



LECTURE SERIES 2014/2015

Sites of Mediation

Entangled Histories of Europe, 1350-1650



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«Prized Possessions: Piracy and Exotica in Early Modern Holland»

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Venue: HS 119, Kollegienhaus University of Basel (Petersplatz 1)

Within a few remarkable decades at the outset of the 17th century – crucial period in the formation of the Dutch Republic – the Netherlands and, in particular, the city of Amsterdam acquired the status of omphalos mundi, the navel or hub of global traffic. Already in the opening decades of the century, the United Provinces and Amsterdam in particular were awash in foreign commodities, many of them marked by strangeness, or rarity. The Dutch laid claim to those exotic rarities in a way other nations did not. Porcelain was one of the signal «East Indian» wares imported by the Dutch and traded by Dutch merchants. Studying the early import of porcelain to the Netherlands – by way of piracy, and state-sponsored looting – this paper proposes a new reading of the valuation of exotic goods and of goods in general. Prized possessions such as porcelain were translated, in still life paintings, into emblems of the vanity of investment in worldly goods.