

A COMPANY OF STATE. THE DUTCH EAST INDIA COMPANY AND THE DEBATES ON THE COMPANY-STATE IN ASIA, 1660s-1690s

ERIK ODEGARD*

This chapter seeks to highlight an episode within the history of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) from a new perspective. The Dutch company, often called «the first multinational company in the world», is most often studied from the perspective of business history, history of trade or maritime history. However, Philip Stern, in his recent *The Company State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundations of the British Empire in India*, introduces a new perspective to study the Early Modern commercial companies. Instead of seeing the various chartered companies as filling «state-like» functions, he argues we should see them as states in their own right¹. Stern argues that the English East India Company, acted as a state in Asia and viewed itself as such even as early as the seventeenth century. Rather than seeing the company as a commercial entity that also fulfills some «state-like» roles, the company *was* a state. This state, moreover, was not constituted solely by the charter granted in England, but also by the privileges received from sovereigns in Asia, as well as the rights it had acquired in specific locations due to purchase, lease, or conquest. This has a number of important consequences for the study of the company. In the first place, we should approach the company as an organization with a political life of its own, independent from that of the mother country. In the second place, this means that we may study the companies from a political perspective, rather than from a purely commercial one. This will also allow scholars to study ideological conflicts within company

* Leiden University.

¹ STERN, 2011: 6.

management and will privilege as political thinkers in their own right the ones that did the ruling: governors and directors.

Stern's argument is based upon an understanding of sovereignty and statehood that is perhaps typical for the British case and thus might seem difficult to apply to another case, such as the Dutch East India Company². However, Arthur Weststeijn has recently used the frame for a study of the discussions on the VOC in the Republic, focusing on the views of three men who at varying points in the 17th century were engaged in debates about the role and position of the VOC³. Of the three men studied by Weststeijn only one actually served the company in Asia. This was Pieter van Hoorn, a VOC council in the Indies in the 1660s and 1670s. The other men discussed the company from the Republic. Pieter van Dam was the secretary of the VOC's central board of management, the *Gentlemen XVII*, and advocated a focus on trade and shipping, while Pieter de la Court was an outspoken opponent of the company and a defender of the idea of the absolute freedom of the seas⁴.

Weststeijn's article is a valuable contribution to the field, but it still sees the company primarily from the perspective of men in Europe who had no experience in Asia and who viewed the company primarily in commercial terms. This is a marked contrast from the way the EIC officials which are at the heart of Stern's work saw the VOC. EIC officials enviously looked at the VOC's position in Asia, which they tried to emulate. The VOC's military power and local revenues allowed the VOC, in English eyes, «to secure by great expenses and Forts their sovereign state in India, Enlarge their Dominion as well as their Trade, and be always in a condition to revenge any affronts that are offered them»⁵. This English quote from the mid-1690s, clearly indicates that seen from the outside, the VOC clearly behaved like a state in Asia.

There are some strands, both old and new, in the scholarship of the Dutch company that tie in very well, with seeing the VOC as a company-state. Gerrit Knaap, in his recent inaugural lecture in Utrecht argued that the company, in its operations in Asia, actually more resembled a colonial state, than a shipping firm⁶. Many of the most important products that the company shipped back to the Republic in the Seventeenth through levies or taxation of territories which the company held by right of conquest⁷. The greatest expenditures in Asia were on its apparatus of state: soldiers, fortifications and civil servants. This ties in well with an older view of Dutch historian Terpstra, who viewed the company as a «state outside the state»⁸. The VOC, in other words, was distinct from the Dutch Republic

² For the idea of corporation and statehood in Early Modern England, see: STERN, 2011: 7.

³ WESTSTEIJN, 2014: 13-34.

⁴ WESTSTEIJN, 2014: 20-24.

⁵ STERN, 2011: 86.

⁶ KNAAP, 2014.

⁷ For example, fine spices, cinnamon and later on, coffee and tea. KNAAP, 2014. Terpstra argued that the VOC's policies can be seen as the direct precursors of the tax-in-products policy of the 19th century colonial state in Indonesia – TERPSTRA, 1942: 1-34, 21.

⁸ TERPSTRA, 1942: 1.

and its governors in Asia had considerable leeway in setting the agenda. The expansion of the territorial control of the company could, however, lead to tensions between governors and directors, as territorial control required large investments.

This chapter will focus on a specific period in the history of the VOC and argue that this period witnessed a clear discussion on the nature of the company's state in Asia, this is the period 1660-1690. The finalization of the conquest of Ceylon in 1658, followed by the capture of Negapatnam a year later and the conquest of the Portuguese towns on the South Malabar Coast in 1662-1663 meant that the VOC had acquired a large new territory it controlled. The question was how to integrate these with the existing VOC settlements in Asia. This required a formulation of the proper role of the company in relation to the local kingdoms (primarily Kandy on Ceylon), local societies and the potentials for trade and other profits. This chapter will focus on the rivalry between two men Rijckloff Volckertsz van Goens (1619-1681) and Hendrik Adriaan van Reede tot Drakensteyn (1636-1691) who after 1670 took opposing sides in this debate. Van Goens, who had been responsible for the final offensives that pushed the Portuguese off Ceylon and who had commanded VOC forces in Malabar and who subsequently served as governor of Ceylon, was perhaps one of the most vocal advocates for territorial power, colonization and a form of statehood for the VOC in Asia in the Seventeenth Century. Van Reede, who had served under Van Goens at the siege of Cochin became his opponent in 1670, after being appointed commander of the Malabar Coast. Van Reede opposed Van Goens' plans, advocated a peace treaty with Kandy and would criticize the territorial and colonization projects of Van Goens. Their personal rivalry also highlights another interesting aspect. It shows how colonial administrators could both use the company's territorial gains for their own profit, even though the company was losing money in the areas under their command. These profits were not merely financial, Van Goens could use his position of power in the region to further the careers of men who were part of his personal network. A good example of this is the elevation of his son to governor of Ceylon to succeed him. On the other hand, Van Reede could cleverly use the mounting criticism of Van Goens's rule to position himself as a good alternative candidate. This was successful in the long run: though Van Reede was dismissed and sent to the Netherlands in 1678, he would use his criticism of Van Goens's costly projects to curry favor with the leading company directors in Amsterdam and would return to Asia in 1684-1691 as commissioner-general. This was a special position, outside the regular VOC hierarchy in Asia, and allowed Van Reede to push through many of his own ideas, but also to engage in some of the activities that he had criticized in Van Goens, chiefly the embarkation of new and costly fortress-construction. All this is to show that company governors could also behave as free agents, and that working for the company's best interests was in no way opposed to advancing one's own interests.

THE COMPANY-STATE IN ASIA

The acronym VOC is often translated in English as the Dutch East India Company. This is an unfortunate translation as it gives the reader a wrong image of the company, as one that is roughly comparable to its English counterpart in London. In fact the literal Dutch translation «United East India Company» is more revealing. We are not, in truth, dealing with *one* company, but with a joint-venture of five regional companies which participated in the united entity in fixed proportions. This federalized constitution of the company in Europe followed the model of the Dutch Republic itself and was designed to make a cooperative effort by the various Holland and Zeeland merchants palatable to all. Indeed, in the original 1602 charter, regulations dealing with the internal organizational structure in Europe take up the body of the text⁹. Apparently making Dutch merchants work together was deemed more difficult to organize than the intercontinental trade itself.

In Asia, this federalized setup had a reverse effect: it created the need for a strong central rendezvous. Since all chambers of the company in the Netherlands expected to receive their just proportion of *all goods* coming from Asia, a central node in the shipping network was needed to load all the ships with the right amount of goods so that every chamber received its due¹⁰. These ships sailed in convoys, but once in Dutch waters proceeded straight to the regional chambers where they would be unloaded and the products auctioned. The central rendezvous in Asia was established in Batavia and this port became the heart of the company state in Asia.

By 1662, after the conquest of Cochin from the Portuguese by Rijckloff van Goens (1619-1682), the company's state comprised a large number of scattered holdings throughout Asia and Southern Africa, from the Cape to Nagasaki and from Basra to Banda. In general we can classify the various territories, ports, forts, factories and islands where the company was present in three different categories: 1) territories, cities or islands held by the VOC in sovereign possession by right of conquest, donation or inheritance, 2) positions which the company leased from local polities and here it received extraterritorial rights of one sort or another, and 3) areas where the company had to operate like other merchants. It could receive privileges or «most-favored» trading partner status here, but not the right to build forts or maintain armies.

The first category was, by the early 1660s comprised of the spice islands in the Indonesian archipelago, the area around Batavia, the coastal lands of Ceylon, taken from the Portuguese in the previous three decades, the city of Malakka, Malabar, captured in three campaigns in the early 1660s, and finally the replenishment station at the Cape. The VOC's territory on Formosa belonged to this category, but had been lost to Chinese Ming loy-

⁹ GAASTRA, 2002: 20.

¹⁰ For the VOC logistical and shipping network, the position of Batavia as rendezvous and the threat of Ceylon fort his privileged position, see: BRUJIN *et al.*, 1987: 119-142. More recent work has studied the intra-Asian system, for the position of Batavia within *this* system, see: PARTHESIUS, 2010: 113-116.

alist Zheng Chenggong, better known as Coxing, in 1662. The second group of positions included Pulicat on the Coromandel coast, while the third group was larger, comprising trading posts in the Persian empire, in the Mughal empire in Surat and Bengal, in Japan, in Tonkin and in Siam, amongst others. The state of the company then was a composite one, sovereign government in one area, humble trader in another. Nevertheless, all these different positions were a part of the same enterprise and all its governors participated in its internal political life. Personnel, especially high personnel, was shifted regularly throughout these positions, strengthening internal cohesion. Nevertheless, it was this internal cohesion which came under pressure in the 1660s and 1670s by the actions of Rijckloff Volckertsz. Van Goens in the so called «western quarters» in this case Ceylon, Malabar and the southern Coromandel Coast.

RIJCKLOFF VAN GOENS AND THE COMPANY IN SOUTH ASIA: A THREAT TO BATAVIA'S DOMINANCE

The VOC had resumed its war with Portugal in 1652¹¹. In the following decade the company captured all the Portuguese forts on Ceylon, the southern Coromandel and the Malabar coast. The epic siege of Cochin in 1662-1663 served as the conclusion for this long period of conquests. By 1663 therefore, the VOC was in possession of a coherent set of possessions in South Asia. These possessions, the coastal lands of the island of Ceylon, the city of Negapatnam and the collection of forts on the Malabar coast – Cochin, Cannanore, Quilon and Cranganore – initially all resorted under the command of the governor of Ceylon in Colombo. Administratively there was thus a strong coherence in this region. This coherence was also mirrored in strategic and commercial relations between the various areas. Malabar and Negapatnam guarded the «flanks» of Ceylon in the Indian mainland and would prevent the Portuguese from using these positions as a platform for the reconquest of Ceylon¹². The position of governor was held from 1662 onwards by the man who had overseen the war against the Portuguese ever since his appointment to commander-in-chief for Ceylon and South India in 1656: Rijckloff Volckertsz. Van Goens¹³. In many respects, Van Goens was personally responsible for the extent of the company's domain in South Asia. He had personally overseen the sieges of Jaffna and Cochin and had overseen the assault on Negapatnam from afar¹⁴. He had been the one who had

¹¹ EMMER & GOMMANS, 2012: 321.

¹² This argument for the military utility of Coromandel and Malabar for Ceylon was still being made in the late eighteenth century, as the VOC improving its fortifications. NL-HaNa 1.04.17, Hoge Regering Batavia, inv.nr 583.

¹³ Van Goens would serve as governor of Ceylon from 1662-1663, again from 1659-1672. In the period 1672-1675 he held the position of «Superintendent and commander-in-chief» over the VOC possessions in South Asia. Since his son was at that time governor of Ceylon, Van Goens still exerted great power over the Ceylon command.

¹⁴ EMMER & GOMMANS, 2012: 321. For Van Goens' role in the war on Ceylon after the fall of Colombo, see: AALBERS, 1916: 135-170.

convinced the *Gentlemen XVII* to send more troops to Ceylon, back in 1655, when he presented a report to them in person¹⁵. He had envisioned and propagated the idea that the Portuguese could be removed from the island altogether. It was also Van Goens who had convinced the company leadership, both in Batavia and in the Republic that it was absolutely imperative to take the Portuguese possessions on the Coromandel and Malabar coasts as well. He had argued that these could serve as a base of operations against Ceylon and should be taken for strategic reasons. Especially the excellent harbor at Cochin could be used as a staging area. In addition, possession of the Malabar coast would give the company access to the Malabar pepper and Van Goens had convinced his superiors that a monopoly on this product was feasible. When Van Goens was promoted to governor of Ceylon in 1662, the cities on «the other side» – i.e. Negaptnam and Tuticorin – resorted directly under his command while the commander of the Malabar coast reported to him, rather than directly to the governor-general and council in Batavia. Only in 1669-1670 would Malabar become an independent command free from the tutelage of Colombo¹⁶. This was a clear break of VOC practice until this time. It had always been policy to make regional governors and commanders directly responsible to the High Government in Batavia, rather than letting them report to a regional head. This was done out of a realization that such strong regional heads could potentially challenge the domination of Batavia in the VOC-system in Asia.

This is in fact exactly what would happen. Given the strong position of Ceylon in the VOC-system, and his great personal power in Ceylon, Van Goens went about changing the position of the company in his command, and entrenching his own interests along with it. Van Goens used his position of great power to appoint friends and family to important positions. This was in itself not unheard of, but the great regional power and the great extent and the number of positions to be filled allowed Van Goens to build up a strong regional powerbase. Van Goens even succeeded in making Ceylon a second rendezvous for ships coming from, and departing to the Netherlands. This was an extremely important achievement. Up to this time, Batavia had been the central nodal point in the VOC's Asian domains. All ships coming from the Netherlands would call first at Batavia, and only from Batavia would ships depart for the Netherlands. This had the advantage of course that the High Government in Batavia was able to control the flow of information to the directors in the Netherlands. Products from South Asia would be collected at Galle on Ceylon and shipped directly to the Republic. This of course also enabled Van Goens to correspond freely with the directors, uninhibited by a prying eyes in Batavia¹⁷. In addition, he pro-

¹⁵ The *Gentlemen XVII* were the seventeen directors of the VOC in the Republic. Representing the six municipal chambers, Amsterdam, Zeeland, Rotterdam, Delft, Hoorn and Enkhuizen. The XVII were responsible for setting general policy which would then be implemented by the «High Government of the Indies» in Batavia. LEUPE, 1855: 141-180.

¹⁶ EMMER & GOMMANS, 2012: 336-337.

¹⁷ GAASTRA, 2002: 52.

posed plans which would radically change the nature of the company in Asia. In the first place, Van Goens proposed to move the seat of the company's capital and rendezvous to Colombo. There were in fact a number of sound motivations behind this idea. He noted the adverse disease environment of Batavia for instance and observed that with the central army reserves at Colombo, the VOC's army would suffer much less attrition due to disease, easing personnel problems. He hoped to promote colonization on Ceylon, which would create a far safer surrounding for the VOC's headquarters than Batavia, which was dependent on rice imports from large regional powers such as Mataram¹⁸. Other reasons given highlight his focus on South Asia, with the new possessions in India and Ceylon secure, Van Goens hoped that the company's trade here would soon be larger than that from the far East. Colombo would then be well suited as a central rendezvous. However, Van Goens ignored one crucial aspect of the rendezvous function: Colombo did not have a safe anchorage for half of the year and even the harbor of Galle, which he likely wanted to use for this role, was not entirely safe. During the summer monsoon, the south and west coasts of Ceylon were dangerous lee shores, prohibiting communications. Behind the attempt to move the VOC headquarters were also two unspoken motivations. In the first place, Van Goens was genuinely enamored by Ceylon and had high hopes of turning it into a «second fatherland»¹⁹. In the second place, moving the capital to Colombo would increase the personal power of Van Goens and afford further opportunities for his clients who served on Ceylon, in Malabar or on the south Coromandel Coast.

In addition to moving the capital, Van Goens proposed capturing the entire island and rendering it safe for large-scale European colonization. He hoped that a new class of European burghers would form the top layer of a reconstructed Ceylonese society. Besides cinnamon, the island would produce areca nuts and the new colonists would focus on agriculture, mainly cotton and tobacco²⁰. These colonization plans show that there was no quick bifurcation between Asia and the America's and that plans for colonization and agricultural settlement remained relevant for many years.

In one respect Van Goens' plans were opportunely timed. The company had lost its agricultural colony on Formosa in 1662 and hopes of regaining it receded after a number of years. This colony had been populated mainly with Chinese settlers, who had proven unreliable to the company, helping the Chinese who invaded in 1661-1662²¹. In other respects, however, Van Goens' plans were both badly timed and poorly received – to say the least. There was a group of VOC officials which supported colonization plans, but these focused their ideas on Java, and Van Goens' plans for Ceylon were quickly dismissed by these men as

¹⁸ Van Goens was well aware of this dependency, having been on five diplomatic missions to the Mataram court in the 1640s and 1650s. S'JACOB, 2002: 131-149, 134-140.

¹⁹ A phrase used by Van Goens in a report on the situation of Ceylon written for the High Government when he was promoted to the position of Director-General in Batavia in 1675. NI-HaNa, 1.04.17 Hoge Regering Batavia, inv.nr. 542.

²⁰ Production of these crops is mentioned in: ANTHONISZ, 1908.

²¹ For capitulation of Formosa, see: ANDRADE, 2011: 290-297.

hurtful for their own plans²². Response to the other plans was even more vitriolic. Moving the capital west was anathema for the VOC staff who had spent most of their careers in the archipelago and Far East. Their prospects for entering the highest layers of management would then be very slim indeed. It did not help either that Van Goens had already moved ahead with implementing the necessities for his policies in the field.

Starting in 1656 after the conquest of Colombo, and gaining pace after the fall of Cochin in 1662 a huge fortress-building program was implemented in the newly-taken Dutch possessions. The old Portuguese fortifications were dismissed as not suited for modern warfare and in need of replacement. Galle, Colombo and Cochin received new enceintes and new forts and citadels were constructed at Trincomalee, Batticaloa, Kalpitya, Mannaar, Jaffna, Negapatnam, Quilon and Cannanore. In addition these major fortifications were often accompanied by a protective screen of minor fortifications, for example Oostenburg at Trincomalee, Hammenhiel near Jaffna and the Sitawaka-Hanwella-Maltuane group of forts which shielded Colombo and its environs from possible attack from Kandy²³. This building program represents perhaps the single largest fortification-building program by Europeans in Asia in the early modern period²⁴. It was also an enormously contentious affair, as it entailed high costs, both in construction as in garrisoning and maintenance. Fortifications were always a preferred way of keeping an area under control. The Spice islands of the Indonesian archipelago were notably heavily fortified. However, the fortification program of Ceylon and South India was seen by many VOC officials as being way beyond the strategic necessity of the situation. In addition, Van Goens insisted in attempting to increase the area under the company's control on Ceylon by waging war on the Sinhalese king at Kandy. This necessitated fortifications inland and high costs for mobile armies. This generated even more criticism.

There are different documents from the second half of the 1670s that illustrate these critical views. There are three documents which are of particular interest, dated in the period 1676-1678. In the first place, there is Adriaan van Rheede's *Considerations on the state of the company on Ceylon* written on request of the High Government in 1677²⁵. This report was preceded by Joost Segenaar's *Short declaration on the state of Ceylon*, written in November 1676 and sent to the *Gentlemen XVII*²⁶. The third paper is an anonymous letter sent to the *Gentlemen XVII* from Ceylon by a self-styled «faithful servant of the honor-

²² Weststeijn mentions the disagreement between Pieter Van Hoorn and Van Goens in his recent article. Though both men were in principle in favor of colonization, they disagreed about the best location. Van Goens advocated Ceylon, Van Hoorn was in favor of Batavia. WESTSTEIJN, 2014: 25.

²³ For an analysis and description of the system of fortification on Ceylon, see: JAYASENA & FLOORE, 2010: 235-260.

²⁴ As the entire system was conceived in one instance and completed roughly in the period 1660-1700.

²⁵ NL-HaNA, 1.04.17, Hoge Regering Batavia, inv. nr 543 and 544.

²⁶ NL-HaNA, 1.04.02, VOC, inv. nr. 4895.

able company»²⁷. These three documents share a critical view on Van Goens' actions on Ceylon. One of the main points of criticism concerns the fortification-building program. Van Reede takes on the assertion, made by Van Goens, that the largest of the new fortifications would be able to withstand even full-blown European sieges. The ability to withstand European enemies was crucial according to Van Goens, who pointed to the Portuguese negligence in this regard as a reason for their expulsion from the island. Van Reede asserted that it was ridiculous to suggest that VOC fortifications could ever be up to European standards. Manning the different fortifications at European levels (Van Reede names 4 soldiers for every 3,77 meters of wall as standard) would require an army of 60.000 men for all the new forts and fortresses! It would be better, Van Reede contented, not to make the fortifications too strong, lest they prove impossible to recapture²⁸. It must be noted that Van Reede here exaggerates as well, in his calculations he takes every meter of wall as a front-line wall, even if they shield one another, greatly inflating his figures. In addition, the assumption that European manning standards should apply in Asia is also problematic. It appears more likely that this was a clever way to attack the plans proposed by Van Goens. Van Reede also included estimates of the cost of fortification construction in the area. For Malabar and Ceylon, Van Reede estimated the total costs of fortification construction at f 2.434.213,18 ¾ guilders²⁹. To him, these high costs were indefensible and a sign of corrupt and inefficient government.

The other two letter-writers agree with him in this respect and also heavily criticized the fortification-building project. Joost Segenaar noted that Van Goens' hostility against Kandy only made Kandy a more implacable foe which now cooperated with «foreign potentates» to overthrow the company on Ceylon, thus necessitating heavy defense expenditure by the company. By building the fortification in locations which the treaty between company and Raja had allocated to Kandy, Van Goens had hardened Kandy's opposition against the company. In short, Van Goens' fortification had become a self-fulfilling prophesy. The anonymous letter-writer agrees and notes that fortification at outlying positions were necessary to cut off Kandy from the sea, but that they did not need to be defensible against a European enemy, as they were only there to exercise a legal claim to the territory and prevent European incursions. Any European move against even a small VOC fortification would serve as a *casus belli*. In short, the fortification itself was of no importance, rather the threat to respond with force was what was crucial. For this, the anonymous writer noted, a strong navy, rather than fortifications was important, «it being obvious that the company's power rests on always remaining master of the seas»³⁰.

²⁷ NL-HaNa, 1.04.02, VOC, inv.nr. 4897, Particuliere consideratien van een getrouwe dienaar van de Ed. Comp. Packende de directie ofte gouvernement van 't eijlandt Ceijlon in Oostindien en aen de Ed. Hen bewinthebebrs in Patria overgesonden.

²⁸ NL-HaNa, 1.04.17, inv. nr. 544.

²⁹ NL-HaNa, 1.04.17, inv. nr. 544.

³⁰ NL-HaNa, 1.04.02 inv. nr. 4897.

Van Goens also received strong criticism for his very strict monopolistic policies. Pieter van Hoorn wrote a fierce criticism of Van Goens, arguing that only by opening the trade of Ceylon could the island be brought to prosperity³¹. When all these critical remarks were being made, Van Goens was no longer governor of Ceylon. Upon the outbreak of war with France and Britain in 1672 he had been promoted to commander-in-chief of the western quarters and had defeated a French invasion attempt in Trincomalee bay. In 1673 Van Goens commanded the fleet blockading the French fleet and army in St. Thomé on the Coromandel coast. The surrender of the French fleet in September 1674 was crucial³². Peace with England had already been signed in February of that year and the French squadron had been the only potential threat left to the company. In addition, Van Goens could strengthen his reputation as an able commander and war hero. These successes enabled Van Goens to move to Batavia as a regular councilor of the Indies, later being promoted to director-general. This position was important. Governor-general Maetsuycker was already old and his likely successor was the director-general. When Maetsuycker died in January 1678, Van Goens succeeded him as governor-general. However, his choice of successor in Ceylon also proved a ground for criticism, Van Goens appointed his son as his successor. The outrage at this move is palpable in the letters as well. The anonymous letter writer, perhaps shielded by his anonymity, voiced it best:

«to conclude I want to add that it is, in my opinion, very detrimental to the honorable Company that this entire governorship has, for so many consecutive years, been directed or governed exclusively by the house of Van Goens, father or son, and those depending on them»³³.

Joost Segenaar, in his missive, constantly speaks of the «Rijckloffen van Goensen» in plural, to underline the fact that these two men were identical in their vision and strategy.

The arrival of Van Goens in Batavia sparked off a period of profound unrest within the Council of the Indies. This culminated in the removal from office of the most outspoken rivals of Van Goens from the Council. Adriaan van Reede, Pieter van Hoorn, Pieter Overtwater and Constantijn Ranst were all sent packing. With the council cleaned in this way, Van Goens felt empowered to proceed with his plans for Ceylon. After the death of Maetsuycker in January 1678, Van Goens succeeded him as governor-general. To Van Goens' shock, however, the council still blocked implementation of his views for Ceylon. Van Goens found out he had few supporters in Batavia. His long service on Ceylon had allowed him to place his supporters in all positions of power there, but this network of support could not help him once he moved to Batavia. Moreover, Van Goens did not receive

³¹ ARASARATNAM, 1973.

³² AMES, 1990.

³³ NL-HaNa, VOC, 1.04:02, inv. nr. 4897. Original Dutch tekst: «Eenlijck tot besluit hier bij voegende dat het mijns bedunckens seer schadelijck voor d' E. Comp. Is, dat dit gantsche gouvernement ende de directie van dien soomeenigh jaer naer den anderen geheel en al door het huys van de Hen van Goens vader en soon off degeenen die daeraen dependeeren gedirigeert ende gegouverneert is geworden».

support from men he had thought would support him. Most importantly, Cornelis Speelman, his future successor as governor-general. Van Goens would seek and receive dismissal from his post in 1681, disappointed in his accomplishments as governor-general in Batavia. In the meantime, the critics which Van Goens had sent home were now voicing their concerns to the *Gentlemen XVII* themselves. These men would ultimately be able to strike back and enforce their vision for the company.

THE DUTCH RESPONSE: *THE GENTLEMEN XVII* AND CONFLICTING IDEOLOGIES OF EMPIRE

How did the board of the company's directors respond to the upheavals within the corps of its colonial administration? The management board of the company had itself been shaken up by the events of 1672³⁴. Opponents of the stadtholder were removed from office or quickly had to change positions on the political issues presenting the Republic. In Amsterdam the powerful mayor and director Gillis Valckenier had taken the leadership in both the city as well as the Amsterdam board of directors. We are especially well informed of the machinations within the Amsterdam board of the company by Femme Gaastra's *Bewind en Beleid*, which focusses exactly on this period. It is notable that within the Amsterdam board a number of former allies of the Witt survived in the new, post-1672, arrangements. These men come to oppose the policies of Van Goens. At the heart of this group were four men: the former diplomat and regent Coenraad van Beuningen, the 21-times mayor of Amsterdam Joannes Hudde, the mayor, regent and member of the admiralty board Joan Huydecoper, and the secretary of the company Pieter van Dam³⁵.

After the death of Gillis Valckenier this group of regents sought to bring the company back into what they saw as a better balance between the roles of merchant and ruler. Van Beuningen, always the most outspoken of the reform-minded group formulated it like this in 1685:

«It is in a certain degree true that the Dutch East India company is a Company of state as well as of commerce. It would be wrong and hurtful, however, if those who have been entrusted with its management in Asia were to conclude from this fact that it was proper to make efforts

³⁴ In 1672, the Dutch Republic was simultaneously invaded by France, England, Munster and Cologne. The disastrous first year of the war almost spelled the end of the Republic as an independent state in Europe. As a result the composition of the urban oligarchies changed markedly, with underlying factions seizing the day – and power. This also had considerable effects on the composition of the VOC's board of directors. For the political ramifications of '72 on the urban level, see: ROORDA, 1961.

³⁵ For the background of the individuals and the composition of both the boards in the Netherlands as well as the High Government of the Indies, see: GAASTRA, 1989.

to occupy, to conquer and to fortify for reasons of state alone, rather than for commercial advantages»³⁶.

Van Beuningen was thus clearly aware of the reality of the dual nature of the company in Asia as both merchant and sovereign. Though Van Beuningen did not propose the abolition of the company-state, he sought important changes nonetheless. In his mind, the balance between the commercial and the state functions of the company had been lost and it should be rebalanced in favor of the former. His proposals had important ideological overtones, as he sought to reduce the power of the company's servants in the East and increase the say of the directors in the Netherlands over policy, trade and, crucially, personnel. Throughout the early 1680s these men debated the possible ways in which to intervene in the problems in the east. Ultimately, it was decided to send a mission under exceptional authority to inspect the company's establishments and to implement changes. The goal of this was to improve the control of the Dutch managers of the company in Asia and to ensure that the goals of the company as the directors saw it, payment of dividends to shareholders, were foremost in everyone's mind. The inspector-general would receive exceptional, plenipotentiary, powers and was empowered to fire personnel, to enforce changes on establishments (i.e. build or reduce fortifications, increase or reduce garrisons etc.) and to root out corruption. In choosing the man to lead this mission, the directors clearly chose sides in intra-company fights: they chose Adriaan van Reede tot Drakensteyn, lord of Mijdrecht and now a member of the *ridderschap* (those noblemen with voting rights in the provincial states) of Utrecht.

THE MISSION OF VAN REEDE, SUCCESS AND FAILURE

While the initial plan was to send Van Reede directly to Batavia to take on the high government itself, this was modified even before he set sail. While Coenraad van Beuningen, who positioned himself as the most stringent supporter of reform had lobbied to send Van Reede to Batavia, this was overruled by the other directors from Amsterdam and Zeeland. Sending the special Commissioner to Batavia would only worsen the factional divides there and undermine the authority of the High Government³⁷. Despite complaining about the management of its assets in the east, the company directors realized that they needed the High Government intact. Otherwise disgruntled employees would always try to use to

³⁶ Dutch original, as quoted by GAASTRA, 2002: 57: «'t Is een gemeen ende in seeckeren sin waerachtig seggen dat de Nederlandsch Oost Indische Compagnie is niet alleen een Compagnie van commercie maer oock van staat. Edoch 't selve soude en seer verkeerd ende schadelijk impressie geven in de gedachten van degeende die het Bewid van deselve Compagnie is touvertrouwt, indien bij haer daeruyt besloten wiert, dat men om insighten vn Staet, ende niet alleen om voordelen te doen door commercie moeyte ende kosten voor 't occupeeren, conqusteren, fortificeren... moet aanwenden». Also referred to in GAASTRA, 1989:148-150.

³⁷ GAASTRA, 1989:162.

directors to settle personal scores overseas. Thus, while the directors insisted on a new focus on efficiency and profitability, they were forced to accept that the company's government overseas needed some leeway to set their own agenda. The restriction of the Van Reede mission to the «Western quarters» of the Cape, Persia, Surat, Malabar, Ceylon, Coromandel and Bengal was thus a compromise agreement. Receiving broad powers outside of the normal VOC hierarchy, Van Reede was supposed to reduce costs, fight corruption and graft and improve revenues. However, Van Reede could not fire or sue employees himself, but had to hand them over to Batavia for trial.

The results of the mission were rather different than expected by its advocates in the Netherlands. After visiting the Cape of Good Hope, Van Reede moved to Bengal, Coromandel, Ceylon and Malabar. The stay in Malabar was prolonged to enable the committee to participate in the war against the Zamorin of Calicut. Leaving Cochin sick in 1691, Van Reede died at sea on December 15th before reaching Surat. His ostentatious grave in Pulicat is easily the largest monument on the Dutch cemetery there. Interestingly, it was built in local fashion (a domed temple), despite a 1678 stricture prohibiting that³⁸.

Van Reede's mission was not perceived as a success. Personnel fired in Bengal was sent to Batavia, where they were promptly taken back into the company's service. In Coromandel, Van Reede sent the families of all personnel back to Batavia. This ended a period of the Dutch community in Golconda and Coromandel and prevented the evolution of a local Dutch society. Bringing over family members was seen as inviting corruption, as it was well known that family networks worked together within the company in illegal trades³⁹. For those involved, it was however a traumatic experience. Daniel Havart wrote his *Op- en ondergang van Coromandel* (Rise and Fall of Coromandel) largely as a defense of the old system against the arrival of Van Reede⁴⁰. There was however another reason for criticism of Van Reede: his fortification projects.

Already when at the Cape, Van Reede had devoted much attention to improving the fortification. A large part of his report from the Cape deals with the efforts to dig a moat around the castle. The large wall dividing the castle and which even today dominates the interior views was constructed on his instigation. In South Asia Van Reede was remarkably resistant to proposals to reduce the costly fortifications, which he had supported in the 1670s. At Cochin he rejected a plan made by engineer Taarant at the request of commander Van Dielen to reduce the fort⁴¹. As Van Reede had overseen the completion of the works

³⁸ VAN DER POL, 2011: 97-101.

³⁹ For an example of such a family network at work, see: GAASTRA, 1989: 120. The example given, as case from 1671, implicated governor-general Maetseuijcker himself.

⁴⁰ HAVART, 1693. Pages 14-15 give an interesting, though polite, criticism of Van Reede's decision to move the seat to Negapatnam. For an analysis of Havart, see: PETERS, 2002: 65-83.

⁴¹ See the map NL-HaNa, Collectie Leupe, 4. VEL, inv. nr. 0899, De waare Grondteijckening van de hooft stadt kochin, der Custe Mallabaar soo als door last van de E. A: Command: Isaak van Dielen door den sergeant H. J. Farant int jaar 1689 in den Maent April perfectelijk is naar gemeeten, [...] Hans Georg Taarant.

in the early 1670s, this might still be put down to an attachment to his former seat of residence. The plans proposed by Van Reede himself to extend the – only recently completed – walls of Galle northward do not fill this category however⁴². In fact, these plans, as well as the most well-known project of the new citadel at Negapatnam, form a consistent picture of *increased* rather than reduced activity on new fortification building programs. The original projects of the 1660s were now nearing completion or already finished. Instead of seeking cuts and reductions in fortifications and expenditure, Van Reede proposed new projects to improve the defense of different important locations. The cap-stone of all this was moving the capital of the Coromandel command south, to Negapatnam and construct there, *ex novo*, a new citadel of massive proportions. Interestingly, the new fortification partly followed new trends in fortification design in the Dutch Republic after 1672. In some respects, however, it remained of an older type, leading us to conclude that an amateur who had seen the new style, but not fully understood all its elements, was responsible for the design. Most likely, it was Van Reede himself, who, as part of the *ridderschap* of Utrecht and related to important army commanders may have seen the new works at Naarden under construction in the late 1670s and early 1680s.

The move to Negapatnam and the expensive fort more than anything else, proved the limits of the power of the directors back home. The inspector they had sent to the east in expectation of cost reductions, had undertaken an enormous project at staggering cost to the company. Apparently, building fortifications was something that all commanding officers did. This may have something to do with the social status one could derive from a reputation as a fortress-builder, or simply with a genuine fear of attack and losses to the company. However, the costs incurred in fortress-construction could be used as a way to try and discredit a governor – or in the case of Van Reede, inspector. Van Goens had been criticized by Van Reede for his fortress-construction on Ceylon. It was now Van Reede's turn to be criticized for his project at Negapatnam. There was another, more fundamental, problem with the Van Reede mission, however. By keeping Batavia out of the scope of the inspection, Van Reede could not get at the core of the problem. Personnel he had dismissed from Bengal were simply transferred to other positions by the governor-general and council⁴³. This would appear an oversight on the part of the directors. The fiercest advocates of the mission had indeed wanted to send Van Reede to Batavia as well. They were however stopped by a more moderate faction of the company directors who argued, wisely, that the directors could not manage their Asian empire from Europe. If the XVII got too involved in the Asian management, and the power-struggles between the company's servants there,

⁴² The proposal to extend the walls of Galle to the north are shown in map HaNa, 4. VEL1054, *Grondtekening van de stad Gale*, ca. 1695. Though the map is dated to ca. 1695, it has to have been made earlier, in the late 1680s when Van Reede visited Galle. The inscription accompanying the proposed extension of the walls reads, «bij de heer van Mijdrecht ontworpen», which clearly can refer only to Adriaan van Reede tot Drakenstein, heer van Mijdrecht.

⁴³ Nicolaas Shaghen for example, was dismissed from Bengal, sent to Batavia for trial, but sent to Ambon as governor. WIJNAENDTS, 1944: 33.

they risked undoing the management structure of the company. This already indicates the limitations of the Van Reede mission and shows why the experiment was not repeated. It was simply not possible to manage the VOC's Asian empire from Europe and bypass the Asian realities.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined the rivalries within the VOC in the period 1660-1690 from the perspective that the company in Asia was in fact a company-state, as argued by Stern for the EIC. The perspective of the company-state allows for a rather different analysis of these events. We can use the perspective of the company-state to analyze the discussions of this period as ideological and political confrontations, rather than just a disagreement about the management of the company. At its heart, the debate was between those who wished to see the company as «mere merchants», against those who saw it as a state in Asia unto itself. This fundamental disagreement was not resolved in this period and debates about the propriety of spending money on soldiers, forts and territorial control continued to plague the company throughout its existence. Likewise, there would always remain a tension between the High Government in Batavia and the governor of Ceylon.

The period 1660-1690 was a period of changes for the company in Asia. The loss of Formosa, and the simultaneous conquests on Ceylon and South India early in the 1660s caused a rebalancing towards the west. However, the new conquests were also a threat to the existing state of the company. The coherent group of possessions on Ceylon, south Coromandel and Malabar, under unified command of Van Goens in Colombo proved a threat for the position of Batavia as the central node of the company's shipping system and as the capitol of the company's state in Asia. By establishing Ceylon as a separate rendezvous, Van Goens effectively placed himself beyond the control of Batavia, in effect turning it into a «state within a state», with himself at its head. Moving ahead with laying the groundwork of his vision for the Company, Van Goens, throughout the later 1660s seized lands on Ceylon from the king of Kandy and attempted to bring them in the company's domain. To protect these gains, he started a very large fortification-construction program. The results of this program can be considered as the unique material culture of a particular vision of empire. Needless to say, Van Goens was fiercely criticized and upon his assumption of the role of governor-general in 1678, relations between him and the council of the Indies broke down, leading ultimately to the intervention of the *Gentlemen XVII*.

In the early 1680s, after the dismissal and death of Van Goens sr. a group of powerful directors from the Amsterdam chamber decided that the best way to address the problems the company faced was by sending over a specially empowered inspector to root out corruption, waste and idleness and make the company more profitable and efficient. The purpose of this mission is best read in the words of Coenraad van Beuningen who feared

that the company would all too readily start thinking in terms of reasons of state, rather than in terms of commerce. The mission of Van Reede, thus, was a push by a group of directors in the Netherlands to attempt to reclaim their control of the Eastern bureaucracy. In this respect, Van Reede failed miserably. While originally the idea was for him to go to Batavia as well, this plan was soon dropped. Actively hindered from Batavia, Van Reede could not fully exercise his broad range of powers effectively. The failure of the directors to assert their dominance reasserts the impossibility to rule the company-state from Europe. Perhaps more serious from the point of view of the reform-minded directors was the fact that Van Reede, who was after all supposed to be their agent, undertook and proposed large new fortification-building programs, which proved very costly. Rather than abandon or reduce fortifications, he decided to build new ones, at great cost to the company. This signaled that even specially selected, highly empowered inspectors operating outside the normal hierarchy could not be controlled effectively from the Republic. This should serve to reinforce our understanding of the company's men in Asia as «free agents» who could act in pursuit of their own interests and affairs and could be checked only with great difficulty by their principals from the Netherlands. In the tug-of-war over which part of the company actually governed the company-state in Asia and Africa, «Batavia» ultimately won out and the directors in the Republic would not send another inspection committee east until the very end of its existence, in the 1790s. To conclude, the study of the internal organization of the chartered companies and of the career paths of its servants can reveal not only the private networks which operated within the companies, but also reveals the fights, political and ideological, over control of the company-state.

SOURCES

NL-HaNa 1.04.17, Hoge Regering Batavia, inv. nr 583.

NL-HaNa, 1.04.17 Hoge Regering Batavia, inv. nr. 542.

NL-HaNa, 1.04.17, Hoge Regering Batavia, inv. nr 543 and 544.

NL-HaNa, 1.04.02, VOC, inv. nr. 4895.

NL-HaNa, 1.04.02, VOC, inv. nr. 4897, Particuliere consideratien van een getrouwe dienaar van de Ed. Comp. Packende de directie ofte gouvernement van 't eijlandt Ceijlon in Oostindien en aen de Ed. Hen bewinthebebrs in Patria overgesonden.

HaNa, 4.VEL0899, De waare Grondteijckening van de hooft stadt kochin, der Custe Mallabaer soo als door last van de E. A. Command: Isaak van Dielen door den sergeant H. J. Farant int jaar 1689 in den Maent April perfectelijck is naar gemeeten, [...] Hans Georg Taarant.

NL-HaNa, 4. VEL1054, Grondtekening van de stadt Gale, ca. 1695. Though the map is dated to ca. 1695, it has to have been made earlier, in the late 1680s when Van Reede visited Galle. The inscription accompanying the proposed extension of the walls reads, «bij de heer van Mijdrecht ontworpen», which clearly can refer only to Adriaan van Reede tot Drakens-tein, heer van Mijdrecht.

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