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Colonial careers : Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen, Rijckloff Volckertsz. van Goens and career-making in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Empire
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3. Rising through the ranks

The early career of Rijckloff van Goens, 1629-1655

This chapter will examine the early career of Rijckloff Volckertsz. van Goens in Asia in the period 1629-1655. This early period of Van Goens' career is a striking example of a meteoric rise throughout the VOC's ranks by a man from a relatively low background. It thus forms an interesting contrast with the appointment of Johan Maurits to the governorship of Brazil, as explored in the previous chapter. Johan Maurits, a high (though impoverished) nobleman, was appointed to a high office within the colonial hierarchy of the WIC on the basis of his networks and experience within the Republic itself. Rijckloff van Goens, by contrast, built his career step-by-step within the VOC's Asian hierarchy, advancing from a lowly position to the rank of a member of the Council of the Indies and commander of the homeward-bound fleet in 1654-1655. The early career of Van Goens can be used to test a number of hypotheses, as the ways in which he achieved this advancement will reveal the internal structure of the company in Asia. How could an orphan in the company's service rise so far through the ranks? Were familial ties important, as we would expect if we accept Adams's thesis, or was the VOC a meritocratic organization? If family ties were important, as we can reasonably expect, given their role in career-making in the Netherlands itself and as chapter two has already shown, what kinds of ties were important and how could new ties be forged? The early career of Van Goens is also interesting as it took place completely in the Indies and thus contrasts with the appointment of Johan Maurits, as detailed in the previous chapter, in that it was less likely to be affected by factional struggles within and between the VOC's chambers and by Dutch domestic politics.

This chapter will argue that to get ahead within the company in Asia, skill alone was not enough, one also needed connections. This meant that ambitious company servants needed to familiarize themselves with the worlds of patronage and patrimonialism in the VOC's Asian empire. At the lower levels of the company's ranks in which Van Goens operated until the early 1650s, it was still possible to make a career without strong support from factions within the VOC in the Netherlands. But this became progressively more difficult as Van Goens rose through the ranks. This chapter will therefore conclude with his trip to the Netherlands in 1654-1655. This heralded a new phase of his career as he would henceforth enjoy the backing of important factions within the VOC, especially in the Amsterdam chamber. The chapter will rely primarily on the application of Julia Adams's theory on patrimonialism to the case of the VOC *in Asia*. The familial networks within the company will, for the first time, be examined here in some detail, thus shedding light not only on Van Goens' career, but also on the careers of others like him. Examining these networks will also help explain the patterns of illegal private trade within the VOC during that period.

Rijckloff van Goens: a career in fast-forward

This chapter will not examine every phase of Van Goens' career in Asia in the period 1629-1655 in equal detail. The following section will provide a brief overview of the progress of his career before turning to address the important questions that this trajectory raises. After the death of his parents in 1629-1630, Rijckloff van Goens remained in Batavia in the care of his uncle, Boycke Boyckes van Goens. And it was his uncle who got him his first job as junior assistant of Arent Gardenijs on the Coromandel Coast in 1632. Starting from this lowly position, Van Goens

advanced through the ranks rapidly, rising to company servant without rank in Batavia at a salary of 12 guilders a month in 1636, to assistant a year later and to junior merchant in 1639. Three years later, in October 1642, he was promoted to the position of merchant (*koopman*), and in February 1645 became the provisional head of the payments office in Batavia (*soldijcomptoir*). A year later he was elevated to the rank befitting this position and made chief merchant (*opperkoopman*). He appears to have fulfilled these duties satisfactorily as he was subsequently sent to Jambi, a VOC post on Sumatra, as the new head. During this time in Jambi, he also made his first trip to Mataram as *secunde*, or second-in-command, of the diplomatic mission. In 1649, he cruised with four ships in the Sunda Straits, hoping to apprehend a convoy of four Genoese ships that had been built and manned in the Netherlands. Although Van Goens did not personally catch the ships, he did gain admission to the Council of Justice in Batavia. In 1649, he once again went to Mataram, but now as the head of the diplomatic mission. Mataram was important to the VOC since it was Batavia's largest neighbor and supplied almost all the rice consumed in the city. Relations with Mataram were often tense, with the kingdom having besieged Batavia as recently as 1629, the year Van Goens had originally arrived in Asia. By 1650, the High Government was so impressed by the now thirty-one-year-old Van Goens that he was sent to the VOC establishment in Siam, where he was supposed to replace the head of the loge, who was deemed untrustworthy, and also to go through the books and get all the accounts in order.²⁵¹ After his return from Siam, Van Goens went to Mataram twice more, in 1651 and 1652, while also serving as the first chief merchant of the castle in Batavia. In 1653, Van Goens was sent to the West, commanding a fleet intended to combat the Portuguese in the waters around Goa and Ceylon. This mission was a success and, having destroyed five Portuguese galleons off Goa, Van Goens was admitted to the Council of the Indies in 1653. The next year, he was discharged with full honors and sailed to the Netherlands as the commander of the homeward-bound fleet, arriving in 1655.²⁵²

The important question raised by this brief description of this successful VOC servant's career is, of course, how? Or, in other words, how was a lowly orphan able to advance through the ranks to become a member of the Council of the Indies, the supreme governing council of the VOC in Asia? There are a number of possible answers to this question. In the first place, if the VOC was strictly a meritocracy, Van Goens must have been exceptionally skilled. The VOC, however, was obviously not a meritocracy, with connections and networks also playing a role in career advancement, even though some of the literature has perhaps overstated the role of having friends in high places. In *The First Imperial Age*, for example, Scammell has the following to say about the VOC's appointment procedures: '*In that time-honoured style which has ruined many a business[,] the directors of the Dutch VOC nominated their talentless friends and relations to Company posts in Asia.*'²⁵³ This statement is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, it obviously overstates its case as Van Goens did not know any directors and, until 1655, built his career wholly in Asia, and very successfully at that. This points to the fact that the little scholarship there is on persons within the company, and especially of their career paths, is focused on the directors in the Republic, rather than on the 'men on the spot' in Asia. Secondly, the quotation hits on the two social

²⁵¹ NL-HaNA 1.10.32, Van Goens, inv. no. 9, appointment to Siam.

²⁵² For a brief overview of the career of Van Goens in this period, see: W.M. Ottow, *Rijckloff Volckertsz van Goens: De carrier van een diplomat, 1619-1655* (Utrecht 1954). Ottow follows rather closely the personal memoir of Van Goens, which was written for his children upon his return to Asia in 1656, in NL-HaNA, 1.10.32, Van Goens, inv. no. 6.

²⁵³ G.V. Scammell, *The First Imperial Age: European Overseas Expansion 1500-1715* (London 1989) 95.

relations that were indeed important to cultivate: patronage and patrimonial ties. This chapter will apply the ideas articulated in chapters 1 and 2 to the early career of Van Goens so as to explain how it was possible for him to enjoy the career he did. To that end, the chapter is divided into six sections, each focusing on a different aspect of Van Goens' career trajectory. As these sections are also ordered chronologically, they follow one another in a logical fashion. The first section will examine Van Goens' position as an orphan in Batavia and the importance of having close family around him. The second section will detail the early connections made on the Coromandel Coast and in Batavia from a patronage perspective. Marriage and the forging of familial links are the main focus in the third section. The ideas on patrimonialism developed by, for example, Julia Adams for the Dutch Republic will be applied here to the VOC in Asia. The insights from sections two and three will be combined in section four in order to explore the network among high officials in Batavia in the early 1640s. Van Goens tried and, I will argue, succeeded in becoming part of this high-placed network. The fifth section will take a different approach by examining the various kinds of assignments that a rising VOC official had to fulfill, focusing on Van Goens' diplomatic and military missions in the late 1640s and early 1650. The sixth section will examine Van Goens' trip to the Netherlands in 1654-1656, arguing that the forging of close personal ties with the company directors was of crucial importance for moving a career to the next level. This section will also provide a background to the appointment of Van Goens as commander-in-chief (*veldoverste*) on Ceylon in 1656, which will be examined in chapter seven.

An orphan in the company's care, 1629-1633

'On October 3, 1629, I sailed with my dear parents to Batavia on the ship Buren'.²⁵⁴ Thus Van Goens starts the narrative of his move to Batavia in 1629, at the tender age of ten. This move would determine the further course of his life. His father, a cavalry officer in the Dutch garrison in Rees on the German Lower Rhine, had decided to enlist with the company at the urging of his brother, Boyckes Rijckloff van Goens, who had moved to Batavia earlier that decade. Van Goens senior would be employed in the company's army at Batavia, in the rank of *commandeur*. Arriving in Batavia on July 10, 1629, the family had just had time to settle into their new environment when, on August 22, the King of Mataram started the now famous Siege of Batavia. This immediately put Van Goens' father in the front line. Things, however, turned out very differently for the family than initially expected as Van Goens senior died only five days later. In the memoir written for his children in the mid-1650s, Van Goens junior described it thus: *August 27, 1629. My beloved father died after having been in the country only for the duration of a month and 17 days.*²⁵⁵

Unfortunately, Van Goens does not mention what the cause of his father's death was: enemy action, or sickness. After his father's death, the family probably moved in with Rijckloff's uncle, Boyckes van Goens. However, Rijckloff's mother Hillegond did not last long either: *July 25, 1630. My dear mother Hillegond Jacobs of Franeker died, leaving me an orphan without parents in a strange land without any special inheritance but the hope of God's blessing.*²⁵⁶ Thus, by the summer of 1630, Rijckloff van Goens had become orphaned in Batavia, aged slightly older than ten. He was the orphan of a soldier; however, not just any soldier. This statement merits some explanation, given that the status of his deceased parents may help shed some light on the success of Van Goens' future career. His father, Volckert van Goens, had been a cavalry officer in the States' army in

²⁵⁴ NL-HaNA, Collectie van Goens, inv. no. 6, unfoliated, page 1.

²⁵⁵ Ibidem, 2.

²⁵⁶ Ibidem, 2.

Rees. However, as the VOC's armed forces did not include a cavalry component, with the exception of the mounted guard of the Governor-General, Van Goens' senior would be likely to have been employed as an officer in the guard of Coen himself. This was a rather more prestigious task than regular soldiering in the VOC's service, and it may have ensured the young Van Goens would have come to the attention of the governor-general, had Jan Pieterszoon Coen not died a month later, in September 1629.²⁵⁷ Nevertheless, it is still possible that the father's position may have furthered the ease with which his son was later able to obtain a position in the company.

Despite the death of both his parents Rijckloff still had some family left in Batavia: his uncle and the latter's family. Since Batavia did not yet have an orphan board (though it did have orphan masters), it is likely that the young Van Goens was entrusted to the care of his uncle, Boyckes van Goens.²⁵⁸ Indeed, Van Goens' memoir confirms that it was his uncle who got him his first assignment:

Anno 1631

*On the ninth of May, through the recommendation of my uncle, I sailed with the ship Prins Willem from Batavia to the Coast Coromandel at the service of Arent Gardenijs, extra-ordinary council of the Indies and Governor on the Coast, who has been a good mentor to me.*²⁵⁹

The young Van Goens thus served as the assistant of Arent Gardenijs, the Governor of the Coromandel Coast. At this point, before the rise of the Bengal trade and the establishment of the VOC on Ceylon and Malabar, Coromandel was easily the most important of the VOC's Western commands, along with Surat and Persia, and its governor was a powerful figure within the company. So while Rijckloff did not stand to inherit much after his parents died, and could not profit from networks or ties forged by them, he did have the crucial advantage of having his uncle already established in Batavia. Indeed, his uncle succeeded in getting the young Rijckloff his first job, involving working for an important man, and with it the opportunity to make his own contacts and his own way in the world.

Coromandel and Batavia, forging crucial links

Van Goens did not stay on the Coromandel Coast for long as Arent Gardenijs was called back in 1632, accused of private trade. Van Goens subsequently returned to Batavia in 1634 with Gardenijs' successor, who also stood accused of private trade, which was prohibited to the company's personnel. Both men for whom Van Goens worked on the Coromandel Coast were, therefore, accused of private trade. Crucially, however, both men were acquitted and continued their careers within the VOC. This was not unusual within the VOC; many members of the High Government were accused of private trade, but subsequently acquitted. As these high-placed company officials' networks of support may help to explain this pattern, this would make a good topic for future research.

Arent Gardenijs was called back from the Coromandel Coast in 1632, put on trial in Batavia, acquitted of all charges and then promoted to second-in-command at Ambon in 1635.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁷ Van Goor, *Jan Pieterszoon Coen*, 507.

²⁵⁸ Part of the archives of the Batavia orphan board are to be found in the Dutch National Archives in The Hague, albeit only from 1700 onwards. The remainder is still with the ANRI in Jakarta and has not been accessed.

²⁵⁹ NL-HaNA, 1.10.32, Collectie van Goens, inv. no. 6, unfoliated, page 2.

Gardenijs had been removed from office after an inspection of the books and warehouses at Pulicat revealed shortcomings. So how did he manage to be acquitted? A likely answer lies in the fact that he was married to Geertruyt Buys, a sister of the wife of governor-general Jacques Specx.²⁶¹ This familial connection probably protected Gardenijs from being convicted, and may also prove an alternative connection of Van Goens to the higher circles of power in Batavia. Indeed, Van Goens was very positive about Gardenijs in his memoir, and the latter may have helped him to get a job as an assistant in the warehouses after his return to Batavia in 1634, given that Gardenijs did not leave Batavia for Ambon until the next year. It is also interesting to note that, according to Van Goens himself, he left for Batavia with Gardenijs in 1632, even though Ottow has made it clear that Van Goens did not, in fact, leave the Coromandel Coast until two years later, likely serving Gardenijs's successor David Pietersz.²⁶² While in Batavia, Van Goens worked for Jacob de With, chief merchant of the castle of Batavia and who later became governor of Coromandel himself.²⁶³ By 1634, therefore, Van Goens was established in a job in Batavia that paid him a salary of 300 guilders a year.²⁶⁴ Five years later, he was promoted to *onderkoopman* or junior merchant. He had now reached a point in life where he could support a family. This was of crucial importance for those wishing to advance within the VOC in Asia, as will be argued in the next section.

The importance of marrying up: marriage as a career-making tool

By mid-1640 Van Goens was legally an adult, having turned twenty-one that June, and so allowed to marry. That same year, on September 13, he proceeded to marry Jacomina Roosegaard Jacobsdochter.²⁶⁵ This marriage is interesting as it highlights a common career-making strategy – marrying an older widow – seen among many young officials in the VOC's Asian empire. The importance of marriage as a social tool has been somewhat understated in the case of the seventeenth-century VOC, although much more research has been done on the Republic itself. This section will explore some of the theoretical insights on the role of marriage that have been developed in relation to the Dutch Republic and will apply them to the VOC in Asia, focusing on the marriage of Van Goens. Can the idea of patrimonialism, as developed for the Republic, also be fruitfully applied to the VOC in Asia?

Julia Adams's ideas on patrimonialism in Dutch politics were discussed at some length in the introduction. She defined it as '*an image or ideology of paternal rule that may link familial with macropolitical, economic, or other sociocultural practices.*' The relevance of the study of this patriarchy is that '*they help determine how political alliances are formed and how power is transferred, how new members of the elite are recruited, how political rule is legitimated, and when it founders.*'²⁶⁶ If it is possible to apply her insights on the role of patrimonialism in Dutch metropolitan politics, we should seek to understand the VOC's internal networking as being akin to the politics of familial factions in the Republic. This would contrast with scholarship that seeks to explain the chartered companies primarily in commercial terms and as very large shipping firms. Indeed, I argue that Van Goens'

²⁶⁰ W. Wijnaendts van Resandt, *De Gezaghebbers der Oost-Indische Compagnie op hare buiten-comptoiren in Azië* (Amsterdam 1944) 93.

²⁶¹ Ibidem, 94.

²⁶² NL-HaNA, 1.10.32, Collectie van Goens inv. no. 6, unfoliated, page 2.

²⁶³ Wijnaendts van Resandt, *De Gezaghebbers*, 98.

²⁶⁴ Nieuw Nederlands Biografisch Woordenboek, 588.

²⁶⁵ NL-HaNA, 1.10.32, Collectie van Goens, inv. no. 6, unfoliated, page 3.

²⁶⁶ Adams, *Familial state*, 32.

early career is an excellent example of the importance of forging the right familial connections. Although the company's official correspondence from Asia to Europe may resemble the functional commercial letter-writing that was supposed to build trust, as discussed in the introduction, the company operated internally as if it were a Dutch municipal council, with factions vying for advancement of their members and clients, and where marrying into a strong network could mean a sudden improvement in fortunes. Strong ties to a familial network in Asia could mean not only advancement, but also access to profitable illegal trading networks held together by the high trust between family members and the costs to one's reputation of betraying one's family network. For the company, though, this was not all bad either. These networks worked *within* the company – indeed, could only work within the company – since it was individuals' role as company officials that saw them scattered across Asia and thus in a position to conduct profitable trades. It can be hypothesized, therefore, that the members of such networks, albeit often engaged in private trade, were at the same time working hard for the company's best interests since the latter's success would also mean their personal success and advancement, and a good performance in Asia would ease their ability to ultimately move back to the Netherlands with their gains and ascend into the local regent community.

Marriage was, therefore, an important social tool in the case of the colonial elites in the VOC's Asian empire. Besides the question of love between individuals, it was an important way for family groups to link themselves to other company elites. Alternatively, junior officials could try to marry into powerful families or become the clients of powerful men by marriage. There were a few recurrent themes in this respect, including the theme of two men marrying two sisters (*verzwagering*), which was also known in the Republic itself. Alternatively there was the pattern of two men marrying each other's sisters. A case that seems typical for the VOC's Asian world was the marriage of a younger man to an older widow. Marion Peters, who studied 'VOC women' on the Coromandel Coast in the seventeenth century, noted that it was common for the widow of a governor or commander who died in office to marry his successor.²⁶⁷ She attributed this to the scarcity of potential mates on the Coromandel Coast. But if we combine her work with other research on the role of women in the illegal trading activities of VOC officials, it seems more likely that marrying the widow of one's predecessor was a way of allowing illegal trades to continue (with an influx of new capital) and, at a stroke, to enable the new governor to develop a whole new network of contacts.²⁶⁸ A variation on this theme was for a junior official to marry the widow of a higher-ranking man. This could help the younger man to gain contacts within higher ranks who might still know their former colleague's widow. However, this strategy could also backfire, as is shown by the eighteenth-century case of the young VOC engineer and artillery officer Elias Paravicini de Capelli, who married the widow of the former governor of Ceylon, Iman Falck. In a letter to his brother in the Netherlands, he complained that his marriage was seen by others as unsuitable because the social distance between the two partners was regarded as

²⁶⁷ M. Peters, 'VOC-vrouwen op de Kust van Coromandel in India', *Jaarboek voor het Centraal Bureau voor Genealogie* 58 (2004) 68-105, 83.

²⁶⁸ Femme Gastra mentions the role of women in the illegal trades of the Batavia elites, presenting the story of the wife of governor-general Maetsuijcker who was caught smuggling Japanese gold to Surat in exchange for diamonds. Maetsuijcker got off by claiming one could not expect a woman to know all the rules. This was a rather convenient excuse as he was responsible for his wife's actions. In reality, the committee that reviewed the case was probably also engaged in the same activities. See: F. Gastra, *Bewind en Beleid* (Zutphen 1989). Leonard Blussé also deals briefly with the role of the Batavia women in: L. Blussé, *Bitters Bruid: een koloniaal huwelijksdrama in de gouden eeuw* (Amsterdam 1997).

too great. Elias also mentioned hearing rumors that he only married his wife for the substantial fortune left to her by her previous husband.²⁶⁹ There seems thus to have been a certain 'bandwidth' for social rise through marriage as, in this particular case, the effect of the marriage on the man involved was negative: he was seen by his peers and superiors as overstepping his boundaries. In many other cases, however, the effect will have been positive, as the new husband would have been able to forge new ties through his wife. For the women involved, the prospect of continued social status and the ability to continue trading activities may also have been important reasons for remarrying. This, however, is a topic for future research.

Another question that has not yet been addressed is the women's role in picking their new husbands. If insights from gender studies are to be fruitfully applied, the perspective of the women involved also needs to be taken into account. This is often difficult to do since most sources available were written by men. However, there are some remarks that can be made. When marrying a widow, a younger official had to take care to present himself in the best possible light as his prospective spouse was likely to be free to accept or decline his offer. This means that reputation, income and being good at one's job were likely to be important attributes for finding a good match. Widows such as Jacomina Roosegaard thus functioned as 'gatekeepers': their ability to select new husbands involved a process of weeding out drunk, incompetent and abusive candidates. The example of the marriage of Cornelia van Neijenroode to the inept and abusive Joan Bitter in 1676 shows the dire consequences of getting it wrong.²⁷⁰ This selection process also held true for Van Goens, who married Jacomina Roosegaard in 1640. She was three years his senior and the widow of Jan Lievensz., who had been a lieutenant in the army at Batavia.²⁷¹ The marriage facilitated Van Goens' entry into the social world around the High Government itself, as the baptismal records of the five children resulting from the marriage over the next six years show and as will be explored in the next section.

The old boys' network: Sweers, Van Vliet, Coyett and Caron

His marriage, in 1640, to Jacomina Roosegaard enabled Van Goens to gain access to a new network of support. This is apparent from the baptismal records of his children, as shown in Table 4. Standing witness to a child's baptism was a privilege reserved for close friends or family, and the witnesses thus reveal who was close to the Van Goenses, or whom the couple wished to be close to.²⁷² In their study of the selection of godparents in eighteenth-century Óbidos (Portugal), Joaquim Ramos de Carvalho and Ana Isabel Ribeiro use the term 'spiritual kinship', which they identify as '*a form of kinship that derives from the participation in certain sacraments*'.²⁷³ The most important of these sacraments was baptism and the election of godparents. The selection of godparents reveals both the aspirations of the parents and the stature of the elected godparents, as well as the ties that were not possible (because certain people were not chosen). Although there are as yet no similar studies for a Protestant Dutch setting, it seems useful to apply the term

²⁶⁹ NL-HaNA, 1.01.50, Stadhoudelijke Secretarie, inv. no. 1229, *Brief van de majoor van de artillerie op Ceilon, E. Paravicini de Capelli, aan zijn broer, B.E. Paravicini de Capelli, betreffende de bezwaren tegen zijn bevordering tot kolonel en de beschuldigingen tegen hem geuit door Gouverneur-Generaal en Raden van Indië, met bijlagen, afschriften. 1791*

²⁷⁰ The case of Cornelia van Neijenroode is perhaps the most famous Dutch divorce case of the seventeenth century. The story is told in: L. Blussé, *Bitters Bruid: Een koloniaal huwelijksdrama in de Gouden Eeuw* (Balans: Amsterdam 1997).

²⁷¹ Ottow, *Rijckeloff Volckertsz van Goens*, 38.

²⁷² *Ibidem*, 39.

²⁷³ J.R. de Carvalho and A.I. Ribeiro, 'Using Network Analysis on Parish Registers: How Spiritual Kinship Uncovers Social Structure', in: J.R. de Carvalho (ed.), *Bridging the Gaps: sources, methodology and approaches to religion in history* (Pisa University Press: Pisa 2008) 171-186, 172.

here. The selection of witnesses for the baptism of the Van Goens children thus reveals the aspired spiritual kinship that Van Goens tried to create between his children, himself and the witnesses.

Table 4: Witnesses to the baptism of Rijckloff van Goens' children, 1641-1646

Child	Date of baptism	Witness 1	Witness 2	Witness 3	Witness 4	Witness 5
Volckert (I)	June 30, 1641	Boyckes van Goens (abs.)	Jacob Leenderts	Pieter Mesdagh	Maria Strijd	Aeltje van de Camer
Rijckloff	June 19, 1642	Cornelis van der Lijn	Adriaen van Liesvelt	Jan de Waert	Adriana Mesdagh	Jolina Hillenius
Jacob	Sept. 13, 1643	Simon van Alphen	Gerrit van Harm	Boyckes van Goens (abs.)	Claesje Jacobs (abs.)	?
Volckert (II)	Oct. 30, 1644	Johannes de Stercke	Caterina Sweers	Gerrit Holliger	Petronella Woudenaer	?
Francoise	Oct. 11, 1646	Ds. V. Candidus	Susanna Boudaen	Johan Verpoorten	Juff. Horst	?

Source: NL-HaNA, Collectie van Goens, inv.no. 6, p. 3-4. (abs. = absentee witness)

There are a number of striking names in the baptismal records to show that Van Goens, who was not appointed chief merchant until October 1646, did indeed have access to the higher levels of Batavian society. Cornelis van der Lijn, for example, was a member of the Council of the Indies in 1641, became director-general a year later and governor-general in 1646-1650.²⁷⁴ In the council, Van der Lijn worked closely with Francois Caron, perhaps best known for his service in the French East India Company.²⁷⁵ Caron was married to Constantia Boudaen, whose sister, Susanna Boudaen, was a witness to the baptism of Van Goens' daughter Francoise in 1646. Susanna Boudaen herself was married to Frederick Coyett, best known today for being responsible for the surrender of Fort Zeelandia on Formosa (Taiwan) to the Chinese in 1662.²⁷⁶ In the 1640s, Coyett was a member of the Council of the Indies in Batavia. Although he was later sentenced to death for his role in the loss of Formosa, this sentence was commuted into life-long imprisonment at Banda. It is unsurprising that Van Goens argued for the release of Coyett in the 1670s. Catherina Sweers, who was a witness to the baptism of Volckert (II) in 1644, was the sister of Salomon Sweers, himself a powerful member of the Council, and married Jeremias van Vliet in 1642. Van Vliet had previously served in Siam and had three daughters with a local woman, Osoet Pegua.²⁷⁷ When Van Vliet left Siam in 1642 to marry Catherina Sweers and accept his new command in Malacca, Osoet Pegua refused to let their daughters go with him. This caused a year-

²⁷⁴ Stapel, *Gouverneurs-Generaal van Nederlandsch-Indië* (The Hague 1941) 25.

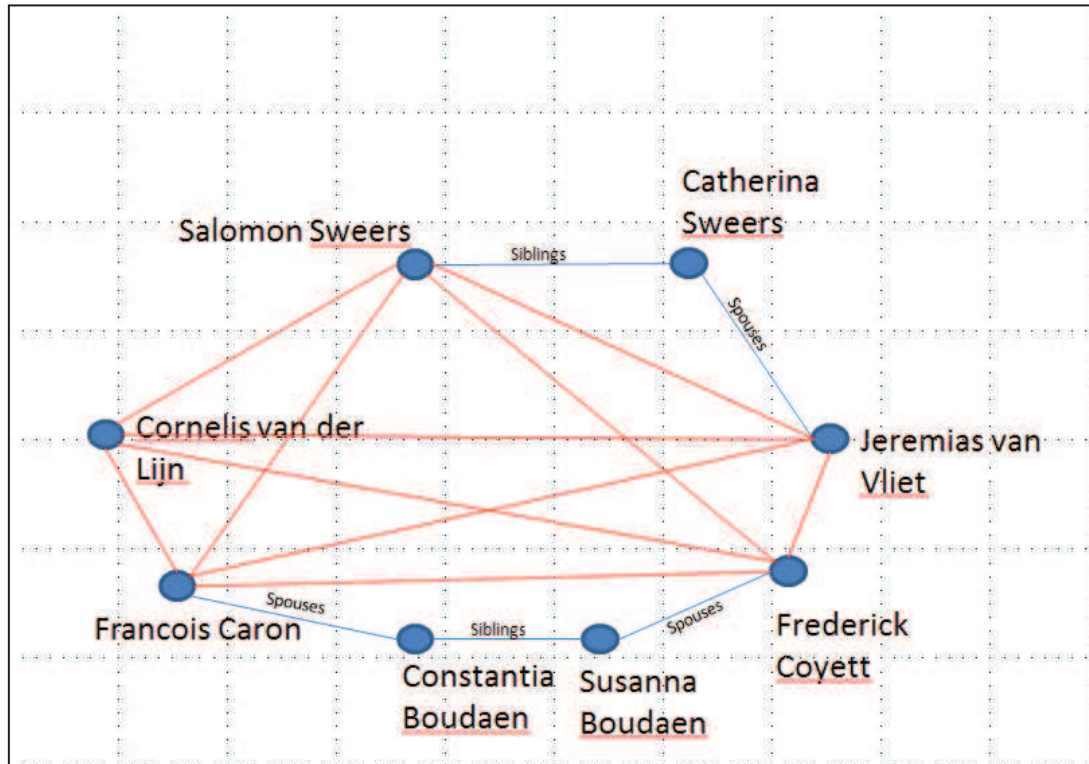
²⁷⁵ G.J. Ames, 'Colbert's Indian Ocean Strategy of 1664-1674: A Reappraisal', *French Historical Studies* 16:3 (Spring, 1990) 536-559, 540-541.

²⁷⁶ W.Ph Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, Deel II: 1639-1655* (Martinus Nijhoff: Den Haag 1964) 268.

²⁷⁷ C. Baker (ed.), *Van Vliet's Siam* (Silkworm: Chiang Mai 2005) 29-30.

long standoff between the former lovers. Since Osoet Pegua was well-connected at the Siamese court, there was little that Van Vliet could do. When Van Goens was in Siam in 1650, he proposed that the company should abduct the girls. The proposal was not acted upon, however, since the diplomatic repercussions would have been severe.²⁷⁸ Although Van Vliet was charged, in 1645, with illegal private trade and found guilty on all charges, he was allowed to maintain his position in the High Government and ultimately repatriated with full honors in 1646. It is likely that this mild treatment was the result of his close connections to the powerful Salomon Sweers, his brother-in-law.

Figure 6: Ties between Van Goens's baptism witnesses



Source: Erik Odegard, 2015. The collegial ties between individuals who served together in the Council of the Indies in the early 1640s are shown in red.

Salomon Sweers was one of the power-brokers within the High Government in the mid-1640s and, as will be made apparent, continued to play an important role outside the official VOC structure by maintaining correspondence with important VOC governors, including Van Goens himself, well into the 1670s. The personal archives of Sweers for this period have been preserved. Interestingly, these were the joint archives of Salomon Sweers, Jan van Vliet (son of Jeremias) and Jacques Specx (acting governor-general in 1629-1632 and the brother-in-law of Arent Gardenijs).²⁷⁹ These archives allow a reconstruction of the network of correspondents. This will be done in chapter seven as most of the material deals with the 1660s and 70s.

Salomon Sweers was forced to leave the company in 1646, after falling out with Cornelis van der Lijn, with whom he had been serving on the High Government. Old charges of private trade were brought up again after the two men got into a fight at a dinner at Sweers' house in

²⁷⁸ Ottow, *Rijckloff Volckertsz van Goens*, 110-111.

²⁷⁹ NL-HaNA, Sweers, 1.10.78, blok A, *Stukken van Salomon Sweers, Jeremias van Vliet en Jacques Specx*.

1645. The position of Sweers is interesting, however, as he clearly retained an acute insight into the company's affairs through his network of correspondents and was also closely involved in the plans for the French company in which Francois Caron became active.²⁸⁰

This, then, was the network of which Van Goens slowly became a part, as is apparent from his letters to Sweers in the years to the early 1670s. The fact that most of the men in this network were charged with private trade and forced to return to the Netherlands at some point makes the longevity of their networks within the company interesting in itself, and this, too, will be explored in chapter seven. But did these ties help Van Goens in this phase of his career? It is likely that they did as Van Goens was steadily promoted through the ranks. It is important to note the incremental nature of his steps on the ladder: only after Van Goens had proven his competence at one level, was he promoted to the next. This is entirely logical as it was not in his patrons' interests to promote him to a high level and run the risk that he would be unable to deliver. The reciprocity of the patron-client relationship is crucial. At this stage, Van der Lijn, whom Van Goens chose as a baptismal witness for his son in 1642, was especially significant. The important promotions that Van Goens was awarded in subsequent years, including his promotion to chief merchant in February 1646, and his appointment to inspect and overhaul the establishment in Siam in September 1650, were both signed by Van der Lijn, and indeed only by Van der Lijn.²⁸¹ Knowing the people who were responsible for advancement and promotions was likely to be a real advantage for getting these promotions. Van Goens' quick strides through the hierarchy, which were achieved despite official statutes banning promotions in the middle of service contracts, were thus in all likelihood due to his network of support within the High Government of the Indies.

Diplomatic missions and military command: career selling points?

By mid-1648, Van Goens was established as head of the trade loge of Jambi, the Sumatran pepper center. His career then took an important turn, when he was sent as the assistant of Sebalt Wonderer on a diplomatic mission to the court of Mataram, the largest and most powerful of the Javanese kingdoms neighboring Batavia. Van Goens aptly summarized the tenuous relationship between the VOC and Mataram: '*Anno 1648. May 26th, I was sent as the first ambassador to the Sousoubounan [king] of Mataram to sign a peace treaty with him. Mataram had always been our bitterest foe that was to be feared at Batavia.*'²⁸² Van Goens slightly inflated his own sense of self-importance here as he was not in fact the head of the mission, but only second-in-command. After this first mission in May 1648, Van Goens went to the court of Mataram no fewer than four times over the next six years. These missions shaped his reputation as an able diplomat and launched his career on a new trajectory, away from trade-oriented assignments and more towards diplomacy and warfare. This transition would prove significant as it gave Van Goens credibility later on and made it reasonable to entrust him with military command. By 1653, Van Goens has been assigned a temporary seat on the Council of the Indies (*raad extraordinaris*).²⁸³ The diplomatic missions in the late 1640s and early 1650s thus seem to have played a vital role in the development of

²⁸⁰ See the files on the French company in the Sweers papers: NL-HaNA, Sweers, 1.10.78, inv. no. 5, fol. 280-283, *Concept van project-artikelen tot oprichting van eene Fransche Compagnie van Oost-Indië met Hollandsche participatie. Ongedateerd*. The archive states it is the handwriting of Sweers himself. There are also papers on a new cooperative French-Dutch company in inv. no. 4.

²⁸¹ NL-HaNA, 1.10.32, Collectie Van Goens, inv. nos. 7 and 9.

²⁸² NL-HaNA, 1.10.32, Collectie Van Goens, inv. no. 6, unfoliated, p. 5.

²⁸³ Ottow, *Rijckloff van Goens*, 189.

Van Goens' career. These missions were important for another reason as well: the accounts of his missions to the Mataram court were published in the Netherlands under the title of *Javaense Reyse* (Javanese Travels) in 1656, and this work set many stereotypes that continued to haunt Dutch colonial perceptions of Java and the Javanese until the very end of the colonial empire in the East in the twentieth century. It is interesting that this manuscript had significant implications for future VOC policy in the East as Van Goens consciously tried to use his reputation as the 'Mataram-expert' to steer policy discussions in the Republic in a new direction.²⁸⁴ The diplomatic missions to Mataram themselves have already been studied quite extensively. Indeed, they are one of the most studied aspects of Van Goens' career. This section will therefore take a different approach and, rather than examining the missions themselves in any great detail, will contemplate the effect they had on Van Goens' career trajectory. Another important development to take into account here is the earliest military missions on which Van Goens was sent, firstly to cruise in the Sunda Straits to intercept ships from the Genoese East India Company, which the VOC considered interlopers, and, rather more spectacularly, to Ceylon and Goa in 1652-1653.²⁸⁵

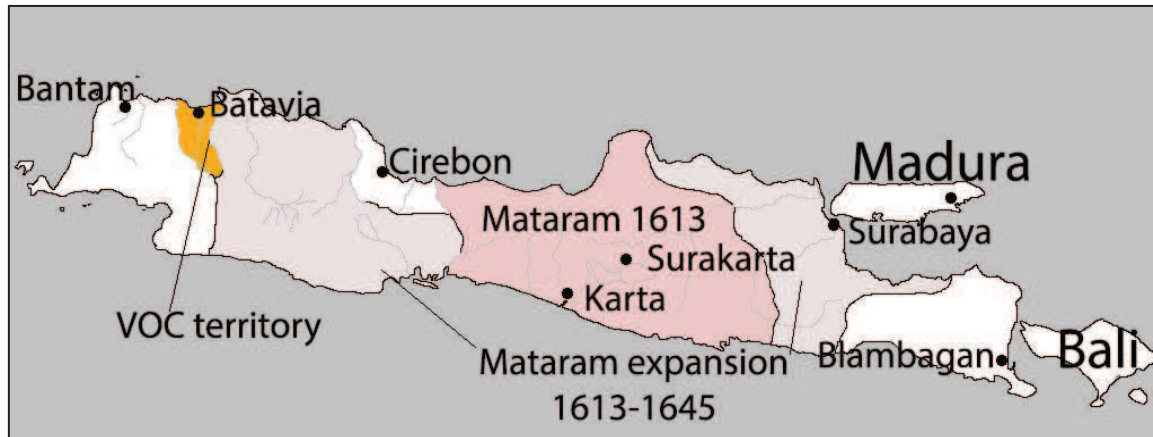
Diplomacy, along with trade and warfare, was one of the broad skillsets in which company officials needed to become experienced in order to advance to high command. Of course, an individual could rarely do all these things at once. In the case of Van Goens, there was a clear progression from trade (office jobs in Batavia) to diplomacy (Mataram) and then to warfare. The VOC and Mataram had signed a treaty in 1646, and this brittle peace had to be reinforced by sending an annual envoy to Mataram. Van Goens' skill as an ambassador strengthened his position, both in relation to the High Government and in relation to the XVII. This latter aspect will be examined in the next section. After these successful diplomatic missions, Van Goens was sent back to India for the first time since leaving the Coromandel Coast in the 1630s. His task was to inspect the VOC establishments on the west coast of India (Surat and Wingurla), as well as Ceylon. In addition, he was to attack Portuguese shipping near Goa.²⁸⁶ This mission was successfully completed, with five Portuguese galleons being destroyed on the roadsteads of Goa.²⁸⁷ It also gave Van Goens the first taste of Ceylon and would inform the opinions he voiced to the directors in the Republic in the mid-1650s.

²⁸⁴ R. van Goens and D. de Wever (ed.), *Javaense Reyse* (Amsterdam 1995) 119-120.

²⁸⁵ For the Genoese ships, see: Ottow, *Rijckloff Volckerts van Goens*, 88-98 and T.A. Kirk, *Genoa and the Sea: Policy and Power in an Early Modern Maritime Republic, 1559-1684* (Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 2005) 130.

²⁸⁶ J. Aalbers, *Rijcklof van Goens, Commissaris en veldoverste der oost indische compagnie, en zijn arbeidsveld 1653/54 en 1657/58* (Groningen 1916) 87-96.

²⁸⁷ Ottow, *Rijcklof van Goens*, 171-175.

Figure 7: Map of Java and the Kingdom of Mataram in the early 1640s

Erik Odegard, 2016. Political map of Java in the first half of the seventeenth century, showing the expansion of Mataram until 1645 and the borders of the VOC's lands around Batavia in that year.

Career consolidation in the Republic

The early phase of Van Goens' career culminated in his appointment to the commander of the homeward-bound fleet in 1654. In itself, commanding the homeward-bound fleet was an honorary position. Of greatest importance, however, was the fact that the commander of the fleet was expected to meet the XVII and deliver a report on the state of the company in Asia. This enabled Van Goens to develop personal relations with directors, thus becoming their client and a patron to others if he chose to return to Asia. Secondly, it allowed him to present his views on the condition of the company in Asia, and his personal views on how this could be improved. Van Goens' report on his diplomatic missions to Mataram has already been briefly mentioned. Darja de Wever argues that Van Goens was now able to present himself to the XVII as the expert on Mataram. This report, according to De Wever, was a way for Van Goens to argue that good relations with King Amangkurat I were no guarantee for profitable relations and that only extension of the company's force of arms would provide such a guarantee.²⁸⁸

The analysis published in the *Javaense Reyse* fits seamlessly with the report on the state of the company in Asia that Van Goens submitted to the company directors in September 1655.²⁸⁹ In this latter report, he presented the state of the company in the starkest terms, focusing on the wars the company was fighting and stressing the need for reinforcements and offensive actions. This line was perhaps most clearly laid out in the case of Ceylon, where Van Goens remarked '... *That I am of the opinion that with God's help it is possible to beat the Portuguese off of the island in two years, if only a thousand soldiers are added to those already there.*'²⁹⁰ This was to become a theme for Van Goens in the coming years as, after returning to Asia in 1657, he continued to hark on about the need for conquests and offensive action, with Ceylon becoming ever more important in his vision for the VOC in Asia and ultimately more important even than Batavia, at least in his imagination. After the final conquest of Ceylon in 1658, he moved his sights to Malabar and the Coromandel Coast, as will be further explored in chapters seven and nine.

²⁸⁸ D. de Wever, 'Ambassades aen den Sousouhouunan Mattaram, machtigste coninck van 't eijlant Groot Java', *De VOC-gezantschapsreizen van Rijklof van Goens en zijn voorgangers*, *Indische Letteren* 11 (Alphen aan den Rijn 1996) 31-43, 41.

²⁸⁹ P.A. van Leupe, 'Rapport Van Goens', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië*, 4^{de} Deel, 1^{ste}/2^{de} Afl. (1855) 141-180.

²⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, 149.

There was also another reason why visiting the Republic was useful: it allowed for making personal contacts with the directors themselves. In subsequent years, criticism of Van Goens' policies on Ceylon, as voiced by 'Batavia', often fell on deaf ears as the directors were positively disposed towards him. This is likely a result of his talking to the directors themselves. Although the ties forged during this occasion are somewhat difficult to trace, Van Goens' personal memoir provides some clues. He mentions that Cornelis Weylandt in Amsterdam would take care of his children, who remained in the Netherlands when Van Goens left to return to Asia in 1657.²⁹¹ Weylandt was the former chief of the Surat establishment, having journeyed to the Mughal court in 1642. He remained active in the VOC's Amsterdam chamber²⁹² and proved to be a reliable correspondent in Amsterdam in the subsequent years. The first request for Van Goens to return to Asia came from the Zeeland chamber, but the Amsterdam directors then joined in, too.

Yet another important reason for visiting the Netherlands was money. Van Goens was allowed to transfer a small fortune of 100,000 guilders to his account in the Netherlands. As this amount of money was enough to set him up for life, his decision to rejoin the VOC was not inspired by want or lack of money.²⁹³ This fortune also indicates that Van Goens himself had dabbled in private trade, which was nominally forbidden to VOC servants. In order to grasp the magnitude of this sum: as first merchant in the castle in Batavia, to which he had been appointed in March 1651, he earned 2200 guilders a year. At that rate of income, acquiring 100,000 guilders would have taken him over forty-five years, assuming that no money at all was spent. Although Van Goens clearly must have profited from various deals and trades, there is no clear evidence as to what these were – which is testimony to his skill in conducting them, if nothing more. Despite this handsome nest egg, Van Goens returned to Asia in 1657 at the head of fleet and army and with the aim of completing the conquest of Ceylon, which was then entering its final phase after the successful, albeit costly siege of Colombo. The second half of Van Goens' career was thus dominated to a much greater extent than before by warfare and conquest, and these issues will be taken up again in chapters five and seven.

Conclusion and comparison

This chapter has examined the early phase of Rijckloff van Goens' career in Asia until his return to the Dutch Republic in the mid-1650s. The main question examined, namely how Van Goens was able to achieve such a successful career from quite humble beginnings, is relevant for a number of reasons. In the first place, the trajectory that Van Goens enjoyed in his early career, and especially the networks that he became part of, exerted a significant influence on his later actions and views, both on Ceylon in the 1650s to the 1670s, and in Batavia in 1675-1681. This, in turn, is important because it was largely the actions and choices of Van Goens that would determine the policies of the VOC and its posture in South Asia over the next century or more, as will be argued in chapters seven and nine. Up until the end of the war with Kandy in 1766, VOC officials on Ceylon labored in the shadow of Van Goens. It is thus worthwhile contemplating whether there was something like 'career path dependency', whereby earlier choices and previously formed opinions to a large extent determined actions and responses in

²⁹¹ NL-HaNA, 1.10.32, Van Goens, inv. no. 6, unfoliated, p. 8.

²⁹² A.J. Bernet Kempers, 'Een Hollandsch gezantschap naar den Groot-Mogol in 1662', *De Gids* 100 (1936) 215-231, 221.

²⁹³ The capital of Van Goens sr. is estimated to have been 500,000 guilders: K. Zandvliet, C. Lesger and R. Paulien (eds.), *De 250 rijksten van de Gouden Eeuw* (Rijksmuseum: Amsterdam 2006) 85. Ottow, *Rijckloff van Goens, Carriere van een diplomaat*, 198-199.

later career settings and new circumstances. This seems relevant in the case of Van Goens, who formed his views on the stance to be adopted by the VOC against local kingdoms during his missions to Mataram and Siam in the 1640s and 1650s. The report delivered by Van Goens to the XVII in 1655 can also be seen in the light of these experiences and, as will be argued in the chapters dealing with the Ceylonese period, the views that Van Goens formed of Mataram aligned very well with the views on Kandy and the Malabar kingdoms that he voiced in subsequent decades. Van Goens' early career is thus crucial to understanding the later policies pursued during his tenure in South Asia.

In the second place, Van Goens' early career is a relevant study because it sheds light on the social interactions within the VOC elite in Batavia in the 1640s and 1650s. Although the networks in Batavia have been addressed in various biographies, their role has not been clearly conceptualized. This chapter has shown that these networks were indeed crucial for career advancement, and this point would be well worth developing in future research. In addition, the existing literature often views the High Government from too great a distance, as it was viewed by company directors in the Netherlands. This bias towards the Dutch side of operations precludes a sufficient understanding of the way in which the company in Asia actually operated. To the members of the High Government, personal and familial gain took precedence over questions of company profitability, efficiency or directors' concerns about corruption. This fundamental disconnect needs, however, to be understood if the operations of the company are to be made sense of. For the VOC servants in the East, their social world of inter-company relations was of the greatest importance as this allowed them to enrich themselves and to get away with it. This chapter has shown that all the higher officials with whom Van Goens became entangled were charged with breaking company statutes on private trade on one or more occasions during their careers. Indeed, Van Goens himself had to answer questions on his conduct during his inspection of Surat in the 1650s. Viewing these actions, from the Dutch perspective, as infringements of the company's monopolistic privileges and, therefore, as 'corruption' would, however, be counter-productive. In the patrimonial system that was the VOC, individuals could very well simultaneously serve both the company and themselves. Indeed, knowing the unwritten boundaries in this world was probably an important skill to be mastered for future advancement.

Comparing the early career of Van Goens with the procedure for appointing Johan Maurits, as discussed in chapter four, it is obviously the differences that catch our attention first. Rather than looking at one event, this chapter has discussed Van Goens' career over a protracted period of time. Unlike Johan Maurits, Van Goens had to start at the bottom of the ladder and work his way up. Johan Maurits came from a background of high nobility, with natural contacts to some of the most powerful individuals in the Republic, including the stadholder himself, but also the latter's influential secretary, Constantijn Huygens. Van Goens, on the other hand, had no contacts with the VOC directors or the elite in the Republic during the early phase of his career and could not rely on his Dutch contacts for support.

Looking into these differences in more detail allows some interesting comparisons to be made. Firstly, the early career of Van Goens in the Indies puts the radical choice of the WIC directors to seek a complete outsider into sharper focus. Van Goens was prepared for high offices in the VOC through the diversity of his assignments in his early years as a merchant, diplomat and soldier. Moreover, he was but one of a whole generation of men who grew up in the company's service and whose first recommendation for higher office within the company,

and accession to the networks that would make upward social mobility possible, was their prior experience.

The WIC chose an outsider to lead its most important colony, based on his connections in the Republic and his performance in one siege. This contrasted with the VOC, which did not appoint governor-generals directly from the Netherlands, but always from the members of the Council of the Indies. Men, in other words, who had gained invaluable experience in running the company's then rapidly expanding empire in Asia, as well as becoming integrated in the networks that bound the company's servants together. The VOC was thus able to use the networks within the company in Asia to scout for talent, with the selection of its high officials consequently being less inspired by the political and patrimonial realities of the Netherlands. Being 'parachuted' into Brazil meant a steep learning curve for Johan Maurits, and we can hypothesize whether appointing a nobleman-outsider to the company's highest colonial office did not also communicate to its mid-ranking and assorted high officers overseas that there were ranks that were effectively out of their reach, thus possibly aggravating problems with embezzlement and graft.

The mechanisms by which the two men were able to gain backing in the early periods of their careers were also quite different. In the case of Van Goens, the conscious construction of familial ties through marriage and baptism was, I have argued, of the greatest importance. What is striking in the case of Johan Maurits is that he *did not marry*. This is less surprising, however, when we consider that he came equipped, at birth, with a fully-fledged set of powerful familial ties. Put rather mechanically, therefore, there was less need for him to marry. Having built his career in the Indies, Van Goens returned to the Netherlands in 1654. This was a very significant move as it brought him into direct contact with the company directors, with whom he was able to forge both personal and professional ties. The comparison between the two men will thus be more balanced in the following chapters as I can now compare their networks across the full spectrum of directors, colonial colleagues and rivals, local society, opponents and local states.