

tary support and payment in silver or gold or in the form of spices, iron, copper, military hardware, munitions and luxury items for the local rulers gave access to the markets for cotton textiles, silk, deer hides, ray skins and rice and for a long time Japanese silver, gold and copper were important links in the Dutch intra-Asian trade.

Like every organisation, the VOC had its business minded strategists and its warlike empire builders. Of the people on the spot, Governors-General Jan Pietersz. Coen, António van Diemen and Rijckloff van Goens belonged to the latter category. Coen was the man who founded Batavia (Jakarta) as a Dutch controlled, independent *rendez-vous* and was the initiator of the Dutch trading network in Asia, realized 'either by force or through mildness'. Van Diemen took it upon himself to organize the conquest of Malacca and Van Goens was to a large extent the driving force behind the conquest of the Portuguese establishments along the Malabar coast. Their names will forever be connected with the Dutch expansion in Asia in the form of military presence or trade, although more by connivance than full agreement of their masters in The Netherlands.

From the beginning, the Portuguese, not only the *Estado da India* but in particular the private traders, strongly opposed the Dutch intrusion into 'their' empire. Therefore the answer to the question: 'could the VOC have been successful without its Empire Builders?' has to be: 'probably not'.

EMPIRES: STRATEGIES AND TRADE. THE ORIGIN OF THE IDEAS OF JAN PIETERSZOOM COEN (1587-1629)

JURRIEN VAN GOOR *

On New Year's Day 1614 Jan Pieterszn Coen, chief merchant and book-keeper general of the Dutch East India Company in Banten (Java), sent a long treatise to Gentlemen XVII, the Company's board in Amsterdam.¹ In a broad 'Discourse' he outlined his view of the future Dutch position in Asia and developed a grand strategy for the survival of what was still an uncertain enterprise. With its twenty-four printed pages, it was the longest and by far the most important treatise thus far written by a staff member of the VOC. With its imaginative wealth of ideas, the breadth of vision and suggestive and lively style, Coen's *Discourse* is still the most readable document from the early 17th century if one wishes to understand the evolution of the Dutch strategy in Asia. The importance of the document is not just its lucidity, however, it also derives its significance from the fact that it was Coen's prospectus for his twofold tenure of office (1619-1623 and 1627-1629). As a Governor-general he had the opportunity to work out his ideas and to lay the foundations of the Dutch overseas empire. Today, he is seen in the historical literature as the first to outline the concept of inter-Asian trade and to build up a Dutch trading network between Asian ports. The profits of this inter Asian trade were to pay for the building of the Dutch settlements in Asia, an idea which up to the very last days of the Company would remain the central principle behind its organisation.² But Coen was not the only

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¹ Coens "Discoers van 1 Januari 1614" is published in Dr. H. T. Colenbrander, *Jan Pietersz. Coen Levensbeschrijving*, 's-Gravenhage, 1934, pp. 451-474.

² Especially in the 17th century this idea proved to be a success.

company servant to record his plans for the organisation of the Asian establishment: it is therefore possible to identify specifically Coen's ideas and to compare them with those of his contemporaries.

With reference to the Eighty years war (1568-1648) and its fundamental impact on Dutch-Iberian relations, particular attention will be paid below to the 'Truce years' (1609-1621) during which, in contradistinction to the European scene, the war in Asia continued unabated. Attention will also be paid to the origins of Coen's ideas, to Iberian examples and to the outcome of his ideas.

When Coen accepted the high office of Governor General he did not have to start from scratch. The Dutch had been sailing to the East from 1595 onward and had founded the East India Company in 1602. Nevertheless, in 1619 the organisation of the VOC (Dutch East India Company) still lacked stability. Apart from several forts in the Eastern archipelago the Company still had no headquarters of its own. A centre of operations, or *rendezvous*, had long been desirable, but until then no one had succeeded in securing a place for a permanent settlement around the Sunda Straits.³ At the time of his nomination to high office, Coen was no outsider to the Asian trade, for apart from a short stay in the Netherlands he had spent most of his life from 1608 onward in the Indies, mainly in the Moluccas and Banten. He was a highly trained man; after his primary education in Hoorn (Holland) he learned Italian bookkeeping and the finer tricks of the trade in Rome, where he lived for more than six years. Between 1600 and 1607, he lived as an apprentice with the De Visscher/Pescatore family, who were prominent Catholic Flemish Italianised bankers and merchants. Returning to his native city, Coen took service with the VOC as a junior merchant on the ship Hoorn. This ship from his native town was one of the thirteen heavily armed merchantmen of the fleet of Admiral Pieter Verhoeff, which was sent out in 1607 to consolidate the Dutch position in the East. Verhoeff was ordered to harass the Portuguese fleet, attack Mozambique and Goa and to try to conquer Malaca; he was to strengthen the Dutch factories in the Moluccas and Spice Islands and to establish a central *rendez-vous*. Hostilities should be limited to the Iberians, while Asians were to be shown all possible friendship and defended against the 'common and cruel enemy'. Thus would the intentions of the Dutch nation be clearly demonstrated: to fight its enemies and protect its friends – all in the hope of procuring free trade.⁴

The voyage of Verhoeff's fleet coincided with an important moment in the life of the Dutch Republic: King Philip III of Spain and the Dutch provinces on revolt were negotiating a cessation of the hostilities. One of the most diffi-

³ Ernst van Veen, *Decay or Defeat An inquiry into the Portuguese Decline in Asia 1580-1645*, Leiden 2000, pp. 170, 171.

⁴ Margot van Opstall, *De reis van de vloot van Pieter Willemsz Verhoeff naar Azië 1607-1612*, 's-Gravenhage 1972, Instruction, pp. 182-190.

cult points for the Spanish king to accept was the Dutch trade with Asia and the Americas. Although it proved impossible to agree on a full peace treaty, the warring parties nonetheless accepted a temporary truce on the basis of the *status quo* in both Europe and Asia.⁵ In order to gain maximum advantage from the terms of this truce, the board of the VOC, with the support of the government of the Republic, was anxious to consolidate its overseas position. Gentlemen XVII, the directors of the VOC, tried to expand Dutch possessions by making new contracts with local rulers in Asia and by a series of attacks on the Portuguese and Spanish strongholds. Time was short, since hostilities in Asia were supposed to cease a year after the signing of the Truce. Although the peace held remarkably well in Europe, the battle in Asian waters continued almost without interruption.

During a first trip to Asia that lasted from 1607 to 1610, Coen was a close witness to the Dutch-Iberian rivalry. He was present at the Dutch attacks on Mozambique in 1608, sailed along the Indian coasts past Goa and Cochin and took part in the chase of Portuguese ships. He then passed through the Malaca Straits where an attack was made upon Malaca, he visited Java and subsequently spent almost a year at Banda Neira in the eastern part of the Indonesian archipelago. Part of Verhoeff's fleet went to the Moluccas to fight the Spaniards. During Coen's stay on Banda, negotiations over the building of a Dutch fort there erupted into an open conflict during which angry Bandanese ambushed and killed admiral Verhoeff with forty of his men. The Dutch response was to conquer the island and build fort Nassau. On his return home, Coen reported in person to Gentlemen XVII, the board of the VOC who, evidently impressed by his knowledge and insights, forwarded the information to the famous lawyer Hugo Grotius.⁶ Grotius on turn used it for his defence of the VOC's position in the Spice Islands against the claims of the English.⁷ Although little is known about Coen's further activities in the Netherlands, one can safely assume that he sought support among the Amsterdam directors of the VOC. Being an ambitious young man, Coen sided with the influential group of shareholders who were in favour of prolonging the war with Spain and who were also strictly protestant.⁸

Coen's evident qualities and his lobbying bore fruit; in 1612, when he was twenty five, the Amsterdam directors made him chief merchant and commander of a squadron of two ships. Once more in the East, his ability marked him out and within a year Coen found himself selected by Governor-general Pieter Both as the man to organise the rather loose administration. In November 1613 Coen

⁵ J. den Tex, *Johan van Oldenbarnevelt*; Paul C. Allen, *Philip III and the Pax Hispanica, 1598-1621. The Failure of the Grand Strategy*, New Haven & London, 2000, pp. 203-237.

⁶ Nationaal Archief, The Hague, Grotius Archief, Supplement I, no. 40, fols. 236-238.

⁷ Martine Julia van Ittersum, *Profit and Principle Hugo Grotius, Natural Rights Theories and the Rise of Dutch Power in the East Indies (1595-1615)*, Leiden/Boston, 2006, pp. 359-480.

⁸ Jurrien van Goor, *Prelude to Colonialism The Dutch in Asia*, Hilversum, 2004, pp. 67-83.

was nominated Director-General over all the factories and ships in Asia and head of the Dutch factories in Banten and Jacatra in West Java. In this new function he made good use of his earlier administrative training; but he was not just a keen bookkeeper and good organiser, he was also a man of quick wits with sharp insight who knew how to impress his superiors in writing.

In Banten, only a few months after his appointment, Coen wrote his remarkable treatise in which he outlined a grand strategy for the VOC, in which he explained to Gentlemen XXVII how trade in Asia worked and what the Dutch should do in order to enhance their position and outwit their Spanish, Portuguese and English rivals. The significance of this treatise is not limited to its strategic recommendations; but also provides fascinating insights into the education and ideas of the founder of Batavia.

The development of the Dutch strategy before Coen

Those first Dutch overseas exploits did not set out aggressively: trade was the main objective for those Hollanders sailing to Asia in the late sixteenth century. Skippers were instructed only to defend themselves, but not to make war actively. On the basis of the information provided by Jan Huygen van Linschoten it was decided to circumvent the main centres of Portuguese power in India. The Dutch chose to sail directly to Java and the Spice Islands in the eastern part of the archipelago. Friendly as well as unfriendly encounters with Portuguese and Spaniards followed, but the essentially defensive policy was only abandoned after the foundation of the VOC in 1602. From then on war and trade were intimately connected.

In contemporary public opinion the Dutch East India Company (VOC) was an instant success. In fact, the English had a head start of two years. London merchants had founded a company of their own in 1600 – on the basis of a mere rumour of the Dutch profits from the Asian trade⁹ in order to forestall competition from the Dutch, who only established their own East India Company – the VOC – in 1602. Indeed, it required a great deal of negotiation before all the overseas traders of Holland and Zeeland could be persuaded to join forces and found a monopoly organisation allowed to trade east of the Cape of Good Hope. However, compared with the English institution the Dutch had distinct advantages that were to become evident in the long run, the most obvious differences being the continuity in the Dutch organisation, due to the introduction of permanent shares, and the political rights that the Estates General allowed them. In its trading area the Dutch company was permitted to enter into political agreements with local rulers, muster troops, build forts, wage war and make peace – all in the name of the Dutch State.

⁹ Philip Lawson, *The East India Company A History*, London and New York, 1994, pp. 16, 17.

Behind the establishment of the monopoly one discerns very different interests at work. On the one hand, the primary incentive for traders was the opportunity to reduce competition; whereas politicians Johan Van Oldenbarnevelt, the Grand Pensionary of Holland and leading statesman in the Dutch Republic, saw in this organisation the opportunity to extend the war overseas. To defray the extra costs of the war in Asia, the States General paid subsidies to the Company on a regular basis. Indeed, what made the VOC so formidable was the combination of permanent capital, political rights and maritime power. Whereas the English company paid out its profits after every voyage, the Dutch charter stipulated that the Directors had to pay the shareholders a dividend only after a ten year period. In this way, capital was accumulated, enabling the Company to build up a lasting organisation; the subsidies from the States General for the war with Spain and Portugal added to the VOC's solvability and military might.

The first fleet sent to Asia by the new VOC in 1603 was heavily armed with instructions to 'do all offence to Spaniards, Portuguese and their allies', the pretext being the 'violent means used by the Spanish king' to keep the Dutch from trading in the East Indies.¹⁰ These warlike plans did not meet with everybody's approval, however. Not all the sailors were willing to fight on land. Moreover, the ten-year term during which no dividends would be paid, gave unsatisfied shareholders reason to complain that their money was being wasted in military adventures. Some of them sold their shares and tried their luck elsewhere, even helping other nations to set up monopoly companies to trade with Asia. In France a dissatisfied Dutchman and former shareholder of the VOC talked the French king Henry IV into trying to organise a French Company in 1606. Another French endeavour, again with the involvement of many Dutchmen, followed ten years later, while the Danish king followed suit in 1616, also enlisting Dutch officials and adopting the formal structure of the Dutch company.¹¹ After the Twelfth Years Truce the Portuguese tried to establish a company within the area of the *Estado da India* as a response to Dutch competition.¹² But of all these ventures only the Dutch and the English ones proved successful; the others went bankrupt within a short time.

It was not so much the evident success of these companies that led the French, Danes and Portuguese to emulate the Dutch example, it was more the idea itself: the idea that a new model had to be introduced in order to reap the full

¹⁰ J. K. J. de Jonge (ed.), *De opkomst van het Nederlandsch gezag in Oost-Indië*. The Hague, 1862-1909, vol. III, p. 147, Instructie voor den admiraal Steven v. d. Hagen.

¹¹ George Masselman, *The Cradle of Colonialism*, New Haven & London, 1963, pp. 172-179; Philippe Haudrère – Gérard de Bouëdec, *Les Compagnies des Indes*, Rennes, 1999, pp. 6-8; Holden Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient 1600-1800*, Minneapolis, 1976, pp. 201, 202.

¹² Stephan Diller, *Die Dänen in Indien, Südostasien und China (1620-1845)*, Wiesbaden, 1999, p. 18; A. R. Disney, *Twilight of the Pepper Empire Portuguese Trade in Southwest India in the Early Seventeenth Century*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, 1978, pp. 69, 70.

benefits of the Asian trade. Undoubtedly, their readiness to adopt the company model must have been enhanced by the vision of the 'Dutch miracle' – the rapid economic, financial and political rise of the Dutch Republic as a new power in Europe. Indeed, notwithstanding the war with Spain, Holland and Zeeland succeeded in establishing a strong state capable of withstanding the attacks of its much larger and richer enemy.¹³ As a Dutch author wrote at the end of the Eighty Years War, by way of explanation and also with justified satisfaction: 'At all times it is found that wars and anxieties that afflict lands and cities through their manifold sins, sharpen the minds of the people'.¹⁴ In his view, the Republic's success was a sign of God's blessing.

It is a remarkable aspect of the Dutch revolt against their Spanish overlord Philip II and his successors that it coincided with an enormous growth of trade and shipping in the harbour towns of Holland and Zeeland. Dutch skippers and merchants opened up previously unknown markets and destinations; ten years after the first Dutchman sailed through the Straits of Gibraltar he had been followed by hundreds of ships of his fellow countrymen. Shipping and ship – building multiplied; the population growth of Amsterdam and other cities forced the city magistrates to extend the city walls several times. All these visible tokens of welfare that the war brought to the Republic and the growing presence of Dutch ships in European waters, made their competitors deeply aware of the Dutch potential. Kings Philip I and II of Portugal and Spain tried several times to curb the influence of these 'rebels' by barring the Iberian ports for Dutch ships. To no avail, however; indeed contemporary Dutch authors considered the Spanish ban a blessing in disguise as it forced the Dutch to look for a direct route to Asia.¹⁵ After an initial setback the Dutch succeeded in finding other ways to get the spices and tropical wares that they had hitherto bought in southern Europe.

From the outset the Dutch ventures in the South Atlantic and the Asian seas were followed with great interest in Lisbon and Madrid. When in 1595 reports from the Netherlands reached Lisbon that a fleet was prepared to reconnoitre the route to Asia, immediately, and without consulting Madrid, word was sent to the viceroy in Goa to make sure that the Dutch would never return home.¹⁶ The effort failed, however, and new measures were demanded. Soon after the first arrival of the four vessels of Houtman and De Keiser in Banten in Java in 1596, a royal letter was sent to the rajas and sultans in the Malaca Straits warning them not to

¹³ The classic work on the rise of the Dutch Republic is R. Fruin, *Tien jaren uit den Tachtigjarigen oorlog 1588-1598*, 7 ed., 's-Gravenhage, 1899. On the 'Dutch miracle' also see Maarten Prak, *Gouden Eeuw Het raadsel van de Republiek*, Nijmegen, 2002.

¹⁴ 'Inleydinghe', in *Begin ende Voortgangh van de Vereenighde Nederlantsche Geoctroyeerde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, 1646, vol. I, p. 1.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ A. R. Disney, *Twilight...*, p. 63.

do business with the newcomers.¹⁷ The advice was diplomatically couched in the announcement that the viceroy in Goa had been ordered to castigate the Dutch for their insolence to trade in Java *and* also to punish those who received them in their harbours. Two years later, in another letter to the viceroy, Philip III referred to the war against the rebels from Holland as more important than any other business.¹⁸ In the following years, regularly royal decrees ordering the viceroy to strengthen the forts and prepare soldiers for the defence show that the Dutch threat was taken very seriously.¹⁹ Regular reports from the Netherlands kept the king well informed on the number and types of ships being built and equipped by his rebellious subjects.²⁰ The warnings against the rebels are stated in general terms: no mention is made of the way they were organised. In 1602 it was still too early to be aware of the possibility of a new Dutch model of trade with Asia; what concerned the Spaniards were the great number of ships fitted out by these 'rebels'.

In the first charter of the VOC, not much is said of the organisation of its trade in Asia, the most important regulation being the monopoly to trade east of the Cape of Good Hope and through the Magellan Straits. The Company was allowed to make contracts with Princes and Potentates in the name of the States General, to build a few fortresses and safe places and to place governors, soldiers and officials there 'for the conservation of the said places, the maintenance of order, government and justice, all for the advancement of trade'. The use of violence was permitted in specific circumstances. Should the Company be maltreated or deceived, the staff were free to take whatever measures they thought necessary. In the absence of a judiciary the staff were free to take the law into their own hands. The only allusion to the war with Spain is found in the article on the division of booty in the case that Portuguese or Spanish ships were taken.²¹ The Company founders wanted to trade in Asia and, if necessary, were willing to use force in the event of encounters with enemies or should their men be maltreated. There was no talk of settlements or colonies in the charter, or of using force to establish them. Only the possibility of setting up factories and forts is mentioned. In Europe a factory was a group of merchants from one country who had specific privileges in the foreign town or country they had settled in. These rights mostly concerned import and export duties, jurisdiction, a special

¹⁷ Paulo Jorge de Sousa Pinto, *Portugueses e Malaios Malaca e os Sultanatos de Johor e Achém 1575-1619*, Lisboa, 1997. Documento 11, Lisboa 4-3-1600, p. 284.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 285.

¹⁹ Raymundo António de Bulhão Pato (ed.), *Documentos Remetidos da Índia ou Livros de Monções*, Lisboa, MCMLXXX-ff), vol. I, II, III, passim.

²⁰ The archives in Simancas, Archivo General de Simancas, contain several reports from spies in the Netherlands describing the preparations of the fleets for Asia; e.g. see *Estado* 626, 627, 628.

²¹ Cf. the text of the charter in Menno Witteveen, *Een onderneming van landsbelang De oprichting van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie in 1602*, Amsterdam, 2002, pp. 81-97.

house and shipyard facilities. The foreigners lived under the special protection of the lord of the land.²² In Asian ports the situation was more or less comparable.

It can thus be inferred from the regulations governing the establishment of forts that initially, at least, there was no primary aim for the VOC to develop from a trading concern into a political power with settlements and colonies in maritime Asia. The founding fathers seem to have had no idea of the long-term consequences of their enterprise. Nevertheless, given the local conditions in Asia and the war with Spain, colonisation was unavoidable.²³ Within twenty years of its foundation, the VOC possessed a string of forts and settlements in the Moluccas and had conquered Fort Victoria on Amboina and a place on Java to found its headquarters, Batavia. In order to understand the paradox of a trading company that became a political power in South – East Asian waters, one needs to follow the development of the idea of a central rendezvous. The following analysis is based on the writings, discourses and pamphlets of contemporaries who had served the VOC in Asia. Foremost among them is Coen, the forth governor general (r. 1619-1623; 1627-1629) who in 1619 subdued Jakarta and founded Batavia.

Dutch trade in Asia before Coen

In order to trade with Asia, the VOC necessarily had to take on the armed struggle against the Iberians. During the first decades of the Company's existence this dual purpose proved problematic and without state support by way of large subsidies in cash and military equipment the business would have found it difficult to survive. Heavily armed fleets of merchantmen were sent out accompanied by men of war, returning home after three or more years where their tropical wares were sold. It was often difficult to maintain cohesion between the fleets and within the fleets. Not only did sea and weather conditions make communication difficult; once a fleet had rounded the Cape of Good Hope it was often divided into smaller squadrons, all of which had a specific destination and objective. Once their obligation had been fulfilled the ships would then reassemble for the voyage home. During the voyage the merchants on board the

²² Cf. John Everaert, 'De Portugese factorijen in Vlaanderen' in *Feitorias Kunst in Portugal ten tijde van de grote ontdekkingen (einde 14de eeuw tot 1548)*, Antwerpen, 1991, pp. 42-53; Bailey W. Diffie and George D. Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire 1415-1580*, Minneapolis, 1977, pp. 313-320.

²³ Jurrien van Goor, 'A Hybrid State: the Dutch Political and Economic Network in Asia' in Claude Guillot, Denys Lombard and Roderich Ptak, *From the Mediterranean to the China Sea: Miscellaneous Notes*, Wiesbaden, 1998, pp. 193-215; cf. Joaquim Romero Magalhães, 'Os limites da Expansão Asiática' in Francisco Bethencourt & Kirti Chaudhuri (ed.), *História da Expansão Portuguesa. Do Índico ao Atlântico*, Lisboa, 1998, pp. 8-28, p. 16.

ships were responsible for trading activities, while the implementation of the general guidelines of XVII was left to the admirals and skippers, who were often alone with their council members to decide what was best. In as far as there was a *grand strategy* in the beginning, instructions were vague, while their execution depended upon the leaders of the fleet, who were only temporarily in Asia and had difficulties in communicating either with XVII or with the other Dutchmen in Asia. The lack of any central *rendezvous* meant that communication between the separate units remained slow at best, and sometimes non-existent. Between 1602 and 1610 only the beginning of a formal organisation was built up in Asia. In 1603 Gentlemen XVII only ordered the admiral Steven van der Hagen to post agents and some staff in Patani and Banten; if he saw fit he was free to do the same in the ports of Macassar and Bali.²⁴ The admiral was also asked to prepare an ambassadorial mission to China to request free access for the VOC.

One gets a clear idea of the level of knowledge in the Netherlands on Asian from a memoir that was attached to Van der Hagen's instruction.²⁵ The author of this paper, Stalpaert van der Wielen had been an agent on Banda Neira between 1599 and 1602. The memoir makes clear that the Dutch still had a great deal to learn about Asian manners and trade. The same conclusion can be drawn from the diary of the chief merchant Hendrik Jansz Craen, who sailed with Van der Hagen²⁶ and recorded everything he found noteworthy in the East Indies, mainly observations of local customs and religion. Macassar and Bali, which had been recommended in 1603, subsequently proved to be of little interest to the Company. (Only the recent conversion of Macassar's ruler to Islam was seen as an advantage: one admiral expected it to be easier to make the sultan Christian. An illusion.)

Van der Wielen evaluated the situation from the perspective of the trade in pepper and fine spices. From the west coast of India to the Moluccas the important ports are described in terms of the goods that were useful in buying spices. Indian textiles and opium could be bartered against nutmegs and cloves in the Moluccas. Equally important in the evaluation of port cities was their position in relation to the Portuguese. For example, although the Portuguese were said to have a stronghold in Bengal, it would be easy to circumvent them. One finds the same defensive tone in his assessment of Pegu: 'we might trade here without being in danger of the Portuguese'. Another factor taken into consideration was the attitude of the local ruler: in Aceh one should not send too many men ashore, because of the 'bad treatment of strangers by the king'; an allusion to the captivity of some Dutchmen there in 1599. The kings of Johor and Patani, however,

²⁴ J. de Jonge, *Opkomst...*, vol. III, pp. 146-163, Instruction for Steven van der Hagen 1603.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 149-163.

²⁶ J. de Jonge, *Opkomst...*, vol. III, pp. 164-204. The diary runs from 25 November 1603 to 26 April 1606.

were described as very friendly towards strangers. All was seen in relation to the opportunities in the Moluccas and the Banda islands. Only Timor is mentioned as a possible place where one might venture a surprise attack on the Portuguese; 'but for us to trade there (Timor) is not well situated'.

In the years between Van der Wielen's stay on Banda and the fitting out of Van der Hagen's fleet the Dutch attitude had changed and the outcome of van der Hagen's mission makes it very clear that the former defensive attitude had been abandoned. Although his fleet made unsuccessful assaults on Mozambique and Goa, they conquered the Portuguese Fort Victoria on southern Ambon and made a successful assault on Tidore.²⁷ During his presence in Asia Van der Hagen agreed contracts with the Samorin of Calicut, the principals of the cities of Banda islands and with the Muslim chiefs of Hitu in the northern part of Amboina.²⁸ Apart from minor differences due to local circumstances, these contracts all focus on the same points: mutual aid in the war against enemies, explicitly specified as the Portuguese in Hitu and Calicut, favourable trade regulations and a monopoly in nutmeg and cloves. When it came to a settlement both parties were granted jurisdiction over their own people and religious freedom. What both parties had in mind was clearly not a colony, but a factory. In general the accent was on defence; the chiefs of Banda promised to protect the Dutch agents; in Malabar and Hitu the Dutch were given fortresses for the protection of their people and goods. The instruction of the Dutch factor in Banten is has a comparable tone: he is ordered to do everything to induce the king and his government to allow the Dutch favourable trading conditions, to protect them and their goods and to foster prejudice against the Portuguese. Another result of Van der Hagen's visit to the Moluccas, in the long run of more far-reaching consequence, was the alliance with the sultan of Ternate. In exchange for Dutch support against the Spaniards in the Philippines, the sultan gave the VOC the site of Melayu to build a fort on his island, subsequently to become Fort Oranje.

The instruction to the head of the Dutch agency in Banten contains an interesting paragraph which says that the factor should also try to get the king's permission to settle a few families of artisans there. According to some historians this and comparable clauses in the contract with Aceh in the same year 1603, are the first indications that the Dutch intended to settle themselves somewhere around the Malaca Straits.²⁹ However, I do not think that these clauses should be read as the first Dutch attempt at colonisation in the East. No-one who has seen the picture of the Dutch loge in Aceh could believe that this small wooden

²⁷ Arend de Roever, *De jacht op sandelhout De VOC en de tweedeling van Timor in de tweede helft van de zeventiende eeuw*, Zutphen, 2002, pp. 107-108.

²⁸ Text in J. de Jonge, *Opkomst...*, vol. III, pp. 204-212.

²⁹ J. de Jonge, *Opkomst...*, vol. III, pp. 51, 224; M. van Ittersum, *Profit and Principle...*, pp. 42, 43.

building on high poles set in an empty compound was ever intended to become the nucleus of a future settlement. In view of the stipulations of the instruction and the regulations for Hitu and Calicut, this paragraph is better interpreted as an expression of the need to have Dutch artisans at hand in an important port and thus to strengthen the factory's staff. The same instruction was given in other places too. What the VOC authorities aimed at was still a classical factory; a model that was more or less in line with local ideas of how foreign traders should be accommodated.

Up to the conquest of Jacatra in 1619 the factors regularly stressed the need for the Dutch to have a safe place to house their trading goods, bullion and ship-building material. Neither in Johor, Banten or any other harbour did they feel safe enough to bring all their possessions ashore.³⁰

An analysis of the Dutch activities up to 1609 confirms that indeed the VOC was pursuing a dual aim. A series of attacks was launched on the Portuguese strongholds of Mozambique, Goa, Malaca and in the Moluccas; on the other hand efforts were made to establish Dutch factories in places that did not belong to either of the Iberian powers. To a certain extent this strategy of combined war and trade was successful; the southern part of the cloves island Amboina was conquered in 1605 and remained in Dutch hands thereafter. The attack on Malaca was unsuccessful, showing that Portuguese power was still sufficient to keep out the Dutch. Moreover, the costs of the war were consuming any possible profits, as many shareholders complained. Nor was it only the shareholders who had their doubts, several admirals too complained that trade and war did not go together.³¹ The pressure increased when peace negotiations were initiated between the Dutch and the Spanish king in 1605 since, quite apart from certain points of difficulty concerning peace conditions in Europe, the trade with Africa, Asia and America was a major stumbling block preventing both parties reaching a permanent settlement. The truce negotiations almost failed when Philip III refused to concede to the Dutch demand for free trade in Asia, even where this was in places beyond the immediate Spanish sphere of influence. In 1609, instead of a definitive peace, a temporary truce for twelve years was concluded. When it became clear that the truce negotiations would lead to a settlement under which both parties would retain their positions in Asia, the Dutch tried to make good use of the time left before the truce came into effect. In order to enforce the Dutch position and to undermine the Iberian claims, the board of the VOC and the States General gave orders to assert Dutch rights overseas by making further contracts in Asia, and to conquer as many Portuguese and Spanish strongholds as possible. An example of such a new contract is the

³⁰ Cf. Jacob l'Hermite de jonghe 'Corte Remonstrantie van den tegenwoordigen stant eeniger plaetsen in Indien... 20 augusty 1612' in J. de Jonge, *Opkomst...*, vol. III, pp. 380-395.

³¹ J. de Jonge, *Opkomst...*, vol. III, pp. 30, 233.

one signed in 1609 between the sultan of Banten and the VOC. In this contract, among other agreements, the king promised to give the Dutch sufficient space to accommodate their men and goods and to offer protection, while the Portuguese and Spaniards were excluded from trading there.³² The VOC promised to assist the king with all its military power against the Portuguese and Spaniards. Comparable agreements were made elsewhere.

Consequently, in Asia the Truce soon collapsed. The reasons usually given for the different course of events in the two war zones of Europe and Asia are of a general nature; most historians are of the opinion that neither party really wanted to stop fighting. In both Dutch and Iberian contemporary literature, each party blamed the other for being unwilling to end hostilities and accused the other of exploiting the disadvantage of the opponent.³³

The secret instructions of Gentlemen XVII in 1608 to attack the Portuguese first and postpone trade met with no opposition. Admiral Matelieff in Banten thought the advice highly sensitive and voiced his opinion that they could have been more successful if the advice had been received earlier. 'Because, if you want one person to be both soldier and merchant, your work will be in vain. The enemy should not be considered so insignificant. If you want to accomplish something by means of war, then forget trade, for otherwise you'll get neither one nor the other'.³⁴

Matelieff's ideas

In Matelieff's vision of war, maritime power was indeed the main instrument for establishing the Dutch trade in Asia. Thanks to the deployment of several fleets the 'enemy' was unable to keep the Dutch out of Asian waters, as he wrote in his *Discourse on the State in the East Indies*, which he presented to the Companies lawyer Hugo de Groot.³⁵ His ideas must have had some impact, for he not only wrote three similar proposals to Gentlemen XVII and the States General, but also had his *Discourse* printed and published as a pamphlet for the general public. In his view, the enemies of the Dutch were no longer limited

³² Mr. J. E. Heeres (ed.), *Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum Verzameling van Politieke contracten en verdere Verdragen door de Nederlanders in het Oosten gesloten, van Privilegebrieven aan hen verleend, enz.*, 's-Gravenhage, 1907, vol. 1, pp. 1-7, 29, 56, 57.

³³ Among the Portuguese the Conde de Ericeira; on the Dutch side the historians Van Twisk and Velius.

³⁴ Advise of Matelieff to admiral Van Caerden, d.d. 4-1-1608, in J. de Jonge, *Opkomst...*, vol. III, p. 233.

³⁵ Cornelis Matelief aan Hugo de Groot, Rotterdam 12 november 1608, in P. J. A. N. Rietbergen, *De Eerste Landvoogd Pieter Both (1568-1615) Gouverneur-generaal van Nederlands-Indië (1609-1614)*, 2 vols., Zutphen, 1987, vol. II, pp. 196-212.

to the Portuguese and Spaniards, but also included the English and the French, who, although maintaining friendly relations in Europe, were using the Dutch war efforts in Asia to buy spices in areas the VOC considered its own domain. 'As long as no remedy is set against this, we will bear the costs, and they will reap the fruits'. A series of remedies to improve the Dutch position were suggested. The first recommendation was the establishment of a central *rendezvous* where all Dutch ships might be restocked and repaired and where all materials might be brought ashore and all the trading goods gathered before sending them back to Europe. It would also mean that smaller ships could be employed to bring in the wares from Asia while the bigger ships would be deployed against the enemy.

Matelieff's ideas on the optimal location for a central meeting place and in what basis it should be established are interesting. Malaca was not feasible for obvious reasons. In the case of Banten he considered the ruling elite too divided to make contracts with. Nor was Aceh suitable for, like Palembang in Sumatra, the estuary was not accessible to sailing ships throughout the whole year. He therefore advised some kind of deal with the king of Jacatra. Negotiations should be conducted as secretly as possible, since Banten would never allow a Dutch settlement to be established at such close proximity in the land of a vassal. If the king were to hear of such an agreement he might well form an alliance with the Portuguese. Jacatra itself was not ideal: two breakwaters or jetties would have to be built to accommodate the large Dutch ships. The following proposals crucially give us an idea of Matelieff's thinking on what a Dutch settlement in Jacatra should be like. First of all he suggested that the ruler of Jacatra 'should profit as much as ourselves from the agreement'. After the Portuguese example in Cochin, the Raja should 'give us a smaller or larger site close to the river to build a fortress'. Since Matelieff does not mention his sources, we can only speculate that his information on Portuguese Cochin was based on his reading of Jan Huygen van Linschoten.³⁶ In brief, Van Linschoten describes a city divided between Portuguese and Malabar zones, each with its own jurisdiction. The Portuguese town was inhabited by a mixed group of Christians, Hindus and Muslims. In 1502 the first Portuguese fort had been established there and the alliance that was struck at the time remained essential to relations between the Portuguese and the Raja of Cochin. Indeed, it had eventually become the unwitting start of Portuguese involvement in the affairs of Malabar and the beginning of their empire.³⁷ But it is highly doubtful whether imperial ambitions played any role in Matelieff's thinking. His main concern was for a securely fortified place where the Dutch and their goods could be protected, a goal which could only be reached through

³⁶ *Itinerario*, vol. I, p. 54.

³⁷ Luís Filipe F. R. Thomaz, *De Ceuta a Timor* (2nd ed.), Algés, 1998, pp. 178, 179, 212, 213; B. W. Diffie et al., *Foundations...*, pp. 221-226.

contracting an alliance with the ruler of Jacatra. The fortress was intended as protection against Portuguese attacks, since the Dutch would be unable to flee inland with their goods as the natives did if assaulted from the sea. 'That is why we need a fixed abode, not to put our trust in flight, but rather in our defence', he wrote. The place should be large enough to accommodate all those Dutchmen who would in the future come to Asia. All newcomers, Dutch and others, who so wished, would have land around the town for agriculture and for grazing. Only those Dutchmen who so desired should remain under Dutch rule. Matelieff cautioned that his part of the agreement with the king would need very careful handling.

Matelieff wanted a substantial factory, but not a colony. This can be gauged from his suggestion on the division of the profits of the agreement with the prince of Jacatra. Each party would pay half the costs of the jetties, while the Dutch, in the name of the States General, would levy a tax on incoming and outgoing Dutch goods, while the king would tax the Chinese and the other traders who would use the other pier. Other Europeans would be banned from the city. Should the king not allow the Dutch to settle in Jacatra, but instead offer them some other place in the neighbourhood, Matelieff thought it would not be feasible to populate a completely new settlement with Europeans, but hoped rather that the king would send his own people to 'live with us'. This did not mean that Matelieff had no place for Dutchmen; indeed he advised bringing out as many as could be found willing at home. These people should be in the service of the States General, but without being paid a monthly salary. Instead they should be given the opportunity to earn their money in trade and shipping. What the admiral had in mind was an emulation of the idea of the Portuguese *casados*. There is no indication in the *Discourse* as to the number of people necessary for the population of the factory.

In charge of this central *rendezvous* should be a commander with considerable authority who should be assisted by a council. The presence of a permanent commander would strengthen and improve the position of the VOC, which up to that point was still too loosely organised. In the absence of a central authority in Asia everyone was following his own inclination, subject to no correction. 'Everyone' should of course be read here as referring to the leaders only.

There was good reason for Matelieff's willingness to deal with the ruler of Jacatra on an equal footing. It was not only the example of Cochin, it was also the lack of force on the part of the Dutch that accounts for his quest for local support. We find the same readiness to co-operate with local power-holders in his other suggestions for the structure of the VOC's Asian establishment. His advice on the conquest of Banda is – at least in the context of later developments – rather curious. The Dutch, he said, should secretly sound out the Sultan of Macassar on the possibility of a collaborative assault on that island. After the conquest, the Sultan would become the lord of the land and have all the tolls and income from

the island, while the Dutch would get the nutmegs. For defence, a fort would be built that would be manned by the Sultan who would have a company of Dutch soldiers at his disposal. The nobles and chiefs would live together under the supervision of the Sultan, while those who objected would be banned. No other Europeans would be allowed to trade there. Nothing came of this plan, but it gives a significant insight into Matelieff's ideas on co-operation. The same approach to native kings is found elsewhere in his *Discourse*. For example, in his proposals for trade in Ternate, Johor and Siam we find the same mixture of politics and trade. Thus, in order to oust the Iberians he suggests bringing the island of Ceram under the States General or the Sultan of Ternate; the sultan of Johor should have the assistance of a company of Dutch soldiers. For the attack on Malaca, an alliance should be forged with the king of Siam, and so on. Matelieff's *Discourse* ends with an admonition to study the temperaments, conditions and power of all the kings in Asia and to treat everyone according to his rank, 'because the one is useful to us with his harbours and lands, the other with his wares, and yet another with his power and authority, each of which we should appropriate as far as is sensible'.

The proposals for co-operation were no sign of trust in local potentates, but should rather be seen as *mariages de raison*. The Dutch had reasons of their own for not being completely convinced of the reliability of their Asian partners. The war with Spain and Portugal had upset the balance of power in maritime Asia and in the resultant confused and unstable political situation the VOC had to find friends among potential foes. Both parties, the locals as well as the Dutch were only too aware of the vicissitudes of war. Some, while they openly professed their preference for trading with the Dutch, instead did business with the Portuguese. The reason given was that the latter were permanently established there, unlike the Dutch who at the time had no fixed settlements and were therefore merely transient.

Another consequence of the rivalry for goods was that it led to higher prices. Matelieff grudgingly noted that the Bandanese especially had become completely untrustworthy, not keeping to the terms of their contracts but instead selling to the highest bidder. The market in nutmeg had become a seller's market, the more so through the arrival of other Europeans.

Matelieff's advice did not fall on deaf ears. Gentlemen XVII accepted the main thrust of his *Discourse* and decided to nominate a resident Governor-general who would supersede the admirals of the fleets that had previously been sent and, as the highest Dutch authority in Asia, would govern in the Indies for a term of five years. To make the new office work, Gentlemen XVII instructed the first Governor-general Pieter Both (1609-1614) to establish a central *rendezvous* somewhere around the Malaca Straits.³⁸ In the event, however, Both's

³⁸ See P. Rietbergen, *De Eerste Landvoogd...*, Introduction.

efforts to convince the rulers of Johor and Banten to allow the Dutch to build a stronghold in their cities met with little success; nor was the Governor-general able to conquer Malaca. He spent most of his time in the eastern part of the Indonesian archipelago fighting the Spaniards. But war and trade did not get together smoothly. Both's tenure of office shows once again that the basic structural problem of the VOC in Asia was the lack of communication between the various factories and the ships. Both himself was unable to organise the correspondence and bookkeeping – a fundamental failure that was due to logistics as much as the absence of qualified staff. The reason for this lack of co-operation between Dutchmen in Asia seems to me that ships were often away for too long at a stretch and could not be reached. Both was aware of the problems of his double mission and therefore, shortly before his departure to the Netherlands, he nominated Jan Pieterszoon Coen to be Director-general and chief of the factories in Banten and Jacatra. The Director-general was to do what Both had not managed to achieve: to supervise the activities of all factories and make it possible to oversee the totality of business in Asia. The nomination was a consequence of another report presented to Gentlemen XVII by the retired chief of the Banten factory, Jacques l'Hermite, junior.

The remonstrance of Jacques l'Hermite

Jacques l'Hermite, (1582-1624)³⁹ a Dutchman of Flemish origin, had ample experience of the Indian trade. He had arrived in Asia in 1605 and had become chief of Banten in 1607, a function he held up to his departure for the Netherlands in 1611. Thereafter he became special adviser to XVII.⁴⁰ His report was written in August 1612.

L'Hermite's views are clearly influenced by his experience in Banten. He had seen difficult times: the competition with the English and Portuguese had been stiff and at times not far from open warfare, while sometimes relations with the local authorities had been strained as a consequence of conflicts at court. Unlike Matelieff and all others before him, the former chief of Banten did not believe in establishing the central *rendezvous* near the Malaca Straits. His years in Banten had taught him that no ruler would allow the Dutch to build a real fortress in or near his city. A factory would be the most that was possible, but then Dutch goods and capital would never be safe from princely exactions, arson or theft. These hazards were not peculiar to the Dutch, the English factors

³⁹ The text of the *Corte Remonstrantie* / Brief Remonstrance is published in J. de Jonge, *Opkomst...*, vol. III, pp. 380-395.

⁴⁰ For his career, see Dr. J.W. IJzerman, ed., *Cornelis Buysero te Bantam 1616-1618 Zijn brieven en journaal*, 's-Gravenhage, 1923, pp. 201-207.

could tell the same story.⁴¹ L'Hermite's ideas were also influenced by the fact that the Truce had not been kept in Asia. In his view, the Spaniards had made no serious effort to end hostilities in the Philippines, even if for the sake of appearances they claimed to have done so. As long as the Spaniards thought they could gain the upper hand, they could not be relied on to keep the peace. L'Hermite was rather pessimistic of any improvement in the Spanish attitude and thought the situation might well last until the end of the Truce. For this reason the VOC's council in Banten had decided to switch from a purely defensive stance to open warfare. (The question of whether L'Hermite's evaluation of the Spanish policy was correct or not does not concern us here.)

On the basis of the foregoing considerations L'Hermite concluded that the Governor-general should reside permanently in the Eastern part of the Indonesian archipelago in order to lead the war against the Spanish most effectively. Neither Banten nor any other site near the Malaca Straits were fit for the purpose: how could one expect a Governor-general to command from such a place where his power was so limited? In this respect Amboyna or Banda, where the Dutch had forts, were a much better prospect; whereas somewhere around the Malaca Straits would be better situated for purposes of trade. With the war effort demanding the Governor-general's full attention, there was a real need for a second functionary to deal with daily administration, since it was simply too much for one man, who would be constantly on the move, to supervise trade, deal with the bookkeeping and take care of correspondence as well.

The Governor-general would have the supreme command of all forts and factories in the Moluccas, his primary tasks being the conduct of the war and the maintenance of order in general. Only in this way could '*the considerable rivalries, conflicts and fracas that reign among us (because all have the same standing and they sometimes involve the natives since everyone stands up for all those under their command)*' be prevented. The administrative responsibilities should be delegated to a second man, of comparable rank, standing, experience and learning, capable of replacing the Governor-general. The second man could be stationed near the Malaca Straits – preferably in Jacatra if the prince could be persuaded to allow the Company to build a royal fortress and town as a central *rendezvous*. Such a settlement, in L'Hermite's view, was the only way to guarantee a stable Dutch position in the long run.

Among his other recommendations, he suggested limiting the overproduction of cloves by concentrating all trees on one island – the first indication of the *extirpation policy* that was later introduced; and the conquest of Banda and expulsion of the native population in order to found a real colony, a Dutch Republic there. The new inhabitants of Banda were to be free men with a status

⁴¹ Sir William Foster, C. I. E. (ed.), *The voyage of Sir Henry Middleton to the Moluccas 1604-1605*, London, 1943, pp. XIX, 83-99.

comparable to the Portuguese *casados*. The reason given by L'Hermite for the conquest of Banda was the unstable trade conditions there; because of strong international competition its inhabitants were free to sell to whomsoever they wanted without the need to honour their contracts. Another proposal was to give the Governor-general better means to wage the war properly: as long as the allies in Ternate and elsewhere were not convinced of the superiority of Dutch power the situation would remain unstable. In addition, more attention should be paid to the recruitment of well trained staff.

Gentlemen XVII took over the recommendations in L'Hermite's Remonstrance and decided to install a Director-general, whose residence would be on western Java, while the Governor-general was to remain in the Moluccas. Whether L'Hermite had expected to become the new second-in-command and future Governor-general is not clear. He was certainly ambitious enough; but it may be that his recent marriage kept him in the Netherlands. In any case, the choice fell on a younger man, who was in Moluccas at that time, who had already caught the eyes of his superiors at home and had now also impressed the acting Governor-general, Pieter Both. In his glowing description of the young man's qualifications we can hear an echo of the recommendations of L'Hermite. The Governor-general explained the choice of Jan Pieterszoon Coen by summing up his main qualities: 'a man very modest in his life, good in council, very well versed in book-keeping and the affairs of trade, not addicted to drinking, who has lived six or seven years in Rome with Justus Pescatore from Oudenaarde, whom I know well.'⁴² For the heavy responsibilities he was about to take upon his shoulders Coen would receive one hundred and fifty guilders monthly.

A machiavellist in Asia

Anyone still in doubt that Coen was the ideal man for the new job must have been convinced by the treatise, also titled *Discourse* that the newly nominated Director-general sent home on New Year's Day 1614.⁴³ More than the businesslike reports by Matelieff and L'Hermite, Coen's document is a real treatise written by a man schooled in the Humanist style of his times. Instead of laboriously describing various situations he draws in his readers by frequent allusions to common knowledge that they are assumed to possess. The discourse is not an open discussion of all available options, but rather a closed treatise that leads the reader inevitably to the acceptance of the author's conclusions as the one and only truth. Coen's writings in general do not lack for rhetorical skills, and this tract is certainly no exception. His repetition of almost identical words, ideas

⁴² P. Rietbergen, *De Eerste Landvoogd...*, p. 298.

⁴³ Cf. note 1.

and impressions in different forms is part of his way of convincing his audience. Another gambit is to introduce a dialogue, posing questions and answering them himself.

Moreover, what makes Coen's style unique and so different from his predecessors is his handling of political themes. Apart from generalities to the effect that one should not place too much trust in Spain's willingness to share the Indian trade with the Dutch, previous authors do not refer to the actual situation in Europe. Coen shows that he is far more aware of the political realities at home. He knew of the growing religious tensions in the Republic and its political consequences. The hardliners among the Amsterdam governing elite who had only grudgingly accepted the Twelve Year Truth had also fallen out with the more moderate Calvinists.⁴⁴ The conflicts ran so high that the very existence of the Republic was in danger. In the end the anti-Spanish party won out and a purge of the city councils and other government bodies followed. The religious moderates were not only ousted from the Amsterdam city council but also from office in the VOC. When Coen wrote his *Discourse* these conflicts had barely begun, yet he showed a keen sense of the direction things were moving when he opted for the anti-Spanish war party in Amsterdam. To underline his point and to demonstrate the untrustworthiness of the Spaniards he made extensive use of a work titled *The Spanish Tyranny* a work that was very popular in the Republic at that time. It went through a large number of reprints in the first quarter of the 17th century, especially during the peace negotiations with Spain.⁴⁵ Until well into the 18th century it was used as a reading book in primary schools. *The Spanish Tyranny* was no less than a translation of Bartolomé de las Casas *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*. These descriptions of Spanish tyranny and crimes in the Americas provided the rebels in the Netherlands with more than enough propaganda material to attack the Spanish king. In his *Discourse*, Coen repeatedly refers to this generally accepted idea of the king's tyranny and unreliability, in order to emphasise the need to prolong the war in Asia. He also echoes the old belief that damage in the East would cripple Spain in Europe. According to Coen, the Spanish king also shared this opinion, the proof being an intercepted Spanish letter that he had taken with him from the Netherlands.

Since many of the ideas and arguments formulated in the *Discourse* are to be found in a less organised form in a letter of the same date, there is good reason to believe that the treatise was meant to be an application for the position

⁴⁴ Johan E. Elias, *Geschiedenis van het Amsterdamsche Regentenpatriciaat*, 's-Gravenhage, 1927, pp. 40-77.

⁴⁵ Benjamin Schmidt, *Innocence abroad: The Dutch imagination and the representation of the New World, c. 1570-1670*, Ph. D. Thesis University of Ann Arbor, 1994, pp. 134-138; J. N. Hillgarth, *The Mirror of Spain 1500-1700 The Formation of a Myth*, Ann Arbor, 2000, pp. 309-327.

of Governor-general. Again, unlike his predecessors Coen often refers to God, stressing that nothing can be done without divine help.

It is not clear whether Coen was genuinely convinced of the wickedness of his opponents, but the actual open warfare in the Moluccas would have been enough to make the point. Moreover Coen wrote that he had letters proving Philip III's preparations against the Dutch in Asia. Perhaps he felt the need to convince part of his audience of the much grander scheme that he had in mind: the foundation of a Dutch 'state' in the Indies. In order to reach that aim the Spanish might had to be broken. 'Two conflicting affairs cannot be steered in one and the same way: to conduct a simple trade is for the united provinces quite different from establishing the most excellent commerce in the world in such a way that they can possess it alone'. There could be little expectation of reliable returns until the solid foundation for a state had been laid. Priority should be given to the war efforts above the short-term profits of trade. Like Matelieff and L'Hermite, Coen did not believe that free trade could be realised without the support of armed ships and soldiers, but he was much more aggressive than his predecessors in his proposals. In his opinion, war would be the final arbiter.

Coen not only aimed at ousting the Spaniards from the Moluccas, he also wanted to drive them from the Philippines in order to take over the lucrative trade with China. Perhaps his anti-Spanish rhetoric is better understood as a means to win support for his schemes among the strict Calvinists. Behind the highly righteous tones one detects a cool and calculating mind. A close reading of Coen's *Discourse*, its style, construction and phrasing reveal a strong influence of Machiavelli's *Il Principe*. Like the Florentine author, Coen distinguishes two enemies of the 'state': internal and external evils. Like Machiavelli, he is concerned with the 'state'.⁴⁶ Although the Dutch word *staat* – as in English – is used in more than one sense, meaning condition or situation as well as its political meaning, it is clear that Coen was referring to a state in the latter sense. His description of the situation in the Indies therefore consists of several sections which more or less follow the organisation of the Florentine's work. An overview of the political relations with native princes is followed by an evaluation of the force the Company could muster on land and sea, including the aid to be expected from local allies, especially those converted to Christianity. Forts and their qualities are discussed; the force of the enemies and what means would be necessary to undermine their power are also considered. Not surprisingly, the English are also listed among the external evils because they were underselling the Dutch, who had higher costs in maintaining their state. Even in areas like Ternate, where the Dutch had amicable relations with the natives, Coen did not feel completely safe: 'For while it is sure that we make one body with the Ternatans in the Moluccas, it is also sure that this being has two heads' and who

⁴⁶ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, Milano, 1994, cap. XIX.

will decide when conflicts arise? By definition Coen did not trust Muslims and described the allies of the Dutch in derogatory terms when it came to their trustworthiness. He was well aware of the way Ternate was exploiting the Dutch presence, but not having the upper hand he was willing to 'simulate friendship' as long as the Dutch got the cloves. The resort to simulation again can be read as a direct reference to the central idea of *Il Principe*: the *raison d'état*.⁴⁷

The willingness to found a 'state' is the guiding principle behind his colonisation scheme; his predecessors had already indicated the need of a factory populated by Dutchmen, but Coen goes much further. For him a colony was not just a safe place to secure the trade and the 'state that the united lands' possessed there, but much more a springboard from which to begin the conquest. 'I pray the Lord... that the rulers in our fatherland will eventually determine to send over many years a mighty fleet, supplied with a very great number of men, to plant a colony, as this is the only way to secure the Indies and to perform a magnificent deed, to cast down the enemy and achieve an important conquest. For this reason I resolved to set down my humble thoughts on paper'.

The inhabitants of the new colony, '*citoyens*', would be given civic freedom and self-government. What Coen had in mind was more or less a Dutch society in the tropics. The people in the settlements could do the work which, up till then, sailors had been forced to do because of the lack of a resident labour force. In this way the military could concentrate on their proper task of fighting the enemy, while the sailors were freed for the commercial trade.

The plan of action involving large fleets was not a simple scheme. Coen had in mind an attack on the *nervi de Spaigne*, the nerves of the Spanish state: the Spanish Moluccas, Manila, Macau, Malaca, São Tomé de Meliapur and other places on the Coromandel coast were to be assaulted *a lenproviso*. Indeed, it was to be a massive assault on the whole of the Portuguese and Spanish possessions in order to take over their trade completely. Once the conquest had succeeded, other European rivals would think twice before taking part in the Asian trade.

In his grand vision, these colonies would be useful in defraying the costs of protection. The Portuguese *casados* 'are for us a good example': the Dutch colonists would similarly earn their living by private trade, and in times of danger they, together with their slaves, would fight to the finish to defend their possessions.

After L'Hermite's report, Coen must have known of the preference of decision-makers for Amboina or Banda as the site of the central *rendezvous*, although he himself is not very clear about where it ought to be established. Wherever it was eventually to be situated, the first requisite for success was the recruitment of more and better staff. People of quality were needed who were not only

⁴⁷ Dr. J. F. Otten, *Niccolo Machiavelli De Vorst Machiavelli, Sleutel van Onze Tijd*, Amsterdam, 1983, p. 65.

there for money, but also for 'honour and advancement'. In Coen's vision fame, honour, reputation and prestige were the qualities of statesmen, attributes that were sorely needed in the Indies; time and again in his later letters he stressed these attributes, trying to convince his superiors to act more forcefully. They should not be looking at first primarily for profits, but rather to build up a strong position in Asia.

Final remarks

If Gentlemen XVII had not been persuaded of Coen's qualities at first, they were so after receiving his *Discourse* and the flow of letters that he wrote as head of the factory in Banten.⁴⁸ In 1617 the board of the VOC explicitly nominated Coen to be the future Governor-general in order to pre-empt any repetition of the unfortunate events of 1615, which had taken them by surprise. In that year, following the sudden death of Governor-general, Gerard Reyst, the Council of the Indies had elected as his successor Dr. Laurens Reaal, a nephew of a prominent member of the moderate party in Amsterdam. Gentlemen XVII, headed by the leaders of the anti-moderate war party in the Republic, promptly asked for Reaal's resignation which he gave in 1619.⁴⁹ Thereafter, it becomes easier to discern Coen's impact on the VOC's Asian policy.

Shortly after his nomination in 1619, Coen conquered Jacatra and founded the Dutch central *rendezvous* at Java. Batavia was to become the Queen of the East, but it never really became a Dutch settlement colony, for the majority of its inhabitants were and remained Asians. Gentlemen XVII were unable to agree to the plans that would have created a free burger community.⁵⁰ Instead the VOC became a business run by professionals on fixed pay and with a clear ranking of officials in which there was hardly any place or function for private citizens.

Once he was Governor-general, and notwithstanding the agreement made in Europe between the English and the Dutch to divide the spice supply equally, Coen did his best to oust his rivals from this profitable trade. The conquest of the Banda Islands in 1621 was part of the anti-British strategy; the original population being replaced by a kind of plantation society in which Dutch planters worked the nutmeg gardens with slaves. After this, apart from the small island Pulo Run the English no longer had access to the main sources of nutmeg⁵¹ and

⁴⁸ W.Ph. Coolhaas (ed.), *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, 's-Gravenhage, 1960, ff., vol. I, pp. VI-XV.

⁴⁹ Cf. Jurrien van Goor, *Prelude to Colonialism The Dutch in Asia*, Hilversum, 2002, p. 79.

⁵⁰ Hendrik E. Niemeijer, *Batavia Een koloniale samenleving in de 17^e eeuw*, Amsterdam, 2005, pp. 23-40.

⁵¹ Cf. Giles Milton, *Nathaniel's Nutmeg How One Man's Courage Changed the Course of*

shortly afterwards they also found the profitable cloves area around Amboyna closed to them. Over the following years the once thriving English trade in the archipelago lost its profitability.⁵² In the long run it was Coen's aggressive strategy that made the English Company reconsider its priorities and opt for the Indian subcontinent. Coen's policy surely paid off: the quasi monopoly in fine spices gave the Dutch a head start in the inter-Asian trade.

With the end of the Twelve Years' Truce, Coen began his attack on the Spanish and Portuguese trade in the South China Sea, not however with great success.⁵³ Further conquests, particularly the assault on the Estado de India, had to await the offensive wave of the mid-seventeenth century.⁵⁴

As Director-general of trade and head of the central bookkeeping office Coen organised and streamlined the Company's administration. The subsequently famous idea of the inter-Asian trade seems to have been born in 1619.⁵⁵

A comparison of Coen's *Discourse* with the earlier reports of Matelieff and L'Hermite shows the development of the Dutch thinking on how to run the VOC in Asia. In the twelve years since the foundation of the VOC, waging war had increasingly assumed major importance. This was partly the consequence of the double mandate handed to the new establishment by its founders, and partly a consequence of the warrior mood among the Amsterdam elite. The Twelve Years' Truce brought no cessation to the hostilities in Asia. Whose fault this was is a moot point, but the Dutch certainly were not unwilling to seize the opportunity, even if they were only slowly and gradually able to take advantage of it.⁵⁶ In 1619 their 'state' in Asia was still a shaky affair, while the English company made profits with much less effort. Coen's *Discourse* is not so much an outline of a trade strategy as an attempt to convince the Amsterdam elite that an aggressive policy was the only means to success and at the same time an appeal for

History, London, 1999, pp. 309-342.

⁵² D. K. Basset, *The Factory Of The English East India Company At Bantam*, Ph. D. Thesis, London University, 1955, pp. 24-38; P. Lawson, *East India Company...*, pp. 30-37.

⁵³ W.P. Groeneveldt, *De Nederlanders in China De eerste bemoeiingen om den handel in China en de vestiging in de Pescadores (1601-1624)*, 's-Gravenhage, 1898, pp. 58ff.; Leonard Blussé, *Tribuut aan China Vier eeuwen Nederlands-Chinese betrekkingen*, 's-Gravenhage, 1989, pp. 41-47.

⁵⁴ Leonard Blussé and George Winius, 'The origin and Rhythm of Dutch Aggression against the Estado de India, 1601-1661' in Teotonio R, de Souza ed., *Indo-Portuguese History Old Issues, New Questions*, New Delhi, 1985, pp. 73-84; Luís Ramalhos Guerreiro, 'O declínio português no Indico e a hegemonia holandesa (1595-1650) in *CLIO Revista do Centro de História da Universidade de Lisboa*, Vol. X, 2004, pp. 111-134.

⁵⁵ Cf. Om Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal 1630-1720*, Princeton, New Jersey, 1985, p. 16.

⁵⁶ Cf. Maria Manuela Sobral Blanco, *Os Holandeses e o Império Português do Oriente (1595/1641)*, 2 vol., Unpublished thesis Universidade de Lisboa, 1974, vol. I, Prefacio.

money and men. Most of the ideas found in the *Discourse* were not really new: they had been raised by his predecessors and must have been common currency among the VOC's leading men.

Coen's treatise differs from Matelieff's and L'Hermite's texts in one major respect: his strong emphasis on religious values, which emphasizes once again the political nature of his argument. The essence of his *Discourse* is an analysis of the situation and the straightforwardness of the choices he thinks should be made, which makes Coen's treatise a guide to the future development of the VOC.

REAJUSTAMENTOS DA ESTRATÉGIA MILITAR NAVAL DO "ESTADO DA ÍNDIA" NA VIRAGEM DO SÉCULO XVI PARA O XVII

VÍTOR LUÍS GASPAR RODRIGUES*

1. A constatação das deficiências estruturais do "Estado da Índia"

Com a chegada dos Holandeses ao Índico em 1595, e em virtude dos sucessivos ataques e apresamentos feitos não só aos navios da "Carreira da Índia", mas também à navegação portuguesa "de Índia em Índia", como lhe chamara outrora Afonso de Albuquerque, vão começar a afluir a Lisboa inúmeras missivas emanadas das mais diversas autoridades do "Estado da Índia", dando conta do sucedido e bem assim da incapacidade demonstrada localmente para se oporem com êxito à nova potência militar naval. Os seus autores alertam então sobretudo para a necessidade de se proceder ao reforço e transformação da anquilosada e impreparada estrutura militar portuguesa existente no Índico e Mares do Sul.

Os responsáveis do Estado e, sobretudo, os homens bons das Câmaras, em especial a de Goa, desde logo vão traçar um quadro muito negro das potencialidades militares da Coroa no Oriente, chamando à atenção para o depauperamento de homens e de meios técnicos, sobretudo de navios, pólvora e artilharia. Em 1603, na sequência de várias outras missivas, o Senado de Goa afirmava que "está este Estado totalmente de todo acabado, e tão acabado que infalivelmente se Vossa Magestade lhe não manda acudir logo com a presteza que para a restauração é necessária, receamos que quando vier já não aproveite".¹

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¹ Carta do Senado de Goa para o rei, de 1603, in *Archivo Portuguez Oriental (doravante APO)*, Joaquim Heliodoro da Cunha Rivara (ed.), fasc. 1, parte 2, Nova Goa, Imprensa Nacional, 1857, p. 111.