Who was the first Dutch consul after the formation of the Republic of the United Provinces in the late sixteenth century? This seemingly simple question is more complicated than it may appear at first glance. To answer, we first need to specify what we mean by ‘Dutch’ and ‘consul’, both of which are problematic terms in a late sixteenth-century context. ‘Dutch’, of course, applies to the rebels who rose up in revolt against their overlord Philip II, the King of Spain. Yet there is some question as to whether we can justifiably speak of ‘the Netherlands’, in the sense of an independent, internationally recognized nation or state, in the Republic’s earliest days. Moreover, within the body of international law that would coalesce in the centuries that followed, a sharp distinction was to develop between diplomatic representatives (who looked after political interests) and consular representatives (who looked after economic and social interests). In the late sixteenth century, however, it seems highly doubtful whether this distinction was observed by the many ‘agents’, ‘envoys’, ‘commissioners’, ‘consuls’, ‘ambassadors’, ‘deputies’ and ‘correspondents’ sent out by the young Republic.¹

We do know, however, that in order to survive, the Republic was compelled to establish relations with other countries, especially those seen as potential allies in the war of independence against Spain. Initially, this meant France and England. In the first phase of the Eighty Years’ War, the Dutch representatives generally operated as part of delegations, with strictly defined (and often quite limited) diplomatic powers and without permanent residence in the country in question. They rarely engaged in consular tasks. An exception was a certain Antoine de Sailly, who was empowered by the States General

¹ For more on the development of this distinction in international law, see J. de Louter, Het stellig volkenrecht, vol. II (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1910), pp. 1–91.
of the Netherlands in 1588 or 1590 to conduct official correspondence with the local authorities of the French port of Calais. He might well have been the first Dutch ‘consul’, if not for the fact that his official title was ‘agent’.2

The designation ‘consul’ was bestowed on the Dordrecht trader Arnoul de la Valee, who was stationed in Aleppo in the Ottoman Empire in 1607. However, he did not receive his consular commission from the States General, but from a group of Dutch merchants who traded with Syria. He was thus a consul in private service. In general, the development of Dutch trade in the Mediterranean region around 1600 was a significant spur to the appointment of new representatives of the Republic who were more specialized in consular tasks. Here, too, for example in relations with the Barbary States of North Africa, the representatives’ duties also included some diplomatic tasks, but even then, the priority was promoting free trade and shipping, as with Pieter Coy, the Dutch agent in Morocco in 1605.3

After the conclusion of an official treaty, known as the capitulations, between the Ottoman Empire and the Republic in 1612, the division of responsibilities between the Dutch diplomatic and consular spheres grew better defined. Contact with the Sublime Porte, as the Ottoman government was known, was reserved exclusively for the Dutch diplomatic representative in Constantinople; responsibility for the Dutch trade federations that had begun springing up around Ottoman ports and towns was given to consular officials. For day-to-day matters, they were accountable to the orateur or ambassador in Constantinople, and their duties were precisely defined in the capitulations. During the tenure of the first Dutch diplomatic representative to the Ottoman court, Cornelis Haga, major Dutch consulates were established in Smyrna and Aleppo.4 The consuls there were given extensive legal and administrative powers over Dutch nationals residing in their jurisdiction.

2 For information on the composition of the consular service of the Republic of the United Provinces, the Batavian Republic and the Kingdom of Holland (as well as a general overview), see O. Schutte (ed.), Repertorium der Nederlandse vertegenwoordigers residerende in het buitenland, 1584–1810 (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1976); and for more on Antoine de Saltly, see Schutte, Repertorium der Nederlandse vertegenwoordigers residerende in het buitenland, pp. 60–61.
3 Schutte, Repertorium der Nederlandse vertegenwoordigers residerende in het buitenland, p. 381.