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A Twisted Truth - The VOC Ship Batavia: comparing history & archaeology (BA Thesis)

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A Twisted Truth

The VOC ship *Batavia*: comparing history & archaeology



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Abstract

Historians and archaeologists often work on related problems but rarely cooperate. The aim of this thesis is to research whether it is necessary to combine archaeological and historical data when both are available. The case study consists of an isolated event: the *Batavia* incident. The *Batavia*, a ship of the Dutch East India Company, was stranded off the coast of Western Australia in 1629. A small group took the boat and went for help while the rest of the people were left on the islands. While they waited for the rescue ship to arrive, a massacre broke out and over a hundred people were murdered. Information from written sources (e.g. a ship's journal and letters) is combined with archaeological evidence. Although many issues were confirmed by both types of sources, sometimes the records were contradictory and a great deal of information was exclusive to one of the types of data. To assemble a complete picture of the *Batavia* incident, it was essential to consult both historical and archaeological sources.



Figure 1: The *Batavia* incident: shipwrecked, stranded, abandoned & massacred, Miklós Lörinczi

Keywords: Archaeology – History – Batavia – VOC – Dutch East India Company – Australia – Wallabi Group – Houtman Abrolhos – Material remains – Documents – Mutiny – Massacre

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Figure 2: The *Batavia* replica

Introduction

Mute versus vocal

*It has been said that the spade cannot lie,
but it owes this merit in part to the fact that it cannot speak.*

Philip Grierson (Halsall 1997: 817)

Archaeological evidence is mute while historical sources are vocal. This is the key definition according to which material is divided between historians and archaeologists. Since their material is different, their methods are different as well. While a historian must listen to many voices and judge their validity and importance, the archaeologist must use interpretations to let a mute object tell its story. Clearly, these different materials and different methods will, to some extent, lead to different results. It is also obvious that these different materials will give rise to different problems (Halsall 1997: 805 & 823).

The key difficulties with these materials are expertly illustrated in the previous quote. Historical material cannot be translated as facts because it might be deceptive or biased. The oft quoted 'history is written by the winners' shows us how such biases may occur and we all use small deceptions or exaggerations in our everyday life to make things look better. Archaeological material, since it is mute, is free from these problems. However, its muteness is in itself a problem because it makes the material difficult to interpret. Certain questions are extremely hard to answer with archaeological material and in practice this leads to a bias where only certain parts of the past can be examined. This bias is furthermore enhanced by the fact that usually only a fraction of all original material has survived.

Although there are many differences between the two disciplines, they are both concerned with the same thing: the human past. This should make them natural allies. However, although there has recently been a consensus that closer ties should be forged, there is still a disturbing lack of dialogue and a strong feeling of estrangement between the two (Halsall 1997: 805). Many historians and archaeologists choose to work separately without consulting each other. Oddly enough, even in the universities the same misguided notion survives that I was taught in high school: archaeology is prehistory and nothing else. It's not only historians that think this way: even many archaeologists still consider prehistoric research to be the 'real archaeology'. Recently an American archaeologist told me that "true archaeologists don't accept history as evidence of anything." Although things are slowly changing, historians and archaeologists behave as if they were competing against each other rather than fighting on the same team (Halsall 1997: 817). Both disciplines need to acknowledge the importance of the other. Failing to do so will create a very unhealthy future for both in which much available knowledge is ignored simply because it comes from the 'wrong' discipline.

The Batavia

The sinking of the *Batavia* in 1629 was a gruesome and horrible event shrouded with mysteries. More than 300 people were shipwrecked in the Houtman Abrolhos off the coast of Western Australia. While a small search party left to find water and help, the rest was stuck on the tiny islands of the Wallabi Group. During the absence of the search party one man, Jeronimus Cornelisz., instigated a killing spree and ordered the deaths of 109 people (Drake-Brockman

1982: 50). Over the centuries the story of the massacre assumed almost legendary or mythological status and it was quoted that Cornelisz. murdered 125 people (Fig. 11: a list explaining this faulty number). Many became inspired to search for the ship to confirm or deny the story. Australian author Henrietta Drake-Brockman is well known for her efforts to find the shipwreck. Because of her own interest in the *Batavia* story, she had the journal translated at her expense and wrote a novel about it. Afterwards she realised that she had accumulated a mass of information, thanks to the help of many historians, and decided to write a more factual book with the aim of finding clues of the ship's location (Drake-Brockman 1982: V-IX). A friend of hers, Hugh Edwards, eventually found the ship near the site she had suggested. Since the discovery of the sunken ship in 1963, decades of archaeological research and excavations have been able to disperse some of the myths surrounding the story (Souter et al. 2007: 3). In 1985, using authentic materials and methods, construction of a replica of the ship was begun at the Bataviawerf in Lelystad, the Netherlands. Ten years later the ship was completed, launched and opened to the public (Van der Zee 2006: 10).

Not long afterwards, I must have been ten years old, I had my first encounter with the new *Batavia*. I became fascinated with everything on the ship and wanted to see, feel and examine every part of it. Closing time came all too soon and, refusing to leave the ship, I decided to hide like a stowaway in the hold. This tactic was not very successful. My interest was quickly transferred to other ships, such as the *Amsterdam*, and soon broadened to cover most aspects of history. It wasn't until almost a decade later that I accidentally crossed paths with the *Batavia* again. I found out that there was a journal which described the events that followed the wrecking of the ship. This was a brand new side of the story of the *Batavia* which I did not remember from my childhood visit. In retrospect, it was probably a good thing because the story would have given me an endless number of nightmares. I soon found myself itching to find out what had really happened with the people of the *Batavia*.

As I began my studies in archaeology I realised that the journal covered only a tiny part of the events. To find out more about what had happened it would be useful, if not necessary, to use archaeological sources as well. Finally the time came to decide on a subject for my thesis and I was excited with the prospect of being able to use the *Batavia*. First I had to find out if there had been any archaeological investigations of the ship and the surrounding islands. I could not believe my luck when I stumbled upon the website of the Western Australian Museum and found more than a dozen relevant publications available for download. The *Batavia* would be the perfect case study for my thesis. First of all, there were excellent and relevant written and unwritten sources. Furthermore, the *Batavia*'s story can be considered an isolated event which was restricted to a few months of activity. This single event was easy to locate in the historic sources and is also relatively easy to isolate in the archaeological record.

Research questions & limitations

In a sentence, the removal of only one word can completely change the meaning: I can (not) swim. The same can be said of archaeological and historic research: a written text may contradict the archaeological findings or vice versa. Can it really be enough to only consult one of these sources? In this thesis I will examine the merits and shortcomings of the two disciplines and try to answer the following question:

Is it necessary to use a combination of archaeological and historical research when we are examining historic times?

I will start by giving a background to the history of archaeology and focus on how the two disciplines have been combined in the past. This theoretical chapter will also cover different theoretical schools that have been or still are part of the disciplines. I will also outline my own theoretical approach. Afterwards, I will provide a short background to the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and its enterprise. I will also elaborate on what happened with the *Batavia* and its passengers. After this introduction to the case study, I will proceed with source criticism of the historical and archaeological materials. This source criticism will be both general for the entire field and more specific for the case study. In this latter part I will delve into the specific materials which are available for this case study and evaluate their merits & flaws.

Ultimately, the two types of sources will be combined according to specific events such as: the ship's cargo or surviving on the islands. The goal of this exercise is not primarily to find a single truth of what really happened. Instead it is to debate whether the different sources lead to different conclusions or whether they point in the same direction. In short, I will be looking for cases where the sources complement, confirm or contradict each other:

- **To what extent do the different sources complement each other?**
- **To what extent do the different sources confirm each other?**
- **To what extent do the different sources contradict each other?**

Finally an evaluation will be made of how different our total understanding of the case study would be if only one type of material would be consulted. This approach to comparing the two types of source material is the core of my method.

In investigating the answers to my questions I will limit myself in time, space and with regards to the material. The time frame is very limited and covers the period of the 4th June - 15th November 1629. During these few months the ship was wrecked and the people lived on the islands until their final rescue. I will not focus on the journey of the *Batavia* before the wrecking or on the voyages of the rescuers. Therefore, I will only look at archaeological remains from the wreck site and the five islands of the Wallabi Group where the survivors were active. In this thesis I will not be able to discuss all of the material associated with the wreck site and the islands. I will focus on a few specific situations, where history and archaeology meet, and their related material.

Purpose, possibilities & problems

As I mentioned before, the purpose of this exercise is not to find one true story of 'what really happened'. Instead the idea is to use this case study to test the possibilities of combining history and archaeology on completely equal terms. Although in the recent past a few such experiments have been attempted or plans of actions have been proposed, this is still largely uncharted territory. As a result this endeavour has its own problems. There is no clear path for me to follow and there is no list of previous mistakes to avoid. My method for this thesis can be considered flawed for two reasons. First of all, I cannot discuss the entire material but must make selections. Secondly, my method is of my own design and has not been tested before; its flaws will only become visible through its use. Of course this approach has its possibilities also: I can go in any direction and it is still possible to make exciting discoveries. There is the small possibility to provide a course of action and method that can be used for future cooperations between history and archaeology. The rest of the thesis will have to prove whether this pioneering mission was successful or not.

Theory

Traditional history & archaeology

It is not fair of me to say that historians and archaeologists have always completely ignored each other. To some extent there has always been some cooperation between researchers. However, this cooperation has never been on fully equal terms: one of the disciplines is always marginalized. Which discipline was dominant and which was marginalized has differed over time and depending on which school of thought was dominant. Furthermore, it can be said that historians have generally marginalized archaeology and vice versa.

Traditional history revolved around telling history 'as it really was'. In doing so, the historian collected a bunch of facts and then compiled them into a narrative. Since traditional history depended on facts, it was about political events most of the time. Facts such as births, marriages, battles and deaths were well documented and could easily be used to construct political histories (Johnson 1999: 150).

Traditional or cultural archaeology (also known as culture history) was concerned with different 'cultures', where these cultures existed and how these cultures changed (Halsall 1997: 806). Cultural change was explained by diffusion, migration or invasion. Much time was spent on linking these archaeological cultures and their movements to particular political historical events. Archaeologists often tried to identify these 'cultures' by examining historically documented peoples. An example is the labelling of material from Kent as Jutish because, according to the historical accounts, Kent was settled by Jutes (Johnson 1999: 150).

During this period archaeologists used the historical accounts to define or explain what they saw in the material. Furthermore, most of the archaeological excavations were undertaken to answer questions posed by historians such as: which king was buried here? Many of the archaeologists were themselves historians who had changed scope just to be able to find the answers to such questions and archaeology was barely used for other purposes (Johnson 1999: 150). During this period we can say that archaeology was used as a complement to traditional history. Both were concerned with political historical events and peoples but history was superior and archaeology was marginalized. The historians and historians trained as archaeologists had no reason to be unhappy with this division which was seen as natural (Halsall 1997: 818).

Processual archaeology & the Annales School

During the first half of the 20th century the Annales School was developed in France. Interest was broadened from politics to include all aspects of past societies. Examining other aspects such as economy or demographics meant that history could no longer rely on single events as facts. The scope had to be broadened to examine changes over time and processes. Both short term and long term processes were of interest (Johnson 1999: 150).

Slightly later, starting in the 1960's, functionalism and processual archaeology (or the new archaeology) broadened the scope of archaeology. To understand how societies function, different aspects of society needed to be examined. These aspects, such as technology, economy and environment, influenced societies over time and had to be seen as processes. It was argued that all general aspects of human behaviour had to be dealt with. Furthermore, it was advocated that archaeology should behave like a natural science (Halsall 1997: 808-809). Theories and

models were copied from the natural sciences and a scientific method was to be used (Jensen & Karlsson 1999: 14). Simultaneously, processual archaeology consciously tried to distance itself from history. History was not considered to be scientific and therefore many archaeologists decided that history had nothing interesting to say (Halsall 1997: 818).

In general, processual archaeology barely caught on for the historically documented periods; for the most part the traditional methods were still used. Historians of the Annales School, while concerned with different questions, continued to focus on historical methods. Archaeological information was not used even when historians were concerned with similar processual questions. One of the ways in which the two disciplines were combined, however, was through Binford's middle range theory. He proposed that in order to understand a dynamic ancient society by looking at dead objects a mediator of some sort was needed to bridge the gap. This mediator should come from outside archaeology and could be found in ethnographic observations or even written records (Halsall 1997: 811-812). Documents were therefore used to test hypotheses formed by interpreting the archaeological material (Johnson 1999: 155). The historic record was used to a very limited extent only to prove or deny these hypotheses. Historians argued that archaeologists did not use the correct sources or the sources correctly, because they did not use the critical historical methods to evaluate their merits and flaws (Halsall 1997: 818). During this period it can be said that historians and archaeologists mostly worked in isolation. On the rare occasions that they collaborated, history was subjected to archaeology.

Current approaches & my direction

The movement away from traditional forms of historic discourse has been called the linguistic turn or the new cultural history (Johnson 1999: 151). The social aspects of history have become more and more important and it was soon discovered that such dynamic systems could not be explained by statistics only. It seemed that mentality and attitudes could be a reason for change but this could not be statistically understood or plotted. As a result, different forms of evidence were needed to understand human behaviour. Experience and feeling were accepted as new ways to gain knowledge about the past and it was emphasized that source criticism was crucial (Jensen & Karlsson 1999: 23). Simultaneously, it was agreed that there are only subjective 'truths' and that many possible interpretations have to be accepted (Johnson 1999: 152). You cannot write history 'as it really was' but instead it is possible to write a history 'as it could have been'.

We can find similar sentiments in the current theoretical approaches to archaeology, sometimes termed post-processual archaeologies, which have been popular since the 1980's. Although this is more a bundle of theories than one universal theory, a few key elements can be identified. Archaeologists, like historians, are pointing towards the necessity for a plurality of interpretations (Jensen & Karlsson 1999: 76). It is agreed that objectivity is impossible; therefore it is important to understand our own subjectivity and its political implications. There has also been a broadening of the field to include symbolism and ideology. This has led to more archaeologists accepting the usefulness of using written sources. Somewhat belatedly archaeologists have discovered the Annales School which, although it shares many features with processual archaeology, has proven to be useful even within the post-processual climate (Halsall 1997: 815).

A new development was the field of contemporary archaeology, which was created in the 1970's but didn't gain momentum until the more recent decades (Buchli & Lucas 2001: 3). It can roughly be explained as archaeology of the modern world, in the modern world (Piccini & Holtorf 2009: 24). It can be divided in studies of general human behaviour and behaviour of contemporary society (Buchli & Lucas 2001: 5). It has been argued by among others William Rathje that this field requires a multidisciplinary approach. Any investigation should incorporate textual, oral, material and ethnographical material as much as possible (Piccini & Holtorf 2009: 10). The creation of this new field reflects the need for closer bonds between history and archaeology. It attempts to remove the ancillary label that historians have put on archaeology and to simultaneously demarginalise historical archaeology within the archaeological field. It is one important step closer towards equal cooperation.

One of the other ways in which archaeologists have used written sources is to determine the context of an object (Johnson 1999: 155). Ian Hodder's emphasis on context as a way of understanding each unique object and every unique society is a part of the post-processual climate. He accepted history (i.e. documents) and historical methods as an excellent way to understand past societies, because there was a greater emphasis on individuality and more of an insider's approach (Jensen & Karlsson 1999: 58). Although this approach has many possibilities, in most cases it is used very limitedly. The historical evidence is often only used as a frame around a picture painted with archaeological evidence and this marginalizes the importance of historical sources (Fig. 3).



Figure 3: Visualisation of contextual archaeology

Ever more voices are being raised for an increase in dialogue between the two disciplines, but not enough has been achieved so far. Contextual archaeology and contemporary archaeology are the two main ways in which archaeologists have shown their willingness to join hands with historians. However, what is discouraging for the future of these disciplines is the fact that historians seem to hold on to the notion of segregation very strongly. Many still follow the traditional way of thinking in which archaeology only has three areas of use for historians. First of all, it can be used to illustrate. Secondly, archaeological evidence can be used as justification or proof of the things written in a historical document. Finally, it's often used to fill in the gaps: if documentation is missing archaeology is timidly used to find out more (Halsall 1997: 819-820). The problem with only using archaeology in these three cases, is that it denies its ability to have its own explanatory value. Furthermore, it often leads to the notion that if there are plenty of historical documents, it is not necessary to consult the archaeological sources. This kind of thinking undermines the possibility of opening up the dialogue between the two disciplines.

My approach is post-processual on a basic level. It incorporates the desire for multivocality and is to some extent contextual. However, I will go beyond this because I view both types of sources on equal terms: they will be each other's context and neither will be marginalized. Only then will they be able to fully contribute with their own expertise. This will be a multidisciplinary approach. The fact that I have selected such a small case study should not be confused with the traditional archaeological approach and looking at isolated political events. Instead it should be understood as a micro archaeological (and micro historical) investigation of an isolated situation. Using this rather than a top-down view gives us the possibility of understanding the situation through its own context without making assumptions.

The Dutch East India Company

Activities & organisation



Figure 4: VOC logo
(Van der Zee 2006: 6)

At the end of the 16th century, trade with Asia was limited to the activities of the Portuguese and –to a lesser extent– the Spanish. However, they seemed to be unable to meet the demand for spices that had arisen in Europe. Small ‘*compagnies*’ were created, among others in the Kingdom of England and the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands. These companies usually only existed until the fleet returned with the goods: there was little continuity or structure. So many companies were created that prices soared in Asia while they dropped dramatically in Europe as a result of competition. It was obvious that it had become necessary to work together instead of compete with each other. At the turn of the century, England was the first to grant a trade monopoly to a single company. A few years later, in 1602, the Dutch Republic followed suit with their *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (abbreviated as VOC: Fig. 4), literally the United East Indian Company (Gaastra 2009: 14-19).

The company was split up in six chambers and the chambers of Holland and Zeeland were responsible for, respectively, 50 and 25 percent of the enterprise. The chambers were in turn represented by the *Heren XVII*, the 17 Gentlemen, in which the chamber of Holland held a minority of 8 seats (Gaastra 2009: 21). It was this group of gentlemen who made most of the decisions concerning the company. Although the company’s main concern was the trade with Asia it soon developed a much wider agenda. It was decided to appoint a Governor-General as a representative of the company in Asia. A city was needed to house the central leadership and to function as a rendezvous point for the fleets. For this purpose Batavia, today’s Jakarta in Indonesia, was founded in 1619 (Ibid.: 46-48).

For economic reasons the company built trading posts, factories and plantations. But, to strengthen their position in the hopes of achieving a monopoly on spices, it was also necessary to have a military agenda. The local populations needed to be suppressed into obedience and competition had to be held at bay. The Dutch Republic gave the VOC the right to act as a representative of the Republic and build forts, appoint governors, establish colonies, mint coins, station troops and negotiate treaties in Asia. The company was also charged with defending the nation’s vessels and exploring uncharted territory. During the 17th century, the supply camp at Cape of Good Hope flourished into a colony. The VOC rapidly expanded and constructed a maritime empire but it has been debated whether this was intentional. It seems more likely that it was the result of reluctant imperialism: controlling coastal areas and avoiding unrest inland was necessary for uninterrupted trade (Gaastra 2009: 21-70).

The VOC was only one of many companies that traded with Asia during the 17th and 18th centuries. However, in many ways it was unique. It has been called the first real multinational and was the first company in the world to issue stocks (Gaastra 2009: 22). From the beginning, the VOC invested its efforts in Asia to create permanent capital, rather than constantly having to import money. Unlike the other trading companies, the VOC set up an intra-Asiatic trade network. Although it had troubles fully eliminating its competition, the VOC was the only company permitted to trade with Japan (Ibid.: 57). During its existence the VOC imported more goods and sent more ships to Asia than all other European trade companies combined. It was declared bankrupt and nationalised in 1798 after decades of financial problems, partially due to the wars with England (Ibid.: 179).

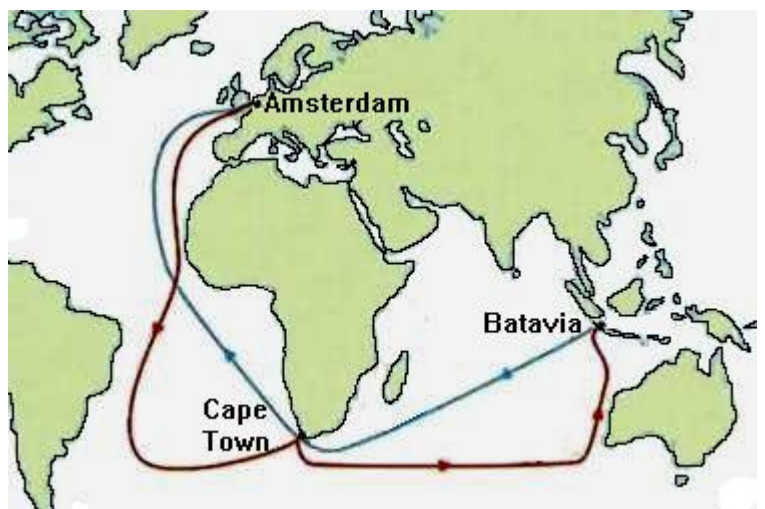
Travelling with the VOC

From day one the VOC ships travelled in fleets. Usually these fleets would consist of a number of large cargo vessels, a few smaller & faster ships and a warship. This way it was easier to defend the precious cargo from pirates or enemy ships. Initially, the fleets would leave three times a year, later there was such heavy traffic that fleets left the whole year round. The *kermisvloot* (fair fleet) was smaller and left the Republic in September, more or less simultaneously with the annual Amsterdam fair. Its main duty was to send messages and orders to Asia as preparation for the next shipment. The *Kerstvloot* (Christmas fleet) left during the winter months and although the winter generally caused storms in the North Sea, the weather at the equator would be favourable. The *Paasvloot* (Easter fleet) was the third of the fleets to leave. Both the Easter and Christmas fleets mostly consisted of large cargo ships. The fair fleet usually consisted of smaller and faster ships. On the journey back home the ships usually travelled in one big fleet, leaving during the winter and arriving in the summer. For safety, the ships would wait for each other at several points along the way and battleships would be waiting in the North Sea to escort them home. The trip towards Batavia usually took 8 or 9 months, on the way back the wind was more favourable and the journey could be completed in 7 months (Gaastra 2009: 116-117).

In 1610 the Dutch discovered that the shortest route to Batavia was not necessarily the fastest one. If they would sail straight east from Cape of Good Hope to Australia before turning north, the strong westerly winds of the Roaring Forties could be used to their advantage (Gaastra 2009: 117). This was called the Brouwer Route and since 1616 all VOC ships were ordered to use it (Fig. 5). The difficulty was that no one could calculate exactly how far they should go east and thus there was a risk of sailing into Australia's coast. At the time, latitude could be measured quite accurately but there was no precise way to measure longitude yet (Drake-Brockman 1982: 41). Not knowing how far to go and only being able to estimate how far they had come, it is amazing that only four ships were lost on the coast of Australia during the two centuries that the VOC used this route. In case of being shipwrecked, the large cargo ships carried several extra vessels on board. The biggest of these, the *barkas*, was a boat with a sail and fit 40 people; it was usually supplemented with one or two sloops. They were stored on deck but could also be towed if more space was desired. They were also used to load or unload cargo and to transport people to and from the ship (Van der Zee 2006: 18-19).

The standard VOC contract for sailors and soldiers lasted 5 years: for the soldiers the journey to and from Batavia was not included. The pay was very low and was not increased at all for 200 years. Working conditions were certainly not the best: after a couple months at sea most of the food was rancid and diseases spread easily among the tightly packed crew. Conditions were not much better on arrival in Batavia. The climate was difficult to bear for most Europeans and the city was not very hygienic. New diseases such as malaria claimed a high death toll. About one third of those who left the Republic would not survive to return. It has long been assumed that

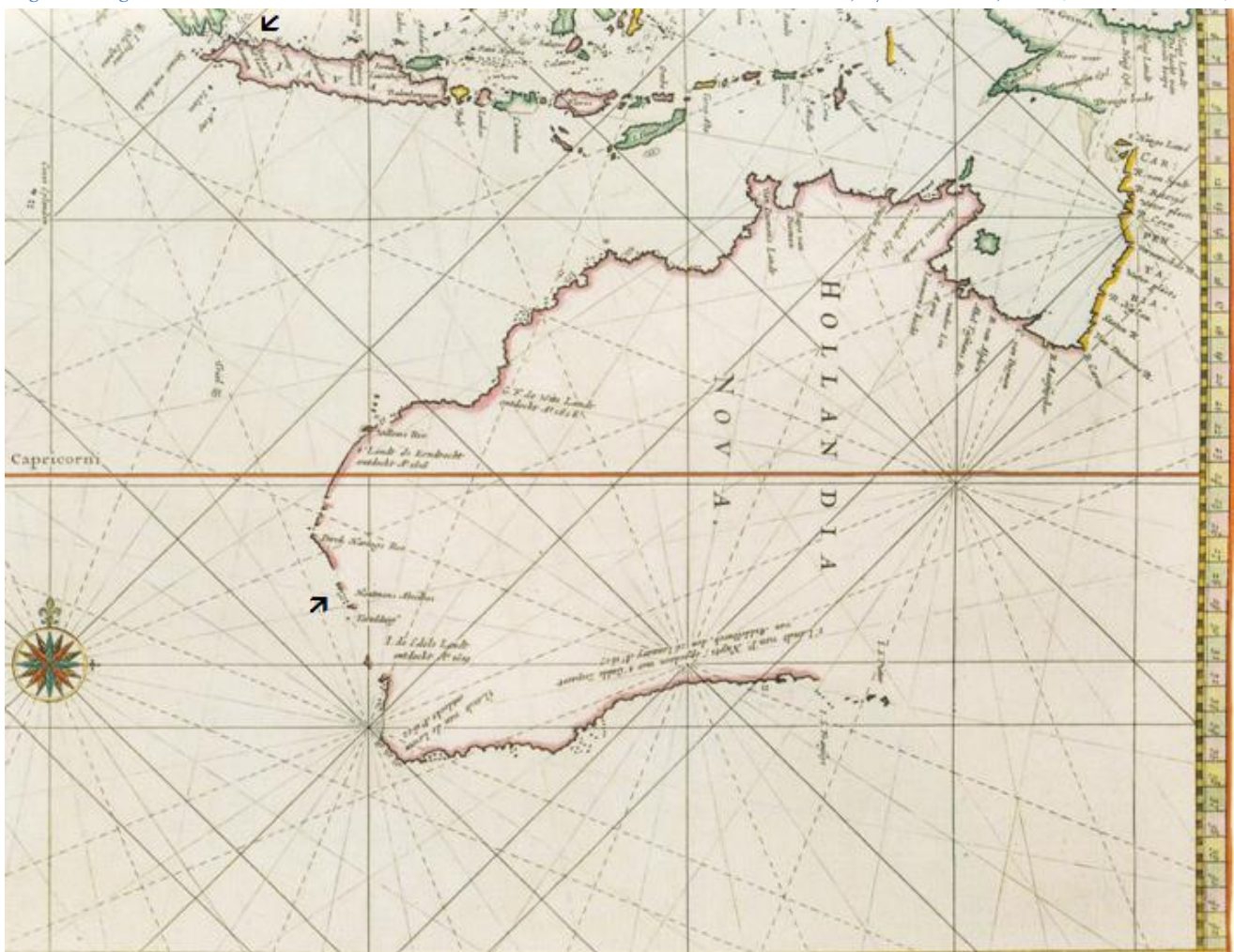
Figure 5: Brouwer's Route & the shorter return journey



those people who decided to join the VOC despite the awful conditions must have been extremely poor or desperate. This was, however, not always the case. Many foreigners (on every ship about 40% of the crew and 60% of the soldiers were foreign) joined because the pay was still higher in the Republic than at home. Another reason for joining was curiosity and the thrill of adventure: stories of the experiences of others in the exotic foreign lands were constantly circulating. The possibility to do a little private trading was also an incentive: although it was forbidden even the highest ranks usually participated and few were punished. Finally, the fact that so many died meant that the prospects of getting promoted were extremely good for the survivors (Gaastra 2009: 91-100).

Besides sailors, soldiers and officers every ship carried passengers, a barber surgeon, a priest and a number of craftsmen (e.g. carpenters, cooks, sail-makers). Finally, there were also a number of merchants on board who were in charge of the cargo. The skipper, who was in charge of the navigation and the crew, was ranked below the upper merchant. The upper merchant on one of the ships would be given the title *commandeur*: this made him the leader of the fleet. Although the *commandeur* was in charge, most decisions were made by councils. Upper merchants and skippers formed the fleet's council, while the merchants, skipper and a few higher officers formed the councils on the individual ships. Ranks and duties were complex but well defined (Drake-Brockman 1982: 11). It was important for everyone to know their place because people of all ages, ranks, professions, backgrounds and nationalities were on board the VOC ships. Mutinies were always a risk if the officers showed themselves weak or incapable of handling their men. Although punishment was severe, conflicts and confrontations were unavoidable on such a long and difficult journey.

Figure 6: Segment of *t'Oosterdeel van Oost Indien* with Batavia and the Houtman Abrolhos, by Pieter Goos, 1666 (Putman 2005: 95)



The story of the *Batavia*

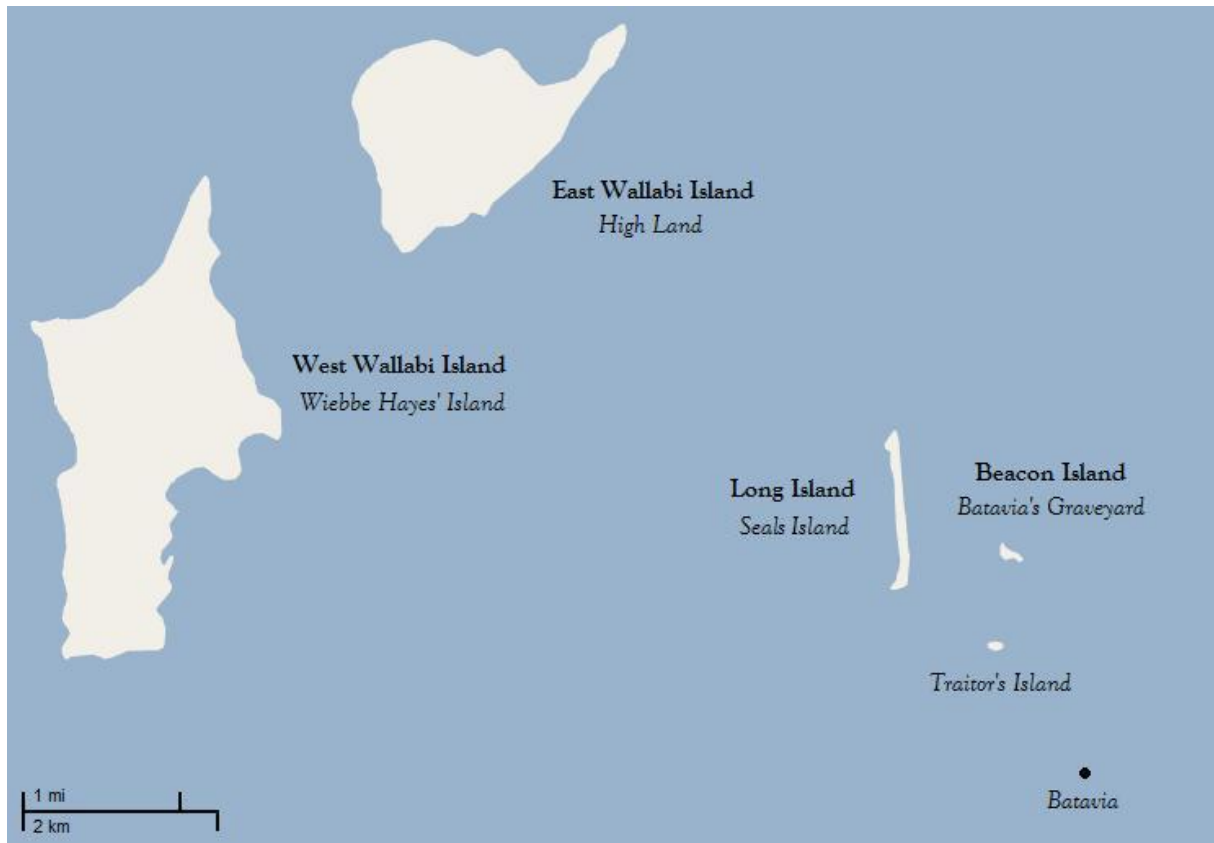


Figure 7: Map of the relevant islands of the Wallabi Group (modern names above & names used by the survivors below)

The journey & the stranding

The *Batavia* was a brand new ship, commissioned in 1626 by the Heren XVII and completed in 1628. It set sail together with six other ships on October 29th in the same year and was the commanding ship of the fair fleet. Its cargo was extremely valuable: twelve chests of silver and gold, silver items for the Mogul-emperor Janghir, over a hundred carved sandstone blocks for the construction of a gate in Batavia, wine, cheese and a high quality woollen textile called *laken*. Perhaps the most precious treasure on board was, however, a chest of jewels. The finest of these were two Roman gems, which are today considered priceless: the sardonyx *Great Cameo* and an agate called the *Rubens Vase* (Fig. 9) (Drake-Brockman 1982: 86).

These precious goods were placed in the charge of the upper merchant of the *Batavia*, who held the title of Fleet President or commandeur: Francisco Pelsaert (Drake-Brockman 1982: 12). Adriaen Jacobsz.¹ was the skipper, thus in charge of the navigation. The relationship between these two can partially be blamed for the difficulties that were to follow: Pelsaert and Jacobsz. had quarrelled violently on a previous journey. Although Pelsaert seemed to have moved on, Jacobsz., who had been scolded for his behaviour by superiors, still carried a grudge (Ibid.: 164).

¹ Last names were uncommon during the 17th century. Instead, the father's name was used, followed by the word 'zoon' (son) – even for girls. Although this *zoon* was always pronounced, in writing it was abbreviated to *sz*. Names were spelled phonetically and differently by every individual. To avoid confusion I will only use one spelling.

The problems started on the first leg of their voyage. The skipper became infatuated with one of the passengers, a married woman named Lucretia Jansz. who was meeting her husband in Batavia. Rejected by Lucretia, Jacobsz. fell in love with her maid instead. Upon reaching the Cape of Good Hope in April, Jacobsz. took the maid for a night out on the town. Getting terribly drunk, both behaved rather shamefully and were reprimanded by Pelsaert afterwards (Drake-Brockman 1982: 161). Enraged Jacobsz. came up with a mutinous plan to capture the ship and its treasure. As soon as they left the Cape a storm arose and the skipper skilfully separated the *Batavia* from the rest of the fleet. Now the other ships, among which a warship, would not be able to intervene. Then he went around trying to find allies among the officers and crew. One night he had a group of men molest Lucretia and cover her with excrement and filth. Pelsaert would thus be forced to take disciplinary action against the crew, alienating them. Then Jacobsz. could stage his uprising, throw Pelsaert overboard, get rid of the women and children, become master of the ship and go pirating across the seas! Unfortunately for Jacobsz., Pelsaert became sick (but did not die): his verdict was delayed and Jacobsz. was forced to wait (Ibid.: 40-41).

While he waited he came too close to the coast of Australia: perhaps his planning of the mutiny had distracted him from his calculations. Believing the coast to still be hundreds of miles away, he made a crucial error in judgement on the early morning of June 4th 1629. Alerted by the look-out, he mistakenly assumed that he was looking at the reflection of the moon on the water; it was in fact the waves breaking on the reefs of the Houtman Abrolhos. Before he knew it the ship violently struck the reef and was wrecked. Initially, he hoped that the tide would rise and they could get free, but as the sun came up and the water started falling rather than rising he realised the situation was hopeless. The surf kept crashing into the ship and throwing it further onto the reef and the ship itself was beginning to break and make water. Luckily, a few tiny islands were spotted in the distance and under Pelsaert's command the boat and the sloop started putting passengers, crew, food, water and some of the valuable goods on two of the islands (Fig. 8). The constant crashing of the waves and mutinous members of the crew made this rescue operation difficult and soon the waves were so dangerous that the small boats could not come near the ship anymore (Drake-Brockman 1982: 122-124).



Figure 8: Illustration of the shipwreck and the tiny islands in the *Ongeluckige Voyagie* (Jansz. 1647: 8)

The survivors & the massacre

There was no water on the tiny islands. Barely any water had been rescued from the ship and it was obvious that a mission in search of water had to be undertaken. The next day Jacobsz. decided he would take the boat and the men from the smallest island and search for water. Now Pelsaert was in a dilemma: should he abandon the rest of the people, not to mention the company's goods, for which he was responsible? On the other hand, he did not trust Jacobsz. to come back with the boat and water. He decided to join the search party after having everyone sign a resolution that they would return at once if they found water; they left the next day. He still knew nothing of the mutiny that had been planned or Jacobsz.' plan to throw him overboard. Once the people on the second island noticed they had been abandoned, they started referring to the other island as Traitor's Island (Drake-Brockman 1982: 126).

Pelsaert did not succeed in finding water on any of the nearby islands and after searching the coast of Australia with no luck, they decided that their only option was to continue to Batavia for help and hope that the people survived. They were joined by a second search party that had taken the sloop; no one was willing to return it to the islands (Drake-Brockman 1982: 127-131). Although it is likely that the skipper still wanted to execute his mutiny plan and get rid of Pelsaert, for unknown reasons this didn't happen. The boat would arrive safely in Batavia a month later and the skipper would be imprisoned the next day (Ibid.: 62).

In the meantime the survivors were in trouble, being left without transportation and very little water (Drake-Brockman 1982: 264). Without leadership the water was not rationed and quickly ran out. Soon people started drinking salt water and urine in desperation; many got sick and about 20 died (Ibid.: 50). For this reason they started calling their island *Batavia's Graveyard*. Finally, on June 10th, it rained. A few days later, as the ship was completely breaking apart, the last people on board abandoned it and floated towards the island. By now 40 people had drowned, 50 had left with the rescue party and there were about 200 survivors left camping on *Batavia's Graveyard*. Jeronimus Cornelisz., the under merchant, floated to the island, discovered that he now held the highest rank and put himself in charge. He quickly learned that the plot for the mutiny had been leaked. He understood that if they were rescued, his participation in the mutiny would surely result in hanging (Ibid.: 167-172).

Cornelisz. set to work to reduce the numbers of the survivors. He started sending people to the other islands in search of water, hoping they would not return. Those who returned were told to lie that there was plenty of water elsewhere, in the hope that more would leave. He gathered a group of men around him and lied to them that Pelsaert had ordered him to reduce the survivors to 40, else they would be too many to be rescued. On July 3rd Cornelisz. ordered the first murders. His main targets were children, women who were not sexually inviting and men who were loyal to Pelsaert and the VOC. Initially, most murders were conducted at night or in secrecy and the bodies were often buried to hide them. Often a group of villains would take a few people by rafts to another island in search of food or water. On the way there they would murder them or drown them. Slowly the murders became more gruesome and more public:

infants were strangled, the sick had their throats slit, seven members of the priest's family were clubbed to death and a boy was beheaded in broad daylight as a joke. Of course people started realising what was going on and several successfully escaped. They escaped to West Wallabi Island where a group led by Wiebbe Hayes had discovered water on July 9th. After hearing about the murders, Wiebbe Hayes decided that they needed to defend themselves in case the murderers came there (Drake-Brockman 1982: 173-176 & 265).

The murder spree on *Batavia's* Graveyard ended on August 16th. By then the villains were alone on the island except for a few women that they used as concubines and a few men, such as the priest, who were deemed useful. Now Cornelisz. unveiled his plan. The men knew that after what they had done on the islands they could no longer hope to avoid hanging. Therefore, when they were rescued, they should capture the rescue ship and go off pirating (Drake-Brockman 1982: 178). For this plan to work Wiebbe Hayes and his gang of loyalists needed to be defeated once and for all or else they might warn the rescuers. After the first attack failed, Cornelisz. tried in vain to lure some of the loyalists to treason. On September 2nd he tried negotiating with Hayes, but he was captured and four of his comrades were killed (Ibid.: 267).

The rescue & the trials

On September 17th, the villains attacked Hayes' island in an attempt to free Cornelisz. During the attack, as luck would have it, Hayes spotted a ship near the High Land and quickly rowed over to it. He warned Pelsaert, who had come along with the rescue ship *Saerdam*, to guard the ship because the villains were planning to capture it. Upon reaching the ship the villains were quickly disarmed. Pelsaert met the survivors and unloaded food and water for them after he made sure that all the villains, including Cornelisz., were imprisoned. Over the following weeks he set about taking care of the survivors and salvaging the valuable goods from the *Batavia* whenever the weather was good enough for diving. Luckily for Pelsaert, the jewels and almost all the chests of gold and silver were recovered (Fig. 9) (Drake-Brockman 1982: 142-145).



Figure 9: The Great Cameo & The Rubens Vase

Simultaneously, Pelsaert formed a council and began the trials. He listened to testimonies of witnesses and defendants. The water cure was used to torture the accused. Water was continuously poured into a bag hanging around the victim's neck until it submerged his mouth and nose. To avoid drowning, the victim was forced to drink the water. These large quantities of water would make the stomach bloat; water intoxication could lead to death. Death was, however, rarely the result. The constant sensation of drowning and bloating was highly uncomfortable and most victims quickly promised to speak the truth. Torture was required

because, at the time, it was Dutch law that you could not be convicted unless you confessed (Drake-Brockman 1982: 101). Even Cornelisz. could not be convicted with the proof of others' testimonies but had to admit being guilty. This proved to be difficult because Cornelisz. revoked his confession several times and had to be questioned all over again (Ibid.: 170).

In the end eight villains were convicted to hanging (some getting their hand chopped off first), the rest would be punished in various ways on the way to Batavia. As requested by the other men Cornelisz. would be first. Seven were eventually hung on Seals Island on October 2nd and one was reprieved on account of his youth (Drake-Brockman 1982: 153-157). He was later marooned with another man on the mainland and they were charged with the job of contacting the locals and investigating any possibilities for trading (Ibid.: 213). Although they were advised to keep a look out for VOC ships that would come pick them up, there are no records of them ever being rescued. They were probably the first Europeans to inhabit mainland Australia.

On December 5th, the last survivors finally reached Batavia (Fig. 10). In the end only 122 people of the estimated 318 who left Amsterdam arrived. The men who had been tried and punished on board the *Saerдам* were tried again and six were executed (Drake-Brockman 1982: 270). Some of the loyalists received promotions. The skipper, who had been imprisoned upon arrival for negligence, was now also charged with the original mutiny plot. No records of his execution have been found. Considering the gap in the company records (October 7th- January 9th) both execution or refusal to admit guilt are possible. Pelsaert, although praised for rescuing most of the precious goods, was also blamed for abandoning the people without water and for the lack of discipline on board the *Batavia*. This was seen as one of the reasons why the ship was wrecked. After he died (possibly of malaria) in September 1630, all his goods were confiscated under the accusation of having engaged in illegal private trade. Whether he was carrying jewels in the name of the company or indeed illegally, is unknown (Ibid.: 56-63).

Figure 10: *Gezicht op Batavia* (View of Batavia), Hendrick Jacobsz. Dubbels, ±1650



Historic sources

The material we can find

As with all material, one of the problems with documents is the degree of preservation. How much of the material that was produced can we find later in archives? Destruction of paper or parchment depends to a large degree on natural processes. Insects can attack the pages and acidic soils or humid storage rooms can speed up the decomposition of the material. Leaving a page in direct sunlight for a longer period of time can result in fading. Water can both wash out the ink and destroy the material. Humans can also speed up the destruction of these materials by incautious handling or just by frequent use. We are all aware of these processes to some extent, but this awareness certainly does not prevent them from happening.

Another major way in which we humans affect the preservation of documents is by selection. Which documents did the medieval monks choose to copy or translate and which did they neglect? Older manuscripts that have been saved have been passed on by hundreds of people and all of them chose to keep it, copy it or translate it. It is a well known fact that throughout history documents have been deliberately destroyed for different reasons. For instance, the Swedish East India Company destroyed their records regularly to avoid being spied on by their competitors. In many wars libraries have been targeted to destroy the enemies' culture. Another famous example is the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls which were supposed to be destroyed. They also proved that the bible had not been copied correctly throughout time but that major differences could be found between original texts and later 'copies'.

The process of selection is not only active after the document is created but also influences the creation of the document. It is important to consider why people in the first place decide to write down certain things and not others. This is a conscious process in which we make a decision to remember certain things and forget others (Piccini & Holtorf 2009: 10). Reasons for hiding evidence can be simple (e.g. when they concern illegal practices) or very complex. It can be added here that in the past writing materials (parchment, paper, ink etc) were not cheap goods that could be wasted: only what was deemed important could be immortalized. In conclusion, natural processes of deterioration, human selection in preservation and human selection in writing are the three main agents responsible for the composition of the historic record today. Naturally this means that the bulk of evidence we are able to find today is unbalanced (Buchli & Lucas 2001: 12).

The documents' content

Now that we have evaluated the merits of the total historical record, we can examine the merits of the individual documents. The first problem we stumble upon has to do with who wrote the document. First of all, it is important to assess the legitimacy of the author in regards to what he is writing about. Source criticism is a well developed historic method to determine the level of credibility of a document. We must also remember that in historic times, when illiteracy was high, not everyone had the possibility to blog their heart out. In practice there was a small elite who was responsible for all documents. It cannot be assumed that the words of this elite reflected the norm or the mass (Hodder 2001: 190). This is an unbalanced view with certain aspects or views left out (Buchli & Lucas 2001: 12).

The selection of what is written down in the document does not necessarily depend on a conscious decision by the writer. It is almost the rule that everyday realities and that which is

conceived as common or natural is not documented (Piccini & Holtorf 2009: 16). This kind of selection is to a great extent subconscious. As Binford discovered during his stay with the Nunamiut Eskimos, there were aspects of their behaviour that they were completely unaware of until they were shown its archaeological result (Binford 1975: 176). Consciously or subconsciously, every writer makes selections about what is included and what is left out of his document. It is important to think of these things when deciding what we want to learn from the historic evidence. It is likely that not all the answers can be found.

Another problem with documents is the fact that they are subjective. It has been shown that even 'factual' documents such as lists of cargo cannot be accepted as truth. For instance, the real cargo of VOC ships and the lists often did not completely correspond due to smuggling by the crew. Binford discovered that the academical, ethnographic documents about the Nunamiut people contained exaggerations and over dramatizations (Binford 1975: 174). Subjectivity can be even more of a problem with other less formal kinds of documents. Rathje's legendary garbage project in Tucson, Arizona showed that the discrepancy between oral report and fact can be startling. People's actual behaviour was very different from what they thought they did or what they said they did (Hodder 2001: 190). While this misreporting can be intentional, undoubtedly most errors can be explained by ignorance of our own behaviour or by tricking ourselves and genuinely believing our own imagination (i.e. subconscious decision such as those discussed above). In the case of intentional omissions or lies many times these alterations are made out of self-interest. Courtesy, for instance when we are talking about someone who has died, is another example of subjectivity.

A final problem also has to do with human nature and that is the unreliability of our memory. It can be said that an older memory is less reliable than a fresh memory, hence documents written as soon as possible after the event are more reliable than later memoirs. As time goes by we can also filter our memories, subconsciously only keeping the good or bad ones. The *good old days* were perhaps just good in retrospect. Similarly, over time we can come to believe that another's memories are our own: we can come to believe we experienced those things ourselves. Traumatic events or stress can also blur our memory; the effects are highly individual and can't be accurately anticipated. In conclusion, the identity of the writer, conscious and subconscious selection, subjectivity and memory all affect the reliability of a historic document.

Batavia documents

Francisco Pelsaert, as Commandeur, was supposed to keep a journal. He had to write how they progressed with their journey and record any special happenings. When the ship was wrecked, all the documents that had been onboard were lost. However, Pelsaert immediately started a new journal. This journal describes the shipwreck, his journey with the boat to Batavia and his return with the *Saerdam*. Furthermore, he describes the salvage work done on the ship and the

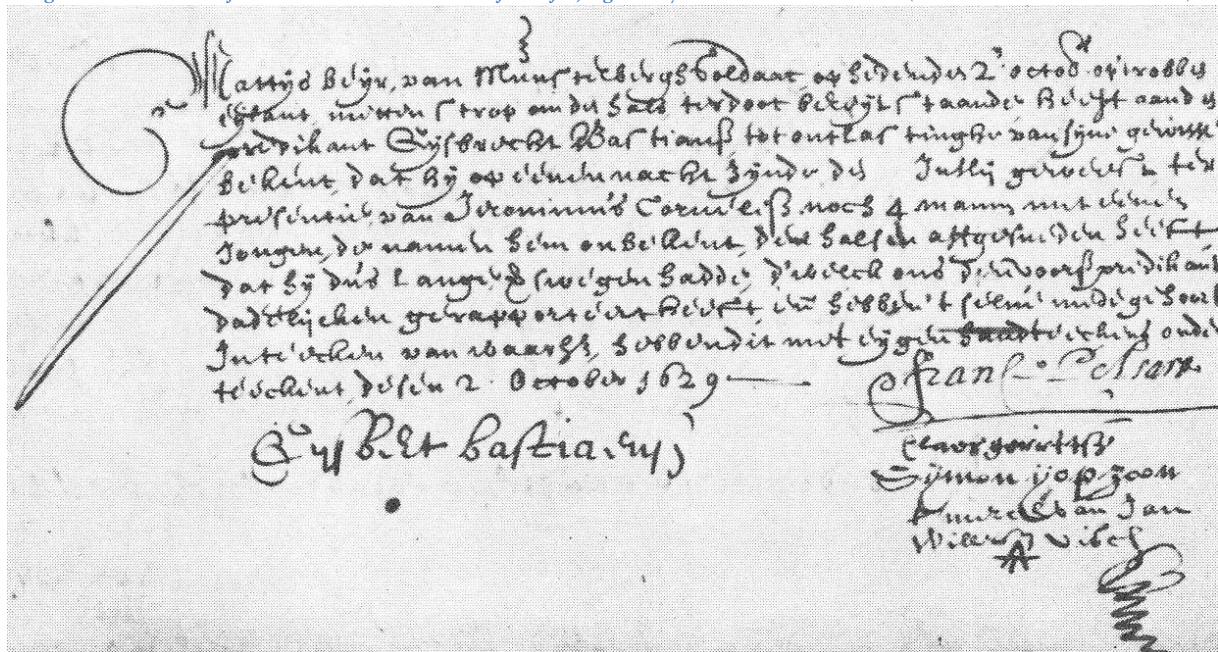
trials. Finally, he records the journey back to Batavia, including his instructions to the two men who were marooned on the mainland and a short description of the exotic animals they had encountered, such as wallaby. Pelsaert's original journal has been preserved in the Netherlands (Drake-Brockman 1982: 43-48 & 235).

318	<u>Left Amsterdam</u>
10	Died on the way
40	Drowned swimming from the wreck
20	Died of thirst/illness
7	Executed on Seals Island
2	Marooned on the mainland
2	Died on the way to Batavia
2	Lost in a storm
4	Killed by the loyalists
109	Murdered by Cornelisz' men
6	Executed in Batavia
116	Survived

Figure 11: What happened to the Batavia's passengers?
In blue: possibly the faulty sum that resulted in the oft stated
"125 people were murdered by Cornelisz."

Pelsaert's journal is very extensive. It contains his own notes about his journeys, the shipwreck and the trials, but it also contains statements and testimonies by survivors and perpetrators (written by Pelsaert) (Fig. 12). Due to his own absence and the nature of the trial, there is no information about life on the islands. Statements by others concern the murders and the various plots involved. This information is very factual. It contains clear accounts on who did what, to whom, on which day and according to whom. This makes it relatively easy to reconstruct the events of the murders in detail (Fig. 11). The factual nature of Pelsaert's journal and the extensive recording of the testimonies are a great benefit. However, there are many possible flaws with the testimonies themselves. Not only were they conducted a few months after the fact when many possible witnesses were dead, but plenty of torture was involved. The results achieved by torture may have been what Pelsaert wanted to hear, rather than the truth. Pelsaert was forced to rely on the honesty and memories of others. The fact that it was Pelsaert who wrote down the testimonies afterwards could also have resulted in omissions or errors. Furthermore, Pelsaert occasionally left out information from his journal to avoid blame. For instance, he does not mention that about 20 people died of thirst. He probably felt guilty for their deaths, having left them without water.

Figure 12: From the journal: confession of Mattijs Beijer, signed by Pelsaert & Bastiaensz. (Drake-Brockman 1982: 223)



His journals were published less than two decades later by a Jan Jansz. of Amsterdam. The book, *Ongeluckige Voyagie van't Schip Batavia*, was a rearranged version of Pelsaert's journal in the third person. The book was an immediate success: already the next year it was published again by a competitor and newer editions would soon follow. It was to be the horror story of the century (Drake-Brockman 1982: 4). Editions of the first book have been preserved and are also available digitally. The immense amount of public interest for this story helped save these books and the original journals from being forgotten or destroyed.

In one of the editions of *Ongeluckige Voyagie* by a competitor a copy of a letter was added. It is six pages long and was written by Gijsbert Bastiaensz., the priest, to his relatives and friends

back home. Although it is undated, it is likely that it was written soon after his arrival in Batavia. In any case, it must have been written before March 1633, when he died of dysentery. There are good arguments for the letter's authenticity even though no original has been located so far. There is information in it concerning surviving on the islands, which is absent in Pelsaert's journals and could only have been written by an eyewitness. Bastiaensz., who had left Amsterdam with his wife and seven children, arrived in Batavia with only his oldest daughter (Drake-Brockman 1982: 77-79).

Bastiaensz.' letter is the only eyewitness account of the events that happened on the islands while Pelsaert was gone. It is unique for its brief description of life on the islands. Not only does he describe the tragedy surrounding the murders, but he also explains the misfortune of being abandoned without water or food. He writes about having to drink urine, eat grass and surviving the massacre of his family. The merits of this letter lie in the fact that it is the only eyewitness account and that it contains information about the everyday life of the survivors. It is, however, quite short and much has been left out. Although the letter must have been written within 4 years of the events (and probably a lot sooner), it is possible that it contains errors. While some parts may have been easy to remember due to their uncommonness, it must have been a very traumatic experience for Bastiaensz. and many memories might have been suppressed. He wrote: "So that when this is not written in good order and clarity there are two good reasons: firstly, I had not the time, for the ships are ready to sail for the Fatherland; secondly, because we have just come out of such a sorrow that the mind is still a little confused" (Drake-Brockman 1982: 268).

Finally, there are a number of official VOC documents and letters that concern the *Batavia* and the tragic events of its crew. As mentioned, there is a gap in the records at the time of the *Saerdam*'s return to Batavia. Among others, there are a letter of instructions for Pelsaert for the rescue mission, a document stating the sentences of the villains who arrived in Batavia and personal letters of Van Diemen (later the Governor-General). These documents can be found in the VOC archives. The journal and Bastiaensz.' letter have been translated into English by E. Drok and fully published in Drake-Brockman's *A Voyage to Disaster* (1982). The same has been done for many of the relevant VOC documents; some have only partially been published.

The main merit of these other documents is that they give a different side of the story. For instance, they blame Pelsaert much more than he blames himself in the journals. However, there are difficulties. Mistakes are often made. For instance, it is mentioned that 125 people were murdered: 96 men, 12 women and 7 children. The total figure is off by 10: the sum was blindly copied from Pelsaert's journals and has found its way into every other account (Fig. 11). Similarly, names and dates are sometimes off. The document in which Pelsaert is accused of illegal trade may have been written out of self interest and isn't necessarily true. Even with these flaws, they give a valuable outside perspective on the events. However, it is certainly a difficulty that these are the only documents available and that no other letters or journals by survivors have been preserved – if they were ever written.

Archaeological sources

Material remains

The enormity of the archaeological record can easily give us the impression that it is largely complete. However, this is far from true. Not only has just a fraction of all sites been discovered, but these sites only contain a fraction of the original material. In our everyday lives we are lulled into a belief that most of our objects or possessions are durable if we want them to be. Certainly our furniture, clothes and books can survive a lifetime or longer unless we throw them away or deliberately destroy them. However, considering the long time frames that archaeologists usually are involved with, only the most durable materials (metals, stones, pottery etc.) can typically be found. There are many reasons for the destruction of the archaeological record: natural, animal or human. Natural processes such as erosion, decomposition and corrosion or disasters such as earthquakes and volcano can destroy archaeological material. Animals can destroy material by trampling, gnawing and burrowing or they can interfere with the site by bringing material to it or taking material away from it. Humans can unintentionally or intentionally destroy material and sites. Looting, construction, carelessness or polluting are examples of destructive human behaviour.

Under the effect of all these destructive factors, usually only the durable materials are preserved. Exceptional conditions are needed to preserve other (organic) materials. Freezing, drying or water logging can save certain organic material although the above mentioned processes can still lead to (partial) destruction. The fact that organic material is rarely preserved is one of the greatest problems of archaeology. A huge percentage of the original material is thereby lost. Furthermore, it can be difficult or impossible to fully interpret what an original object was, e.g. a suit, when there are only buttons left. The whole archaeological record is generally limited and damaged but when the individual objects are also fragmentary or badly preserved it makes our job even harder. While archaeologists have learned to cope with the limitations of the archaeological record and the fact that it consists of mostly inorganic material, the degree of destruction of a site and its material will always prove to be problematic.

The archaeological method

Shortcomings of the archaeological method have been discussed at length for a long time. It is not my intention to go into all the possible problems here. Instead, I will briefly discuss a few of the most prominent issues. One of the main issues is the relationship between objects and human behaviour/society. It has been discussed at length whether objects are only a reflection of society (i.e. there is a church because we are religious) or if they also contribute actively to society (i.e. the creation of McDonald's changed our dietary habits). The degree to which objects reflect individual or collective ideas and actions is difficult to determine. Whether a certain motive on a piece of pottery had a function (practical, religious or otherwise) or can be considered purely aesthetical is not easy to decide. In many cases we are stuck with our interpretations and will never 'know for sure'. Binford somewhat pessimistically said that even the most experienced archaeologist can at best make informed guesses (Binford 1975: 175).

It is a fact that archaeologists deal with mute objects and to some extent this can be crippling. These objects usually cannot tell us of their makers' or owners' intentions nor can they tell us what meaning they held for their owners. When we find a ring we do not know if it was a cheap trinket that barely mattered or an heirloom that was extremely meaningful. This problem was

addressed early on and it was realized that we can investigate certain aspects of past societies more easily than others. The discovery resulted in what is known as Hawke's ladder, a scale of topics we can research, ranging from easy to difficult. Technology and economy were assumed to be relatively easy to understand from the mute material while religious beliefs were considered more or less impossible to determine (Halsall 1997: 808). Much of archaeological practice has been aimed at these easier topics but as a result of the post-processual climate more attention is being paid to tackling those that are more difficult. I must point out that, as mentioned, there are few certainties with archaeological results and the more difficult the topic the less certain the results. In any case archaeological results or evidence should not be immediately accepted as facts.

It has been argued that archaeology of any time period is to some extent contemporary because we are working with the past in the present (Piccini & Holtorf 2009: 14). We cannot avoid looking at the past through modern eyes. We like to think that we recognize objects from our society in the archaeological record but whether these analogies are correct is not certain. As always we must be vigilant of our own subjectivity and our cultural background and be critical of the questions we ask and the results we get. In conclusion, it can be pointed out that –and this goes both for written and for archaeological material– **the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence**.

Batavia artefacts & data

There is continually a hard surf, and one has to observe precisely the moment of smooth water, otherwise one would never have been able to do anything on the wreck. For when we first came here with the yacht, there was a piece of the poop and the foreship still above water, but now it has been altogether washed away, so that under water lies only the keel with a little of the hold of the wreck, where the pieces of cannon, anchors, ropes, and suchlike heavy goods are lying, incredibly matted together, and cannot wash out.

Drake-Brockman 1982: 235

Pelsaert describes the rapid deterioration of the wreck during his month of salvage work. However, the end of this passage provided the distinct possibility that something of the wreck or its cargo might still be found in situ. Henrietta Drake-Brockman used other evidence from the journals to propose that the *Batavia* had sunk somewhere in the Wallabi Group and not the more southern Pelsaert Group, as was believed. Indeed, following her notes, the shipwreck was finally discovered in 1963 by a friend of Hugh Edwards, almost exactly in the state that Pelsaert had described. Edwards, a journalist and amateur diver, immediately invited a team of divers and marines to investigate the shipwreck. Tools and explosives were used to get objects loose from the reef. Several cannons were lifted and a large amount of artefacts such as coins, pottery and navigational instruments were taken from the site. Although photographs were taken and some of the artefacts were donated to museums, much valuable archaeological information was lost. Edwards' team even attempted some small excavations on Beacon Island (Fig. 13). Skeletal material, glass and metal were found; much was thrown away or simply reburied (Edwards 1990: 122-181). Edwards wrote a semi-fictional book on their findings and the story of the *Batavia*.

Figure 13: Henrietta Drake-Brockman, Hugh Edwards
& George Brenzi at a victim's grave, 1963



His book is difficult to use as evidence. There are no references and it is not possible to examine the value of the facts presented in it. A lively imagination is clearly the source of the imaginary dialogues between the *Batavia* survivors, but on other occasions it is more difficult to separate fact from fiction. Its merit lies in the fact that it is the only account of what happened during the first excavation and investigation of the *Batavia* and the islands. It is also useful for understanding some of the first interpretations made about the material remains. For instance, it was Edwards who called two structures *Wiebbe Hayes' fort* and *Cornelisz.' prison*, names that have stuck (Edwards 1990: 189). There are, however, difficulties with the material that was recovered. Much was kept by the people working with Edwards; what was donated to museums was poorly documented and not well preserved. On the whole, it is difficult to make an assessment of what they found exactly and where these artefacts are now.

Almost a decade after the *Batavia's* discovery the Western Australian Museum organised a major investigation of the shipwreck. During four seasons (1972-1975) the wreck was meticulously documented and many loose objects and cannons were lifted. The second & third seasons focused on excavating and raising the large pieces of timber that were part of the ship's hull (Ingelman-Sundberg 1975: 1). Operations were difficult due to the conditions of the ship and its location. Much of the ship was stuck in the reef and coral had grown over many of the objects. Because the ship is located precisely on the edge of the reef in the highly turbulent breakers there were great risks involved for the divers. The strength of the waves and their effect on the site can be illustrated with 100 kg sacks of coral: some of them were moved 50 meters in two days (Green 1975: 44-47). The ship's hull has been restored and is visible at the Shipwreck Galleries in Freemantle along with many artefacts.

Now that the ship was located, it was possible to identify the islands mentioned in Pelsaert's journals. A digging frenzy followed Edwards' investigation of the shipwreck, tourists came to hunt souvenirs on the islands and Edwards returned on several occasions with students to perform minor excavations. It wasn't until a decade later, more or less simultaneously with the marine investigations, that the Western Australian Museum took a serious interest in the islands. In 1974 Robert Bevacqua published the results of a survey of the stone structures on Beacon, Long & West Wallabi Islands. In the same year, an excavation was undertaken at the slaughter point site on West Wallabi. Another survey, which included Traitor's and East Wallabi Islands, was completed in 1988 to evaluate which sites should be protected. In 1992 Martin Gibbs surveyed Beacon Island and excavated a few test pits. Finally, a large-scale survey of most of the islands was carried out in 2007. This survey took nine days and resulted in a list of sites that should be excavated or investigated more. Considering that it has been almost 50 years since the discovery of the *Batavia*, remarkably little has been done on the islands.

All material found during the surveys, excavations and investigations by the Western Australian Museum (W.A.M.) are in their possession. Most artefacts have undergone conservation, some have been restored and all that were collected by the museum are well documented. Following the work on the shipwreck a catalogue was compiled. Difficulties lie with those artefacts that were collected by inhabitants and tourists and donated to the museum later: much is poorly

preserved. It is obvious that many objects must still be in private collections, awaiting discovery. Furthermore, certainly much still remains to be collected from the reef and excavated on the islands. The reports, surveys, articles and projects written and published by the W.A.M. are all digitally available on their website.

The shipwreck and its associated finds have been almost completely investigated and excavated. The excavation reports and catalogue are very extensive, which is a great benefit. The difficulties lie in the marine environment of the shipwreck. Not only has a lot of material been corroded by the salt water and destroyed by the heavy wave-action, but the active coral reef has overgrown much of the shipwreck. During the excavations much was broken because it was necessary to use pick-axes or explosives to extract artefacts from the reef (Green 1975: 52). The marine environment also created a selection by preserving some materials better than others.



Figure 14: An anchor led to the discovery of the *Batavia*

On the islands, the focus has been on skeletal remains and the stone structures. During the last two decades a few excavations of skeletons have been undertaken on Beacon Island. Some skeletons were found earlier by inhabitants and their context is unknown. Those that have been properly excavated include the six people found in a mass grave. In 2008 the first results of a molecular analysis of the *Batavia* victims' DNA was published. Much is still left to be investigated or excavated before more complete interpretations can be made. The small amount of archaeological work done on the islands is one of the greatest drawbacks. Another difficulty is the fact that, according to Pelsaert, anything worth salvaging was taken back to Batavia, even items as seemingly insignificant as empty barrels (Drake-Brockman 1982: 150 & 221). But these surveys and excavations also have many merits, one of which is the fact that much of the Wallabi Group has been put under government protection ensuring that no further damage can be done to the sites (Souter et al. 2007: V). The excavations around some of the stone structures have given insight into the survivors' subsistence strategy, their shelters and other aspects of their survival on the islands. The excavated skeletons have provided a more personal view on the massacre.

Among the recovered material there are both fragmentary and intact artefacts. Destruction can be explained by the turbulence of the water and the interference of burrowing birds on the islands. The fishermen who live on some of the islands have also caused considerable damage by digging and building, most notably considering the skeletal remains buried on Beacon Island (Gibbs 1994: 5-6). Although mainly inorganic materials and wood have been preserved, there are also small amounts of other organic materials such as leather, ivory, wax, rope and fabric (Stanbury 1974). Nevertheless, there is a clear bias towards inorganic and wooden artefacts.

Analysis: history versus archaeology

The cargo

Already in the early days of the VOC all ships were required to carry a list of their cargo. These listed all the items and their amounts precisely. Money was often accounted for separately. The records of the VOC are very accurate when it comes to matters of trade; it is relatively easy to know how much was bought and sold of which goods. Of course, these lists are not perfect. It is well known that many passengers and crew members took money or items with them for private trading (Drake-Brockman 1982: 57). Especially the higher ranks were able to take out large loans and make a profit from this practice. Naturally, it was forbidden by the VOC but since everyone participated it seemed difficult to put a stop to it. Illegal goods were, of course, not listed on the cargo lists.

When the *Batavia* struck the Morning Reef of the Abrolhos Islands, chaos broke out. The waves were beating the ship so severely that it was almost impossible to stand upright and it was difficult to bring the most precious cargo up onto the deck. While people and the jewels were being brought to the islands, the ship started breaking. Soon everything in the hold started floating and not much could be saved. The people still on board were having a merry time, breaking open the liquor cabinets and roaming over the decks of the ship. The rioters broke into the main cabin and looted the commandeur's chest. They took all of his papers and, after reading some of them, tore them up and threw them overboard (Drake-Brockman 1982: 124-186). They also broke open one of the chests of money and "at last, in drunkenness, have thrown the money at each others' heads" (Ibid.: 243). The other chests of money sank within a week as the ship fell apart.

Because of the loss of the cargo list, it is necessary to search through the other documents to find evidence of the cargo. Pelsaert's journal mentions the precious jewels that were on board. These were rescued before the ship sank and sat in Cornelisz.' tent until Pelsaert returned to claim them. The journal also mentions the chests filled with silver and gold coins and bars. Except for the one that was looted, these sank with the ship. All were saved later by Pelsaert's team of divers besides one which could not be lifted because it had a cannon and an anchor lying on top of it. He also mentions that a few barrels of wine, water, bread and vinegar were saved from the wreck or rescued later after being found floating on the ocean. He criticizes Cornelisz.' and his men for wearing richly embroidered *laken* which they had fished up from the wreck. These items, perhaps with the exception of some of the goods in barrels, were undoubtedly part of the cargo and were supposed to be traded in Asia (Drake-Brockman 1982: 145-151).

The archaeological investigations of the wreck have been able to shed some more light on the *Batavia's* cargo. Some of the finds confirm those items mentioned in the written sources. For instance, already during Edwards' investigation of the shipwreck Spanish silver coins were found (Edwards 1990: 156). During the subsequent excavations over a thousand more silver

Figure 15: Silver coins salvaged from the wreck

coins were discovered (Ingelman-Sundberg 1975: 11). It is unknown whether these coins are those that were looted and thrown around or indeed remains from the lost chest with the cannon and anchor on top of it. The value and amount of these coins does, however, suggest that they were not someone's personal property but indeed part of the cargo (Fig. 15).



Fragments of chests and barrels, barrel hoops and hinges indicate, perhaps not surprisingly, that there were indeed chests and barrels on board (Bevacqua 1974b: 15). Keys and locks that have been found also point to the fact that some of them might have contained valuable items (Stanbury 1975: 86). However, apart from a barrel which was full of nails (Ingelman-Sundberg 1975: 12), the content of these containers is not known. Whether they were used for cargo, personal belongings or to store food and drink for the long journey is anyone's guess. The same can be said for the large amount of jugs, jars and pharmaceutical bottles that have been recovered (Stanbury 1975: 3 & 9).

The ship's ballast, which was not mentioned in the written sources at all, was revealed during the excavations. Naturally, heavy objects such as spare anchors, cannon balls and cannons were



Figure 16: The sandstone blocks of the gate

stored in the hold and their discovery was more or less expected. More surprising, however, were over eight thousand bricks found lining the hold (Stanbury 1975: 13). Their purpose is unknown, but they were probably sent to Batavia for construction. The purpose of the sandstone blocks is better known. These blocks, of which over 130 have been found, are carved and have distinct shapes (Green 1975: 49). Reconstruction shows that they formed a gate (Fig. 16). A large copper pintle, which was part of a hinge, was also found and it probably would have been attached to a heavy door which might have belonged to the gate (Souter et al. 2007: 13). The costs involved in making these blocks and shipping them to Batavia suggests that it was for a very important building. The size of the gate hints that this building might have been the fort of Batavia. It is curious that this precious cargo is not mentioned in the written source and that Pelsaert's divers did not try to rescue it.

In conclusion, if we want to know the cargo of the Batavia we need to use both archaeological and written sources. Of course, even now we will probably never know what the rest of the cargo was. Although they both prove the presence of the chests of silver and barrels with different contents, all the other objects can only be found in one of the sources. Neither the jewels, *laken* or bars of silver can be found archaeologically because they were salvaged. On the other hand the ballast was not mentioned in the written sources. Perhaps Pelsaert did not mention the ballast, although it was both valuable and uncommon, because it couldn't be salvaged. If he wouldn't mention it, perhaps others would forget and he could avoid blame.

Surviving in the Abrolhos

The survivors were stuck on the islands for a little over three months. What did they do? What did they eat? How did they live? All of these questions are difficult to answer. In the written sources the main focus was on the murders and the mutiny; living arrangements were of less importance. Simultaneously, their stay on the islands was rather short in archaeological terms and combined with the fact that as much as possible was salvaged, little material remains for studying. However, if we combine both sources of information we can come quite a long way.

In the written sources it is mentioned in passing that they lived in tents: “he has been called by Jeronimus into his tent,” “he has been fetched out of his tent” or “he has battered in the head of Hendrick Denys [...] in front of his tent” (Drake-Brockman 1982: 180). This information is part of the testimonies in Pelsaert’s journal and is also mentioned in Bastiaensz.’ letter. These tents are, however, not described so that we don’t know how many there were or what they were made of. It is likely that these tents were taken down upon their departure, taking any valuable material with them to Batavia. If they were left behind, the word tent suggests a temporary structure and it is unlikely that any traces of these tents could be found more than three centuries later. Interestingly, five stone structures have been found on the islands that are more permanent. Only one of these can be positively linked to the *Batavia*’s survivors, the origin of two structures is unknown and the remaining two were constructed much later (Bevacqua 1974a: 23). It can be speculated that at least the first structure might have been used as a house, but other functions are also plausible. Two structures will be discussed at length later on.

My children got a very meagre ration, so that they nearly perished from hunger and thirst; I ate seals’ skins; and I put some salt water into the tot of water that I was given, so that it would last a little longer. [...] Most of the time I sat on the beach reading, and then I plucked some salad or grass that was there, and then I had neither oil nor vinegar; for two months I tasted neither bread nor rice.

Gijsbert Bastiaensz. (Drake-Brockman 1982: 265)

Finding food and water was one of the greatest challenges for the survivors. Life was especially hard on the smallest islands (*Batavia*’s Graveyard, Traitor’s Island & Seals Island) because there was no fresh water except for what they could collect when it rained. A few times they were lucky and barrels were found floating on the ocean. Although mentioned only as a trick to separate people from the group to murder them, it is suggested in the journal that they hunted seals and birds (Drake-Brockman 1982: 187 & 196). Furthermore, fishing around the wreck is mentioned (Ibid.: 145). The loyalists on the big island were much luckier; the island had wells of water and an abundance of food: “how miraculously God has blessed the good ones who were together, with water, with fowls, with fish, with other beasts, with eggs in basketsfull” (Ibid.: 267).

Excavations on *Batavia*’s Graveyard have yielded large amounts of fish and mammal bones, but only those bones that have signs of burning or butchering have been attributed to the survivors (Gibbs 1992: 9). Edwards’ team also found fire places and seal bones, some of them with knife

nicks (Edwards 1990: 181). Excavations on the loyalists' island have yielded even more insight into their subsistence strategy. The burnt remains of tammar wallabies, shellfish, seals, shearwaters (a type of seabird) and oysters were found alongside iron fragments bent into the shape of fish hooks (Bevacqua 1974b: 5 & 11). Later excavations have recovered fish bones as well (Souter et al. 2007: 9). The students of Aquinas College suggested that the food remains reflect the subsistence of approximately 40 men for three months, based on their excavations at the loyalists' camp (Bevacqua 1974b: 6).

Besides searching for food and water, there was very little to do on the islands. Bastiaensz. mentions that he spent much of his time reading. A decorated copper book clasp was found on Wiebbe Hayes' Island and it is likely to have belonged to a bible (Fig. 17) (Souter et al. 2007: 6). It is intriguing to think that someone took a book with him when the ship was sinking and that afterwards, in the confusion and terror of the murder spree, someone cared enough to take it with him in his escape to the loyalists. Probably, though, not many were able to read this book and enjoy it. Certainly some time was spent making weapons and tools such as fish hooks. Two lead ladles and scraps of lead excavated on Wiebbe Hayes' Island suggest that these ladles were manufactured on the site (Bevacqua 1974b: 14). Bastiaensz. states that the loyalists made him a pair of clogs and it is also mentioned that the villains dressed themselves in clothes of rich red *laken*, which they probably had the women sew for them (Drake-Brockman 1982: 146 & 267).



Figure 17: Copper book clasp
(Souter et al. 2007: 12)

Considering the survivor's subsistence strategy, both written and archaeological sources give more or less the same information about which types of food they ate. However, the written material is unique because it mentions eating grass and describes the emotions involved in trying to survive. On the other hand, the archaeological material can provide data to confirm the written sources about how many people may have been living on a certain site. Importantly, if we would only look at one type of evidence the living arrangements of the survivors would be completely different (tents vs. stone structures). It is likely that both tents and huts were used simultaneously. If we are interested in knowing how they spent their time on the islands, certain activities such as manufacturing clothes or ladles are only mentioned in one of the sources. Evidence of reading, however, can be found in both. Clearly, also the lives of the survivors need to be examined on the basis of both materials in order to provide a more complete picture.

Cornelisz.' prison

When the villains tried to capture the rescue ship *Saerdam*, they were immediately captured. They were well-bound and locked up in the foredeck of the ship. The same evening Wiebbe Hayes brought Cornelisz. on board and he was locked up with the others. The next day Pelsaert sailed to *Batavia's* Graveyard and had the rest of the villains imprisoned. These were then taken to Seals Island, where they were isolated and could be fetched for questioning. It is mentioned

in the journal that those who were already imprisoned on the ship were taken ashore, but it is not mentioned to which island. It is likely that they were all kept on Seals Island; whether Cornelisz. was separated from the rest is not revealed (Drake-Brockman 1982: 143-146).

Were the prisoners merely bound hand and foot, or were they imprisoned in some kind of small building? During his survey of the islands, Edwards decided that the two stone structures on Long & Beacon Islands must have been prisons. He named the one on Beacon Island Cornelisz.' prison, because he believed that they would have kept the main criminal separated from the rest (Edwards 1990: 189). It can be speculated that Cornelisz. was indeed isolated from the others. Certainly they did not trust him and they might have been scared of what he could convince the others of doing. He might have tried to convince his fellow convicts of doing something treacherous or he could have attempted to make someone set him free. But if he was indeed isolated, did they keep him on *Batavia's* Graveyard or somewhere else?

Surely, it would have been practical to keep Cornelisz. locked up on the island, because that is where Pelsaert and his council held the trials. For nearly two weeks Pelsaert was interrogating the villains and Cornelisz. had to be fetched almost every day. An entry in Pelsaert's journal might give us some clarification. A few days before the executions, Cornelisz. tried to commit suicide by poisoning himself. He soon came to regret his decision and asked for an antidote: "at last he began to get some relief [...] but he had to be got out of his prison certainly 20 times during the night, because his so-called miracle was working from below as well as from above" (Drake-Brockman 1982: 212). This passage suggests that Cornelisz. was kept in some sort of prison by himself since it says his prison and not the prison. However, if he were imprisoned in a stone structure on the beach, would it really have been necessary to let him out to do his business? It seems more likely that it was needed to let him out if he was still locked up somewhere on the ship (Fig. 18).

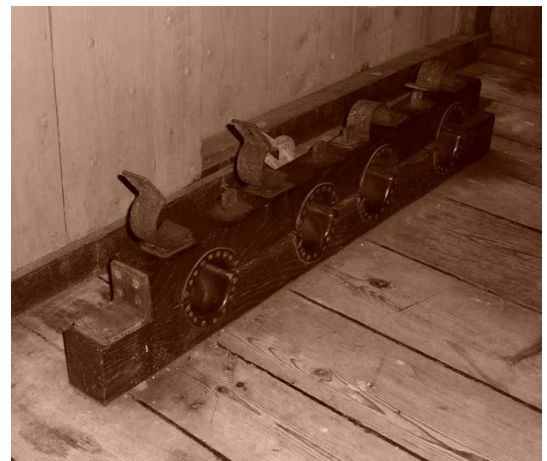


Figure 18: The stocks on board the *Batavia* replica

So what can archaeological evidence say about the two 'prisons'? The rectangular coral & limestone structure on Beacon Island is surrounded by two other circular structures (Gibbs 1992: 14). The entire site was excavated in 1967 and a few artefacts were found. None of these artefacts are Dutch, indeed most of them can be dated to the 19th century. The site has been interpreted as windbreaks and linked to the crew of the ship *Hadda* which ran aground near Beacon Island in 1877 (Bevacqua 1974a: 17-19). They took shelter on the island for a couple of days and waited for the wind to turn. No other artefacts found in the area can be conclusively associated with the *Batavia* (Green & Stanbury 1988: 9). Hence, it is very probable that the windbreaks were built by the *Hadda* crew and that the rectangular structure was not Cornelisz.' prison.

The structure on Long Island consists of stacked massive coral plates with an entrance towards the north and is slightly larger than a king-sized bed. The island was not only used to execute and imprison the villains. Previously, the villains had put 45 people there, later murdering the majority of them. The structure could have been built by these people as a shelter: its function need not have been that of a prison. Only two artefacts have been found that can be positively linked to the *Batavia*: a pin and a potsherd. Neither of these was found near the structure (Bevacqua 1974a: 14-15). However, combining archaeological and archival research no other explanation has been found for the construction of this shelter. Neither its function nor its origin can therefore be confirmed, but association with the *Batavia* incident cannot be denied either (Green & Stanbury 1988: 12). The lack of data makes it impossible to draw any conclusions at all.

In this case, combining both kinds of data still gives us very little information. Although it seems likely that at least Cornelisz. was imprisoned in some room, it is unknown where this room was. Moreover, it is not known whether the others were locked up as well. It seems likely, however, that the entire island served as their prison where they were kept isolated from other people and from which they were unable to escape. Perhaps the structure on Seals Island was not their prison but simply a shelter. Since so little is known, new evidence might lead to completely different interpretations. As for "Cornelisz.' prison", it seems very likely that it was built much later and fulfilled the function of windbreak for the *Hadda* crew. In this case the archaeological evidence has contradicted the interpretation Edwards made on the basis of the written sources.

Wiebbe Hayes' fort

Wiebbe Hayes and his loyalists were camping on West Wallabi Island. They managed to ward off three attacks by Cornelisz. and his men, killing some of the villains and capturing Cornelisz. How they were able to defeat the villains is, however, unclear; Pelsaert's journal only mentions that they "made themselves ready to counter-attack if they should come to fight them" (Drake-Brockman 1982: 143). Whether they used a fort to defend themselves is not mentioned in the written sources, neither are any tents or other kinds of shelter.



Figure 19: Inland structure

On the island there are two stone structures, which have been popularly described as Wiebbe Hayes' camp & fort. The inland structure is a large rectangular room with low walls, built of limestone slabs (Fig. 19). It's located right next to several fresh water wells. Because it is built on bare limestone it has not been possible to excavate it. A small number of artefacts have been collected on the surface of the site, but most of these cannot be linked to the *Batavia*. Although the site most probably functioned as a shelter for guano miners around 1900, its origin is more uncertain. It is possible that guano miners or fishermen built the shelter, but it could also have been made much earlier by Wiebbe Hayes' men (Bevacqua 1974a: 7-9).

Slightly over 400 meters towards the coast are the ruins of another structure: Wiebbe Hayes' fort (Fig. 20). The rectangular coastal structure is almost twice the size of the inland structure and is divided by a partition into two rooms. It is built in a similar fashion using stacked slabs of limestone. The name 'fort' is both misleading and inaccurate since the site is, in essence, a roofless hut. However, its location is excellent from a defensive point of view. It is simultaneously well camouflaged and commands a good view over the surrounding land and sea. The shallow reef and mudflat that lie before it protect the site even from small boats. The coastal structure (also called Slaughter Point site) has been excavated on numerous occasions, first by Edwards and the students of Aquinas College and most recently by the Western Australian Museum in 2007. Typical 17th century Dutch artefacts such as sherds of Bellarmine jugs have been found next to ship's nails and fragmented barrel hoops. These indicate a clear link to the *Batavia* survivors. A significant midden of faunal remains combined with fireplaces and fish hooks points to domestic activities on the site. The location, artefacts and food remains all speak for the interpretation that (some of) the loyalists camped on this site. No later material has been found on the site and no other interpretation seems reasonable for the site's origin (Bevacqua 1974a: 9-13; Bevacqua 1974b).



Figure 20: Coastal structure, Slaughter Point site

The archaeological excavations have been able to provide information about the loyalists' camp that was completely absent from the historic record. Despite the dubious origins of the inland structure, Slaughter Point site can certainly be interpreted as a loyalist camp. Not only has the site been positively identified as relating to the *Batavia*, but the faunal remains have given a unique insight into the subsistence strategies of the survivors. The question of the function of this structure –mainly defensive or domestic– still remains unanswered.

The murders

The gruesome murders are the main part of Pelsaert's journal and Bastiaensz.' letter. The latter does not describe the murders in detail (not even the murder of his family) but rather describes the traumatic experience of constantly being threatened with death. The letter gives us an insight into the terror that reigned on the islands. Pelsaert's journal, on the other hand, is not very emotional. Arranged by suspect, it contains a full transcript of the villain's testimony followed by a summary and the sentence. Many murders involved multiple perpetrators; therefore, one murder can be described several times in the journal. People were murdered in many different ways. In the beginning it was popular to take a few people by raft towards deep water. The villains would then tie them up and throw them overboard; sometimes violence was involved. Later, other methods were used: throats were slit, people were strangled, stabbed, shot, decapitated or clubbed to death. Sometimes the wounded were simply dragged into the water assuming they wouldn't survive (Drake-Brockman 1982: 167-246).

For the execution of these various murders, many different types of weapons are mentioned in the texts. These include muskets, swords, pikes, daggers, knives, sticks, axes, adzes, morningstars and nooses. Some of these weapons were probably taken during the evacuation from the ship, but others (certainly the nooses) were no doubt found and manufactured on the islands. Pelsaert pointed out that the loyalists "made weapons from hoop-iron and nails, which they bound to sticks" (Drake-Brockman 1982: 144). This was a feat that Bastiaensz. admired as well: "of the guns and pikes they made, one is inclined to say how is it possible that man can invent such things?" (Ibid.: 267)



Figure 21: Remains of a morningstar
(Souter et al. 2007: 14)

Many weapons or fragments of weapons have been found during surveys and excavations. On Beacon Island, Edwards found the mechanism of a gun and a bullet between the ribs of a skeleton (Edwards 1990: 180-181). A cutlass and musket balls were sent in anonymously during the *Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976* Amnesty held in 1993 and on Long Island a lead morningstar was found in 2001 (Fig. 21) (Gibbs 1994: 3; Souter et al. 2007: 4-13). The fragmentary iron remains of what was probably the handle of a knife or a sword have also been discovered. The large amount of iron nails and barrel hoop fragments unearthed on Wiebbe Hayes' Island might be the remains of the weapons the loyalists manufactured for themselves (Bevacqua 1974b: 12-14). It is not surprising that so few weapons have been found on the islands. It is likely that everyone took their own knives and weapons with them to Batavia. The villains who could not be trusted with weapons had been disarmed immediately; their weapons were probably confiscated rather than thrown away on the islands.

So far ten skeletons have been found that can be identified as the victims of the *Batavia* massacre. All of them were buried on *Batavia's* Graveyard. Sometimes the bones were reburied, but on other occasions parts of the skeletons were taken (Gibbs 1994: 5). Because only part of

the skeletons, for instance the skull, was taken and the rest was left in situ many of the remains became disorganised. Now it seems that all of the skeletons are reassembled correctly. The first skeleton² was discovered in 1960 by an island fisherman and was relatively complete (Green & Stanbury 1988: 9). Trauma on the skull is consistent with a glancing blow, but that was probably not the cause of death (Pasveer 1997: 6).

Edwards and his team discovered three other bodies in 1963. The first one³ had been discovered earlier and was now missing its skull. The body was found in association with a bullet and purse and the bones were collected and sent to the museum. It is probable that a skull⁴ with severe fractures, which might have been the cause of death, belongs to this body. The entire skeleton of the second victim⁵ was found in a shallow grave. The cut marks on the skull might have been fatal, but it was also reported that the jaw was dislodged: this might have been the result of very violently cutting the victim's throat. Of the third body only the skull⁶ with fatal cut marks was excavated. The rest of the skeleton was under the foundation of a fisherman's hut and could not be excavated. It is possible that even more bodies can be found there (Edwards 1990: 177-180; Pasveer 1997: 1).

Close to the grave of victim M3901 a multiple burial⁷ was discovered in 1990; it was excavated during three seasons (Fig. 22) (1994, 1999 & 2001). Six bodies were found: three adults, one adolescent, one child and an infant. The adults and the adolescent have been determined as possibly male. None of the victims shows any signs of trauma that could have led to death, although one of them has cranial trauma consistent with a violent blow to the face. Though it is possible that they died of natural causes (dehydration or sickness) they might also have been killed by drowning, strangulation or having their throats cut. Even bullet or stab wounds don't necessary have to leave any marks on the bones (Franklin & Freedman 2005: 79-85).

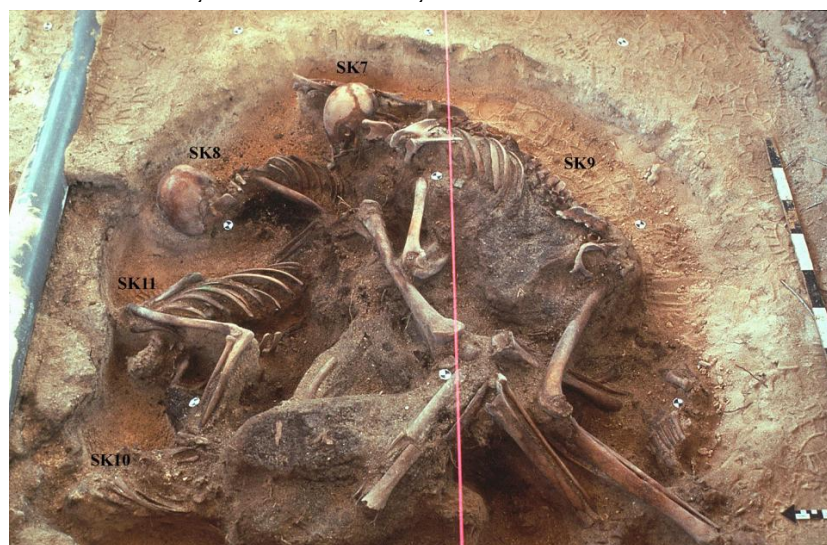


Figure 22: The multiple burial, SK9 is removed (Franklin & Freedman 2005: 80)

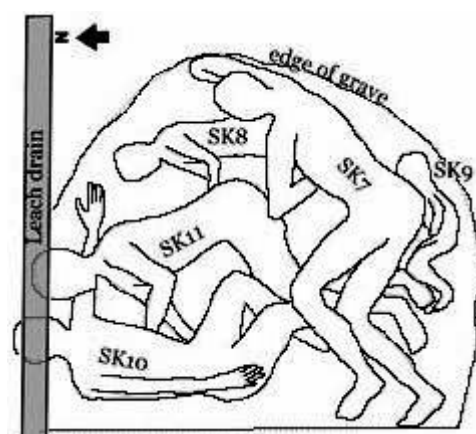


Figure 23: Reconstruction of the bodies, prior to the discovery of SK12 (Paterson & Franklin 2004: 82)

² BAT M3901

³ BAT A15508

⁴ BAT A15831

⁵ BAT A15507

⁶ BAT A16316

⁷ (SK5+SK11) (SK6+SK10), SK7, SK8, SK9 & SK12

A first attempt has been made to analyse the mtDNA of all of the individuals. However, due to poor preservation and contamination it has only been possible to conclude that 4 individuals were not maternally related. Sex determination and the confirmation of other familial ties, though it was the main aim of the analysis, was not possible (Yahya 2008: 137-148). Instead, most of our information comes from morphological and pathological analyses. These have focused on sex & age determination, general health and signs of trauma. By examining signs of trauma the cause of death can be determined in some cases. The results of these analyses are combined with the description of the murders in Pelsaert's journal and then the skeletons can be tentatively identified. There are, of course, problems with this method, for instance with those skeletons that show no signs of trauma. On the other hand, not every person who was killed is mentioned by name nor is their murder always described in detail in the journal. Sometimes there is just a sentence which states: "he had also murdered another four men, with a boy" (Fig 12) (Drake-Brockman 1982: 213). Identifications of the victims have so far been biased towards those individuals who are mentioned by name and whose death is described in detail. Care must be taken with applying the written sources so selectively to the archaeological material.

The multiple burial can be mentioned as an example of such hasty conclusions. Although one of the skulls was identified as that of a middle-aged male, the grave was interpreted as being that of Bastiaensz.' family (Pasveer 1997: 10). The journal states that the wife, six children and their maid were murdered and thrown in a grave. Although some of the children were male, none of them was old enough to be linked to the skull. The primary theory was quickly proven wrong when the other bodies were excavated. None of the victims showed signs of trauma, although most of the priest's family had been brutally clubbed to death with axes and adzes, a method likely to leave marks. An alternative multiple burial of three men and a cabin boy was suggested. These victims had their throats slit, some of them being too ill to offer any resistance (Paterson & Franklin 2004: 84-87). It is suggested that the way they were dumped in the shallow grave is consistent with the murderers wanting to quickly cover up their crimes (Fig. 23). Earlier victims of sickness and dehydration probably would have had a more Christian burial rather than simply being tossed into a pit. Later victims might not have been buried at all and it is questionable whether the bodies of those who were drowned ever washed up on shore or were buried.

In the end the question remains as to why Cornelisz. decided to instigate this murder spree. This cannot at all be explained on the basis of archaeological sources but instead we must turn to the written sources. It is clear that he convinced a group of men to follow him by telling them at first that it was Pelsaert's order to cut back on people. Sometimes the villains mentioned different excuses for their behaviour such as that there wasn't enough water and food for everyone. Towards the end, however, several of the villains seem to have gotten drunk with power: "because his folk were murmuring and no longer desired a ration of water, but desired either to die or to become masters of that island" (Drake-Brockman 1982: 224).

The forementioned Jan van Bommel being brought again has been asked why he has lived so godlessly here on the island, daily calling out, "Come now, devils with all sacraments, where are you? I certainly wish I now saw a devil, and who wants to be boxed on the ear? [...]" confesses, that he has done so and that he had been ordered the same, because daily he had heard from Jeronimus that there was neither devil nor hell and that these were only fables.

Drake-Brockman 1982: 209

This quote reveals the true reason for Cornelisz.' crazy dictatorship. He was a religious fanatic following the teachings of Torrentius. He believed that everything he did was ordered by God and because God was perfect and good, nothing he [Cornelisz.] did could be evil or bad. Basically, he believed that there was no devil or hell and that everything he did was the will of God. After he had gained the trust of his followers he began to imprint these radical views into their minds and many of them believed him (Drake-Brockman 1982: 212). The spell was not broken until another figure of authority, Pelsaert, told them that Cornelisz. was wrong. Perhaps one of the reasons why Cornelisz.' religious views were so easily accepted was because this was a period of great religious upheaval. A series of religious reformations swept over Europe during the 16th and 17th centuries and many people were deeply confused about their beliefs. The fact that religious fanaticism could be blamed for such a tragedy as the *Batavia* massacre came as a complete shock to the VOC. Previously, they believed that they only needed to monitor the goods, but now it became obvious that they needed to keep a much closer eye on their personnel. The *Batavia* incident was followed by a series of rules and regulations for all VOC employees in higher ranks (Ibid.: 73-77).

Cornelisz.' motives for murdering more than a hundred innocent people are something we can learn only from the written sources. To some extent the same can be said for the weapons used and the different ways in which people were murdered. There are, however, also archaeological remains of some of the weapons and the skeletal remains of a small percentage of the victims. Without the written sources we would have never known about all those people who were drowned or whose bones we cannot find. On the other hand, without the archaeological evidence of the graves we would know nothing about how they were buried. Other personal information about the individuals –such as their age, stature or general health– can only be discovered through osteological analyses.

The executions

On October 2nd 1629 eight condemned men were taken to Seals Island to be punished for their crimes. All of them were to be hanged (Fig. 24). Before their execution, four would have their right hands cut off and Cornelisz. would lose both hands. The other condemned begged for Cornelisz. to be hanged first "so that their eyes could see that the seducer of men died." Two men confessed further sins but the others died unrepentant. The youngest, Jan Pelgrom de Bye, "could not compose himself to die; weeping and wailing and begging for grace" and he was therefore reprieved from hanging (Drake-Brockman 1982: 213). They would maroon him later on the mainland.

Edwards envisioned the gallows to have been erected on a ridge near the stone structure on Long Island. The rest of the island is solid coral rock, but on that ridge there's soft earth and guano. Furthermore, it is close to a good landing spot and directly opposite of Beacon Island (Edwards 1990: 189). The Western Australian Museum also mentioned this site as the possible gallows site in one of their surveys, but also stated that no evidence of the gallows was found (Green & Stanbury 1988: 12). No excavations have been undertaken on the island, but a remote sensing survey of the entire island, using a metal detector, was completed in 2007. One of the aims of this survey was to locate the gallows site. It was anticipated that remains from the gallows might be found, but that it was unlikely to find any human remains. It was Dutch practice at the time to let the bodies of criminals hang and decompose, because earth was not permitted to them (Souter et al. 2007: 13-14).

During the survey a large concentration of iron nails, bolts and fastenings was found at the anticipated location of the gallows in a small area of 16m². The nails are very poorly preserved and highly corroded, but the bolts and fastenings are in a better state. Analysis and comparison to other bolts found on the *Batavia*'s hull point towards the conclusion that these iron objects can be linked to the *Batavia*. However, it must be pointed out that only metal objects have been collected so far. Perhaps future excavation could more conclusively confirm this as being the gallows site. It might even be possible that one day a cluster of bones of hands will be uncovered (Souter et al. 2007: 14-21).

Partially due to the small amount of archaeological work that has been on Long Island, very little material evidence is available concerning the gallows. What we know comes almost exclusively from Pelsaert's journal and Bastiaensz.' description of the executions. The possible identification of the gallows site could serve as a confirmation of the written sources. If in the future it would be discovered that the bodies of the criminals were buried anyway, their bones might confirm or contradict the story of the hands getting chopped off. Of course, a future discovery of several sets of metacarpals and phalanx bones would confirm the story as well. However, for now the story of the execution is almost entirely constructed by history.



Figure 24: Illustration of the executions on Seals Island in the *Ongeluckige Voyagie* (Jansz. 1647: 40)

Conclusion

I started out by asking: is it really necessary to consult archaeological and historical data when both are available? This question was so broad that it was necessary to narrow it down to a case study. The story of the *Batavia* shipwreck and massacre turned out to be an ideal, isolated event which could be studied using both kinds of data. This event was limited in time and space and could easily be examined without interference from other events. Within this event, several different topics were examined on the basis of written sources and archaeological data and a comparison was made between the two. Often enough the two sources confirmed each other but there was also a great deal of information which could only be gathered from one of the sources. On a few occasions the two sources contradicted each other and it was necessary to combine them in order to construct a possible interpretation that works for both. Of course, in the end, there are still some issues that remain a mystery. These include questions such as: where was Cornelisz. imprisoned? Were the structures on Seals and West Wallabi Islands built by the survivors? Were the convicted criminals really hung and did they have their hands chopped off? Who were all the victims? Some of these questions may never be answered, but hopefully some may be confirmed or contradicted by future excavations and research. Perhaps one day a journal by another survivor will be discovered or new graves will be revealed.

Many issues could be confirmed by both types of sources. These include some parts of the cargo, such as coins and barrels with different contents, as well different aspects of survival on the islands. Of the latter, evidence of reading and books can be mentioned as well as the types of food and drink consumed by the survivors. Many of the different types of weapons that were reportedly used by the villains, as well as those produced by the loyalists, were also confirmed by artefacts. Archaeological research was able to confirm that a group of survivors camped on West Wallabi Island and it was even calculated that this group consisted of about 40 people and camped on the site for nearly three months. This would confirm the information given about the loyalists in Pelsaert's journal. Various finds of skeletons on Beacon Island have also confirmed the massacre. Not only do some show signs of severe trauma, consistent with the written sources, but the fact that a mass grave has been found indicates the haste in which people were murdered. These are not the traces of small incidents but indeed those of a massacre.

Some issues that are mentioned in the written sources cannot, and possibly never will be, confirmed by archaeological data. Part of the cargo which was rescued or the bodies which were dumped into the ocean can never be found archaeologically. The murders of some people who were slaughtered in ways that don't leave marks on the skeleton might never be confirmed either. Issues such as Cornelisz.' motives or how it felt emotionally to live through such an ordeal are also examples of topics that can only be examined through the written sources. Perhaps, however, the executions of the criminals may yet be confirmed archaeologically in the future.

Intriguingly, during the decades since the discovery of the *Batavia*, archaeological evidence has been able to reveal details that were previously unknown. One of these discoveries was the ballast on board the ship, most surprisingly the sandstone blocks of the gate. Although the origins of some of them are still uncertain, the stone structures on several of the islands are fascinating. Even though only the origin of the coastal structure on West Wallabi Island has been confirmed so far, two more might potentially be related to the survivors. The fact that the survivors manufactured lead ladles on the islands also came as a surprise. The burial sites found on Beacon Island, including the mass grave, also unearthed new information as to how the victims were buried. Furthermore, information can be obtained about the victims, that is not mentioned in the written sources. Some of this information, such as general health or nutritional intake can give us a broader insight into the society of their time.

There were two specific issues where the sources contradicted each other. The first one concerns the stone structure on Beacon Island which was interpreted falsely on the basis of the written sources. It was indeed mentioned that Cornelisz. was kept in a prison, but archaeological and archival research proved that if he was kept in a prison, it wasn't in this structure. The structure was in fact much younger, a windbreak built by the *Hadda* crew in 1877. The second one concerns the living arrangements of the survivors. The written sources exclusively mention tents, while the archaeological evidence consists of up to three stone structures but no tents. All three structures are on islands where survivors lived after fleeing from the villains. This might be a possible explanation for these different living arrangements. On *Batavia's* Graveyard and the reef around it there must have been an abundance of material from the shipwreck. Canvas from the sails and wood from the ship could easily have been used to construct a few temporary shelters, all the more so because it is mentioned that they built rafts and sloops from the wreckage. Those who fled could probably not take any material or tools with them. It is unlikely, especially as far away as on West Wallabi Island, that much material floated ashore. The survivors would have been forced to use the material that was available on these islands: rocks.

The importance of dialogue between the disciplines of history and archaeology has been debated for a long time and opinion has gone back and forth. However, it seems to me that such a dialogue is not only important but in fact crucial. An archaeologist excavating a medieval monastery would be a fool to turn his back on the historic sources and vice versa. Choosing to use only one type of research when both are available seems as pointless as closing one eye when you could look with two. How can we imagine to see the full picture when we are not using all the evidence? In this case study, it was impossible to get a complete picture of the *Batavia* incident without combining history and archaeology. Although the sources confirm each other on a number of topics, they also sometimes contradict each other. Furthermore, several topics can only be studied on the basis of one of the types of sources. Therefore, for this case study, but possibly for others as well, it was *crucial* to combine both types of evidence to find the complete picture. It is time for historians and archaeologists to realise this, stop competing & start cooperating.

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As always, the biggest thank you to Edin Musovic for being interested and supportive no matter what.

Figure 25: Beacon Island - a beautiful place for digging & diving



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Illustrations

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Fig 2: The *Batavia* incident, art: Miklós Lörinczi

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