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Assessing the Truth

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Assessing the Truth

Correspondence and Information at the End of the Golden Age

Harold Cook

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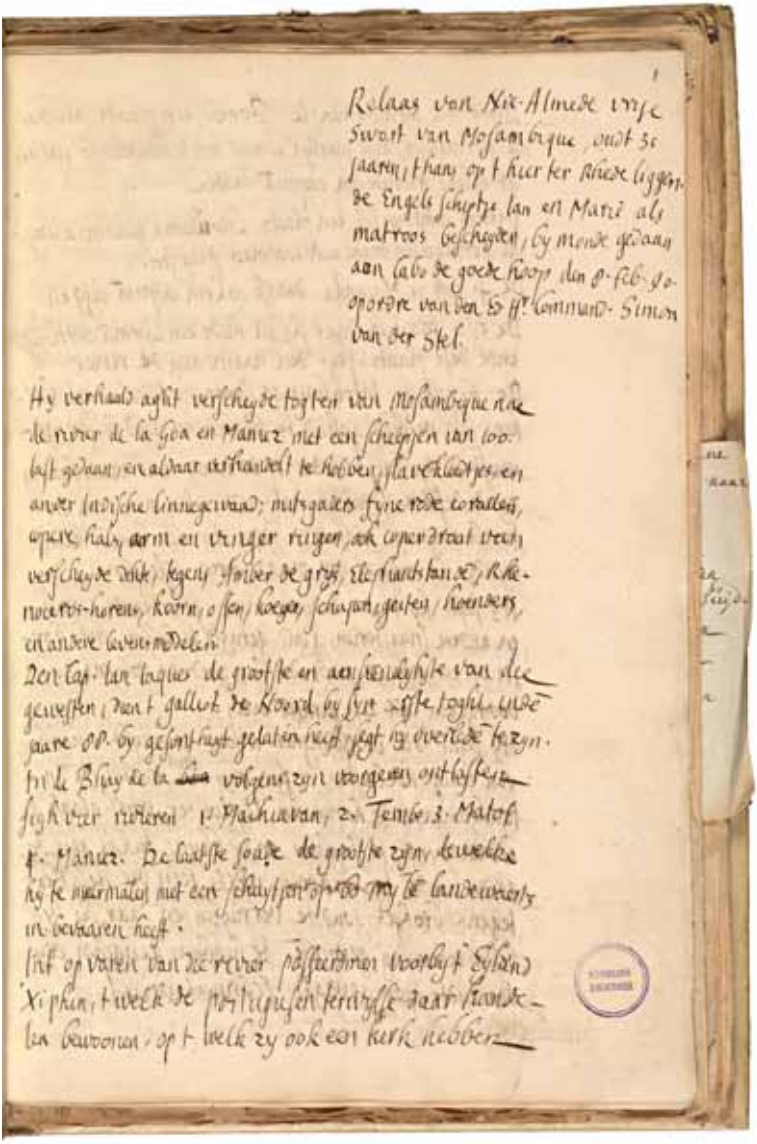


1. First page of the copy of the 'Relaas van Nic. Almede' in the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, KW 72 C 14, fol. 1.

We are all aware of living through big changes in the world. Many of them are intertwined with the soaring accessibility of computers and the Internet. We can imagine the banking crisis never happening if shares were still being traded on the floors of stock exchanges by hand signals and shouts, rather than through complex mathematical formulas that generate electronic responses and that not even the regulators understand. Or we can imagine green futures brought to us by electronically automated systems that lessen the impact on the earth of industrial and post-industrial activities by coordinating those activities. Think of systems that improve the efficiency of petrol-powered engines or that support new methods of manufacturing biofuels. Molecular biology, which holds out such great promise for those who can afford it, is unimaginable without computing power and tools for the collection and management of information. All these novelties are interlinked with the world we have always known, of bodies and objects, hopes and fears, and the exercise of power. The same world has also brought forth countless films about anti-utopian futures where minds and bodies are subject to much more all-embracing control by technology than we have yet experienced in real life. It is also overflowing with real suffering and powerful emotional responses, which contrast with virtual realities. Thus, while some kinds of changes in our information systems have led to more precision and efficiency, and others hold out the promise of material betterment, others yet raise doubts and uncertainties.

This is where a bit of historical perspective might help. One way to apply it is by pointing out that knowledge usually depends on comparisons: one person is poorer than another, that kind of cell structure has a certain kind of quirk compared to another, this sample of air from the Greenland ice sheet is different from this other one. History enters the picture in daily conversation: we are better off than granddad or grandma, who laboured so hard for their bread; or, the Dutch economy once benefited tremendous-

ly from the long, wide and deep rivers of silver herring running through the North Sea, which by comparison are now tiny trickles; or, the problems of man and nature go back to the agricultural revolution of the Stone Age, or perhaps to the Industrial Revolution of two centuries ago; or maybe my own problems are simply due to that stupid boss I had to try to please a few years ago. Our points of comparisons are then and now, now and the future.

So it comes as no surprise to hear the following comment in a discussion about Open Access among high-placed European officials. Neelie Kroes, currently the European Commissioner for Digital Agenda, was holding an English-language interview for a series of 15-minute YouTube videos 'talking with various people about their experiences in the digital field'. Her interviewee was Robbert Dijkgraaf, a mathematical physicist and string theorist who has recently become the Director of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. In passing, he mentioned how the scientific method had been invented in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries, when students travelled freely from university to university, creating a system of open access. 'We are almost … reinventing our past with modern technology', he said.[1]

Dijkgraaf's historical comparison may be meant to address the present and future, but it suggests a powerful historical point of reference as well. The developments to which he was referring are often called the Scientific Revolution, which as he says is often associated with the open and free exchange of knowledge that we link with the Enlightenment, indeed with modernity itself. He may have picked up this view from his educational formation, or perhaps more recently from reading about some of the historical projects funded by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences when he was its president. In any case, given that our current concerns with information technology have engendered a raft of implicit comparisons like his, some explicit comparisons might be helpful. For that, we need examples. We need something to think with.

A wonderful source from the period that interests me most is

to be found in the papers of Gisbert Cuper (1644-1716). More on his life in a moment; for now, it is only necessary to say that his voluminous correspondence, beginning in the middle of the 17th century and continuing almost to his death at the age of 82, is one of the largest remaining from his period. In 1854, 16 volumes of his papers were given to the Rijksarchief, and 140 to the Koninklijke Bibliotheek. (The division sprang from the idea that his diplomatic and political papers belonged in the national archive, while his personal and scholarly papers were more in their place in the library.) Many more letters of his survive in other libraries and archives throughout Europe. One estimate suggests that between 5000 and 7000 of his letters are extant.[2] He corresponded with people not only in the Dutch Republic, but in the Baltic, Berlin and many other places in Germany, France, Italy and the Middle East, even England. Writing in Latin, Dutch, French and Italian, Cuper was clearly a member of what Erasmus called the *Respublica literaria*.

When I first consulted the printed, incomplete inventory of the Cuper papers published in 1842, a surprising item came into view.[3] Late in life, Cuper had begun to reorganise his papers, collecting them in folio-sized notebooks with vellum covers and bindings. One of these items contained odd reports from far-away places.[4] As a professor, patrician, politician and diplomat, he wrote plenty of reports himself, but these happened to be not by him. Perhaps because it was a out of place in Cuper's correspondence, I could not resist calling up the volume. What arrived was a relatively thin notebook with only a few pages in the middle containing writing, the more numerous pages before and after being blank. Inside the front cover was a loose piece of paper in a contemporary hand, listing the contents. The first was 'Relatie van Nic. Almede, vrye Swart gedaen op de Caap c. 1690. aengaande de Landen geleghe aghter Mozambique'.[5] Well, I have colleagues who study the history of Africa, and academic friends who study the Portuguese Empire, I myself am interested in the early history of the Cape; and I know that reports from that pe-

riod by Africans themselves are not very common. So, although according to plan I should have been spending my time in puzzling out Cuper's correspondence, I indulged my curiosity.

The report was headed exactly like documents from the VOC archives, with a title that said: 'Relation of Nic. Almede, free black man of Mozambique' – which at that time referred to the city rather than the country – '35 years old, having arrived here by reason of being registered as a sailor on the English ship "John and Mary", given orally at the Cape of Good Hope on 8 February 1690 at the order of His Excellency Commander Simon van der Stel.'[6] The date is possibly important, falling as it does about a year after the Dutch stadholder Willem III (1650-1702) also became King William III of England, making allies of the Dutch and the English. This was also a period of growing attacks on the Portuguese factories of the southeast coast of Africa by Arab Omanis as well as by local rulers.[7] As the last sentence of the report on Almede's interview says, 'The Portuguese are in a hot war with all the surrounding nations'.[8] No doubt the VOC was considering taking advantage of the situation to break into the coastal trade; indeed, about three decades later the Company established a factory of its own in Delagoa Bay (now called Maputo Bay).

According to the report, Almede began by saying that he had previously been on ships that sailed from Mozambique as far south as Delagoa Bay. They imported Indian linen, including large amounts of slave cloth; fine red coral; copper neck, arm and finger rings; and copper thread of various thicknesses. Local products they bought in turn included ambergris, elephant tusks and rhinoceros horns, as well as grain, oxen, cows, sheep, goats, chickens and other foodstuffs. He goes on to describe his travels as a merchant up and down the rivers that lead to the coast, telling what he learned about Portuguese activities there: the number of soldiers (and monks) in the main settlements; how they were armed; what goods the merchants traded; where slaves could be had; how and by whom the local people were governed and so forth. He was especially good at describing the huge

2. 'Zee-paerden in Lowango'. In: Pieter van den Broeke, *Korte Historiael*, 1634, p. 13. The Hague, KB, KW 893 G 52.

amounts of gold and silver he had seen. One place he describes – likely to be a centre of the increasingly powerful Rozvi Empire, also known as the Changamire Dynasty – had household goods made of gold and silver. These included not only candlesticks, but also hand basins, plates, cups and more, even chairs covered with sheets of pure gold. Almede said that they picked up lumps of gold and silver from the bare ground, as thick as tobacco pipes. The king, he went on, had over a hundred wives; three of his sons could read and write. They prayed to a great and wise god named Missimos in a wood of oak trees, and celebrated weddings with great feasts, accompanied by trumpets and drums. If anyone committed adultery, their throat was cut. They didn't ride horses, although the land was full of wild ones. (Presumably he was thinking of zebras.) There were also elephants, buffaloes, rhinoceros, hartebeests, boars and 'tygers' (by which he must have meant lions, since of course there were no tigers in Africa). There was even a kind of horse with two long horns that runs very fast, and ostriches. He then came back to the subject of gold, mentioning pyramids of it bigger than two men could encircle with their arms.

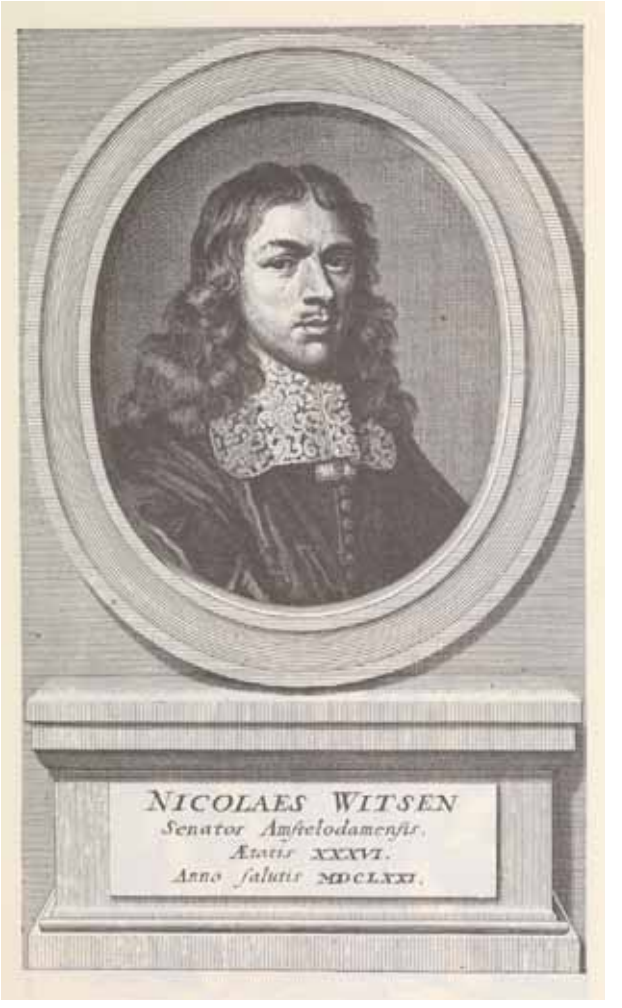
It is a good story, and it might be worth further analysis, although aside from a few major towns and capes, few of the place names are identifiable. Almede had a Portuguese-derived name, but coming from the Swahili coast he may have spoken with an accent difficult for his interpreters to transcribe, and to have referred to places by their names in local languages rather than how the Dutch knew them. For now, then, let us skip to the last paragraph. 'A final account he gave', it says, 'was about having seen many animals around Caba Corientes on land and in the sea, not unlike mermen ("de meerminnen niet ongelyk"), about 12 feet high, more or less, and with a girth proportionate to their height, having a head like a pig, an upper body like a man, flippers like a turtle's, and the lower part of their body with a tail like a fish. He has heard them whistle, but they make no other sound. Both the males and females had genitals like humans. They were reddish

in colour and with muscles like animals rather than fish, with four long teeth in their mouths, the two above almost as long as a span but the ones below sticking out only two fingers long. They eat on land but are very shy of humans. The aforesaid teeth are excellent medicinals and are good for gout and other complaints, so in Mozambique they are sold for a great deal of money.'[9]

This is intriguing, and I suspect that Almede's description of mermen is the reason the report found its way into Cuper's papers. But what are we to make of it? One possibility is that it is a mangled account of the Indian Ocean dugong or sea cow. They occur in the region and are impressively big, if not quite 12 feet long. Dugongs have incisors that in the males protrude like tusks and their tails are like those of whales. In keeping with the text, they have flippers, exposed mammalian genitals, red meat and high-pitched calls. But there is one major counter-indication to this identification. Dugongs don't go on land: hippopotami do that. So we are not dealing with a straightforward eyewitness report. Almede may well have been leading his VOC questioners on, into deeper and deeper legends. Reports of merman-like gods and goddesses are known throughout Eurasia, and a similar creature occurs in Dogon folklore from the region of Mali. Could Almede have been drawing on a legend he heard in Mozambique? After all, that is where you could buy merman teeth if you had the money. Or was he playing back to his Dutch interrogators a story he had heard from European sailors, making a joke at their expense at the end of his interview just to see if they would put it down on paper? There is also the possibility that the comment about 'de meerminnen niet ongelyk' is not Almede's voice at all, but an interpolation by the recorder, interviewer or interpreter.

Let us note that in asking such questions we are attempting to disentangle truth from fiction. As we will see, Cuper often tried to do the same, which may be why a copy of the report was sent to him in the first place. It is bound together with other accounts of far-away places and peoples: the beliefs of the St. Thomas Christians on the Malabar coast; Abyssinia; the North African city of

3. Jan de Baen, *Portrait of Gisbert Cuper*, probably from the late 1670s; image of Harpocrates above his left hand, Minerva in background, maid of Deventer over his right shoulder, and medal of the States General at his right elbow.



4. Portrait of Nicolaes Witsen. In: N.C. Witsen, *Aeloude en hedendaegsche scheeps-bouw en bestier*, 1979 (facsimile of the 1671 edition). The Hague, KB, NE 1980/839.

Constantina, in modern Algeria; New Guinea; New Zealand;[10] a list of questions and answers about the Greek Orthodox church; and another list of questions and answers from Malacca. There is even a copy of a Latin letter from Peking sent to Moscow in 1680 by the Jesuit father Ferdinand Verbiest (1623-88), and another of 1689, when the Muscovites and Manchus signed a peace treaty, with the Jesuits serving as interpreters. The connections with places administered by the VOC and the interest in contacts between Muscovy and China suggest that these are copies of papers that Cuper had obtained from his friend Nicolaes Witsen (1641-1717), one of the Heeren XVII. Indeed, one of the reports about Chinese-Muscovy negotiations includes a note in French at the end, in Cuper's hand, stating that it was communicated to him in 1691 by Witsen. Cuper's network was not only providing him with fresh sightings of mermen, but was allowing him to read confidential Jesuit documents within two years of their composition.

The relationship between Cuper and Witsen is therefore important, as has been noticed by other historians.[11] Since the two shared much in common, it developed into a friendship. Both were born in the early 1640s, Witsen three years before Cuper. Witsen was the son of an Amsterdam patrician and Muscovy merchant; Cuper's father a more modest official (*land- en dijkschrijver*) of the government of Overbetuwe, in the rural province of Gelderland. Both had excellent educations and embarked on Grand Tours of France and Italy, although Cuper cut his short while in Paris in order to accept a position at the Deventer Illustrious School. Both became firm supporters of Willem III during the *rampjaar* of 1672, and served afterward as members of their respective city councils, often as burgomaster or *schepen*. Witsen joined the board of the Amsterdam chamber of the VOC before election to the Heeren XVII, served for a brief time in the States General, represented Amsterdam as ambassador extraordinary to England after the Glorious Revolution – they wanted to arrange payment for the huge loan they had advanced William –

and hosted the visit of Tsar Peter to Amsterdam in 1697-98. Cuper added the post of deputy of Overijssel in the States General to his other duties – although this obliged him to resign his professorship – spending 13 years in The Hague. He later served the States General again as one of their representatives in the field (*gedeputeerde te velde*) during the War of Spanish Succession. Witsen and Cuper died within a year of one another, Cuper first, in 1716.

There were differences too, of course. Cuper remained more closely connected to academic circles, Witsen to commercial ones. Cuper moved up the social ladder by developing an impressive command of ancient and modern languages and literature, and by being at the same time adept at the methods of working in the Dutch Republic. He put his linguistic skills to good use in composing Latin communications issued by the States General. For instance, on behalf of William and Mary he worked closely with Gaspar Fagel (1634-88), the Grand Pensionary of Holland, in writing a document that became a manifesto for the Glorious Revolution.[12] But his own letters tell us little about himself. The editor of his diary from the year he served as *gedeputeerde te velde* explains that it is more like a combined travel journal, work record, report of military events, and memoir than an autobiography, so that anyone looking for psychological insight will be disappointed.[13] We can think of him as a person from the provinces who wished to impress while remaining keenly aware of the necessity to guard his every step. Witsen had more of the self-confidence of someone born near the centre of power, but even he was very cautious. Clearly, both of them were well-experienced office-holders, typical of the patricians (*regenten*) of their day.[14] They must have been not only happy in dining with their associates and extended families, but comfortable in the daily routines of committee meetings, negotiations, memos and reports, and sorting, filing and recollecting information. Indeed, this was a golden age of archives and libraries. Magistrates and merchants alike found it necessary, for the sake of good administration, to assemble vast repositories of books and records. Witsen and

Cuper moved easily in such spaces. It brings to mind comparisons with contemporaries such as the chief minister of France, Jean-Baptiste Colbert (1619-83), the son of a merchant family who rose to power thanks to his account-book methods of administering the king's business. One of Colbert's recent biographers has called him the 'information master'.[15]

It is no surprise, then, that one of the interests Cuper and Witsen shared in common was information collecting. Solid, up-to-date information was the lifeblood of their daily management practices. It pervaded their political lives and was also visible in other realms, such as collecting books and objects. After they first met in The Hague in 1683, Cuper visited Witsen in his cabinet, where his personal books, papers, pictures and objects were kept. Following the visit he wrote Witsen a flattering letter in elegant Latin. As with letters of the kind since Roman times, it was meant to be read by others, and it was: Pierre Bayle (1647-1706) considered it erudite and elegant enough to be published in his new journal, *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*. Because it especially praised the information that Witsen was collecting on a map of Central and East Asia, Witsen also published Cuper's letter in the book that resulted from those efforts, *Noord en Oost Tartarye* (1692).[16]

As with most examples from the period, then, the correspondence between Witsen and Cuper began only after they knew one another personally. For instance, Saskia Stegeman's excellent recent study of one of Cuper's correspondents, a physician and antiquarian named Theodorus Janssonius van Almeloveen (1657-1712), demonstrates that the volume and quality of van Almeloveen's letters was deeply affected by whether he could meet his correspondents for personal conversation. His early correspondence began with those he knew the best, family and school acquaintances. When van Almeloveen opened a correspondence with Cuper in order to gain his support for an appointment at the university of Harderwijk, he had not yet met the professor. However, he made up for this by dropping the names of people whom

they knew in common. Later, when van Almeloveen extended his correspondence to Germany and France, and even to England, he did so via personal intermediaries. His correspondence with Cuper only began to flourish after 1700, because 'they were able to meet one another' for conversation more often. In the absence of face-to-face connections, as in the case of his French and English correspondents, van Almeloveen's letter writing tended to peter out.[17] Put another way, written communication was often a way of compensating for the absence of someone with whom the writer would otherwise have been speaking. You might therefore think of the Republic of Letters as an attempt to continue a Republic of Conversation by other means.

But the work of putting words on paper imposes its own disciplines. When addressing someone not present in the flesh, you cannot judge how your words are being taken. You don't have the feedback that would lead you to expand on your remarks or to change the subject. You cannot take back what you have written down, only try to explain it away long after the fact. Copies of what you wrote, including any mistakes, can be circulated widely to all and sundry. Careful self-censorship and utmost discretion were therefore a necessity. Van Almeloveen, for instance, never dared to discuss politics in his letters, and 'if asked for an opinion or judgement' he would 'beat a hasty retreat'.[18] In other words, when we examine the correspondence networks of the early modern period, we are looking at something more like a public record than personal thoughts. That is why historians, as well as the historical actors, sometimes term this group a 'Republic': it was governed by rules of polite behaviour not unlike the rules of debate in a political chamber.[19] You might be able to hide or disguise your identity when publishing a book, but very rarely in letters.[20] These letters are not, by and large, 'ego-documents'.[21]

An epistolary conversation might begin with one or two letters in which a supplicant is addressing a patron, but in order for it to be sustained, it had to develop into a system of exchange of

mutual benefit. In Cuper's case, for instance, Bianca Chen noted that 'the reciprocity of news provision' between him and his correspondents 'indicates a more equal basis for correspondence' than simple patronage.[22] Patronage might of course play a role in such a relationship, but it need not have been the determining factor. As in the Dutch political economy of the period, power in the Republic of Letters was generated by a system of exchange. It could lead to personal advantage, but it also fed into general accumulation.

But exchange and accumulation of what? Let us call it 'information', although Professor Herman Boerhaave of Leiden (1668-1738) was already using the word 'data'.[23] As Chen demonstrated, the Witsen-Cuper exchange shows how much both men cared about information concerning tangible things: books and maps, pictures and drawings, travels, antiquities, *naturalia*, and other objects.[24] In exchanging this kind of news, they placed accurate information first and foremost. It was after all Witsen's investigations into the peoples and places of Central Asia and his method for managing this information by mapping it that provoked Cuper's poetic admiration. Their main efforts were to describe as accurately as possible what was happening or what had been found, or to compare different descriptions in order to assess their accuracy. In doing so, they were trying to disentangle truth from fiction. Anyone with expertise was admitted to this public game, even if the main players were generally individuals of a certain prominence. It was not social status that produced information or guaranteed its validity. Information from a person like Almede also got heard. Witsen and Cuper saw it as their responsibility to assess it as well as they could, bringing to the task their command of lots of different kinds of information. In the exchanges of the Republic, others would be quick to point out any assessment that proved incorrect.

Over the course of the Witsen-Cuper correspondence, then, there is a continual line of conversation about the latest information, along with accumulations of it that allowed comparison

and assessment. The two of them were especially interested in the variety of peoples of the world, their customs and languages. This played into the vital question of how the world came to be populated after the Great Flood. That problem had long been debated, but it had become especially pressing after Columbus's discoveries and the realisation that the new lands were not a part of Asia.[25] How could Noah's descendants have gotten to the New World? It was a question that had concerned even Hugo Grotius (1583-1645). One theory held that there was a land bridge between the two continents, but one of the reports Witsen sent to Cuper – which as it happens is bound next to Almede's report about mermen – showed that VOC investigations into the seas northeast of Japan made the existence of the so-called Straits of Anian very doubtful.[26]

Deep questions about the history of humankind and how it related to the Bible were hardly confined to the Americas, however. In 1711, Witsen wrote to Cuper about a Jew from the Malabar coast of India who was visiting Amsterdam and reported that his community descended from the exiles of the Babylonian captivity. Cuper had his doubts. He wanted to know if this person could be interviewed to find out if his people knew only the Pentateuch or whether they also had other books of the Old Testament. This would help to determine whether they might be Samaritans, a Judaic group that did not go to Babylon and did not recognise any Bible books except the five books of Moses.[27] On another occasion, Witsen wrote to a minister on Ceylon to ask if the Sinhalese language was related to Hebrew. (The answer was not very much, although they might have a handful of words in common.)[28] When Witsen sent Cuper reports from Urk and other places around the Zuider Zee about fragments of carved stone that had been dredged up in the nets of fishermen, and information about the names of villages said to be drowned under the water, they debated whether the places might once have been occupied by ancient Tartars, although they preferred to think they might have been Greek or Roman.[29] Similarly, they, and particul-

5. A monument from Vegaturia, in Siberia, published in vol. 2 of N.C. Witsen's *Noord en Oost Tartarije*, 1705, p. 759, found among Cuper's manuscripts. The Hague, KB, KW 72 C 32, A6.

6. Manuscript sketch of an ox-like skull from under the ground in Siberia, sent to Cuper by Witsen. The Hague, KB, KW 72 C 32, A7. The finished image was printed in N.C. Witsen's *Noord en Oost Tartarije*, 1705, vol. 2, p. 746.

arly Cuper, collected inscriptions as well as sets of marks suggesting writing. Most of Cuper's inscriptions were in Latin and Greek, and they were so numerous and varied that, it was suggested as recently as 30 years ago, they still contain surprising discoveries.[30] He and Witsen also shared illustrations of cuneiform tablets, Egyptian hieroglyphics and Chinese characters, hoping to be able to decode them one day. Witsen passed on images of strange marks on stones from Siberia.[31] Later generations would use such sources to construct theories about the genealogy of languages and people.

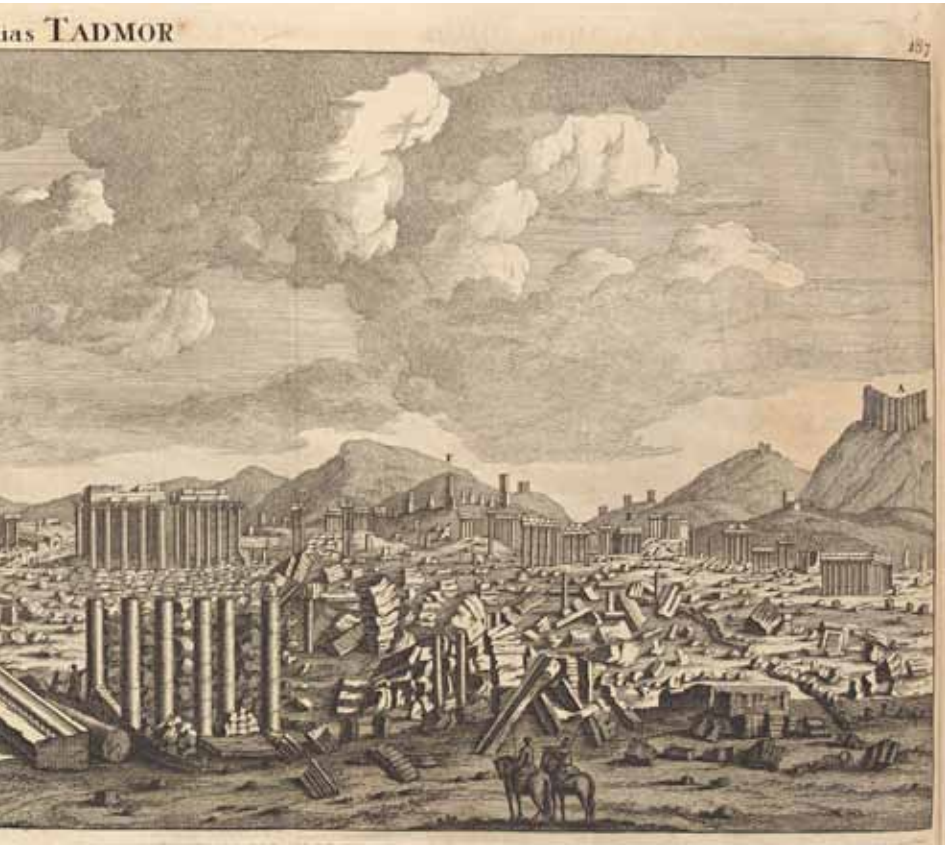
In assessing evidence, then, the two figures of our story compared historical reports with ancient sources, eyewitness reports and – think of those merman tusks said to be sold in the markets of Mozambique – tangible evidence. On one occasion, when Cuper and Witsen had a brief dispute about fossils, they fought it out with reference to such primary evidence. Witsen liked the ideas of the English physician John Woodward (1665-1728), who had written about fossils as evidence of the Great Flood, but Cuper was suspicious of Woodward and told Witsen so.[32] Witsen's rejoinder concerned the remains of an elephant dug from deep under the ground in Siberia. This was at 65 or 70 degrees north, where no elephant could live for long, so it must have been pushed there by the rising floodwaters and then buried in the mud of the final deluge. Moreover, Witsen had in his cabinet the skull of a two-horned animal larger than a steer and unlike anything now known, also dug up from a good depth in that cold land. It must be 'een oer os' (a primal ox), also buried by the Flood. He sent Cuper a drawing of it from several angles.[33] Tangible evidence illustrated.

As Cuper extended his network of correspondents, then, he was eager to acquire images as well as words. Many are beautiful. But he was also interested in accuracy. For instance, he wrote to the Dutch consul in Aleppo asking for various kinds of information, including copies of inscriptions or illustrations of anything ancient from the city and its surroundings, promising to reim-

burse him for any expenses. When in 1691 a group of European merchants obtained the permission of the local ruler to visit Palmyra (also known by its biblical name of Tadmor), a once mighty city that now lay in ruins, the Dutch artist G. Hofsted or Hofstede van Essen went along to record the scene. Van Essen subsequently produced an engraving of his panoramic view for a report on the expedition that was published in the *Philosophical Transactions*.[34] When Cuper received a version of it in the form of a painting on a four-metre wide wood panel (along with an account of the expedition – in English, which was a problem – and some medals), he started spreading the word to his European correspondents about the great discoveries being made in the east.[35] Another version of van Essen's representation was published in a lavishly illustrated book by the Dutch artist Cornelis de Bruijn (1652-1727), about his journeys in the Near East.[36] De Bruijn subsequently undertook another remarkable journey, this time from Moscow through Persia to Batavia in the East Indies, documenting the whole in pictures. Cuper was again among those who urged him to publish. Although de Bruijn never got to Palmyra, he did visit and draw another major ruin, that of Persepolis. But about the time he did so, two other books were published that also had depictions of Persepolis, showing it differently. This led Cuper openly to question de Bruijn's accuracy, but after de Bruijn published a defense of his drawings, and after Cuper carefully went over the different illustrations with the artist himself, he was finally convinced that de Bruijn deserved the palm for accuracy.[37]

Illustrations therefore counted for much. If you could see it, it must be real. Even better if you could handle it.[38] Cuper eagerly used this kind of evidence to explore the classical tradition as well. His main patron in securing the rectorship of the Illustrious School in Deventer had been Johann Friedrich Gronovius (1611-71), professor of Greek and chief of the library at the university of Leiden, a man known as one of the foremost scholars of his generation.[39] Cuper had obviously impressed him with his own command of Greek and Latin, as well as with his critical intelligence.

7. 'Ruins of Palmyra'. In: Cornelis de Bruijn, *Reizen door Klein Asia*, 1698. The Hague, KB, KW 530 A 53.

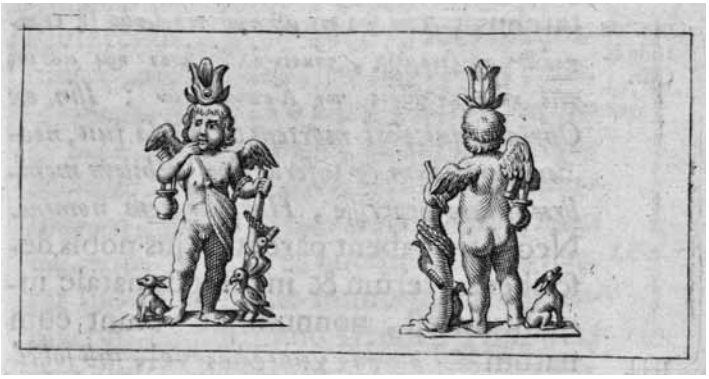


Cuper's first book, published about the time of his appointment, was a set of commentaries and corrections on various passages in classical literature, not unlike Gronovius's own *Observationes* – it even shared the same title.[40] But he was also one of the philologists of the mid-17th century who moved toward antiquarianism and archaeology.[41] Cuper's next book, published in 1676, helped to secure his reputation as a scholar to be reckoned with, and it dealt with the interpretation of an object: a little statue of the Egyptian

god Harpocrates. He was handling a new kind of evidence.

The object came from the collection of his schoolmate Johannes Smetius junior (1636-1704; Smetius was one of Cuper's first correspondents; they began writing not long after Cuper took the position in Deventer, and remained in communication until Smetius's death.) Smetius was the son of a Nijmegen *predikant* who made great efforts to come into possession of the antiquities, usually of Roman provenance, that were frequently discovered in and around the city. Johannes Smetius senior (1591-1651) had used this kind of evidence to show, in his *Oppidum Batavorum* (1644), that the chief city of the Batavians was Nijmegen, which still seems to be the consensus. Many patriots in the Dutch Republic identified themselves as the new Batavians. The tribe was praised by Tacitus as one of the chief pillars of Rome in northern Europe during the Republican period, who then rose up against the Empire in the first century C.E. to protect their independence. In 1676, delegates from the various nations embroiled in the ongoing wars in the low countries gathered in Nijmegen, where peace negotiations would go on for over two years. Many of these eminent men and their retinues visited Smetius's cabinet. Cuper was by then not only a professor but also one of the senior officials of Deventer. The book on Harpocrates, written by a rising Dutch politician and fluent classicist, served to explain one of the most puzzling objects in the Smetius cabinet, and it made Cuper's erudition internationally visible.

Bianca Chen has explained Cuper's investigations into the Harpocrates figure very well.[42] He was the first to unravel the story as we know it today. Smetius's Harpocrates was the Egyptian god Horus, the son of Isis and Osiris, depicted as a child. The image of a child with his finger raised upright near his mouth resembles the hieroglyph for child, but the Ptolemaic Greeks understood it in another sense altogether. Touching the forefinger to the lips they saw as a sign for silence and therefore an indication of how the wisdom of Horus was related to the keeping of secrets. For the Romans, Harpocrates therefore became associated with vari-



8. Gisbert Cuper, *Harpocrates*, 1676, p. 5. The Hague, KB, KW 185 M 15.

ous of the mystery cults that were very popular about the time of the ancient Batavian revolt. Smetius's figure was Roman, but harked back to Egypt. Cuper attacked the common opinion that the Harpocrates figure was invoking silence; rather, he thought the little god personified the sun, and was pointing upward. It is also notable that in his short book, Cuper dealt with the object as an object, illustrating the amulet from both front and back and supplying comparative images of related figures. This approach made his argument accessible to a wider audience than the classical scholars for whom Latin texts in the Republic of Letters were usually written. Reading his arguments and studying his illustrations, you get a taste of what it must have been like to visit Smetius's cabinet. Even a diplomat killing time during the negotiations for the Treaty of Nijmegen would have been able to appreciate his method.

Today we might use the term 'iconography' to denote how Cuper was trying to disentangle layers of meaning in the figured object. His contemporaries, even the iconoclastic Calvinists among them, were accustomed to seeing signs all around them, whether triumphal arches, decorated carriages in processions,

or coats of arms. They also enjoyed a genre popular with both ordinary and learned people, that of emblem books. An emblem has three features: a short motto or saying similar to Erasmus's *adagia*; a picture that can represent the same meaning by visual signs; and an explanation, often religious or moralistic in tone.[43] Emblems have usually been studied in relationship to the symbols incorporated in paintings, poetry and literature, where meaning abounded.

But sometimes emblems were depicted within circles rather than squares, suggesting a connection with a tangible rather than conceptual object: a medal. In classical antiquity, metal buttons and medallions are known to have been given by one person to another to cement a special relationship between the two. In the Middle Ages a new function for the medal came into being: pilgrims collected badges as souvenirs of the places visited on their travels. From the 15th century on a related genre emerged: casting or striking medals to commemorate special occasions. The medallions usually had a portrait on one side and an emblem on the other, with names and mottos inscribed around the edges so that they could be identified accurately by all. Princes and republics soon began issuing medals as self-reflective statements about themselves and important events. One advantage of the medium is that it presented the view of the maker and could not be altered. When the Sea Beggars captured Brielle in 1572, for instance, they produced a silver medal to mark and glorify the event. Person, event and meaning, all rolled together in one tangible object.[44] Cuper took a serious interest in medals of his own day. He wrote Latin verses about medals struck in Sweden and advised on the content of one of the many medals commissioned in honour of the fortunate expedition of William III to England.[45] By the 17th century, even ordinary people had medals made to commemorate weddings or funerals.[46]

Medals are of course similar to coins, and Cuper, like Witsen, was an avid coin collector. Coin collecting had by that time captured the interest of large numbers of people.[47] The learned Anna

9. Many 'penningen' lie on the table, and a book on the right is open to a page showing coins. Joachim Oudaan, *Roomsche mogentheid*, 1664, frontispiece. The Hague, KB, KW 499 B 27.

Maria van Schurman (1607-78) discussed a Roman coin found by Smetius with professor Arnoldus Buchelius of Utrecht (1565-1641), and afterward sent him a fine gold coin of the emperor Augustus.[48] Cuper's patron Gronovius collected coins, and others of younger generations, such as Professor Peter Burman of Leiden (1668-1741), kept up the tradition.[49] Latin works on numismatics were beginning to appear for this erudite audience.[50] By Cuper's lifetime it was assumed that Roman coinage had been worked out, but Greek and related coins were still being carefully sorted. The information they conveyed was causing an earthquake in the fields of ancient chronology and literature. The study of coins even led a learned French Jesuit, Jean Hardouin (1646-1729), to dismiss almost all of classical and patristic tradition as a 13th-century forgery, a kind of radical skepticism that angered people like Cuper.[51] But the general public was also being served. Hubert Goltzius of Antwerp (1526-83) had produced some magnificent studies in the 1560s illustrating the history of Rome from coins and medals – occasionally forged – and a century later Joachim Oudaan (1628-92) made copious use of coins in a lavish book for the Dutch market on ancient Rome: *Roomsche mogentheid* (1664). As he explained in his foreword, 'At the moment, the credibility of many historians is confirmed from inscriptions on coins and medals ("penningen"), and the same explain many things that are shadowy in the texts. But more than that, the medallions tell us things that cannot be found in books.'[52] This led him to present his new history of antiquity in the form of seven dialogues illustrated with 114 plates showing up to 12 coins each, to a total of about 1300 coins. In effect, *Roman power* is one of the earliest social histories of the Roman Empire. Oudaan's work would be drawn on not only by historians but also by the philosophers who later would initiate debate on monetary value per se.

Cuper was therefore eager to acquire coins and lists of coins from his correspondents. Many of them happily complied, since they too were collecting them. He obtained massive amounts of information from Ottoman lands. A Dutch merchant, Dan-

iel Cosson, promised to send Cuper ancient coins and objects as well as inscriptions, and before his death at the hands of pirates he indeed sent Cuper a great number of antiquities from Smyrna, Ankara and other places.[53] At about the same time, Cuper established a correspondence with Daniel Jan de Hochepied (1657-1723), who in 1687 was appointed Dutch consul in the important entrepôt of Smyrna. (Hochepied's aunt was married to Cuper's friend Witsen.[54]) Hochepied not only supplied Cuper with coins and information, but served as a conduit to others, such as the remarkable traveller Jerotée de Villers Cotret, father superior of the Capucins. De Villers had travelled throughout the Aegean and the Balkans, and further, to Armenia, Georgia, Persia, Diyarbakır, and the region of ancient Babylon, including Basra. The reverend sent many careful depictions of medals and coins to Cuper. In one of his replies, Cuper comments that one of the medals was not Arabic after all, but Persian; in another, Cuper said that a quarter of the coins and medals de Villers had sent to him were Roman (obviously, the rest were not), and one of them was extremely rare.[55] Another French-speaking correspondent in the region, Toinard, sent him illustrations of Phoenician coins, while we also know that Cuper obtained many depictions of Persian and Arabic coins from the library of the King of Prussia in Berlin via his correspondent La Croise.[56]

Cuper's involvement with coins was not only as a collector, however. As a government minister he was involved in important debates about coinage in the Republic. Each of the seven united provinces possessed at least one mint turning out coins for the States (there were eight in all), and six municipal mints were producing currency as well. Together they supplied a variety of coins for use regionally, and also three silver coins for use in foreign trade, the *leeuwendaalder* for the Levant, the *dukaat* (or *rixdaalder*) for the Baltic, and the *rijder* or *ducaton* for VOC trade in Asia. The Dutch revolt was meant to protect ancient rights and liberties, and Cuper's home town of Deventer had a mint that had been working since the tenth century, still claiming rights grant-

10. Illustration of coins from Tyr/Phonecia, sent to Cuper by Nicolas Toinard. The Hague, KB, KW 72 C 3, fol. 87.

ed to it in the Middle Ages by the Holy Roman Emperor; nearby Zwolle, also in Overijssel, had a similar mint. The Deventer mint, which produced VOC currency among other kinds, finally discontinued operation in 1698, in keeping with a decision of the States General of May 1694, which closed several of the mints by more or less buying up their rights.[57] As one of the representatives of Overijssel until the spring of 1694, when he returned to Deventer to become burgomaster and treasurer, Cuper took a keen interest in the local mints.[58]

Coinage presented far more problems than merely the multiplicity of mints. In their function as global entrepôts, places like Amsterdam were attracting money – coins – from all over the

world. Money changers there handled something like 1000 different kinds of gold and silver coins.[59] This required them to set countless exchange rates, a challenge that stimulated the invention of some new mathematical methods.[60] The variety of coins and rates created business not only for arbitrage commissions but for counterfeiters as well.[61] The physical properties of coins were not as stable as they looked. The ordinary rubbing of coins against one another, handling them with one's fingers, and keeping them in a purse could wear them down, and there were always people who could not refrain from illegally clipping them by shaving tiny bits of the valuable metal from the edges. All of this could lower the metallic content of any particular coin, so that its face value could not be taken for granted. That effect came about not only through wear and tear and criminality, but also through the operations of the authorities. In a period of almost constant warfare and all the attendant serious difficulties of raising money to pay for troops, weapons, ships, fortifications and all the rest, many rulers – and mint-masters – resorted to producing more coins from the same amount of gold or silver they had used the last time around, thereby debasing the currency.

The decentralised Dutch Republic developed methods that resolved many of these problems. (I leave aside for the moment the other miracle of the Dutch system, which was the invention of what we would call national debt.[62]) It did so by developing an abstraction that allowed accurate comparison and coordination. It was called the guilder.

The new kind of guilder was a money of account – not guilder coins that circulated from hand to hand but a unit of calculation. Its actual worth was lower than that of the 16th-century coin from which it derived, the Carolusgulden, which came in both gold and silver versions. The guilder was, if you like, the fixed variable in any financial formula, the '1' in comparison to which all other values could be calculated.[63] According to Pit Dehing and Marjolein 't Hart, the disentangling of the guilder of account from the current guilder began in Amsterdam after the

establishment in 1609 of the city bank, the Wisselbank. The new instrument was put into use in Amsterdam around 1638, with the States General getting on board in 1659, allowing for a stable unit of measure throughout the Republic. Because this unit could be equated with a fixed weight of silver, silver obtained a regularised value, making Amsterdam an attractive place to send silver for sale.[64] (Silver guilders began to be minted in 1680; the reforms of 1694 confirmed the silver content at 9.61 grams per coin.) In other words, while our common-sense view of value might tell us that a guilder was worth just under ten grams of silver, you can put it the other way around, and say that just under ten grams of silver equals a guilder.[65] It is the fixed relationship between the unit of value and the material thing that does the trick, a trick that assures that different parties conducting the same comparison will all arrive at the same result.

How was this enviable degree of stability achieved? First and foremost by regulating the system of exchange and then by assessing the units of exchange by physical assays. The Amsterdam authorities more or less forced money changers into becoming cashiers for the Wisselbank, which held their current money and calculated its value according to the unit of account, the guilder. Merchants also participated in the bank, so that their transactions could be settled by instructing the bank to shift funds from one account to another. They also enjoyed the convenience of being able to issue bills of exchange in the constant value of the Wisselbank's guilders. Even the receivers of taxes participated in the system. So did the Bank van Lening, the municipal pawnbroker, which created a stable credit market for small- and medium-sized loans. All of these depended on the unit of calculation, the guilder. The second step was to assess the value of the coins deposited at the bank according to their metallic content, which was done by applying accepted and carefully checked methods of assaying. The Wisselbank itself was not a lending bank, a trading company, or any other kind of organisation that might in today's parlance be called a bank. It was simply an instrument for depos-

iting coins, physically assessing them, and subsequently allowing the resulting money of account to be transacted between accounts. Its simplicity was founded on a stable unit of value. And that in turn was guaranteed by the assayer, who determined the bullion value of all the many different coins deposited there.[66]

Something similar allowed the Republic to coordinate the production of coins at the mints. From the late medieval period on, the masters of the various mints had been obliged to cooperate with each other through membership in a body called the *Generaliteitsmuntkamer*, which was perpetuated by the Union of Utrecht as the *College van Raden en Generaalmeesters van de Munt*. By dictating the standards employed by this group, the States General could coordinate the activities of the mints even though they were run by provinces or cities. The relevant procedures have been fully explored in a book of 1998 by M.S. Polak.[67] To put it simply, samples of coins in production were deposited in a guarded safe box, the *muntbus*, the contents of which were considered to constitute a random sample ('een steekproef') of total production. (I will come back in a moment to the language used here.) The *muntbus* would be periodically opened in front of the officials and the coins examined and assayed, to guarantee that a certain weight of metal of the proper value went into each coin. During the periodic retrospective inspections, checks were carried out of the running accounts, weights and measures, and the metallic value of the samples. The latter test, performed by an *essayeur-general*, was called the *essay*. We might also note that mathematics also benefitted from such operations. The need to figure out in advance the result of mixing two or more kinds of alloyed metal to get a different alloy relied on a method called 'alternate alligation' that went beyond arithmetic into the realm of algebra.[68] Like currency exchange, this too stimulated mathematical innovation. No wonder, then, that people like Copernicus and Newton were also deeply immersed in problems of coinage.[69] It might put you in mind of Teyler's Museum in Haarlem, the epitome of 18th-century Dutch truth-finding, where fossils

and scientific instruments sit alongside a library, paintings and drawings done 'from life', an encyclopedic print collection, and a fantastic cabinet of coins and medals.[70]

Coin production during the Republic, then, was far more than a secure manufacturing process. It entailed the creation of stable value by coordinating the activities of many people around a stipulated set of procedures that focused on material substances. They depended on stable weights and measures, but also on the shared expertise of people like the assayers. The symbols stamped on both sides of the resulting metal pieces stood for a tightly controlled, publicly harmonised, and carefully monitored production process that guaranteed a specified content. You might think of the images on coins as something like hallmarks, an agreed statement of quality. The States General did not have to run the mints; it only had to negotiate the standards by which they would be run. Quality and value were guaranteed by this kind of 'proef'. Agreed-upon methods of testing produced stable pieces of information from material objects, and this information was in turn circulated in the form of marked pieces of metal.

The word for the activity that guaranteed value, then, was 'test' or 'essay'. In both English and Dutch, the word 'test' comes from an Old French word for pot (which also gives rise to 'tête' for head), as in *fruittest*.[71] By the 14th century, the word was associated with what is called a 'cupel', which is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as 'a small flat circular porous vessel, with a shallow depression in the middle, made of pounded bone-ash pressed into shape by a mould, and used in assaying gold or silver with lead'. To 'essay' something also comes to us from French, as did the connotation of putting yourself to a trial through the process of writing, as in Montaigne's famous *Essais*. *Proof* and *proeven* (German *prüfen*, French *preuve*) indicated a guarantee of the value of a noble metal, moving into 'proof' as a sample coin struck with a new die to show its worth, and later migrating to other occupations involved with striking, as in 'page-proofs'.

These words can, of course, also be associated with taste, as in *wijnproef*, or the English expression 'the proof of the pudding is in the eating'.[72] Perhaps more common in Dutch is a *keur*, which since at least the 13th century has meant a stamp marking value, or *keuren*, a 'proof' assessed by taste. By the early 17th century, being marked for quality in this way had moved into being correct in behaviour, *keurig*.

That defines our man Cuper to a tee: *keurig*. A committee-room lion who flourished in the decentralised Republic. An information master who believed that possessing more and more knowledge would resolve more and more negotiations. Someone who believed that sharing information could therefore be used to coordinate many kinds of activities. But to be useful in such processes, that information needed to be assessed, its truth value verified. It needed to be true no matter who spoke it, whenever or wherever, and to be capable of being put into writing and shared. Cuper the collector of inscriptions, and of coins, the assayer of marks from the past, put these values into currency internationally through exchanges of writing.

Well-assessed information had currency because it could be accepted anywhere. It allowed Cuper to cultivate scholarly friends in Rome, including the Vatican librarian, who read his letters aloud to the Pope for their elegant Latinity; Pope Clement XI (1649-1721; pope from 1700 to 1721) responded by sending Cuper a portrait of himself, which Cuper proudly hung in his house.[73] And despite his work on behalf of the allied forces, in 1715 he was made a member of the Académie Royale des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres in Paris, which was considered a great honour for a foreigner.[74] He was certainly, therefore, a good diplomat. We might also consider him a kind of merchant-banker in the world of information. As he wrote in a letter of 6 June 1708 to the Abbé Jean Paul Bignon (1662-1743), he was inviting him into a 'commerce de Lettres'.[75]

There may be more to learn about Cuper from government archives. Assayed and disentangled information was beginning

to be called, in English, 'intelligence', in Dutch *inlichtingen*. Information masters like Cuper, who were also first-rate linguists, might therefore be connected with dangerous affairs. After leaving the States General, Cuper continued to receive letters from Hochepied in Smyrna with the latest news of political and military struggles in the Ottoman lands, expected French warships and Anglo-Dutch convoys, and the like.[76] Cuper was made aware of a plan for the assassination of William of Orange in the months before his adventure to England in 1688,[77] and two decades later he was brought out of retirement when the States General needed an old hand to help strengthen the alliance with England, which was threatening to unravel in the years following the death of William III in 1702. The Romans and Greeks combined knowledge and power. Cuper and his fellow new Batavians were doing the same, in the spirit of a motto posted over one of the market squares of his home town: *Fide sed cui vide* ('Trust, but keep your eyes open').

It is important to realise, then, that the decentralised activities in which Cuper participated required not shared belief but exchanges of reliable information. People of different faiths and of different cultures, from anywhere in the world, could meet and do business based on properly assessed goods and information about them. He rebuked his friend Witsen for considering some people to be heretics.[78] Not all information was shared, of course, but as in business enough transparency was required to establish grounds for negotiation and assure compliance with agreements. Documents were exchanged. Letters were written. Stabilised in these material forms, information could be collected and compared. The system enabled the search for truth continually to correct and improve what was known. It could be shaped into reports and publications, and images drawn from life. And it was collected and stored in cabinets, libraries and archives. Evaluation worked by checking a proposition against other kinds of information. The production, accumulation and exchange of knowledge was a true 'commerce de Lettres'. But also a puzzle:

descriptive information might be exchanged relatively easily, but other forms of knowledge, such as belief, are sticky, hard to understand without living inside another language. Sometimes they were even inscribed in systems of writing that could not be deciphered. The true information master therefore needed to be a linguist. Again, our man, Cuper.

So perhaps we haven't invented anything fundamentally new with modern technology, only added some new methods for the exchange of information. The Internet was built by scientists and national security experts to exchange information; governments and academics quickly jumped on the bandwagon, along with commercial organisations. All those groups have developed intentionally clear and simple methods of expression that can move across cultural and linguistic borders easily. Hunger for access to information has been with us for centuries. In that sense, Robbert Dijkgraaf was pointing to something important.

Yet, the new technologies do have two strikingly different properties. First is the ease and speed with which ordinary people were able to gain access to the network, allowing them to express their personal views and to act out their personal fantasies. Compared to Cuper's generation of well-to-do and well-placed literati, it is mass participation that distinguishes our methods of electronic communication. The contents of the exchanges follow suit, with a higher entertainment quotient. Moreover, in contrast to the proudly personal way in which participants in the Republic of Letters presented themselves, users of the Internet enjoy the protean ability to move around in it under false identities. The Republic of Letters was personal, but never private in the modern sense of that word. The struggles over open access to information and the protection of privacy that we know today are relatively new. The second major novelty of the Information Age is that we can alter the record so easily. Appropriating, changing or simply inventing information is easier than ever, at a time when intellectual piracy and fraud are (apparently) expanding rapidly in the scientific community. At the same time, the traces

we leave in the ether are hard to erase. We have moved from an economy of assayed coins to an economy of bits and bytes, and we are left to wonder whether the new alchemies of our time will be able to assess the results effectively.

A final thought: Cuper collected a huge mass of information that gives many hints about his practices and activities, and these in turn indicate powerful relationships between the decentralised Republic, commercial exchange, and a certain kind of knowledge rooted in information. That knowledge was meant to be about how to find the truth, by methods of careful description that in effect amounted to assaying tangible things. But Cuper's archive also contains all kinds of unexpected stories, including the one about merman-like creatures from southern Africa. One last anecdote, then. Cuper recorded an account about a merchant named Jan Daems, who had lent Emperor Charles v a cool million in gold for the war in Hungary. When the emperor visited Antwerp, Daems asked to join him at his midday meal, and Charles graciously assented. The next day, Daems built a fire out of cinnamon and placed on it the obligation he had from the emperor, burning it up.[79] A story about freedom granted by cancelling debt, about generosity of spirit being returned in kind. A nice thought. I wonder if it is true. Without repositories like the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, where knowledge is collected, exchanged and assayed in the open, we will never know.

Notes

Thank you to my colleagues and staff of the Koninklijke Bibliotheek and NIAS *for their support and hospitality throughout my Fellowship, and to Gary Schwartz for his editorial assistance.*

1 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6OUovur3Oo&feature=BFa&list=PL6F1CCF7D77241D63, accessed 13 November 2012, quotation at about 7:20.

2 On his papers, see P. Bosscha, *Opgave en beschrijving van de handschriften, nagelaten door Gisbertus Cuperus*, Deventer (M. Ballot) 1842; for the estimate, see Ignace H.M. Hendriks, 'Kopiisten, kopieën en Cuper', *Hermeneus* 55 (1983-84), no. 3, Themanummer *Epigrafiek*, p. 153.

3 Bosscha, *Opgave* (note 2), item 16, pp. 44-47.

4 A.J. Veenendaal, *Het dagboek van Gisbert Cuper, gedeputeerde te velde, gehouden in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden in 1706*, The Hague (Martinus Nijhoff) 1950, pp. xxviii-xxxxiv.

5 'Relation of Nic. Almede, free black man, given at the Cape [of Good Hope] c. 1690 about the lands lying behind Mozambique.'

6 'Relaas van Nic[olaes] Almede vrije swart van Mosambique oudt 35 jaaren, thans op t hier ter Rhede liggende Engels schiptje Ian en Marie als matroos bescheyden, by monde gedaan aen Cabo de goede hoop den 8 Feb. 90 op ordre van den Ed. Hr. Command. Simon van der Stel.' The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, KW 72 C 14, fols. 1-4v.

7 Richard Gray, ed., *The Cambridge History of Africa*, vol. 4: *From c. 1600 to c. 1790*, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press) 1975, pp. 384- 410; H.H.K. Bhila, 'Southern Zambezia', in *General History of Africa*, vol. V: *Africa From the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century*, ed. B.A. Ogot, Paris (UNESCO) 1992.

8 'De portugysen zyn thans met alle de omleggend natien in een heeten oorlog.'

9 'En eyndelyk verhaalt hy omtrent Caba Corrientes an land en in zee gesien te hebbe[n] seker gediertens, de meerminnen niet ongelyk, omtrent 12. voeten, min off meer groot, en dik na gelangen, hebbende t' hooft als een varken, en t boven lyf als een mensche; d' armen als de vlerken van een schildpad, ent onderlyf een staart; also een visch: hy heeft se te meermale[n] hore[n] fluyten; nog geen ander geluid maken; onder deselve zyn man en vrouw en haar schamelheydt, als die van menschen; zyn rood-aghtig van coleur, en haar vleesch is dat van de beesten

gelyk en niet de visschen; zy hebben 4. slag-tanden in den bek, twee boven, en soo veel ander ter langte van een spann; dog steken maar 2. vinger breed uyt de kinnebacken. Sy asen opt landt, vallen seer schuw voor menschen, de voorsch. tanden werde[n] seer medicinael en goed voort podagra en andere qualen te zyn, kosten op Mosambique groot geldt.' KW 72 C 14, 4-4v. My thanks to Guido Golüke for help with a couple of passages in this paragraph, and his interest.

10 Georgius Everhardus Rumphius, *Antwoort en rapport aan Anthonij Hurt, 1684*, ed. W. Buijze, The Hague (W. Buijze) 1998, publishes this report and the one about Malacca, both with English translation.

11 For recent examples, see Marion Peters, 'Nicolaes Witsen and Gijsbert Cuper: Two Seventeenth-Century Dutch Burgomasters and their Gordian Knot', *Lias* 16 (1989), pp. 111-50; Bianca Chen, 'Politics and Letters: Gisbert Cuper as a Servant of Two Republics', in *Double Agents: Cultural and Political Brokerage in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Marika Keblusek and Badeloch Noldus, Leiden etc. (Brill) 2011. The best source for the biography of Cuper remains Veenendaal, *Dagboek* (note 4), and for Witsen, Marion Peters, *De wijze koopman: het wereldwijde onderzoek van Nicolaes Witsen (1641-1717), burgemeester en VOC-bewindhebber van Amsterdam*, Amsterdam (Bert Bakker) 2010.

12 Fagel was related to Cuper, since his brother's daughter married Cuper's brother: Bosscha, *Opgave* (note 2), p. 37.

13 Veenendaal, *Dagboek* (note 4), p. xxviii.

14 In Cuper's case, he sometimes referred to himself as the President of the College of Their High Mightinesses. See Pieter J.A.N. Rietbergen, 'C.C. Rumpf, G. Cuper and Cultural Relations between Sweden and the Dutch Republic During the Last Quarter of the 17th Century', in *Baltic Affairs: Relations between the Netherlands and North-Eastern Europe, 1500-1800*, ed. J.Ph.S. Lemmink and J.S.A.M. van Koningsbrugge, Nijmegen (Institute for Northern and Eastern European Studies) 1990, p. 322. He had ambitions to rise politically in the wake of William III's success in becoming king: Veenendaal, *Dagboek* (note 4), pp. x-xiii.

15 Jacob Soll, *The Information Master: Jean-Baptiste Colbert's Secret State Intelligence System*, Ann Arbor (The University of Michigan Press) 2009.

16 Peters, 'Witsen and Cuper' (note 11), p. 115.

17 Saskia Stegeman, *Patronage and Services in the Republic of Letters: The Network of Theodorus Janssonius van Almeloveen (1657-1712)*, Amsterdam (APA – Holland University Press) 2005, pp. 108-56, quotation on p. 156.

18 Ibid., pp. 239, 167.

19 Anne Goldgar, *Impolite Learning: Conduct and Community in the Republic of Letters, 1680-1750*, New Haven and London (Yale University Press) 1995.

20 Martin Mulsow, 'Practices of Unmasking: Polyhistors, Correspondence, and the Birth of Dictionaries of Pseudonymity in Seventeenth-Century Germany', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67, no. 2 (2006), pp. 219-50; Martin Mulsow, *Die Unanständige Gelehrtenrepublik: Wissen, Libertinage und Kommunikation in der Frühen Neuzeit*, Stuttgart (Metzler) 2007.

21 Rudolf M. Dekker, ed., *Egodocuments and History: Autobiographical Writing in its Social Context Since the Middle Ages*, Hilversum (Verloren) 2002.

22 Chen, 'Politics and Letters' (note 11), p. 84.

23 John C. Powers, *Inventing Chemistry: Herman Boerhaave and the Reform of the Chemical Arts*, Chicago (University of Chicago Press) 2012.

24 Bianca Chen, 'Wat van ver komt … Gijsbert Cuper en de zeventiende-eeuwse interesse voor de tastbare oudheid van verre streken' (Afstudeerscriptie, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2005).

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50 Such as Ezekiel, Freiherr von Spanheim's *Dissertatio* of 1664, which went through at least three editions in the next 50 years, Charles Patin's *Thesaurus numismatum* (1672) and Jacob de Wilde, *Selecta numismata antiqua* (1692); also see Crawford, Ligota and Trapp, *Medals and Coins* (note 44).

51 Anthony Grafton, 'Jean Hardouin: The Antiquary as Pariah', in *Bring Out Your Dead: The Past as Revelation*, Cambridge, MA (Harvard University Press) 2001. Cuper considered Hardouin's views to be a 'rêverie': Gisbert Cuper, *Lettres de critique, d'histoire, de littérature, &c. écrites à divers savans de l'Europe*, Amsterdam (Henri du Sauzet, Guillaume Smith) 1742, pp. 7, 345. Also see Bosscha, *Opgave* (note 2), p. 53.

52 Joachim Oudaan, *Roomsche mogentheid in gezag en staatsbekleeding der oude keizeren &c*, Amsterdam (Daniel Baccamude for Frans Kuyper) 1664, p. 2.

53 Hendriks, 'Kopiisten, kopieën en Cuper', (note 2), pp. 153-54.

54 On Catharina van Hochepied, see Peters, *Wijze koopman* (note 11), pp. 57-60.

55 The correspondence took place in 1714-16; the letters of de Villers to Cuper are in the Koninklijke Bibliotheek at KW 72 C 34 c. 1-4, 7-8; and from Cuper to de Villers at d. 1-14.

56 The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, KW 72 C 3, fols. 85-88; Nationaal Archief 1.10.24, 'Collectie Cuperus', no. 13, fol. 941.

57 My thanks to Jan Lucassen for sharing information about numismatics and the Deventer mint with me.

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During the Dutch Revolt, Manchester (Manchester University Press) 1993; James D. Tracy, *The Founding of the Dutch Republic: War, Finance and Politics in Holland, 1572-1588*, Oxford (Oxford University Press) 2008; Oscar Gelderblom, ed., *The Political Economy of the Dutch Republic*, Aldershot (Ashgate) 2009.

63 On the importance of this distinction see H. van Werveke, 'Monnaie de compte et monnaie réelle', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 13 (1934), pp. 123-52.

64 Dehing and Hart, 'Linking Fortunes', (note 59), p. 40. For more, see Pit Dehing, *Geld in Amsterdam: wisselbank en wisselkoersen, 1650-1725*, Hilversum (Verloren) 2012.

65 M.S. Polak, *Historiografie en economie van de 'Muntchaos': de muntproductie van de Republiek (1606-1795)*, 2 vols., Amsterdam (NEHA) 1998, vol. 1, p. 53.

66 Dehing and Hart, 'Linking Fortunes' (note 59), p. 46.

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68 J. Williams, 'Mathematics and the Alloying of Coinage 1202-1700: Parts I and II', *Annals of Science* 52 (1995), pp. 213-34, 235-63.

69 Timothy J. Reiss and Roger H. Hinderliter, 'Money and Value in the Sixteenth Century: The Monete Cudende Ratio of Nicholas Copernicus', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 40 (1979), pp. 293-313; on Newton, see Carl Wennerlind, *Casualties of Credit: The English Financial Revolution, 1620-1720*, Cambridge, MA (Harvard University Press) 2011.

70 The coins and medals had a patriotic focus, following in the wake of Pierre Bizot's *Histoire metallique de la Republique de Hollande* (1687) and Gerard van Loon's *Nederlandsche historipenningen*, 4 vols. (1723-32): see Bert Sliggers et al., *De idealen van Pieter Teyler: een erfenis uit de Verlichting*, Haarlem (Gottmer Uitgevers Groep) 2006, pp. 231-80.

71 I here draw on the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the Van Dale *Groot Woordenboek der Nederlandse Taal*. The use of *fruittest* I owe to Ad Leerintveld.

72 On the importance of 'taste' as an assessment of value, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, ed. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, New York (Crossroad) 1989, pp. 35-42.

73 Veenendaal, *Dagboek* (note 4), pp. xvi-xvii.

74 After his death, his *elogue* was read to its general assembly; it and another by Père Niceron were published in Cuper, *Lettres de critique* (note 51), pp. xvii-xxiv.

75 Cuper, *Lettres de critique* (note 51), p. 189: 'Je n'aurois osé prendre la liberté de vous écrire, si Mr. Galland ne m'avoit fait sçavoir, que vous souhaittiez passionne-

ment qu'il y eût un commerce de Lettres entre nous.'

76 The Hague, Nationaal Archief, 1.10.24, no. 13.

77 Bosscha, *Opgave* (note 2), p. 38.

78 The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, KW 72 C 32, fols. 47v-48, letter of 20 October 1712: Cuper wrote the word 'ketter' in large letters to emphasise his concern, and went on to say that only the Roman church was still trying to drive Christians away.

79 The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, KW 72 C 32, A8: fol. Hr-v.