A Cabinet of Religious Curiosities

Theatricality and Performativity in Bernard Picart's Illustrations for the Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde (1723-1737)

Un cabinet de curiosités religieuses. Théâtralité et performativité dans les illustrations de Bernard Picart pour les Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde (1723-1737)

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Figure 1

Bernard Picart, *La CIRCONCISION des JUIFS PORTUGAIS,* 1722, engraving, 33,4 x 22 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

1 In the 1725 engraving entitled *La CIRCONCISION des JUIFS PORTUGAIS*, the exiled Parisian artist Bernard Picart depicts the moment just before the circumcision of a newborn (Fig. 1). Approximately twenty-five Portuguese Jews are assembled in a domestic seating room. The accompanying key beneath the engraving identifies important characters in the foreground and background, along with their respective roles. The child's father kneels beside his son, the godfather holds the boy, spreading his legs during the surgical operation, and a mohel, a Jew trained in the practice of *brit milah*, prepares to perform the circumcision at center stage. Another figure, possibly a rabbi or a family friend, stands on the right, holding a chalice. Several women are also visible in the foreground. Notably, a « NB. » in the key explains that these women are Christian, as « *les femmes Juives, n'assistant pas à cette Ceremonie* ». In a separate chamber in the background, two women and the child's godmother accompany the mother, who appears to be recovering from giving birth to her son, as this ceremony traditionally takes place on the eighth day after an infant's birth.

2 Picart created this intriguing study of the Jewish liturgical circumcision rite for the renowned *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde* (1723-1737). This lavishly illustrated collection was edited in Amsterdam by the Huguenot publisher Jean-Frédéric Bernard and comprised seven volumes on the devotional ceremonies, customs, and rituals of religions worldwide[1]. Praised for their ingenuity, these books aimed not only to collect and describe information about religious worshipping but also to analyze and compare specific religious ceremonies and customs. Bernard combined various stylistic characteristics from genres such as the encyclopedia, travelogue,

essay, and fine art compendium, providing readers with an equally instructive and pleasurable experience. Consequently, the *Cérémonies* enjoyed immense popularity and widespread distribution across Europe, thanks in no small part to the impressive engravings by Picart and his Amsterdam school[2]. These engravings not only contributed to the collection's contemporary acclaim but maintained its significance as a compendium for visualizing religious denominations well into the nineteenth and twentieth century. Correspondingly, previous research considered Picart's body of illustrations a « source of, and target for, social agency », to use Alfred Gell's terminology from his anthropological theory of art, *Art and Agency* (1998), in which he states that artworks should not solely be studied for their beauty or meaning but as actors in a network of social relationships[3]. Picart's engravings helped to shape a radical new and moderate light on the topic of religious diversity, which is why the *Cérémonies*' agency should be considered in religious and political terms.

3 In this article, however, we will explore how other factors also deliberately influenced readers' experiences of encountering Picart's illustrations in the *Cérémonies*. First, we argue that Picart and Bernard's book series should be contextualized within an ever-evolving consumer market, considering its dissemination as an early modern commodity. The Dutch economy in the early eighteenth century was characterized by a highly affective knowledge society, driven by a growing interest in cultural and religious diversity. Focusing on the specific case study of the Jewish circumcision, we will further contextualize Picart's engravings using a recently coined term in the field of early modern studies: *imagineering*, a concept that describes an artistic shift in representational modes over the course of the seventeenth century. As recent studies have shown that Picart's illustrations were tools to evoke emotions and engage viewers actively, we will explore what may have caused their *agency* in the final part of this article. Attributing theatrical characteristics to both the source and its magnificent engravings, we argue that readers were encouraged to interact with the scenes depicted in a more involved and embodied manner. In essence, we will develop a performative conception of knowledge by demonstrating how Picart and Bernard employed theatrical strategies within an extra-theatrical medium in order to illustrate the emergence of a new form of *theatrical* knowledge production and dissemination in early modern Western Europe, one that *performatively* influenced how (religious) knowledge was spread, valued, and experienced.

Picart, Bernard, and the dissemination of religious knowledge

4 One recurring aspect that is emphasized time and again in previous research on the *Cérémonies*, is the pervasive element of comparison in Picart and Bernard's editorial approach[4]. In her 2005 article, « Bernard Picart and the Turn toward Modernity », Margaret Jacob characterizes the *Cérémonies* as an extraordinary work due to its status as one of the earliest naturalist accounts of world religions, foreshadowing what would become modern-day anthropology[5]. Like Jacob, Swiss ethnographer Paola Von Wyss-Giacosa argues in her 2006 doctoral dissertation, *Religiönsbilder der Frühen Aufklärung*, that Picart and Bernard's comparative method established a proto-anthropological approach to the study of religion in the early eighteenth century[6]. Their compilation of primary sources for the volumes reflected an ambitious phenomenological approach,

with both the editor and the engraver painstakingly gathering recently published works and reliable information.

5 Another important contribution to the historiography of the *Cérémonies* stems from Margaret Jacob, Lynn Hunt, and Wijnand Mijnhardt, who initiated a conference on the *Cérémonies*, which resulted in the publication of an edited volume, *Bernard Picart and the First Global Vision of Religion* (2010) and a monograph, *The Book That Changed Europe: Picart & Bernard's Religious Ceremonies of the World* (2010)[7]. In these studies, Hunt, Jacob, and Mijnhardt characterize the Dutch Republic, particularly Amsterdam, as a marketplace for religious ideas. They uncover the cosmopolitan network of French, Dutch, German, and English individuals with whom Picart and Bernard interacted. Among their acquaintances were some of the most important publishers and booksellers in Europe, all sharing a particular interest in the power of devotion. In an era of seemingly unending religious conflicts, they sought to examine the inner workings of religion. Rather than considering it a natural given defined solely by one's relationship to divinity, these thinkers began to view religion as a set of historically conditioned beliefs and ritual practices that could provide insights into human nature as a whole. Hence, Hunt, Jacob, and Mijnhardt demonstrate that Picart and Bernard aimed to challenge their audience with a radically new religious education that would upend traditional surveys and worldviews by stimulating religious toleration in Western Europe[8].

6 While the Dutch Republic may have been a safe haven for almost all religious denominations around the turn of the eighteenth century, quarrels about religion, especially on the freedom of worshipping, still prevailed in most European countries[9]. By stressing the resemblances between all forms of devotional practices in all religions and in all continents, Picart and Bernard would contribute to an international environment of respect and mutual comprehension. The authors of *The Book That Changed Europe* assign a major role to Picart's deliberate use of engravings, recognizing the *Cérémonies* as a precursor to Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*[10]. By drawing « *d'après nature* » and by relying on real-life models whenever possible, they notice that Picart tried to create a picture that would be as objectifiable as possible. For when he could not gain personal access to particular religious ceremonies, Picart drew from images available in liturgical booklets, witness accounts, or travelogues, depending on the geographical region he wanted to portray. Dutch prominence in the book trade made such images more accessible in cities like Amsterdam than anywhere else in the world[11].

7 Picart and Bernard's level of accuracy essentially earned the collection its label of credibility and authenticity, at least in theory. In contrast, Jacques Revel added a contested, yet significant point of view to this general understanding of the book series. In « The uses of comparison: Religions in the Early Eighteenth Century », he questions the existence of a single and stable use of comparison in the early modern period. Revel's text shows how early modern authors all engaged with comparative methods differently and thus operates as a warning for slipping into a retrospective and anachronistic view of unequivocal progress of the eighteenth-century comparative method that led to the emergence of contemporary scientific disciplines such as the history of religion and modern anthropology[12]. Rather than a single use of comparison, early modern artists employed a distinctive variety of *uses of comparison* to highlight religious diversity. Those who studied religion disagreed profoundly about both the

content and limits of their field of interest. Therefore, early modern uses of comparison functioned more as an argumentative device than as a fixed scientific instrument or method. Even within the single enterprise of the *Cérémonies*, neither Picart, nor Bernard made use of only one way to depict the rituals and customs of the world's religions. Their work is characterized by a great variety of strategies to represent the similarities and differences between religious ceremonies, depending on what the artists wanted to convey to their audience. Therefore, a completely neutral approach can neither be ascribed to the engraver's artistic strategies, nor to the editor's compilation of other sources. While earlier research by Von Wyss-Giacosa (2006) and Hunt, Jacob, and Mijnhardt (2010) argued their motives were mainly religious and political, we stress the importance of artistic factors too.

8 Picart and Bernard operated during a period that witnessed significant shifts in the valuation of knowledge. Particularly in the Dutch Republic, urban centers such as Amsterdam and The Hague transformed into knowledge hubs characterized by the large-scale production and distribution of knowledge. As argued by Inger Leemans and Anne Goldgar in their edited volume, *Early Modern Knowledge Societies as Affective Economies* (2020), this transformation resulted in the comprehensive commoditization of knowledge[13]. Learning, observation, intelligence, and education became reproducible goods, imbued with economic value. Key players in the affective knowledge market, including scholars, publishers, merchants, and entrepreneurs, sought to meet consumer interests by employing artistic strategies that established embodied forms of knowledge. This approach, in turn, contributed to the attribution of quality and the establishment of trust in new products[14]. However, the question arises: how did these various producers try to stimulate enthusiasm for knowledge products? This is where the term « affective » becomes relevant. Affect connects emotional responses to both the human body and the external world. Although emotions are often perceived as intense mental experiences, early modern emotional theory firmly connects the passions to bodily functions and the material contexts in which these bodies operated. Consequently, emotions can be regarded as *emotives*: they serve as performative means of communication[15]. By emphasizing the communicative and performative aspects of the early modern Dutch knowledge economy, the term « affective » illustrates how artistic objects had the power to influence people, transform situations, and exert agency.

9 Picart and Bernard's collection provides a great example of an early modern knowledge-turned-into-commodity-item. As their volumes wished to collect, describe, analyze, and compare all information about religious worshipping, both the editor and the engraver responded to an increasing market of supply and demand in which interest in other cultures, their ceremonies and customs, and their ways of life was on the rise. The project was invested with financial profit from the start. This already became apparent in Bernard's notice of the upcoming book series that was published in the *Journal des Sçavans* in January 1721[16]. The publisher was a great marketeer who tried to appeal to his audience on all possible aspects of the flourishing book market. In the advertisement, Bernard made sure to highlight the utmost care that would be taken during the production and distribution of the books. Stressing the use of a newly invented letter font as well as the most beautiful paper, he addresses the material aspects and lay-out of the enterprise[17]. He simultaneously assures his readership of the intellectual qualities of the volumes that will consist solely of curious and rare subjects that were treated before by renown authors to whom will be frequently referenced.

Bernard even puts an emphasis on the inclusion of entire dissertations from outstanding « *Savans* » that have slipped through the cracks of history for far too long. Yet, he also appeals to the audience's reading experience as he recalls including only those tracts that are limited in scope and prove to be of significant interest, not least in correspondence to the engravings by Picart and other skillful artisans[18]. For he explicitly mentions that he is confident that the public will receive the engravings favourably:

> Le Libraire s'engage aussi de son côté à ne donner au Public rien qui ne puisse lui être utile, & à ne faire engraver que des Figures instructives & nécessaires, don't le dessein soit beau & correct : car on se propose d'expliquer, & de donner une idée Claire des sujets qu'on traite, autant pour les moins que de satisfaire la vûë, qui ne laissera pas d'y trouver son compte[19].

10 Underlining the importance and mutual necessity of text and images, a dual focus on the informative and instructive nature of the engravings, as well as on their visual appeal, seems key to the production and distribution of the *Cérémonies* already in its initial announcement. To convince the readers of both the intellectual and attractive qualities of the upcoming work, some examples of pages and figures were exhibited at the bookseller's shop in the Kalverstraat, Bernard's home address[20]. From the start of their mutual endeavour in 1721, Bernard heavily relied on Picart's fame and status as a very popular engraver to set up a marketing campaign. Combining knowledge with artisticity, he was able to answer the public's increasing interest for cultural and religious peculiarities[21]. This shows how Bernard not only had religious or political motives. Instead, his project was a particular artistic endeavour too, for he knew how to respond to the affective knowledge economy that surrounded him.

« Imagineering » religious knowledge

11 In *Marketing Violence: The Affective Economy of Violent Imageries in the Dutch Republic* (2023), Frans-Willem Korsten, Inger Leemans, Cornelis van der Haven, and Karel Vanhaesebrouck argue that the affective knowledge economy we briefly described in the former section came with a baroque kind of image production :

> In the context of the early modern entrepôt market of images, the material production of images constituted collective forms of imagination that worked as a cultural technique producing distinct historical selves. This is not only a matter of engineering imaginations into materiality (prints, paintings, plays, staged spectacles); it is also a powerful cultural technique that defines how people find themselves affectively embodied in the world[22].

12 The cultural technique referred to here is described elsewhere as « imagineering », a term derived from the fusion of imagining and engineering[23]. The concept of « imagineering » encompasses the staple market of images shaped by a variety of market strategies, media technologies, as well as social and affective techniques in early modern image production and consumption. The early modern Dutch Republic stood out as one of the first states to transition into a modern capitalist society. Within this framework, it nurtured a cultural market that functioned akin to a *magazine de l'univers*, producing distributed maps, illustrated books, paintings, luxury objects and other visual materials across European markets and beyond[24]. Picart and Bernard's book series was also subject to the principles of 'imagineering'. In the preceding section, we demonstrated how Bernard effectively leveraged marketing strategies to

transform his books into valuable commodities. However, it is crucial to delve into the specific artistic strategies upon which he relied for this purpose. Additionally, we must explore the extent to which these were driven by media technologies, thus serving as social and affective techniques capable of exerting agency on an early modern audience.

13 In her 2021 article, « Visual Provocations », Paola von Wyss-Giacosa unravels one of Picart's most common artistic strategies in the series: the « con-visualisation » of images – that is, the engravings' sequence, size, style, adaptation, and placement within the overall pictorial programme of the volumes[25]. Von Wyss-Giacosa thereby argues that Picart's artistic conception offered « a many-layered, thought-provoking challenge to the public to see religious ceremonies as an anthropological constant, to compare, to ponder and to raise doubts, to recognise their universal aspects, the needs they fulfil, and the dangers this entails »[26]. However, as we argued in a previous article, Picart's artistic strategies were not limited to the « con-visualisation » of his own illustrations in the volumes. Following the example of Bernard's compilation of other sources, Picart made eager use of earlier designs too: « Taking up his spectators into a flurry of images that were circulating throughout and beyond the Dutch Republic and relying on a collage technique to assemble different details within one and the same engraving », Picart found a way to alter dominant and biased views on various religious ceremonies[27]. His use of a deliberate « collage technique » to assemble different details within one and the same engraving imprinted new conceptions of specific cultural practices that had an undeniable performative impact on the general perception of these corresponding religions. In the remainder of this section, we will consider the shared cultural archive on which the engraver relied to construct his representation of the Jewish circumcision. For this archive may indicate to what extent Picart's illustrations were driven by other media technologies that, in turn, served an affective purpose.

Figure 2

Johannes Leusden, *Circumcisio,* woodcut, 1657, 55,5 x 68,5 cm, Utrecht.
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14 Although there certainly was no abundance of earlier depictions that dealt with the Jewish circumcision – unless Biblical interpretations of the circumcision of Christ – Picart's composition does reminiscence a couple of engravings by one of his most competent contemporaries, amongst which are Johannes Leusden (1657), Romeyn de Hooghe (1665) and Jan Luyken (1683). The former's depiction least resembles Picart's image. It is a clear example of the widespread biased representation of Jewish ceremonial culture. As Richard Cohen has shown, even the least polemical and sympathetic of seventeenth-century representations of Jews – such as a depiction of a circumcision performed by a man in priestly vestments illustrating a book by Johannes Leusden (Fig. 2) – tend to interweave actual contemporary as well as archetypal biblical characteristics of Jews[28]. This resulted in an ingrained, constructed, imaginary, and therefore stereotypical representation of Judaism, rather than an accurate image of Amsterdam's Jewish population. On the contrary, Picart's depiction clearly stems from a more engaged involvement with the matter represented. Unlike the « Circumcisio » woodcut from Leusden's *Philologus-Hebraeo-Mixtus* (1657), Picart does not represent the Jews in stereotypical garments like the men wearing a Taled in the back left of the former's woodcut. The only man who is wearing a Taled around his shoulders in Picart's depiction, is the Godfather holding the baby. Furthermore, like the title of his engraving also stresses, Picart deliberately chooses to represent the « Portuguese » Jewish community instead of the « German ». In the early modern period, the « Portuguese » or Sephardic Jews were acknowledged to be the most « assimilated type » of Jews in the city of Amsterdam. In this regard, the engraver even seems to

embroider the truth as he neglects that the Ashkenazi Jews actually formed the largest part of the Dutch Republic's Jewish community during that period[29].

Figure 3

Romeyn de Hooghe, *Besnijdenis-scène,* 1665, chalk drawing, 55,5 x 68,5 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

15 Relying on these kinds of alternative artistic strategies, Picart would enhance recognition from the part of his audience, thereby deliberately influencing how European readers would encounter « exotic » cultural practices, not only overseas, but within their very own cultural communities as well[30]. Giovanni Tarantino has wittily phrased this strategy as a means to « dis-orient the self », an emerging principle in the early modern times in which structural processes of labelling, ridiculing, and othering were gradually replaced by generous attempts at understanding[31]. Picart might have found inspiration, in this regard, in another predecessor's depiction: Romeyn de Hooghe's black and white chalk drawing for a 1665 painting design of the de Barrios family (Fig. 3). Here, the Jewish population would appear extremely familiar to a general, non-Jewish readership. For instance, only the mohel and the older man behind the child's godfather wore a distinguishable kippah. Like Picart, de Hooghe chooses to depict both men and women in non-traditional garments that conforms to contemporary fashion. The same recalls for Jan Luyken's 1683 *Joodsche Bensydenis* (Fig. 4). This last example leans most closely to our case study. For the overall composition of Luyken's design is adopted in Picart's depiction of the ritual, as well as the main characters and elements that can be distinguished in the engraving. Although several members of this family are dressed in traditional Jewish prayer shawls, they do not remotely resemble Leusden's more stereotypical design. What is especially intriguing about Luyken's engraving, is the clear separation between men and women –

an indication of the artist's wish to correctly represent the regulations of the ceremony. As we encountered earlier on, Picart even went one step further in this by including Christian women as assistants in his design. This, of course, should be interpreted as yet another way to 'dis-orient the self' by enhancing contact and mutual comprehension between two separate cultural worlds.

Figure 4

Jan Luyken, *Joodsche Besnydenis,* 1683, engraving, 16,3 x 17,9 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.
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16 Picart's reliance on earlier sources and his simultaneous adaptation thereof show that the artist went to great pains to deliver an image of the Jewish circumcision ceremony that was either the most suitable to reality, the most accurate to his knowledge, or the most intriguing to his audience. However, although Picart's « imagineering » of earlier sources, and his reliance on at least two artistic strategies to assemble a multi-layered image of the circumcision – a strategy of « con-visualisation » and a « collage technique » – it is still not clear what exactly caused Picart's engravings to be considered a « source of, and target for, social agency ». Therefore, in the last section of this article, we will demonstrate how the concept of theatricality is installed within the *Cérémonies* as a specific media technology that may help us to understand the changing relationship between science, commercial culture, and the early modern knowledge economy.

Towards a performative conception of religious knowledge

17 Korsten et al. (2023) have shown how the rise of a vibrant visual culture in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic resulted in an extensive, transnational, commercial, and representational infrastructure of images. They argue that this infrastructure involved technologies that, although developed for one medium, could easily be adopted by others, thereby describing a historical shift in which new technologies were deployed to make images speak to the public in a more involved and embodied way[32]. A crucial and recurring technology or cultural technique that crossed the boundaries of different media can be found in the notion of theatricality. In his contribution to Leemans and Goldgar's *Early Modern Knowledge Societies as Affective Economies*, Karel Vanhaesebrouck delves into the paradoxical interaction of *theatricality* and *performativity* that characterized the early modern period. Referring to W.J.T. Mitchell's notion of « beholding » as a kind of space- and time-travel, Vanhaesebrouck shows how theatricality functioned as a structuring principle of early modern culture :

> Beholding, Mitchell explains, is not just a synonym for 'observing, witnessing, viewing, watching, even reading or interpreting'; it may include all of these, but 'it incorporates them into a complex process that combines fascination (literally, 'a binding') with a certain distance or detachment.' Exactly this double bind, between binding and detachment, will prove to be the very nexus of the fundamental transformation which we will attempt to describe[33].

18 The idea of a « double bind », Vanhaesebrouck explains, is of central concern to understand the intertwinement of an early modern, Dutch theater culture and its surrounding cultural context, and more precisely the transformation of the relation or tension between both. On the one hand, different public manifestations in the public sphere, such as processions, celebrations, tribunals, executions, festivities, and other events operated as *realcore* performances that turned the public space into a kind of theater itself. On the other hand, these manifestations in the public space became events that were subsequently marketed, for instance via the distribution of prints or the commemoration in paintings[34]. Correspondingly, theatricality did not only manifest in the organization of real spectacles but also fed the fascination of a broader public through all kinds of representations in different media, making eager use of theatrical techniques, or more precisely, « explicitly insist on the theatrical nature of the event, by representing the spectators themselves, by making the *mise en scene*, the techniques deployed to theatricalize the event, visible, and by addressing the onlooker himself as a spectator »[35]. Theatricality thus operated both as a structuring device in public events, and as a visual rhetorical device in the representations that depicted these events and were circulated afterwards. Moreover, the commercialization of manifestations in distributable prints and their subsequent functioning as objects in a market enabled what was theatrical to turn into spectacle. The use of theatrical strategies in an extra-theatrical context caused the dissemination of knowledge to become commercialized, valued for its engaging, embodied, and especially spectacular way of (re)presenting knowledge to a broader public.

Figure 5

Romeyn de Hooghe, *Interieur van de Portugese Synagoge te Amsterdam tijdens de inwijding,* 1675, engraving, 39 x 49,8 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

19 A lot of prints from the period rely on theatrical techniques that are used again and again to turn pictures into embodied experiences: they draw the spectator inside and demonstrate, at the same time, what techniques are used to do so[36]. A great example of these theatrical strategies can be found in Romeyn de Hooghe's *Interieur van de Portugese Synagoge te Amsterdam tijdens de inwijding* (Fig. 5). This illustration is part of a series that commemorated the inauguration of the synagogue in Amsterdam. In this print, theatrical techniques are at work that dramatize the construction, opening, and inauguration of the synagogue, thereby re-enacting its genesis and the celebratory events that were initiated on August 2, 1675. First, the engraving provides an exegetic overview of the synagogue's interior, with at the center, on the east-facing *tevah*, the *chazzan* who leads the congregation in prayer. Second, on the right of the *tevah*, a bunch of men carrying either torah scrolls or candles are depicted in a procession that leads to the holy ark in the back of the synagogue. This shows how the engraving also knows a temporal dimension, as de Hooghe creates a narrative plot that commemorates the inauguration rites in their entirety. Third, the addition of other scenes within the overall design, including a floor plan and an external street view, also contribute to the overall accumulative theatricality of the engraving, as different loci of viewpoints are simultaneously represented in juxtaposition[37]. Last, the upper part of the engraving celebrates Amsterdam's freedom of religion, for an allegory of the Amsterdam City Virgin and the personification of Freedom of Conscience here grant a Jewish rabbi and a kneeling woman the freedom to practice their creed. This is, of course, also a kind of theatrical fiction that is added to the overall composition and contributes to the dramatic story that the engraving tends to display. The same applies to the inclusion of

the names of the regents of the synagogue, the members of the building committee, and the clerics that performed ceremonies during the inauguration, in the medallions on either side of the print. In Vanhaesebrouck's logic, this engraving thus operates as a spectacle: it is fundamentally *theatrical*, for de Hooghe makes ample use of theatrical techniques; and it has a deliberate *performative* effect, as such commemorative prints shape the way in which spectators remember these kinds of events, no matter whether they were present or not.

Figure 6

Bernard Picart *LA DEDICACE DE LA SYNAGOGUE DES JUIFS PORTUGAIS, A AMSTERDAM,* 1721, engraving, 33,8 x 41,6 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum

20 In Picart and Bernard's *Cérémonies*, an engraving is included that highly resembles the de Hooghe original. However, Picart's adaptation of the scene in *LA DEDICACE DE LA SYNAGOGUE DES JUIFS PORTUGAIS, A AMSTERDAM* (Fig. 6) is far from an exact copy or mirror image of the former. Although Picart clearly played with telling details within the original design, his engraving lacks simultaneity and allegorical details. Instead, Picart's illustration seems more like a snapshot of one specific moment during the inauguration, notwithstanding he still features some aspects that point at dramatic temporal activity, such as the procession of the Thora scrolls. The exclusion of other overtly theatrical elements could be explained by the supposedly scientific character of the *Cérémonies*, an argument which is reinforced by Picart's use of the encyclopedic feature of an explanatory key at the bottom of the page. However, another explanation emerges when we consider the specific contexts in which both illustrations appear. Unlike de Hooghe's thematic cluster of prints that deal with the construction and inauguration of the synagogue, Picart's engraving is included within a collection that deals with a far broader theme: the various Jewish religious ceremonies, and by

extension the various rituals and customs of all the world's religions. While de Hooghe relies solely on neatly arranged and orderly scenes in this particular work, Picart employs a radical different strategy in the *Cérémonies*. It appears that Picart combines accumulative theatricality with a more immersive approach.

Figure 7

Bernard Picart, *INSTRUMENS qui servent à LA CIRCONCISION,* 1725, engraving, 33,5 x 21,6 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

21 In addition to the almost clinical distance created by these distinct scenes, such as the inauguration of the synagogue or the earlier case study of the Jewish circumcision, it seems that another type of theatricality is at play in the *Cérémonies*. This form of theatricality engages the spectator in an even more involved manner, residing in a more implicit spectatorial regime or address. For another Picart engraving depicts the actual circumcision *tools* used during the performance of *brith milah* (Fig. 7). This is why the former illustration of a Jewish circumcision ceremony should be seen as part of a diptych. In Figure 7, *INSTRUMENS qui servent à la CIRCONCISION*, a finely grained and detailed depiction features a ceremonial circumcision knife, a silver shield that facilitated *periah* (i.e. the tearing of the preputial mucosa of the glans), bandages, and a flask of astringent (i.e. a hemostatic substance to limit blood loss after vascular injury), among other tools. Picart signs his design in the left-hand corner of the engraving as follows: « *Dessiné d'apres nature par B. Picart 1725* ». This signature implies that the illustrator takes pride in accurately designing these liturgical instruments from real-life references. When comparing Picart's design to a real eighteenth-century circumcision set, the impressive level of accuracy in his engraving becomes evident. The engraver must have taken great care to depict the Jewish tools for performing a circumcision correctly, considering it would not have been easy for a Dutch Protestant

to gain access to a Jewish family willing to provide insight into their ceremonial culture. As Picart includes detailed studies of different Jewish liturgical instruments, such as the circumcision tools, but also the tallit, the tzitzit, the tefillin, the mezuzah, among other examples, he provides his audience with a close-up of materials that must have been rather unfamiliar to an early modern public.

22 Here, Von Wyss-Giacosa's statement regarding Picart's strategy of « con-visualization » of images in the *Cérémonies* gains weight. Zooming in on the mohel's toolset in Picart's depiction of the circumcision ritual, one can easily recognize the instruments he also features in his close-up engraving. Because of the con-visualization of these very distinct representational modes, it seems like an abstract theoretical lesson is turned into practice. By providing his spectators with both a generic close-up of the tools used during a circumcision and a representation of the proceedings of such a ceremony, Picart manages to make tangible a for a Western European audience very abstract, and hitherto little documented liturgical practice amongst Amsterdam Jews. It is utmost remarkable, though, that Picart makes use of two separate engravings that enhance each other's meaning. One can imagine the ways in which early modern readers might have taken the book in hand when they came across these pages, zooming in and out on the engravings themselves and flipping back and forth between the various sheets that together provided more information about what was represented as a highly spectacular ritual. This relation and correspondence between the two engravings thus asks for an active interpretation of the source by the spectator. Instead of a mere top-down dissemination of knowledge, Picart's engravings invite the spectators to develop a personal relationship with the scenes depicted, one that is fueled by a stimulation of knowledge acquisition that was not solely pedagogical, but sensational as well. In other words, knowledge aimed to evoke meaning, insight, and impact, thereby exerting a deliberate performative effect on the audience.

Conclusion : A Cabinet of Religious Curiosities

23 In a 2019 article exploring the evolving perception of religious diversity in the early-eighteenth-century Dutch Republic, historical philosopher Wiep van Bunge notably recognized a fascinating connection between Picart and Bernard's *Cérémonies* and early modern cabinets of curiosities. Van Bunge contends that these cabinets, much like Picart and Bernard, invited observers to marvel at the infinite diversity and intricacy of the natural world and its inhabitants. Both aimed not only to inform, but also to ignite excitement in their audience regarding the world's rich tapestry of cultural diversity[38]. While van Bunge's correlation between the *Cérémonies* and contemporary cabinets of curiosities may seem trivial, it underscores a fundamental aspect of Picart and Bernard's collection: the shared commitment of both editor and engraver to engage and captivate their readership, extending beyond mere information dissemination.

24 Recent studies on early modern cabinets of curiosities, exemplified by Claudia Swan's pivotal 2021 monograph, *Rarities of these Lands,* have demonstrated that from the sixteenth century onward, a new paradigm of collecting emerged in the Low Countries and beyond[39]. These *Wunderkammer* served as compressed spaces where viewers assumed the roles of armchair travelers, enabling them to encounter and comparatively analyze objects from distant lands. Surekha Davies' essay in the second

edition of the volume *Early Modern Things* (2021), is exemplary in this regard. For she explains how these cabinets were distinctive in two ways :

> first, they allowed their viewers to experience great distance, space, time, and culture via physical things in a compressive space and not merely via representations (although images and descriptions also circulated). Furthermore, fleshwitnessing in a cabinet was an efficient way to 'unique' and 'admirable' expertise[40].

25 In this citation, the word « fleshwitnessing » is employed as a pun on « eyewitnessing », emphasizing the multi-sensory experience offered by a cabinet, beyond mere visual observation. Davies characterizes the cabinet of curiosities as a space where distance and detachment coexist. Viewers encounter paraphernalia from distant places and cultures while immersing themselves in these places and cultures due to their « physical presence » in the cabinet. As demonstrated in this article, Picart's illustrations for the *Cérémonies* demanded a similar approach from its spectators. Previous research has shown they served as significant sources of, and targets for, social agency. However, we argue that in addition to religious and political motives, artistic factors also played a significant role in the agency these engravings exerted on their audience.

26 Our focus therefore was not solely on tangible changes induced by these illustrations but rather on the performative representational strategies inherent in Picart's designs. Specifically, we argued that the artist employed theatricality as a recurring technology or cultural technique that transcended different media. By infusing theatrical elements into the extra-theatrical medium of printmaking, Picart actively engaged spectators in two distinct ways. Firstly, he introduced accumulative theatricality by importing theatrical techniques into engravings, underscoring the theatrical nature of the depicted ceremonies. Secondly, he immersed spectators even further by incorporating engravings with specific ceremony details, shedding more light on the rituals as such. Like objects in an early modern cabinet of curiosities, viewers actively interacted with Picart's engravings through distance and detachment, instruction and sensation, and theatricality and performativity. While Picart's deliberate use of two distinct modes of representation may initially seem unconventional and incongruous as an artistic choice, it responds to two fundamental aspects inherent in the *Cérémonies*: information and excitement. These aspects are inseparable from the book series' circulation in a highly affective knowledge economy, where knowledge dissemination depended on not only intellectual qualities but also attractive and sensational characteristics. Consequently, a summary analysis and comparison of both circumcision prints helps us understand Picart and Bernard's collection as a pre-industrial, multimodal object generating agency. The performative use of theatrical strategies in an extra-theatrical context causes the book series to be understood as a readable cabinet of religious curiosities.

NOTES

1. The order of the original French edition of the *Cérémonies* varies from set to set. In this article, we adhere to the numbering of the set found in the Bibliothèque National de France (BnF, RES-G-562). According to this edition, the title pages of the original seven volumes divide the set into two groups. The first group consists of the volumes titled « *tous les peuples du monde* » and includes the following components : « Tome Premier » on Jewish and Catholic ceremonies (volume 1) ; « Tome Second » on the remaining Catholic ceremonies (2) ; « Tome Troisième » on the ceremonies of the Greeks and Protestants (3) ; « Tome Quatrième » on the Anglicans, Quaquers, Anabaptists and others (4) ; and « Tome Cinquième » on Islamic ceremonies (« *les Céremonies des Mahometans* » ; volume 5). The second group comprises the volumes on the « *peuples idolâtres* ». This set is divided into « Tome Premier » – which consists of a « Premiere Partie » on the ceremonies of the « peoples of the West Indies » (« *Ceremonies Religieuses des Peuples des Indes Occidentales* ») and a « Seconde Partie du Tome Premier » on East Indian rituals (« *Pratiques Religieuses des Indiens Orientaux* ») – and « Tome Second, Première Partie » featuring a variety of religious ceremonies performed by the Banians, Chinese, Japanese, Persians, and Africans. These volumes will be respectively referred to as volume 6 and 7. The set in the BnF also includes two additional volumes that contain Bernard's critique on a bowdlerized 1741 edition of the original Amsterdam volumes by two Parisian clerics, Antoine Banier and Jean Baptiste Le Mascrier : « Tome Septième Seconde Partie », and « Tome Huitième », consisting of a historical parallel between ancient and early modern religious practices. This has led to nine volumes often being included in the collection. However, these last two volumes are excluded from consideration in this dissertation.

2. For more information on Picart's Amsterdam School of artisans, see : Inger LEEMANS, « Bernard Picart's Dutch connections: Family trouble, the Amsterdam theater, and the business of engraving », in Lynn HUNT, Margaret JACOB, and Wijnand MIJNHARDT (dir.), *Bernard Picart and the First Global Vision of Religion*, Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 2010, p. 35-58.

3. Paola VON-WYSS-GIACOSA, « Visual Provocations: Bernard Picart's illustrative strategies in *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde* », in Giovanni TARANTINO, and Charles ZIKA (dir.), *Feeling Exclusion: Religious conflict, exile and emotions in early modern Europe,* London and New York, Routledge, 2019, p. 251-252.

4. Earlier contributions to the studies on Picart and Bernard's *Cérémonies* also include Samantha BASKIND, « Bernard Picart's Etchings of Amsterdam's Jews », *Jewish Social Studies,* vol. 13, nº 2, 2007, p. 40-64 ; Silvia BERTI, « Ancora su Bernard Picart. Alcune sue importanti opere ritrovate », *Rivista storica italiana*, vol. 119, nº 2, 2007, p. 818–34 ; Ilja M. VELDMAN, « Familiar Custosm and exotic rituals. Picart's illustrations for Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples », *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art,* vol. 33, nº 1/2, 2007/2008, p. 94-111 ; Wijnand MIJNHARDT, *Religie, tolerantie en wetenschap in de vroegmoderne tijd*, Utrecht, Utrecht University, 2008 ; Rolando MINUTI, « Comparativismo e idolatrie orientali nelle "Cérémonies religieuses" di Bernard et Picart », *Rivista storica italiana*, vol. 121, nº 3, 2009, p. 1028–72 ; Christine GOUZI, « L'influence de Bernard Picart (1673-1733) et de son atelier amstellodamois sur les gravures d'obedience janséniste française au XVIIIe siècle », in Yves KRUMENACKER (dir.), *Entre Calvinistes et Catholiques. Les relations religieuses entre la France et les Pays-Bas du Nord (XVIe-XVIIIe siècle),* Rennes, Presses Universitaire de Rennes, 2010, p. 181-203 ; Paola VON WYSS-GIACOSA, « "Dessiné d'après nature", Die Repräsentation jüdischer Religion in Bernard Picarts Bildtafeln für die "Cérémonies

et Coutumes religieuses de tous les Peuples du Monde" », in Bärbel BEINHAUER-KÖHLER, Daria PEZZOLI-OLGIATI, and Joachim VALENTIN (dir.) *Religiöse Blicke—Blicke auf das Religiöse, Visualität und Religion,* Zurich, TVZ, 2010, p. 283–310 ; Luisa SIMONUTTI, « Inquietudine religiosa e relativismo critico: l'iconografia di Bernard Picart », *in* Marco GEUNA, and Giambattista GORI (dir.), *I filosofi e la società senza religione,* Bologna, Il Mulino, 2011, p. 257-300 ; Maria EFFINGER, Cornelia LOGEMANN, and Ulrich PFISTERER (dir.), *Götterbilder und Götzendiener in der Frühen Neuzeit. Europas Blick auf fremde Religionen*, Heidelberg, Universitätsverlag Winter GmbH Heidelberg, 2012 ; Tomoko MASUZAWA, « Striating Difference: From "Ceremonies and Customs" to World Religions », *Republic of Letters*, vol. 3, nº 3, 2014, p. 1-25 ; Samantha BASKIND, « Judging a book by its cover. Bernard Picart's Jews and art history », *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies,* vol. 15, nº 1, 2015, p. 6-28.

5. Margaret JACOB, « Bernard Picart and the Turn toward Modernity », *De Achtteinde Eeuw,* 2005, p. 10.

6. Paola VON WYSS-GIACOSA, *Religionsbilder der Frühen Aufklärung: Bernard Picarts Tafln für die Cérémonies et Coutumes religieuses de tous les Peuples du Monde*, Waber/Bern, Benteli Verlags AG, 2006, p. 10.

7. Lynn HUNT, Margaret JACOB, and Wijnand MIJNHARDT, *The Book That Changed Europe*, Cambridge and London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010 ; and L. HUNT, M. JACOB, and W. MIJNHARDT (dir.), *Bernard Picart and the First Global Vision of Religion, op. cit*.

8. L. HUNT, M. JACOB, and W. MIJNHARDT, *The Book That Changed Europe*, *op. cit.*, p. 20-21.

9. Joke SPAANS, and Jetze TOUBER (dir.), *Enlightened Religion: From confessional churches to polite piety in the Dutch Republic,* Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2019.

10. *Ibid*., p. 126.

11. *Ibid*., p. 141-143 and p. 147. For more information on the importance of the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth-century book publishing world, see : Andrew PETTEGREE, and Arthur DER WEDUWEN, *The Bookshop of the World: Making and Trading Books in the Dutch Golden Age*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 2019.

12. Jacques REVEL, « The Uses of Comparison: Religion in the Early Eighteenth Century », in L. HUNT, M. JACOB, and W. MIJNHARDT (dir.), *Bernard Picart and the First Global Vision of Religion*, *op. cit.*, p. 331-347.

13. Inger LEEMANS, and Anne GOLDGAR (dir.), *Early Modern Knowledge Societies as Affective Economies,* London and New York, Routledge, 2020, p. 5.

14. *Ibid*., p. 6.

15. *Ibid*., p. 14.

16. *Journal des Sçavans* 69, January 1721, p. 53.

17. *Journal des Sçavans* 69, January 1721, p. 54.

18. *Journal des Sçavans* 69, January 1721, p. 57.

19. *Journal des Sçavans* 69, January 1721, p. 54-55.

20. *Journal des Sçavans* 69, January 1721, p. 58.

21. I define « artisticity » as the aesthetic quality of a work of art, encompassing the organization of the artwork in terms of both form and content. It stimulates a profound process of aesthetic perception in the viewer, thereby engendering a heightened aesthetic experience.

22. Frans-Willem KORSTEN, Inger LEEMANS, Cornelis VAN DER HAVEN, and Karel VANHAESEBROUCK, *Marketing Violence: The Affective Economy of Violent Imageries in the Dutch Republic*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2023, p. 21.

23. Frans-Willem KORSTEN, Cornelis VAN DER HAVEN, Inger LEEMANS, Karel VANHAESEBROUCK, Michel VAN DUIJNEN, and Yannice DE BRUYN, « Imagineering, or what images do to people: Violence and the spectacular in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic », *Cultural History,* vol. 10, nº 1, 2021, p. 1-30.

24. F.-W. KORSTEN et al., *Marketing Violence*, *op. cit.,* p. 11.

25. P. VON WYSS-GIACOSA, « Visual Provocations », *op. cit*. p. 234.

26. *Ibid*., p. 252.

27. Steff NELLIS, « Imag(in)ing Bairam: Charting Image of a Turkish Festival in Picart and Bernard's *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde* (1723-1737) », *Journal of Muslims in Europe,* vol. 13, 2023, p. 24.

28. Richard I. COHEN, *Jewish Icons. Art and Society in Modern Europe,* Berkeley, University of California Press 1998, p. 39-43. See also : Theodor DUNKELGRÜN, « The Christian Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe », *in* Janathan KARP, and Adam SUTCLIFFE (dir.), *The Cambridge History of Judaism: Volume 7, The Early Modern World, 1500-1850,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017, p. 316-348.

29. Samantha BASKIND, « Judging A Book By Its Cover », *op. cit.*, p. 14-16.

30. While information on religious and cultural practices of nations all over the world bloomed during the early modern period, most Europeans only came around these phenomena as « armchair travellers » in works like the *Cérémonies*. As Benjamin Schmidt wittely puts in *Inventing Exoticism*, « exotic » reporting necessitated some form of visual apparatus: « By employing graphic forms to desribe distant phenomena, illustrations allowed the learned of Europe to process exotic knowledge more effectively. Pictures delivered data from a distance. » See : Benjamin SCHMIDT, *Inventing Exoticism: Geography, Globalism, and Europe's Early Modern World,* Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015, p. 84. However, the feeling of « otherness » did not only apply to cultural practices abroad. As Samantha Baskind has shown, prejudices were also prevalent regarding « divergent » cultural practices within European cities like Amsterdam. See : Samantha BASKIND, « Bernard Picart's Ethchings of Amsterdam's Jews », *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 13, n° 2, 2007, p. 40-64.

31. Giovanni TARANTINO, « From Labelling and Ridicule to Understanding: The Novelty of Bernard and Picart's Religious Comparatism », in Giovanni TARANTINO, and Paola VON WYSS-GIACOSA (dir.), *Through Your Eyes: Religious Alterity and the Early Modern Western Imagination,* Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2021, p. 235-266.

32. F.-W. KORSTEN et al., *Marketing Violence*, *op. cit.,* p. 20-22.

33. Karel VANHAESEBROUCK, « The Spectacle of Dissection: Early modern theatricality and anatomical frenzy », in I. LEEMANS, and A. GOLDGAR (dir.), *Affective Economies, op. cit.*, p. 254.

34. *Ibid*., p. 255.

35. *Ibid*., p. 256.

36. *Ibid*., p. 260.

37. We borrow the term « accumulative theatricality » from Yannice DE BRUYN, *Staging Siege: Imagineering Violence in the Dutch Theatre, 1645-1686.* PhD thesis, Free University of Brussels/Ghent University, 2021.

38. Wiep VAN BUNGE, « Tolerating Turks? Perceptions of Islam in the Dutch Republic », in Wiep VAN BUNGE (dir.) *From Bayle to the Batavian Revolution: Essays on Philosophy in the Eighteenth-Century Dutch Republic,* Leiden, Brill, 2018, p. 241.

39. Claudia SWAN, *Rarities of these Lands: Art, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Dutch Republic*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2021, p. 92.

40. Surekha DAVIES, « Catalogical encounters: worldmaking in early modern cabinets of curiosities », *in* Paula FINDLEN (dir.), *Early modern things: Objects and their histories, 1500-1800*, second edition, London and New York, Routledge, 2021, p. 231.

ABSTRACTS

In 1723, the first volumes of the seven-part book series, *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde* (1723-1737), were published in Amsterdam by the exiled Huguenot Jean Frederic Bernard. Lavishly illustrated with more than 250 engravings by the famous exiled Parisian engraver Bernard Picart, the *Cérémonies* provided a revolutionary insight into all the world's religions by comparing ceremonies, customs, and rituals on an equal footing. Earlier research has already shown that Picart's body of illustrations must be considered as a « source of, and target for, social agency », to put it in a Gellian way. Accordingly, Picart's printed illustrations can be considered as tools to elicit emotions and demand the viewer's active intervention by means of emotionally laden visual strategies. In this article, I intend to deepen our understanding of the way(s) in which Picart's representations of religious ceremonies from all over the world worked as a profound force for change by looking into the various ways in which Picart tended to achieve his goal. In addition to earlier scholarly work that highlighted Picart's use of the comparative method (Hunt et al. 2010), the « con-visualization » of images (Von Wyss-Giacosa 2019), and the « dis-orientation of the self » (Tarantino 2021), I argue that his artistic strategy is also highly indebted to the use of theatricality as a visual rhetorical and performative device to spread knowledge.

En 1723, les premiers volumes de la série en sept livres, *Cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde* (1723-1737), sont publiés à Amsterdam par le Huguenot exilé Jean Frédéric Bernard. Somptueusement illustrée de plus de 250 gravures par le célèbre graveur parisien, également exilé, Bernard Picart, la série *Cérémonies* offre une perspective révolutionnaire sur les religions du monde en comparant à parts égales cérémonies, coutumes et rituels. Des recherches antérieures ont montré que le corpus d'illustrations de Picart doit être considéré comme une « source et cible de l'agentivité sociale », pour le dire avec les mots de Gell. En conséquence, les illustrations imprimées de Picart peuvent être vues comme des outils pour susciter des émotions et exiger l'intervention active du spectateur par le biais de diverses stratégies visuelles. Dans cet article, je souhaite approfondir notre compréhension des moyens par lesquels les représentations des cérémonies religieuses de Picart ont agi comme une force de changement en examinant les différentes manières dont il a cherché à atteindre son objectif. En plus des travaux universitaires antérieurs qui ont mis en avant l'utilisation par Picart de la méthode comparative (Hunt et al., 2010), de la « con-visualisation » des images (Von Wyss-Giacosa, 2019) et de la « dés-orientation du soi » (Tarantino, 2021), je suggère que sa stratégie artistique doit également beaucoup à l'utilisation de la théâtralité comme dispositif rhétorique visuel et performatif pour diffuser le savoir.

INDEX

Mots-clés: Bernard Picart, Cérémonies religieuses, théâtralité, performativité, agentivité
Keywords: Bernard Picart, Religious Ceremonies, Theatricality, Performativity, Agency

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