MARGERY CORBETT

The Dutch Mission to Peking in 1655

In 1669 John Ogilby, following the tradition established by the De Brys, had published by J. Macoch in London a one-volume collection of works as up to date as possible concerning China. Entitled *An Embassy sent by the East India Company of the United Provinces to the Grand Tartar Cham of Tartary or Emperour of China Delivered at Pekin, by Peter de Goyer and Jacob de Keyser. A° 1655*, it was foremost a translation of Johan Nieuhof’s *Het Gezantschap der Neerlandsche Oost-Indische Compagnie aen Den Grooten Tartarischen Cham, Den tegenwoordigen Keizer van China […]*, followed by a General Description of China, also from Nieuhof, *A Narrative of the Success of an Embassage sent by John Maatzuyker de Badem, General of Batavia […] Written by a Jesuite in those Parts*, and lastly [*…] an Appendix of several Remarks taken out of Father Athanasius Kircher.

The *Gezantschap* was edited by Hendrik Nieuhof, brother of Johan, and was published by Jacob van Meurs in Amsterdam in 1665. Ogilby employed Wenceslar Hollar to copy the engraved title-page in the Dutch edition which is by Nieuhof himself or someone in Van Meurs’s workshop, and indeed it served very well as a visual introduction to all the contents.1 (illus. 1.)

Johan Nieuhof was a steward of the Dutch East India Company, and, probably because he was known to be an accomplished draughtsman, he was chosen to accompany the Dutch embassy to the imperial court which together with embassies from the Mongols, the Tibetans and the South Tartars was received in Peking after a five-month journey from Canton. Their object was to obtain free trade throughout China. By permitting these delegations the emperor was breaking with the age-old policy of keeping foreigners out of China. In fact it had already been breached by Portuguese Jesuits and others of that Order who came as missionaries but were accepted because their more distinguished members brought to China the scientific knowledge of western thought. The English were excluded because ‘thirty years since they took 4 vessels containing salt, the Mandorin Prisoner and shot down a Fort’.2

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2 John Ogilby, *An Embassy […]* (The British Library, shelf-mark 152.i.3), p. 120.

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AN EMBASSY
Sent by the EAST-INDIA Company, of the
UNITED PROVINCES
to the
GRAND TARTAR CHAM or EMPEROR OF
CHINA
Delivered at PEKIN, by Peter de Groot, and
Jacob de Berge, 1655.