

**89. Miniature Tankard**

Dutch Republic, last quarter of the 17th century

Silver

2 x 1 1/4 x 7/8 in. (5.1 x 3.1 x 2 cm)

Marks: none

Foundation Amsterdams Historisch Museum, KA 4195

**90. Miniature Oil Lamp**

Dutch Republic, 18th or 19th century

Silver

1 1/2 x 1 3/8 x 5/8 in. (3.8 x 3.3 x 1.6 cm)

Marks: alloy mark [sword]

Foundation Amsterdams Historisch Museum, KA 4979

**91. Miniature Bed Warmer**

Last quarter of the 17th century

Attributed to Hendrik van der Star

Silver

1/2 x 3 3/8 x 1 3/8 in. (1.3 x 9.9 x 3.3 cm)

Marks: maker's mark [star in circle]

Foundation Amsterdams Historisch Museum, KA 4112

**92. Miniature Snuffer and Stand**

1721

Frederik van Strant I (1678–1727)

Silver

2 3/8 x 1 1/4 x 1 1/4 in. (6.5 x 3 x 3 cm)

Marks: Amsterdam city mark, maker's mark "FvS" [in rectangle], 19th-century tax mark

Foundation Amsterdams Historisch Museum, KA 5124

**93. Miniature Cooking Pot**

Haarlem, last quarter of the 17th century

Silver

H. 3/8 in. (1 cm), Diam. 3/4 in. (1.8 cm)

Marks: maker's mark [rose] (unknown maker)

Foundation Amsterdams Historisch Museum, KA 4264

**94. Miniature Box with Lid**

Dutch Republic, ca. 1700

Silver

H. 3/4 in. (1.8 cm), Diam. 1 1/8 in. (2.7 cm)

Marks: 19th-century tax mark

Foundation Amsterdams Historisch Museum, KA 4193.1/2

Margrieta van Varick's inventory of 1696 apportioned to her children a variety of precious metal objects, including coins, jewelry, silver boxes, dishes, and cups. Among these were a vague category of eighty-three items described as either pieces of "children toys silver" or "silver playthings or toys." The inventory does not offer detailed accounts of these objects, making them difficult to identify precisely; and while it is presently associated almost exclusively with children, the word "toy" once referred to any small plaything or curiosity made to amuse and delight. But the napkin-wrapped bundles Margrieta left Johanna, Marinus, Rudolphus, and Cornelia likely contained at least a few miniatures such as those gathered here.

Miniature objects constituted a significant category of Dutch silver craftsmanship in the seventeenth century. At its height, the trade supported over forty specialized miniature-makers in Amsterdam alone, some of whom sustained businesses over generations.¹ Their products ranged from elaborately detailed machines with movable parts like carriages, windmills, and cannon, to common tableware and domestic goods, such as the tankard (*drinkkan*; cat. no. 89), oil lamp (*snotneus*; cat. no. 90), and bed warmer (*beddepan*; cat. no. 91) seen here.

The form of oil lamp shown is known as a *snotneus*, literally "snot-nose," for its tendency to drip. Typically made of earthenware in the seventeenth century, this form

continued to be made well into the nineteenth century. It could stand on its funnel-shaped end or be hung on a wall from the hook at the side. The flame flickered from the projecting spout, where a wick drew oil out of the cylindrical container; the channel beneath caught stray drops. In design this miniature may resemble the "old lanthorn" listed in the household goods section of the Van Varick inventory.

Another object related to lighting in the inventory is a "dubbell brasse Candlestick Snuffers & Extinguishers." Snuffers were used to trim the excess wick off a candle or lamp, or to extinguish a flame altogether.² Their basic scissor shape would remain relatively constant, though their decoration,

material, and accessories changed to keep pace with consumer taste. The stand with curved handle in this miniature snuffer set (*snuiter in standaard*; cat. no. 92) was just such an innovation. Encountering a similar object in 1668, the English diarist Samuel Pepys drily questioned the purpose of its stylistic novelty: "a new-fashioned case for a pair of snuffers... is very pretty; but I could never have guessed what it was for, had I not seen the snuffers in it."³

Two other household items are represented in miniature. Bed warmers bore hot coals safely between the chilly sheets to make a bed cozy. This miniature version (cat. no. 91) displays a lavish attention to detail, from the working hinge and decorative perfora-

tions of the lid to the delicately turned handle. Another ubiquitous form in the late seventeenth century, but unusual today, is the cooking pot (*kookketel*; cat. no. 93). Bearing a simple pattern of incised lines and a moving handle, the pot renders a typically utilitarian iron vessel in precious metal, thus elevating its culinary service almost to a rite.

Because of their small size and the fast-changing assay standards at the time of their production, early silver miniatures rarely bear the documentary hallmarks of larger silver pieces, making them difficult to attribute positively. The snuffer set, bed warmer, dish, and rattle are rare in part because they can be associated with known miniaturists. The snuffer set bears the mark of Frederik

van Strant I, an Amsterdam silversmith celebrated for his miniature tableware. He was related to other identified miniature-producers of the eighteenth century, including his son, Frederik van Strant II, maker of the rattle (cat. no. 100).

Some diminutive boxes (*doosje met deksel*; cat. no. 94), unlike many other miniatures, can still perform their essential function even in their reduced size, concealing contents that may or may not relate to those held by their life-size counterparts. The cosmetics containers of a miniature toilet set might bear tiny samples of powders and elixirs, or something entirely unexpected, such as a piece of jewelry or a love note. Margrieta van Varick left many small boxes,



95. Miniature Saltcellar

Dutch Republic, early 18th century
Silver

½ x ⅞ x ⅞ in. (1.3 x 2.3 x 2.3 cm)

Marks: 19th-century tax mark

Foundation Amsterdams Historisch Museum,
KA 4464



96. Miniature Lavabo

Dutch Republic, late 17th century
Silver

3 x 1 x 1 ¼ in. (7.6 x 2.5 x 3.1 cm)

Marks: none

Foundation Amsterdams Historisch Museum,
Collection Backerstichting, KB 931



97. Miniature Dish

Late 17th century
Michiel Maenbeeck (active 1662–1682)
Silver

Diam. 3 ⅞ in. (9.6 cm)

Marks: maker's mark [crescent]

Foundation Amsterdams Historisch Museum,
KA 4473



98. Miniature Spinning Wheel

Dutch Republic, early 18th century
Silver

1 ⅜ x ¾ in. (3.3 x 2 cm)

Marks: 19th-century alloy mark

Foundation Amsterdams Historisch Museum,
KA 5003



99. Miniature Table Brush

Dutch Republic, ca. 1700
Silver

⅞ x 1 ⅞ x ⅞ in. (2.2 x 4.2 x 1.6 cm)

Marks: 19th-century tax mark

Foundation Amsterdams Historisch Museum,
KA 4098



100. Miniature Rattle

1743
Frederik van Strant II (active 1727–after 1749)
Silver

L. 2 ½ in. (6.2 cm)

Marks: Amsterdam city mark, date letter, maker's
mark "FVS" (in oval)

Foundation Amsterdams Historisch Museum,
KA 4497

some silver, some decorated or in other ways precious, to her children. The only object that her executors felt required a simile in its description was the "small gold box, as big as a pea" left to her son Marinus. What that pea-sized box held, or was meant to hold, must remain a tantalizing mystery.

Adults collected such miniatures as curios to be displayed, sometimes incorporating them into domestic tableaux like the dollhouses of Petronella Oortman (1686–1710) and Petronella Dunois (1675–1700) preserved at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. The interiors of these massive cabinets displayed the contents of an idealized merchant's house, allowing their owners to affirm and revel in their role as able domestic overseers.

The silver objects in the dollhouses suggest the variety of miniatures once available in Holland. Oortman's dollhouse displays silver only where life-size objects would have

been made of the precious metal, specifically for tableware, such as saltcellars (*zoutvat*; cat. no. 95). Like silver, salt was a significant commodity in the Dutch trade networks of the seventeenth century, acquired first in Spain, and later in the Cape Verde islands, present-day Venezuela, and other Caribbean locations.⁴ As today, salt was a crucial seasoning added to food at table, often from a squat trencher salt like the version here, whose miniaturization suggests both the ubiquity and the importance of its full-size counterpart. Though they could be made of other materials, saltcellars wrought in silver reflected the value of the mineral they held as well as the wealth of their owners, for whom dining sometimes became a performance of social sophistication. Margrieta van Varick's inventory lists "one silver saltseller" as a bequest for her daughter Cornelia.

The lavabo (*wandfontejntje*; cat. no. 96) also figured in the social ritual of dining.

Wall-mounted, with a cistern, spigot, and catch-basin, it allowed diners to wash their hands near the table in a secular purification rite. Metal lavabos like the miniature version here, incised with delicate floral patterns, were found only in wealthy households. By the sixteenth century, Dutch republicans of lesser means could aspire to affluent dining habits with washbasins of painted ceramic.

Other tableware included dishes translated into miniature forms. The tiny dish (*schotel*; cat. no. 97) mimics motifs common to contemporary ceramic and silver tableware: chased and repoussé decorative patterns of blossoms and cherubs (see cat. no. 88). Painstaking mimicry was one of the delights of the silver miniature and, when convincingly achieved, testified to the craftsman's skill. Following trends in life-size pieces, miniature silver was often melted down and refashioned, taking on a new form when the previous style lost favor.⁵ This care-

ful recycling of precious metal objects accounts for the rarity of certain types and styles, this piece among them, and hints at the fate that may have befallen the "silver playthings" left to the Van Varick children.

Unlike Oortman's dollhouse, Dunois's includes a number of objects not typically made in silver, from a tiny linen press to a mousetrap, broom, spoon rack, and spit with two roast chickens (fig. 98a). Miniaturized and cast in metal, such items, like the silver spinning wheel (*spinnenwiel*; cat. no. 98), cannot be used for their assigned function but have a Midas-touched quality. Produced at different scales, they disrupt the careful proportions of the house, which might indicate that they were not custom-crafted for the space, but were rather stock silver miniatures, perhaps part of a collection that pre-dated the house's creation.⁶

Departing from the careful mimesis of the Oortman house, Dunois's silver miniatures

hint at the allure such objects may have held for Dutch consumers. Susan Stewart has written that the "dollhouse has two dominant motifs: wealth and nostalgia. It presents a myriad of perfect objects that are, as signifiers, often affordable, whereas the signified is not."⁷ This assertion certainly applies to silver miniatures, which allowed consumers to possess diminutive versions of what would otherwise have been—both financially and culturally—prohibitive in life size. The Dutch republicans of Margrieta van Varick's day frowned upon extravagantly conspicuous consumption and would have found silver furnishings like those commissioned by French and Spanish royalty in the seventeenth century unthinkable. Miniaturized, however, silver furniture became acceptable. By literally shrinking the domestic realm and casting it in precious metal, an impulse to venerate the Dutch household could find respectable expression.

Dollhouses like Oortman's and Dunois's were specialty playthings of elite ladies, but their emphasis on the orderly management of the home was also central to the preparation and education of young girls. Prints of the period depicting children's games show girls playing with dolls and doll-sized objects, activities meant to instill the virtues needed to run a good Dutch household.⁸ Brushes of various shapes and sizes, each with its specific purpose, aided in the strict maintenance of domestic space. Sweeping and scrubbing were something of a national pastime. Associated symbolically with spiritual and patriotic purity, brushes thus became another obvious category of silver miniature. Some were cast entirely of silver, while others, like this one (*tafelborstel*; cat. no. 99), were made notionally functional when equipped with real bristles.

While it was common for Dutch girls to play with wooden, ceramic, and base metal

miniatures, wealthy girls may have had silver versions of such items: literary sources attest that royal children were the first to own silver miniatures, which usually took the form of household and cooking utensils for girls and military models for boys. Non-royal children in the Dutch Republic were later depicted with other silver objects, often an iconic coral and silver teething rattle. The miniature *rinkelbel* or tinklebell rattle here (*rammelaar*; cat. no. 100) has the whistle, bells, and teething stick common to Dutch rattles of the period. Teething sticks or gumsticks were often made of red branch coral, rock crystal, or wolf's teeth, materials all believed to have protective qualities. Bells also warded off evil and reminded caretakers of a child's whereabouts. A belt or chain at the waist attached to the loop near the whistle-end, allowing the rattle to dangle at a safe distance from a baby's neck. As teething tools, entertainment devices, and amulets, *rinkelbellen* also functioned, like modern silver rattles, as important ceremonial gifts, inscribed with dates, names, and coats of arms as they passed from generation to generation. Their precious, exotic materials, products of the burgeoning Dutch shipping trade, made them symbols of affluence as well as the wider culture's investment in the objects and activities—the very idea—of childhood.⁹

Margrieta van Varick's careful division of "children toys silver" and "silver playthings or toys" among her sons and daughters suggests that this Dutch conception of childhood remained strong even in a far-flung outpost like Flatbush. The "gold bell and chaine" she left Marinus may have been some version of *rinkelbel*. A portrait of a Van Rensselaer son wearing a whistle-and-bell rattle shows that the form persisted in Dutch-American households as late as 1730.¹⁰ The napkin bundles and a detailed accounting of their contents are the first items listed in Margrieta's inventory, echoing her 1695 will, which specified that each child receive these precious napkin-wrapped collections of objects "devided as thos noates sealed on them mention." The priority given these carefully prepared bundles suggests that they were endowed not just with material value, but also with deep maternal feel-



Fig. 98a. Kitchen in the dollhouse belonging to Petronella Dunois, 1675–1700. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, BK-14656.

ing. Van Varick likely formed each grouping with the individual in mind, choosing not only objects appropriate for gender and age, but also those she associated with specific recollections.

Because Margrieta may have carried and cared for these silver toys over many years, she might have expected Johanna, Marinus, Rudolphus, and Cornelia to do the same, allowing these objects to accrue and encapsulate new childhood memories and adult aspirations before being passed to the next generation. Negotiating between childhood and adulthood, play and responsibility, the silver toys stand as powerful transitional objects, tokens of passage between states that, while culturally prescribed and historically distant, remain, like a mother's generous care for her children, familiar and immediate.—AS

1. For a brief history of the origins and development of the silver toy trade, see Poliakov 1986. The best comprehensive survey on silver toys is still Houart 1981.

2. See "Snuffer," *Dictionary of Traded Goods and Commodities, 1550–1820* (2007), online at www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=58876 (accessed February 8, 2009).

3. Entry for January 23, 1668, in Pepys 1905a, 433.

4. Davies 1974, 30.

5. Poliakov 1986, 13.

6. Pijzel-Dommisse 1994, 10.

7. Stewart 1993, 61.

8. For a discussion of children and childhood in Dutch culture, see Schama 1987, 481–561.

9. For more on rattles, *rinkelbellen*, and *rammelaars*, see Dekker 1997; Bedaux and Ekkart 2000, 61–73; Wassing-Visser 1958.

10. Attributed to John Heaton, *Boy of the Van Rensselaer Family*, ca. 1730, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Rodman C. Rockefeller; Blackburn and Piwonka 1988, 196 and 231 (color); and Steven Bielenski, "Boy of the Van Rensselaer Family," www.nysm.nysed.gov/albany/bios/vr/boy.html (accessed May 2009).

101. Nutmeg Grater

Probably England, ca. 1690

Silver and cowrie shell

4 7/8 x 1 3/4 in. (12.7 x 4.4 cm)

Marks: none

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Irwin Untermyer, 1968 (68.141.278)

In the seventeenth century, the smooth-shelled *Cypræidae* family of snails, today known as cowries, were called *porcellanae* for their resemblance to the bodies of pigs.¹ And from this, the term *porcelain* was derived and first applied to fine-bodied Chinese ceramics because of their similarity to cowrie shells.² European consumers treasured both of these exotic goods for their smooth glassy surfaces. Like nautilus shells (see cat. no. 19), cowries are found in the tropical waters in and around present-day Indonesia, which was one of the main strongholds of the Dutch East India Company.

Smaller cowrie shells served as jewelry or a form of currency among many societies in the West Indies, and larger shells were often used to create tobacco boxes and spoons.³ This large tiger cowrie (*Cypraea tigris*) has been mounted with silver fittings to create a nutmeg grater. The rounded outer surface of the shell is fitted with a cross-shaped brace, which is decorated with linear engraving and scalloped edges and is wider at the rounder end of the shell. A similarly decorated band runs around the bottom of the shell. A lid punched from the reverse to create a rough surface for grating is hinged to the shell's mounts at the rounder end and held shut at the other end with a pressure clasp. A curving strap handle is also attached to the silver bands. A small hole in the silver braces at the opposite end of the shell lines up with a hole drilled in the shell to allow the release of grated nutmeg shavings that might fall into the shell's interior. The silver is unmarked, but similar shell nutmeg graters are generally thought to be English.⁴

Nutmeg (*Myristica fragrans*) originally grew only on the Moluccan Islands off the coast of Indonesia, also known as the Spice Islands. The Dutch monopoly on these



spices and on trade from the Spice Islands during much of the seventeenth century helped them achieve the wealth that gave birth to their golden age.⁵ As one exotic object (a cowrie shell) fashioned into a tool for using another exotic item (nutmeg), this nutmeg grater illustrates the importance of the spice trade, and the exploration that it entailed, to Dutch material life. Margrieta van Varick participated in this spice trade; her inventory lists "3/4 of a lb Nutmeg" among other spices as part of her shop goods.

Though in some ways, a cowrie-shell grater seems like an inefficient tool—nutmeg could easily get trapped and wasted in the folds of the shell's interior—it was a status symbol, making a statement of wealth and culture for its owner that was far more important than any peculiarities of its design.—EEE

1. Yule and Burnell 2000, 725, trace this name to medieval Italy and allude also to the theory that the name "porcellana" for shells was a vulgar reference to their resemblance to a part of the female anatomy. Rumphius also indirectly references this theory, noting the shells are "called worse by Sailors"; Rumphius 1999, 166. I would like to thank Jessie McNab of The Metropolitan Museum of Art for her assistance with this entry.

2. Yule and Burnell, 723; Rumphius 1999, 166.

3. Rumphius 1999, 164.

4. See, e.g., Davis 2002, nos. 2–4.

5. Hochstrasser 2007, 105–7.