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Keeping corruption at bay: A study of the VOC's administrative encounter with the Mughals in seventeenth-century Bengal

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Chapter 6

The Find: Politics of Corruption and the Committee in Action in Mughal Bengal

Therefore, it is to be understood that all the information and evidence should be provided in such a manner that they can help the judge in making a judgment, by basing his decree or sentence on these available information (as evidence). But if the aforementioned information comprises only of the evidence given by the moors and the heathens, along with extracts from their account books, without these being corroborated by the sworn testimonies of trustworthy Christians or others who suffice (this criterion), and the charges would be proven by law, our intention is to allow the accused to make a reconvention against his charges and he would then be only discharged from his office and (deprived of) entitlement to his salary.¹

¹ ‘...verstaende bij aldien de informatie en bescheyden soodanigh syn dat nae syn Ed oordeel by den righter daerop sentientie gewesen en strafe gedecreert sal kunnen worden, maer wanneer de voorsz. informatien alleen soude bestaen ingetuijgenissen van mooren en heijdenen, mitsgaders extracten uijt derselver boecken, sonder dat die souden mogen syn gecorrobeert door beedigde verclaringen van geloofwaerdige Christenen off andere suffisante, en in regten aennemelijk bewijzen soude onse intentie daer heen gaen, dat de sulcke met soodanige bescheijden als 't haeren lasten sullen wesen gereconvereert alleen herwaerts sullen werden opgesonden buijten qualiteit en gagie.’

NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38. Instructions from the *Heeren XVII* for Hendrik Adriaan van Reede, heer van Mijndrecht, appointed as the commissioner of Bengal, Coromandel, Ceylon and other areas in the western quarters, Amsterdam, December, 1684: f. 3r.

On the point of the phrase - ‘those who suffice this criterion’, it is unclear to me what was exactly meant. One can only think of the possibility of mixed European Christian groups that were present in Bengal in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The following comment by Robert Chambers, the President of the *Raad van Justitie* in Chinsurah in 1781 can shed some light - ‘All children with European fathers and conceived from native women, were to belong to the group of Europeans. The illicit children conceived from such alliances belonged to the group of black Portuguese or native Christians. These black Christians were to be tried only in the *Raad van Justitie* for their crimes that were physically punishable, because the governor-general and the Council of the Indies in Batavia, owing to the religious beliefs of these persons, would not allow the magistrates in Chinsurah to have them deliver their testimonies as witnesses to the Muhammadan administration, even if they happened to be accused by the *jamadar*. Therefore, criminals of that race are treated as if they are Europeans. But in civil cases, these criminals might be tried before the director as the chief *jamadar*, or before the assistant of the *fiscaal*, just as it is done with the rest of the natives. Also, they must be brought before the director, in case of transgressions, that were meant for punishment there in Chinsurah. If needed to be flogged, they should receive it from the hands of Christian soldiers and not Muhammadan servants, because they are themselves Christians and the punishment should be less strictly executed, than it is done for the natives. They should also not be tied to a pole, as was the case in such instances, during the execution of the punishment.’ [*De wettige kinderen van Europeesche vaders, al waren het kinderen bij inlandsche vrouwen verwerkt, werden gerekend tot de Europeanen. De onwettige kinderen van dergelijke ouders, behoorden tot de klasse van de zwarte Portugeezen of inlandsche Christenen. Deze zwarte Christenen werden wegens misdrijven, welke aan den lijve strafbaar waren, alleen vervolgd voor den Raad van Justitie, aangezien de Gouverneur-Generaal en de Raad te Batavia, wegens de*

The instructions handed down by the *Heeren XVII* to Van Reede and his committee in 1684, contained the above condition, which required the collection of sufficient evidence with Dutch (or European, Christian) testimonies for convicting an accused Company official. Accordingly, Van Reede reached the factory at Hooghly in February 1686, and began his investigations among the VOC personnel there. However, despite the *Heeren XVII*'s instructions which demanded Christian testimonies at court, Van Reede inevitably had to seek the help of local brokers. While carrying out his interrogations for forming his legal cases, he therefore used the testimonies of such 'heathen' and 'Moors' from Bengal whom he was not to trust. These testimonies in combination with those of other VOC officials were used by the committee to bring charges of illegal trade against the very director of the Company in Bengal, Nicolaas Schagen. But Schagen was not the only one who displeased Van Reede and his committee. Before starting with his investigation in Bengal, Van Reede had stopped over at the Cape in 1685 where Rijkloff van Goens Junior, the son of the late Rijkloff van Goens (the former governor-general of the Company and Van Reede's ex-patron) was the VOC commissioner.² Van Reede clashed with him there and reported the matter in detail by writing back to the *Heeren XVII*.³ Their friction ensued as a result of Van Reede's attempt to protect Simon van der Stel, the Company's Governor at the Cape, from Van Goens Jr.'s intervention as the commissioner. Van der Stel was a friend of Van Reede as Van der Stel happened to be one of the nephews of Huydecoper van Maarsseveen and thereby, the relative of another of Huydecoper's nephews, Joan Bax. Bax

goddienstige belijdenis dezer lieden, den magistraten te Chinsura niet wilde veroorloven hen ter vonnissing over te leveren aan het Mohamedaansche Bestuur, gelijk had moeten geschieden, indien zij aangeklaagd waren door den Jammadar. Misdadigers van genoemd ras werden daarom behandeld alsof zij Europeanen waren. Maar in burgerlijke zaken mochten deze lieden gedagvaard worden voor den Directuer als Hoofd Jammadar, of voor diens assistant den Fiscaal, evenals zulks met de inboorlingen het geval was. Ook moesten zij voor den Directeur gebragt worden, wegens die overtredingen, welke te Chinsura gestraft warden. Tot geesseling veroordeeld ontvingen zij, omdat zij Christenen waren, deze straf uit de handen van een Christen soldaat, en niet uit die van een Mohamedaansch voetknecht en werd de straf met minder gestrengheid voltrokken, dan waarmede die aan inboorlingen werd ten uitvoer gelegd. Ook werden lieden van bovengenaamd ras bij zulke eene strafuitoefening niet aan de paal gebonden.] See, Reus, "De vermeestering van Chinsura," 55–56.

² NL-HaNA, Familie Van Goens, inv. nr. 27, Act on the appointment of Rijkloff van Goens Jr. as the commissioner-investigator of the Cape of Good Hope, 22 November, 1680: folios not numbered.

³ A. Hulshof, ed., "H.A. van Reede tot Drakenstein, journaal van zijn verblijf aan de Kaap," *Bijdragen en mededeelingen van het Historisch Genootschap* 62, (1941): 5.

was a close friend of Van Reede while Huydecoper became Van Reede's strong ally after the latter's return to the Republic in 1678. Through both these connections, Van der Stel, too, thus belonged to the factional group of Van Reede.⁴

By the time Van Reede had left the Cape to sail further east, he had ensured that Van Goens Jr. was removed from his position and sent to Batavia. Appointed as an *extraordinaris* member of the *Raad van Indië* there, the idea was to keep him under the watchful eye of the Governor-General Johannes Camphuys, a political ally of the Huydecoper – Van Reede faction.⁵ Not unexpectedly, this situation did not have a harmonious end and open conflict broke out between the members of the *Raad*, led by Van Goens Jr. and the other members allied with Camphuys.⁶ The matter became so serious that it had to be presented to the *Raad van Justitie* to be resolved, shortly after which Van Goens Jr. returned back to the Republic in 1685. Meanwhile, Van Reede arrived at Ceylon in 1685 and brought charges against certain officials there as well.⁷ He then proceeded to Bengal in 1686 and continued with his investigations there till the next year. In 1687, he left for Coromandel and on arriving there, worked together with Bacherus. While Bacherus investigated the factories in the interior of the Coast, Van Reede himself resided at Nagapattinam. Here, too, some high officials of the Company were accused and sent to trial at Batavia by Van Reede and Bacherus.⁸ Although the headquarters of the VOC for the Coromandel Coast was Pulicat, it was moved to Nagapattinam in 1689 after Van Reede's departure. With an interlude of two years from 1689-91 in Jaffnapatnam and Tuticorin, Van Reede sailed further upwards to Malabar. It was an eventful year as Van Reede had to deal with

⁴ For the relation between Simon van der Stel and Joan Huydecoper van Maarsseveen see, UA, Family Huydecoper, inv. nr. 60, Letter from Huydecoper to Van der Stel, 7 October, 1685: folios not numbered.

⁵ Huydecoper clearly extended his support for Camphuys by calling him 'one of the most capable ministers of the honourable Company'. See, UA, Huydecoper family archives, inv. nr. 60, Letter written to cousin Joan Bax from Amsterdam, 10 October, 1685: folios not numbered.

⁶ A.M. Lubberhuizen van Gelder, "Rijkloff van Goens, de Jonge, en zijn bezittingen," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 101, no. 2/3 (1942): 301.

⁷ For both Van Reede's first visit to Ceylon and second visit to Jaffnapatnam see Jos Gommans, "Malo Mori Quam Foedari: Een onderzoek naar het ontstaan van de commissie Van Reede tot Drakestein en haar verrichtingen op het eiland Ceylon (1684-1691)" (bachelor's thesis, Nijmegen University, 1984), 35–51.

⁸ Peters, *In steen geschreven*, 41–43.

the political unrest in Malabar at a time when his health was deteriorating. He suddenly left Malabar in 1691, as the commander of Surat, Van Dielen later reported and sailed for Surat. On his way to Surat, Van Reede died on board his ship on 15th December in 1691.

Throughout his journey, he drew up fortification plans and concentrated his energy to produce his later volumes of the *Hortus Malabaricus*. But at the same time, he did not lose sight of his duties as a commissioner-general and brought certain officials to the *Hoge Regering's* notice. As decided, he was to report the names of all Company servants suspected or found guilty of corruption. These people were then to be tried in the *Raad van Justitie* in Batavia on the basis of the evidence gathered by Van Reede and his committee members. This meant that in Bengal, like other places, he had the power to enquire into and interrogate all men employed in the Company's factories there. Those who were beyond the Company's jurisdiction and were still suspected or found guilty of corruption within the Company, were left to Van Reede's discretion.⁹ This possibly implied the Indian brokers and other locals whose services were used by the Company but over whom the Company's administration had restricted jurisdiction.¹⁰ However, it is important to mention here that the Company could bring charges against such men to the Mughal authorities, on the basis of which they could be tried at the *qazî's* court.¹¹ Given that this was the setting of the Company's limits of formal existence in Bengal, it is worth examining what Van Reede's findings eventually led to. What did the committee's operations in Bengal finally discover about corruption in the VOC? How did it contribute, shape or form the on-going discussions about the Company's corruption in Bengal?

⁹ NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions of the *Heeren XVII* for Hendrik Adriaan van Reede, 1684: f. 2v.

¹⁰ For a brief overview of the judicial system of the VOC in Asia see, Hendrik E. Niemeijer, "The Central Administration of the VOC Government and the Local Institutions of Batavia (1619-1811) – An Introduction," in *The Archives of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and the Local Institutions in Batavia (Jakarta)*, eds. G.L. Balk, F. van Dijk, and D.J. Kortlang (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 65-67.

¹¹ The VOC records mention the incident of a silversmith and washer-man being tried at the 'Moorish court' for allegations of fraud that was raised by the Company and according to which the accused were punished. See F. de Haan, *Dagh-Register gehouden int casteel Batavia vant passerende daer ter plaetse als over geheel Nederlands-India, anno 1681* (Batavia, 's Gravenhage: Landsdrukkerij, Martinus Nijhoff, 1919), 369.

The Findings

For the investigations carried out in the factories in Bengal, Van Reede left detailed reports containing information about financial, social and other aspects of the Company and its employees in the western quarters. On behalf of the committee, he was originally supposed to produce three copies – one for the *Heeren XVII*, one for the governor-general and the *Raad van Indië* in Batavia and another for himself representing the committee. The compilation in the National Archives at Hague now contains all of these copies collected together in almost a dozen bundles (from the Amsterdam chamber only, apart from their copies in the Zeeland chamber), of which three volumes contain information over Bengal.¹² In his reports on Bengal, Van Reede wrote not only about the illegal trade and bookkeeping frauds, but also of the state of the factories there, about the area surrounding these factories and the locals who worked at the Company's bases. These accounts contained moreover lengthy descriptions of the different commodities that the Company traded in, in Bengal – namely, the various types of silk and other textiles and the corresponding prices at which they were bought and sold in the market. In the midst of this huge mass of information, the focus remained nevertheless on the many instances of corruption that Van Reede pointed out among certain Company officials.

He began writing about his experience by mentioning how his arrival in Bengal was detested by the Company's people there, who did not want him to investigate them. In fact, he complained that Van Goens Jr. managed to secretly dispatch a letter with the help of English ships to these factories, alerting the men there about Van Reede's arrival and the *Heeren XVII*'s orders for inspection.¹³ Van Reede wrote that when he started his investigations he felt that both the local inhabitants as well as the Dutch Company servants were withholding everything and

¹² These are now in the National Archives at Hague. For the missives on Bengal in the Amsterdam chamber see, NL-HaNA, VOC, OBP, inv. nrs. 1408, 1421, 1422. For the rest of the missives on other places that were produced by the committee in the Amsterdam chamber see, NL-HaNA, VOC, OBP, inv. nrs. 1429, 1435, 1449, 1450, 1477, 1478, 1479, 1494. For the copies in the Zeeland chamber see, NL-HaNA, VOC, OBP, inv. nrs. 9709, 9710, 9711, 9712, 9714.

¹³ NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to the *Heeren XVII*: f. 19v-20r.

acting secretly – everything that could cause damage or leave a negative impression was done away with, so that all seemed suitable and clean. Nobody knew anything, if asked about someone who knew something then one would hear being said that such men had either left or had been sent somewhere else.¹⁴ But keen to prove himself an efficient commissioner, Van Reede reported that he stuck to his duties and drew up a list of the names of those officials whom he suspected of corruption within the Company. In addition, he also gathered enough evidence to send some of them to the court at Batavia for trial and punishment.

One of the primary accused officials in the Van Reede committee reports was Jan Pit, the then provisional *gezaghebber* (chief) of the factory at Kasimbazaar and second in command in Bengal. Van Reede accused him of intentionally hiding information and not maintaining proper accounts of the Company's transactions in order to facilitate illegal activities.¹⁵ Pit was also accused of being one of the group of officials who carried out their own illegal private business in the name of the '*Kleine Compagnie*' (Small Company) under the protectorate of the VOC in Bengal.¹⁶ Since the year 1679 when Jan Pit had begun his tenure in Bengal, Van Reede reported that this '*Kleine Compagnie*' had been formed by a select group of directors, *pakhuismeesters* (warehouse-overseers), *guastoshouders* (assistant cashiers) and *fiscaals* (official appointed for controlling cargo of all VOC ships and maintaining Company rules) who retained their dominance on this illegal trade and did not allow anyone else to enter the club. According to Van Reede's reports, the former director Marten Huijsman and his wife, the *fiscaal* Pieter Mesdagh, the *pakhuismeester* and *onderkoopman* Isaac van Helsdingen, and the *guastushouder* and *onderkoopman* Quirijn van Rijn were also members of this racket.¹⁷ As for the other accusations, there were

¹⁴ NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to the *Heeren XVII*: f. 19v.

¹⁵ NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to the *Heeren XVII*: f. 29rv.

¹⁶ NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to the *Heeren XVII*: f. 38r.

¹⁷ Prior to the Van Reede committee, Isaac Soolmans was appointed as the commissioner-general in Bengal, by Johannes Camphuys and his Council of the Indies in Batavia. In Soolmans' reports, he made a series of allegations against Marten Huijsman as the director of Bengal and his Council members including Jan Pit, Isaac van Helsdingen, Pieter Mesdagh, Quirijn van Rijn and others. Later of course, Soolmans joined the committee as the second in-charge after Van Reede. See, NL-HaNA, Aanwinsten 1de afdeling, inv. nr. 9615, Missive to

complaints of embezzlement, buying commodities for household and personal use with the Company's money, and withholding customs duties from the Mughal governors.¹⁸ Most of these complaints in Van Reede's reports were, therefore, clearly connected to allegations stemming from the violation of the Company's monopoly regulations.

Besides this, Van Reede also brought serious allegations against the then director of Bengal at Hooghly (Chinsurah), Nicolaas Schagen and his wife. The committee managed to collect sufficient evidence against Schagen and his illegal trade with the English East India Company officials in Japanese copper (*staafkoper*) on his way from Malacca to Bengal. They also found his wife guilty of participating in this trading network. Under these circumstances, the Company's court at Batavia scanned through all the evidence and pronounced Schagen guilty of violating certain codes in the VOC *artikelbrieven*. He was charged with violating article 10 in the Statutes of Batavia prescribing punishment for all illegal trade carried out by wives and domestic workers for which the Company servants were to be responsible.¹⁹ Besides that, he was also tried under the violation of article 1 forbidding illegal trade.²⁰ The punishment was decided by the terms of the law of the *Hoge Regering* passed in 1678, whereby all the smuggled goods were to be confiscated.²¹ It was also pointed out, that since Schagen had not reported to the *opperhoofd* of Balasore about the cargo of his ship (as he was supposed to do, with regard to the rules of article 30), he had erred there too and was therefore subjected to deportation.²² In view of the combined allegations, he was pronounced guilty and sent to Ambon. It was only after Van Reede

the *Heeren XVII* in Amsterdam from Isaac Soolmans in Hooghly, 16 December, 1684: ff. 1 - 275; Answer to the protest made by Soolmans, as provided by the director, Marten Huijsman and his council in Bengal, 27 September, 1684: f. 435-448.

¹⁸ NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to the *Heeren XVII*: ff. 25r-33v; 39r-40v.

¹⁹ NL-HaNA, VOC, Ingekomen stukken bij de Raad van Justitie in Batavia bij de Heeren XVII and the kamer Zeeland, inv. nr. 9521, Conclusion of the *Raad van Justitie* in Batavia delivered by Gerard de Bevere, *Extraordinaris Raad* and *advocaat-fiscaal* of the Indies against Nicolaas Schagen, *Extraordinaris Raad* van Indies and ex-director of the Company in Bengal, 6 October, 1688: folios not numbered.

²⁰ NA, VOC, inv. nr. 9521, Conclusion of the *Raad van Justitie* in Batavia delivered against Nicolaas Schagen: folios not numbered.

²¹ Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek*, 3: 12.

²² NA, VOC, inv. nr. 9521, Conclusion of the *Raad van Justitie* in Batavia delivered against Nicolaas Schagen: folios not numbered.

died, that Schagen produced in 1691, an *apologia* pleading ‘not guilty’ in self-defence.²³ In addition to such serious charges, Van Reede also mentioned other instances that had caused severe damage to the Company’s profits, for example, the desertion of the contractual labourers who entered the Company’s service in the Republic but had broken their contracts and now worked for other European Companies in India or for the big Indian merchant-nobles.²⁴ He also provided examples of the personal collaboration between certain Dutch and English officials to facilitate their mutual smuggling ventures.²⁵ The other noteworthy aspect of his observations was his remarks about the local brokers and *gomashas* (agents helping to maintain revenue accounts of landholdings) who, he claimed, regularly helped the VOC officials in their illegal businesses. Almost half of an entire volume that was compiled meticulously by him contained copies of all the account books belonging to the local brokers who had signed a contract with the VOC to show which of them had defrauded the Company with the connivance of some of the corrupt officials.²⁶ A large part of his report also contained explanations of the policies and attitudes of certain Mughal officials who made it difficult for the Company to work in Bengal. These documents give a rich insight into the process of the VOC officials being integrally connected to the local populace of Bengal for acquiring knowledge about the market.

The reports of the Committee seemed therefore to have exposed an important body of information to the directors in the Republic and the *Hoge Regering* about the Company’s affairs in

²³ NA, HR, inv. nr. 241A, Consideration of Nicolaas Schagen on the instructions of Van Reede: folios not numbered.

²⁴ NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to the *Heeren XVII*, 1686: f. 92rv.

²⁵ NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to the *Heeren XVII* from Hooghly, 9 December, 1686: f. 61r. Robert Parthesius writes that ‘In contrast with the English and the Portuguese, the VOC did not lose ships due to the replacement of ballast with the products of illegal trade.’ In the relevant footnote, he adds that ‘No record has been found to indicate otherwise’. The case of Nicolas Schagen and the mishap his ship encountered at Balasore because of the mistakes in the loading and unloading of cargo and ballast prove that such incidents related to illegal trade were very much present in the VOC, as it had been in the EIC. See, Parthesius, *Dutch Ships*, 95-96, 175.

²⁶ NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1422, Brief summary compiled by Hendrik Adriaan van Reede tot Drakenstein, the lord of Mijndrecht with the account books of the three merchants who conducted trade with the Company servants in Bengal, 4 April, 1686: f. 1212r-1215v.; Translated version in Bengali from the account book of the *banya* Rammu Dutt, who was used by Jan Pit for his private illegal trade, 5 May, 1686: f. 1216r-1217v.

Bengal. However, all of this information was not entirely new to the *Heeren XVII* at that time. Van Reede was not producing reports containing any new information or shocking revelation. De Graaff who had been in Asia during Van Reede's inspection, made the following remark (which however was not free of his own factional prejudices) about him in his account –

And that one should opine that the lord N.N. (intending to keep the name anonymous though he was clearly referring to Van Reede as is proven by the rest of his text) went to India among all other reasons, to do a special service to the Company, by uprooting and intervening into the illegal trading swindle of Bengal and other places, without trying to promote his own interests, nobody is going to persuade me of it as I believe that men are naturally inclined to riches by virtue of their being, many of whom would never in their lifetime abandon their ambition and greed for money.²⁷

De Graaff's narrative was not unjustified, given the socio-political context of the time. But what De Graaff importantly pointed out was the fact that Van Reede decided to take up his position of the commissioner and return to India when he had no pressing reason to do so. He was already holding a noble title in the Republic in 1684, a manor house in Utrecht and a high position in the States of Utrecht.²⁸ Was there another reason then, as De Graaff wrote, for Van

²⁷ 'En dat men ook soude menen dat de heer N.N. ook anders om naar Indie gaat als om de Compagnie een besondere dienst te doen, in 't uitroyen ende verstoren van den particulieren handel so in Bengale als anders, sonder sijn eigen interest te bevorderen, dat sal mijn ook niemand kunnen wijs maken, vermits ik geloof dat meest alle mensche uit der nature tot rijkdom en staat genegen zijn, en veele onder deselve zijn die noyt so lange sy leven van de staat sugt en gelt gierigheid versadigt zijn.'

Note though that the book – *Reisen van Nicolaus de Graaff* was published in Hoorn in 1701 as a posthumous version of what De Graaff had written during his lifetime (1619-1688), and it cannot be ascertained with certainty whether there were discrepancies between the original manuscript and its print version. But the *Heeren XVII* at least had access to the information provided by De Graaff in his writings, long before it was published as a book in the Republic. Graaff, *Oost-Indise spiegel*, 100. For the original version see Nicolaus de Graaff, *Reisen van Nicolaus de Graaff, na de vier gedeeltens des werelds, als Asia, Africa, America en Europa: Behelsende een beschryving van sijn 48-jarige reise en aanmerkelykste voorvallen, die hy heeft gesien en die hem zyn ontmoet. van de levenswyse der volkeren, godsdienst, regeringe, landschappen en steden als ook een nette, dog korte beschryving van China, desselfs over groote landschappen, menigvuldige steden, gebouwen, gegraven kanalen, scheepvaard, oudheid der Chinesen; mitsgaders derselver oorlogen tegen de Tartaren; en op wat wyse de tartar moester van China heeft gemaakt. hier agter is by gevoegd d'Oost-Indise spiegel, zynde een beschryving van deselve schryver van geheel Oost-Indiën, de levenswyse so der Hollanders in Indiën, als op de schepen, en een net verbaal van de uit en t'huis reise* (Hoorn/ Amsterdam, Utrecht: Feykenryp/ Hendrik en de Wed: Dirk Boom, Antoni Schouten, 1701).

²⁸ Van Reede served in the VOC till 1677 after which he returned to the Republic in 1678. On an official estimate, he had earned 11,500 guilders for his service to the Company in India. Thereafter, he bought the manor house of Mijdrecht in 1679 and was admitted into the Equestrian Order of Utrecht. He took over the title of the Lord of Mijdrecht. In 1680, he obtained a seat in the Audit Office and in 1684, he exchanged that

Reede to have chosen to return to India? Was it about gaining more money, or having more power or the need to get back to unfinished business, left behind in 1676? On a first glance, though, there was nothing about the committee or its findings that could raise suspicion. The names of officials that Van Reede mentioned as being guilty of illegal trade and other corrupt activities could not have had apparently raised questions. The other official papers also gave no reason to doubt the zeal of the committee and its intentions. Yet, the play of factional forces in the committee's findings could not have been so easily set aside or put out of consideration. Who was Jan Pit and who was Nicolaas Schagen? What were their political connections within the Company's administration?

The answers to these questions unlocked the vital link that pitched these men against Van Reede in 1686. They were both allied to the Van Goens family (Van Goens Sr. and his son, Van Goens Jr.) and thereby belonged to the opponent faction of Van Reede. As has been shown in the previous chapter, Van Reede and Van Goens clashed with each other within the VOC and Huydecoper van Maarsseveen, who too was not fond of Van Goens and his policies, gave his open support to Van Goens' opponent – Van Reede. Pit and Schagen, on the other hand, had the open support of Van Goens Jr. In a letter written by Van Goens Jr. to the *Heeren XVII* in 1683, the brother of Jan Pit, Martin Pit was recommended by him to be appointed to the *Raad van Indië* (for keeping a check on the bookkeeping accounts concerning the Company's trade in Asia).²⁹ The Pits were also connected to the Van Goens family through wedding relations and another brother, Jacob Jorisz. Pit who served as the Governor of the Coromandel Coast from 1681 to 1686 also left for Batavia before the Van Reede committee's inspection could begin

for a seat as a deputy of the States of Utrecht. In October of the same year, he attained the position of the *watergraaf* of the Nieuwe Vaart in Utrecht. It was not until the end of 1684 that he involved himself actively into the Company's affairs again. See Heniger, *Hendrik Adriaan van Reede*, 57.

²⁹ This letter, signed by Van Goens Jr. is now preserved in Hudde's collection of papers. It bears no direct name but Van Goens Jr. addressed his letter to someone, whom he described as '*Mijn edele achtbare heere*' / 'My honourable lord.' One can assume that it was either written to Hudde or to any of the members of the *Heeren XVII* at that time. NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 5, Letter from Van Goens Jr. to the *Heeren XVII*/Hudde in Amsterdam, 14 September, 1683: folios not numbered.

there.³⁰ The case with Schagen was similar, as he, too, was mentioned in Van Goens Jr.'s letter for being considered in the position of vice-president in the *Raad van Justitie*.³¹ The name of Marten Huijsman, the then commander of Malabar and the former director of Bengal, also featured in the list of men recommended by Van Goens Jr. to the *Heeren XVII* in his letter of 1683.³² It is quite clear then that Pit, Schagen and Huijsman were allied to the Van Goens faction. This explains why Van Reede had targeted these names, among all the other Company servants that were working in Bengal at this time. As for the other members in the investigation committee, there was Isaaq Soolmans, who was the second in rank and had earlier functioned as a commissioner in Bengal, when appointed by Batavia in 1684. This was at a time that Marten Huijsman was the director of the Company in Bengal. Soolmans then had his differences with Huijsman on several issues regarding illegal trade and other allegations, that according to him the director had not acknowledged and attempted to overlook.³³ Soolmans had also written to the *Heeren XVII* complaining about Jacob Verburg, the former director of Bengal, who allegedly used a certain group of local brokers to facilitate his own illegal trade.³⁴ Besides Van Reede, Soolmans too therefore had his scores to settle and all complaints from his earlier experiences were taken over and incorporated into the reports of the Van Reede committee in 1686.

These connections showed how corruption allegations were being used for factional motivations by the VOC. The *Heeren XVII* wished to align factions in the overseas

³⁰ Willem Hartsinck was married to Maria Pitt in 1675. Willem was the son of Carel and served with Van Goens in the campaign against St. Thome and on Ceylon. Carel Hartsinck was married to the sister of Van Goens's second wife, Esther the Solemne. It is, thus, through the Hartsinck's there is a familial link to Van Goens post-1675 at least. See, Molhuysen and Blok, *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek*, 588, 699; Peters, *In steen geschreven*, 41–42.

³¹ NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 5, Letter from Van Goens Jr. in Amsterdam, 14 September, 1683: folios not numbered.

³² NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 5, Letter of Van Goens Jr., 1683: folios not numbered.

³³ NA, Aan. 1de Afdeling ARA, inv. nr. 9615, Letter from Isaac Soolmans to the director, Marten Huijsman, the *oppercoopluijden* Jan Pit, Johannes van Keulen, *ondercoopluijden*, Pieter Mesdagh, Jacob Hinlopen and Isaak van Helsdingen, 12 September, 1684: f. 337-354; Letter from Isaac Soolmans to Marten Huijsman, 23 September, 1684: f. 432-434; Answer to the protest of Soolmans by Huijsman and his council, 27 September, 1684: f. 435-448.

³⁴ NA, Aan. 1de Afdeling, inv. nr. 9615, Letter from Isaac Soolmans to Marten Huijsman, 1 September, 1684: f. 405-407.

administration of the Company under the pretext of sending commissioners and committees for investigation. In this case, Van Reede and his political friends tried to align their factions in the Republic with the factions in Bengal and subsequently with the rest of the other areas. The former clique of Van Goens had still been retained through his son, Van Goens Jr. and his older allies in several places which became the cause of grievance for Van Reede. During the period that Soolmans served as the commissioner, he had reported about how he felt it to be a heavy duty, given the numerous open and hidden enemies in the closed circle of Bengal, with the director, Huijsman and his council of men sharing factional alliances.³⁵ This closed clique became the evident concern of Van Reede and Soolmans in 1686 as they, both, targeted those men still operating in Bengal who happened to be in the pro-Van Goens faction. With allegations of corruption brought against them, the Van Reede committee wanted to have these men removed from their power base. For formulating their cases, they had to dig up legal evidence. In the process, many extra-VOC actors also came to be used and absorbed in the Company's administrative space. Considering the fluid setting of the region of Bengal, as seen in Chapter 4, this was not surprising. The ambivalent jurisdiction of the local villagers and brokers, and the informal power of the Mughal nobles – all of these had to be dealt with by the committee with regard to the problem of corruption. It revealed thus two sides to the story – (a) the factional infighting of the Company officials among themselves one one side (b) and, the locals being embroiled in the Company's administrative politics on the other side. These aspects can be discerned from the way legal cases against Pit and Schagen came to be formed by the committee, supported by an analysis of Van Reede's final report sent to the *Heeren XVII*. It is important to remember in this context that local testimonies were only accepted at the *Raad van Justitie*, if they were supported by Christian or Dutch witness accounts, as has been shown at the beginning of

³⁵ NA, Aan. 1de Afdeling, inv. nr. 9615, Letter from the former commissioner Isaac Soolmans in Hooghly to the *Heeren XVII* in Amsterdam, 16 December, 1684: f. 1-2.

this chapter. Considering this, it is extra challenging to see how these two worlds were encountered by the committee and Van Reede in their combat against corruption.

Jan Pit and his Partners in Crime

Jan Pit, the *gezaghebber* of the VOC factory at Kasimbazaar, was accused by Van Reede of violating several Company rules including embezzlement, the conducting of illegal, private trade on commodities that the Company had a monopoly on and of making friends with the English who were, as he described, the dinner-guests (*tafel-gasten*) of Jan Pit.³⁶ None of these habits were peculiar to Jan Pit as a VOC official serving in Bengal. In fact, there is ample evidence of English and Dutch officials intermixing freely, and this even went on sometimes to encompass the French and the Danes.³⁷ During the tenure of Jacob Verburg (1678-80) as the director at Hooghly, the EIC officer Matthias Vincent mentioned the regular ‘entertainment’ at the Dutch factory lodges where garden parties with drinks seemed to be a usual affair.³⁸ When Verburg died, Vincent wrote highly of him saying that, ‘he was a quiet man, and of better principles of moral honesty than Dutchmen in great employments generally observed.’³⁹ Undoubtedly, Pit was not the only one then to engage in such actions that were in contradiction to the formal prohibitions on the Company’s illegal trade. Added to these personal alliances that were fostered among the different European Company servants, Van Reede also accused Pit of harbouring strategic bonds with local brokers and VOC factors.

Van Reede cited the names of three Indian merchants who had indulged in illegal, private trade by collaborating with Jan Pit and others from the *Kleine Compagnie*. They were Deepchand (Diepsient), Kalyan Das (Caljandas) and Jai Biswas (Siaijwiswas) *alias* Ramsen (Ramceen).

³⁶ NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to the *Heeren XVII*: f. 61r.

³⁷ Chijs, *Dagh-Register, anno 1659-61*, 316–17; Kathryn Wellen, “The Danish East India Company’s War against the Mughal Empire, 1642-1698,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 19, no. 5 (2015), 445–48; Richard Carnac Temple, ed., *The Diaries of Streygham Master, 1675-1680 and Other Contemporary Papers Relating Thereto*, vol. I (London: The Government of India, 1911), 329; Richard Carnac Temple, ed., *The Diaries of Streygham Master, 1675-1680 and Other Contemporary Papers Relating Thereto*, vol. II (London: The Government of India, 1911), 240.

³⁸ Fawcett, *The English Factories in India*, IV: 222.

³⁹ Fawcett, IV: 248.

However, the most that the Company could do with their limited jurisdiction over these merchants was to dismiss them from further service. Van Reede also added that the locals in general were so afraid of Pit that they did not always want to give away information properly.⁴⁰ What is important to note is that despite all these frequent complaints about the missing papers and lack of witness accounts, Van Reede eventually managed to garner enough evidence against Pit. This was mainly collected from the account books of the three accused brokers, who had allied themselves with Pit. Besides Pit, Jacob Verburg (the director of Bengal in 1679), Herman Fentzel (the *gezaghebber* in 1681), Nicolaas Baukes (director of Bengal in 1682), and Marten Huijsman (director of Bengal in 1684) were also alleged to have conducted illegal trade and deprived the Company of its due profits. These Dutch officials were accused of evading tolls with the help of the *factoors* and *gomashas* and of trading illegally in their name or through the Company's brokers by paying them commission in return. On the official records, however, they entered the money given to the Indian brokers as a loan advanced for buying new merchandise for the Company's trade in textiles.⁴¹

While all the brokers were forced to disclose their account books to Van Reede and his committee, the fact that they were written in the Hindustani (local Hindi), Gujarati and Bengali languages remained a problem for the commissioner and the committee. It was not possible to translate them without local help which form the other side of our story involving the local merchants and villagers. For reading these accounts, Van Reede resorted to the aid of another broker named Jadu (*Saton*). Jadu clearly testified against the misdeeds of his colleagues and their allied officers by adding his signature at the end of all the committee reports. In the sources, his testimony against one of the brokers, Kalyan Das was translated from Bengali to Dutch and read as follows –

⁴⁰ NA, VOC 1421, Missive from Van Reede to the *Heeren XVII*: f. 20r.

⁴¹ NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1422, Extracts from the account books of the three brokers showing contracts with the directors in Bengal signed, 1679-1685: f. 1075r-1094r. Also see, NL-HaNA, VOC, OBP, inv. nr. 1313, Memoir from Francois der Haze for direction to the chief of Kasimbazar, Jacob Verburg, in the position of the *opperkoopman*, and to the assistant-director and then provisional merchant, Jan Pit, 22 June, 1675: f. 156rv.

I, Jadu, having worked in the quality of a broker in the service of this Honourable Company have, according to the order of the Honourable Lord Hendrik Adriaan van Reede, Lord of Mijdsrecht, translated to those officials who had been committed for this purpose, the words of Kalyan Das as they have been written in the abovementioned extract from his account books concerning the trade that was conducted between him and the servants of the Honourable Company from the year 1679 to the end of the year 1686 and this has been compared with a corresponding note that has been signed by me, to which I testify to agree as the truth; and I sign it with my own hands. Hooghly, 15th April, 1686.

(written below)

This is the signature of Jadu, the broker of the Dutch Company.⁴²

The fact that Jadu openly dared to provide a written declaration meant that he was not in league with either Jan Pit or his local colleagues in Bengal. In the same way, the name of Ramu Dutt (written as *Rammoedel*), a *baniya* merchant and a *factoor* (local agent or broker) of the Company also surfaced in the reports.⁴³ Ramu Dutt confessed to being part of the illegal trade dealings in 1683 when Jan Pit used him to sell his private goods to Jai Biswas in Hooghly.⁴⁴ Van Reede not only praised Dutt for his service but also consolidated his position as a broker of the VOC in Bengal. Jadu too was highly recommended by Van Reede and assigned the task of assisting with the supervision of textile quality control.⁴⁵ The reason for Jadu's willingness to provide a

⁴² *'Ick Satou, als makelaar in die qualiteit gebruikt wordende in den dienst van d'I Comp hebbe ten ordre van zijn Hoog Ed Heer Hendrick Adriaan van Reede tot Drakesteijn heere van Mijdsrecht vertolckt aan d' expres daer toe gecommiteerden uijt den mont van Caljandas d'hier voorenstaande extracten uijt de boeken van hem aangaande den handel tussen hem ende bediende van d'I Comp gedreven sedert den jare 1679 tot het laatste van den jare 1685/6 ende deselve geconfronteert met de gelijke notitie daarvan bij mij aangetekent verklare die daar 't eenemaal mede te accorderen en tot teken den waarheijt die met mijn hant ondertekent Onglijj desen 15 April 1686 (onderstont)*

Hier staat getekent Satou makelaar der Hollantsche Comp.'

NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1422, Extract from the account book of Kalyan Das in the Gujarati language, 15 April, 1686: f. 1081r-1086v.

⁴³ On the relevance of the term '*baniya*' and its implications in pre-colonial India see, Subrahmanyam, "Of Imârat and Tijârat," 764.

⁴⁴ NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1422, Extract from the account book of Jai Biswas in the name of Ramsen and Nandakishor trading with the Company's servants as written in Bengali language with the testimony of Satou, dated 15 April, 1686: f. 1092v-1093r. Also see, NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1422, Confession of Ramu Dutt being used by Jan Pit for his private and illegal trade in Hooghly, 15 December, 1686: f. 1168.

⁴⁵ NA, HR, inv. nr. 241, Instructions and regulations, 1687: folios unnumbered.

testimony can be ascertained from Soolmans' reports written earlier, that were not mentioned in Van Reede's writings. Soolmans had written earlier about how Jan Pit had made Jai Biswas and his accomplices too powerful as brokers for Pit's own illegal profit.⁴⁶ Jai Biswas had problems with Jadu, who was also working for the VOC at that time. Biswas eventually managed to get Jadu out of service through accusations of fraud. Later, thus when Van Reede and his committee arrived and wanted to expose Jan Pit's actions, Jadu seized the opportunity to get back at Jai Biswas and his friends who had been working with Pit. Jai Biswas and Jadu's personal conflict instigated the latter to help Van Reede and Soolmans against Jan Pit and his local allies. This incident does indicate that the local mercantile space in Bengal was also riddled with infighting and the strategic building of alliances against common rivals. It cannot be concluded here with certainty that these brokers were aligned in neat factions. But it is evident that they did enter into competition and were inclined to operate in groups for profit motives. It also showed how such animosities among local brokers became embroiled with the factional politics of the Company in Bengal.

In this process of constructing charges against Jan Pit, there are thus a few things that became evident. Firstly, it was clear that corruption allegations were used politically to blend in with factional interests. As is evident here, Soolmans and Van Reede were in a faction against Verburg, Huijsman and Pit and such rivalries motivated the former to allege the latter of illegal trade and other corrupt actions. Secondly, it also showed how the VOC administrators could merge their factions with that of the brokers and mercantile groups in Bengal. In this case, Pit was allied with the brokers Deepchand, Kalyan Das and Jai Biswas who were challenged by the faction of Van Reede and Soolmans tied with brokers such as Jadu and Ramu Dutt. While the act of Pit in initiating unsolicited contact with the locals was shunned as corrupt and damaging for the Company's monopoly, it also revealed that such practices were common among the VOC

⁴⁶ NA, Aan. 1de Afdeling, inv. nr. 9615, Letter written by Isaac Soolmans to Marten Huijsman in Hooghly, 10 November, 1684: f. 517.

officials in Bengal. Thirdly, it also showed the urge of the Company officials to have control over these brokers as they were the chief sources of knowledge for gaining commercial success and a firm footing in this region. It is for this reason that Shaista Khan, wrote to Van Reede about the brokers being claimed by the Company servants unjustly.⁴⁷ This issue continued to be a constant bone of contention between the Mughal administrators and the VOC officials in their formal/informal encounters. As regards the allegations against Pit, his brother, Marten Pit as a member of the *Raad van Indië* managed to prevent the case from proceeding to the *Raad van Justitie* in Batavia.⁴⁸

The Case of the Director and his Wife

A second case that was started by the committee revolved around Nicolaas Schagen who was the director at the factory in Hooghly when Van Reede reached the waters of Bengal in 1685.⁴⁹ A long legal duel ensued thereafter between Van Reede and Schagen that culminated in the latter being deported to Ambon. Not only Schagen, but also his wife was entangled in this factional battle with the committee targeting her and accusing her of having smuggled fine silk (*armozijn*) for illegal profit. This silk was supposedly bought from the English in Kasimbazaar by the Company's *soldijboekhouder*, Barend Kaaskoper who then sold some of it to Gerrit Coper, the *schipper* of the VOC yacht, *De Bombaij* and some of it to Jan Frins, the *schipper* of the ship, *Strijen* and some more to the *boekhouder*, Anthony Mina.⁵⁰ It was in this network of exchanges that Schagen's wife was alleged to have participated, by buying a part of the silk from Kaaskoper. Even though it was the fault of Schagen's wife, the committee made full use of it in forming

⁴⁷ NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1422, Translated missive from Persian written by Nawab Shaista Khan to Van Reede on 6 June, 1686, 16 December, 1686: f. 1255rv.

⁴⁸ NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to the *Heeren XVII*: f. 50v-52r.

⁴⁹ NA, VOC, inv. nr. 109, *Resoluties* of the *Heeren XVII* in Amsterdam, 19 October, 1684 and 23 November, 1684: folios not numbered; NL-HaNA, VOC, inv. nr. 242, *Resoluties* of the *Heeren XVII* in Amsterdam, 31 August, 1684 and 17 October, 1684: folios not numbered. Also see, NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Copy of the instructions of the *Heeren XVII* for Hendrik van Reede, December, 1684: f. 1r-8v.

⁵⁰ NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1422, Index of all the testimonies, confessions, examinations, reports, and interpretations about the private trade in Hooghly, December, 1686: f. 1313r- 1313v.

their charges against Schagen who by virtue of the *plakkaat* of 1642 on illegal trade (*verboden handel*) was to be held accountable for the offences of his wife.⁵¹

These occasions showed that though the Dutch women were not tried openly in the courts for civil offences in Batavia, there was no problem in either charging them with offences or using their testimonies (in combination with the higher official witnesses) for the Company's legal administration. The wife of Barend Kaaskoper, Clara Catherina Stumphuis, for instance, provided a written declaration stating that a servant of Schagen had brought in a picnic basket covered with cloth that was full of money to her house, giving it to her husband. She described this servant as being 'tall and brown, and full of life' but could not recall his name specifically.⁵² Her testimony was seriously included and cited as one of the primary pieces of evidence to build this case against Schagen and his wife in the *Raad van Justitie's* legal proceedings in Batavia. It is important however to mention here that this representation was limited to European women only, unlike the voices of local women that remained directly unheard of in all instances (or was at best present through colonial translations).

While there was no testimony from the aforementioned servant that could be used for this case, there were a striking number of other testimonies used as legal evidence, given by the local menial workers of the Company. The gardener (*mali*) of Kaaskoper was interrogated and testified, in Portuguese, to the events that were described by Catharina Stumphuis.⁵³ He told the Van Reede committee about going to Schagen's residence with his master, Kaaskoper and having seen in the afternoon a heavy basket being brought, that was covered with cloth, to Schagen's lodge (*logie*). He presumed it to have contained money. He also confirmed seeing Schagen's wife pacing up and down earlier in the gallery waiting for the basket to arrive. The basket was eventually brought with the help of one of Kaaskoper's coolies from Schagen's lodge

⁵¹ Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek*, 1: 585.

⁵² NA, VOC, inv. nr. 9521, Testimony of the wife of the bookkeeper Barent Kaaskoper called Catharina Stumphuis, 5 December, 1686: folios not numbered.

⁵³ NA, VOC, inv. nr. 9521, Examination of the *mali* or gardener along with a certain coolie from the bookkeeper, Kaaskoper, 16 December, 1686: folios not numbered.

to his own house and put upstairs where after the cloth was removed, the *mali* caught sight of some money inside. The *mali* also admitted to bringing in the same basket to the house of the Company's cashier, Marten van Heemskerk. There were further declarations about the illegal *armosijn* trade between his master, Kaaskoper and the *schippers*, Coper and Frins with the money. Besides this, even the words of the *coolli* mentioned before were recorded in the testimonies (in a mix of Portuguese and Moorish language). He testified to having helped in moving the boxes earlier from Schagen's lodge to Kaaskoper's house and later to the house of Maarten van Heemskerk.⁵⁴ All these links were used as evidence, naturally in combination with the major testimonies provided by Company servants like Kaaskoper, who himself confessed to having received money from Schagen's wife for the commodities she bought.⁵⁵ Another official, Arnout Deldijn (*boekhouder*) confessed to Zeeman, the *advocaat fiscael* of the Company about Gerard Coutier (*onderkoopman*) who had helped Schagen's wife by sending Alexander Hendrik (*onderkoopman*) to buy illegal *armosijn* from the English in Kasimbazaar.⁵⁶

As Schagen was charged with the offences of his wife, he was also held responsible for his own involvement in an illegal trading deal of Japanese copper (*staafkoper*). Several men on board the *fluijt* Strijen which was on its way to Bengal from Malacca, and where Schagen and his wife were present testified to the events of boxes of copper being picked up at Malacca and unloaded at Balasore on an English chaloupe. The witnesses who testified included the names of men like Andries Smit (*soldaat* and *oppasser* of Schagen), Wijnand Barsvelt (corporal of the *oppassers* of Schagen), Jan Abramse van Oldenhoven (*opperstuurman*), Jan Praijer (*opperchirurgijn*), Pruge van Heel (*onderchirurgijn*), Harmanus Naekemus (*bottelier*), Jan Frins (*schipper*) and others who either saw or helped with the loading and unloading of the boxes of copper. Even though it

⁵⁴ NA, VOC, inv. nr. 9521, Conclusion of the *Raad van Justitie* in Batavia delivered against Nicolaas Schagen: folios not numbered.

⁵⁵ NA, VOC, inv. nr. 9521, Conclusion of the *Raad van Justitie* in Batavia delivered against Nicolaas Schagen: folios not numbered.

⁵⁶ NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1422, Index of all the testimonies, confessions, examinations, reports, and interpretations about the private trade in Hooghly, December, 1686: f. 1314v- 1315r.

is not possible to deduce from the sources conclusively what led these men to change sides and agree to provide witnesses for Van Reede, the answer may be sought in the modifications brought about in the Statutes of Batavia.⁵⁷ According to the *plakkaat* of 12th-14th August, 1678, all *schippers* (captains), *boekhouders* (bookkeepers), *onderkooplieden* (rank of junior merchants), *opperstuurlieden* (rank of senior merchants), *hoogbootsman* (rank of senior boatswains), *schiemann* (assistant boatswains), *botteliers* (officials in charge of provisions) and *kuipers* (officials in charge of the utensils) at all levels were to be held responsible for any illegal trade on a ship that they had been on.⁵⁸ The code also mentioned deportation without having the right to a fair trial as a punishment.⁵⁹ The offices involved were amplified in 1679 to include the *adsisten* (assistants), *stuurlieden* (sailing crew), *konstabels* (constables) and *zeilmaker* (sailing-cloth maker) as being subjected to the same punishment for conducting illegal trade in Asia.⁶⁰ These codes might have been the reason why lower Company servants involved in this case were no longer interested in lending Schagen their support. Van Reede, in turn, requested the *Hoge Regering* to grant amnesty to these men by virtue of their willingness to provide confessions. But it is not difficult to see that such virtues were not supposedly freed from personal and political motivations. It is difficult to fathom all of these personal intricacies in detail from official accounts. But it is possible to conclude that the incentive of getting a one-third share of the confiscated goods if someone reported illegal activities might have also been a motivating factor.⁶¹

This case, like the previous one, showed how factional motives were intermingled with the operations of the committee in charging officials and their families with corruption. Schagen and his wife were targeted by Van Reede as they belonged to the pro-Van Goens group that eventually brought Schagen to the Court at Batavia. This case also stands out for its involvement

⁵⁷ The Statutes of Batavia were the code of laws designed for the VOC in Asia. See for details, http://databases.tanap.net/ead/html/Colombo_Jurriaanse/index.html?N1AE3C, accessed 30 December, 2017.

⁵⁸ Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek*, 3:12.

⁵⁹ Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek*, 1:12.

⁶⁰ Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek*, 3:37–38.

⁶¹ Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek*, 1:12–13.

of locals such as menial servants in the legal processes of the Company that were initiated against prominent officials. The purpose of using these testimonies of the servants was connected to the fact that all officials were answerable for the actions of their domestic servants or slaves in the Company's administration.⁶² It showed how, like the brokers in the previous case, ordinary villagers and workers in this case were also seen as being part of the VOC's illegal trading racket in Bengal. At the same time, the presence of these men was proof of the fluid and informal relations that existed between the Company officials and the locals in this region. This case also showed that control over not only the brokers but also the local inhabitants of the villages under the Company's supervision remained a matter of concern for the VOC officials.

Both these two cases above can be contextualised in the situation of the VOC in Bengal as explained earlier in Chapters 3 and 4. The fluid geo-political space of Bengal ensured that the Company officials there operated as semi-*zamindars* within the Mughal administrative world. It has been argued before that this led the officials to informally attempt penetrating the Mughal administrative domain through factionalism, appropriation of elite lifestyles and acquiring jurisdiction over the local inhabitants of the villages leased out to the Company. The two cases discussed here demonstrate that such practices which boosted the personal ambitions of the officials were common. Factional alignments of individual officials with groups of local brokers existed beyond the formal limitations of the Company. This allowed them to gain more information about the mercantile scenario of Bengal and acquire private profits. It, in turn, enabled the Company officials to live a more luxurious life suited to their administrative elite status in Bengal that Van Dam or De Graaff complained about. Moreover, these cases also show the urge of the Company officials to gain control over the villagers and assert their jurisdiction vis-à-vis the Mughals in the region. This last condition led to a situation of frequent tussle as is evident from the incident of collision with the provincial *karori*, Abdul Ghani Beg during Van Reede's stay in Bengal. As Van Reede reported, Abdul Ghani Beg demanded tolls from the

⁶² Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek*, 1: 96; Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek*, 2:473.

Company which he accused the officials of having evaded by illegally using the local brokers and *gomastas* for their private trade.⁶³ To exert further pressure, he visited the village of Baranagore (which was under the Company's lease) with his men and scribes calculating and writing everything down, that frightened the villagers there and caused them to flee their village. Van Reede wrote that the VOC director in Bengal was not doing anything at this time so that he had to initiate contact with the Mughal *subahdar*, Shaista Khan. When that too did not work, the Company reportedly approached the *amin*, Matta Monidas who promised to look into the matter. But Abdul Ghani Beg, being more powerful, retained an upper hand in Bengal threatening to strip the Company off of its trading privileges. This example showed how the Company could be affected in the Mughal administrative world because of the officials' vulnerable semi-*zamindari* status in the village of Baranagore where a Mughal *mansabdar* could intrude and challenge the Company's base of resources, jurisdiction and right to provide protection to the villagers. Secondly, it also showed the awareness of the Company officials of the factions existing within the Mughal administration, so that they could align their interests with the *amin*, Matta Monidas against the *karori*, Abdul Ghani Beg in Bengal.

The findings of the committee can be better understood in the context of the complex situation of the VOC, as explained in Chapters 3 and 4, in Mughal Bengal. The VOC existed in the Mughal administrative world as semi-*zamindars*/ *ijaradars* in Bengal. By virtue of this existence, they maintained personal contact with provincial *mansabdars*, merchants, brokers and inhabitants of those villages that were leased out to them. But this status was not entirely comprehensible to the *Heeren XVII*. Within the Company's administrative world, it was translated or conveyed as the VOC having limited jurisdiction over the villages under lease and having necessary interactions with the Mughal officials and locals for trading purposes. Shuttling between these two worlds, the Company officials realised that their semi-*zamindari*/ *ijaradari* status lent them greater control over locals which allowed them to make illegal profits and pursue individual

⁶³ NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to the *Heeren XVII*: f. 75v-82r.

interests. Factionalism on all sides further facilitated this process. But it also ensued a tussle with the Mughal officials at times which brought the informal practices of the Company officials to the fore. Van Reede and Soolmans in the course of their investigation exposed these practices as illegal and corrupt, but the semi-*zamindari* world of the Company officials in Bengal remained beyond the committee's grasp. When Schagen thus wrote about Van Reede not understanding the ways of the Company in regions such as Bengal, he was possibly hinting at this informal administrative world of the officials. Under such circumstances, one wonders how did Van Reede explain the cause of corruption among the Company officials that he exposed in Mughal Bengal in the reports sent to the *Heeren XVII*.

Writing on Corruption

Throughout his reports, Van Reede chose to associate the corruption of the Company officials with the local situation – namely, rampant corruption among the Mughal governors and the locals in a landscape as Bengal. Thus, while he acknowledged the fact that the VOC in Bengal lived ‘as friends obliged by favours granted by the King of Hindusthan, the then great Mughal’ who had allowed them to have ‘several privileges, more than his own subjects, to not only live with all the freedom in this land and empire but also to conduct trade’, he also did not hesitate to remark how the region was infested with ‘the tyranny of the sovereign government of heathens and Moors (*de tiranique souvereyne regering van heijdenen en mooren*).’⁶⁴ In his missives to the *Heeren XVII* and the *Hoge Regering*, his description of Bengal reflected this idea. He wrote –

Bengal...can be administered and made useful for the profit of the Company, if it is governed with prudence and expertise, and executed with loyalty and zeal... the government (in Bengal) is entirely Islamic and functions under the king of Hindustan, the

⁶⁴ ‘De I. Comp woond in Bengalen als vrunden en gunstelingen van den coning van Hindostan, den groten mogul genaamd, van de welke wij hebben veel privilegen en voorregten boven alle zijn eijgen onderdanen, niet alleen om met alle vrijheijd in deszelve landen en rijken te leeven, maar om daarin met alle gemak de negotie te drijven in soodanige coopmanschappen als d'I. Comp goed vind aan te brengen en weder uijt te voeren.’

NA, HR, inv. nr. 241, Instructions and regulations: folios not numbered.

lord of the lands from Persia till the region of Arakan. Bengal is administered by Shaista Khan, an uncle from the mother's side of the king Aurangzeb, who has given him this land as a source of his income for strengthening his frontiers and paying the military expenses and for maintaining his own court along with the treasury of the empire. In order to collect all the money, this land is (therefore) divided into provinces among governors and superintendents who administer the finances (of these divisions) and hold them in lease. The predominant nature of the prince enjoying the highest authority called *Naboo* (*Nawab*), is said to be extremely greedy; as a consequence of which he is neither the happiest nor righteous in his administration...the entire course of the political administration is monarchical and asserts itself fully over all regions, over all men and all resources. The regents (indicating Mughal administrators) are extravagantly grand, selfish, and conspicuously pompous with their lifestyles, (the standards of) which are often more than their power and income. They are drawn to tyranny and extortion, not only from their unregulated squandering behind women, servants, horses, tents, camels, and elephants but also for having more resources to maintain their households and their (political) favourites in their courts, occupying more important offices.⁶⁵

In this extract, the stereotypical notion of a rich land where the profits were plundered by corrupt administrators was reflected. While he admitted that there were unaccounted for riches in Bengal, he also talked about the large-scale misappropriation of these riches by the Mughal *mansabdars* like Shaista Khan. Such *mansabdars*, according to him, resorted to frequent extortion and tyranny making corruption the rule of their land. Van Reede described the *karori* of Bengal, Abdul Ghani Beg, as one of those many 'Moors, who were greedy for money, knowing their

⁶⁵ 'Bengale...tot voordeel van de generale Comp kunnen beheert en te nutte gemaekt worden, soo deselve met verstandt en kennisse beleydt, met trouw en ijver uytgevoert U Ed Ho. agth. maar werden toegebracht...de regeringh (in Bengale) is geheel mahometaans staende onder den groten mogul ofte den koningh van hindostan, als algemeen heer der lande van persia af tot tegen het gebied van Arrakan werde Bengala bestiert door den vorst Chahestachan, een oom van 'smoeders wegen met den koningh Orantsjab of Orangsab, aendien vorst zijn dese landen uytgegeven, om daar en uijt derselver inkomsten de frontieren te versterken, de lasten der militie te betalen, zijn eygen hof te onderhouden, midsgaders boven dien tot de schatkist van't rijk, nogh enige somma op te brengen oversulks zijn dese landen in veel provintien verdeelt, door gouverneurs en superintendents der selver financien geregeert, en om die te bestieren als in paght gegeven, het predominerend nature van den vorst in dese opperste regeringh Nabbob genaemt werd geseght seer geldgierigh te zijn, en bij gevolg niet van de gelukkigsten, nogh zijn regeringh reghuvaardigh... de geheele cours van de politique bestieringh is monarchael, een vol gebied voerende, over de menschen en derseher middelen, de regenten zijn uijtnemende groots staatsughtigh, met veel uijtwendige praght, en huijsboudingh, 't welk boven haar vermoogen en inkomen sijnde, haar vervoert tot dwingelanderij en extorsien, daartoe sij niet alleen gedwongen worden door haar ongeregult verquisten, aen vrouwen, dienaren, paerden, tenten, camelen, en oliphanten maar om ook middelen te hebben haar, aen het hof en bij de favoriten te maintineeren, also wel (om) een grotere bedieningen te verkrijgen, maar daar ook ingelaeten te worden...?.

NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to Heeren XVII: f. 73rv.

own selfish interests alone'.⁶⁶ He added that the lower administrators of the Mughal government, sensing the deficit in their share of money due to the Company's presence in Bengal, were bent on driving the Company away from this land. It is for this reason that the Company officials were hindered in their peaceful trading operations. Van Reede further regretted writing that since it was not in the Company's hands to change the law of this land – which was violent behaviour and extortion by the Mughal authorities – attempts to please Abdul Ghani Beg through gifts were made.⁶⁷ He also wrote that it was a wise decision to work with gifts, rather than lodge complaints and seek justice since it would have actually 'cost (the Company) more and helped little'.⁶⁸ This justification laid bare the idea that practices which were otherwise not approved by the Dutch administrative ethos, had to be adopted by the Company officials in Bengal in order to comply with the Mughal ways of administering there.

Moreover, the corrupt practices of the Company officials were heightened in Bengal, as Van Reede explained, by the climate and squalor of the region. In his words –

...the headquarters and the Company's lodge are situated in a land where the moors and the mohammedans are so filthy, and the climate so hot that there one had very little freedom to turn away from the influence of (their) eyes filled with vice...⁶⁹

His contempt for the atmosphere of Bengal could have been shaped by the ideas that were already doing the rounds in the Republic through published literature. But it justified the Company servants' illegal indulgences, in the natural backdrop of Bengal's immoral and base air, which induced the corruption of all Company officials. As a result of which Van Reede's reports portrayed the Company's factory being in utter disorder, a description that was surprisingly in striking contrast to its comparison with a 'castle' made by Schouten earlier. Van Reede wrote –

⁶⁶ "...dat de moren geld gierigh sijnde, haar eigen interest kennend...".

NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to *Heeren XVII*: f. 77v.

⁶⁷ NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to *Heeren XVII*: f. 77rv.

⁶⁸ NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to *Heeren XVII*: f. 75r.

⁶⁹ '...al het welk het hoofdcomtoir en 's Comps logie, gelegen in een land alwaar de mooren en mahometanen zoo vies, het climaat zoo heet men weijnig vrijheid gehad heeft zigh te wenden of keeren als onder haar ontugtige oogen...'

NA, HR, inv. nr. 241, Instructions and regulations: folios not numbered.

Till now the Company's valuable merchandise has been put in Hooghly at warehouses, built of straw huts and in places which are not just prone to theft and fire, but also lie beyond the sight and supervision of the director...The outer walls of the Company's lodge, garden and orchard looks so miserable and dirty, that even the poorest inhabitant seems to be better enclosed and cared for ...For the accommodation of the married families of the Company servants, there is a small plan as has been shown to you, which elucidates the possibility of these families living close to the main factory and the Company's lodge at minimum cost.⁷⁰

Accordingly, he proposed reforms including the building of stone walls around the factory and the appointment of a *fiscaal* to regulate illegal trade, among other changes at Hooghly (Figs 18, 19A and 19B).⁷¹ The image of a filthy land with abundant riches that were exploited by the Mughal administrators was seen as a reason to provoke the Dutch Company officials to take to corruption. This corruption, according to Van Reede, damaged the Company since 1678 (from the year of Van Goens' governor-generalship) to an 'almost uncountable amount...that went far above the rough estimate of 38 hundred thousand gold.'⁷²

But nowhere did Van Reede mention about the jurisdiction of the Company officials over the three villages in Bengal (although he mentioned about them being on lease), nor did he seem to understand the informal semi-*zamindari* status of the Company officials in the Mughal world. Yet throughout his reports, his desperate attempt to impress upon the Company officials their role as merchants and their goal of making commercial profits did convey the sense that the

⁷⁰ 'Tot nog toe heeft men alhier Honglij 's Comps kostelijke coopmanschap en effecten vertrouwd in pakhuizen, stroo hutten, en plaatsen met alleen in gevaar van dieven en brand, ook geheel buijten het ooge en opsig van den directeur...De buijten muuren van s'Comps logie, thuijn, en boomgaart heeft zoo miserable en vuilj gelegen, den alderarmsten inwoonder veel beter bewaard en beslooten is geweest...Tot accomodement van de getrouwde en hare familien is U l. aangewesen, en bij den caartie/cartier afgemeten hoedanig men deselve met de minste kosten zal kunnen logieren en binnen de logie doen te samenwonen...'.
NA, HR, inv. nr. 241, Instructions and regulations: folios not numbered.

⁷¹ For a detailed explanation of the illustrated plans in the factory at Hooghly see, G.G. Schilder, Rosemary Robson-McKillop, and J.R. van Diessen, *Atlas Isaak de Graaf/ Atlas Amsterdam* (Voorburg etc.: Asia Maior/Utrecht: KNAG, 2006), 206–9.

⁷² 'Wat schade de generale Comp in Bengale, zedert den jare 1678 geleden heeft is bij na niet na te rekenen door het drijven van particulieren handel, als quade en ontrouwe directie, passerende bij ruijge calculatie verre op de agtendertig tonnen goud...'.
NA, HR, inv., nr. 241, Instructions and regulations: folios not numbered.

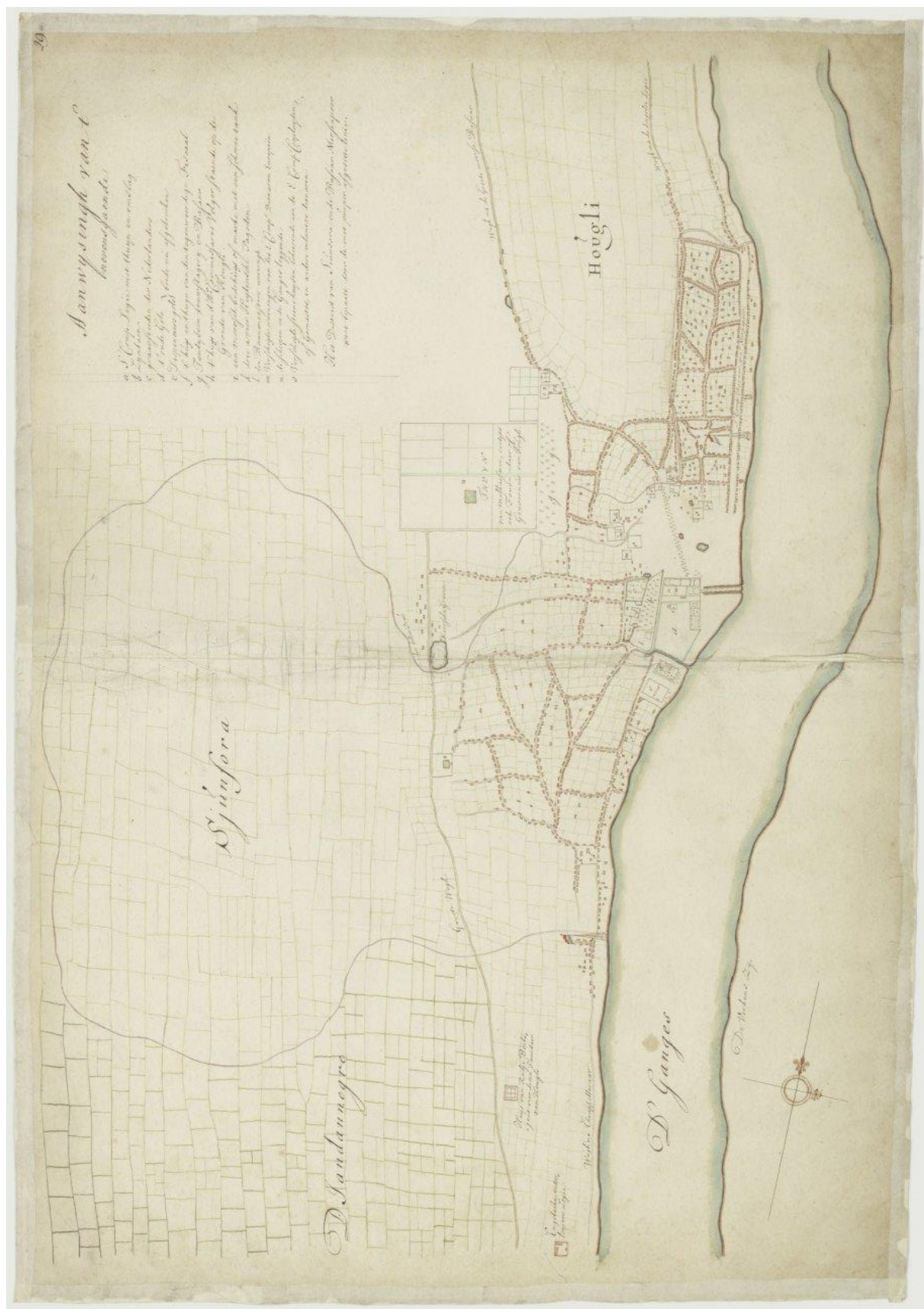


Fig 18: Plan of the Company's lodge, garden and its surroundings in Hooghly, 17th century, reproduced from NA, Kaarten Leupe, access number 4.VEL, inv. nr. 1102.

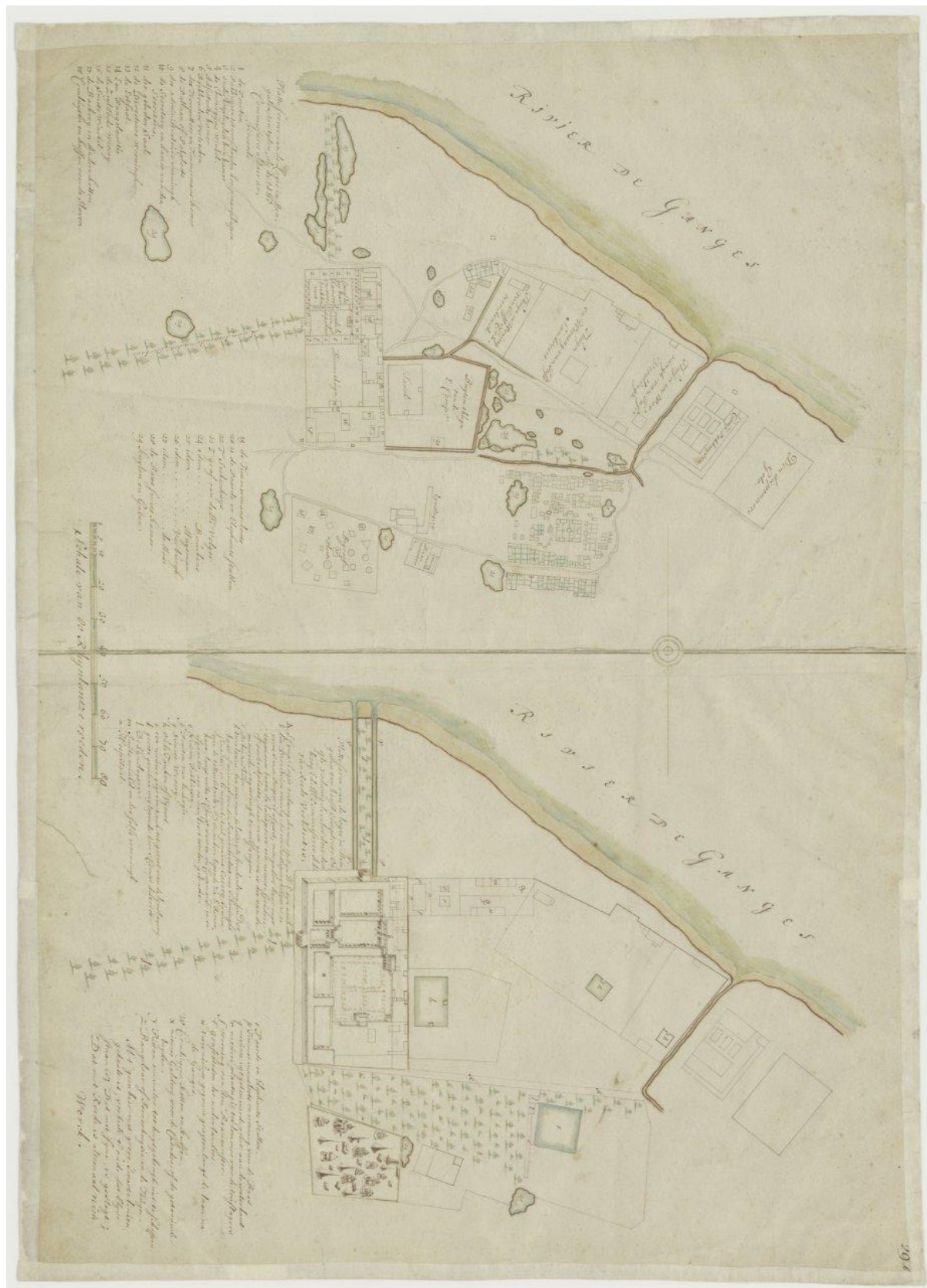
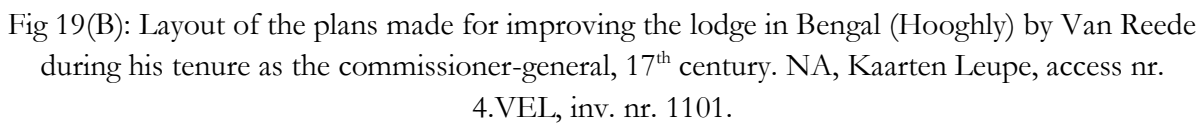


Fig 19(A): Layout of the plans made for improving the lodge in Bengal (Hooghly) by Van Reede during his tenure as the commissioner-general, 17th century. Reproduced from NA, Kaarten Leupe, access no. 4.VEL, inv. nr. 1101.



Company officials lived a life that was anything but that of a modest merchant. Van Reede repeatedly made this clear by reminding the officials of their function as VOC merchants –

...therefore, we should always bear in mind that we are nothing more in these lands than the servants of the Company and have no other quality apart from being merchants. Although our lords and masters are owners of their own kingdoms, and it is in this capacity that the governor general and the Council exercise their kingly authority and power here, it is not relevant to us in Bengal, for though the power and majesty of our lords and masters that brings upon us, the servants of the honourable Company, an ornament of honour and dignity to decorate ourselves, it should not become an instrument with which qualities/positions that are not suited to us can be gained. Considering this, we should not conduct our affairs here like that of princes and kings.⁷³

The warning to not behave like ‘princes and kings’ in Bengal showed how this was actually the lifestyle that the Company officials led there. Moreover, while stating that commerce was necessary and so was contact with the brokers, but Van Reede warned against informal contacts that were made for the illegal trade of the Company officials. He wrote –

...my zeal in discovering and investigating into the fraud and forbidden private trade (of the VOC in Bengal) has revealed three practices by which the wicked and the disloyal (Company servants) secure themselves, from not being convincingly punished by law...the first practice revolves around their use of the help of none other than the very moors and heathens, with whom the Company has to trade in this land, and through whom all the trade, both good as well as bad, is conducted. The words spoken and written by such men against Christians are as per the laws of our land not trustworthy...⁷⁴

⁷³ ‘...derhalven moeten wij altijd in gedagten houden wij in dese landen niet anders zijn dan dienaren van de generale Comp; geen andere qualiteit hebbende in deese landen dan coopluijden, want schoon onse beeren en meesters eigenaren en heeren zijn over coningrijken, en in den persoon van den gouverneur generaal en raaden van India een koninglijke magt ende autoriteit oeffenen, zo en is zulx niet relative tot ons alhier in Bengale, want schoon de maght en hoogheijt van onse beeren en meesters aan ons haar Ed hoog agtd. dienaren toebrengt een ornament van eere en agtingh om ons te verciereen zo en is zulx egter geen instrument voor ons daar mede te werken, als tot ons in die qualiteit niet behorende: ’t welke zo wij wel considereren wij ons zaken alhier niet als coningen en princen zullen willen hebben aangemerkt...’

NA, HR, inv. nr. 241, Instructions and regulations: folios not numbered.

⁷⁴ ‘Mijn sijn in het ontdekken en naervorsschen van frauden en particulieren verboden handel voorgekomen drie paractijquen, waarmede de quade en ontrouwe haar selven secureren, om niet te kunnen overtuigt en naereghen gestraft worden...het eerste is; sij tot hulpe gebruiken geen andere dan moren en beijdenen, met wie de Comp in dese landen handelen moet, en door welke de

In another place, he commented about the Company being cheated by the local merchants often owing to the availability of an enormous variety of textiles and their different prices which the Company administrators could not have had possibly known in its entirety.⁷⁵ He tried to encourage the *Heeren XVII* to gain greater control over them, and thereby drag them within the purview of the VOC administration. Such intentions are clearly revealed in these lines –

...the entire charter has been rendered entirely fruitless in these parts ... because all the orders and placards of the state have no force, as one cannot punish the guilty and the transgressors who cannot be punished, the ones with whom and by whom, they (the Company officials) conduct not only illegal trade but also commit fraud and theft, against the Company.⁷⁶

This need to control the brokers and other locals was accompanied by a message about how the general corruption of the land and its inhabitants was not to be an example for the Company officials who were to resist the foulness by performing their duties of serving their 'lords and masters'. Van Reede wrote –

...but if we (the VOC servants) still follow the bad manners and customs of the local inhabitants, we would then burden conscience, and make ourselves incapable of many things, and that would be the cause not only of contempt but also that of failing to execute our duties properly of serving our lords and masters.⁷⁷

The Company official in Bengal was therefore instructed to work as a merchant whose duty was to earn profits for the *Heeren XVII* and not behave like the locals and the Mughal administrators. However, despite this strong commercial rhetoric of the committee, its proposals and measures,

goede en quade negotie gedreven wordt, sodaniger luijden woorden en schriften zijn tegen Christenen nae de wetten onser landen niet geloofbaar,...'.

NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede: f. 58rv.

⁷⁵ NA, HR, inv. nr. 241, Instructions and Regulations: folios not numbered.

⁷⁶ '...het geheele octroij in dien delen, ...want alle de ordres en placcaten van den staat zijn van geen kragt, soo men de schuldige en overtreders derselve niet en kan straffen, welke niet konnen gestraft worden, soo de genen met wie, en door wie sij niet alleen den verboden handel, maer ook frauden en diverijen uijtvoeren, tegen haar, ...'.

NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to *Heeren XVII*: f. 60rv.

⁷⁷ '...dog soo wij d'inlanders, gelijk der zelver quade zeden en gebreeken, navolgen wij beladen ons gemoed, maken ons tot veele dingen onbequaam, en zijn oorsaak niet alleen van veragting maar dat wij den dienst voor onse heeren en meesters niet nabehoren konnen uijtvoeren.'

NA, HR, inv. nr. 241, Instructions and regulations: folios not numbered.

in fact, led to the indirect strengthening of the Company officials' administrative status in Bengal. The proposal of building strong walls for the factory at Hooghly to improve trade encouraged the attempts of the Company officials to maintain their informal elite status while simultaneously being agreeable to the *Heeren XVII*. The instruction to have more control over brokers worked in favour of the Company officials who were trying to assert their jurisdiction in a greater measure over the locals. Thus, in practice, the measures of the Van Reede committee in Bengal did not drastically curtail or disturb the Company's informal administrative status there. But it did enhance a standard stereotype of Mughal Bengal and its inhabitants which apparently had a corrupt influence on the Company officials and hampered their intention of trading in peace. It also tried to portray the VOC administration as ideally being interested in nothing more than commerce abroad, which was to be preserved through the Company's monopoly.

This rhetoric of commerce was strongly present in the *Heeren XVII's* redress committee and was reiterated by Van Reede in his regulations for the VOC director and council in Bengal. Van Reede was influenced by the prominent administrators and VOC directors of his time such as Hudde, Huydecoper, Van Beuningen and others who formed a group of men with specific ideological inclinations and were imbued with the idea of reform. Van Reede had begun his career quite early as a military cadet and was interested in building up his military skills under the patronage of Rijkloff van Goens in the VOC. However, after his conflict with Van Goens and his return to the Republic, he got back in touch with his old friend, Saint Martin who was already acquainted with the Huydecoper and his circle of friends (since Van Reede's and Saint Martin's common friend, Joan Bax was one of Huydecoper's nephews). By then, Van Reede was known for his botanical work, the *Hortus Malabaricus*, of which the first volume was dedicated to one of his patrons and allies, Joan Maetsuyker (an opponent of Van Goens).⁷⁸ The fact that Van Reede was getting closer to the group of Huydecoper can be deduced from the journal records of

⁷⁸ Van Reede dedicated Vol. I of his *Hortus Malabaricus* to Johannes Maetsuyker, the governor-general of the VOC in Batavia. See, Heniger, *Hendrik Adriaan van Reede tot Drakenstein*, 100.

Huydecoper which showed that Van Reede visited the Huydekoper residence frequently with Saint Martin in the years before his appointment as the commissioner. It was during these times that Van Reede's interest in Huydecoper's group of (probably Cartesian) friends was rekindled. Another coincidence emphasised this point further. Descartes had a daughter by his female servant and he adopted the daughter as his niece, naming her Francine.⁷⁹ Van Reede, too, had adopted a daughter by the name of Francina, who was possibly born of a Portuguese/Hispanic mother and was recognized as his sole heir during the last years of his stay in Malabar.⁸⁰ However to return to the subject of reforming commerce, the rhetoric of the 'wise merchant' which was upheld during the Republican government of the De Witts (also a group of Cartesians) lingered on in the Dutch political space even after the restoration of the office of the *stadhouder*. These ideas were carried forward by Hudde and his allies and were implemented in the resolutions of the *Heeren XVII* that aimed towards creating a more corporate character of the Company abroad. What Van Reede was doing in sketching a commercial guideline can be comprehended in this context, especially as a response to the banter about immorality and corruption of the Company officials in Bengal.

Van Reede and his committee's reports tarnished the image of a *corrupting* Mughal Bengal to portray an *incorrupt* image of the Company officials. Moreover, it revealed the way corruption became the major tool of the *Heeren XVII* for achieving their political and administrative goals. As shown in the previous chapters, the *Heeren XVII*'s plans of reform and redress in the Company was sparked by the rising socio-political tensions concerning corruption in Dutch society at that time. Van Reede, at a crucial juncture of these political developments, helped his allies in the Republic to blur the stigma of overseas corruption, by providing a reason for the same.⁸¹ He built an ideal of a dutiful corporate official, and tried to portray the image of an

⁷⁹ Ariew et al., *Historical Dictionary of Descartes*, 8.

⁸⁰ Heniger, *Hendrik Adriaan van Reede*, 87–92.

⁸¹ The concern about corrupted Company servants returning to the Republic and living a lavish life is expressed in the reports written by Van Reede.

undaunted Company official adhering to his administrative ethics, in the face of numerous challenges encountered abroad. In reality, this did little to diminish the acts of violation of the Company rules (namely, illegal trade etc.) among the officials. In fact, by the eighteenth century, the VOC in Bengal came under the control of a few director-families such as Van Dishoeck, Huysman, Pelgrom, Sadelijs and Sichterman who built their network of illegal riches and led pompous lifestyles as *nabobs*.⁸²

The Van Reede committee was not a success when it came to fulfilling its proclaimed goals. It ended up being a personal tool for political rivalries, with Van Reede using corruption allegations to align factions between the *Heeren XVII* in Republic (Amsterdam) and in Asia (Bengal as shown here and elsewhere in India). There is no doubting the presence of serious ideological motivations in launching the redress project of the 1680s that led to the formation of this committee. But such ideologies were not freed from personal and political motivations driven by factional bickering among the Company administrators. The reforms of the committee also did not amount to any revolutionary change within the VOC. It simply kept the practices in the overseas factories intact and resulted only in minor personnel modifications in the areas Van Reede visited. But notwithstanding all these drawbacks, the committee was important for having made substantial contributions to the ongoing changes in the VOC. It laid the ground for several major debates and policies of the Company in the eighteenth century. Some of these debates concerned the question of monopoly of the VOC and the limits of its permissible private trade in the Indian Ocean. Besides, the committee's emphasis on the commercial rhetoric proved how the VOC as 'a Janus-faced hybrid institution straddling the divide between merchant and sovereign' remained divided on the issue of 'whether to use mercantile or military means' throughout the greater part of the seventeenth century and beyond.⁸³

NA, VOC, inv. nr. 1421, Missive from Van Reede to *Heeren XVII*: f. 37r.

⁸² Piet Emmer en Jos Gommans, *Rijk aan de rand van de wereld: De geschiedenis van Nederland overzee 1600-1800* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2012), 387-90.

⁸³ Vink, *Encounters*, 119.

Van Reede and his committee also contributed towards creating a moral higher ground for themselves and their allies in the VOC administration. The committee, moreover, brought the focus of the Company in the Republic on the behaviour of its administrators in the overseas territories and the corruption there. In practice, corruption allegations and its reforms eventually came to play a substantial role in – (a) establishing a connected factional link between the political space in the Republic – the Company in the Republic – the Company in Bengal – and the Mughal administrative world and (b) creating degrading moral impressions of the landscape of Bengal, its people and its governance by the Mughal *mansabdars* there, in order to justify corruption among the Company servants abroad. On a factional level, it showed how administrators functioned through personal and informal networks under an official façade. On the level of creating a narrative on corruption about Bengal, it brought this region to the focus of overseas corruption of the VOC. Even though Van Reede's written reports remained confined to the official circles, similar ideas were echoed in the popular books and images circulated in these and later years. A steady discourse on the vices of Bengal helped in stretching the existing perception of VOC corruption to new levels, explaining the emergence of wealthy Company officials in Bengal. It also culminated in the introduction of the oath of corruption as suggested by Van Reede in his reports to the *Hoge Regering*, which has been mentioned at the beginning of the introductory chapter of this dissertation.

Conclusion

This chapter connects the developments that were discussed in the earlier chapters to show how Mughal Bengal became a part of the core perception of the VOC's overseas corruption in the late seventeenth century. This eventually led to the creation of an oath for all the Company servants that they would not take part in corrupt practices. Against the changes in the Republic revolving around the political situation, the financial tensions and the need to preserve a credible image of the VOC for its investors, the Van Reede committee was appointed by the *Heeren XVII*

in 1684. Its members arrived in Mughal Bengal (and other places in India) with special instructions from the *Heeren XVII* to investigate more thoroughly all the Company's factories in this region, besides Ceylon, Malabar, Coromandel and Surat. Van Reede and his committee's findings showed how Bengal as a place with fluid contacts and several personal dynamics was hard for the *Heeren XVII* and the *Hoge Regering* to comprehend and control. The committee's attempts to construct charges against Pit and Schagen uncovered these uncontrollable dynamics even further. But there were other important factors as well, namely factional politics in the overseas administration of the Company that were exposed through the committee's reports and investigation. Both the cases of the committee in Bengal that are discussed here show how – (a) corruption allegations came to be used to align factions between the VOC in the Republic and in Asia, (b) and factional infighting within both the Company and Mughal administrators as well as the personal deals with local brokers in Bengal which added to the complexity of the problem of corruption. Van Reede's reports also showed instances of informal arrangements and relations with Mughal administrators as well as incidents of conflict with them. These fluid VOC-Mughal administrative interactions as well as informal contact with the locals were represented on paper by Van Reede and the other members in his committee in a more flattened and stereotypical manner. The Mughal administrators in Bengal, according to the reports of the committee, were corrupt and were affected by the many depravities offered by the region and its climate. On the informal side, this probably changed little. Moreover, it showed that the Company administrators in Bengal were engaged in activities that were geared towards fulfilling their personal ambitions, beyond the restrictions of the *Heeren XVII*. But on the formal side, it led to the emergence of a strong rhetoric of mercantile integrity within the Company that went on to shape the standard of the Company officials' administrative behaviour. Bengal, in this sense, broadened the perception of VOC corruption to indicate overseas immoralities, that accounted for the corrupt ways of the Company officials who lived and served there. The echoes of this were heard in the

condemnable, extravagant *nabob* lifestyles of VOC officials living lavishly in this region in the subsequent century.