

G. L. Balk, F. van Dijk, D.J. Kortlang, F.S. Gaastra, H.E. Niemeijer, P. Koenders, *The Archives of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and the Local Institutions in Batavia (Jakarta)*. Leiden, Brill, 2007, 572 pp., 16 color ills. ISBN 978 90 04 16365 2

The *Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC), known in English as the Dutch East India Company, was the world's first multinational, founded by Dutch traders and burghers in 1602. It was the largest and most organized of the early modern European trading companies operating in the East. Its activities spread from the Cape of Good Hope to Japan and the Indonesian spices islands. During its two centuries' existence, the Company not only transported goods between Asia and Europe, but also helped exchange knowledge and mutual perceptions between the two continents. Its highly bureaucratic organization left us with at least 25 million pages of records containing data on political, economic, social, cultural and environmental conditions of the places and peoples the Company's men came into contact with. With kilometers of documents which had survived centuries of physical challenges, the VOC also surpasses its contemporary rivals in its capacity of the producer of historical sources. The VOC archives are deservedly included in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register.

In 1619 the VOC captured Jaccatra and turned this Javanese town into its administrative center in Asia with

a new name, Batavia, present-day Jakarta. The Jakarta collection is one of the VOC archives around the globe; the others are kept in Sri Lanka (Colombo), India (Madras/Chennai), South Africa (Cape Town), Malaysia (Melaka) and The Netherlands (The Hague). For the most important collection at The Netherlands' National Archive (*Het Nationaal Archief*, NA) in The Hague, an extensive inventory has been published as *The Archives of the Dutch East India Company, 1602–1795 (The Hague: Sdu, 1992)*. Following its example, the present volume is the fruit of the co-operation from 2001 to 2006 between the National Archive of the Republic of Indonesia (Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, 'ANRI') and the Dutch National Archive within the framework of the TANAP (Towards a New Age of Partnership) program. The aim was to 'improve the accessibility and the physical condition of the archives (in Jakarta) created by the Dutch East India Company and the Netherlands Indies Government' (p. 9).

The book can be divided into two parts. The first consists of articles which provide essential information about the origin, significance and structure of the archives. These introductory articles are presented in three languages: English, Indonesian and Dutch. The second part comprises the inventories of the documents, all in the Dutch language; therefore it is specifically for researchers with a knowledge of the Dutch language.

The opening article by the prominent VOC expert, Femke Gaastra, explain-

ing the 'Organization of the VOC' at home and in Asia, is almost identical to that in the previously-mentioned 1992 volume. Hendrik E. Niemeijer elucidates the 'Central Administration of the VOC Government and the Local Institutions of Batavia (1619–1811)'. This article is the key to understanding the background of the administrative units of the VOC in Batavia which produced the archives assembled in this volume: the High Government, the High Commission, the General Audit Office, the Court of Justice, the College of Aldermen, the District Council, the Orphan Chamber, the Board of Matrimonial Affairs and Minor Court Cases, Notaries, the Trustees for the Deceased Estates of Chinese and other non-Christian Bereaved, the Batavian Loan-Bank, the Opium Society and Directorate, the Reformed Church Council, and the Poor Relief Board, plus the Nicolaas Engelhard Collection. These archives contain various types of documents concerning the Company and the city of Batavia, such as resolutions of the High Government, daily recording of matters relating to trade, politics and local affairs, accounts of income and expenditure, records of court cases and criminal verdicts, banking records, civil rolls, personal wills, records of public work, and many more. This demonstrates that Batavia was a European-ordered city in Asia and a state in itself, with a strong bureaucracy.

The 'History of the Archives' by G. L. Balk, F. van Dijk and D. J. Kortlang gives details of the attempts over time

to organize the archives and to compile the inventories. Very helpful are the directions for the users of the archives, which contains suggestions how to start and pursue research, for example about the VOC personnel. The list of literature about the VOC is not extensive, but comprehensive enough (covering major areas of the Company's operations) and updated from the 1992 volume. Included here are also some interesting illustrations, especially those of the documents in Javanese, Arabic and Chinese.

The VOC archives in Jakarta are invaluable sources for researchers who are interested in the subjects related to the period and activities of the VOC as well as Asian histories of the early modern time (seen through the eyes of the Europeans). Since researchers will find the richness of the archive materials, quantity- and quality-wise, both inspiring and overwhelming, the inventories constitute a good preparation for actual work with the records kept in the ANRI. While the archives become more accessible, other obstacles still remain, notably the seventeenth and eighteenth century Dutch language forms and convoluted scripts. From this reviewer's first-hand experience, both can be overcome with some guidance in language training and paleography – and perseverance. The results of the quest through the VOC archives are more often than not gratifying.

Besides its main function as the guide to the VOC archives in Jakarta, the introductory articles of this book can well serve as a short introduction into the

history of the VOC and Jakarta during Dutch rule for non-experts. This book fulfils the requirements of UNESCO's Memory of the World program, which is 'to preserve the endangered memory of humanity recorded, (...) while ensuring the widest possible access (...) for researchers and the general public.'

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