



Lodewijk Wagenaar (ed.), *Aan de overkant. Ontmoetingen in dienst van de VOC en WIC (1600-1800)* (Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2015, 353 pp., ISBN 978 90 8890 316 8).

Were it not for the fact that the volume under review was brought together by Lodewijk Wagenaar, one might well imagine that it had been presented by admiring colleagues whose researches have intersected with the diverse terrain that he has investigated. In any case this book is testament to Wagenaar's broad vision and ability to bring diverse contributions together, all with the seemingly simple premise of determining how the servants of the VOC and WIC engaged with so many 'others' (not to mention each other) from 1600 to 1800.

Of course this undertaking, based on a careful reappraisal of primary source documents, produced very different results dependent on the available light. And, as Roelof van Gelder observes in his treatment of the Francophone Swiss doctor Louis Relian (1725-1778), the 'other' of the individual who enrolled with the companies could just as readily be the crew with whom one shipped as the diverse peoples of Africa, Asia or the Americas. The book also makes clear how many seemingly first-hand encounters were conditioned by news already in circulation, whether in the form of travellers tales, official reports to the governing chambers in Holland and Zeeland, or the printed works that were pouring from the presses of the Republic, often with fantastic images.

Even with this variety, there is an almost uniform excellence of the various chapters arranged by geography. And even if one might wish for a certain degree of chronological consideration as the reader is taken from the islands of Japan to the mouth of the Delaware, there is significant overlap that leads, cumulatively, to a greater appreciation of the varied encounters between the circulating servants of trade and empire and their numerous partners and rivals, not to mention the all-important intermediaries who granted access to diverse linguistic worlds and their employees who, within short generations, were often the sons of local partners. Much is done, too, to contextualize the encyclopedic offerings of such Churchmen as Philippus Baldaeus (1632-1672) and François Valentijn (1666-1727), or yet to correct the longstanding shorthand concerning the allegedly demeaning treatment of VOC emissaries to the Tokugawa Lords of Japan.

The volume takes its own first bow with Leonard Blussé's discussion of the agency of the indigenous societies of Taiwan from the 1620s, from the acephalous groups living in the shadows of the Sino-Dutch colonial project to

the autonomous hinterland kingdoms believed to be guarding routes to gold mines, which succeeded in drawing the Dutch in to their own struggles. To be sure, this chapter goes much further in this regard than Tonio Andrade's otherwise absorbing *Lost Colony*, which documents the fall of the Dutch to the Sino-Japanese lord Koxinga in 1662. Cynthia Viallé then shows how, in the presence of a genuinely curious shogun Tsunayoshi (r. 1680-1709), the VOC factors – who knew full well that they were not seen as representatives of a foreign crown – mustered as much skill and enthusiasm as they could to represent their society to Japanese eyes and with some appreciation rendered in return.

In a fascinating chapter, Tristan Mostert enlivens a transaction initiated by the great humanist of the Kingdom of Gowa, on Sulawesi, Karaeng Pattingalloang († 1654). Said to be literate in Latin and able to speak Portuguese and Castilian like a native, the Karaeng commissioned the production of one of the greatest globes ever produced in the Low Countries. While the high price demanded and the subsequent vicissitudes of war saw that this most cumbersome of cargoes was never delivered, Mostert suggests that such pieces were rightly perceived as appropriate gifts of state for more northerly kingdoms, and by Governors General ever more eager to represent Batavia as a regal capital in its own right.

Menno Witteveen makes an excellent case for dating the start of the transition of Batavia into such a centre with a royal family of its own by examining the crucial marital alliance of Governor General Antonio van Diemen (1593-1645), the former bankrupt fled to the East, and the already twice-married heiress Maria van Aalst (1607-1674). While others, such as Gene Gelman Taylor, have discussed how closely interlinked the elite of the emergent town were, the intimacy of local succession and rivalries are laid all the more bare here. Indeed, from its inception, Batavia, with its close-knit elite, was the command center for future VOC operations stretching (eventually) from Cape Town to Nagasaki, evolving from the extraction of costly spices to the business of governing, largely through proxies. With the challenges of competition both on the ground and at sea, local peasantries and unfree laborers bore the brunt of commercial pressures, resulting at times in revolts. This is not to say that there was an absolute resistance to the right of the VOC to collect taxes and Wagenaar shows how, in the run up to general disturbances in coastal Lanka in the 1750s, indebted cinnamon cultivators would plead their case to official inquiries, allowing some insight into the nature of colonial societies in which locally-appointed middlemen had the most to gain. Still, greed and bureaucratic inertia would make naught of such efforts to ameliorate conditions and only fed the impression that the hinterland ruler of Kandy was the true protector of Sinhalese interests. Certainly the place of debt looms large in Alicia Schrikker's treatment of the relatively neglected northern Tamil enclave of Jaffna, which saw a similar repeat of such state theatrics in the 1790s, with planned revisions to the ways

in which the census was generated by local teachers who would count subjects worthy of taxation by labor or, if you were to see it from the local angle, life expectancy linked to productivity. While a commission was established to resolve this situation, its unfinished work was doomed by the arrival of the British in 1795.

Both of the aforementioned chapters, dealing with what we now see as the final decades of the VOC on Lanka, make stark contrast with the hopeful future trumpeted in the 1605 depiction of a handshake between Joris van Spilbergen (1568-1620) and King Vimaladharmasuriya of Kandy († 1604), who had been eager for an alliance against the Portuguese. Pauline Lunsingh Scheurleer goes to great pains not only to demonstrate that there had indeed been an exchange of royal images in the first Dutch-Sinhalese encounter, but just what the form of the now lost image of Vimaladharmasuriya may well have taken, based on ivory gifts of previous eras. Certainly in this sense we find the summation of how the Sinhalese wished to represent their regal selves.

Travelling West, Guido van Meersbergen emphasizes just how the Company's emissaries to the Mughal Court of Aurangzeb (1658-1707) knew full well how to present themselves by the 1670s, being aware that they had been incorporated in a galaxy of mid-ranking (and gift-bearing) officials, much as Martine Gosselink later shows how the VOC operation in Persia would position itself in the decades before the cataclysmic Afghan invasions of the 1720s; invasions that generated the collapse of the Safavid state.

Of course scholarly and artistic exchanges took place in such settings too, and Carolien Stolte's exemplary discussion of indigenous informants in India reveals the sources of Baldaeus's celebrated images of East Indies 'heathens' – being depictions of the incarnations of Vishnu procured in Gujarat by a disgraced Dutch painter, Philip Angel, who was eager to regain favor with his company after having enjoyed the patronage of the Safavid Shah Abbas II. Beyond this, moreover, she gives us cases of Baldaeus's South Indian informants who either are named but never depicted, or conversely depicted and never named.

Angel's infraction had involved illicit trade. For his part Arend de Roever offers a glimpse of how Company officials, including the future Governor General Jacob Mossel (1704-1761), were eager to have their own names kept at a distance from the private trade that enriched them even if it was technically licit. After all, the riches to be reaped on Java were a far cry from the deathly encounters at less glorious postings such as the slave coast of Guinea, where the local-born sons were both the prime movers of the WIC and its potential competitors, as Natalie Everts makes plain in a sometimes moving discussion of one such son of a governor who was deemed too big for his boots by his local friends and covert rivals alike. What he and his kin had, though, were all-important familial connections to local society. As with the pleas of the Lankan peasants, though, his entreaties would fall on deaf

ears and be stymied in ways that anticipated the later tragedy of Kuasi Boachi (1827-1904), the Ashanti prince turned planter in West Java.

Rounding out the volume are the essays of Lodewijk Hulsman, Jaap Jacobs and Geert Jan Bestebreurtje. Hulsman's treatment of relations between competing and once more varied local groups south of the Amazon bears close comparison with that of Everts for West Africa, given how attempts were made to harness the personal networks of local elites for profit and colonization. It also bears comparison with the failed endeavours of David Pietersz. de Vries in New Netherlands in the 1630s as described by Jacobs, who shows how an aspirant patron to a colony could end up caught as much between the ice of the Delaware River as two rival peoples and even the printed depictions of his predecessors. Certainly these last treatments make one mindful of the ways in which the Dutch had been used in local conflicts in Taiwan, as Blussé argued in the first chapter, and that in the Early Modern Era, the worlds of Far East and the Americas were actually linked in the printed imagination. One need only visit the Founders Gallery at the Ashmolean Museum today to find shields from the Moluccas displayed alongside Burmese Buddhas and the mantle of Powhatan Wahunsenacawh of Virginia († 1618).

If anything it is a mild disappointment that the book finishes with Geert Jan Bestebreurtje's tangential treatment of how books have been collected and libraries may be traced through owner's marks. Still, he is right to bemoan the recent efforts to dissolve such national collections as those of the KIT and the KITLV, and his philosophical reflection on the dissolution of Boudewijn Büch's famed collection in Amsterdam could just have easily been applied to that of Karaeng Pattingalloang. Also missing from the volume was some treatment of the great massacre of Chinese at Batavia in 1740 (which was in part an onflow of the collapse of the Persian market's for Batavia's sugar) and, perhaps more handily, an index, which would swiftly allows the non-specialist to see just how interconnected the worlds of the VOC and WIC were. Still, as the combined 27 directors of both companies may have slowly learned, you can't have it all.

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