

CURATING IDENTITIES: WOMEN AND THE CREATION OF AN AMERICAN CULTURE
IN COLONIAL NEW YORK

by

ELIZABETH O'NEILL KENISON

(Under the Direction of Jennifer Palmer)

ABSTRACT

Women living in colonial New York were poised at the crossroads of two global trade routes, the British and the Dutch, and so had access to a collection of goods and ideas unparalleled in either their fellow North American colonies or their European mother countries. As is evidenced in surviving estate inventories and portraiture, among other sources, women who had the freedom and the economic means to purchase import goods took advantage of their unique position within the global world of trade to curate collections of trade goods that allowed them to express a sense of taste developed alongside exposure to this global material culture. Their collections of import items show a developing aesthetic culture distinctive to New York, and in the case of some goods, such as calico, they created demand for specific object types that reflected their location at a unique intersection of trade and culture.

INDEX WORDS: Colonial America, Colonial New York, Global trade – 17th century,
Global trade – 18th century, Material culture – colonial America, Women
– colonial America, Probate inventories, Probate inventories – New York,
Portraiture – New York, Portraiture – colonial America

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF FIGURES	v
CHAPTER	
INTRODUCTION	1
I TEA.....	10
II JAPAN.....	18
III CALICO.....	27
IV TURKEY CARPETS.....	47
V BOOKS.....	54
VI CONCLUSION.....	73
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	76

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1: Susanna Truax, attributed to Pieter Vanderlyn, 1730. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 1980.62.31.....	17
Figure 2: Portrait of a Lady, attributed to Gerrit Duyckinck, c. 1710. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1972.263.1	24
Figure 3: Anna Cuyler Van Schaik, attributed to the Schuyler Limner [Nehemiah Partridge], 1720. Albany Institute of History and Art. Published in <i>Hudson Valley Paintings in the Albany Institute of History and Art</i> (Albany: Albany Institute of History and Art, 1959) 25	25
Figure 4: Japonsche rock (Japanese robe), c. 1725-1775. Centraal Museum, Utrecht, The Netherlands, 8141	26
Figure 5: Catharine Schuyler [Dumond], attributed to Gerrit Duyckinck, c. 1725. Winterthur Museum, 1956.0569 A.....	27
Figure 6: Textile, indigo resist dyed, c. 1766. Colonial Williamsburg, 1955-257,2	42
Figure 7: Calico samples sent from Mary Alexander to London merchant house Barclay & Sons, 1730. The New-York Historical Society Archives, Alexander Papers, Box 5 Folder 10..43	43
Figure 8: Unknown Woman, attributed to Gerrit Duyckinck, c. 1690-1710. Winterthur Museum, 1956.0565 A.....	44
Figure 9: Deborah Glen [Sanders], attributed to the Gansevoort Limner [Pieter Vanderlyn], c. 1739. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Museum of American Folk Art/Colonial Williamsburg, 1964.100.1.....	45

Figure 10: Susanna Truax, unknown artist, c. 1740. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 1978.80.20.....	46
Figure 11: Woman's two-piece gown, c. 1790. Colonial Williamsburg, 1990-10,1	47
Figure 12: A Maid Asleep, Johannes Vermeer, c. 1656-1657. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 14.40.611.....	53
Figure 13: Turkey work-upholstered side chair, c. 1660-1690. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 52.77.51.....	54
Figure 14: Elsie Rutgers Schuyler Vas, attributed to Gerardus Duyckinck, 1723. Albany Institute of History and Art, 1957.104	70
Figure 15: Catherine Van Cortland Johnston, attributed to John Heaton, 1734. Albany Institute of History and Art, 1984.2	71
Figure 16: Young Lady with a Fan, attributed to Pieter Vanderlyn, 1737. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1980.61.5.....	72
Figure 17: Magdalena Douw Gansevoort, attributed to John Heaton, c. 1737-1740. Winterthur Museum, 1963.0852 A.....	73

Women in colonial New York had access to an expansive and expanding world of goods. Colonial New York's unique position at the crossroads of not one but two global empires, the British and the Dutch, allowed these women to purchase and possess imported goods that were unavailable to most of their fellow American colonists, as well to many of their mothers, sisters, and grandmothers in their home countries. Indian calico, Chinese tea, Japanese silks, and Persian carpets graced their homes and their persons. Though relatively accessible to those with the money to purchase them, these items nonetheless served as costly displays of wealth, status, and refinement, imbued with complex meanings and displayed by the women who owned them as a means of demonstrating not only their economic ability to acquire the items but also their good taste in doing so. This meant that New York women were in a singular position when it came to curating and fashioning those goods into a distinct and coherent aesthetic: the availability and variety of these goods allowed them to assimilate a range of influences and options, and then, for those with the means to do so, choose what they thought most effective and simply liked the best. As a result, throughout the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries women in colonial New York played an integral role in shaping an emerging North American identity and culture on a global stage.

Two very different source bases demonstrate this curation of goods. On the one hand, probate inventories give relatively comprehensive views of individual women's possessions, identifying the range of items they owned and often grouping these items together to give some idea of how they might have been distributed throughout their homes. Portraits, on the other

hand, display a few choice pieces of material culture in greater detail and with much more symbolism, contextualizing the meanings of these objects very differently than does the broad sweep of an inventory. Considered together, these sources thus provide two different angles by which to view the types of material culture that appears in both contexts, allowing a more complex understanding of their functions within New York women's lives. We can compare them effectively as they overlap in both objects included and in time period; that said, the time period that inventories cover is significantly longer, and so while the portraits examined here span at most about fifty years, from approximately 1700 to 1750, surviving inventories from the colonial era (ending for the purposes of this analysis in 1783) date between 1669 and 1778. Nonetheless, inventory dates tend to cluster around the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries, meaning that this study focuses most closely on the decades on either side of the turn of the eighteenth century.

In fact, it was in this era as well that the most potent mixture of cultures existed in colonial New York. The old Dutch order, technically over in 1664, nonetheless exerted strong influence as the new English colonial forces slowly but surely grew in importance, and this relatively peaceful imperial overlap allowed a mixture of cultural influences that was highly unusual in the contentious imperial world of the seventeenth century.¹ Also unlike its fellow North American colonies, New York by the late seventeenth century had attracted a heterogenous mixture of different European settler groups, each with their own cultural and aesthetic values, in contrast to the more insular enclaves of British settlers that tended to populate the colonies to New York's north and south. The source of this multiculturalism as well as its

¹ There were a number of reasons for this gradual and relatively peaceful transition, but the Dutch government and the West India Company were largely disinterested in the colony by the 1660s, and the English viewed it as a trophy of their endless wars with the Dutch in the mid- to late seventeenth century, without having much interest in the colony itself.

most dramatic example was the strong Dutch presence throughout New York, their cultural impact far outlasting their colonial ambitions in the colony. Though the Dutch only colonized New York for about forty years, from the early 1620s to the English takeover in 1664,² they firmly established their presence throughout the Hudson Valley, and adopted a policy of real if unofficial religious tolerance that attracted groups fleeing from less welcoming environs in Europe, the Caribbean, or even nearby New England.³ England's casual enforcement of its colonial presence, particularly in the first few decades after the takeover, ensured that the Dutch and their cultural influences remained strong in New York well past the end of their official colonial administration.⁴

This unique colonial history meant that the Dutch and English women who predominantly populated the upper echelons of New York society had available to them at least twice the colonial networks and trade routes—Dutch and English—than did women in other American colonies; thanks to policies like Britain's Calico Acts of the early eighteenth century, they had better access to those trade routes than did even the women in their parent countries.⁵ This increased access meant that those women with sufficient means to obtain the luxury import

² The Dutch retook the colony briefly in 1674, but this intervention was ill-fated and short-lived. Though they only began colonizing what was then New Netherland in the 1620s, they had technically claimed it since 1609, when the English-born and Dutch-bankrolled Henry Hudson made his voyage up the river that now bears his name.

³ This was in part due to the fact the Netherlands had one of the highest standards of living in Europe, with a wealthy and powerful middle class and a relatively advanced social welfare system. The Dutch overall didn't have much incentive to move to a faraway colony, and so, desperate for settlers, the New Netherlands government was relatively lenient towards foreign nationalities and religions. For more on Dutch religious toleration and its shaping of New York society, see Evan Haefeli, *New Netherland and the Dutch Origins of American Religious Liberty* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

⁴ For a history of New York City see for example Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); for New York State see Milton M. Klein, ed., *Empire State: A History of New York* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001); for specifically the Dutch colonial history of New York City/New Amsterdam, see for instance Eric Nooter and Patricia U. Bonomi, eds., *Colonial Dutch Studies: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (New York: New York University Press, 1988) and Russell Shorto, *Island at the Center of the World* (New York: Doubleday, 2004).

⁵ Giogrio Riello, "Asian Knowledge and the Development of Calico Printing in Europe in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Journal of Global History* (2010), 11.

items coming in from Europe and Asia had an opportunity to form aesthetic sensibilities and tastes informed by these crosscurrents of culture and trade. If it was not quite a melting pot, it was nevertheless richly influenced by particular intersections of opportunity, availability, and conceptions of what constituted an object's worth and meaning, drawn from greater exposure to not only goods themselves but to ideas about those goods.⁶

Under these circumstances, it is logical that New York women began to form their own tastes. It is less clear, however, how that process occurred; while the dearth of more traditional written sources by and about New York women (letters, diaries, etc.) make study of their possessions all the more valuable, it also means that often the records of those possessions must stand on their own, without broader insight into the decision-making processes behind them. The information that can be discerned about the women whose possessions were inventoried and whose portraits were painted indicates that they tended to be middle- to upper-class, generally the wives and daughters of merchants or landowners—and in some instances merchants and landowners themselves. Portraits of New York women were executed by folk or limner painters, formally untrained artists who made a living appealing to those with disposable income and a desire to document their own likenesses and social positions. Though there were limners based specifically in New York City, the itinerant nature of many of these painters meant that many of their subjects were residents of the largely rural and small-town Hudson Valley.⁷ Women whose possessions were inventoried, on the other hand, tended to be from New York City and to some extent Albany, the second-largest settlement in colonial New York. These inventory subjects all

⁶ For an in-depth discussion of the ethnic makeup of New York City in particular in this era, see Joyce D. Goodfriend, *Before the Melting Pot: Society and Culture in Colonial New York City, 1664-1730* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).

⁷ For more on New York limner painters and their trade see Roderic H. Blackburn and Ruth Piwonka, eds., *Remembrance of Patria: Dutch Arts and Culture in Colonial America, 1609-1776* (New York: The Albany Institute of History and Art, 1988), 209-255.

died as single women and thus owned their possessions in their own name: in every case where the woman's personal history can be discovered, they were widows, wealthy enough to have an estate worth documenting. Though there are a fair number of women's inventories that appear to document a middle-class life, most clearly show a wealthy and upper-class existence.

Though material culture studies of colonial New York have produced several important works, the use of inventories and portraits has been limited.⁸ A small handful of essays using inventories as their primary source base have been written by New York material culture scholar Ruth Piwonka, focusing largely on Dutch material culture forms and generally pulling from a relatively limited slice of both men's and women's inventories; otherwise, the trove of New York inventories has been puzzlingly neglected.⁹ New York limner portraits have long been known and studied in an art-historical context, but the difficulties of these paintings' attribution has almost wholly preoccupied previous studies of these works, leaving little room for consideration of their value in a historical or material-culture context.¹⁰ Broader works about portraits and material culture in colonial North America often neglect New York and the Mid-Atlantic region

⁸ Preeminent among these works is Blackburn and Piwonka, eds., *Remembrance of Patria: Dutch Arts and Culture in Colonial America*. Others include Roderic H. Blackburn and Nancy A. Kelley, eds., *New World Dutch Studies: Dutch Arts and Culture in Colonial America, 1609-1776* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987) and Deborah L. Krohn and Peter N. Miller, eds., *Dutch New York between East and West: The World of Margrieta Van Varick* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

⁹ These are: Piwonka, "New York Colonial Inventories: Dutch Interiors as a Measure of Cultural Change," in Blackburn and Kelley, eds., *New World Dutch Studies*; Piwonka, "I could not guess what she intended to do with it': Colonial American-Dutch Material Culture," in Roger Panetta, ed., *Dutch New York: The Roots of Hudson Valley Culture* (Yonkers, NY: Hudson River Museum and Fordham University Press, 2009); and Piwonka, "Margrieta van Varick in the West: Inventory of a Life," in Krohn and Miller, eds., *Dutch New York between East and West*.

¹⁰ For examples of this, see *101 Masterpieces of American Primitive Painting from the Collection of Edgar William & Bernice Chrysler Garbisch* (New York: The American Federation of Arts, 1961), Mary Black and Jean Lipman, *American Folk Painting* (New York: C.N. Potter, 1966), Robert Bishop, *Folk Painters of America* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1979), Deborah Chotner, *American Naive Paintings: The Collections of the National Gallery of Art Systematic Catalog* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), and Louisa Wood Ruby, "Dutch Art and the Hudson Valley Patron Painters," in Joyce D. Goodfriend, Benjamin Schmidt, and Annette Stott, eds., *Going Dutch: The Dutch Presence in America, 1609-2009* (Boston: Brill, 2009). That said, there are exceptions to this: Blackburn and Piwonka (along with Mary Black) discuss them throughout *Remembrance of Patria*, and Wayne Craven's excellent and influential work on the influence of British engravings stands out; see Wayne Craven, *Colonial American Portraiture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

more generally, focusing on New England or the southern plantation colonies as emblematic of colonial American experiences and cultures, which renders them of limited use in understanding New York's particular culture and influences.¹¹ The historiography on women in colonial America tends to have similar preoccupations and blind spots, though a few works point out the significant differences between Dutch-descended women's experiences and those of their British-descended peers.¹² Works specifically on women in colonial New York are useful and informative, but quite limited in number, and generally interested in the legal and cultural shift in women's roles between Dutch and English rule.¹³ This study attempts to fill a number of these gaps, reaching across methodologies and disciplines in order to better understand New York women's material lives and commercial connections to the rest of the world.

While portraits and inventories offer significant insight into women's material lives, the lack of information about the circumstances under which portraits were painted, and when and by whom inventoried items were purchased, can make the process of untangling the decision-making making processes involved in each difficult. It is likely that some of widows' inventoried possessions had once belonged to their husbands, for instance; portraits of women may have been influenced by husbands and fathers, and all the painters known to have worked in colonial

¹¹ For portraits see for example Margaretta M. Lovell, *Art in a Season of Revolution: Painters, Artisans, and Patrons in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); for material culture more broadly see for example Jennifer Van Horn, *The Power of Objects in Eighteenth-Century British America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017). They also tend to locate changes later in the eighteenth century, which will be more fully discussed in the conclusion.

¹² See for instance Carol Berkin, *First Generations: Women in Colonial America* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1996).

¹³ Outside Krohn and Miller, already discussed. See Biemer, *Women and Property in Colonial New York*, and Susan Shaw Romney, *New Netherland Connections: Intimate Networks and Atlantic Ties in Seventeenth Century America* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, 2014). There is also a pop-historical biography of the Dutch female merchant Margaret Hardenbroeck Phillipse: Jean Zimmerman, *The Women of the House: How a Colonial She-Merchant Built a Mansion, a Fortune, and a Dynasty* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006).

New York were men. However, while these factors were certainly important, they can hardly account for all the expressions of taste and choice displayed in women's inventories and portraits. Widows lived anywhere from years to decades after their husbands' deaths, and under both Dutch and British law they were entitled to relatively small portions of their husbands' estates: British law allowed widows life rights to one-third of their husbands' property, while Dutch custom usually dictated that a man's property be split evenly between his heirs, including both male and female children as well as his wife. (Dutch law also provided women the ability to maintain their property even while married, and while not all Dutch women availed themselves of this option, for those who did their dower rights became significantly less important.)¹⁴ A woman's inventory listed only her own property, that which could be considered when executing her will or splitting her property between heirs; thus, even if items in her possession had once been her husband's, they were by that time legally hers.¹⁵

Much less is understood about the process of portrait-painting in colonial New York; there are no accounts of this process from either artists' or sitters' points of view, and thus the decision-making processes that went into these portraits is necessarily opaque. However, the wide variety of depictions and the singular nature of many of the objects included in these portraits seem to discount the idea of the artist having dominant creative control over how their subjects were portrayed.¹⁶ The scarcity of matching pendant portraits of women's husbands along

¹⁴ For discussion of Dutch and English legal systems and how they affected women's lives in colonial New York, see Linda Briggs Biemer, *Women and Property in Colonial New York: The Transition from Dutch to English Law 1643-1727* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Research Press, 1983) and David E. Narrett, *Inheritance and Family Life in Colonial New York City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).

¹⁵ This excluded her dower property from being listed—she would have had to be granted the items directly by her husband's will. Dower property was essentially a lease: women were allowed life rights but the property would revert to the couple's children (or other heirs) on her death, obviating the need to be inventoried.

¹⁶ For more on limner painters and the little we know of them and their methods, see for instance Louisa Wood Ruby, "Dutch Art and the Hudson Valley Patroon Painters," in Joyce D. Goodfriend, Benjamin Schmidt, and Annette Stott, eds., *Going Dutch: The Dutch Presence in America, 1609-2009* (Boston: Brill, 2009) and *Four American Families: A Tradition of Artistic Pursuit* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1984).

with their own likenesses also appears to indicate that women's portraits were created outside the role of accessory or auxiliary to their husbands' displays of wealth and status, and, while it is difficult to say precisely why each individual woman had her portrait painted, the idea that they were merely modeled and shaped by their male family members as trophies or advertisements belies the likenesses that these portraits display. That the objects women were portrayed with were their own, and that they had input into their inclusion, seems a the most reasonable assumption to make.

Therefore, to examine women's possessions is also to access something of their interiority, to understand cultural forces that shaped them as well as their own navigations of those forces. They harnessed and reworked these cultural influences in order to craft a sense of taste and an aesthetic sensibility that was dependent on but also separate from the cultures that had so shaped them. While this sense of taste was perforce unique to each woman, together the consumer class of New York women shows a collective gesturing towards patterns of consumption and curation in their household items and those particular pieces they chose to be portrayed with that sets them apart from both their compatriots in their home countries as well as the residents of the colonies to each side of them. By drawing upon the combination of trade goods and aesthetic ideas available to them, New York women with the means to choose their own possessions display a rich variety of meaningful goods that connected them to their mother countries and to loci of trade around the globe. Patterns on both a broad and an object-by-object level show colonial New York women's fascination with luxury items that held great cultural meaning, and their ability to mold from these items a broader sensibility which shows the beginnings of a unique American aesthetic.

This study will focus on five categories of material culture: tea-related items, objects from Japan or inspired directly by Japanese aesthetics, calico, Turkish carpets, and books. All were import items in colonial New York, and all brought with them strong meanings of social and economic status. All came from different parts of an increasingly connected globe: Japan, India (calico), China (tea and porcelain), Turkey and the Middle East more broadly, Europe (books and various tea-goods). Goods from each category also appear in both portraits and inventories, allowing a multi-dimensional view of these objects or categories of objects, from these two very different but complimentary source bases. Throughout, other sources, such as extant objects, travel diaries, and documents, are incorporated as well, when relevant. But relying equally on both inventories and portraits throughout, and looking in particular at the import goods both display, allows for a view of a New York which was globally connected, a world of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century commerce not wholly directed by men, and a collection of objects which are brought to life by their contexts within their owners' lives. This study aims to bring together methodologies and resources from multiple disciplines in order to show how women who lived in colonial New York and had the means of choosing and purchasing their own belongings used that power in order to shape their material lives, in a way that demonstrates their global mindset and their own senses of taste that emerged from the diverse objects and influences they accessed via an ever-expanding world of goods.

I. Tea

Throughout the British-American colonies, tea-drinking provided a material and ritual link to Britain itself, as well as with its Asian colonies that supplied the beverage. In New York, this British cultural meaning was all the more complex and all the more meaningful, given its notably different relationship with Britain and its British colonial status compared to its fellow North American colonies. Though tea was certainly known in the Netherlands, it was neither as popular nor as ritualized there as it was in England, and it does not appear to have had the same type and level of genteel associations and meanings that accumulated around the drink in England. Tracking the use and display of tea-related goods—pots, cups, dishes, tables, storage canisters, and more—is therefore one way to gauge not only the import and use of one particularly common import item, but the increased English cultural influence in New York as well.¹⁷

Tracking tea consumption within inventories is reliant on the way inventory-takers described objects: though kettles or porcelain cups may have very well been used to make and serve tea without being described specifically as "tea kettles" or "tea cups," the way the objects were described by contemporaries reveals the specific cultural meanings that they were imbued with. In this case, this is less of a handicap than it might otherwise be: the significance here lies not necessarily in how they were used in fact, but how they were perceived and set apart in the context of a specific cultural ritual. Margrieta van Varick's 1696 inventory is the first to contain this kind of language that linked objects explicitly to tea-drinking, listing a total of eighteen "tea disshes," one of which was cracked and six "painted," along with a total of twenty-three tea cups,

¹⁷ For more on the global trade and cultural meanings of tea, see Erika Rappaport, *A Thirst for Empire: How Tea Shaped the Modern World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017) and George van Driem, *The Tale of Tea: A Comprehensive History of Tea from Prehistoric Times to the Present Day* (Boston: Brill, 2019).

four of which were painted brown and three painted red and blue.¹⁸ Clearly, Van Varick owned a wide variety of different serving dishes which were recognized as used specifically for tea.¹⁹ (It should be noted that at this point these porcelain cups and dishes would have also been Chinese trade goods, imported in both form and material along with the beverage they were designed to contain.)

Van Varick's array of tea cups, however, was rare not only among her contemporaries, but for decades after her death, as well. The next surviving inventory listing a specifically tea-related object is Mrs. Rombouts's from New York City, which includes just "1 brass tea Kettle," in 1708.²⁰ Both Van Varick and Mrs. Rombouts appear to have been outliers, however, who were ahead of their time, even despite the vast disparity between the type and number of tea goods they owned. It is only after about 1720 that tea ware begins showing up regularly in women's inventories: When Gertye Splinter died in 1722 in New York City, she owned "7 tea dishes & 7 tea cups"²¹; two years later Peternela Tenycke, also of New York City, owned no fewer than four dozen "Tea Dishes."²² It is notable that Rombouts, Splinter, and Tenycke all hailed from New York City (Van Varick, a perpetual outlier, is difficult to generalize about); however, by 1730, when Catharine Phillipse died in Albany, she too owned both a "Tea Cannister" for storage and a silver tea pot.²³ Maria Gerretse, also of Albany, left two tea cannisters, "1 Earthen tea pott," "15 Earthen tea Dishes," and five tea cups among her

¹⁸ Krohn, Deborah L. and Peter N. Miller, eds., *Dutch New York between East and West: The World of Margrieta Van Varick* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 356-357.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Inventory of Mrs Rombouts's estate in the folder "Estates: Rombouts, Francis," Box 5, *New York Miscellaneous Collection*, New York Public Library Archives.

²¹ Inventory of Gertye Splinter, 1722, *New York, Estate Inventories and Accounts, 1666-1822* database, accessed via Ancestry.com; original housed in the New York State Library's archives.

²² Inventory of Peternela Tenycke, *New York, Estate Inventories and Accounts, 1666-1822* database, accessed via Ancestry.com; original housed in the New York State Library's archives.

²³ Inventory of Catharine Phillipse, MS 2958.7716, The New-York Historical Society (hereafter NYHS).

possessions when she died in 1740.²⁴ In Dutchess County, a largely rural area directly north of Manhattan, Mary Dickinson left a 1753 inventory listing "Tee Cups & Plats & Canisters" valued together at four shillings, as well as a tea kettle and tea pot.²⁵ Hester Rynders, once again of New York City, left behind in 1763 "19 China tea sauzers 6 tea cups [a] tea Kinnister [and a] tea pot" along with two tea kettles, another tea pot, and six tea spoons,²⁶ when Rebecca Palmer's effects were auctioned in 1773 they included "A small tea table" as well as a "tea basket" and tea pot.²⁷ Finally, Margaret Ten Broeck of Albany left in her 1778 inventory record of a wide array of tea-related items, including fifteen spoons, three tables, and two kettles, along with a tea pot and pair of tea tongs.²⁸

What this somewhat numbing parade of tea goods clearly shows is the distinct uptick in the prevalence of these items among New York women's possessions, both in terms of the number of women who owned these items as well as the sheer number of items each owned. The surviving colonial women's inventories span 109 years, from 1669 to 1778. Of these, twenty-eight date from the first fifty years (1669-1719), while only twelve date the subsequent fifty-nine years (1720 and after). However, while only two of the first twenty-eight list any tea-related objects, eight out of twelve, or fully two-thirds, of the second grouping include tea ware. That said, the number of tea goods each woman owned does not necessarily show the same dramatic uptick: Margrieta Van Varick owned a stunning amount of tea ware in 1696, while Rebecca Palmer, in 1773, owned just three items. Instead, the number of pieces each woman owned seems to have been tied more closely to their overall affluence and number of items in their

²⁴ Inventory of Maria Gerretse. *New York, Estate Inventories and Accounts, 1666-1822* database, accessed via Ancestry.com; original housed in the New York State Library's archives.

²⁵ Inventory of Mary Dickinson, *New York, Estate Inventories and Accounts, 1666-1822* database, accessed via Ancestry.com; original housed in the New York State Library's archives.

²⁶ Inventory of Hester Rynders, in Rynders family notes and inventory, MS 2958.8523, NYHS.

²⁷ Inventory of Rebecca Palmer, in Box 1, Benjamin Palmer papers, 1669-1817, NYHS.

²⁸ Inventory of Margaret Ten Broeck, MS 2958.9618, NYHS.

inventory, though only after 1720 or so. Extremely affluent women in the earlier period, such as Christina Cappaens, did not necessarily own any tea goods at all. Thus, it appears that there are two trajectories at work here: tea items themselves became increasingly common in both middle- and upper-class women's households, and, once that happened, the number and variety of those items became a way to distinguish oneself and to display affluence and status.

This narrative of the increasing prevalence of tea-drinking and its attendant material culture is also supported by travel narratives written by visitors to New York and its environs in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Early travelers who passed through New York around the turn of the eighteenth century and recorded and published their observations make no mention of the residents' tea-related habits; observers like Charles Woolley (1678-80), Benjamin Bullivant (1697), and Sarah Kemble Knight (1704) were much more likely to note cultural differences in dress and, especially, architecture, rather than tea. Mid-century travelers, however, make frequent mention of tea-drinking. Peter Kalm (1749) discusses access to drinkable water in New York City specifically in regards to tea-making, and makes mention of a variety of plants that rural residents of New York and New Jersey brewed in place of imported tea leaves.²⁹ Indeed, he specifically mentions that "Tea, coffee, and chocolate, which are at present universally in use here, were then (before the English settled here) wholly unknown," and while he is here discussing what had by that point become New Jersey, rather than New York proper, his observations highlight the particularly English connotations of tea-drinking.³⁰ Meanwhile, perhaps the most well-known traveler within eighteenth-century North America, Dr. Alexander

²⁹ Peter Kalm (trans. John Reinhold Forster), *Travels into North America* (London: T. Lowndes, 1772), 196, for example 115.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 406. The parenthetical is a footnote in the original text.

Hamilton of Maryland, makes frequent mention of his own tea-drinking habits, which indicates that he was able to easily obtain the drink throughout both urban and rural New York.³¹

Hamilton also made observations about the tea-related material culture he observed, as well as his opinions about its meaning. At one point he encountered a family in rural New York who lived in a "small log cottage," where Hamilton and his companion found "several superfluous things which showed an inclination to finery in these poor people," including a mirror, pewter cutlery, and "a set of stone tea dishes, and a tea pot." These items he deemed "superfluous and too splendid for such a cottage," while the "tea equipage" itself was "quite unnecessary."³² This episode indicates that by the 1740s tea-drinking and its attendant material culture had become a staple of even rural, lower-middle-class life in New York, reaching even those whom upper-class observers like Hamilton felt did not deserve to display such markers of gentility.³³

Compared to the increasingly frequent appearance of tea goods in women's inventories and travel accounts, however, almost no portraits of women contain depictions of tea wares. The notable exception to this is an extraordinary portrait of the three-year-old Susanna Truax, painted in 1730 (fig. 1).³⁴ Dressed in a colorfully striped dress and holding a customary rose in one hand, in her other hand she holds something decidedly less customary: a spoon with a lump of white sugar on it. Beside her on a table is a shallow dish filled with more sugar lumps, alongside a teapot and a cup of tea that has spilled over into its saucer. Unlike the roses and songbirds which

³¹ Carl Brandenburg, ed., *Gentleman's Progress: The Itinerarium of Dr. Alexander Hamilton* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1948).

³² *Ibid.*, 55.

³³ For further discussion of the social meanings of and anxieties around class and tea-related material culture see Ann Smart Martin, "Tea Tables Overturned: Rituals of Power and Place in Colonial America," in Dena Goodman and Kathryn Norberg, eds., *Furnishing the Eighteenth Century: What Furniture Can Tell Us About the European and American Past* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 169-182.

³⁴ Susanna Truax, attributed to Pieter Vanderlyn, 1730. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 1980.62.31.

are more common accompaniments to child portraiture, the tea and sugar project a more commercial and status-conscious message, one less about purity and innocence and more about gentility and refinement. Certainly the figure that the toddler projects is strikingly adult, though this was common in child portraiture of the era: even very young children were presented more like miniature adults than young children.³⁵ Susanna Truax's portrait takes this a step further, however, representing her as approximating an adult woman not only in appearance but also in behavior, showing her in the midst of preparing and serving tea using adult-sized objects (she does not appear to be playing with a toy tea-set). Thus the representation of her in the act of drinking tea is both a display of her family's wealth and sophistication, as well as a prediction of her future as a refined and genteel woman.

Interestingly, the Truax family were not major landholders in New York—indeed, there is little information about them that has survived. They appear to have been residents of the rural Hudson Valley, as Susanna's childhood portrait shares distinct stylistic similarities to other works by Pieter Vanderlyn, who worked in the upper Hudson Valley around the time the portrait was painted. They also appear to have been Dutch, as the portrait inscription that notes her name, age, and the date of the portrait is written in Dutch. It thus appears that the Truaxes were part of the wave of increased consumption of tea and its related material culture seen in women's inventories and commented on by Dr. Hamilton. Though they were perhaps not quite the "log cottage" dwellers Hamilton was so outraged by, they were certainly not in the top tiers of Hudson Valley society, and thus their conspicuous and unusual display of tea goods appears to have been at least somewhat aspirational. This kind of carefully deployed symbolism, indeed, could very well have helped secure their places in a world which they had been previously at the

³⁵ See also, for example, the portraits of Sara Gansevoort and Christina Ten Broeck, both at the Albany Institute of History and Art.

edges of: depicting their daughter as the miniature version of the refined, genteel—and Anglicized—woman they envisioned her becoming was a powerful statement of social transformation. Indeed, their Dutch heritage—evidently strong enough that Dutch was still their first language, over two and a half generations after English takeover—makes them especially intriguing adopters of this very English-associated category of material culture. In turn, this speaks to the spread of increasing English cultural hegemony among New York colonial residents throughout the eighteenth century, manifested conspicuously in this increasingly common and meaningful trade good.



Figure 1. Susanna Truax, attributed to Pieter Vanderlyn, 1730.
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 1980.62.31.

II. Japan

In a similar way to tea, Japanese goods give the opportunity of looking at the influence of trade goods in New York women's lives while simultaneously opening up the potential to understand their ties with the European countries and cultures they came from. The Netherlands' trade relationship with Japan makes the presence of Japanese goods and aesthetic influence within New York women's portraits and inventories particularly useful for understanding these ties. After 1640, when Japan closed its doors to almost all European trade, and throughout the rest of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Netherlands were the sole European nation still allowed to trade directly with the country.³⁶ Therefore, if the objects discussed here were truly Japanese imports, which it seems likely many of them were, this would be simultaneously a material link to Japan itself—perhaps the least-available and thus most "exotic" Asian country in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—as well as to specifically Dutch trade networks, reinforcing the longevity of Dutch influence, both cultural and practical, in late-seventeenth and eighteenth-century New York.³⁷

The objects described as "Japan" within women's inventories cover a wide and sometimes puzzling range of goods, indicating that New Yorkers' understanding of what made something recognizably Japanese was complex and did not rely on a single aesthetic or material category. Margrieta Van Varick's 1697 inventory lists several "Japan" objects: a wooden dish, four small boxes, and a stilyard, or balance.³⁸ Though it is always unclear at this remove exactly what is meant by descriptors like "Japan," around this time the word was coming to refer to a kind of

³⁶ Krohn and Miller, eds., *Dutch New York between East and West*, 151 and Leo Akveld and Els M. Jacobs, eds., *The Colorful World of the VOC* (Bussum, the Netherlands: THOTH Publishers, 2002), 137.

³⁷ For more on the Dutch in Japan see Adam Clulow, *The Company and the Shogun: The Dutch Encounter with Tokugawa Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014). For Pan-American material culture connections to Asia, see Dennis Carr, ed., *Made in the Americas: The New World Discovers Asia* (Boston: MFA Publications, 2015).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 345.

lacquer specific to the country (and, soon, any kind of lacquer that resembled it), which seems a likely explanation for these objects' appearance and description.³⁹ However, it could also mean more than this: Christina Cappoens is listed as owning "1 Japan blanket" in 1694, while Gertruy Van Cortlandt owned a "tin jappan mug & salver" in 1724— further complicating what exactly "Japan" meant as a descriptor in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century New York.⁴⁰

All three of the women who owned "Japan" objects were themselves first- or second-generation Dutchwomen, and often had close personal ties to global Dutch trade routes—further emphasizing the importance of the Japanese-Dutch connection. Van Varick's objects in particular appear to evoke this exclusive and lucrative trade connection, particularly as one of her objects was a balance that would've been used directly in trade, to weigh precious metals or foreign currencies. Moreover, Van Varick had an unusually direct connection to the Netherlands' Asian trade network: she had lived a portion of her life in Batavia (modern-day Jakarta), the Asian base of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and the hub of Dutch-Asian trade, and both her uncle and her first husband had been merchants there.⁴¹ This makes it all the more likely that her balance and bowl were genuine articles of Japanese manufacture. Van Cortlandt's tinware, on the other hand, presents more of a puzzle, as does Cappoens's blanket. Japan was not particularly known within the international trade network for its metalware, though earlier in the seventeenth century it had exported quantities of precious metals.⁴² In addition, India was a much more significant source for fabrics that would read as "exotic" and Asian to an American eye, as will

³⁹ "Japan, n." OED Online. March 2019. Oxford University Press.

⁴⁰ Ruth Piwonka, "New York Colonial Inventories: Dutch Interiors as a Measure of Cultural Change," in Roderic H. Blackburn and Nancy A. Kelley, eds., *New World Dutch Studies: Dutch Arts and Culture in Colonial America, 1609-1776* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987), 75.

⁴¹ For more on Van Varick's life in Batavia see Krohn and Miller, eds., *Dutch New York between East and West*; for more on Batavia's position within the VOC's trade empire see Akveld and Jacobs, eds., *The Colorful World of the VOC*.

⁴² Krohn and Miller, eds., *Dutch New York between East and West*, 151.

be seen. That said, one particular type of Japanese textile was much better-known: Japanese kimonos—referred to simply as *rocken*, or "robes," in Dutch—were fashionable in this era, so Japanese patterns and fabrics were certainly known to those in the Netherlands and its diaspora, even if they were not as plentiful or recognizable as Indian calicoes or Chinese silks.⁴³

Portraits strongly reinforce the knowledge New Yorkers in particular had of Japanese fabrics, and their status as luxury items. Three women were painted wearing *rocken*, or replicas of them, in three distinctly different patterns and color schemes. These types of robes were instrumental in the Japanese-Dutch trade alliance that was crucial to Dutch East India Company (VOC) interests in Asia, and were a keystone of Asian cultural influence in the Netherlands: as part of the elaborate gift-giving that occurred between the VOC officials and the Japanese shogun, the officials were presented with kimonos of varying quality, as befitted their rank in the company.⁴⁴ Though this was far from the only source, actual or inspirational, of loose, free-flowing robes in Europe at this time, they were the template upon which these types of robes were based.⁴⁵ In addition, the distinctive patterning of the robes' fabric in the three New York examples link them directly to this Japanese trading connection. There are a multitude of other portraits that portray women in loose robes that are solid-colored, and later colonial portraiture shows—usually male—subjects in robes made with distinctly European patterned silks.⁴⁶ None of the New York examples discussed here show this dilution or European inspiration, however, connecting them much more directly to the Japanese sources of this style. In addition, though

⁴³ Stephan Wolohojian, Melinda Watt, and Michael Gallagher, *A Grand Tableau: Charles Le Brun's Portrait of the Jabach Family* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2017), 30-31.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ The best-known of these is probably John Singleton Copley's 1767 portrait of Nicholas Boylston, now in the Harvard Art Museum. See also the woman's banyan in the collections of the Victoria & Albert Museum, made from silk designed by the British Anna Maria Garthwaite (<http://m.vam.ac.uk/collections/item/O85965/banyan-garthwaite-anna-maria/>).

women are certainly known to have worn these types of robes—usually, like men, as informal wear just after getting up or before bed—portraits of them in these outfits are significantly more rare than those of men.⁴⁷ Thus the presence of three different portraits portraying women wearing these robes is singular, specific to this particular time and place.

The detail that went in to depicting these robes also displays not only their unique nature as a grouping, but their individual singularity: none of the three are alike in patterning or color scheme, except that they all appear to be made of fine silk. What appears to be the earliest of these portraits is also perhaps the finest example: a portrait of an anonymous woman attributed to Gerrit Duyckinck, member of an extended Dutch family of artists that spanned several generations (fig. 2).⁴⁸ The fabric of the woman's robe, white or pale gray with floral motifs, is carefully described, as is the sheen of its surface. Indeed, the detailed rendering makes it seem quite likely that the artist was working from life, and that this was not an aspirational object but something the sitter herself owned, or at the least had access to.

The two other examples depart from the anonymous women in specifics, but continue to make clear the robes' use as symbols of wealth and luxury. The second of these portraits is of Anna Cuyler Van Schaik, attributed to Nehemiah Partridge and dated 1720 (fig. 3).⁴⁹ Van Schaik's robe is much more boldly patterned than either of the other examples, with large

⁴⁷ See above catalog entry on the women's banyan in the V&A. The paucity of women's portraits featuring these outfits appears to hold true in both the Netherlands and England, as well as in the American colonies. For a well-known English example of a portrait of a man wearing a banyan, see the 1709-12 portrait of Isaac Newton by James Thornhill; it hangs at the Woolsthorpe Manor in England but can be viewed on the Web Gallery of Art (<https://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?html/t/thornhil/newton.html>). For Dutch examples see for instance the Jabach portrait that is the subject of Wolohojian, Watt, and Gallagher, eds., *A Grand Tableau*, or the portrait of Daniel Bernard by Bortolomeus van der Helst in the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, reproduced in Akveld and Jacobs, eds., *The Colorful World of the VOC*, 47.

⁴⁸ For more information about the Duyckincks see *Four American Families: A Tradition of Artistic Pursuit* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1984).

⁴⁹ *Hudson Valley Paintings in the Albany Institute of History and Art* (Albany: Albany Institute of History and Art, 1959), 25.

whimsical shapes covering the fabric. Hers is also the robe that most closely resembles the very few *rocken* made for the Dutch trade that still survive; one dating from the eighteenth century, which was made in Japan, has a similarly bold and colorful design (fig. 4).⁵⁰

Conversely, the third example is vague in its depiction of its subject's clothing, despite making a clear effort to evoke the type of intricate patterning present in the first two examples. Catharina Schuyler's portrait, dated to roughly 1725 and attributed, like the anonymous woman's portrait, to Gerrit Duyckinck, clearly displays a silk robe with Asian-inspired patterning (fig. 5).⁵¹ However, Schuyler's portrait shows this pattern in much less detail, displaying an almost abstract design of curlicues and squiggles. Although the robe in Schuyler's portrait strongly evokes the type of fabric seen in the first two examples, it is much less convincing as a description of an actual garment: the pattern is abstract and does not show the kind of detail and intricate patterning so clear in the other two examples.⁵² It seems much more likely that the artist knew of and had seen these types of robes, but that Schuyler herself did not own one, and that the painter was working from a general aesthetic rather than a particular piece of fabric. If this is indeed the case, it highlights to an even greater extent the desirability and aesthetic meaning of these garments, and the potency of that meaning above and beyond the specificity of a particular object. New Yorkers clearly prized Japanese goods of various types, and their increased accessibility in the colony, in terms of both actual goods and aesthetic ideas, allowed New York

⁵⁰ It is interesting as well that these two portraits show their subjects posed identically; New York limner portraits frequently took their inspiration for poses and backgrounds from British print sources, which appears to be the case here. For more on the use of British print sources in limner portraits, see Wayne Craven, *Colonial American Portraiture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

⁵¹ Though this attribution appears to be incorrect, on one side or the other.

⁵² The image of the Schuyler portrait on Winterthur's website, and the one appended here, show clear surface damage, and the darkness of the overall painting make it difficult to make out details overall. However, in person the painting appears to have been restored, and it is much easier to see the robe patterning, which makes it appear even more abstract and muddled.

women to access and incorporate their influence into their own aesthetic sensibilities in a way unavailable to other colonial American women—or, indeed, many European women.



Figure 2. Portrait of a Lady, attributed to Gerrit Duyckinck, c. 1710
Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1972.263.1



Figure 3. Anna Cuyler Van Schaik, attributed to the Schuyler Limner [Nehemiah Partridge],
1720

Albany Institute of History and Art

Published in *Hudson Valley Paintings in the Albany Institute of History and Art* (Albany: Albany
Institute of History and Art, 1959).



Figure 4. *Japonsche rock* (Japanese robe), c. 1725-1775
Centraal Museum, Utrecht, The Netherlands, 8141



Figure 5. Catharine Schuyler [Dumond], attributed to Gerrit Duyckinck, c. 1725
Winterthur Museum, 1956.0569 A

III. Calico

Despite the intriguing prominence of Japanese design in women's portraiture of the early eighteenth century, Japan was far from the most well-known source for fashionable Asian fabrics. Instead this distinction went to India, whose colorful floral designs, printed on fine yet durable cotton cloth, gained extreme popularity in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁵³ Referred to as calico or chintz, these cotton fabrics were imported to Europe in such quantities that, by the turn of the eighteenth century, countries throughout Europe were banning their sale (with the exception, intriguingly, of the Netherlands), under pressure from native wool and linen producers who felt their livelihoods threatened.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, the British deemed these fabrics suitable for export, as long as they were not sold in Europe itself.⁵⁵ Thus, European colonies had ready access to calicos that had been imported from India to Europe then re-exported, which provided colonial women with opportunities to acquire and utilize these fabrics that were unavailable to their metropolitan counterpoints.⁵⁶

At the same time, European craftspeople attempted to make copies of these fabrics, whose full success was hindered until the mid-1700s by their inability to not only to grow and spin cotton to the necessary quality, but also to mimic the pigmentation and colorfastness of the Indian textiles.⁵⁷ Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century calicos, unlike their mass-produced

⁵³ Though they had been known in Europe since at least the beginning of the early modern period. See Giorgio Riello, "Asian Knowledge and the Development of Calico Printing in Europe in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Journal of Global History*, 5 (2010). For more on the global calico trade and its historical importance, see Giorgio Riello and Tirthankar Roy, eds., *How India Clothed the World: The World of South Asian Textiles, 1500-1850* (Boston: Brill, 2009) and Giorgio Riello and Prasanna Parthasarathi, eds., *The Spinning World: A Global History of Cotton Textiles, 1200-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁵⁴ Riello, "Asian Knowledge and the Development of Calico Printing," 11.

⁵⁵ Amelia Peck, "'India Chints' and 'China Taffety': East India Company Textiles for the North American Market," in Amelia Peck, ed., *Interwoven Globe: The Worldwide Textile Trade, 1500-1800* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013), 105.

⁵⁶ For more on this import-export chain and its importance within the British Empire, see Jonathan Eacott, *Selling Empire: India in the Making of Britain and America, 1600-1830* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 106, and Riello, "Asian Knowledge and the Development of Calico Printing," 25.

nineteenth-century successors, were luxury items, if somewhat more available ones compared to other goods from the East, in terms of both cost and supply. They were also items particularly associated with women: the most prevalent uses of calico were in women's clothing and in household items like curtains and bedspreads, thus implicitly tying calico to the feminine realms of fashion and the home. These realms also, crucially, provided the primary canvases on which women could convey their economic and social status and, especially, express and refine their taste.

Therefore, calico provides one of the broadest insights into women's consumption of Asian import goods, providing the most examples across the longest stretch of time of any category of import goods considered here, as well as among a comparatively wide range of social classes. To be sure, calico remained an elite item in this period, and its distribution was not democratic: nonetheless, it is important to note its prevalence among different groups of women in the middle and upper classes throughout colonial New York, in New York City, Albany, and the rural Hudson Valley. Among those women who had some amount of disposable income and a desire to calibrate their own consumption to worldly ideals of taste and refinement, calico appears to have offered an accessible and versatile means of expression.⁵⁸

Calicos were used for clothing, both for men and women, though women's much more voluminous gowns served as a better and more common vehicle for displaying calico's colorful designs. Calico was also used for household items, both decorative pieces like bedspreads and curtains, and in some cases for more pedestrian household linens like sheets and towels. All of these goods, of course, were directly associated with women: more than that, they would have

⁵⁸ Peck discusses calico as a social leveler in the colonies; though this seems perhaps slightly far-fetched, it certainly supports the idea of the greater accessibility of calico among colonial Americans. Peck, "'India Chints' and 'China Taffety,'" 105.

been seen as belonging to and the province of women, even while they were married or still living with their fathers, positioning these items as particularly useful in dissecting the development of women's tastes and preferences. The range of patterns and colors calico provided also aid in this analysis, though undyed calico was also imported and in use, usually for plainer household items. Despite its less decorative (and almost certainly less expensive) nature, it would have been a finer and more expensive replacement for the much more common, and European-produced, linen, therefore still conveying information about the status of its owner.⁵⁹ Indeed, it is the household uses for calico, both decorative and not, that show up in women's inventories most often, while their uses in fashion are displayed in a selection of portraits. Although this is likely in part because of the different foci of inventories versus portraits, it is interesting to note the scarcity of calico clothing in women's inventories, as this may indicate an overall scarcity that highlights the value and social meanings of the calico gowns that appear in portraiture as status symbols.⁶⁰

Indeed, Margrieta Van Varick is the only woman inventoried to own calico clothing; hers is also the earliest to include calico listings and has, by an overwhelming margin, the most listings and pieces compared to any other woman in New York. Her 1697 inventory contains no fewer than twenty-seven listings for calico objects and another nine listing for chintz objects: all together these listings include an astonishing 412 individual pieces.⁶¹ In addition to these listings from her household, an inventory of her shop reveals a further nine listings for calico, most of

⁵⁹ Peck, "'India Chints' and 'China Taffety,'" 105.

⁶⁰ Then again, there are many eccentricities to the way clothing is denoted within inventories, so it is difficult to come to any decisive conclusions. Indeed, several inventories don't take note of clothing at all, and even those that do often appear to be missing crucial items, like stays, shoes, etc. It may very well be that the clothes women were buried in were not inventoried, which while logical also means that inventories are missing not only pedestrian items that women may have owned only one of, but are also likely missing their best or one of their best outfits, leaving intriguing holes in inventories' clothes listings.

⁶¹ Krohn and Miller, eds., *Dutch New York*, 344-347.

them for fabric yardage (totaling slightly over fifty-seven yards) and one for eleven calico caps.⁶² Her household items include carpets, quilts and blankets, curtains and valences, napkins, pillow cases, bibs, handkerchiefs, "clouts" or utilitarian cloths, and children's beds.⁶³

Of these, carpets, bedspreads of various sorts, and curtains repeatedly show up in other inventories of later dates. Instead, it is Van Varick's most utilitarian items—napkins, handkerchiefs, clouts—that are most unique to her. (It is also these items that propel the object count of her calico goods to such heights: often she owns these objects in incredible numbers, as with her 106 calico napkins.) This stands at odds with Van Varick's inventoried goods more generally, which tend to be notable for being comparatively luxurious rather than comparatively ordinary. The pedestrian nature of these objects suggests that they were not dyed or printed but merely plain—and perhaps indicates, by their sheer number, that Van Varick acquired them in Asia, where calico would have been likely easier and cheaper to get a hold of than linen. If this is the case, then in fact even her most basic everyday items set her apart, in part as a mark of her wealth, but most of all a hallmark of her direct experiences within the web of seventeenth-century global trade.

Van Varick's calico clothing included petticoats, neckcloths, nightgowns (what would today be called dressing gowns or bathrobes), aprons, and waistcoats: there are no gowns or dresses, the type of garments we will see in portraits, and it is unclear how decorative versus utilitarian these objects were. The petticoats are described as flowered, indicating that they were meant to be fashionably displayed. The other items are without further description, however, and particularly items like the neckcloths and aprons were likely plain. Indeed, it is notable how few

⁶² Ibid., 349-350.

⁶³ A bed at this point referred to a mattress, either stuffed and ready to sleep on or simply the unstuffed casing—this last is probably what is meant by the "children's beds."

of Van Varick's calico items are described as decorative in any way: besides the petticoats, there are just two "Chint flowerd carpet[s]," two striped calico curtains, and "two Cullerd [colored] callico Curtens" (along with "three smaaler ditto").⁶⁴ (Of the fabric in her shop many listings do not get further description, but four are described as "flowerd" and one as "stript."⁶⁵)

Just how extraordinary Van Varick's calico collection was is made clear by the handful of other inventories that include calico listings. This very sparseness, however, also highlights the point made above, that calico was something accessible to a wider (if still not particularly wide) variety of women, even if they only had a couple of goods made from the material. Indeed, almost every other inventory that includes calico lists a dozen pieces or less, and these were overwhelmingly display items like curtains, bedspreads, and carpets, indicating that for most women calico consumption was possible but limited—and that what pieces were obtained were shown off. This is not always true—the 1703 inventory of Margaret Duncan, a Quaker woman living in New York City, noted that she owned just "1 p[air] Calico Sheets,"⁶⁶ a distinctly unostentatious use of the fabric. But in the vast majority of cases, these pieces were clearly meant to be prominently displayed. In 1710, for instance, a New York City woman, Mary Grasillier, is listed as owning "1 Sett white Calico Curtains," along with "2 calico Coverliets," both providing ample opportunity for display.⁶⁷ A year later, in Albany, Margareta Schuyler also

⁶⁴ These carpets would appear to refer to the early-modern sense of the word, as table- rather than floor-coverings, as the relatively delicate—and expensive—calico would not have held up well to being walked on. See "carpet, n.," meaning I.1.a. OED Online.

⁶⁵ Krohn and Miller, eds., *Dutch New York*, 350.

⁶⁶ Inventory of Margaret Duncan, *New York, Estate Inventories and Accounts, 1666-1822* database, accessed via Ancestry.com; original housed in the New York State Library's archives.

⁶⁷ Inventory of Mary Grasillier, *New York, Estate Inventories and Accounts, 1666-1822* database, accessed via Ancestry.com; original housed in the New York State Library's archives. The curtains appear to have been bed curtains, an excellent way to display significant quantities of bright, expensive fabric; they're listed along with a bedstead, feather bed, and other bedding. The coverlets were perhaps examples of what were referred to as palampores, large pieces of calico with a discrete pattern and border, used as bedspreads or wall hangings. See Peck, ed., *Interwoven Globe*, 106, 204.

owned both a coverlet (hers specified as "flowered") and curtains, for both a bed and windows. In addition, she had a blue calico tablecloth and three "flowered cotton cloths for a chest," as well as one for "the kas," a type of large, distinctively Dutch cabinet.⁶⁸ Schuyler's daughter, Gertruy Schuyler van Cortlandt, owned two calico carpets, as well as the evidently relatively common bed and window curtains.⁶⁹

One of these curtain listings marks it as particularly intriguing within the world of New York's global trade and domestic taste-making: "4 p[ai]r Blue & white callico curtain & vallins [valences]."⁷⁰ This appears to describe a type of calico that was particularly popular among Dutch women in the Hudson Valley—a notably large number of examples of which survive, with provenances (see for example fig. 6). There is significant debate about the origin of these textiles, which tend to be relatively crudely printed compared to other Indian calicos, and almost no examples of which have been found in England. It seems likely that they were printed in India for the North American market—a market which seems to have been centered in the Hudson Valley.⁷¹ Hypothesizing about the source of the Hudson Valley's interest in this particular type of calico is intriguing, though necessarily speculative. It is interesting to note, however, that the Dutch had a particular fascination with the blue and white designs of the Chinese porcelain they encountered in Asia and brought back to the Netherlands—to such an extent that they made a distinctive national art style out of copying the colors and to some extent the methods of this porcelain. Delftware tiles and dishes were certainly present in New York in this era (Van

⁶⁸ Piwonka, "New York Colonial Inventories," 73.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 74-75.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 74-75.

⁷¹ See Peck, ed., *Interwoven Globe*, 295 for this conclusion and a good summary of the debate over these textiles' origins. This is not however universally agreed upon, and there are scholars who believe that while the cotton itself may have been imported from India, the printing was done in England. See for example the catalog entry for Quilt, indigo resist, 1750-1770, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1955-175 (<https://emuseum.history.org/objects/12657/quilt-indigo-resist?ctx=1ad1a93401fe40931cbc3113704f8e7d2fbb4e79&idx=8>).

Cortlandt, for instance, owned "2 delftware dishes") and in the seventeenth and into eighteenth centuries this Chinese-cum-Dutch aesthetic style appears to have been commonplace in both the Netherlands and in New York. Therefore, the similarities between Delftware and the blue and white calicos that gained particular and concentrated popularity among the Dutch-dominated Hudson Valley appear evocative of a broad aesthetic through-line between New York and the Netherlands. What is more, it is a through-line which is not simply a mimicry of European (or, for that matter, Asian) goods and decorative notions. Instead, this blue-and-white calico melds a Dutch aesthetic, in turn inspired by the Chinese, with an Indian trade good which in turn was only widely available in the American colonies. To popularize and create demand for this particular type of calico, Dutch-American women—and as the ones who were most frequently choosing and purchasing fabric, it would have been women—had to not only draw upon exterior influences but remake them, in the process creating something new and unique to their own particular culture.

The fact of the specifically New York-oriented trade connection with Asia that facilitated the acquisition of this particular type of calico is itself intriguing, as is Van Cortlandt's evident participation in this connection. As a second-generation Dutchwoman and a resident of Albany, she was at the epicenter of the formation of Dutch-American identity; though she likely didn't remember an officially Dutch New York, she was living, even at her death a quarter of the way into the eighteenth century, in the midst of a cultural Dutchness that persisted in Albany well into the nineteenth century. This was a unique milieu within the American colonies, or, indeed, anywhere else; thus Van Cortlandt made choices and participated in trade networks that proclaimed her position within, not merely a transplanted Dutch culture, but a particular

evolution of Dutch aesthetic values grafted to American colonial trade opportunities, one which could only have germinated within colonial New York.

Indeed, it is perhaps notable that all three of the women who owned significant collections of calico were Dutch: Van Varick was born and lived much of her life in the Netherlands, as did Schuyler, who was so deeply embedded in the Dutch community of her Albany home that her inventory was taken down in Dutch, despite that she died nearly a half-century after the colony had become English. Her daughter, though a generation removed, nonetheless grew up in the intensely Dutch Albany, and was born and married into two of the three premier Hudson Valley Dutch families.⁷² Though most analyses of calico importation to the American colonies focus, understandably, on the impact of English trade connections and laws, examining this group of inventories begs the question of how Dutch trade policies affected these Dutchwomen's accumulation of calico, significantly higher than their inventoried peers'. It also brings up the question of what cultural forces may have been at work in determining Dutch women's calico ownership versus that of English women, though calico's popularity among the other English-dominated colonies makes this difficult to hypothesize about. It may simply be an indication that Dutch women in New York tended to be wealthier, more frequently inventoried, or have more interest in trade goods than their English peers.

The influence of women merchants is also a tantalizing if often unclear element in the formation of specific tastes and fashions among New York women. Two inventoried women were merchants at the time of their deaths, Van Varick and Gertye Splinter, and both have separate sections of their inventories listing their shop items versus their personal goods. Splinter's inventory lists no calico goods; Van Varick's shop contained an array of different types

⁷² These families were the Van Cortlandts, the Schuylers, and, most of all, the Van Rensselaers. For this classification see Blackburn and Piwonka, eds., *Remembrance of Patria*, 295.

of calico fabric as well as a number of caps, as discussed above. The third woman to serve as a merchant in New York and to leave behind any substantial record of her business was Mary Spratt Provoost Alexander, who, while she did not leave an inventory or a limner portrait, is one of the few colonial New York women to have had her letters preserved in any number. She was married twice, both times to merchants, and appears to have carried out a significant amount of the family business in each case: it is her involvement in the Alexander merchant business which has left a direct record, however, and it consists of dozens of business letters back and forth to London merchant houses which supplied the Alexanders' own store. Intriguingly, Mary Alexander's correspondence with these London houses is almost entirely in regards to fabric; though it is possible this is merely a quirk of the historical record, it would seem to suggest that even when thoroughly enmeshed within the masculine world of business, Alexander took control of the more feminine-aligned elements of it, either by choice or delegation.⁷³

The most fascinating element of Alexander's correspondence are the sheets of paper she sometimes included with her orders to London, covered with scraps of cloth that she either pinned to the paper or stuck to it with bits of sealing wax and then notated in order to best convey her wishes. One particularly interesting sheet consists of calico scraps, dated to 1730, which gives an entirely unique view of the types of calico not only available to New York women but particularly desired by them, as conveyed by a female merchant who dealt closely with such fabric orders (see fig. 7).⁷⁴ Alexander lived and worked in New York City, and so this is not necessarily a representative sample of the tastes of all New York women—Hudson Valley-

⁷³ For more on women's participation in the commercial networks of colonial North America, see for instance Ellen Hartigan-O'Connor, *The Ties That Buy: Women and Commerce in Revolutionary America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

⁷⁴ Folder 5, Box 10, Alexander Papers, NYHS.

style blue and white calico such as that discussed above is notably missing, for instance⁷⁵—but nonetheless her fabrics give an extraordinary snapshot of actual fabric patterns being sold in colonial New York. Because of their delicate nature and potential for reuse, historical fabrics rarely survive in large quantities, and those that do tend to do so either by sheer chance or, more often, because they happen to be extraordinary in some way and thus difficult to understand as broadly representative. Alexander's sample sheet allows us to see the kind of representative array often absent in surviving pieces, and provides a compelling illustration of the often vague or nonexistent descriptions of calico within inventories.

Alexander also requested patterns and colors she did not have samples of. In a separate letter, for instance, she pinned a note to a calico sample that specified, "let the Stripe of this be broader, and the Ground white."⁷⁶ Clearly, she and the women she sold fabric to had strong and specific opinions about what they wanted, and expected to be able to obtain not only a particular type of fabric but various highly specific iterations of it. Moreover, that Alexander was unable to provide an example of the fabric pattern she was requesting indicates that she and her customers drew on sources beyond simply what they were sent by London merchants. They looked to other aesthetic ideas they encountered in their lives, be they fabrics or inspirations further afield; they also, crucially, relied on their own imaginations to conceive of designs that suited their tastes. Having developed these tastes in part by exposure to and making choices between trade goods, they now expected to be able to not only choose but dictate which of these goods they consumed.

Portraits also help to illustrate and explicate what types of calico women especially prized, particularly for use in fashion. The earliest and finest of not only this grouping but

⁷⁵ Though blue-and-white patterns do occur, if not in the same type of bold and large-scale designs that tend to typify the surviving Hudson Valley styles.

⁷⁶ Folder 1, Box 10, Alexander Papers, NYHS.

(somewhat arguably) of the whole corpus of women's limner portraits is a turn-of-the-eighteenth-century portrait of an anonymous woman attributed to Gerrit Duyckinck (fig. 8).⁷⁷ Though the woman's unknown identity thwarts a more specific understanding of her social position, her lavish clothing and accessories—not to mention the sophistication of the painting itself—give a good indication of her status. The fabric of her gown is a densely patterned, dark-background calico that is almost certainly an Indian import, given the time period, and moreover one whose design had not necessarily been selected to mimic established European aesthetics. It was white-background calicos that were far and away the most popular type in Europe, and especially Britain, as opposed to the dark-background calicos that were preferred in India itself.⁷⁸ This is perhaps a function of the portrait's relatively early date, but it also falls in line with other elements of the portrait, most notably the Turkish carpet, that similarly profess non-European aesthetic values.

The other two portraits that feature calico gowns are from several decades later, and appear in portraits of women who appear to be of slightly lower social standing than the anonymous woman. Both sitters' names are known, and both were from the Hudson Valley; neither was from or married into any of the upper-crust Hudson Valley families, but both appear to have been comfortable, and their proud display of their calico garments may suggest calico's power and accessibility as a status symbol beyond the top-most tier of families. The portrait of Deborah Glen, dated to circa 1739 and attributed to Pieter Vanderlyn, is a relatively rare example of a full-length portrait of a New York woman (fig. 9).⁷⁹ Glen's dress features red flowers and

⁷⁷ Unknown woman, 1690-1710, attributed to Gerrit Duyckinck, the Winterthur Museum, 1956.0565 A.

⁷⁸ Giorgio Riello, "The Indian Apprenticeship: The Trade of Indian Textiles and the Making of European Cottons," in Giorgio Riello and Tirthankar Roy, eds., *How India Clothed the World: The World of South Asian Textiles, 1500-1850* (Boston: Brill, 2009), 337-343.

⁷⁹ Portrait of Deborah Glen (later, Mrs. John Sanders) (1721-1786), c. 1739, attributed to The Gansevoort Limner [Pieter Vanderlyn], The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Museum of American Folk Art, 1964.100.1.

white vines on a brown background, less densely patterned than the unknown woman's but still a clearly Indian textile, complete with its, by European standards, less-fashionable dark background. Colonial Williamsburg, which owns the painting, notes that family tradition suggests that this was Glen's wedding portrait, and thus that it depicts her in her wedding dress.⁸⁰ If this is the case, it highlights the desirability and status encoded in this fabric and the garments made from it. Moreover, the scale of the painting reinforces this portrayal of status; because it is full-length, the closely described pattern of the fabric takes up perhaps a third of the entire canvas, highlighting not only Glen's status but the importance of her clothing in displaying and solidifying that status.

The importance and centrality of calico clothing is also apparent in its final instance in women's portraiture, in the circa 1740 portrait of Susanna Truax by an unknown artist (fig. 10)⁸¹—the second of two portraits of Truax to survive, the other discussed above in relative to the tea cup she is depicted with.⁸² Artistically the least accomplished of these portraits, it nonetheless depicts the pattern of her dress in fine detail, capturing the flowers, vines, and leaves that make up its intricate design. This is an example of the white-background calico that became the defining English aesthetic choice among the fabrics imported from India, and the model for the types of calico it would itself produce from the mid-eighteenth century onward. Thus, it represents a particular intersection of Asian and European taste—or rather, a European adaptation and digestion of an Asian form. The colorful designs on a white background evoked European styles of embroidery,⁸³ and were thus a comfortable aesthetic choice while simultaneously being a coveted import good. Indeed, in 1740 it was still quite likely that the

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Susanna Truax, unknown artist, c. 1740. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 1978.80.20.

⁸² The fact that two separate portraits of her survive makes her unique among colonial New York women.

⁸³ Riello, "The Indian Apprenticeship," 341.

fabric for Truax's dress would have been made in India and imported by the British East India Company; there is a chance that it was printed in England, though in that case the plain cotton fabric used as the base for the designs would have still been Indian, as England did not have the technological or resource-based wherewithal to produce it yet.⁸⁴ Over the span of roughly forty years, then, imported calico was displayed in women's portraiture as a sign of wealth and social status in similar ways, even if the designs and the underlying aesthetic meanings of those designs shifted from portrait to portrait.

Calico's endurance as a status symbol and luxury item lasted well beyond the date it was last documented in limner portraits, and this longevity is in part what testifies to its importance and continued potency as a marker of wealth and refinement.⁸⁵ The one example of an extant calico gown that survives from colonial New York, which belonged to Anne Van Cortlandt Van Rensselaer, emphasizes this continuity (fig. 11). It gown itself dates from circa 1790, and thus its style shows the clear differences in fashion that had developed in the intervening decades between portrait representations of calico gowns and its construction; however, the fabric itself is dated to sometime before this, likely the mid-eighteenth century, making it roughly contemporaneous with Truax's and Glen's portraits, as well as with Alexander's sample sheet.⁸⁶ This sheet indeed shows a number of samples with similar color schemes and patterning, and Truax's portrait in particular shows a very similar design, situating Van Rensselaer's gown firmly within a context of other New York calico-owning women. Van Rensselaer, as her name proudly displays, was a member of two of the three most prominent families in the colonial-era Hudson

⁸⁴ Ibid., 343.

⁸⁵ For more on surviving garments in colonial America and what they can tell us about its residents, see Linda Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal: The Language of Clothing in Colonial and Federal America* (Williamsburg, VA: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2002).

⁸⁶ Woman's Jacket, India Chintz, Part of Gown, c. 1790, unknown maker, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1990-10,1.

Valley, and it can be reliably asserted that she was at the forefront of Hudson Valley fashion—particularly when wearing clothes fine enough to have been preserved for over 200 years. That Susanna Truax, who as discussed above came from what appears to be a successful but far from prominent family, was able to wear almost exactly the same type of fabric as Van Rensselaer indicates the popularity and relative accessibility of calico as a luxury item among American colonists: it projected an indisputably fashionable image without being prohibitively expensive.

Thus calico shows the broad appeal of import goods among New York women in terms of both aesthetics and social status. This relatively broad distribution of calico is supported by the presence of calico items in a fairly wide array of inventories as well; though calico ownership overall is far from ubiquitous among New York women, those who did own pieces do not seem to fit into a particular social or economic bracket, judging by a combination of their aggregate inventories and family status. Almost always display objects, and always goods with particularly feminine associations—curtains, gowns, bedspreads—calico goods provided a potent and accessible way for New York women to utilize import goods to craft a sense of taste and in turn an image of their homes and of their selves. This image, then, was dependent on goods and aesthetics which were global as well as—given the Calico Act restrictions—particularly American. This was image-creation particular to a time and place, that allowed aspiring middle-class women to self-consciously display a status symbol that was potent yet not out of their reach, while comfortably upper-class women could display the same symbols more casually and yet with similar meanings around social position—a social position that specifically explicated their presence within a globalizing world.



Figure 6. Textile, indigo resist dyed, c. 1766
Colonial Williamsburg, 1955-257,2



Figure 7. Calico samples sent from Mary Alexander to London merchant house Barclay & Sons, 1730

The New-York Historical Society Archives, Alexander Papers, Box 5 Folder 10



Figure 8. Unknown Woman, attributed to Gerrit Duyckinck, c. 1690-1710
Winterthur Museum, 1956.0565 A



Figure 9. Deborah Glen [Sanders], attributed to the Gansevoort Limner [Pieter Vanderlyn], c.
1739
Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Museum of American Folk Art/Colonial Williamsburg, 1964.100.1



Figure 10. Susanna Truax, unknown artist, c. 1740.
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 1978.80.20.



Figure 11. Woman's two-piece gown, c. 1790
Colonial Williamsburg, 1990-10,1

IV. Turkey Carpets

In addition to the textiles from India and to some extent Japan that were making their way to colonial New York, there were also a few pieces coming from the Middle East, or at least strongly inspired by such works. These were Turkish or Oriental rugs, referred to almost unilaterally in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as "Turkey carpets." These appear to have been relatively rare in the American colonies generally, particularly in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, with only a few recorded instances in inventories and letters and even fewer in paintings.⁸⁷ Thus they served as a rare but particularly potent symbol of wealth and an exoticized status symbol for those with access to them, including three different women in colonial New York.

The first colonial American portrait to depict a Turkey carpet—and one of only four total to do so—is the portrait of an unknown New York woman attributed to Gerrit Duyckinck, discussed above in relation to the woman's calico gown (fig. 8). The woman leans upon a table covered with a distinctively patterned carpet, immediately recognizable as Turkish in design. The scholar Sarah Sherrill suggests that it is a Medallion Ushak pattern, one of the most popular types exported from Turkey;⁸⁸ what is less clear is whether this is in fact a carpet of Turkish origin, or a "turkey-work" replica made in England (or elsewhere in Europe). Clearly, however, Middle Eastern aesthetics were valued and used to evoke wealth and status. Also, the legibility of the carpet's pattern as a common Turkish design suggests that, if it was not actually from Turkey itself, it nonetheless was strictly indebted to imported patterns and designs: Europeans

⁸⁷ See the extended discussion of the presence of Turkey carpets in the American colonies in Sarah B. Sherrill, "America and the Oriental Carpet: Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in Jere L. Bacharach and Irene A. Bierman, eds., *The Warp and Weft of Islam: Oriental Carpets and Weavings from Pacific Northwest Collections* (WA: The Henry Art Gallery, 1978).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

were not adapting Turkish techniques and blending them with their own aesthetic ideas, but copying over wholesale both method and design. In this way these carpets functioned differently than trade goods such as calico, which became increasingly a hybrid of Indian and European design influences. The very exoticism of Turkish designs was evidently a significant element of their value, and it was this rich and recognizable aesthetic that was part of what made them such potent status symbols.

In addition, the other cultural influence that this carpet evokes by its presence within the portrait is Dutch. Perhaps the most emblematic use of Turkey carpets in art is in Dutch genre painting of the seventeenth century (see for example fig. 12).⁸⁹ Thus the presence of the carpet in this woman's portrait brings with it a two-fold visual meaning, one that links it and her both to the East and to a specifically Dutch digestion of this Eastern aesthetic. Alongside this, it should be noted that this woman's portrait is the most clearly European-inspired example of New York limner painting, with little of the flatness or stiffness of modeling that is usual in these portraits.⁹⁰ (For a particularly noticeable example of this, compare the rendering of her hands to that in almost any other limner portrait.) It is clear that the artist was quite familiar with European painting styles, and had perhaps even had some training there.⁹¹ Clearly coming from a strong

⁸⁹ While these carpets were valued and displayed throughout Europe and throughout European painting of the era, nowhere were they more frequently represented than in Dutch genre painting, both powerful symbols of trade and practical household items. The Dutch also had trade connections to the Middle East, particularly Persia (modern-day Iran); see David W. Davies, *A Primer of Dutch Seventeenth Century Overseas Trade* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961).

⁹⁰ For discussion of this distinctively folk-artistic style and its inspirations, see John Vlach, *Plain Painters: Making Sense of American Folk Art* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988). While Vlach argues that this style was not necessarily "naïve" or less proficient, it nonetheless was not in line with the European artistic modes of the era.

⁹¹ Though this would discount the work's current attribution to Duyckinck; for other difficulties with this attribution see Wendy A. Cooper, *An American Vision: Henry Francis du Pont's Winterthur Museum* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2002), 190.

artistic background, the idea that the artist's evocation of Dutch genre painting was intentional rather than incidental seems reasonably high.

Reflecting the rarity of painted representations of Turkey carpets, only two women's inventories include mentions of them. Margrieta Van Varick owned three such carpets, specified by their comparative value: one is listed as "the biggest and finist," one as "the second finist," and one has no such description, making it presumably the least-fine.⁹² Though once again Van Varick's abnormally large collection of import items would seem to be explained by her travels and her close connections to Dutch trade networks, it is interesting to note that all three of these carpets are described as "turkey-work," a phrase usually denoting European replicas of Middle Eastern rugs. It is unclear, then, where these rugs originated. Van Varick did have other material connections to the Middle East, however: among her possessions are several pieces of "arabian" money, as well as a "Morish tobacco pipe,"⁹³ the only objects in New York women's inventories outside of Turkey carpets themselves that suggest Middle Eastern origins or, at the very least, stylistic influences. Thus it is tempting to say that Van Varick's carpets were of true Middle Eastern origin, and either the phrase "turkey-work" was used loosely or her inventory-takers, only familiar with European-made rugs, could not tell the difference.

The question of inventory-takers' precise knowledge and categorization comes up again when looking at the other woman's inventory to include a Turkey carpet, that of Gertruy Van Cortlandt. She is listed as owning one such carpet, located in her parlor (along with her blue and white calico curtains, discussed above).⁹⁴ This suggests it was a prized display piece, meant to be shown off to guests. It's also valued together with a total of nineteen chairs, and is listed directly

⁹² Krohn and Miller, eds., *Dutch New York*, 344.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 343-344.

⁹⁴ Piwonka, "New York Colonial Inventories," 74.

after an entry that includes "1 large oak table"; though this could indicate that it was spread on the floor beneath the table and chairs, its apparently prized status and common carpet usage of the time would seem to argue that it was draped over the table rather than laid out on the floor. As in Van Varick's case, it is difficult to know whether Van Cortlandt's carpet were truly Turkish or was instead a European copy; while her inventory lists it as a regular "Turkey carpet," and not turkey-work, it's unclear what that truly tells us about its origins. Wherever it was made, however, it shows a clear valuation on Van Cortlandt's part of Middle Eastern aesthetics and their ability to connote wealth and status.

The descriptor "Turkey-work" was used in a one other woman's inventory, though in this case to describe seating furniture rather than carpet. In 1708, Mrs. Rombouts owned "1 old turkey work couch wth two Chairs" alongside another "old turkey work" chair.⁹⁵ These pieces of furniture would have consisted of a wood frame whose seat and back panel were upholstered with heavy fabric, made in the same manner as replica Turkey carpets and with similar patterning, hence their name (see for example fig. 13). Turkey-work furniture was fashionable particularly in England in the mid- to late seventeenth century, and several examples survive with American provenances.⁹⁶ In all of these examples, the English turkey-work is mounted on chair frames made from American woods, indicating that colonists would buy lengths or pieces of turkey-work imported from England, and then have chairs or couches built to fit this upholstery; we can assume this is what Rombouts did as well.⁹⁷ This mix of components makes these pieces of furniture intriguingly hybrid: Turkish designs copied and displayed on English-

⁹⁵ Inventory of Mrs. Rombouts, NYPL.

⁹⁶ See fig. 13 and Margaret Swain, "The Turkey-work Chairs of Holyroodhouse," in Edward S. Cooke, Jr., ed., *Upholstery in America and Europe from the Seventeenth Century to World War I* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1987) for these American examples.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 59-60.

style chairs, which in turn were recreated in specifically American materials. In many ways, then, they serve as a literal and material representation of the often more intellectual processes that were at work in the creation of most if not all the items discussed here, melding together aesthetic, methodological, and material influences from multiple continents to produce a coherent and meaningful object.



Figure 12. A Maid Asleep, Johannes Vermeer, c. 1656-1657
Metropolitan Museum of Art, 14.40.611



Figure 13. Turkey work-upholstered side chair, c. 1660-1690
Metropolitan Museum of Art, 52.77.51

V. Books

To some extent any entry in an inventory or object in a portrait can be read for clues to interior lives. Many of the object analyzed above can be seen as indicating cultural identity, for example, or a certain global mindset seen through an array of trade goods. Some objects, however, naturally lend themselves to this task, and books in particular gesture towards a life of the mind. Though inventory-takers seldom recorded specific book titles, and a relatively small overall proportion of women's portraits include depictions of books, the evidence that has survived nonetheless displays the ways in which books played crucial roles in both the interior ideas and beliefs and the outward communities and class standings of women in colonial New York. On an intellectual level as well as a material one, then, books reveal their owners' cerebral and social lives in a way inaccessible through most other material culture.

Books were relatively common objects in the types of women's households that were inventoried: of the women's inventories that survive, half list at least one book owned by their subject. Of those women who owned books, they were likely to own multiple: just three women owned only one book, in two cases a Bible, in one case a book of psalms.⁹⁸ A further six women owned only two or three books, while three more have books listed as a unit without noting the exact number. The greatest number owned by any one woman belonged to, perhaps at this point unsurprisingly, Margrieta Van Varick, who owned eighty-seven books which were counted, as well as a "parcel" of others.⁹⁹ While this is decidedly the largest collection recorded, there were other women with significant holdings: Catharine Phillipse owned fifty-two books in total, for

⁹⁸ Inventories of Elizabeth Partridge and Alice Cox, both in the *New York, Estate Inventories and Accounts, 1666-1822* database, accessed via Ancestry.com; original housed in the New York State Library's archives, and inventory of Mrs. Rombouts. Mrs. Rombouts's inventory has another listing for "1 Desk wth books & papers," but it's unclear whether these refer to account books or printed books.

⁹⁹ Krohn and Miller, eds., *Dutch New York between East and West*, 346, 358.

instance, among which were two Bibles, four psalm books, one "Testament," one testament with psalms, and "one small Bible & testament."¹⁰⁰ Christina Cappoens owned twenty-five books, the only one listed with any specificity a "churchbooke Wth: silver claspes & Cheanes [chains],"¹⁰¹ while Maria Garretse owned nineteen, including a Dutch Bible and a psalm book.¹⁰² Gertye Splinter had a total of seventy-eight books in her house, if her stock of four testaments, fourteen psalters, fifty-two Dutch school books and one Dutch psalm book are counted from her shop; of the seven listed among her own personal goods, there was a Dutch Bible and testament, a psalm book, and four books listed as a group without individual titles.¹⁰³

Religious books were clearly prominent and important possessions, and this is supported by books' appearances within portraiture. There are four portraits of New York women that include books, and, by their elaborate and expensive decoration, three of these books appear to be religious—likely, in most cases, psalm books or personal prayer books rather than Bibles. Indeed, it is notable just how similar all three of these books are in appearance, and how closely they conform to descriptions in inventories; this is perhaps the one instance in which an inventory entry can be matched with some certainty and exactness to a representation of an object within a portrait. This indicates a cohesive overall aesthetic for these books, a material language of ostentatious piousness available to and embraced by wealthy women—in particular, wealthy Dutch women—throughout New York. Here especially we see the potential for these books to sit at a complex crossroads of meaning, a materialistic outward display of an intellectual and personal relationship to one's beliefs. That this appears to be a display particular to Dutch

¹⁰⁰ Inventory of Catharine Phillipse, NYSL/Ancestry, 1730.

¹⁰¹ Inventory of Christina Cappoens, NYSL/Ancestry, 1693, *New York, Estate Inventories and Accounts, 1666-1822* database, accessed via Ancestry.com; original housed in the New York State Library's archives.

¹⁰² Inventory of Maria Garretse, NYSL/Ancestry, 1749.

¹⁰³ Inventory of Gertye Splinter, 1722, *New York, Estate Inventories and Accounts, 1666-1822* database, accessed via Ancestry.com; original housed in the New York State Library's archives.

women emphasizes the complicated ways that culture, religion, and aesthetics combined to form particular currents of influence that strongly affected colonial New York.

Indeed, one of the most striking things about religious books within portraits is their decorative covers and accoutrements, including clasps and chains. Even the appearance of a book in a portrait that seems to particularly emphasize plainness and piousness includes these lavish touches, as seen in the earliest of these portraits, that of Elsie Rutgers Schuyler Vas, from 1723 (fig. 14). Forty-nine at the time her portrait was painted, Vas appears a loose-fitting robe and a distinctive and voluminous head-covering, called in Dutch a *kuif*. This would have been most often worn by widows and older women, and was likely a statement of her social status as a matron, as well as a statement of her stolid Dutch identity.¹⁰⁴ Thus, while this choice of garment necessarily suggests a preoccupation with appearance—as does almost any element of a formal portrait—the preoccupation it reveals is not with economic class per se but with social standing. Instead of displaying a social position based in wealth, as displayed via an array of luxury items, she displays a social position based in particular cultural expressions of status and seniority. Though these two facets of social positioning are often closely related in portraits' iconography, Vas's case clearly divides the two, emphasizing her Dutch cultural identity and social status as a matron but entirely foregoing any object—jewelry, expensive cloth, a fan or other accessory—that would link this status to material wealth. The only thing that shows an indication of this kind of wealth is the book by her side, decorated with gold—and, of course, the existence of the portrait itself.

¹⁰⁴ Tamms K. Groft and Mary Alice McKay, eds., *Albany Institute of History & Art: 200 Years of Collecting* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1998), 48. She actually has two head coverings on: the *kuif* is tied over a more delicate cap, whose ruffles can be seen at the top of her head, while its gauzy pieces of trailing fabric, or lappets, frame her face and can be seen under the tail-ends of the *kuif*. This under-cap is nearly identical to head coverings seen in a couple of other New York portraits, all of older women; for a portrait with the closest visual relationship with Vas's, in terms of the dual *kuif* and cap, see the portrait of Tryntje Laurens Provoost in the New-York Historical Society collections (c. 1700-1710).

Vas had been born into a middling Dutch New York family, but had married into one of the most prominent families in the Hudson Valley, and for a time her husband, David Davidse Schuyler, had served as mayor of Albany.¹⁰⁵ After his death in 1715, she remarried, this time to Petrus Vas, a domine or minister of the Dutch Reformed Church in Kingston, New York.¹⁰⁶ This portrait was painted a year after her second marriage; within this context the seemingly religious nature of the book set beside her gains further depth of meaning, as is her overtly Dutch costume. The Dutch Reformed Church was perhaps the single most important cultural stronghold of the Dutch in New York; in particular, it preserved knowledge of the Dutch language, continuing to give sermons in Dutch throughout the Hudson Valley well into the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁷ Thus, it would be unsurprising that the wife of a leader of this institution would have a vested interest in putting forth an image of herself that was clearly and legibly Dutch, both in her everyday life and, especially, in what was almost certainly the only representation of her ever recorded. Her status at the point this portrait was painted was tied inextricably to the Dutch Reformed Church and, therefore, to a particularly staunch and conservative form of Dutch identity itself.¹⁰⁸ The inclusion of the book thus helps to give greater context to the overall symbolism of the portrait, while this context in turn gives us greater information about the book itself, seemingly confirming its religious subject matter as well as strongly indicating that it would have been written in Dutch.

¹⁰⁵ See "Elsie Rutgers Schuyler (Mrs. Petrus) Vas (1674-after 1752)," Albany Institute of History & Art Online Collections, <https://www.albanyinstitute.org/details/items/elsie-rutgers-schuyler-mrs-petrus-vas-1674-after-1752.html>.

¹⁰⁶ Groft and McKay, eds. *Albany Institute of History & Art*, 46.

¹⁰⁷ Roderic H. Blackburn and Ruth Piwonka, eds., *Remembrance of Patria: Dutch Arts and Culture in Colonial America, 1609-1776* (New York: The Albany Institute of History and Art, 1988), 49-50.

¹⁰⁸ This is unlike, as far as is known, any other subject of a New York limner portrait: church officials and their wives do not appear to have often commissioned portraits of themselves. (This is in contrast to inventories: several women who were widows of religious leaders were inventoried and often had fairly lavish possessions, such as Tryntie Arents and, most notably, Margrieta Van Varick.)

If this is in fact the case, it would have also been an import good, albeit of a different type than those discussed in the previous sections. Even English books were almost certainly printed in England rather than the colonies. New York, like the other North American colonies, did not have the capacity to print enough books to keep up with colonial consumers' demands, and for most of its colonial history it did not even try: colonial customers wanted a relatively small number of a wide range of titles, making it more economical to import titles from London than print them on colonial presses.¹⁰⁹ Though there was an active printer in New York City beginning in 1693, he printed almost entirely government records and documents (though he did print a run of *The Book of Common Prayer*, which he lost money on).¹¹⁰ There were also London patents in place for the printing of certain books, in particular Bibles, that ensured that all examples seen in inventories would have without a doubt come from England, either along with their owners or imported later.¹¹¹ Books of almost any type, then, were not only intellectual but material links to Europe for American colonists.

This was true to an even greater extent for Dutch-language books. There does not appear to have ever been a printing press established in Dutch New York, and so all Dutch books would have come from the Netherlands: this remained true even well after English takeover, and there was evidently an active market for imported Dutch Bibles until at least the 1750s.¹¹² Certainly, for all that there is generally a dearth of description within inventories, a number of inventory-takers noted when the religious books they took especial note of were in Dutch. The earliest of these was Tryntie Arents's 1696 inventory, a woman who like Elsie Vas was married to a

¹⁰⁹ James N. Green, "The Book Trade in the Middle Colonies, 1680-1720," in David D. Hall and Hugh Amory, eds., *A History of the Book in America: Volume 1, The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 218.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 211-212; 214.

¹¹¹ James Raven, "The Importation of Books in the Eighteenth Century," in Hall and Amory, eds., *A History of the Book in America*, 187.

¹¹² Blackburn and Piwonka, *Remembrance of Patria*, 177.

prominent religious leader—indeed, Arents's inventory takes particular note of the fact that she was the widow of New York City's late Lutheran minister, the kind of personal detail rarely mentioned in inventories' formulaic introductory language.¹¹³ Her Dutch Bible was one of only three books in her inventory, the other two being psalm books with silver clasps, which likely looked something like Vas's gold-clasped book; these were almost certainly also in Dutch, though are not listed as such, highlighting how dependent descriptive information was on the whim of the describer.¹¹⁴

The overall inconsistency in the appearance of books described as "Dutch" in women's inventories is certainly dependent on individual inventory-takers, but it also suggests possible shifts in how common these books were, and thus how worthy of note. This is underscored by the relative dearth of religious books described as "Dutch" early in the era covered by these inventories. After Arents, the next is in 1708—Mrs. Rombouts's "Dutch Psalm"—before there is a cluster of them in Gertye Splinter's 1722 inventory, a "large Dutch Bible" in Gertruy Van Cortlandt's inventory two years later, and finally another "Large dutch bybel" among Maria Garretse's belongings in 1749. Among Splinter's personal goods is a "Dutch testament" and, like many other women, an "old large Dutch Bible": the similarity of these descriptions is perhaps notable, given the irregularities in descriptions noted earlier. The descriptor also has an easily identifiable source: Dutch Bibles tended to be relatively massive, one surviving example measuring four inches thick and more than sixteen inches tall.¹¹⁵ These consistent descriptors of difference—not only in a foreign language but also of unexpected size—and the sparsity of these

¹¹³ This was Bernhardus Arensius, who had served as the Lutheran church's minister for twenty years before his death in 1691 (and who, like many Dutch religious men, used a Latinized version of his surname). See Peter Deebrach, "A Time-line of St. Matthew," *Evangelical Lutheran Church of St. Matthew*, <http://www.stmatthewnyc.org/about/st-matthews-history/a-time-line-of-st-matthew/>.

¹¹⁴ Inventory of Tryntie Arents, *New York, Estate Inventories and Accounts, 1666-1822* database, accessed via Ancestry.com; original housed in the New York State Library's archives.

¹¹⁵ Blackburn and Piwonka, *Remembrance of Patria*, 177.

descriptors in earlier inventories suggests that these books became less common and thus more worthy of remark as time went on. Whereas earlier women whose religious books were almost certainly in Dutch, such as Christina Cappaens, accumulated neither of these descriptors, as time went on, and as the English language and more standardized book sizes became the norm, Dutch women's religious tomes became increasingly odd and worthy of remark.

Even in an earlier era, however, there were some elements of these religious books which were deemed notable across the board, most particularly the often lavish decoration they sported. Silver and occasionally gold clasps, as well as occasionally chains, were the most commonly noted. Vas's portrait gives a visual example of what these books could have looked like; an even more detailed and elaborate example is shown in the 1734 portrait of Catherine Van Cortlandt Johnston (fig. 15). Johnston's portrait portrays a very different overall image than Vas's, with her silk gown, necklace of jet beads and intricately worked gold earrings, and uncovered head; her book follows along with this, and in addition to two clasps it has finely wrought corner decorations and a short chain attached to it, all in silver. In addition, while it is small in size, it's quite thick (and generally of different dimensions than Vas's); it seems possible that Johnston's book is a small Bible, though given the usual dimensions of Dutch Bibles it may more likely be a psalter or prayer book (or "church book"). It might also, of course, be an English Bible: much less is known about Johnston, but she does not appear to have the overwhelming cultural and religious ties that Vas had to the Dutch Reformed Church. Though born into one of the premier Dutch families in the Hudson Valley, she appears to have married an Englishman, judging by her surname, and it's unclear what religious denomination she would've belonged to as a married woman. That said, her book conforms aesthetically to books listed almost exclusively in Dutch women's inventories, and given the social status of her birth family and the cultural hold of the

Dutch Reformed Church over the Hudson Valley, it seems most likely that she would have retained close ties to the Reformed Church and to her Dutch heritage.

Indeed, Johnston appears to have more of a relationship with the book itself, at least spatially, compared to the other examples of religious books in women's portraiture. Instead of having it set off to the side, she holds it in her hand, suggesting a greater connection between sitter and object. It also makes the book seem less like something to fill space and more like an integral part of the portrait itself; it would have been significantly easier not to include the book in the painting, suggesting a specific impetus to put it there. Though Johnston's book is the most decorative and therefore the most tempting to read as a material object and show of wealth, rather than for its personal or intellectual value, its positioning within the portrait in many ways complicates this reading. While it certainly serves as a status symbol and a display of wealth, the visual language of the portrait conveys a meaning that goes above and beyond this more straightforward reading of the object's presence.

A seemingly clearer portrayal of a book as a material status symbol appears in the third portrait portraying a woman with a book, of an unknown nineteen-year-old (fig. 16). The book itself looks quite similar to Vas's, though the clasps are silver rather than gold, and there is an extra set of silver mounts with small rings attached to them—presumably for connecting a chain to, as it is in Johnston's portrait. This presumably religious book—like Vas's, it seems likely to be a prayer book or psalter—at first appears out of place among the other material culture in this portrait. The large fan the woman holds, her pearl necklace, her patterned sash, and the lace on her cuffs and neckline all read more straightforwardly as markers of refinement and at least some small amount of luxury. Within the material context of the painting, therefore, the book seems much more legible as a symbol of wealth and status rather than of pious religious feeling. Its

position, like that of the book in Vas's portrait, is that of an ornament or set piece, without the direct relationship to the sitter that is shown in Johnston's portrait: as in the case of Vas's portrait, then, its particular meaning in relation to the subject can be best understood by drawing upon the other material culture of the portrait and how the book fits within this context. Though its more objective potential meanings—religious belief, literacy and the valuation thereof—are certainly present as well, its value as a decorative object and status symbol appears foremost. The portrait of the unidentified woman uses her book, then, seemingly at once as a symbol of piety, literacy, and wealth, situating the book at a complex intersection of meanings.

The final portrait of this group in many ways stands apart from the others; nonetheless, it reinforces many of the same themes. The late 1730s portrait of Magdalena Douw shows her holding a book, her finger marking her place as she looks to the viewer (fig. 17). It is the only example of a book in a woman's portrait that does not appear to be religious in content, though it is not clear what type of book it might be; it has an unmarked, vivid-red cover, and is quite small, likely indicating that it was meant more for private reading than for display. This is another element that makes it an intriguing addition to this group of portraits: while the other books discussed here seem to have been meant for display in the women's lives as well as their portraits, Douw's book appears to be a more private object that is displayed in her portrait less as a mark of wealth or status than as an insight into her personal life. Douw's portrait overall has a spontaneity to it, which is rare among the often stiffly-posed limner portraits; nonetheless, the book's cover is carefully color-coordinated to other elements of the portrait, like her shoes and details of her gown. So, while her relationship with the book within the portrait is charmingly candid, compared to other portraits examined here, and the non-religious reading material opens up new paths of inquiry, it should be seen as in many ways congruent with the other examples of

women's books in portraiture: a carefully choreographed element of a larger whole, and one that was meant to convey and document particularities of a woman's self and image. Neither religious nor expensive, and shown not only held by but actively interacted with by Douw—her thumb marking her place—Douw's book appears to indicate, more than any of the other portraits looked at here, that its owner simply liked to read.

Douw's portrait overall also perhaps indicates a greater shift in cultural values and aesthetics that her book hints at. Though not significantly later than the other portraits discussed here—it appears to be contemporaneous with or only a few years later than the portrait of the unknown woman, and is only about fifteen years later than Vas's—it portrays a distinctly different image of its subject compared to other limner portraits of women. Douw was, like many portrait subjects, a member of a network of old and prosperous Hudson Valley Dutch families, but her portrait shows a complicated mixture of old and new, traditional and fashionable, and to some extent Dutch and English.¹¹⁶ Her gown is of the emerging *robe à la française* style, made with elaborately patterned and fashionable damask silk that would have been made in London, and she wears an elaborate pearl necklace.¹¹⁷ However, she also wears a cap, a rarity in the stylized limner portraits and something that seems to represent modesty and practicality, as well as bright red shoes, a common feature of full-length portraits of Dutch New York girls.¹¹⁸ These

¹¹⁶ Her mother was a Van Rensselaer, linking her directly with the preeminent Dutch family dynasty of the colonial era; the Douws themselves were also prominent, and her brother would serve as mayor of Albany. Her 1740 marriage to Harme Gansevoort would also help to enmesh her even more directly in Hudson Valley Dutch family connections. Robert G. Wheeler, "The Albany of Magdalena Douw," *Winterthur Portfolio*, vol. 4 (1968), 63-74. For more on Douw's extended family and the society she lived in, see Alice P. Kenney, *The Gansevoorts of Albany: Dutch Patricians in the Upper Hudson Valley* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1969).

¹¹⁷ Damask was also made in France, but this would've had to have been smuggled into British New York, and so it seems significantly more likely that the fabric came from London, where the Spitalfields silk industry produced large amounts of high-quality patterned damask like that shown here.

¹¹⁸ The women who usually wear head coverings in New York limner portraits are middle-aged or elderly women, which Douw, who would've been nineteen in 1737, certainly was not. The only exception to this I know of is the portrait of the fourteen-year-old Catalyntje Post, one of the few limner portraits dated later than Douw's (c. 1747), in the National Gallery, D.C. For examples of portraits showing Dutch girls wearing red shoes, see the portrait of Susanna Truax (discussed above), and the portraits of Sara Gansevoort (c. 1720) and Christina Ten Broeck (1720) in

contrasting modes of dress seem to elucidate a tension between sophistication and childhood modesty, as well as imported English styles and fashion statements more particular to Dutch New York. Overall, it displays an image of Douw that departs from previous portraits of women, and perhaps shows the beginnings of a shift that would be taken up by the more formally-trained artists who painted depictions of New York's wealthy residents beginning mid-century, the women usually depicted in similarly-styled silk gowns. Though Douw's portrait is still deeply entrenched in a limner style and tradition, these shifts in her dress seem to support the shift seen in the depiction of her book: though she comes from the same cultural background as Vas and Johnston (and seemingly the unknown woman as well), the expression of her image no longer entrenched in the same visual and material language. While the portrait is interested in displaying similar values of literacy and status via book ownership, it is no longer necessary or perhaps just no longer as meaningful to express those values through a specifically religious—and, crucially, particularly Dutch—book. Douw's Dutch identity, though maintained by her lifelong residence in the Hudson Valley and her marriage into a family as strongly Dutch as her own, did not necessarily subscribe to the kinds of material signifiers that appeared as such potent symbols in her fellow Dutchwomen's portraits.

As discussed above, the type of religious book shown in the majority of these paintings conform to a type mentioned with some regularity in inventories. Cappoens's church book has already been discussed; in 1694 Tietje Lypsen had an old Bible with silver clasps, while two years later, in addition to her Dutch Bible, Trytie Arents owned two psalm books, also with silver clasps. Along with her own Dutch Bible, Gertye Splinter's Dutch Testament had silver

the Albany Institute of History and Art. Deborah Glen's portrait, discussed above, also shows her wearing red shoes, which seems to be the only portrait besides Douw's that shows a young woman, rather than a toddler, wearing the style.

clasps, as well, as did her "small Psalm Book," and in 1730, Catherine Phillipse owned "one small Bible & testament with Silver Clasps" and two "Psalm books with Two Silver Clasps." It is worth noting that women often had more religious books listed than just those with silver, indicating that these silver-decorated versions were by no means ubiquitous, or the default for religious books in the era: possessing one or several of these books was a choice and one inherently tied to wealth and status. It is unclear how they may have been used differently than other religious books but, going along with how they are depicted within portraits, they may have been meant for display, either within the home (particularly in the case of Bibles), at church (particularly in the case of small and more portable prayer books), or both.

Despite religious books' frequent appearance and special treatment within inventories, however, it should be noted that it is unclear whether they were actually numerically the most common. Collection of books in a women's homes tended to be lumped together as a single listing, without any details given about their titles, contents, or even physical descriptions, making them difficult to analyze. Indeed, it is ironically the smaller book collections which yield the most information about the specific titles and subjects New York women owned and read about: in the very specificity of these few titles lies the greater portion of their value. Here we get a unique look into what subjects and ideas this small selection of women valued enough to own a book about—women, moreover, who owned only a very small number of books at all. Only three inventories list specific books that aren't religious texts, for a total of only four titles (most of which are not, in fact, direct titles at all).

Margaret Duncan's 1703 New York City inventory is unusually exhaustive: written in a neat, clear hand, it carefully details Duncan's modest collection of possessions. This care extends to the notation of Duncan's two books, "1 Quarto Bible" and "1 Small book of James Nailors

writing," the latter worth just nine pence.¹¹⁹ Though Duncan left little record outside her inventory, this detail alone gives significant insight into her life. James Nayler was an early Quaker leader, which strongly indicates that Duncan herself was a Quaker, as well. In addition, that she owned one of Nayler's books (he published several that this entry could refer to¹²⁰) gives us more information than a more straightforward note on her religion could: Nayler had split from Quakerism's founder, George Fox, shortly after converting, and had been branded and imprisoned for blasphemy.¹²¹ Thus, even without knowing the exact collection of writings Duncan owned and even with this facile explanation of Nayler's place in the at this point extremely short history of Quakerism, we learn not only Duncan's religion but which elements of it she valued enough to obtain and keep a book of writings about. Duncan's case, then, highlights in particular both the extraordinary value of listings like hers as well as the vast amount of information that is missing about women whose books are not detailed in this way.

When Margareta Schuyler died in Albany in 1711 she owned three books: "1 Testament with silver clasps in a box," "1 book in folio Calvins Institutes," and a "history of the Netherlands."¹²² Here we have one of the very few inventory entries that can actually lead us to a specific book: John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, originally published in Latin in 1536. (This seems likely to be the Dutch translation, which first appeared in 1560.)¹²³ Schuyler belonged to one of the largest and wealthiest Dutch families in colonial New York, and even close to fifty years after the English takeover of the colony her inventory was recorded in Dutch,

¹¹⁹ Inventory of Margaret Duncan, *New York, Estate Inventories and Accounts, 1666-1822* database, accessed via Ancestry.com; original housed in the New York State Library's archives.

¹²⁰ A simple search of the Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO) database provides a plethora of collections and editions of his writing that Duncan could've owned.

¹²¹ William G. Bittle, *James Nayler, 1618-1660: The Quaker Indicted by Parliament* (York: William G. Sessions, 1986) 131-145.

¹²² Blackburn and Kelley, eds., *New World Dutch Studies*, 74. This inventory was taken down in Dutch, as was translated into English by Ruth Piwonka.

¹²³ John T. McNeill, ed., *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), v. 1, xl.

one of the very few surviving women's inventories to be so. Even without knowing that she owed a copy of the *Institutes* we could assume that she belonged to the staunchly Calvinist Dutch Reformed Church, which, as discussed above, was one of the strongest links between New York and the Netherlands both before and after the English takeover. However, her ownership of the book, like Margaret Duncan's ownership of James Nayler's writings, tells us more than just Schuyler's religion. Again like Duncan, the *Institutes* among Schuyler's belongings indicates her relationship to her religion. Beyond fairly standard religious texts like the testament listed or a Bible—curiously absent from her inventory—Calvin's book indicates an intense and highly literate relationship between Schuyler and her religious beliefs. Though this is certainly conveyed simply by the presence of Bibles, prayer books, and other more formal religious texts as well, Duncan and Schuyler's ownership of books that fell outside these bounds expresses something deeper, an intellectual relationship between themselves and their religion mediated by scholarship and philosophy.

Calvin's presence in Schuyler's home also shows her close connection to her Dutch heritage, via the Dutch Reformed Church, something indicated to an even greater extent by her book on the history of the Netherlands. Schuyler, who was born and grew up in the Netherlands, and who lived until middle age in Dutch New York, thus had not only a strong cultural connection to her homeland but an intellectual one as well, both pious and secular. Her history of the Netherlands is in fact the only secular book which is specifically mentioned in a woman's inventory, and is an intriguingly particular object, so obviously imbued with meaning and clues to Schuyler's identity. Once again, as with Duncan's collection of Nayler's writing, the value of this entry highlights how much is missing in so many other women's listings of "parcels of books" without further specification.

It is not until Margaret Ten Broeck's 1778 Albany inventory that another entry lists a book in any detail, "a book licht du Waerhigt."¹²⁴ The title translates to "light of truth" in both Dutch and German, and almost certainly refers to a book published in 1706 by Christian Weise bearing the same name.¹²⁵ Though the book in question was written in German, the similarities between the two languages mean that if Ten Broeck was fluent in Dutch she could've likely deciphered it; it may also suggest, however, that she was fluent in German as well. Like Duncan's Nayler and Schuyler's Calvin, this book in Ten Broeck's inventory elucidates a relationship between her and her religious beliefs that took on a different dynamic than that expressed by women who owned only standard religious texts: these three books in these three women's possession would suggest that their religious beliefs were deeply held and grappled with, their respective religions—Duncan's radical Quakerism and Schuyler and Ten Broeck's staunch Calvinism—more to them than social rituals or cultural ties. These women's intellectual relationship to their religious beliefs, expressed through their book ownership, is thrown into even higher relief when it is remembered that these books made up a substantial part of these women's extremely small libraries: indeed, in Ten Broeck's case it was the only book she was listed as owning.

¹²⁴ Inventory of Margaret Ten Broeck.

¹²⁵ My thanks to Dr. Scott Nelson for suggesting Weise's authorship.



Figure 14. Elsie Rutgers Schuyler Vas, attributed to Gerardus Duyckinck, 1723
Albany Institute of History and Art, 1957.104



Figure 15. Catherine Van Cortlandt Johnston, attributed to John Heaton, 1734
Albany Institute of History and Art, 1984.2



Figure 16. Young Lady with a Fan, attributed to Pieter Vanderlyn, 1737
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 1980.61.5



Figure 17. Magdalena Douw Gansevoort, attributed to John Heaton, c. 1737-1740
Winterthur Museum, 1963.0852 A

VI. Conclusion

Women in colonial New York chose and displayed the goods in their possession in order to say something about themselves. Often, they were conveying information about their wealth and status; simultaneously, however, they were communicating information about what they found beautiful or pleasing. It is this combined sensibility that New York women developed under the influence of but separately from their European and colonial American peers, utilizing their exposure to and ability to procure with relative ease goods from across the globe, via multiple networks of trade and taste, to allow them to develop unique collections of goods particular to their time and place. This curation of these goods was dependent on trade networks, but equally dependent on the women's decision-making and the choices they made between the large number of goods at their disposal; their curation of their households created a new whole out of various streams of influence. In some cases it went even further than this, and New York women created demand for specific import goods that were molded specifically to their own tastes, as in the case of the blue-and-white Hudson Valley calico. This is, then, perhaps the most advanced form of something which can be traced throughout all the inventories and portraits mentioned here: the development of a unique New York—a unique American—sense of taste.

This taste-formation would develop and morph further in the Revolutionary era and the Early Republic, and occur well beyond New York's borders. Newly-minted citizens of the United States would use import goods—including several discussed here, particularly imported fabric and, of course, tea—to make strong statements about their identity, and women would be at the forefront of these efforts.¹²⁶ While in the lead-up to the Revolutionary War these statements

¹²⁶ See for example Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Knopf, 2001) as well as Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980) for discussions of women's roles in boycotting and substituting for import goods in the Revolutionary era. David Jaffee locates the

would be made by refusal rather than consumption of these goods, and by avoidance of rather than participation in global trade routes, the continued centrality and symbolism of trade goods within the development of an American identity is striking. The meanings imbued in imported objects remained potent and indeed fraught, a match point for developing ideas of connection with and difference from other parts of a rapidly expanding globe: in short, for the development of an identity. This continuity is striking, but by dating its inception to the Revolutionary or Early Republic periods, the very connection it displays is lost: identity-formation through material culture appears to have sprung up along with the new country, belying the rich colonial history that imbued certain objects with value and meaning and created a potent material world for the Revolutionary generation to harness and transform.

Those women who lived in colonial New York with the freedom and the wealth to choose their own possessions serve as an important early step in this identity-development. Though they likely did not think of themselves as Americans per se, they would have been aware of themselves as colonial residents within a unique milieu, heavily influenced by their European parent countries but no longer of them, sharing similarities with their surrounding colonies and yet notably different from them. And they certainly understood the power of the objects they chose, as well as the power of the choice itself. Given this chance to adorn their lives and craft an image of themselves from the array of import goods they purchased, they embraced the opportunity and created collections and indeed whole new styles in order to best express themselves through their possessions. The records that have survived of these singular collections of goods testify to the power of these objects, the importance of global trade, and,

sea-change in Americans' material lives even later in the 1830s; see David Jaffee, *A New Nation of Goods: The Material Culture of Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

most of all, to the vision and taste of the women who curated them into meaningful reflections and representations of their lives.

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