

MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER

NOMINATION FORM

PART A – ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

1 *SUMMARY*

The Dutch East India Company (VOC, Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie), founded in 1602 and liquidated in 1795, was a Dutch trading company. It was the largest and most impressive of the early modern European trading companies operating in Asia. It got the authority of the Dutch government in the trade zone between South Africa and Japan to conduct trade, erect fortifications, appoint governors, keep a standing army, and conclude treaties in its name. Statistically, the VOC eclipsed all of its rivals in the Asian trade. Between 1602 and 1796, the VOC sent almost a million Europeans to work in the Asia trade on 4,785 ships, and netted for their efforts more than 2.5 million tons of Asian trade goods.

The VOC presence in and around Monsoon Asia resulted not only in warehouses packed with spices, textiles, porcelain and silk, but also in shiploads of documents. Most of the papers found in VOC archives were produced by locally stationed company officials, but much was also produced by the peoples with whom they interacted: kings and noblemen, traders and middlemen, shippers and harbour masters. The extensive information network that the VOC built up for its business operations is impressive indeed. Data on political, economic, cultural, religious, and social circumstances over a broad area circulated between hundreds of VOC officials and dozens of establishments around the world and the administrative centres in the Netherlands and at Batavia, now the city of Jakarta. About twenty-five million pages of VOC records have survived in repositories in Jakarta, Colombo, Chennai, Cape Town, and The Hague. The VOC archives make up the most complete and extensive source on early modern world history anywhere.

Every region and place in Asia and Africa possesses its own historical sources. These range from carved inscriptions in stone, manuscripts on palm-leaf and bark, and printed court chronicles to trade correspondence, travel reports, and the records of civic administrations. Stretching more than four shelf kilometres, the archives of the VOC contain data relevant to the history of hundreds of Asia's and Africa's former local political and trade regions. The VOC archives not only richly supplement valuable regional sources, they also contain general information on Monsoon Asia and Southern Africa as a whole, providing us with the data necessary to draw a broad comparative picture from region to region, and from village to village. When analysed with skill and training, the VOC archives offer a wealth of new and valuable knowledge on Asian and African societies in the 17th and 18th centuries. The study of VOC archives will lead to a new blend of historical narratives that place both national and regional histories into a new multi-regional and even global setting.

The nature, uniqueness and significance of the VOC archives is extensively sketched in Appendix 2: Towards A New Age of Partnership (TANAP): An Ambitious World Heritage Project. Additional information is available at the website www.tanap.net.

2 *DETAILS OF THE NOMINATOR*

2.1 *Name (person or organisation)*

Nationaal Archief (national archives of the Netherlands)

2.2 *Relationship to the documentary heritage nominated*

Custodian of the VOC archives in the Netherlands.

Moreover, the Nationaal Archief co-ordinates an international programme to save the contents and to encourage the use of the VOC archives all over the world by improvement of preservation and accessibility. This programme is called Towards A New Age of Partnership (TANAP) and includes co-operation with the directors of the repositories who are custodians of the archives of the VOC in Cape Town (South Africa), Chennai (India), Colombo (Sri Lanka), Jakarta (Indonesia) and The Hague (the Netherlands).

2.3 *Contact person (s)*

Dr M.W. van Boven, director of Nationaal Archief; General State Archivist
Dr Van Boven is in charge of the nomination process.

Dr P. Koenders, project co-ordinator TANAP programme
Dr Koenders takes care of the consultation and correspondence.

2.4 *Contact details (include address, phone, fax, email)*

Mail	Postbus 90520, 2509 LM Den Haag, the Netherlands
Visitors	Prins Willem Alexanderhof 20, Den Haag, the Netherlands
Phone	+31 (0)70 331 5400
Fax	+31 (0)70 331 5499
E-mail	maarten.van.boven@nationaalarchief.nl
E-mail	pieter.koenders@nationaalarchief.nl

3 ***IDENTITY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE***

3.1 *Name and identification details of the items being nominated*

Archief van de Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie
(Archives of the Dutch East India Company).

- a) South Africa: 1652-1806
- b) India: Dutch Records 1664-1825
- c) Sri Lanka: Dutch Records 1640-1796
- d) Indonesia: Archives of the Dutch East India Company 1612-1811
- e) The Netherlands: Archives of the Dutch East India Company 1602-1811

In South Africa, Indonesia and the Netherlands part of the archives of the former Dutch East India Company have been split up in various record groups. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century, some documents were considered to be the private property of the persons who held positions in the VOC organization. These documents have survived in collections of private papers. In the nineteenth and twentieth century, these collections were transferred to the governmental repositories mentioned in this nomination.

3.2 *Description*

The VOC archives contain the records of the Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, the Dutch East India Company. The company was founded in 1602 and was liquidated in 1795. In some countries, legal successors continued the activities of the VOC. This explains why the period

of creation of the record groups differs per country. The Board of Directors ("Heren XVII") was seated in the Netherlands. As the trading posts were in Asia and South Africa, the Board of Directors appointed regional managers. According to the importance of their establishment, they got various names, such as director, commissioner, chief or governor. The trade was supervised by the administrator in Batavia (modern Jakarta), who was called the Governor-general.

In order to control the trade and their servants tens of thousands of kilometres away, a voyage of many months by ship, the VOC set up a gigantic information network. Every trading post had to copy the main bulk of its administration and send it to the Governor general in Batavia. The administration of the trading posts comprised the resolutions of the local director and his council, the daily reports, reports about the exploration of the region or embassies to the local authorities, the financial records, the correspondence, the treaties with local rulers, reports about the trade and the products needed in the region, etc. The central administration in Batavia copied the main bulk of these documents again and sent it to the Board of Directors in the Netherlands. These duplicates arrived every year in the Netherlands. After an analysis of the documents the Board of Directors sent their reply and gave new orders to the Governor general in Batavia.

In the course of time, many documents were destroyed, but as duplicates were made and shipped, often documents have survived in Indonesia and the Netherlands that have disappeared in other countries. The various VOC record groups and sub-record groups in South Africa, Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia and the Netherlands make up one fonds and cannot be separated. They constitute an organic whole and belong to each other like the five fingers of one hand. For instance with the help of the VOC records in Indonesia and the Netherlands, it is possible to reconstruct the administration of the VOC establishment in Vietnam itself, where in Vietnam none VOC documents have survived.

See Appendix 1 for all record groups in the Netherlands, Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka and South Africa who together make up the VOC Archives.

4 JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION/ ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA

4.1 Yes, the archives were always kept under the custody of the subsequent governments.

4.2 The archives of the VOC contain social, religious, cultural, political, geographical, military and economical information from and about many countries in Asia, South Africa and the Netherlands and about the relations in these fields between those countries. Many countries lack written sources, or have very hiatus written sources concerning this period. The archives are not only used for anthropological, cultural and historical studies, but also for scientific research. For instance, meteorologists use the thousands of weather reports in the archives for research concerning the El Niño phenomenon.

See the appendix with additional information, which is also available on the Internet on www.tanap.net

4.3 a. time

The VOC archives reflect the history of the European expansion as well as the history of the regions where the VOC founded trading posts. The company was the first multinational of the world and with the development of shares and shareholders it was an important link in the development of modern financial instruments. Moreover, when exploring the African and

Asian world, the VOC servants described and made drawings of numerous "discoveries", like the nowadays extinct dodo. The VOC archives include thousands of maps and drawings. Frequently, these pictures are the first representations ever made of the people, houses, landscape, flora or fauna of these regions.

b. place

The VOC archives have been created in the South Africa, Yemen, Iran, India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, China, Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar, Taiwan, Japan and the Netherlands.

c. people

The VOC archives not only contain information about the countries where these archives were created, but also concerning the surrounding region. For instance, the archives created by the VOC Cape of Good Hope establishment (modern Cape Town) hold information on South Africa as well as reports on Namibia, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique and the Swahili coast of Africa as far north as Somalia.

The VOC archives contain much information concerning regions about a period where little or no other written sources have survived. For example, the journal of a Dutch commander who visited Korea, is nowadays considered as a vital source for the early sixteen-century history of Korea; the event is described in every Korean schoolbook.

As the VOC archives were part of a global information system of the VOC trade organization, they contain abundant cultural, religious, social, political, economical information as well as geographical, geological and agricultural information. In a time when a voyage from Europe to Africa and Asia took many months, the world's first multinational needed this information network to control the trade and the servants of the company. In addition, being the world's first joint-stock company, the Board of Directors needed the facts to give account of its policy to the stockholders. A VOC director was in charge of a trading post for a few years. He had to keep a diary with information about the daily affairs. Moreover, when he left he had to compose a report for his successor with information about what had happened in his region in the period that he was in charge of the trading post. The directors also wrote reports about expeditions to explore the region and embassies to the local and national rulers. These reports describe the personal relations of the court, the shifts of power, the foes and allies. In addition, dozens of other types of documents were created and they reflect the life and history of the people in the region of these trading posts.

d. subject and theme

See 4.3 a. The servants of the VOC made detailed reports, because every minor detail could be of big influence for the profits or losses, the position of the VOC in relation to concurrent traders and in some cases the political power of the company. Likewise, the VOC archives contain much information about the development of natural sciences. For instance between 1640 and 1754 the VOC settlement (and the successor of the VOC between 1795 and 1854) on the tiny island of Deshima in the harbour of Nagasaki was called Japan's window on the Western world, because apart from the Chinese, the Dutch were the only foreigners to trade with Japan in this period of seclusion. Until 1854, the Dutch language was used for the scientific discourse.

e. form and style

The VOC archives contain thousand of documents written in the language of the regions of the trading posts by local rulers and local traders. For instance, the oldest handwriting in Tamil

language can be found in the VOC archives in the Netherlands. And the VOC archives in South Africa contain one of the rare 18th century letters of the Sultan of the Comores. Some of the documents in regional languages are written on special carriers like ola's (palm leaves) or specimen of paper manufactured in Japan that only has survived in the VOC archives.

4.4 a. rarity

Due to the nature of the organization, many documents are unique in relation to its type and time. For instance, the so-called thombo's in Sri Lanka contain information about the ownership of pieces of land. These documents are still recognized and often used as legal proof in court cases.

b. integrity

In the course of time the climate as well as neglect have destroyed many records. In the nineteenth century, many documents were deliberately destroyed to save money. Tons of paper were considered not interesting for historical research. The documents (made of rags) were sold to recycle into new paper or to manufacture cartridges for guns. Yet about 25 million pages have survived. Jointly these documents comprise a rather complete image of the history of the VOC company and the regions of the trading posts of the VOC.

c. threat

A fact-finding mission in 1999 showed that the global extent of the VOC archives is about 4,000 shelved meters of documents. Due to the tropical climate of Indonesia, Sri Lanka and India, many of these documents are in extremely bad condition. The Universal Procedure for Archival Assessment (UPAA), an instrument developed by the National Archives of the Netherlands and the Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research (TNO), showed that 59% of the VOC archives in Jakarta, 63% in Colombo, 73% in Chennai, 5% in Cape Town and 10% in the Hague is in extremely bad condition. They cannot be consulted by the public without losing information. Part of these documents cannot be saved, so the contents of these archives have to be preserved by migration to other carriers.

d. management plan

The Netherlands government finances a programme to improve the physical condition and accessibility of the VOC archives. This programme is called Towards A New Age of Partnership (TANAP) and has been running since 1999 (see also 6.1 and Appendix 2).

In 2002 already about half of the VOC archives in Indonesia have been boxed in acid free wrappers and boxes. The re-boxing of the VOC archives of Sri Lanka has been finished. The re-boxing of the VOC archives in India will start in 2003. The condition of the storage of the VOC archives in South Africa and the Netherlands is adequate. The Netherlands provided leaf casting units, other instruments and materials for the repositories in Jakarta, Colombo and India to speed up the process of paper repair. Additional workshops were held.

In 2001, the National Archives of Indonesia together with the National Archives of the Netherlands initiated an international conference in Jakarta on the preservation of paper archives in tropical climates. One of the spin-offs of this conference was the start of the development of so-called tropical boxes in order to try to regulate the humidity inside the boxes and to prevent rodents and insects from damaging the documents. As the influence of the information spread in workshops and conferences is often short lived, an annotated bibliography about preservation of archives in tropical climates was produced. The International Council of Archives (ICA) has reprinted this bibliography.

Nevertheless, the preservation of all VOC archives is not possible. Therefore, a microfilming project has been started. As the budget is limited, these microfilm projects focus on the documents that have the most important significance for the country that keeps the archives, like the thombo's in Sri Lanka, mentioned under 4.4 a.

In other cases a transcription project has been started. The most important project is the digitization of the resolutions (decisions and proceedings) of the VOC Governor and Council of Cape of Good Hope. These documents make up the backbone of the VOC archives in South Africa. The transcriptions are made in XML format and will be published on the Internet in 2003.

In every country, the situation is different and diverse solutions have to be found. The management plan has to be developed and adjusted in consultation with all parties involved. Obviously, the availability of a sufficient budget is an important element in the strategy and success of the preservation. To save as many documents as possible, the projects focus on instruments that benefit the main part of the VOC archives, like boxing, good housekeeping, collection control (by labelling and documenting the condition of the individual objects), improvement of the storage environments and human resource development.

Another tool to improve the accessibility of the VOC archives is the conversion of all the inventories of the VOC record groups (see appendix 1) in EAD format (Encoded Archival Description). In Spring 2003, they will be published on the Internet (on www.tanap.net and on the websites of the various repositories). In some cases, the old inventories had to be adapted. In other cases, entire new inventories have to be produced. In 2004, a new inventory of the records in Chennai will be published and it is the intention that in 2005 or 2006 the new inventories of all the VOC record groups in Indonesia will be finished.

Additional finding aids are in progress too, like a detailed description of all the documents the Board of Directors in the Netherlands received from Asia and South Africa. With the help of this new instrument, a reconstruction can be made of the destroyed and scattered local administrations of the VOC trading posts. In this way, all the involved countries get their VOC archives virtually back. Moreover, this VOC Database in XML format will be an essential instrument for researchers to "attack" the millions of pages of VOC documents. The presentation of this "VOC Database" on the Internet is scheduled in 2005.

5 LEGAL INFORMATION

5.1 *Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)*

The archives are owned by the governments of South Africa, Tamil Nadu (India), Sri Lanka, Indonesia and the Netherlands.

5.2 *Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details, if different to owner)*

a. Cape Town Archives Repository (office of the National Archives of South Africa)

The Head
PO Box X9025
Cape Town 8000
South Africa
T: +27 (0)21 46 24 050
F: +27 (0)21 45 29 60
E: capearch01@hotmail.com

- b. Tamil Nadu Archives
 The Special Commissioner of Archives and Historical Research
 28-29 Gandhi Irwin Road, Egmore
 Chennai - 600 008
 Tamil Nadu, India
 T: +91 44 819 0191
 F: +91 44 819 1202
 E: tnarchives@vsnl.net
- c. Department of National Archives of Sri Lanka
 The Director
 P.O. Box 1414
 7, Reid Avenue
 Colombo 7
 Sri Lanka
 T: +94 (0)1 69 44 19
 F: +94 (0)1 69 44 19
 E: narchive@slt.lk
- d. Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia (National Archives of Indonesia)
 The Director-General
 Jalan Ampera Raya
 Cliandak Timur
 Jakarta 12580
 T: +62 21 780 5851
 F: +62 21 780 5812
 E: anrinet@indosat.net.id
- e. Nationaal Archief (National Archives of the Netherlands)
 The Director
 P.O. Box 90520
 2509 LM Den Haag
 the Netherlands
 T: +31 (0)70 331 5400
 F: +31 (0)70 331 5499
 E: maarten.van.boven@nationaalarchief.nl
 E: pieter.koenders@nationaalarchief.nl

5.3 *Legal status:*

a. Category of ownership

The archives are owned by agencies or departments of the various governments.

b. Accessibility

There are no specific restrictions concerning the accessibility of the VOC archives, except for the physical condition of part of the documents.

c. Copyright status

There are no specific copyright restrictions, except for the regulations of the various institutes concerning the use and publication of documents in general.

d. Responsible administration

The agencies of the various governments are legally responsible for the safekeeping of the VOC archives.

e. Other factors

6 MANAGEMENT PLAN

6.1 Is there a management plan in existence for this documentary heritage?

No (see also 4.4 d).

Due to the limited budget of most of the agencies that own VOC archives, they lack a management plan concerning the VOC archives. The TANAP programme has been initiated to assist these countries with the storage and custody of the VOC archives. The archival projects of the TANAP programme vary according to the custodial problems in the various countries.

In South Africa and the Netherlands, the storage conditions and custody meet international standards. The TANAP programme supports India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka with a boxing project. In 2003, the VOC archives in Chennai and Colombo will be stored in acid free covers and boxes. In Jakarta about half of the VOC archives have been boxed in acid free covers and boxes. The boxing programme in Indonesia will be finished in 2005. The Indonesian parliament have donated a budget for the renovation and a new air-condition system of one of the buildings of the National Archives of Indonesia to improve the storage of the VOC archives. The TANAP programme has initiated research projects to help the repositories to improve storage conditions. The National Archives of the Netherlands assists the National Archives of Indonesia with the assessment of the physical state of the VOC archives in order to set up a preservation programme. Moreover, archivists of the Netherlands Nationaal Archief assist their colleagues in Indonesia with the production of finding aids to improve the management and the use of the archives. In 2003, the inventorization of about half the VOC Archives in Jakarta will be ready. The intention is to have the other inventories finished in 2005.

The management of the physical condition and the production of finding aids is only part of the safekeeping of the documentary heritage. Obviously, it is important that researchers actually have access to the contents of the documents. Unfortunately, a major obstacle for international research of the VOC archives is the Dutch language together with the early modern Dutch handwriting. Even Dutch historians need special training to decipher the VOC documents. Hence, the TANAP programme also initiated projects to master the language and the reading of the uncommon characters. The University of Leiden in the Netherlands has already trained more than thirty young scholars from Asia and South Africa in an Advanced Master's Programme about fifteen of them got a fellowship to write a Ph.D. theses. Dutch scholars as well as supervisors from their home countries support the candidates. In this way, the university programme is creating an international network of historians who are able to use the VOC sources.

7 CONSULTATION

7.1 On 10 and 11 December 1998, an international conference was held in the Hague and Leiden (the Netherlands) to discuss a programme to save the contents of the VOC archives and to encourage the use of the documents all over the world by improvement of the preservation and the accessibility and to train young scholars of Asia and South Africa to do research. This programme is called Towards A New Age of Partnership (TANAP).

The conference was attended by representatives of the agencies who own the VOC archives (in Cape Town, Chennai, Colombo, Jakarta and the Hague), by historians of the most countries where the VOC had trading posts (China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Netherlands, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Yemen, South Africa).

A representative of the British Library was present, because the India Office in London keeps various documents of the VOC archives.

Moreover, the conference was attended by the Secretary General of the International Council on Archives (ICA) and the ambassadors to UNESCO of India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and the Netherlands. The Programme Specialist of the Memory of the World Programme, Mr. Abdelaziz Abid addressed the conference.

At the end of the conference, the representatives signed a declaration that they agreed to support and facilitate within their respective institutions the aims of the TANAP programme. One of the aims of the programme is the entry of the VOC archives in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register.

Due to the different hierarchical position of the various custodial institutions and the diverse national regulations, the intention to set up an international committee to organize the nomination for the Memory of the World Register failed. In view of the time schedule for the nominations for the Memory of the World Programme, the Nationaal Archief, being the initiator of the TANAP programme, decided to nominate the VOC archives. The other custodial agencies and authorities in South Africa, India, Sri Lanka and Indonesia are invited to send a letter of support.

See UNESCO's Memory of the World website about previous communication on the VOC archives: www.unesco.org/webworld/mdm/mow_projects.html#5

See also the website of the Netherlands UNESCO Committee about its support for the nomination of the VOC Archives for the Memory of the World Register (the English webpages are unfortunately under construction): www.unesco.nl/main_2-6-2.php

PART B – SUBSIDIARY INFORMATION

8 ASSESSMENT OF RISK

8.1 The main threat is caused by the bad physical condition and storage conditions of the VOC documents in Sri Lanka, India and Indonesia in combination with the large extent of the VOC Archives and the limited budget. Microfilming and / or digitisation is the only solution to safeguard all the contents.

Listing in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register will generate more awareness of the importance of the VOC archives and it will help to increase the budget. Private organizations might want to contribute when governments cannot provide sufficient means.

9 ASSESSMENT OF PRESERVATION

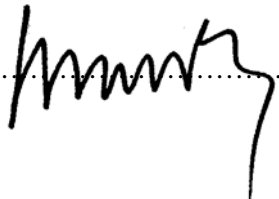
9.1 *Detail the preservation context of the documentary heritage (see 3.3)*

See 4.4 and 6.1

PART C - LODGEMENT

This nomination is lodged by:

Dr M.W. van Boven
Director of the Nationaal Archief and General State Archivist of the Netherlands

(Signature).......... (Date).....30 December 2002.....

Appendix 1:

The Record Groups kept in the Netherlands, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India and South Africa who make up the Archives of the Dutch East India Company (VOC).

Appendix 2:

Towards A New Age of Partnership (TANAP): An Ambitious World Heritage Project

VOC ARCHIVES APPENDIX 1

THE RECORD GROUPS KEPT IN THE NETHERLANDS, INDONESIA, SRI LANKA, INDIA AND SOUTH AFRICA WHO JOINTLY MAKE UP THE ARCHIVES OF THE DUTCH EAST INDIA COMPANY (VOC)

I. Archives of the VOC Management in the Netherlands

1. Record Groups in the Nationaal Archief (The Hague, the Netherlands)

1.04.01	Archieven van de Compagnieën op Oost-Indië	1594-1603
1.04.02	Archieven van de Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie	1602-1795
2.01.27.04	Uit Engeland overgekomen stukken (collectie Nederburgh)	1791-1793
2.01.27.01	Archief van het Comité tot de Oost-Indische Handel en Bezittingen	1796-1800
2.01.27.02	Archief van de Raad der Aziatische Bezittingen en Etablissementsen	1800-1806
2.01.27.03	Archief van het Ministerie van Koophandel en Koloniën en het Ministerie van Marine en Koloniën	1806-1808 1808-1810
2.01.27.05	Archief van de Hollandse Divisie bij het Ministerie van Marine en Koloniën te Parijs	1810-1814
2.01.27.06	Archief van de Comptabiliteit betreffende Oost-Indische bezittingen	1795-1813
2.01.27.07	Archief van Oost-Indische troepen	1796-1807
3.02.33	Archieven van twee Hollandse Staatscommissies totde Zaken van de Oost-Indische Compagnie	1790-1796

II. Archives of the VOC Management in the Trade Zone

A. *Archives of the Central Administration in Batavia*

1. Record Groups in the Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia (Jakarta, Indonesia)

---	Archief van de Gouverneur-Generaal en Raden van Indië (Hoge Regering)	1612-1811
---	Archief van de Commissarissen-Generaal (Hoge Commissie)	1791-1799
---	Archief van de Raad van Justitie-....
---	Archief van de Amphioensociëteit-....

2. Record Groups in the Nationaal Archief (The Hague, the Netherlands)

1.04.17	Archivalia afkomstig van de Hoge Regering te Batavia	1602-1827
1.04.18.02	Archief van de Boekhouder-Generaal te Batavia	1700-1801

B. *Archives of the Local Management in the Trade Zone*

VOC ARCHIVES APPENDIX 1

1. Record Groups in the Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia (Jakarta, Indonesia)

---	Notarieel archief-....
---	Archief van de Schepenbank-....
---	Archief van de Weeskamer-....
---	Archief van het College van Heemraden-....
---	Archief van de Bank van Lening-....
---	Kerkelijke archieven-....
---	33 gewestelijke archieven-....

2. Record Groups in the National Archives of Sri Lanka (Colombo, Sri Lanka)

lot 1	Archives of the Dutch Central Government of Coastal Ceylon	1640-1796
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3. Record Groups in the Tamil Nadu Archives (Chennai, Tamil Nadu / India)

---	Dutch Records	1643-1852
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4. Record Groups in the Cape Town Archives Repository (Cape Town, South Africa)

1/1	Council of Policy	1649-1795
1/2	Court of Justice	1652-1843
1/3	Master of the Supreme Court, Cape Division	1673-c.1955
1/4	Receiver of Land Revenue	1686-1832
1/5	Returns for Taxation Purposes	1692-1845
1/6	Quitrent Registers	1792-1939
1/7	Notarial Archives of the Cape of Good Hope	1790-1983
1/8	Lombard Bank	1793-1843
1/9	Treasury	1794-1923
1/11	Collector of Tithes and Transfer Dues	1773-1844
1/19	Attorney General	1661-1923
1/21	Archives of the Slave Office	1789-1985
1/39	Secretary of the Burgher Military Council	1712-1795
1/82	Secretary of the Burgher Council	1695-1803
1/84	Cape Title Deeds and Transfers	1652-1825
1/89	Registrar of Deeds, Cape Town	1708-1941
2/2	Magistrate, Stellenbosch	1683-(1992)
2/3	Magistrate, Swellendam	1743-(1990)
2/4	Magistrate, Graaff-Reinet	1781-1970
5/4/6	Secretary Lodge De Goede Hoop, Cape Town	1772-(1990)
5/16/15	Evangelic Lutheran Church, Strand Cape Town	1780-1907
8/2	Leibbrandt Series	1651-1898
8/5	Miscellaneous Documents	1654-1901

5. Record Groups in the Nationaal Archief (The Hague, the Netherlands)

1.04.18.01	Archief van de Weeskamer te Batavia	1700-1791
1.04.18.03	Archief van de Schepenbank te Batavia	1685-1804
1.04.19	Archieven van de voormalige Nederlandse bezittingen in Voor-Indië	1703-1826
1.04.20	Archief van de Nederlandse factorij te Canton	1742-1826
1.04.21	Archief van de Nederlandse factorij in Japan te Hirado en Deshima	1609-1806

TOWARDS A NEW AGE OF PARTNERSHIP (TANAP)

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1. TANAP:

AN AMBITIOUS WORLD HERITAGE PROJECT

How did the earth's peoples, cultures, economies, and polities become so closely interconnected? When did our world become 'global' and what vital role did Asia and Africa play at the centre of this new international community? New questions are being asked about the history of Asia and Africa and about their interaction with the West, but how do we unlock the answers? What is the key?

Unravelling a 'Braided' World History

At sites across Asia, Africa, and Europe, remnants of this global past lie in wait. Kilometres of archives have survived centuries of humidity and tropical heat, and historians have only just begun to unearth their secret treasures--answers to the riddle of humankind's collective past. Only a few experts are able to

VOC ARCHIVES APPENDIX 2

decipher the handwritings of the archives or even to determine its languages. This unique collection of records has been glorified in the colonial past and despised in nationalist awakenings, but as modern historians unravel its secrets layer by layer, they become more and more convinced that it is the most complete and extensive source on early modern World History anywhere: the Archives of the Dutch East India Company (voc), 1602-1795.

The VOC: the World's First Multinational

The voc (*Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*) was a Dutch trading company founded by traders and *burghers* from port towns such as Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Middelburg. It was the largest and most impressive of the early modern European trading companies operating in Asia. It formed in 1602 when the States-General of the United Provinces, the highest authority of the Republic of the Netherlands, persuaded several competing Dutch spice-trading firms to incorporate into a single trading company. It had the States-General's authority in the trade zone between South Africa and Japan to conduct trade, erect fortifications, appoint governors, keep a standing army, and conclude treaties in its name.

Seventeen gentlemen (The *Heeren XVII*) served as the Board of Directors in the Netherlands of the world's first joint-stock company. voc-Asia was governed on-site by a governor-general at Java, his Council of the Indies, and by subordinate voc officials in a network of forts and factories in Africa, the Middle East, India and Sri Lanka, throughout Southeast Asia, and up into China, Taiwan, and Japan.

Statistically, the voc eclipsed all of its rivals in the Asia trade. Between 1602 and 1796 the voc sent almost a million Europeans to work in the Asia trade on 4,785 ships, and netted for their efforts more than 2.5 million tons of Asian trade goods. By contrast, the rest of Europe combined sent only 882,412 people from 1500 to 1795, and the fleet of the English (later British) East India Company, the voc's nearest competitor, was a distant second to its total traffic with 2,690 ships and a mere one-fifth the tonnage of goods carried by the voc. The voc enjoyed huge profits from its spice monopoly through most of the 1600s. In the last quarter of the 17th century European demand shifted to textiles, coffee and tea, commodities over which the voc did not and could not exercise a monopoly. Thus, voc revenues came increasingly from tolls, taxes and tributes collected through an expanding colonial administration over its territorial holdings in Africa and Asia. Crippled by a debt of almost one hundred million guilders and reeling from the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War and French control over the Netherlands, the voc was liquidated at the end of the eighteenth century.

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25 Million Pages of Historical Records

The VOC presence in and around Monsoon Asia resulted not only in warehouses packed with spices, textiles, porcelain and silk, but also in shiploads of documents. Most of the papers found in VOC archives were produced by locally stationed Company officials, but much was also produced by the peoples with whom they interacted: kings and noblemen, traders and middlemen, shippers and *shahbandars* (harbour masters).

The extensive information network that the VOC built up for its business operations is impressive indeed. Data on political, economic, cultural, religious, and social circumstances over a broad area circulated between hundreds of VOC officials and dozens of establishments around the world and the administrative centres in the Netherlands and at Batavia, now the city of Jakarta. About twenty-five million pages of VOC records survive among the vast holdings of VOC repositories in Jakarta, Colombo, Chennai, Cape Town, and The Hague.

2. NEW PARTNERSHIPS, NEW HISTORIES:

AN OCEAN OF POSSIBILITIES

The VOC sources have a complex legacy. The TANAP programme seeks to facilitate an historical approach that blends the use of both VOC and local sources to inform upon a broad range of Asian and African subjects. This approach can only be successful in a new Partnership between historians and universities from all places involved in the VOC encounter.

Local Legacies

Every region and place in Asia possesses its own historical sources. These range from carved inscriptions in stone, manuscripts on palm-leaf and bark, and printed court chronicles to trade correspondence, travel reports, and the records of civic administrations. Stretching more than four shelf kilometres, the archives of the VOC contain data relevant to the history of hundreds of Asia's and Africa's former local polities and trade regions. The VOC archives not only richly supplement valuable regional sources, they also contain general information on Monsoon Asia and Southern Africa as a whole, providing us with the data necessary to draw a broad comparative picture from region to region, and from village to village.

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New Historical Blends

When analysed with skill and training, the VOC archives offer a wealth of new and valuable knowledge on Asian and African societies in the 17th and 18th centuries. Several recently published books demonstrate this. Without the consultation of the VOC records, for example, important chapters in the history of Southeast Asian kingdoms such as Ternate (Maluku), Jambi, Palembang (Sumatra), and Mataram (Java) could not have been written. VOC materials have also proven to be useful and reliable in the reconstruction of the silk trade of Iran. Furthermore, without accessing VOC records we would not have understood the significance of Mocha (Yemen) as an international trading port. We also would not have possessed the kind of detailed economic history of India that we do now, for in the 1680s the VOC leased entire villages and extensive plots of land in southern Coromandel and Kerala, providing a font of information about village life and agrarian production in India during that period. Finally, we would lack essential information concerning Japan's copper trade and its self-imposed closure to Western trade after 1636.

VOC sources likewise contain many data and descriptions of various peoples of southern Africa such as the Khoikhoi and San. VOC reports also cover the Arabian seas extensively, including Mauritius and Madagascar as well as the slave trade of Mombassa. Perhaps most importantly, Dutch sources comprise the only major surviving record of early Taiwan, describing in detail both the original Austronesian society and the early Chinese settlements of the 17th century.

The study of VOC archives will lead to a new blend of historical narratives that place both national and regional histories into a new multi-regional or even global setting. From a sea of information comes an ocean of possibilities!

3. PRESERVATION OF CULTURE:

ACCESS TO HISTORY

Time and the tropical climate have not been kind to the VOC archives. A 1999 fact-finding mission to the repositories of VOC archival papers in Asia revealed widespread damage to the paper records from climate and conditions of storage as well as wear and tear resulting from the consultation of the documents. These are clear threats to the archives' survival. The VOC records are an endangered piece of the world's heritage, and one of the goals

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of TANAP is to preserve them for the future. The chief purpose behind preservation, however, is the conservation of the information. Therefore, simultaneous to preservation, finding aids will be compiled or improved and linked world-wide to reveal the full value of this historical treasure-trove.

South Africa

The Cape of Good Hope was a vital VOC way station and its VOC archives are no less important. The Cape Town Archives Repository possesses 4,900 VOC entries that run 325 meters. Most of the documents are adequately preserved, so the attention concentrates on the improvement of the accessibility of the backbone of the archives, the Resolutions of the Political Council. The records are currently being transliterated by South African experts and will be made available on the Internet.

Sri Lanka

Colombo was a key VOC port in the Indian Ocean until the beginning of the nineteenth century. Sri Lanka's National Archives therefore possess some 6,900 VOC documents spanning 310 meters. The tropical climate has been hard on these records, so preservation and microfilming are priorities here. Moreover, numerous boxes hitherto marked simply 'miscellaneous' shall finally be fully described and integrated with the existing inventory into a new digital finding aid.

India

The Tamil Nadu Archives presently keep the least studied of all VOC records. This collection in Chennai is made up of 1,763 VOC pieces running 64 meters. As most of the material of the former VOC settlements in India has been lost in the course of time and the remaining objects are severely damaged, immediate conservation and microfilming are vital to safeguard the information. In addition, dated finding aids will be replaced by a completely new digital inventory.

The Netherlands

The VOC holdings of the National Archives of the Netherlands comprise 18,000 entries and run 1,330 shelf meters in The Hague. As this is the most intensively consulted of the VOC collections, portions of the material are in need of repair. At the end of the 20th century an inventory was conducted and its results published, but the entries were only described on a general level thus limiting its usefulness. TANAP archival activities in the Netherlands therefore focus on generating a detailed description

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of each piece and then linking them in a digital “super inventory” with VOC holdings elsewhere in the world.

Indonesia

Once the centre of VOC administration in Asia, Jakarta maintains almost half of the VOC archives worldwide, nearly 15,000 VOC entries occupying an impressive 1,800 meters of shelf space. Within the framework of the project, the National Archives of Indonesia and the National Archives of the Netherlands reconfirm their longstanding commitment to co-operation, which includes material support, lectures on Dutch palaeography, and the training of conservators and archivists. The VOC records will naturally benefit from this collaboration. One of the major products of this enterprise will be the long-awaited revision of the outdated VOC archival catalogue of 1882.

4. SCHOLARSHIPS AND RESEARCH:

TOWARDS A NEW INTERNATIONAL PLATFORM

Too often, the vantagepoint of knowledge produced about Asia and Africa has been, as one scholar notes, ‘from the deck of the ship, the ramparts of the fortress, [and] the high gallery of the trading-house.’ In an effort to facilitate more autonomous histories of regions outside Europe, TANAP offers MA and Ph.D. programmes to train young, promising Asian, African, and European scholars. Research in VOC archives is not an easy undertaking. Key skills must first be developed to make full use of the archives. However, the practitioners of these skills will make a profound mark upon the conception and writing of history on both the local and global levels.

The Advanced Master’s Programme (AMP)

TANAP offers twenty scholarships in total for young, promising historians from Asia and Africa. The AMP provides a year of intensive language and historical training at Leiden University and the National Archives of the Netherlands, culminating in a well-researched and original Ph.D. proposal by the student. A Master’s degree in history or a related field is required for admission. Fellowships, which include allowances for travel, tuition, and living expenses, are set aside for students from regions where the VOC archives are most relevant. However, other students with appropriate interests are encouraged to apply as well.

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The Advanced Master's Curriculum

Basic Dutch language acquisition and acquaintance with the archives are the heart of the AMP curriculum. Both intensive and semi-intensive courses are offered to develop reading proficiency in early modern Dutch. Palaeography courses acquaint the participants with the work of deciphering and transcribing old manuscripts. A course of study on research methods explains how to explore the VOC archives efficiently. Methodology and history courses, combined with preparatory research coursework, are designed to lead the AMP students to the formulation of a Ph.D. proposal grounded in the relevant archival sources. The AMP training takes one year and runs independently of the Ph.D. programme.

The Ph.D. Programme

From the Advanced Master's Programme, a number of TANAP students will be eligible to embark upon Ph.D. research. Ph.D. candidates receive financial, technical, and academic assistance from Leiden University and the expertise of faculty and staff in the Netherlands working under TANAP. Furthermore, these TANAP Ph.D. students continue to receive support from supervisors in their home countries.

Within the TANAP framework, CNWS also offers a limited number of Ph.D. scholarships to Dutch students who will carry out their research in close co-operation with their Asian and African TANAP colleagues.

Organisation

The TANAP research programme in the Netherlands is a nationwide endeavour involving experts from all major Dutch universities. The programme is housed at Leiden University, which has outstanding Asian and Oriental library collections and an especially broad base of faculty expertise and other scholarly resources in Asian and African studies. Administratively, the research programme is integrated into the Research School for Asian, African, and Amerindian Studies (CNWS). A national team of scholars, the TANAP Programme Committee, is responsible for the quality and progress of the programme itself.

The specific initiative to develop the TANAP research programme came from the Institute for the History of European Expansion and Global Interaction (IGEER), a research cluster within CNWS. IGEER has a high international profile and a longstanding commitment to training non-western scholars, and most of the historical research on non-western societies conducted within the research school comes under its auspices. This research cluster

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will therefore provide the bulk of the expertise needed to conduct the TANAP programme at Leiden.

5. SOUTHERN AFRICA:

PLAINS, HEIGHTS AND SETTLEMENTS

Strategically located between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, the southern reaches of Africa offered an ideal way station for European ships heading for the monsoon seas in Asia. The inhabitants of these lands traded food stocks with occasional European ships passing by. But this limited support was not enough to sustain the growing transoceanic trade network. In 1652 the VOC established the first permanent European settlement at the Cape of Good Hope, a small way side station intended to water and provision passing ships. Over time, this outpost grew into a bustling colony, and settlers flocked to the VOC settlement for its fresh water, fertile soil, and temperate climate.

From Refreshing Station to Colony

The semi-nomadic Khoikhoi of the western Cape bartered their cattle with European ships passing their lands for over a century before VOC commandant Jan van Riebeeck arrived to establish a more permanent refreshing station for passing VOC ships. The colony at the Cape of Good Hope founded in 1652, initially comprised little more than a small fortress surrounded by fruit gardens. Most of the foodstuffs and materials the VOC settlement needed for itself and the ships that passed by were expected to come from the Khoikhoi and San through barter.

As European settlement and trade expanded, the older system of barter was no longer sufficient to meet European demands. In 1657, the agrarian frontier of the colony extended beyond the original settlement, when free European farmers settled behind Table Mountain. Until about 1700, the VOC's frontier expanded slowly through the south-western Cape. The growth of VOC settlement also brought its trading enterprises into contact with new African polities in the North. Some of these chiefdoms worked with VOC and others resisted its demands, but the nature of society, statecraft, trade, and warfare changed fundamentally for all.

Around 1700 economic and legal systems were firmly in place. New villages were founded, such as Stellenbosch and Drakenstein. Many western Cape Khoikhoi were now entirely

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dependent on the colony. In the words of one VOC official, Khoikhoi society had become 'a nation of hunters and robbers.' As the frontier of European pastoralism expanded to the north and west and the *trekboers* settled down, many Africans were forced to forsake their lands.

The Cape settlement itself contained labourers, soldiers, farmers, artisans, exiles, and slaves, many of them from places as diverse as India, China, Indonesia, Madagascar, Zanzibar, and Angola, as well as the Netherlands, the German states, England, Sweden, and France. The political order was a hierarchical one, with clear social distinctions between Company servants, freeburghers, free Africans, free Asians, and slaves. The early formation of Cape civil society is an important yet understudied topic in historical research.

The VOC Cape records

The Cape records of the VOC in The Hague and Cape Town include not only the standard administrative and trade records, but also annual tax rolls, criminal and civil court records, inventories, wills, land grants, church minutes, letter books and daily registers, and much more related to daily life at the Cape. They allow the historical reconstruction of Cape society between 1652 and 1795 with comprehensiveness virtually unparalleled anywhere in the world.

However, VOC sources concerning the Cape go beyond the confines of the European settlement as well. The Company sent expeditions far into the African continent, both to explore the area and to trade for goods and slaves. VOC records therefore include observations on social, economic, and political life in many parts of southern Africa outside of direct Company control, including most of the present Republic of South Africa, Namibia, Madagascar, Mozambique, Mauritius, and the Swahili coast of Africa as far north as Somalia. Although not as detailed as those that exist for the core areas of its settlement, these papers form an essential and underused resource for the history of Africa.

6. THE ARABIAN SEAS:

WHIRLPOOL OF TRADE

Descending from the central plateau with its thin atmosphere through successive mountain ranges, travelling through mist and hailstorms, passing by green terraces and wādīs, my journey ended in a sweltering hot, barren coastal plain, where drift sand drawn upwards coloured the sun yellow. Only a desolate field of

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ruins, with scattered remnants of mosques and bastions. No bustling people, no chaotic activity, only abandonment and the skeletons of vessels (...)' This is how one scholar of the region described his first journey from the Yemeni highlands to the ancient port town of al-Mukhā (Mocha). His aim was to bring the once brightly flourishing port to life again, if on paper only. It soon turned out that VOC documents and charts were the richest sources of all.

A Vibrant World

The archives originating from the VOC settlements in Iran and Yemen are important to understand the vibrant world of the Arabian Seas region. The VOC offices in al-Mukhā (Yemen) and in Gamron (modern Bandar 'Abas, Iran) were both directed from the main VOC office in Surat (Gujarat). Much valuable information on trading competition in the Arabian Seas region - the coastlines surrounding the Arabian Sea and the interiors of the Red Sea and the Persian or Arabian Gulf - was gathered here. Since ancient times, the littorals of the Arabian Seas have attracted a great number of trading vessels from western India. Peddling, the small-scale coasting trade to the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, was the most important element of the regional economy. Every year, thousands of Indian merchants sought to do business with their fellow merchants in the Gulf and the Red Sea. Entire armadas of small vessels were constantly delivering a variety of goods - textiles, pepper, sugar, wood, rice, and slaves - to Arab traders who were every bit as busy as their Indian colleagues. The shipping network of al-Mukhā in the early seventeenth century included no less than 27 major port towns in western India, located roughly from Sind to Cochin.

The VOC sought to profit from this existing 'archipelago of trade' by selling, for instance, Indian textiles in Yemen, and Javanese sugar in Persia, but was not very competitive in the highly refined but small-scale coastal trading network. The Dutch preferred large ships and investments and therefore focused primarily on long-distance deep-sea navigation, the precise antithesis of the port-to-port coasting trade in the Arabian Seas.

Fortunately for historians, VOC sources on the Arabian Seas region provide not only accounts of Dutch trading activities, but also information concerning the aforementioned Arab-Persian-Indian trading network from Jidda to Bombay and from Basra to Cochin. When cross-checked with other sources, VOC documents may thus help to further our understanding of the region's autonomous history.

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The VOC trade in Persia: Sugar for Silk

Like many other European, Arab, and Asian traders, the Dutch also traded in the Persian Gulf. The VOC appointed a Director for Persia who kept an office, several warehouses, and even a pleasant garden in Gamron. His agents closely monitored the silk markets in Kirman, Shiraz, and Isfahan. Initially, raw silk purchased in Safavid Persia could be sold in Europe for a good price. Neither the British nor the Dutch were able to monopolise the silk trade, however. In the Shah's realm one could either accept the terms of trade dictated by Persia's strong and effective government or risk being shut out of the trade altogether.

When the sale of raw Persian silk to the international market became less profitable, the VOC shifted its attentions to the purchase of Persian gold. The annual fleet from Batavia to Persia was usually loaded with pepper, cloves, and nutmeg and a great quantity of Batavian sugar. Although Afghan armies toppled the Safavid dynasty in 1722, the VOC remained active in the region until 1766.

The long VOC presence in Iran from the height of Safavid power until well after the dynasty's fall has resulted in an invaluable collection of historical documentation on local trade, politics, and economics. Through the prism of the silk trade at the great bazaar at Isfahan, a more complete picture of Safavid society may be gleaned.

Al-Mukhā: A Forgotten Arabian Port-town

The Arabian side of the Red Sea coast was among the first targets of the Portuguese. Portuguese traders sought in the late 16th century to intercept the Asian trade that brought wealth to Aleppo and Alexandria, but Afonso de Albuquerque failed to turn Aden into a Portuguese bulwark for controlling the Red Sea trade. Instead, these lands were eventually conquered by the Ottomans and ruled as Turkish provinces.

The Yemeni seaport of al-Mukhā nevertheless proved a good place to purchase precious metals and later coffee. At the beginning of 1621, the VOC opened an office in al-Mukhā, after having received a favourable *firman* (decree) from the Imam of Yemen, a vassal of the Ottoman Sultan.

The Dutch traders quit the port again in 1684, unable to compete with the English, who sent their ships directly from London to al-Mukhā in order to purchase the finest coffee from the Yemeni mountain ranges and the Ethiopian Highlands. But when coffee prices in Europe tripled between 1693 and 1695, the VOC hastened to send its ships back to Yemen. European rivalries,

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instability in Yemen, the competitiveness of other coffee markets such as Cairo and Jeddah, and the seasonal variance in prices all complicated the purchase of coffee. By 1720, however, the Arabian coffee boom was over. By then, coffee plants had been distributed all over the world, from Java to the Caribbean, and in 1739, the office in al-Mukhā was finally closed.

7. INDIA:

SHORES WITHOUT END

The Indian subcontinent attracted merchants from both within and without the old Indian Ocean trade network. The VOC exchanged silver and gold here for silks, textiles, and pepper. Trading posts were established in the Bay of Bengal (Hooghly), including the Coromandel Coast (Pulicat, Nagapattinam, and further on the Malabar Coast (Cochin), the Konkan and in Gujarat (Surat). Consequently, in each coastal region of India, detailed records of social, political, and economic dealings were kept.

Surat, the Mughal port to the Indian Ocean

The centre of the Mughal Empire's authority lay in Delhi, deep in India's interior. Its outlets to the sea were Bengal in the east and Gujarat in the west. The Province of Gujarat was a bright jewel in the Mughal crown. Its major port, Surat, represented an enormous source of wealth for Akbar and his successors on the Mughal throne. In order to enjoy trading rights, the European trading companies had to make large tributary payments to the Mughal emperors on a regular basis. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the ports at Surat, Ahmadabad, Cambay, and Broach were crucial connections within the Arabian sea and important markets for occidental and oriental goods. Here the westerners bartered European, African, and Japanese luxury goods for indigo, sugar, textiles and other goods from Gujarat and the interior. Beautiful and seemingly endless Sindhi textiles and other luxury exports were in demand in Iran, Basra and Hormuz, and elsewhere throughout the Indian Ocean trade network.

The great maritime centre of Surat harboured an important merchant community. Their wealth was enormous, and some individual traders possessed as many as fifty ships. Others were engaged in high finance, extending credit to overseas enterprises. No surprise, then, that Surat became the centre of English and Dutch operations in the Arabian Seas region. From there the westerners expanded their interest to Bombay and

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further down the west coast, in Konkan and north Kanara, where the four ports of Chaul, Dabhol, Goa and Bhatkal served the needs of the Adil Shahi kingdom of Bijapur and the Nizam Shahi kingdom of Ahmadnagar. The growth or decline of these and other ports' fortunes (Calicut) was closely connected to European presence, as English and VOC factory records from Surat, Bombay and Vingurla reveal.

Malabar

Pepper was the prime product of western India's Malabar Coast during the early seventeenth century. It was also the backbone of the Portuguese-Asian spice trade. The fall of Portuguese Cochin to the Dutch in 1663 was a heavy blow to the Indo-Portuguese spice trade. However, for the VOC, Cochin never became profitable, despite the conclusion of several pepper contracts with local princes and the equipping of cruisers to combat smuggling by sea.

Inheriting Portugal's pepper contract also meant inheriting its place among old rivalries on the Malabar Coast. The Dutch, following the example of the Portuguese *Estado da India*, became involved in the affairs of the Rajas of Cochin and Travancore and other Malabar princes. Costly wars on the Malabar Coast, such as the 1701 engagement with the Raja of Cochin against the Zamorin of Calicut and his allies, adversely affected VOC activities in the region. The Raja of Travancore finally put a stop to Dutch ambitions by soundly defeating the VOC, the Rani of Elayadathu Swaroopam, and their armies at Colachel in 1741. The VOC survived in a reduced capacity on the Malabar Coast until the British finally took possession of Cochin in 1795.

Historians of Malabar India have archival records from the VOC's 200-year presence in Cochin and its eight outposts at their disposal. The seldom-used VOC sources at the Tamil Nadu Archives in Chennai provide valuable insights into the social and political history of Kerala, and the importance of maritime Malabar for the Arabians Seas region.

Coromandel

The Coromandel Coast had attracted western traders from Roman times. Tamil maritime contacts with the Persians and Arabs were even stronger. Arab merchants sailed to Southeast Asia from the ports of Coromandel, carrying pearls, corals, arecanuts, cardamom, silk and cotton textiles. When the Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagara took over Tamil territory, maritime activities with Southeast Asia (Melaka) increased even more.

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The Europeans entered the scene at a time when the Vijayanagar kingdom was in decline. This power vacuum allowed the Dutch to negotiate with the Sultan of Golkonda and the nayak or lesser lords directly. These lesser rulers then began leasing entire villages to the VOC. Indian princes traded with the Europeans, taxed them, and employed their military prowess for their own ends, and in turn the Indian villages produced both fine and staple goods for VOC export. Pulicat became the main centre of VOC activities on the Coromandel coast. Bimlipatam, Jagannathapuram, Masulipatnam, and Negapatnam were but a few of the other seventeenth-century VOC settlements dotting India's eastern seaboard. The records produced by these trading posts are as valuable now as their textiles were then. Because of their attention to detail and the bottom line, the expansive VOC archives are indispensable for any village or regional history of southern India.

The Bay of Bengal

The Bay of Bengal was situated, both geographically and commercially, at the heart of the vast intra-Asian trade network. Its trading ports flourished by their South China Sea connections on the one hand, and their Indian Ocean connections on the other. Southeast Asian producers had long demanded quality Indian textiles in return for their spices. Numerous Persian traders frequented the Bay's ports in search for profits. As a distinct trading zone with its specific cultural characteristics, the Bay of Bengal was therefore of immense importance for any European trading enterprise. To successfully develop its spice trade in island Southeast Asia, the VOC needed to participate along this essential axis of intra-Asian trade, the Maluku – India connection.

Trade settlements along the Hooghly River and throughout the Ganges Delta drew Asian and European traders to participate in the trade in raw silk and textiles, saltpetre, opium and slaves. In the 1630s the VOC began opening trading posts along the Ganges, eventually centring itself at Chinsura on the right bank of the Hooghly. With no fewer than a dozen trading posts along the Ganges from Agra to Patna, the VOC was the most important foreign commercial presence in Bengal until the British took over in the course of the eighteenth century.

Using VOC sources, Indian historians have been able to reconstruct the trading complex of Mughal Bengal. Bengal at times accounted for half of the VOC cargo to Japan and much of the total export to Europe. Bengal was the pre-eminent world exporter of raw silk and textiles during the 17th century and an indispensable importer of Japanese silver and Indonesian spices as well. Largely unstudied, the VOC -Hooghly records are of

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immense importance to improve our understanding of the strategic importance of the Bay's trading and political centres.

8. SRI LANKA:

JEWEL IN THE OCEAN

To ancient mariners, Sri Lanka was *Ratnadipa*, the land of gems. By about the fifth century BC peoples from northern India had settled on the island. Legends mention the name of their leader, prince Vijaya. The settlers were called *Sihalas*--'people of the Lion'--because Vijaya's father was actually believed to have been a lion. Within four centuries, most of the islanders had accepted Buddhism, and from 67 until 993 C.E. the city of Anuradhapura was the political and religious centre of the island. Giant reservoirs were built for irrigation. However, it was not rice, but rather cinnamon and the elephant trade that attracted Western traders. To control the Sri Lankan cinnamon trade, the VOC conquered the port town of Colombo from the Portuguese in 1656 and there established its largest colonial settlement in Asia save Batavia (Jakarta).

A Faustian Bargain

In 1638, Raja Singa II of Kandy granted the VOC a trade monopoly on cinnamon in return for military assistance in the struggle with the Portuguese on Sri Lanka. Twenty years later, Dutch power had replaced the Portuguese as the ruler of maritime Lanka, as well as the narrow straits between Sri Lanka and the Indian mainland. Then, in time-honoured tradition, the VOC held onto large tracts of land--most of coastal Sri Lanka, as it happened--as remuneration for unpayable debts. By the end of the 18th century, the VOC exercised direct rule in the coastal area over more than 350,000 Sinhalese and Tamils who peeled more than half a million pounds of cinnamon annually for the Company. The VOC administration entrenched itself firmly in Jaffna, Galle, Colombo, and countless villages in the countryside.

Although the treaty of 1638 did not give the VOC the legal right to the coastal territories, it severely diminished the state of Kandy's sovereignty, and it resulted in an exclusive Dutch monopoly in the cinnamon trade that deprived the islanders of their most important cash crop. Furthermore, the VOC tried to become the main elephant exporter and the sole importer of cloth to the island as well. After taking over most of the Catholic churches of the island, the VOC actively promoted Dutch Reformed Protestantism, which was only countered by continuing Catholic missions from

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Portuguese Goa and finally a revival of Buddhism during the second half of the eighteenth century.

Only a tiny fraction of the large corpus of archival information available has been explored thus far to study Dutch –Sri Lankan interactions. Unfortunately, few documents from the great Kingdom of Kandy itself have survived. When used in concert with extant Sinhala and Tamil literary works, VOC records provide much information on - to borrow the words of a Sri Lankan historian - ‘the rich and variegated history of the island ... a history which not only helps us to understand how people lived in the past, but also explains many of the attitudes, policies and aspirations of the people who live there in the present day.’

9. ISLAND SOUTHEAST ASIA:

THE GIRDLE OF EMERALDS

For the rapidly changing societies of modern Island Southeast Asia, the past seems nowadays like a foreign country. Yet, there are some constants. For over 600 years, the Straits of Melaka have pulsed with commercial energy. The big port cities along its coasts were and continue to be cultural melting pots where countless ethnic groups meet. World religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity now as then share their space with local belief systems. Historians can now discover the roots of Island Southeast Asia in the VOC records of yesteryear.

A Violent Entrance

A number of aggressive conquests marked the VOC’s arrival in insular Southeast Asia as they sought a profitable source of spices. The Dutch occupation of Ambon in 1605 and Jakarta in 1619, the annexation of the nutmeg production centre of Banda in 1622, and the conquest of Makassar (Ujung Pandang) in 1669 sent shockwaves throughout the archipelago, especially among Javanese, Malay, and Makassarese overseas traders. These operators were forced to regroup, reorganise their ancient networks, and look for other allies.

In contrast to the mainland of Southeast Asia, in the Indonesian archipelago the VOC was not just another of many traders. The VOC’s administrative and diplomatic centre at Batavia, its interests in the Spice Islands of Maluku, and its presence to varying degrees throughout the entire archipelago have made its documents an indispensable part of studying Indonesia’s history.

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Beyond the Shadows of History: Java and the VOC

Europeans arrived in Java at the height of the last and greatest of the imperial states of Java, the Sultanate of Mataram. Sultan Agung (1613-1646) conquered most of Java, but his son, Susuhunan Amangkurat I, virtually destroyed the state his father had forged. The period that followed the collapse of Mataram in 1677 was one of confusion. In 1680, Amangkurat II could only restore the kingdom in East and Central Java with the help of the VOC, who in return gained more control over trade. A new Mataram court was established in Kartasura, but the period that followed was one of Javanese bloodshed, succession wars, rebellion of regional kingdoms against the central court, and growing Dutch interference with Javanese matters of state.

Subsequent events during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries show that tensions between the core region of Java and the coastal periphery gave way to increasing VOC intervention. As a trading company, the VOC's aims were initially not directed towards territorial expansion. Direct involvement in Javanese civil wars and the country's instability, however, smoothed the way for the VOC to become a territorial power controlling much of western Java (Priangan), the Pasisir (the north-east coast), and eventually eastern Java as well (1743-1746).

The renewed study of Javanese and VOC sources concerning Java has changed the historical picture. The Dutch presence on Java is now seen as a sort of laboratory of early colonialism. But it is also obvious that Javanese early modern politics can be judged solely on its own terms. A combination of Javanese and Dutch sources will eventually present a clearer picture of this important episode in Indonesian history.

The Ports: Their Rise and Demise

The rise and demise of ports such as Melaka, Banten, Makassar, Gresik and Semarang, are inextricably connected to the history and fortunes of the VOC itself. The daily arrival and departures of numerous local vessels in various south-east Asian ports, cross-cultural contacts between trading families and diaspora communities, and even ecological changes such as deforestation as a result of extensive shipbuilding were all dutifully noted in the records of the VOC. In exploring the history of the maritime towns of the archipelago during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the more that VOC sources have been explored, the more complex and remarkable our historical picture of the archipelago has become.

Forgotten Islands

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The breadth of subjects and depth of detail in the enormous quantities of VOC documents from eastern Indonesia make them ideal resources for new and innovative approaches to the histories of seafaring nomads, island societies, the practice and propagation of Islam and Christianity, systems of slavery and bondage, and petty trade in spices and marine products. The Moluccas (Maluku) were the main target of western trading companies in the early seventeenth century. The Dutch administrations resident in strong fortresses on Ternate in the north, Ambon in the centre, and Banda in the south have left voluminous collections of VOC records in Jakarta and The Hague. From the Banda archives, detailed seventeenth-century surveys of forgotten Austronesian island cultures from Maluku Tenggara (south-east Maluku) come to us. How these island peoples, who cherished a distinct nautical symbolism in their artefacts, housing, and shipbuilding, lived their lives just a few centuries ago is still a mystery today.

The World of the Malay

In the past, the world of the Malay stretched much further than present day Malaysia. The Malay world included a number of local polities such as Johor, Perak, Aceh, Palembang, the Minangkabau and many more. The presence of the VOC did not change a fundamental pattern which had been in place since at least the time of the Sumatran kingdom of Srivijaya and perhaps much earlier, in that all of the states in the region reacted to shifting balances more or less as they long had, with an eye to maintaining--and if possible improving--their position in both local and long-range commerce relative to their neighbours. Initially, the VOC simply added an additional variable to this dynamic system.

During the 18th century, the relationships between many Southeast Asian states and the European trading settlements underwent change. VOC sources complement Malay texts to show how some polities successfully navigated narrowing political and economic straits while others in the region did not. These sources show, for instance, how the kingdom of Johor successfully used the presence of the VOC to strengthen its own position towards Aceh, and without the help of Johor the Dutch attack on Portuguese Melaka would have ended quite differently. The political relations between the Malay states in the eighteenth century, their role in the upsurge of regional trade, and the creation of an environment that encouraged the English to settle in Singapore, are important themes still insufficiently studied through VOC sources.

Early Philippine – Indonesian Relations

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Less well known than the VOC records on Indonesia and Southeast Asia are those collections of documents that pertain to the Philippines. There are hundreds of documents extant, including the correspondence between Ternate (both VOC and the sultan) and the kings of Magindanao and Zamboanga, that promise to reveal vital new information about the poorly understood and often ephemeral island kingdoms in the liminal between the present-day states of the Philippines and Indonesia.

10. MAINLAND SOUTHEAST ASIA:

EMBRACED BY RIVERS

Three great rivers—the Mekong, the Menam and the Irrawaddy—and their giant deltas embrace the states of mainland Southeast Asia. Alongside these arteries of the local economies numerous towns, villages and peoples flourished. Unfamiliar with the rugged hinterlands, the Dutch limited themselves to a number of small trading posts along the littoral of mainland Southeast Asia. From northern Vietnam (Tonkin) in the east to Myanmar (Arakan) in the west, VOC scribes observed movements in trade and the political activities of kings and kingdoms great and small. Numerous travel reports, diplomatic accounts, and curious stories bear witness to great quests for wealth and power, both temporal and spiritual.

The Vietnamese Connection

Plying the regular sea route passing through the Bay of Tonkin to and from China and Japan, Dutch merchants also explored the Red River in the north of Vietnam and settled down at the flourishing port of Pho Hien. Warehouses were then built there for the purchase of silk, ceramics and porcelain. Although the remains of the VOC buildings in Pho Hien have not yet been excavated, a few old Vietnamese houses still provide a glimpse of the once bustling international port community.

During the 17th century the Dutch also briefly maintained an office in the southern seaport of Hoi An (Faifo), which was a crossroads astride several trade routes that absorbed social and cultural elements from Japan, China, and many Southeast Asian lands in addition to many influences from the West. Owing to the VOC's involvement in trade and politics in Tonkin, Champa, and Cochin China the VOC archives contain valuable historical material on Vietnam's overseas trade relations.

Peoples of the Mekong

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The lands and peoples along the lower basin of the great Mekong River were also well-known to the VOC. Dutch explorers and traders described early Khmer trade and society in lively terms. A single collection of VOC material written on Laos and Cambodia between 1635 and 1644 runs more than 170,000 words across a vast array of documents, as remarkable for what they say as for what they do not. In 1636 the VOC established a trading post in Udong, on lake Tonle Sap near Phnom Penh, to purchase rice, deerskins, and lacquer for sale in Japan. In 1669, the VOC official Gerrit van Wuysthoff published an account of his 1641 expedition to Vientiane to promote trade with the Lao kingdom.

Court and Company in Siam

The Siamese capital Ayutthaya, on the banks of the river Menam, was the site of countless diplomatic overtures from both East and West, and served as the administrative and cultural capital of a powerful potential ally and a trading partner rich in natural products. Unfortunately, most of the historical records of Ayutthaya did not survive the Burmese invasions of the late 18th century. Thai-VOC records however did. During much of the 17th century, Dutch trade represented by far the most significant and extensive Western contact with Siam.

VOC records on Siam are currently among the least-consulted sources on Thai history, despite the archive's extent and relative completeness. Changes in royal administration, political infighting, tributary relations, rebellions against the crown, Siam's wars with various mainland kingdoms, court ritual, the Thai court's attitudes toward overseas trade, and information about local and foreign trading communities were all regularly discussed in VOC letters.

Pegu and Arakan

Along the third great river running through the Southeast Asian mainland, the Irrawaddy, a few other kingdoms traded with the VOC, including Pegu and Arakan. Although traditional Pegu kings had built their city gates towards the east, they were open to trade with the West. Situated between the Straits ports of Melaka and Tenasserim on the one hand and the Bay of Bengal on the other, the small port of Syriam near today's Rangoon served as an important exchange market. Syriam was particularly famous for the huge jars, called *martabans*, that could be purchased there, in order to transport rice, oil and not to mention gunpowder, safely and securely. Owing to continuous warfare between Bengal and Arakan, numerous prisoners of war were locally offered for sale as slaves to the VOC, and afterwards most were transported to Batavia and Maluku under its flag.

11. CHINA:

TRADE'S GLORIOUS EMPIRE

Tea: 'It purifies the blood, dispels heavy dreams, chases away stupidity, and strengthens Venus.' At the outset, Europeans drank tea mainly for medicinal reasons. When they started to drink it for social reasons as well during the first half of the eighteenth century, China's ports began to attract an ever-greater number of western merchants. With much of Europe hooked on the drink, the VOC and other European companies lined up in Canton to get a piece of the action. European traders offered silver, tin, pepper, sandalwood, birdsnests and other tropical import products as barter to purchase tea and porcelain.

Batavia: City at the Crossroads

In 1619, the VOC decided to establish its headquarters at the crossroads of the intra-Ocean traffic. The location chosen, Jacatra (renamed Batavia), was close to the Portuguese-dominated Straits of Melaka, where the traffic lanes from both the Indian Ocean and the China Sea came together. Both the Dutch and Chinese had interests in common in the Southeast Asian markets, and both strongly affected the fortunes of insular Southeast Asia.

The Formosa Experiment

From their centre at Batavia, the VOC tried to capture a share of the China Sea trade, especially that from Fujian. Shortly after the initial conquest of Jacatra, Governor General Jan Pieterszoon Coen felt bold enough to attack the Portuguese trading post at Macao in order to break the China-Manila trade connection. In the end, violent Dutch attempts to exert dominion over the Chinese coastal settlements failed. The Dutch instead settled down on Taiwan (Formosa) in 1624. During the late 1630s, the connection between Batavia and Taiwan grew into a principal trade link in the Indies for the VOC, which imported silk from Amoy, and later Tonkin, through Taiwan to trade for Japanese silver.

Until the victory of Ming China under Cheng Ch'engkung ('Coxinga') over the VOC and consequently the fall of Fort Zeelandia in 1662, the Company exercised almost 40 years of political, economic and religious control over the native Formosans. Dutch-Chinese commercial and agricultural activities attracted the first wave of Chinese immigrants to the island. VOC sources, such as the recently published four volume

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'Dagregisters' (accounts of daily affairs) of Fort Zeelandia, form the single most important historical resource for the study of pre-Chinese Formosan society

China's Junks, Dutch Treasure

After the loss of Taiwan, the VOC was not able to establish any form of direct trade with China again. Military expeditions, diplomatic missions to Peking, and endless *pourparlers* in Fuzhou were all in vain. Chinese junks only began to sail to Batavia in great numbers after the fall of the Ming dynasty in 1683, when Peking liberalised the overseas junk trade of the southern provinces to Southeast Asia. The period between 1690 and 1740 was the heyday of this revitalised junk trade, primarily between Amoy and Batavia. The junks brought valuable shiploads of saltpetre, raw silk, porcelain and tea to Batavia, while the Chinese *nachodas* returned with the pepper, textiles, and cloves much sought-after in China.

The New Market of Canton

The rapid increase in tea consumption throughout Europe was the immediate reason that English traders began to navigate directly from London to Canton in 1697. The VOC in Batavia relied on revenue from the yearly cargoes of tea brought in by Chinese junks. Imperial trade restrictions and growing European competition, however, led to the VOC decision in 1728 to navigate directly from Amsterdam to Canton and Macao. A chain of Chinese trading houses or *hong* at Canton then served as intermediate offices for the European tea trade.

When prices in Europe dropped owing to strong competition, the Dutch tea trade came under regulation by a special VOC *China Commissie* in 1756. Until the 19th century, China remained the only major supplier of tea to the world market, and until its dissolution, the VOC remained a major player in the global tea trade.

12. JAPAN:

TREASURY OF ASIA

Allowed to rent only the tiny island of Deshima on the Nagasaki water front, the VOC in Tokugawa Japan was obsessed above all with locally mined precious metals for the intra-Asian trade: first silver, then gold *koban*, and finally copper staves. At the same

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time, Deshima functioned as Japan's window on the West, and its gateway to Japan.

Deshima: Gateway to the West

The first VOC establishment in Japan, a factory in Hirado, opened in 1609. Thirty years later, the shogunate moved the Dutch to the island of Deshima, where they displaced the disfavoured Portuguese. The VOC presence on Deshima was quite literally on the periphery of Japan, but it was nevertheless important. In 1636, the Shogunate issued the *Kaikin* edict, intended to prohibit all Japanese overseas navigation. The flourishing *Nihon machi* or Japanese trading towns at Ayutthaya in Siam, Tourane, Kanganan, and Hoi An in Quinam and Tonkin as well as Udong near Phnom Penh were left to VOC and Chinese merchants, who from then on served as the only suppliers between an isolated Japan and the outside world.

Even in isolation, Japan continued to be an essential producer of precious metals for the world market. As the only Westerners allowed in Japan between 1640 and 1854, the Dutch in Deshima circulated Tokugawa gold, silver, and copper exclusively onto Southeast and South Asian markets. Relegated to the periphery of the China Sea trade, the VOC had to adjust itself and its practices to the market and the shifting balances of power in the area. In the words of one scholar, 'what better indicator of continuity and change of the Eastern market could the historian select than a 'multi-national' trading company that has to dance to the tune of the market?' The dance of the VOC can tell us much about the broader trade of Asia.

Besides the Dutch, the Chinese were the only foreigners allowed to trade with Japan during the period of seclusion. Chinese merchants were given twice the trading quota of the VOC. They purchased silver, gold, and copper as the VOC did. However, China has not preserved substantial records of their trade with Japan during the Tokugawa period (1603-1867). A combination of Japanese and Dutch sources--for the VOC kept a keen eye on its Chinese competitors--will doubtless teach us more about Sino-Japanese relations during this critical period.