schellinks' palette of interests was broad and the subjects of his poems testify to his willingness to incorporate the everyday and the vulgar: his poems in Amsterdam's local dialect took as their subject the common folk, he published saucy stanzas and irreverent verses, and he produced dozens of poems for specific occasions and purposes, such as birthdays, funerals, and paintings. But he also contributed a poem to the anthology of Protestant prayers 't *Gebedt onzes Heeren* (*Our Lord's Prayer*). Furthermore, he was the author of *Het volmaeckte ende toe-geruste Schip* (*The perfect and well-equipped ship*) a collection of poems and songs for "lovers of seafaring," published in 1678.²¹

It is worth noting that he also participated in poetic puzzle games requiring of players that they react to one another on the subject of a particular event or literary work, following strict rules for the form and rhyme scheme. The series known as *Knipzang* is a particularly well-known example based on P. C. Hooft's poem "Veldeuntjes," for which 17 poets collaborated in the creation of a racy pastoral tale that developed on the various meanings of the word *knippen* (to cut). Following a similar principle, in 1657 Schellinks and three fellow poets took turns composing comic birthday verses for one another to mark their birthday (they all claimed to have been born on the same date: 2 February). Heading each ode was a symbolic "laurel," an acknowledgment of the recipient's superior prowess as a poet; in verse, the recipient would then express gratitude but declare himself unworthy, before going on to praise the following recipient in the circle, and so on.²²

The names of those involved in these examples of recreational and anthologized poetry give an accurate insight into the circles in which Schellinks was moving. He wrote his series of birthday verses with Hieronymus Sweerts, Gerbrandt van den Eekhout and David Questiers; the same quartet also contributed to the *Knipzang*. It is likely that both projects were initiated by Hieronymus Sweerts, a poet and printer who was the son of the eponymous painter and the grandson of the engraver Emanuel Sweerts. Gerbrandt van den Eekhout was himself a painter and a pupil of Rembrandt. And David Questiers, a plumber, was brother to the renowned poet Catharina Questiers, who also had some talent as an artist, engraver and sculptor. All four poets, then, were part of a mixed cultural milieu in which people engaged in artistic expressions in all sorts of ways and at all levels of society. It was precisely in this mid-century period that relations between the literary and visual arts assumed a particularly intimate character.²³ This phenomenon gained public expression when poets, painters and sculptors closely collaborated on the design of decorations for parades and the popular tableaux vivant as part of the inauguration festivities for Amsterdam's new city hall. In 1654 the art dealer Marten Kretzer set up the *Broederschap der Schilderkunst* (Fraternity of Painters), and Schellinks, Sweerts, Van den Eekhout, and Questiers were among its first members.²⁴ The fraternity devoted itself to the connection between what were in this period considered sister arts: painting and poetry. Distinguished poets such as Joost van den Vondel, Jan Vos and Jan Asselijn gave their blessing to the establishment of the fraternity with laudatory poems. This same group was also responsible for publishing the anthologies of poetry in which Schellinks

participated. In one way or another, many of them were also involved in theater: poets such as Vondel wrote plays themselves; Marten Kretzer was a former regent of Amsterdam's city theater the *Amsterdamse Schouwburg*; and Jan Vos was the director of the theater itself from 1649 to 1669.

Clearly, Schellinks was operating as part of an extensive cultural network comprising artists, poet–playwrights, and literati who were uncommonly receptive to, and encouraging of, one another's talents, and who were explicit in their appreciation of their fellow artists' willingness to step beyond the confines of their own specialism. The fact that being associated with poetry afforded somewhat higher status to painters surely also played a role; their occupation was transformed from skilled craft to intellectual activity. As we will see in the next section, in all its vivid playfulness, this was the local milieu of a relatively well-to-do artist who was ready to engage with global events.

An Ode to Indian Painting

The foremost reason for our interest in Schellinks' literary career is to be found in a poem published in 1657 in the second volume of an anthology titled *Kliios Kraam*.²⁵ The list of contributors to this publication included by now well-known names such as Vondel, Vos, Sweerts, and Questiers. None of Schellinks' poems are particularly notable, except, that is, for his poetic ode *Op de Schilder-konst der Benjanen*, which attracted our attention less for its literary qualities than for its subject matter: Indian miniature painting.

On the Painterly Art of the Banias

Painting had its founding with the Chaldeans
 To they the honour of eternal memory.
 From their head this artistic crown
 Was stolen by noble artists.
 The Greek hunger for learning
 Carried the art to great heights.
 It was the diligence of the Romans that
 audaciously robbed them of this honour.
 Good fortune then that the Germans
 and French dared to take their chance:
 Their courageous endeavours proved
 That art's crown best fitted them.
 Now the ingenious Gujarati shows
 So beautifully on the silk page,
 His painting more wondrously noble
 Than an artist's brush ever made:
 And with this he mocks Europe
 Knocking from its head art's crown:
 Thus was art despoiled by art
 Which artist ever thought
 That here artistry would climb
 To the peak, to the stars?
 All Christendom rightly gapes

Astonished and struck dumb.
 With his veracious eye, the Greek,
 Reproaches the great Apelles and Zeuxis,
 Exalted for their art, and says:
 Thou didst deceive the animals
 But it is the Hindustani who succeeded,
 Who has delighted us all through art.
 The Chaldeans show us on the horizon
 The source of painting, not more
 The Mughal is free with his find
 It is Peru's pride that Gualpa's²⁶ mouth,
 Threw forth silver, to his joy,
 And to Spain, it offers a crutch.
 Even should the West Indies offer
 The Bania for his art all the silver
 That Potosí still has in its casket
 He'd say, I'll not swap art for treasure.
 This lesson teaches us all in Europe:
 Art cannot be bought at any price.

The main thrust of the poem is that the art of painting has its origin in biblical times, among the Chaldeans. They handed on their “artistic crown” to the Greeks and Romans, and it was later worn by the Germans, the Dutch, and the French.²⁷ Now, however, and quite unexpectedly, this crown finds itself in India, where, as the poem describes, such unparalleled art is made: “His painting more wondrously noble/Than an artist's brush ever made.” The central theme of Schellinks' poem is by no means original: Vasari's much earlier foreword for *Vite* (second edition, 1568), for example, also traces the beginnings of the fine arts to the biblical East, from where it spread to Greece and Rome, before its ultimate blossoming in Renaissance Italy.²⁸ Karel van Mander, a Dutch adherent of Vasari, further develops on this theme in *Schilder-boeck* (1604). He, too, maintains that the source of painting as an art form should be sought among the Chaldeans and Egyptians, going on to provide a summary of the most important ancient, Italian and, of course, Flemish and Dutch artists.²⁹ Schellinks extends this line a little further, however. Rather than coming to a halt at the Italians or the Dutch, he has the painterly crown pass to the India of his own time. With this, the circle is complete: painting has returned to the East, where it was born.

It is regrettable that Schellinks' poem handles the subject of Indian miniature art itself in only the most generic terms: he has little more to say on the matter than that it is “*zeer heerlyk*” (utterly splendid) and “*wonder eel*” (wondrously noble), and we remain in the dark about the exact nature of its remarkable qualities. Yet the simple fact that Indian miniature art is placed on the same level – perhaps even a level higher – than the European artistic tradition is truly startling. Luxury crafts from the East were much admired in Europe for their high-quality craftsmanship and exceedingly sophisticated execution. However, the visual arts emanating from Asia garnered far less praise. When it came to painting, Europeans were decidedly unreceptive to the idea of adapting their own aesthetic criteria. Eastern painting was often brushed aside as “artless,” “flat,” or “stiff.”³⁰ In fact, Schellinks' poem is the earliest literary source suggesting that a European artist appreciated Indian painting for its aesthetic qualities. What is more, it also shows *how* that same artist, by fully participating in the playfulness of Amsterdam's small literary milieu, came to such an appreciation.

III All the World's a Stage

Let us now set aside Schellinks' literary endeavors and once more turn our attention to his painting. The highlights of Schellinks' Indian work are without doubt the two vibrantly colorful oils showing the four princes Dara Shikoh, Shuja, Aurangzeb, and Murad Bakhsh parading past their father as he looks on in surprise (Figures 16.1 and 16.2).

Before we embark on a more thorough exploration of the striking scenes depicted in the two paintings, we will take a brief look at the subject matter. Both works have already been subjected to fairly rigorous analysis as allegorical representations of the bloody "civil war" that tormented the Indian Mughal Empire in the period from 1658 to 1661.³¹ The sudden illness that beset the ruling monarch Shah Jahan in 1657 (r. 1628–1658) sparked a fierce struggle for succession. Confined to his palace in Agra, Shah Jahan could only watch on as his four sons battled it out with one another. Dara Shikoh was the regent and also his father's favorite, but it was he who came off worse against his colluding brothers Murad and Aurangzeb. Aurangzeb would ultimately emerge victorious, whereupon he had his brothers Dara and Murad executed, in 1659 and 1661 respectively. As Shah Jahan's second son Shuja was also murdered in that same year, Aurangzeb had the entire empire to himself. Shah Jahan remained in captivity the rest of his life, in the company of his eldest daughter Jahanara Begam. He died only after several years, in 1666. How did Schellinks obtain this quite detailed information about Shah Jahan and his sons? And why did he choose to situate his portrayal of this tragedy in a theater setting?

Schellinks' Sources

Schellinks' accurate and detailed references to the Mughal struggle for succession testify to the fact that he must have been well informed about what took place.³² The assumption up to this point was that Schellinks must have drawn on the first extensive discourse on this struggle in the eyewitness account by the French physician François Bernier and the chronicle that the Amsterdam historian Olfert Dapper based on it. However, these two publications only saw the light of day approximately 10 years after the events described, and also much later than Schellinks' poetic ode to Indian painting.³³ Were there perhaps other, earlier channels through which Schellinks could have received his information?

First, it is very possible that he would have been able to draw directly from reports by representatives of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in Mughal India.³⁴ One such document, by the Company secretary T. J. Groeneveldt, was recorded by the scholar-librarian Adam Olearius in the historical account of the Company soldier Volquard Iversen. This German text offers a fairly accurate narrative of the events surrounding the battle for succession, and was published in 1669, a full year before Bernier.³⁵ Another promising trail to Schellinks' probable source leads not to the VOC, but to England or possibly, to that other great Asian information network, the Society of Jesus.

As we discovered already, Schellinks' Grand Tour lasted from 1661 to 1665 and took him to England, France, Italy, Sicily, Malta, Switzerland, and Germany. In England, whether or not via East India Company channels, he may have heard already about the regime change in Mughal India, the more so because it would certainly have reminded people of the stunning events of the Civil War at home. One other candidate for Schellinks' source brings us to Rome. In his comprehensive journal of the tour Schellinks recounts a visit to Rome around Easter 1664. There he had the privilege of kissing the slipper of Pope Alexander VII and also visited several

places of interest, including the celebrated Kircherianum, the cabinet of curiosities belonging to Athanasius Kircher.³⁶

It was also precisely in this Easter period of 1664 that another globetrotter visited the city; being a friend of Kircher it seems certain that he would have also visited the Kircherianum. This was the German Jesuit Heinrich Roth (1620–1668). Roth is known today first and foremost as the noteworthy author and translator of the first European Sanskrit grammar, rendered in Latin. More pertinent to our purpose here is the fact that from 1654 to 1662 he served in Agra as a missionary, in which capacity he witnessed from proximity the Mughal struggle for succession.³⁷ While in Rome, Roth gifted a number of Indian miniature paintings to Kircher, which he used as illustrations for the “Ten Avatars of the God Vishnu.”³⁸ We can only speculate on whether Schellinks and Roth bumped into one another during this Easter in Rome. What we know for certain, however, is that Roth was by no means begrudging in sharing his experiences relating to the Mughal succession war. Following Roth’s visit to Rome, Duke Philip William of Neuburg invited the Jesuit to his baroque court to relate his spectacular tale. In all likelihood the Duke was prompted to offer this invitation by his confessor, also a Jesuit, Theodor Rhai. The ensuing sequence of events led ultimately to the publication in 1665 of Roth’s *Relatio rerum notabilium Regni Mogor*, an extremely rare account of the Mughal battle for succession that was published by Joannis Michaelis Straub in Aschaffenburg, a town that Schellinks visited that same year on his return journey to Amsterdam.³⁹

The remarkable confluence of their life paths prompts the question of whether a relationship can be detected between Schellinks and Roth; between the former’s theater curtains and the latter’s *Relatio*. Although the latter work is exceedingly rare, in 1682 it was partially translated into Dutch by the prolific writer Simon de Vries.⁴⁰ This suggests that the *Relatio* must have been available in Amsterdam. Another, more easily substantiated piece of evidence for Roth being Schellinks’ source is the fact that Roth’s Latin text mentions an *ingenti cultro*, the enormous knife that was used to have Murad Bakhsh killed on the orders of Aurangzeb.⁴¹ Bernier’s description of this knife reduces it to a *petit couteau de cuisine*, and it is not Murad Bakhsh but Dara Shikoh who is put to death (it is worth noting here that Bernier, not Roth, was historically correct on the last point).⁴² Just a quick glance at the two paintings confirms that, yes, the bloodied blade held by the dromedary rider certainly has more of Roth’s *ingento cultro* about it than Bernier’s kitchen knife. Groeneveldt, who generally stays close to historical truth, is less specific about the murder weapon and he uses the terms *umb-bringen* (kill) and *nider sebeln* (put to the sword) when discussing the deaths of Dara and Murad, respectively.⁴³ These observations would suggest that the two Schellinks works are based on Roth’s apparently hasty 1665 account in the *Relatio* and were painted prior to the publication of the more thorough histories by Groeneveldt in 1669 and Bernier in 1670. However, whatever the exact source, the previous shows that an Amsterdam painter could not only garner information about Asia through Dutch channels like the VOC but also, partly through his travels, tap into alternative information circuits.⁴⁴

Mise en Scène

The year in which Roth published his *Relatio* (1665) coincides with Schellinks’ return to Amsterdam and the completion of that city’s municipal theater, the Amsterdamse Schouwburg. In contrast to its previous incarnation, this theater had the complex machinery and painted sets that made it possible to evoke an illusionary world.⁴⁵ It was in fact the beguiling interplay of reality and illusion that made theaters so well loved in European cities and royal courts in the

seventeenth century. In Amsterdam the box office smashes of their day were translated and adapted plays by Spanish and French playwrights such as Calderón, Lope de Vega and Corneille. These were mostly historical tragedies driven by intense feelings of duty, revenge, and love, often intertwined in a narrative of complex court intrigues.⁴⁶ One entirely different genre that also thrived in Amsterdam – before the Schouwburg's temporary closure in 1672 and the introduction of the more austere approach taken by its new in-house company Nil Volentibus Arduum – was the theater of spectacle and entertainment, preferably with music and plenty of breathtaking special effects. This form of theater was the particular forte of Jan Vos, the theater's director from 1647 to 1667. His successful repertoire also included tableaux vivant presenting spectacular allegorical versions of historical events. Like Vondel, Vos belonged to a small but influential coterie of Catholic theater makers close to the Amsterdamse Schouwburg.⁴⁷ In the light of the early observations regarding the sister arts, it should be of no surprise that close artistic and social connections arose between theater and painting – this relationship was personified by the personal relationship between these two disciplines' most renowned exponents: Vondel and Rembrandt. Their names evoke once more the aforementioned circles of Schellinks' literary friends, and here we can gradually discern the emergence of an amicable network of painters and poets and now theater practitioners that was closely intertwined with the Protestant ruling class of remonstrant regents.

This brings us back to the theatrical setting of Schellinks' paintings.⁴⁸ The Paris painting is clearly split into two-dimensional components: one in front of the translucent screen; the other behind it. In the foreground, we can see what appears to be a courtier who is, as it were, serving up this other dimension to Shah Jahan and his daughter. This interplay of reality and illusion created using a translucent screen (*espejo*) and a wizard (*magus*) or clown were well-known theatrical techniques of the day.⁴⁹ And heavenly figures surrounded by clouds – like Akbar and Jahangir in Schellinks' paintings – were a common sight in the theater, though they would probably have appeared through an opening in the roof or be lifted using a simple pulley mechanism.⁵⁰ It is by no means inconceivable that on occasion, in the tradition of sixteenth-century *theatrum mundi*, the entire theater was used for events that deliberately avoided the distinction between actors and spectators, intensifying the disorientating effect of the illusionary reality.⁵¹

Leafing through Schellinks' travel journals, it is not long before his interest in theater comes to the fore. He writes about regular visits to plays and operas, noting in great detail the perspective and setting used. We have so far been unable to establish an unequivocal connection between Schellinks and a particular playwright, and for this reason it remains unclear whether the two paintings relate to an imaginary play or to a spectacle that was actually staged.⁵² The striking correspondences between the theater depicted in the London painting and the Amsterdam Schouwburg (prior to renovation) offer scant evidence one way or another in this regard (Figures 16.4, 16.5). While it is clearly true that Schellinks did not render an accurate representation of the Schouwburg on this canvas, it would appear that he did draw inspiration from this theater.

The existence of a close relationship between painting and theater is confirmed in writings by several art theorists working in Schellinks' time and locale. Rembrandt's student Samuel van Hoogstraten was emphatic in his use of theater as a metaphor to aid the artist in the creation of a new and virtual reality. But to Van Hoogstraten theater was far more than mere metaphor. He advised painters to actually participate in stage plays, and he further urged history painters to place events in a "single and momentary" scene that is able to depict a complex historical story in a manner that is *eenweezich* (of one nature) and *eenstemmich* (of one voice).⁵³



Figure 16.4 Hans Jurriaenszoon van Baden, *Interior of the Amsterdam Theatre*, The Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, Florida, USA.

Although on the basis of the fairly detailed information available about seventeenth-century theater plays we can all but exclude the possibility that Schellinks painted an existing play. At the same time, the dramatic qualities of the Mughal battle for succession would have been made an eminently suitable subject for the historical Spanish and French repertoire that so flourished in the Amsterdam of the 1650s and 60s.⁵⁴ Mutinous heirs and continual court intrigues were by no means the sole preserve of the Mughal court; similar forces played out in Calderón's highly successful play *La vida es sueño* (*Life is a Dream*), which was translated into Dutch as *Sigismundus, prince van Poolen* (Sigmund, Prince of Poland) and had three runs in the 1650s and '60s.⁵⁵ And the theme of great Asian "upheavals" also enjoyed huge popularity in works such as the 1657 play *De Grooten Tamelan* by Johannes Serwouters which, we should note, took as its subject the world-conquering Amir Timur, who also happened to be the forefather of the Indian Mughals. Other plays were less popular, but even the fact that such works as *Trazil of overrompelt Sina* (1666) by Van der Goes and Vondel's *Zungchin* (1667) even saw the light of day in this period says much about the appeal Asia must have held for audiences in Europe. Now, glancing back for a moment at the two works by Schellinks, we see reflected in them the theater style of 1660s Amsterdam, a tripartite concoction of fascinations: for the grand spectacles of Vos and his ilk, for Serwouters' contemporaneous upheavals in the East, and for the intriguing synthesis of reality and illusion by Calderón and his ilk. Indeed, Calderón was an explicit source of inspiration for Van Mander and other painters searching for "pleasing or useful hidden things" (*bebaeghlijke oft nutte verborgben dingben*) that were "bedecked beneath many ornamentations" (*onder veel versieringben gbestolpt*).⁵⁶ If we were inclined to impose a category on Schellinks' Indian paintings, then



Figure 16.5 S. Savry, *Het toneel van de eerste Amsterdamse Schouwburg*, engraving 1658, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.

despite the obvious exoticism the visual language is closer to late-Renaissance Mannerism than to Saidian Orientalism. And Schellinks' irrefutable interest in all things visual retains an emblematic and stratified quality; here, naturalism remains subordinate to his predilection for the unseen and the ambiguous.

IV Conclusion

In the preceding we attempted to establish a new interpretation of Willem Schellinks' paintings about India by giving particular attention to the dynamic exchange between painting, poetry and theater in the circles in which he worked in seventeenth-century Amsterdam. The artist's poetic ode to the *Schilder-konst der Benjanen* makes Schellinks the first European artist to base a public expression of admiration for Indian art on artistic grounds. This admiration gained its most spectacular expression in the two paintings in which he takes an allegorical approach to depicting the succession battle that raged in India from 1657 to 1661. Schellinks was able to hear or read about the latter through various Eurasian information circuits, ranging from the Dutch or English companies to missionary reports, from travel accounts to even newspapers, whether on the road across Europe or at home in Amsterdam. The Mughal war of succession aroused the imagination of his European contemporaries and made them anxious about the deeper significance of these dramatic events for their own political turmoil. For sure, the sheer

savagery of the Mughal fratricide matched the prevailing taste of directors and audiences alike at the Amsterdam Schouwburg, for spectacular stage performances recounting historical court intrigues, preferably accompanied by exotic staging and dazzling special effects. Furthermore, given the close connections between painters and playwrights, and the analogy drawn in art theory between painting and theater, it is anything but surprising that Schellinks chose the theater to convey his own interpretation of those distant but ominous events.

Acknowledgments

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NOTES

- 1 Gij huwt uw zinrijk rijm aan t vloeiend penceel; En doet voor oog en oor uw verf en letters spreken. Cited in Minderaa, “De Knipzang,” 31.
- 2 For biographical information about Willem Schellinks, see Alsteens and Buys, *Paysages de France*, 40–55; Mens, “Willem Schellinks,” 73–74; Aikema et al., *Schellinks Fecit*; De Vries, “Willem Schellinks,” 150–163; Houbraken, *De groote schouburg*, vol. 2, 263–273.
- 3 For Schellinks’ travels in France, see Alsteens and Buys, *Paysages de France*, which contains extracts from Schellinks’ French diary.
- 4 Versions of both his travel journals can be found in Oxford (Bodleian) and Copenhagen (Royal library). We consulted the Copenhagen manuscript at Netherlands Institute for Art History (RKD) in The Hague (NL-HaRKD.0389). The section of this journal covering Schellinks’ period in England was translated and published by Exwood and Lehmann, *The Journal*. For the sections covering his time in Italy, south of Rome, see Aikema., *Schellinks Fecit* and Dafour, *Naturalia et Mirabilia*.
- 5 For the Atlas van der Hem, see De Groot, *The World of a Seventeenth-Century Collector*.
- 6 Willem Schellinks, *L’empereur Shah Jaban et ses quatre fils*, Musée Guimet, Paris; Willem Schellinks, *Parade of the Sons of Shah Jaban on Composite Horses and Elephants*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, inv. no. IS.30-1892.
- 7 Schellinks used a similar technique with two opposing perspectives on a single historical event in his two *Attack on Chatham* paintings in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.
- 8 Willem Schellinks, *Hunting Scene with Shah Jaban and His Sons*, Museum of Islamic Art, Doha.
- 9 Hond, “Willem Schellinks,” 291–292.
- 10 One can find yet another reading of the battle between falcon and heron in an engraved portrait by A. Sadeler of Anselmus de Boodt (1550–1632), court physician of Rudolph II in Prague. Here the motto above the birds reads: *Obstando Delemus* (through perseverance we win).
- 11 Willem Schellinks, *A Turkish Sultan and His Court Entertained by Dancing Girls*, auction in London (Sotheby’s), 5 July 1984, lot no. 365. Recently, we discovered another version in The Royal Collection Trust (RCIN 406161).
- 12 Willem Schellinks, *Oriental Horsemen Riding to the Hunt*, British Museum, inv.no. 1923,0013.20; Willem Schellinks, *An Indian Yogi Tied to a Palm Tree*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. no. 2014.118. See Forberg and Lunsingh Scheurleer, “How to Succeed,” 356–373.

- 13 Although composite animals were used before by Flemish artists for allegorical works as is demonstrated by Pieter van der Borcht's etching (1578) on the difficulty of governing: "Zoveel hoofden, zoveel zinnen" (So many men, so many minds), Royal Library of Belgium, Print Room, SI 1673. Recent authors have suggested more original Indian miniatures on which Schellinks based his protagonists, see Forberg, *Die Rezeption indischer Miniaturen*, 46–63.
- 14 For an analysis of Schellinks' working methods, see Forberg and Lunsingh Scheurleer, "How to Succeed".
- 15 Lunsingh Scheurleer, "Mogol-miniaturen," 10–39, esp. 24–26; Forberg, *Die Rezeption*, 15–63; Schrader, *Rembrandt and the Inspiration of India*, 34.
- 16 Lightbrown, "Oriental Art and the Orient," 228–279; Lunsingh Scheurleer, "Het Witsenalbum," 167–254; Forberg, "Imported Chronology," 107–144.
- 17 "On decouvrir dans celui-ci (tableaux Indiens & Chinois) les plus secretes particularitez des histoires, de la façon de vivre, & de la religion du pays," cited in Lunsingh Scheurleer, "Het Witsenalbum," 214.
- 18 For the most recent discussion, see Schrader, *Rembrandt and the Inspiration of India*.
- 19 The various editions of *De Oldipodrogo*, *De Amsterdamsche Vreughe Stroom*, *De Nieuwe Haagsche Nachtegaal*, *Cupidoos Lusthof*, *Apolloos Minnezangen*, *Den Koddigen Opdisser* and *Kliios Kraam* are examples from this genre that flourished briefly in the 1650s.
- 20 For Schellinks' literary production, see De Vries, "Willem Schellinks," 150–163; Alsteens and Buys, *Paysages de France*, 41–42; P. Minderaa, "De Knipzang," *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde* 79 (1963), 31–32.
- 21 The author's name for this volume was "Willem Schellinger," but Minderaa identifies him as Willem Schellinks because the concluding lines of the book are signed "W. Ses Stuyvers," a pseudonym used by Schellinks. This attribution has recently been called into question by Hans Buys, presumably due to the incorrect dating of the volume (Alsteens and Buys, *Paysages de France*, 52).
- 22 Minderaa, "De Knipzang," 31.
- 23 Frijhoff and Spies, *1650: Bevochten eendracht*, 441ff; Porteman and Smits-Veldt, *Een nieuw vaderland*, 561–569.
- 24 Schellinks later dedicated a poem to Kretzer in the anthology *Kliios Kraam* (1657): "A poor painting in a richly gilded frame".
- 25 *Kliios Kraam, vol. verscheiden gedichten: De tweede opening* (Leeuwarden: Hendrik Rintjus, 1657), 351–252.
- 26 Schellinks is referring here to Diego Gualpa, the Inca who according to legend discovered the gold and silver mines at Potosí in 1545.
- 27 The motif of the crown being passed from region to region recalls the laurel that Schellinks' circle of poet friends passed on to one another as part of their cycle of birthday poems. The birthday poems were also written in 1657 and three of the four friends had poems published in *Kliios Kraam*.
- 28 Vasari, *Le vite*, 2, 3–23.
- 29 Mander, *Schilder-Boeck*, fol. 61.
- 30 Schwartz, *Terms of Reception*, 42–45; Hond, "Cornelis de Bruijn," 67.
- 31 J. Auboyer was the first author to devote more extensive attention to Schellinks' Indian sources, in "Un maitre hollandaise," 251–273. For the latest research into both paintings, see Subrahmanyam, "A Roomful of Mirrors," *Ars Orientalis*, 39 (2010), 39–83; Forberg, *Die Rezeption indischer Miniaturen*.
- 32 Compare Forberg and Lunsingh Scheurleer, "How to Succeed," who show that Schellinks used a rather large variety of recent sources on India: books on Asia, travel accounts, European prints, Indian miniatures and first-hand information from travelers. For a more general impression of Shah Jahan's Mughal court Schellinks could turn to accounts by contemporaries such as Manrique (1649), Terry (1655) and particularly Boullaye le Gouz (1657). In Rome he might also have been able to draw on accounts from the Jesuit historian Daniello Bartoli and the Jesuit missionary Rodolfo Acquaviva.
- 33 Bernier, *Histoire de la dernière révolution*, followed in 1672 by translations into Dutch by Simon de Vries and also in Dapper, *Asia of naukeurige beschryving* (Amsterdam, 1672). For Bernier, see also the more recent Tinguely, *Un libertin en l'Inde moghole*.
- 34 Some of these reports also reached the *De Oprechte Haerlemsche Courant*, the oldest still extant Dutch newspaper published from 1656 by Abraham Casteleyn, which reported international news, mostly from Europe

- but incidentally also from the West and East Indies. Unfortunately, both the digitized newspaper resource Delpher and other libraries have many gaps for their seventeenth-century newspapers. Delpher did not contain any references to the Mughal war of succession.
- 35 Andersen and Iversen, *Orientalische Reisebeschreibungen*, Chapter XV in the Iversen volume, 209–213.
- 36 Folio numbers 679–688 on Rome are absent from the copy of his journal in the RKD, for which reason we have turned for the missing details to Houbraken, *De groote schouburg* vol. 2, 269.
- 37 For Roth, see Camps, *Studies in Asian Mission History* and Vogel in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, 22 (2005), 106–107.
- 38 For the ten Avatars see: Forberg, *Die Rezeption Indischer Miniaturen*, 70–133.
- 39 Rhai and Roth, *Relatio rerum notabilium regni Mogor in Asia* (Aschaffenburg, 1665). We used the version from the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris. This work is likely by Roth as recorded by Rhai (see also Roth's notes in a version in Belgium's Koninklijke Bibliotheek (ms. 6828–69, p. 415–417). This probably also explains the large number of historical inaccuracies in *Relatio*. For Rhai and Neuburg, see Jaitner, *Die Konfessionspolitik*, 27–28, 40–44.
- 40 Vries, *Curieuse aanmerkingen*, 1229–1231.
- 41 *Relatio*, 15. Not taking into account Roth's version of the events, Forberg suggests that Aurangzeb sits on the elephant and Murad on the dromedary (Forberg, *Die Rezeption*, 51–52). We feel, though, that it makes more sense to have the two allies Aurangzeb and Murad on one side against Dara and Shuja (on the horse) on the other. Since Aurangzeb promised the throne to Murad (following Roth), the latter sits on the elephant, indeed symbolizing imperial power. Aurangzeb sits on the dromedary, feigning allegiance with his brother; his blood-stained knife refers to his upcoming betrayal.
- 42 Tinguely, *Un libertin en l'Inde moghole*, 123. *Relatio* relates the following, incorrect sequence of events: (1) three brothers fight against Dara, who is defeated, betrayed and executed, (2) Murad and Aurangzeb defeat Shuja, (3) Aurangzeb has Murad killed.
- 43 Andersen and Iversen, *Orientalische Reisebeschreibungen*, 211 and 215 respectively.
- 44 See also Kuruppath, *Staging Asia*. We are grateful to Katherine Schofield for the suggestion of a possible English source as based on the diary of Peter Mundy.
- 45 Elenbaas, "De verbouwing van de Amsterdamse Schouwburg," 285–298.
- 46 Porteman and Smits-Veldt, *Een nieuw vaderland voor de muzen*, 524.
- 47 For Jan Vos, see Dudok van Heel, "Jan Vos," 23–43 and recently Geerdink, *Dichters en verdiensten*. For tableaux vivant, see Smits-Veldt, "Vertoningen in opvoeringen," 210–218.
- 48 The one study that devotes serious attention to this staging and refers to aspects such as the "bouffon" in the foreground and the "écran transparent" in the background is Jean de Loewenstein, "À propos d'un tableau," 293–298.
- 49 Cruickshank, "All Done with Mirrors," 17–30; Barnwell, "L'illusion comique," 110–130. One scene reminiscent of Schellinks' theater paintings is described in Jan Zoet's 1666 poem *Wonderlikke voorzegging, gedaan binnen Londen, door de hof-nar van Karel Stuart*, which satirized Karel II. Zoet has a *taaf-felgeke*, a "table-jester," show off his remarkable knowledge while King Charles is fully occupied with his wine (Cordes, *Jan Zoet, Amsterdammer*, 537–538). For a fascinating parallel with the clown in South Indian drama at that time, see Gommans, "Cosmopolitanism and Imagination."
- 50 Depictions of the monarch with his two deceased predecessors have a long tradition in European painting through the story of The Three Kings. A copper engraving from 1652 shows the coronation of Louis XIV attended by the three kings in a cloud, greeting Mary and the baby Jesus (Trexler, "Träume der Heiligen Drie Könige," 57).
- 51 Bernheimer, "Theatrum Mundi," 225–247.
- 52 Thanks to the account by Jean Baptiste Tavernier, first published in 1675, we know that in seventeenth-century Golkonda there truly was at least one occasion when a group cooperated to create an imitation of an elephant: (Tavernier, *Travels in India*, vol. 1, 128). Although Schellinks based his elephant on an Indian miniature, "his" elephant was formed by nine women, the same number as the one described by Tavernier.

- 53 For a more detailed examination of this metaphor and these quotes, see Weststeijn, *The Visible World*, 140–143; 185–187.
- 54 Porteman and Smits-Veldt provide an excellent overview in *Een nieuw vaderland voor de muzen*, 523–545.
- 55 For Calderón's subject matter, see Parker, *The Mind and Art of Calderón*; and Greer, *The Play of Power*.
- 56 The author's words in Van Mander's *Witleggingh op den Metamorphosis Pub. Ovidij Nasonis*, cited and interpreted in Miedema, "Karel van Mander's *Grondt*," 658.

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