Performances of Peace, the topic of this volume, has been dealt with in the previous chapters with regard to the period of the Treaty of Utrecht itself. In this contribution, I will deal with the way this peace was commemorated 300 years later. The tercentennial, of which the conference ‘Performances of Peace’ was also a part, gave rise to debates both on its historical meaning and the political message for today. The tension between past and present in the celebration will be a major element of this article. A comparison with the jubilee of the other major peace treaty in early modern history, Westphalia, is easily made.\(^1\) In the previous chapter, Jane O. Newman deals with the tercentennial of the Peace of Westphalia in both France and Germany in the immediate post-war context.\(^2\) In 1998, half a century later, 350 years of Westphalia was commemorated in the two peace cities of Münster and Osnabrück, as well as in the Netherlands. For the celebration of the Treaty of Utrecht, Westphalia 1998 served as a source of inspiration, but was not followed as an example. A major difference was the relative obscurity of 1713 among a wider audience, whereas 1648 had been widely known for a long time. The challenge of commemorating an unknown event is one of the topics in this article. I participated in both the Westphalia and Utrecht commemorations, so, in a way, it will a personal account of the commemoration projects. The international exhibition ‘Peace Was Made Here’ is the central element. This exhibition was organized by museums in four cities that hosted negotiations leading to treaties in the framework of the Treaty of Utrecht: Utrecht, Madrid, Rastatt and Baden. Like Westphalia 1998, the peace cities of the past were the commemoration venues of today. I will analyse the concept of this exhibition (based on academic research), its organization and its tercentennial context.

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\(^{2}\) See chapter 14 in this volume.
Commemorating an Unknown Peace

During the celebrations in 2013 it was impossible to escape the peace of 300 years ago in Utrecht and its surroundings. By the autumn of 2013 most inhabitants and visitors of the city must have noticed the flags, posters, adds, TV programs or the large picture by the British photographer Red Saunders on the town hall, even if they had not participated in one of the numerous activities organized by the commemoration committee, the ‘Stichting Vrede van Utrecht’ (Foundation Peace of Utrecht). A decade earlier, the Peace of Utrecht was a historical event unknown in the Netherlands and even in Utrecht itself. The few people who had a clue often mixed it up with the Union of Utrecht of 1579. This ignorance of such an important event in the country where it took place, contrasted to the situation in Britain, where the Treaty of Utrecht had long been part of the well-known core of historical knowledge. In an episode of Monty Python’s Flying Circus, two miners in Wales get into an argument about whether the Treaty of Utrecht was concluded in 1713 or in 1714, causing a dangerous situation a mile underground. John Cleese and his companions must have taken it for granted that the Treaty of Utrecht was widely known among their audience in order for them to make a point with their sketch.

The reason for this difference in appreciation is quite obvious. For the Dutch the Union of Utrecht as the founding of their nation and the Peace of Münster as the international recognition of their independence were far more glorious than the Treaty of Utrecht. The negotiations in Utrecht were rather humiliating for the Dutch envoys and the final results disappointing. The phrase from the French ambassador Melchior de Polignac: ‘nous traiterons chez vous, de vous et sans vous’ expressed the superiority of the great powers and fed the fear of an Anglo-French deal excluding the smaller allies. In the Dutch collective memory this phrase was symbolic for all the negative connotations with 1713. The Treaty of Utrecht marked the end of the Golden Age and the role of the Dutch Republic as a great power. For in the nationalist view of the nineteenth century national independence and international recognition were far more glorious than the Peace of Utrecht.

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3 For an overview of the activities of the Tercentennial Foundation, both the preparations and the celebration in 2013, see: 9 jaar Stichting Vrede van Utrecht 2005–2013, ed. Lieke Hoitink and Petra Orthel (Utrecht: Stichting Vrede van Utrecht, 2013).