



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

**Colonial careers : Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen, Rijckloff Volckertsz. van Goens and career-making in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Empire**  
Odegard, E.L.L.

**Citation**

Odegard, E. L. L. (2018, January 18). *Colonial careers : Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen, Rijckloff Volckertsz. van Goens and career-making in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Empire*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/59468>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/59468>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/59468> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation

**Author:** Odegard, Erik

**Title:** Colonial careers : Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen, Rijckloff Volckertsz. van Goens and career-making in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Empire

Date: 2018-01-18

## 5. Ceylon: Trade or Territory?

*Van Goens and Ceylon as a challenge to Batavia's dominance, 1655-1670*

In 1655-1656 Van Goens briefly returned in the Netherlands for the first time in twenty-seven years. Using his previous experience as a diplomat, merchant and soldier, he was able to convince the VOC directors to change course towards a more aggressive expansionist policy in South Asia. By 1656 he was set to return to Asia at the head of a large fleet, with the aim of finally ejecting the Portuguese from Ceylon, Malabar and, if at all possible, Diu. This proved to be the start of an entanglement with Ceylon that would last until 1675, when he returned to Batavia. Ceylon captivated Van Goens and, even in Batavia, the major debates centered on what place the island should take in the VOC's now sizable Asian domains, and what the official policy should be in relation to the interior kingdom of Kandy. This chapter will focus on the first fifteen years of this period, 1655-1670, when Van Goens was to a large extent able to dictate the VOC's policies on Ceylon and Southern India. While on Ceylon, Van Goens faced three questions: how should the VOC rule its parts of the island? What should be the relationship between the Ceylon government and the surrounding polities, both on Ceylon with Kandy, as well as with the neighboring states in Southern India? Thirdly, how should Ceylon relate to the neighboring VOC commands of Surat, Vengurla, Coromandel and Bengal? Van Goens came up with answers to all these questions and attempted to put them into practice, thus shaping the VOC's posture in the area for the next century and more. This chapter will address the central questions of *why* and *how* Van Goens was able to so decisively shape policy on Ceylon. Throughout the 1660s, Van Goens became the VOC's 'Mr. Ceylon' and was largely successful in transforming it into a sphere of its own, the center for the company's activities in South Asia and to a large degree removed from Batavia's control. This also had its effects on Van Goens himself, who became increasingly obsessed with the island and the company's prospects there, regarding it as a potential 'second fatherland' and naming his daughter (born in 1668 in Colombo – a city, incidentally, which was rebuilt under his direction) Esther *Ceylonia* van Goens. As well as the effects on Van Goens personally, this growing obsession with Ceylon also affected the way that we as historians can study him. Over time, Van Goens came to present the island's future prospects in ever more glowing terms – if only his policies were to be followed, that is. Reports were more and more edited to convince his audience (the directors), while the veracity of reports' contents became ever more questionable. This worked for as long as Van Goens' predictions came true or were at least feasible; in the event, however, of a major crisis, this web of deception could crumble, leaving Van Goens dangerously exposed. This is the theme that binds this chapter and chapter seven together. While this chapter will focus on the 'construction of Ceylon' – in other words, on the military, administrative and commercial regulations and strategies that were enacted by the VOC, and the way in which Van Goens' personal life became entangled with it, both from a family perspective and in terms of patronage relations – chapter seven, by contrast, will focus on information control, which lay at the heart of Van Goens' ability to shape policy, and how this control started to deteriorate from 1670 onwards.

Van Goens' tenure on Ceylon is unique within the VOC's history as it is the clearest example of a regional governor breaking free from the tutelage of Batavia. The VOC's stated policy was to shift its highest commanders regularly from one assignment to the next. This prevented them from becoming too deeply embedded in their local surroundings and, of course,

served to affirm the centrality of Batavia. This was in marked contrast to, for example, the administrative structure of the East India Company (EIC) with its two, later three, competing 'presidencies'. Julia Adams has argued that the divided nature of the EIC's administration ultimately worked to its advantage as personnel stayed within their presidencies, and these presidencies checked on each other jealously. According to her argument, Batavia's centrality ultimately proved disadvantageous to the VOC as it meant that a close familial circle of connected governors and councils covered and increasingly enriched each other at the expense of the VOC.<sup>387</sup> The only challenge to Batavia's centrality was the Ceylon government under Van Goens. The most elaborate study of a period of this tenure on Ceylon is W.M. Ottow's book on the period 1655-1662. This proved a valuable tool for finding important letters in the archives as Ottow made a very comprehensive study of the official letters sent during this period.<sup>388</sup> As the subtitle of Ottow's work suggests, it is primarily an archive study, and does not offer much in the way of analysis. This chapter will make grateful use of the archival work of Dr. Ottow, while also adding some of its own and providing an analytical framework for interpreting the data. In the light of the way Van Goens' career developed in this period, and how his name and Ceylon became nearly synonymous in VOC circles, it is fair to ask whether this was the result of a conscious strategy on his part. On this question, the available literature is divided. Arasaratnam and Goonewardena present Van Goens as a staunch opponent of Raja Singha, with his actions seen as part of a conscious strategy from the outset.<sup>389</sup> In Ottow's work on the period 1655-1662, however, Van Goens is presented as perhaps the archetypical, faithful company man: Calvinist, unyielding to those who broke the rules, and attempting to further the interests of the company at every turn.<sup>390</sup> In Ottow's view, the conflict between Van Goens and Van der Meijden (see below) was the result of a clash of personalities, rather than a conscious strategy by Van Goens to undermine the latter and to seize the governorship of Ceylon for himself. This is interesting as Ottow's earlier study hinted at the lucrative private trades Van Goens must have engaged in to amass his considerable fortune.<sup>391</sup> This chapter will argue that Van Goens developed his ideas for the potential role of Ceylon in the VOC's system, and his own position on Ceylon, gradually. His early attempts to cede Jaffna to the Coromandel government seem to indicate that he did not have his extremely ambitious vision for the Ceylon government's role as an alternative power base for the VOC in Asia from the outset. Yet, by 1662, Van Goens had become both enthralled with the island itself, as well as with the opportunities it offered him to advance causes close to his heart such as proselytization of the Calvinist faith and the creation of a Dutch colony, as well as his private fortune. By the end of the period under review, Van Goens had become *the* face of an ambitious, imperial Ceylon policy, and a potent threat to the power of Batavia.

In seeking to make sense of this unique period, this chapter is divided into four sections. First, Van Goens' journey to the Netherlands in 1655-1656 will be detailed. How did he convince

---

<sup>387</sup> J. Adams, 'Principals and Agents, Colonialists and Company Men: The Decay of Colonial Control in the Dutch East Indies', *American Sociological Review* 61:1 (1996) 12-28, 19-25.

<sup>388</sup> W.M. Ottow, *Rijckloff Volckertsz. van Goens, Krijgsman, Commissaris en Regent, Dienaar der V.O.C.: Archiefstudie over het Europees verlot (1655-57) en de eerste grote Ceylon-periode (1657-62): omslagjaren voor de man die van jongs af aan in V.O.C.-verband prachtig carrière maakte, maar het later bitter moeilijk kreeg* (2nd revised edition, published by author, 1996).

<sup>389</sup> The two works of Goonewardena and Arasaratnam complement each other and, though old, still present the most complete picture of the early years of the Ceylon government: K.W. Goonewardena, *The foundation of Dutch power in Ceylon 1638-1658* (Djambatan: Amsterdam 1958) and S. Arasaratnam, *Dutch power in Ceylon, 1658-1687* (Djambatan: Amsterdam 1958).

<sup>390</sup> Ottow, *Rijckloff Volckertsz. van Goens: Krijgsman Commissaris en Regent*, 259-260.

<sup>391</sup> Ottow, *Rijckloff Volckertsz. van Goens: De carrière van een diplomaat*, 289-299.

the XVII to put him in charge of the military operations in South Asia? What were the intended goals, and what means were put at his disposal? How did he forge ties with directors and other important individuals in the Republic, and was he helped in this by the networks within the VOC's Asian branch that he had built up over the previous quarter-century? Lastly, this section will briefly explore the position of the VOC in South Asia and Ceylon, especially in 1655, when Van Goens submitted his report.

The second section will detail the conquest of the final Portuguese strongholds on Ceylon, and the related offensive on the Malabar Coast that lasted until 1663. Besides the military operations themselves, this section will focus on the professional rivalry between Van Goens, the *superintendent en veldoverste* (commander-in-chief) of the VOC's Western commands, and the governor of Ceylon, Adriaan van der Meijden. The two men clashed repeatedly over policy, and Van Goens was increasingly able to subvert the office of governor to his superintendence. This led Van Goens to formally take up the position of governor of Ceylon in 1662, a position that he would hold, with a short intermission in 1664-65, for the next thirteen years.

The third section discusses the policies that Van Goens advocated in relation to Ceylon, both as *superintendent* and as governor. This section will argue that Van Goens' ideas developed throughout the late 1650s and early 1660s and that it was not until the mid-1660s that they were finalized. Although Van Goens was, in the end, firmly in favor of absolute conquest of the island, he had a keen eye for the administrative practices that could be made to serve the VOC's administration. The office of the *dessave*, a local provincial governor, which was adopted from Portuguese and pre-colonial administrative practices, is a good example of this.

A discussion of policy and administration automatically leads to the fourth section, and to the question of who would occupy these positions. And this is where Van Goens' centrality in a new network of Ceylonese servants came into play. By linking himself to the VOC elites in Coromandel, Bengal and Surat, Van Goens created a network of support in the region, with the result that he was free to play the part of the powerful patron for those wanting to hold one or more of the many positions in the new administration. These included Van Goens' son, Rijckloff junior, who arrived in Ceylon in 1658, was promoted to assistant merchant in 1662 and appointed to the important position of *dessave* of the *dessavonie* of Colombo in 1665. These connections and networks are discernable thanks not only to the official VOC papers, but also – again – to the wealth of information stored in the correspondence books of the Sweers Collection in the National Archive. These sources make it possible to gain insight into how such a network of patronage and family connections operated and to populate this with real individuals rather than merely names on paper. Lastly, this chapter will conclude by briefly recapitulating the major points and underlining how these will again play a role in chapter seven.

### **Persuading the directors: Van Goens in the Republic, 1655-1656**

Rijckloff van Goens returned from his inspection of the Western Quarters in Batavia in summer 1654. He was sent on a final diplomatic mission to the Court of Mataram in August that year and then requested to be repatriated to the Republic. The term 'repatriated' is somewhat ironic as Van Goens had never lived in the Netherlands on a permanent basis. His request was granted, however, and he left for the Netherlands on January 28, 1655 in the honorable position of commander of the homeward-bound fleet.<sup>392</sup> VOC ships on the intercontinental trips always

---

<sup>392</sup> Van Leupe, 'Rijckloff Volckertsz. van Goens: buitengewoon raad van Indië', 304.

sailed in convoys. The function of commander of the homeward-bound fleet was a largely honorary position and a way of showing appreciation for services rendered. Returning commanders were rewarded, upon their safe return, with gifts such as silver or gold chains, commemorative medallions or goblets, or money. Van Goens, for example, received a sum of 600 guilders or a gold chain worth that amount.<sup>393</sup> There was another perk of being named commander of the fleet: the returning commander received a ‘debriefing’ from the delegated directors of the XVII. In return, the commander was expected to present the directors with an overview of the state of the company in Asia and give advice on policy. In this capacity, he was supposed to speak on behalf of the High Government of the Indies,<sup>394</sup> with his report also being submitted to the States-General. This allowed Van Goens a platform to present his views directly to the directors. Van Goens’ report (*vertooch*) is interesting in several ways. In the first place, it is much more argumentative than other reports of the same nature. Mattheus van den Broecke’s report of 1670, for example, merely gives a description of the state of the various VOC governments.<sup>395</sup> Although Van Goens also gave a description of the state of all the VOC governments, he tied this description to a central analysis and recommended policy options based on this analysis. In the *vertooch*, filed in Amsterdam in September 1655, Van Goens would pay by far most attention to the Western Quarters of the company, India and Ceylon, where the war with Portugal was being waged. Coromandel especially received much attention, with its description alone covering nearly twelve pages in the transcription made by P.A. Leupe in the nineteenth century. The description of the situation on Ceylon, though short at just one page, is particularly ominous in light of Van Goens’ later career:

*It is to be regretted that the honorable Company has not been able to drive the Portuguese from the island, from which it would have profited exceptionally, for it would have allowed Your Honors to occupy these lands with fewer costs and more advantage in the future.*<sup>396</sup>

The need for more aggressive military action to ward off competitors, to defeat the Portuguese and to restore the company’s stature in Asia formed a recurrent theme throughout the *vertooch*. Van Goens argued that the company had previously fought too half-heartedly on too many fronts at the same time. Immediate reinforcements were, therefore, needed to expel the Portuguese from Ceylon and to end the war there once and for all. Short-term investments would result, he claimed, in long-term returns. In the West of India, Diu should be taken from the *Estado*. War was also needed, in Van Goens’ eyes, on the Coromandel Coast against Golconda to restore the company’s honor and instill due respect. Here, too, there were forebodings of ideas to come as Van Goens mentioned that personnel in Coromandel could well be evacuated to Ceylon, thus making that island a safe redoubt of the VOC in South Asia. At Malacca, intervention was needed to instill proper respect for the company’s exclusive privileges and to move the tin trade to there. Further east, meanwhile, the war with Macassar was proving a steady drain on the

<sup>393</sup> P. van Dam and F.W. Stapel, *Beschryvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie, eerste boek, deel II* (Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague 1929) 321-322.

<sup>394</sup> P.A. Leupe, ‘Rapport van Goens’, *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië* 4:1/2 (1885) 141-180, 141. ‘representeerende de suprioren en Hoogste overheijt’.

<sup>395</sup> NL-HaNa, States-General, 1.01.02, 12564.48, Rapport van den heer Mattheus van den Broecke.

<sup>396</sup> Leupe, ‘Rapport van Van Goens’, 149. ‘Te beclagen zijnde dat d’ E. Compe. niet heeft connen gelegen comen, den Portugees van dat eijlant te verdrijven, daaraan deselve sonderlinge soude geprofitteert hebben, om die landen voortaan nae UEd. concept met minder onkosten ende meerder voordeel te mogen besitten.’



company's resources, and the need to keep the Macassarese incursions into Ambon in check had consumed all the reinforcements that had been sent over from the Netherlands during the war with England. Had these forces been free to be deployed on Ceylon and in India, great successes would have been gained. A quick resolution with Macassar was, therefore, necessary, and the company could try to stem its advance by concluding more treaties with other local kingdoms and by restricting the trade in rice to the great port. All-out warfare with Macassar was not an amenable prospect as *'we will have to kill many thousands ere he [the King of Macassar] will yield on that account, having a land so full of people that they well may be compared to ants.'* In his review, Van Goens thus noted that merely maintaining the status quo was not in the VOC's interests. Peace in the East would facilitate a major war effort in the West, where, on Ceylon and the opposite coast of Madurai, the company could conquer prosperous territories. Control of Diu would effectively beat the Portuguese and give the VOC access to a large income in the form of the Diu tolls. Now was the time, therefore, to invest in extra soldiers and fleets, and Van Goens hinted that he was open to being sent back to Asia at their head. Well aware that this was perhaps not what the directors expected, Van Goens noted *'I have, in this report on the Company's State, perhaps voiced my opinion somewhat boldly and bluntly, which in conclusion. I request and hope will be tolerated.'*<sup>397</sup> This hope was apparently fulfilled as Van Goens was selected in 1656 to command a force of thirteen ships, of which nine were large warships – some of which had been purpose-built as warships during the recent war with England.<sup>398</sup>

The *vertooch* of Van Goens and his visit to the Netherlands fit into a recognizable pattern within the VOC. The most famous example of a similar type of document is, of course, Jan Pietersz. Coen's *Discours*, written when he was head of the VOC's factory at Bantam in 1613 and submitted on January 1, 1614.<sup>399</sup> Like Coen, Van Goens addressed the directors directly and proposed important changes in strategy. Coen's *Discours* is perhaps exceptional for its clear style and catchy one-liners, a style that Van Goens lacked. Possibly, Van Goens had read the earlier document because his admonition *'that I have never spared my enemies'*<sup>400</sup> (by which he meant the enemies of the company) echoes what is perhaps Coen's most famous line: *'But do not despair, do not spare your enemies, for God is with us.'*<sup>401</sup> On the other hand, returning to the Netherlands to create a possible platform for future advancement was a strategy commonly employed by VOC servants in the first half of the seventeenth century. Coen had employed it in-between his two stints as governor-general. Among lower ranks, too, it was a common practice: Antonio van Diemen, for example, was director-general in Batavia before returning at the head of the homeward-bound fleet in 1631. After returning to Batavia in 1632, he was restored to his former office and became governor-general in 1636.<sup>402</sup> Francois Caron, who is best known for his long tenure in Japan, also enjoyed a brief Dutch interlude in 1642-1643. Carel Reyniersz. was governor of the Coromandel Coast and counselor-extraordinary of the Council of the Indies in 1636-1638, after which he

<sup>397</sup> Ibidem, 179: *'Ick hebbe in dit vertoogh van 's Comp.s. Staet apparent omtrent UEd. wat stoutelijck ende rondelijck mijn meeninge uijtgedruet, 't welck ick tot besluitj andermael versoecke mach geduijt werden'.*

<sup>398</sup> Aalbers, *Rijckloff van Goens: Commissaris en veldoverste*, 120. E. Odegard, 'The sixth admiralty: The Dutch East India Company and the military revolution at sea, c. 1639-1667', *International Journal of Maritime History* 26:4 (2014) 669-684, 679, 684.

<sup>399</sup> For the *Discours*, see: J. van Goor, *Jan Pieterszoon Coen, 1587-1629: Koopman-Koning in Azië* (Amsterdam 2015) 151-184.

<sup>400</sup> Leupe, 'Rapport van Goens', 180.

<sup>401</sup> H.T. Colenbrander, *Jan Pietersz. Coen: Levensbeschrijving* (Nijhoff: The Hague 1934) 148.

<sup>402</sup> W.M. Witteveen, *Antonio van Diemen: De opkomst van de VOC in Azië* (Pallas, Amsterdam University Press: Amsterdam 2011) 127-135.

returned to the Netherlands at the head of the homeward-bound fleet. He returned to the East in 1645, having lost much of his fortune as a merchant in Amsterdam. Although he became governor-general in 1650, he was fired by the XVII when he requested to be repatriated for health reasons. He was succeeded by Joan Maetsuijcker, who then held the position for the next twenty-five years until he died and was succeeded by Rijckloff van Goens.<sup>403</sup> The pattern of Dutch intermezzos still held in the eighteenth century: Gustaaf Willem, Baron van Imhoff, the most famous eighteenth-century governor-general, was sent to the Netherlands in 1741-42 before returning to Batavia as governor-general in 1743.<sup>404</sup> These are just some examples to show that a brief European interlude was not unusual, and perhaps even the norm, in the careers of the most successful VOC servants in Asia in the first half of the seventeenth century. But why was this the case?

A stay in the Netherlands not only provided an opportunity to debate policy, but also served to connect, or reconnect, with the directors on a more personal level and so build a network of support in the Republic. For the directors, meanwhile, it could prove advantageous to forge close connections with high-ranking VOC personnel. The problem of long distances and information control by agents in Europe made it vital to bind high VOC servants to the interests of the directors. These links could be forged during a stay in Europe, as the case of Van Goens makes clear. Being able to present his ideas in person to the directors enabled Van Goens to portray himself as an expert policy-maker and company servant far more effectively than letters ever could. Van Goens delivered his report in September 1655 and, by April of the next year, was requested by the directors to come to the meeting in Middelburg to explain his ideas further. At this meeting, and a subsequent one in Amsterdam, Van Goens was asked to return to Asia: *'I was cordially requested by directors of Middelburg in Zeeland and later at Amsterdam as well, to once again serve the Company. Contemplating all that the Lord had granted me had come to me in the service of the honorable Company, I found myself obligated to do so, as the service to the fatherland and the welfare of my family seemed to invite me to do so. All the more as the friendly and cordial affection of the directors seemed to invite me to it. So I enlisted once again in God's name in my former capacity of counselor-extraordinary, with the stipulation that I would be preferred over all others for the first vacant ordinary council's seat.'*<sup>405</sup> Upon his departure in November, Van Goens was accompanied by his wife and his eldest son, Rijckloff junior, who was enlisted in the capacity of a junior merchant. His younger son, Volckert, remained in the Netherlands to continue his education and was placed in the house of his father's friend, Cornelis Weylandt, a former VOC official at Surat who had served as the head of the loge at Agra in 1640. This pattern was replicated later, when Van Goens put his second wife's daughter in a house with other contacts in Amsterdam. All in all, Van Goens' stay in the Netherlands in 1655-56 was important as it provided him with a platform to articulate his ideas and helped him build personal ties to the directors. These would come in good use later on; as his relationship with Batavia became ever more antagonistic during the 1660s, Van Goens could always count on the support of the directors.

---

<sup>403</sup> F.W. Stapel, *De Gouverneurs-Generaal van Nederlandsch-Indië in beeld en woord* (Van Stockum: The Hague 1941) 26-27.

<sup>404</sup> *Ibidem*, 58-59.

<sup>405</sup> NL-HaNA, Van Goens, 1.10.31, inv. no. 6.



Figure 13: Map of the VOC's presence in South Asia, ca. 1663



Source: Erik Odegard 2015.

### Conquest and control

Leaving in November 1656 at the head of what became known as the ‘Christmas fleet’ Van Goens sailed first for the Cape and from there to Batavia. At Batavia, the reinforcements that had come over with Van Goens were disembarked and a new squadron prepared to sail west. This squadron under Van Goens met the squadron under Adriaen Roothaes, which had left Batavia in August 1657. Roothaes had a combined force of nine ships, with a total of 914 men and 307 cannon, while Van Goens left Batavia a month later with three ‘yachts’, one ship (by which was meant a normal East-Indiaman), a galliot and two fluyts bound for Surat and Persia.<sup>406</sup> After Van Goens joined Roothaes’ fleet on the blockading station at Goa, it was decided not to strike at Diu because the Portuguese had been forewarned, but instead to reinforce the VOC’s position

<sup>406</sup> Aalbers, *Rijkloff van Goens: Commissaris en veldoverste*, 122-125.

on Ceylon. First, Tuticorin, on the Madurai Coast opposite Ceylon, south of the Adams Bridge, was taken. Van Goens then led the conquest to the north, taking Mannar, Jaffna and Negapatnam in rapid succession between February and July 1658.<sup>407</sup> This settled Van Goens' reputation as an able leader and increased his status with the directors. After the fall of Negapatnam, the war moved west again, to the Malabar Coast. The Portuguese strongholds of Quilon (Coylan), Cochin, Cranganore and Cannanore needed to be taken, according to the High Government, to secure the VOC's position on Ceylon. While Quilon was indeed taken in December 1658, Governor Van der Meijden evacuated it later that year, to the dismay of Van Goens. The loss of Quilon was the final straw in a slow-burning conflict between the two men. For several months, Van Goens had been collecting information on the poor performance of Van der Meijden and then initiated a process that saw the latter recalled to Batavia to account for his actions.

### **Becoming governor: undermining Van der Meijden**

The appointment of Van Goens to the position of *commissaris en veldoverste* in the South Asian commands was imposed on the existing VOC hierarchy in the region. As commander-in-chief, Van Goens stood above the local governors and commanders in Ceylon, the Coromandel Coast, Malabar and Surat – but with a carefully-delimited mission. Van Goens was made responsible for the conduct of the war on a strategic level, although as field-commander he was occasionally also responsible on a tactical level. In addition, as part of his role of *commissaris*, Van Goens had to inspect the existing commands, weed out illegal private trade and make sure local officials were working for the company's benefit, rather than for their own profit. In short, Van Goens' mission was also an attempted solution for a severe principal-agent problem. Tales of untrammelled private trade are rampant in the biographies of VOC servants in all areas of Asia in the first half of the seventeenth century. Chapter three makes this point for the members of the High Government with whom Van Goens worked in the 1640s and 1650s, and many of whom were sent home after being charged with illegal personal enrichment. The same holds true for the lower echelons of dignitaries in the Western Quarters. The VOC-controlled areas on Ceylon were ruled by *landvoogd* (later governor) Adriaan van der Meijden. He had worked with the former commander-in-chief on Ceylon, Gerard Hulft. After Hulft died during the Siege of Colombo, Van der Meijden brought the siege to a successful end and the government of Ceylon was duly shifted from Galle to Colombo. Van der Meijden had been responsible for the decision to retain Colombo, rather than handing it over to the King of Kandy. This decision marks the moment when the VOC and Kandy truly became enemies. As governor, Van der Meijden was nominally responsible for the commercial and civilian administration of the newly conquered territories, as well as for maintaining diplomatic relations with local states, all subject to approval from Batavia.<sup>408</sup> Van Goens, as a military leader and inspector, should not have had a say in these matters except where they impinged on the war effort. This division of labor effected within the VOC in the area of large-scale war is remarkable, but little studied. Speelman in Macassar held a similar position, and this meant that the VOC actually maintained a separate military chain of command, a feature of its organization that it later lost. By this point, therefore, the company was not solely a commercial enterprise. This division of labor on Ceylon broke down in the late 1650s

<sup>407</sup> Aalbers, *Rijckloff van Goens: Commissaris en veldoverste*, 135-170.

<sup>408</sup> Wijnaendts van Resandt, *De gezaghebbers*, 58-59.

and early 1660s. The problem was that Van Goens simply would not agree not to meddle in the government of Ceylon's affairs.

As mentioned above, Van der Meijden's decision to evacuate the fort at Quilon on the Malabar Coast in the face of heavy attacks sparked Van Goens' ire, but the latter had already been building a case against Van der Meijden for months. Van Goens judged Van der Meijden incapable of bearing the responsibilities of the large and organizationally complex government of Ceylon, and accused him of turning a blind eye to questionable practices of his subordinates. Before the loss of Quilon, there had been insufficient grounds for dismissing Van der Meijden and sending him back to Batavia. After Quilon's loss, however, things were very different and he was instructed to return to Batavia in summer 1660 to defend himself to the High Government. In the meantime, Van Goens acted as provisional governor of Ceylon.<sup>409</sup>

The outcome of this case, however, was deeply unsatisfactory for Van Goens as the council ruled that '*On Ceylon it appears that various accusations were accepted all too readily and in a temper. Once accepted, they [Van Goens] have tried to substantiate these accusations and to make them into large crimes, without considering whether they could be sustained or not.*'<sup>410</sup> Van der Meijden was cleared of all charges, readmitted as counselor-extraordinary of the Council of the Indies and allowed to return to his post in Colombo. Although Van Goens handed over the administration to Van der Meijden and switched to focusing all his attention on conquering Malabar, at the first opportunity he again tried to wrest the governorship of Ceylon from Van der Meijden.<sup>411</sup> Van Goens' short interregnum was important, however, as he used it as an opportunity to remodel the colony's administrative structure. The contents of these changes will be discussed in the following section; suffice it to say here, however, that the imposition of a new administrative model was a significant move, as in this brief period Van Goens could create various new offices and populate them with his own supporters. In a later letter to the High Government quoted in Valentijn, Van Goens reacted to the 'slander' that he had had Van der Meijden deported in order to 'possess the governorship himself', thereby attesting to the fact this was something being gossiped about in VOC circles.<sup>412</sup> In his *Beschryvinge*, Van Dam went much further, arguing that Van Goens was envious of Van der Meijden's position and wanted this position for himself.

Whatever Van Goens' true motivations were, he continued to undermine Van der Meijden in all possible ways, with an instructive example of this being given in a letter reporting the state of affairs on Ceylon, signed by governor Van der Meijden and two of his councilors, Pieter de Bitter and Jacob van Rhee, on January 29, 1662. The report, addressed to the XVII in Amsterdam, detailed the status of the garrisons, the condition of trades and the progress of the refortification works, among other things. Before the letter was sent, however, Van Goens got the opportunity on February 13 to add remarks and comments in the margins. Some of these remarks are quite instructive as they show how he tried to undermine the directors' faith in their governor on Ceylon by, for example, criticizing the other two signatories, Pieter de Bitter and

<sup>409</sup> Ottow, *Rijckloff Volckertsz. van Goens: Krijgsman Commissaris en Regent*, 106-109.

<sup>410</sup> W.Ph. Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, Deel III* (Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague 1968) 330, 16 December 1661. '*... soo schijnt op Seylon in 't aennemen van alderhande beschuldigingen soo tegen sijn gem. e. als andere personen van qualiteyt vrij wat gereet ende driflich geprocedeert te sijn, welcke beschuldigingen eens aengenomen sijnde, men dan naderbant met alle cracht heeft willen waermaecken ende tot groote misdaden trecken sonder veel aenschouwing te nemen, of se gefundeert conden worden ofte niet.*'

<sup>411</sup> The whole episode is well detailed in: P. van Dam and F.W. Stapel, *Beschryvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie, tweede boek, deel II* (Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague 1932) 320, as well as in: F. Valentijn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën, vyfde deel* (Dordrecht and Amsterdam 1726) 141-154.

<sup>412</sup> *Ibidem*, 157.

Jacob van Rhee, and claiming: *Note: Jacob van Rhee has married the Governor's daughter and his advices is therefore not admissible. And Pieter de Bitter has not had time yet to forget much about Ceylon.*<sup>413</sup>

There was thus no way that Van der Meijden could make his case without suffering interference by Van Goens. Van der Meijden admittedly tried to pin the loss of the yacht *Hercules* on Van Goens, arguing that the latter had ordered the captain to anchor in the Bay of Galle, while the captain and pilot had argued that the bay was unsafe at this time of year.<sup>414</sup> It was Van Goens, however, who had the last word as he once again had Van der Meijden sent back to Batavia on charges of private trade. Van Goens' position was now stronger, however, than before as he had since been in direct correspondence with the company directors in the Netherlands and they ordered Van der Meijden to return home in 1663.<sup>415</sup> This time, too, Van Goens acted as provisional governor of Ceylon and combined this position with that of commander-in-chief. In 1662-1663, he was thus able to finalize the conquest of Ceylon by also conquering the Portuguese-held cities on the Malabar Coast. Cochin endured a siege from late October 1662 until early January of the next year, but eventually fell, boosting Van Goens' reputation as a conqueror (see Figure 14).

**Figure 14: Entry of Van Goens into Cochin, January 1663**



Source: P. Baldaeus, *Naaauwkeurige beschryvinge van Malabar en Choromandel: Derzelver aangrenzende Ryken, en het machtige Eyland Ceylon* (J. Janssonius van Waasberge and J. van Someren: Amsterdam 1672).

<sup>413</sup> NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. no. 1234, fol. 202 verso. *Nota, Jacob van Rhee is met den Gouveneurs dochter getrouwt, niens advijs daer om in deesen niet aennemelijck is. En heeft Pieter de Bitter noch niet veel van Ceylon vergeeten*.

<sup>414</sup> Generale Missiven, deel 3, 1656-1674, p. 378.

<sup>415</sup> Van Resandt, *De gezaghebbers*, 58-59.



However, Van Goens was not able to enjoy his successes for long. Although the XVII had accepted his offer to stay on in Ceylon, and had ordered the High Government to appoint him as the new governor of Ceylon, Van Goens' wife protested to the council in Batavia that she did not wish to move to Colombo again, a city that was still being rebuilt, and requested the High Council to reward Van Goens for his services by recalling him to Batavia.<sup>416</sup> Van Goens therefore handed over control of VOC Ceylon, of which the conquered Malabar Coast possessions formed a part, to Jacob Hustaert, the former governor of Ambon.<sup>417</sup> This proved, however, to be only a temporary setback as Van Goens was reappointed to the governorship in September 1664 and returned to Ceylon later that year. Now, Van Goens was free to shape the administration of Ceylon to a much greater extent than previously. The following section will examine the administrative structure devised by Van Goens in 1661-62, and the people appointed to positions within this system.

### **Administration and policy**

Once in position as governor of Ceylon in the mid-1660s, Van Goens proposed a number of ambitious schemes that, if enacted, would have fundamentally changed both the position of the VOC on the island and that of Ceylon within the VOC's Asian network. As some of these proposals have been dealt with at some length in the available literature, this section will explore them only briefly before focusing attention on how Van Goens' proposals affected his opportunities to act as a familial head and a patron on Ceylon (or could have affected them, if they had been implemented). The question of the network construction will be taken up in the next section.

The first question to be discussed in this section, therefore, is the design of the Ceylon government's structure, and the individuals Van Goens was able to appoint to these positions. As the question of appointments will be examined from the perspective of patronage in the next section, the focus in this current section will be on the implications of the way that the positions themselves were described. The next point concerns Van Goens' plans for territorial enlargement of the Ceylon government at the expense of the Kingdom of Kandy and the emphasis that Van Goens placed on the need to build a strong network of fortifications. This ties in with the questions of trade and colonization. As will be argued, there was a discrepancy between Van Goens' plans for monopolization of trade by the company and colonization of Ceylon by Europeans.

Subsequently, the question of communications with the Republic will be examined. This is a crucial aspect of Van Goens' tenure on Ceylon as safe communications with the Netherlands allowed him, at an institutional level, to invoke orders from the directors to overrule Batavia's criticism of his policies. On a personal level, safe communications also allowed him to extend his patronage network on Ceylon to families in the Republic itself. Lastly, Van Goens' direct challenge to Batavia's dominance in VOC Asia and his vision for making Colombo the VOC's capital will be examined, and it will be argued that this was a logical consequence both of his other plans and of his experience in negotiating with Mataram in the 1640s-1650s.

---

<sup>416</sup> Valentijn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën, vyfde deel*, 155-156.

<sup>417</sup> H.K. s'Jacob, *De Nederlanders in Kerala 1663-1701: De memories en instructies betreffende het commandement Malabar van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague 1976) LXVII.



### Administering territory

Ceylon came to be ruled quite differently from other VOC colonies in Asia as it was not until the eighteenth century that the VOC was able to control comparable territories on Java. This distinction is quite important as the VOC's administration and the offices that were available were heavily influenced by the need to administer larger territories. This is also why the short period in 1661-1662, when Van Goens took on responsibility for governing Ceylon and Adriaan van der Meijden was in Batavia facing trumped-up charges, was important. It was precisely during this period that Van Goens chose to codify the new administrative structure of the colony.<sup>418</sup> By doing so, he limited Van der Meijden's ability to design new offices and appoint individuals to fulfill them. He himself, by contrast, was able to appoint individuals in the newly regulated offices. Although these appointments required the approval of the High Government in Batavia, there is no indication that the latter was particularly concerned about who occupied the lower offices. In addition, the descriptions of the offices themselves gave a considerable push in terms of policy on Ceylon. The fact that *dessaves* were now appointed in the new administrative subdivisions of Colombo, Jaffna and Galle meant the implicit assumption that the VOC would now play an administrative role in managing the land and villages. This played well with Van Goens' insistence that the company should rule the island (or as much of it as possible) as a sovereign possession.

After the conquest of the north of the island, Van Goens initially considered the government of Ceylon to have become too large and unwieldy. To ensure effective governance, he proposed detaching Mannar, the Wannu and Jaffna and adding them to the Coromandel government. Jaffna could be established as a new capital for this command. Alternatively, Van Goens proposed conquest Tanjore and the establishment of a capital at Negapatna.<sup>419</sup> These ideas had been discussed with the Coromandel governor, Laurens Pit but he was hesitant to agree with such a scheme. Nevertheless, Van Goens proposed his ideas to Batavia. The High Government refused to approve such a scheme, however, as it argued that all of Ceylon faced the same threats and challenges and should thus be kept in one hand.<sup>420</sup> To accommodate this wish, Van Goens proposed appointing two subaltern commanders with regional authority in Galle and Jaffna. The governor of Ceylon at Colombo and his council, known as the Council of Ceylon or the Political Council, would direct the affairs of Colombo itself and its surrounding lands, as well as acting as a court of appeal for cases coming from the subaltern commands.<sup>421</sup> The Council of Colombo would maintain correspondence with the High Government and the directors in the Netherlands and pass on their orders to the commanders. The local commanders and their councils would, in turn, direct local affairs, rule on important cases concerning Europeans and oversee the lower administrative divisions' activities.<sup>422</sup> This division of labor was designed to ensure that the governor in Colombo would not be crushed beneath the load of managing such a large government. An important appointment in this regard was Anthony Paviljoen's

---

<sup>418</sup> Van Goens issued the descriptions of the offices to Van der Meijden upon the latter's return in Ceylon in June 1661. The instructions for the highest offices were published in 1908 by the Colombo public records office: S. Pieters, *Instructions from the governor-general and council of India to the Governor of Ceylon, 1656-1665* (Colombo 1908). The title is somewhat misleading as the documents were not issued by the governor-general, but by Van Goens in his capacity as superintendent, inspector and acting governor of Ceylon.

<sup>419</sup> T. Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company in Coromandel, 1605-1690: A study in the Interrelations of European Commerce and Traditional Economies* (Martinus Nijhoff: Den Haag 1962) 57.

<sup>420</sup> Ottow, *Rijckloff Volckertsz. van Goens: Krijgsman Commissaris en Regent*.

<sup>421</sup> K.D. Paranavitana, *Land for money: Dutch land registration in Sri Lanka* (the author: Colombo 2001) 31-33.

<sup>422</sup> Ibidem. An example of the tasks for the commander of Jaffna is given in: S. Pieters, *Instructions*, 83-104.

appointment as commander in Jaffna. Paviljoen had earlier served under Laurens Pit on the Coromandel Coast and formed a bridge between the two governments, himself becoming Governor of Coromandel later in his career.

In terms of local administrative structure, perhaps the most important decision was to continue the office of the *dessave*, a lower provincial governor. It was this office that put the VOC most directly in touch with the population of the island. The office itself was adopted from Portuguese and pre-colonial practice and required intensive cooperation between the *dessave* (most often a European company servant) and the lower offices of *mudliyar* and *korale*, both of which oversaw administrative subdivisions of the *dessavonie*. The VOC thus exercised indirect rule over the areas that it claimed as its own, working at the local level through headmen and village leaders.<sup>423</sup> So how was VOC-held Ceylon administered in 1662? In the first place, it is important to note that though the VOC had removed Portuguese power from the island, it controlled a lot less territory than the Portuguese had done at the height of their power. Although the King of Kandy had proven unable to extract the VOC from its new coastal strongholds, it was a different issue in the inland provinces lying closest to Kandy. By then, the VOC's holdings on the southwestern coast had been reduced to about half the size of the Portuguese holdings there in 1638, while the entire stretch of territory between Negombo and Mannar eluded VOC control altogether. In the north, the VOC held the same possessions as the *Estado* had in Jaffna and the Wannu and claimed them as a completely sovereign possession because the former Kingdom of Jaffna had passed by conquest to the Portuguese and again to the VOC. On the eastern coast, the King of Kandy could, by 1662, freely access the ports at Batticaloa and Trincomalee/Kottiyar. All in all, the Kandyan position was much better by the early 1660s than it had been in 1638.<sup>424</sup>

Van Goens divided the VOC's holdings on the island into three groups. The governor maintained his seat in Colombo, and the area around the capital ultimately fell under the governor and council of Colombo. In the north, the commander and council of Jaffna were responsible for governing the Jaffna peninsula, the island of Mannar and the Wannu. This was mirrored in the south, where the Galle commandment administered the coastal region between Bentota and Walawe.<sup>425</sup> A simplified schematic outline is given in Figure 15.

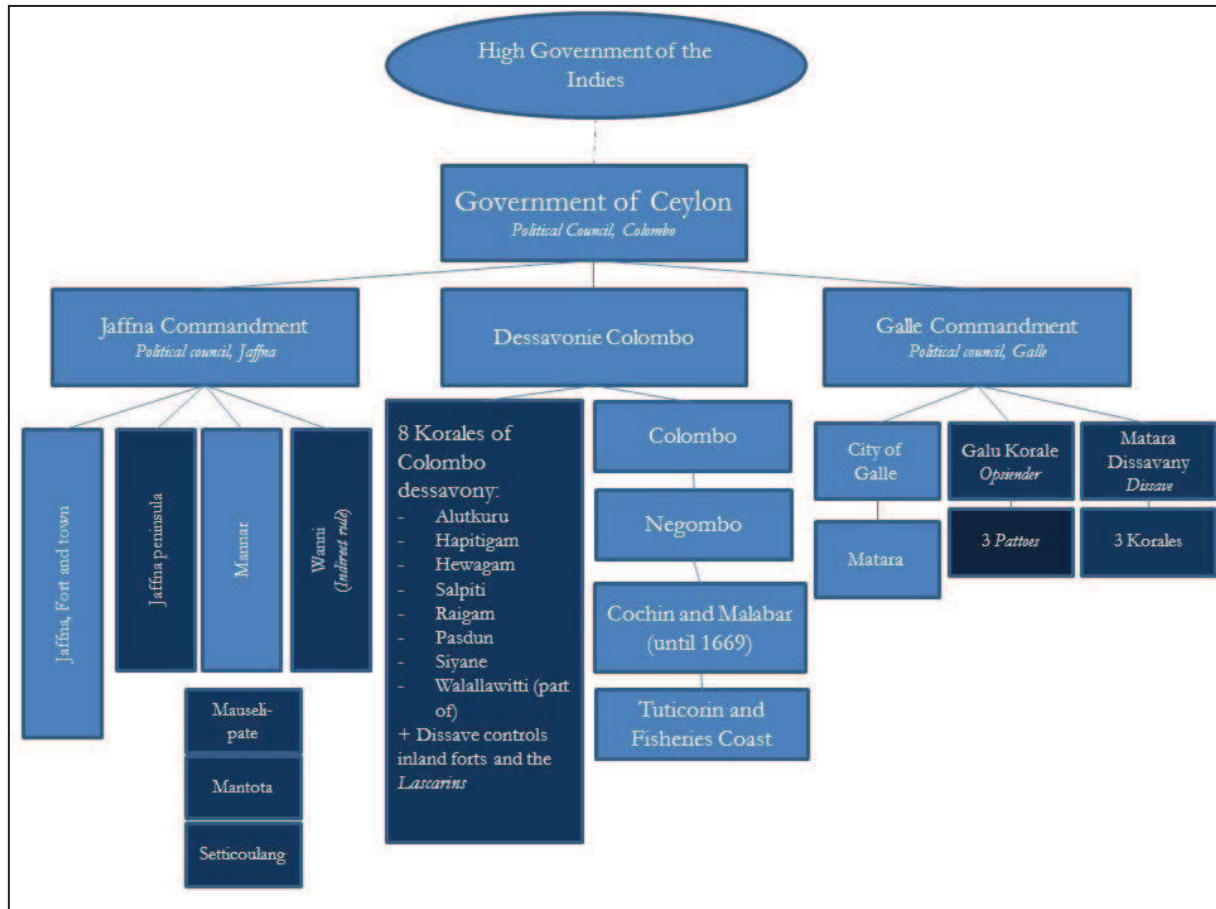
---

<sup>423</sup> S. Arasaratnam, 'Elements of social and economic change in Dutch maritime Ceylon (Sri Lanka) 1658-1796', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 22:1 (1985) 35-54 39-40.

<sup>424</sup> Goonewardena.

<sup>425</sup> Paranavitana, *Land for money*, 21-22.

Figure 15: Organization of the government of Ceylon



Source Erik Odegard 2015, based on: Paranavitana, *Land for Money: Dutch land registration in Sri Lanka* (Colombo 2001) 21-23, 38. VOCsite.nl.

There were thus a number of important functions that needed to be filled: two commanders (Galle and Jaffna), and their respective councils (*dessaves*) at Colombo, Matara, the Wanni and Jaffna peninsula, and a similar office of *opsiender* (overseer) in the Galu Korale.<sup>426</sup> Besides these offices, a number of other important positions needed to be filled, mostly related to the central government in Colombo. Crucially, a trustworthy head of the cinnamon peelers needed to be instated. In addition, the Malabar command functioned as a subordinate command that reported to the governor of Ceylon, rather than resorting independently under Batavia. The logic behind this arrangement will be detailed in the next section. This meant that, in practice, Van Goens could also exercise great influence over appointments in Malabar. Table 5 presents lists of office-holders from 1661 to 1670 and shows how Van Goens was able to appoint his own protégées to important positions, as will also be detailed in some examples.

<sup>426</sup> K.D. Paranavitana, *Land for money*, 30-140.

Table 5: High officers in Ceylon in 1661/62, 1665, 1667, 1670.

Position	Officeholder 1661 / 1662	Officeholder 1665	Officeholder 1667	Officeholder 1670
<b><i>Colombo and Colombo dessavonie</i></b>				
Dessave of Colombo	Pierre du Pon			
<b><i>Opperkoopman of Colombo (Hoofdaministrateur)</i></b>				
Fiscal	Lucas van der Dussen*			
<b><i>Opperhoofd Tuticorin</i></b>	Laurens Pijl		Laurens Pijl	Laurens Pijl
<b><i>Jaffna command</i></b>				
Commander in Jaffna	Anthony Paviljoen	Jorephaes Vos	Jorephaes Vos	Jorephaes Vos
Dessave of Wanni	Jacob van Rhede			Maarten Huijsman
<b><i>Galle command</i></b>				
Commander in Galle	Isbrand Godske (until early 1661) Adriaen Roothaes	Adriaen Roothaes	Adriaen Roothaes	Adriaen Roothaes
Dessave of Matara	Ferdinandus Alvares	Rijckloff van Goens jr.	X	Pieter de Graauwe
<b><i>Opsiender in Galu Korale</i></b>		Rijckloff van Goens jr.	X	
<b><i>Malabar command</i></b>				
Commander	N.A.	Ludolph van Coulster / Isbrand Godske	Lucas van der Dussen	Adriaan van Reede
<b>Garrison Commander</b>			Adriaan van Reede	

Source: NL-HaNA, VOC, 1.04.02, inv. nos. 1239, 1243 1251, 1273, 1274, 1277.

\* Appointed as fiscal in 1664, but rejected by Van Goens and returned in Batavia in 1667.

As is apparent from this overview, some individuals occupied multiple positions in the Ceylon government throughout the decade 1660-1670. An interesting example is Lucas van der Dussen, who was appointed as fiscal in Colombo by the High Government in 1664, but whom Van Goens refused to accept.<sup>427</sup> This is a clear indication that Van Goens tried – successfully – to manage his own personnel administration without taking any account of Batavia's advice or even

<sup>427</sup> s'Jacob, *De Nederlanders in Kerala*, LXIX.

outright orders. It was his direct link with the Netherlands that made it possible for him to defy Batavia. The subsequent appointment of Van der Dussen in 1667 to the position of commander of Malabar, despite Van Goens' suggestion of Adriaan van Reede, was most unwelcome to Van Goens. On that occasion, however, he could not overrule it. Van Goens' general ability to arrange appointments on Ceylon to his own plan put him in a very powerful patronage position, an issue that will be explored in section four of this chapter. Looking at the list, it is also striking that while a number of positions were characterized by a rapid turnover, some officials could serve for rather long periods. A good example is Adriaen Roothaes, the commander of Galle from 1662 until 1671. Roothaes is best known for his role in the blockade of Goa during the last phases of the war on Ceylon.<sup>428</sup> Roothaes served as commander of Galle under Van Goens for over a decade and is an indication of the type of men Van Goens preferred as commanders of the subordinate commands; in other words, men with military experience and who had been in battle with Van Goens himself, such as Roothaes and Van Reede, were preferred over those who had spent their careers solely in the accounting offices.

*Fortifications, diplomacy, colonization and trade*

The idea that the company should not only be a merchant, but also a ruler of extended territories and large numbers of people not in the service of the company was thus implicit in the administrative division implemented by Van Goens in 1661. These goals were made more explicit from 1664-65 onwards as Van Goens tried to expand the VOC's control over provinces that had formerly been administered by the Portuguese, but had been taken by Kandy instead of the VOC when Portuguese power was destroyed.<sup>429</sup> Van Goens argued that it was not enough merely to control a narrow stretch of the lowlands from Negombo to Walawe, but that the VOC also needed to press its borders inland by claiming at least all the areas that the Portuguese had claimed. In addition, the company needed to control all the major ports and anchorages by fortifications so as to make sales of cinnamon to anyone other than the VOC more difficult. In 1659, when war with Raja Singha seemed imminent and the Kandyan army was engaged in forcing the population of the lands around Negombo and Colombo inland, the smaller ports of Chilaw and Calpentijn (Kalpitiya) were taken. With a small force, Governor Van der Meijden faced down a larger Kandyan army at Kalpitiya.<sup>430</sup> A year later, Van Goens initiated a return to the East Coast when he sent a force under Captain Pieter Wasch to refortify Trincomalee.<sup>431</sup> This force was withdrawn later that year as sickness had reduced the garrison. It was not until 1667 that the company returned to the East Coast permanently. It should be noted that, until around 1660, Batavia still supported most of Van Goens' actions. An occupation of Batticaloa and Trincomalee, through which most of Kandy's trade passed, had been advised by the High Government if Raja Singh could not come to terms with the VOC's continued presence on the island. However, as the damage wrought by the depopulation of the lands of Negombo and Colombo became clear, the High Government became steadily more supportive of a negotiated settlement with Kandy, while Van Goens became steadily more vociferous in his admonitions that only force would bring Kandy to reason. With the return of Van Goens to Ceylon in 1665, a

<sup>428</sup> Aalbers, *Rijckloff van Goens*, 171-191.

<sup>429</sup> Goonewardena, *The Rise of Dutch Power*, 115. Especially important in this regard is the little-known Battle of Pannara, which resulted in the VOC losing control over most of the province of the Seven Korales 'for all time to come'.

<sup>430</sup> Van Dam and Stapel, *Beschryvinge* 2.2, 279.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibidem*, 289-290.



much more aggressive policy vis-à-vis Kandy was initiated. By 1667, Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Kalpitiya were being refortified with stone forts, while Kottiyar was occupied by a field sconce a year later. In the west, too, the VOC increased the lands under its control, especially in the areas east of Colombo and Negombo. Here, a series of field fortifications and small forts was constructed in the valley of the Kelani river, reaching ever closer to Kandy itself. The lack of a forceful response from Kandy against these moves reinforced the idea in Van Goens' mind that Raja Singha was weak and that Kandy would easily be conquered by the VOC.

Van Goens justified these aggressive and expansionist policies by arguing that the cinnamon monopoly could only be guaranteed if the company controlled all the island's ports. Cinnamon was peeled in the border areas between the company's lands around Negombo and the king's lands bordering those to the east. If the VOC did not keep an eye on shipping in the king's ports, Van Goens argued, cinnamon could very well be traded through them, thus undermining the VOC's monopoly. But merely extracting cinnamon was not to Van Goens' liking. If the company came to control more land, he argued, it could extract more revenues from taxes, tolls and land rents.<sup>432</sup> In addition, encouraging weavers from India to migrate to the Jaffna area would allow the company to start producing the textiles that were needed as merchandize throughout Asia in its own territory. This territory was expanded in 1673 to include the VOC's lands around Negapatnam within the Ceylon command.<sup>433</sup> If administered properly, Ceylon could both cover its own operating costs and turn a nice profit, at least according to Van Goens. Related to these ideas was the idea of turning the island into a Dutch settlement colony. This had previously been attempted at Batavia, and indeed Pieter van Hoorn was still arguing for it.<sup>434</sup> According to Van Goens, however, Ceylon was much more suited. His statement on the prospects for settling Ceylon is worth quoting in length as it clearly shows his growing infatuation with the island that increasingly came to dominate his thinking:

*Certainly, if there is to be a hope for a colony anywhere in India, it shall have to be on Ceylon, where so many people shall be able to make a living as can live there, without needing anything from the outside... This is not to be expected at Batavia, where our colony will never be able to overcome the impertinent and bellicose Javanese, neither in power not in numbers... besides it [Batavia] is a castle without fresh water and a city which needs to get the same far from its walls... which is completely different on Ceylon, which is encircled with good ports, cities and castles, all with fresh water within their walls, whose inhabitants – through the servitude of the inhabitants – will be able to live very well on agriculture. Ceylon is a compact island, lying in the heart of India, of which some have called it the navel.<sup>435</sup>*

<sup>432</sup> For a brief description of the monopolistic policies, see: S. Arasaratnam, 'Monopoly and Free Trade in Dutch-Asian Commercial Policy: Debate and Controversy within the VOC', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 4:1 (1973) 3-15, 7-8.

<sup>433</sup> Arasaratnam, *Dutch power in Ceylon*, 165-166.

<sup>434</sup> A. Weststeijn, 'The VOC as a Company-State: Debating Seventeenth-Century Dutch Colonial Expansion', *Itinerario* 38:1 (2014) 24-27.

<sup>435</sup> Van Dam and Stapel, *Beschryvinge* 2.2, XII-XIII. 'Seker, soo in India ergens hope tot colonie is, 't sal op Ceylon moeten wesen, daer haer soo veel menschen kunnen erneren, als daerop sullen kunnen wonen, sonder iets van buy ten van node te hebben....Dit is op Batavia niet te verwaghten, daer onse colonie noyt sal gestelt worden die brutale en bellicense Javanen te boven te komen, noch in maght, veel min in getal.... behalven dat het [Batavia] een casteel is sonder versch water, ende een stadt, die 't selve verre buy ten moet halen.... 't welke op Ceylon geheel anders gestelt is, sijnde 't selve rondsom versien van bequame havens, steden en castelen, alle met het versebe water bin non hare muyren, niens inwoonders door de dienstbaerheyt der inlanders seer wel kunnen bestaan op den lantbouw, sijnde Ceylon een beknopt eylandt. gelegen in 't hert van India, waarvan het sommige sehryvers de navel genoemt hebben'.

Van Goens thus envisioned Ceylon in close connection with the areas of Southern India in which the company was active. While his earlier schemes for expansion in the Caveri Delta of Tanjore had been rejected in the 1650s, Van Goens would propose similar expansionist policies during the Madurai-Tevar war of 1663-1665. Solidifying control of what was seen from Ceylon as the 'opposite shore' would enable the company to raise tolls at the Pamban channel and so complement the control the company's fort at Mannar offered on voyages from the Gulf of Mannar to Palk Strait.<sup>436</sup> But in this instance as well, Batavia refused to send the reinforcements Van Goens thought necessary for successful implementation of his scheme.

Colonization and sovereign rule over large territories with considerable autochthonous populations raised the same kinds of questions that were also raised in Brazil, the most difficult of which was, again, the question of free trade. To increase the prospects of a lively colony on Ceylon, carefully prescribed free trade was presented as an option. As in Brazil, the proponents of the policy argued that the populations over whom the VOC now aspired to rule had always enjoyed free trade and that stable rule would be jeopardized by a ban. In addition, if free trade encouraged the emergence of a Dutch colony, the garrisons could in time be reduced as the new *burghers* formed militia companies. Lastly, trade was also open to the 'Moors of Bengal', a rather vague category that was used to cover Muslim merchants from the northern Coromandel Coast and Bengal proper. Their access to the Ceylonese markets could not be prohibited as they imported crucial goods such as textiles and rice, while also exporting arak, betel nuts and, crucially, elephants. The VOC had experimented with exporting elephants by itself, but this had not been a success. Elephants were the island's second most important product, and so, on pragmatic grounds, access to Ceylon could not be prohibited. If these 'Moors' (whom Van Goens always regarded with the greatest distrust) were allowed to trade with Ceylon, why not the company's own subjects? The opponents of the policy argued, on more general grounds, that opening up a private trade from company lands went against all the maxims of the VOC and that it would '*open a door which could not lightly be closed again*'.<sup>437</sup> It was subsequently decided in 1662-1663 that the company's subjects on Ceylon would be allowed to trade freely with Bengal. However, as will be argued in chapter seven, this was not a final decision.

It is clear from all this that Van Goens came to be increasingly ambitious about the prospects for Ceylon and his own role in bringing these plans to fruition. This ambition and the increasing unwillingness to brook dissent or to see things from another perspective brought Van Goens into repeated confrontations with the High Government in Batavia. Indeed, governor-general Maetsuijcker and his council came to be ever more hesitant about Van Goens' plans. It must be noted, though, that they themselves had vacillated in their advice given to Ceylon in affairs such as the proper conduct with Kandy and support for a Dutch colony on the island. The rivalry between Van Goens and the High Government, and thus between 'Colombo' and 'Batavia', became ever more pronounced after Van Goens' return to the island in 1665.

#### *Private communications and the role of Ceylon as an entrepot*

Crucial for the successful implementation of Van Goens' policies were direct communications with the XVII in the Netherlands. The previous section has argued that, already quite early on, Batavia (i.e. the High Government of the Indies) was quite skeptical of Van Goens' plans. But

<sup>436</sup> P.M. Vink, *Encounters on the Opposite Coast: The Dutch East India Company and the Nayaka State of Madurai in the Seventeenth Century* (Brill: Leiden and Boston 2016) 388-389.

<sup>437</sup> *Ibidem*, 280.

this view of the governor and council was overruled by largely pro-Van Goens sentiment among the directors. How could Van Goens bypass the High Government and appeal directly to the directors? A first option was offered by the ancient caravan route through present-day Iraq and Syria. Letters were forwarded to the director of the factory in Persia at Gamron. 'Persia' forwarded these letters to Basra, from where they were taken overland to Aleppo and then continued their journey by ship to Italy and overland to the Netherlands. There are numerous documents from the 1650s through the 1670s that have been marked with the signifier 'Via Persia' to make it clear that they reached the VOC directors other than through normal routes.<sup>438</sup> A famous example of important news traveling along this route is Van Goens' 1674 report on the state of Ceylon's defense against French attack, which was delivered on January 5, 1675 after a journey of 328 days.<sup>439</sup> This seems to have been an exceptionally long voyage. Moree, in his study of the VOC's postal service, mentions average journey times for Dutch-Asian mail of five to six months, and sometimes as little as four months.<sup>440</sup> The Persian postal link had a number of advantages: it could offer quicker communications with the Netherlands in times of crisis, while also removing important communications from the prying eyes of the High Government in Batavia. The director of Persia was thus a possible channel for alternative communications with Patria. Table 6 shows the directors of Persia in the period 1661-1671.

**Table 6: VOC directors of Persia in 1661-1671**

Name	Period
Hendrik van Wijck	1661-1665
Huybert de Lairesse	1665-1667
Isbrand Godske	1667-1670
Lucas van der Dussen	1670-1671

Source: W. Wijnaendts van Resandt, *De Gezaghebbers der Oost-Indische Compagnie op hare buiten Comptoiren in Azië* (Amsterdam 1944) 245.

The last two of these, Godske and Van der Dussen, had both served as Commanders of Malabar under Van Goens' supervision before being appointed to Persia, but both had quarreled with Van Goens (see chapter seven). This points to a reduced reliability of the Persian connection from the late 1660s onwards. Less is known of the other two men, but Huybert de Lairesse had been the permanent replacement of Dirck van Adrichem after his death in 1665. Perhaps he had got to know the latter's widow, Van Goens' second wife, in that capacity. In both cases, the men had built their careers predominantly in the Western Quarters. Direct communications offered Van Goens the option to bypass the High Government and appeal directly to the VOC directors. But this was still a relatively cumbersome route: only exceptionally were letters sent in this way, and bigger parcels, or indeed gifts, could hardly be sent through this route. Van Goens consequently started working on a far more ambitious plan immediately after returning to Ceylon in 1665, and this would bring him more obviously into direct conflict with 'Batavia' for the first

<sup>438</sup> P. Moree, *Met vriend die god geleide': Het Nederlands-Aziatisch postvervoer ten tijde van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (Walburg Pers: Zutphen 1998) 55-57.

<sup>439</sup> P.A. Leupe, and J. Leeuwenson, 'Daghregister van de landreijs, gedaen bij mij Joannes Leeuwenson, secretaris van de ed. heer Ryckloff van Goens, raed ordinaris van India, super-intendent, admiraal, krijgs- en veldoverste, soo te water als te lande; dienende tot bescherming van 't eiland Ceylon, de custen van Cormandel, Mallebaer, Madure, etc. beginnende ao. 1674', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië*, 10:1; 2 (1863) 94-144, 142.

<sup>440</sup> Moree, *Met vriend'*, 55.

time. Starting in 1665, Van Goens opened a direct shipping link from Galle to the Netherlands, thus bypassing Batavia in a much more dramatic way than had been the case with the Persian letters.

In 1664 the XVII decided in favor of direct voyages to Ceylon at the urging of Van Goens.<sup>441</sup> Dutch Asiatic shipping gives the number of outbound voyages from Ceylon in the period 1650-1675 as sixteen, most of which will have taken place in the last ten years of that period.<sup>442</sup> The products coming to Europe from Ceylon were more valuable than the cargoes from Batavia, which was a possible reason for allowing the direct sailings. This sparked intense controversy with Batavia as the direct sailings undercut its role as the central rendezvous and thus threatened the High Government's control, precisely because of the concomitant loss of information control. Indeed, this seems to have been exactly Van Goens' purpose. The private communications that Van Goens enjoyed with the directors in the Netherlands proved crucial for him as he could now go against Batavia. Contemporaries were aware that Van Goens could ignore Batavia at will. Pieter van Dam perhaps phrased it most clearly: '*But as they [the High Government] saw that he had support in these lands [from the directors] and that his conduct was approved, they did not act and let things pass.*'<sup>443</sup> Until 1670, Van Goens could rule supreme in the VOC's lands on Ceylon, sure in his support from the Netherlands and untrammled by control from Batavia.

### **Patron-in-chief: Van Goens' familial and patronage networks, 1662-1670**

The previous sections focused on how Van Goens was able to thwart the formal hierarchies of the VOC and, to a large extent, make Ceylon into an independent command, separate from Batavia and reporting directly to the Netherlands. This was made possible, and also reinforced, by Van Goens' informal position in the social world of the South Asian VOC, both as a patron and as a family head. The ability to have an independent personnel policy (as shown above in the case of Van der Dussen), facilitated by the direct contacts with the Republic, allowed Van Goens to reinforce his links to the directors by appointing family members to positions in the Ceylon government. Meanwhile, his second marriage, in Colombo in August 1668, allowed him to create new familial networks within the VOC elite in Asia. This section will examine both of these intertwined issues: patronage and the building of familial networks. An important source for the information on patronage is provided by the correspondence book of Salomon Sweers, Jeremias van Vliet and Jacques Specx, which has been used before to illustrate how familial news from Brazil was disseminated in VOC Asia. This correspondence is also a good example of how bonds of friendship, familiarity, patronage and reciprocity were articulated and confirmed in the letters of related VOC employees and former employees. First, however, I will address the issue of marriage and remarriage, and the opportunities that this offered for creating a network of support.

#### *Marriage: the sequel*

Jacomina Roosegaard died in January 1667, and by August of that same year Van Goens had married again; this time, his marriage was to Esther de Solemne, the twenty-seven-year-old

---

<sup>441</sup> J.R. Bruijn, F.S. Gaastra and I. Schöffner, *Dutch Asiatic shipping: Volume I introductory volume* (Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague 1987) 79.

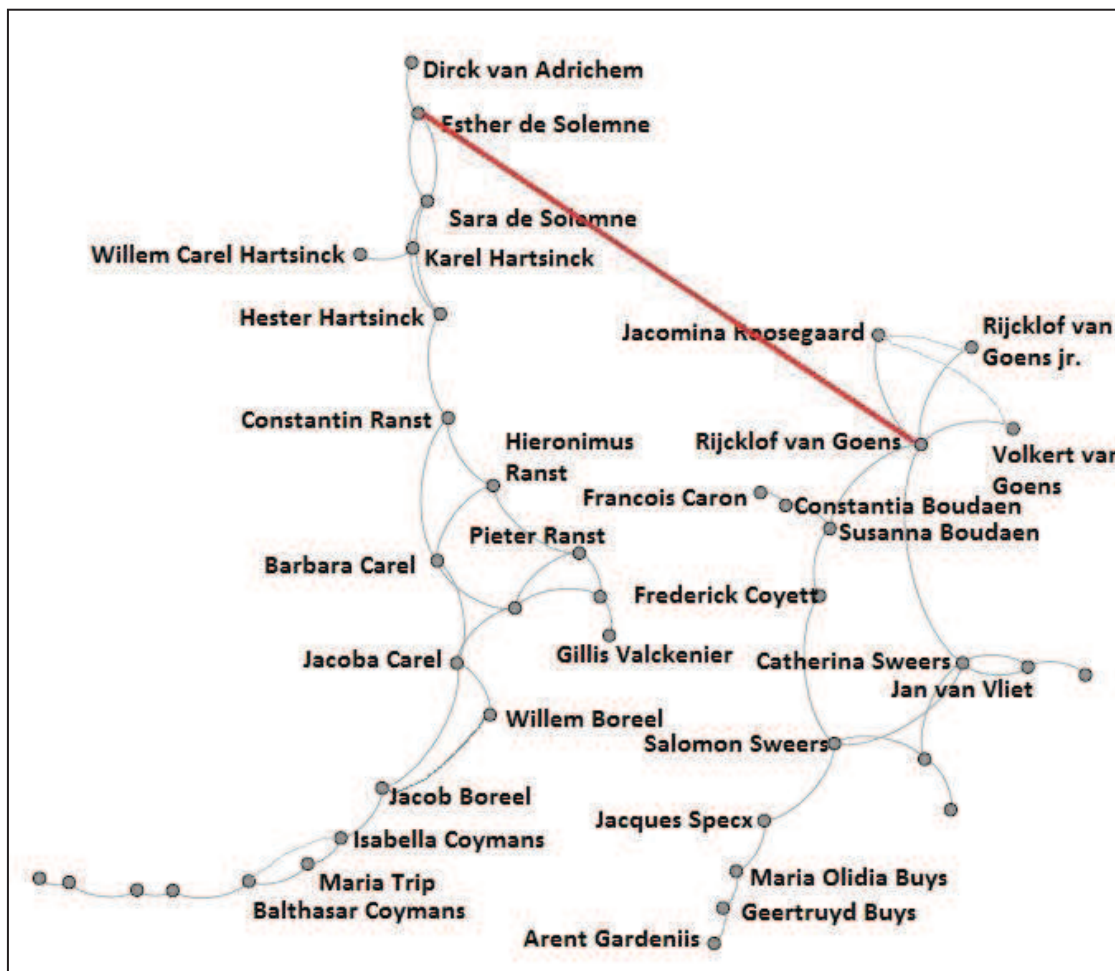
<sup>442</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>443</sup> Van Dam and Stapel, *Beschryvinge* 2.2, XIV.



widow of the former head of the Surat factory, Dirck van Adrichem.<sup>444</sup> The marriage is interesting for a number of reasons. Esther de Solemne provided a network bridge to various other VOC families in Asia. Esther's sister, Sara de Solemne, was married to Carel Hartsinck, former head of the factory at Deshima and, by 1667, director-general in Batavia, although he died a month after being appointed.<sup>445</sup> Carel Hartsinck had several children, both by his former Japanese concubine and with Sara de Solemne. Hartsinck had recognized his 'Japanese' children, allowing them to advance within the VOC under the Hartsinck name. One of his sons, Willem Hartsinck, married Maria Pit, thus connecting these two powerful families with strong interests on the Coromandel Coast.<sup>446</sup> Through his marriage to Esther de Solemne, Van Goens therefore created bonds with these two families, both of which supplied important officials to the neighboring Coromandel government.

**Figure 16: Familial networks of Van Goens before his marriage to Esther de Solemne**



Van Goens' networks before his second marriage (connections shown in red). These are all familial ties: spouses, siblings, children or baptism witnesses. Made with GEPHI software.

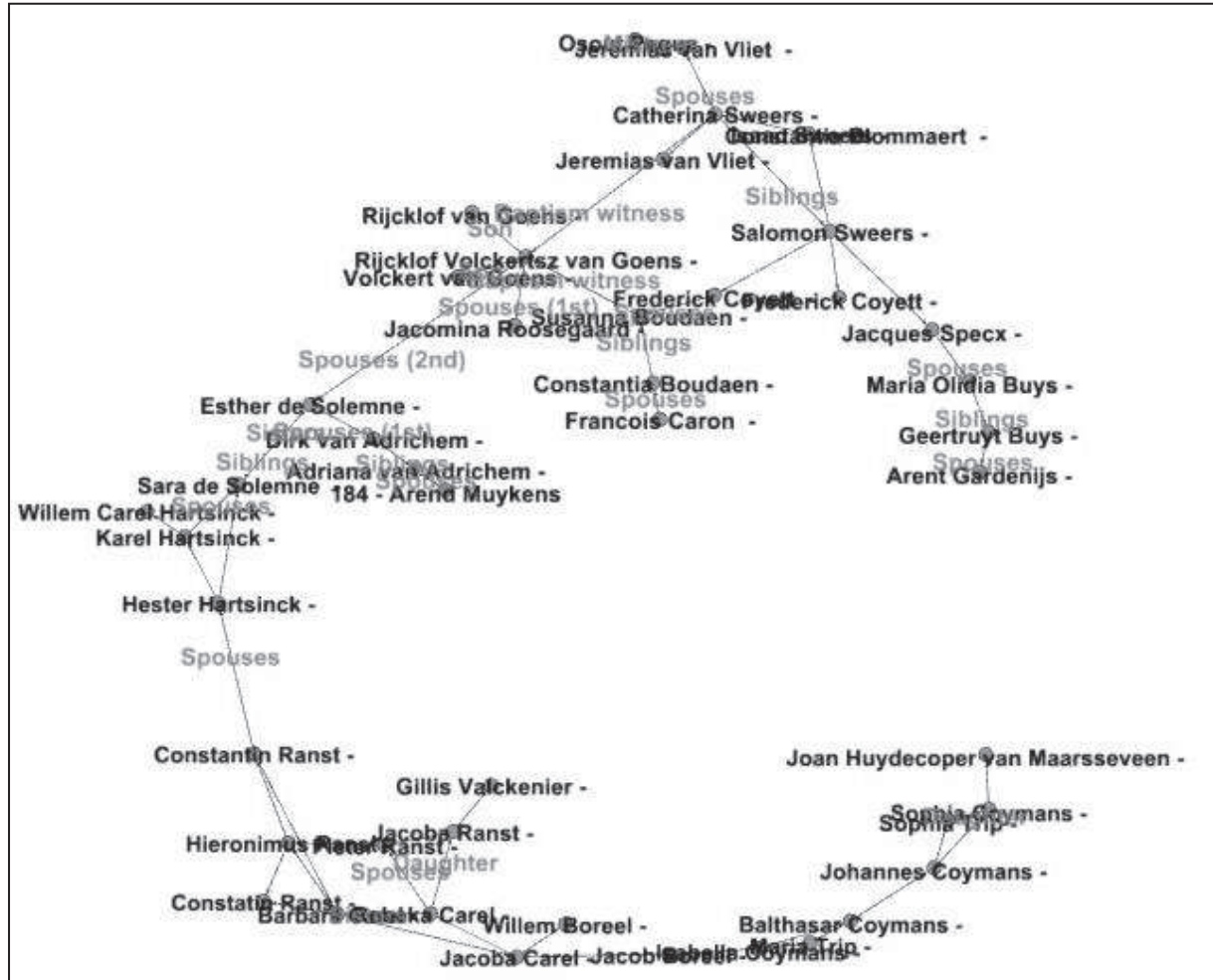
<sup>444</sup> P.C. Molhuysen, P.J. Blok and K.H. Kossman (eds.) *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek, zesde deel* (A.W. Sijthoff's Uitgevers-Maatschappij: Leiden 1924) 589.

<sup>445</sup> P.C. Molhuysen, P.J. Blok and K.H. Kossman (eds.) *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek, achtste deel* (A.W. Sijthoff's Uitgevers-Maatschappij: Leiden 1924), 699.

<sup>446</sup> U. Bosma and R. Raben, *Being "Dutch" in the Indies: A History of Creolisation and Empire, 1500-1920* (NUS Press and Ohio University Press: Singapore and Athens 2008) 61.



Figure 17: Van Goens' network after marrying Esther de Solemne in 1667



Van Goens' personal network after his marriage to Esther de Solemne in 1667. Figure made with GEPHI software, Erik Odegard.

But the marriage to Esther would not last long: she died a year after their marriage, while giving birth to a daughter who, as mentioned before, would be christened Esther Ceylonia van Goens. But Van Goens would not remain a widower for long: he would remarry for a third time just a year later, to the then fifteen-year old Johanna van Ommeren.<sup>447</sup> Of her family background little is unfortunately known, but it is likely that her father was Rudolph van Ommeren who is mentioned at the Cape in 1662.<sup>448</sup> This would mean that Van Goens had again chosen to marry 'within the company', but the exact impact of the familial networks is more difficult to ascertain.

#### *Unraveling a network of patronage through correspondence*

While on Ceylon, Van Goens ensured he did not lose touch with important figures in the Republic. Besides the official correspondence sent to the directors either directly or via Batavia, he also remained in touch through his personal networks. These enabled him to disseminate news from Ceylon to potential supporters in the Republic and to receive valuable information about the directors' plans and the composition of the board of directors, the *XVII*. Though

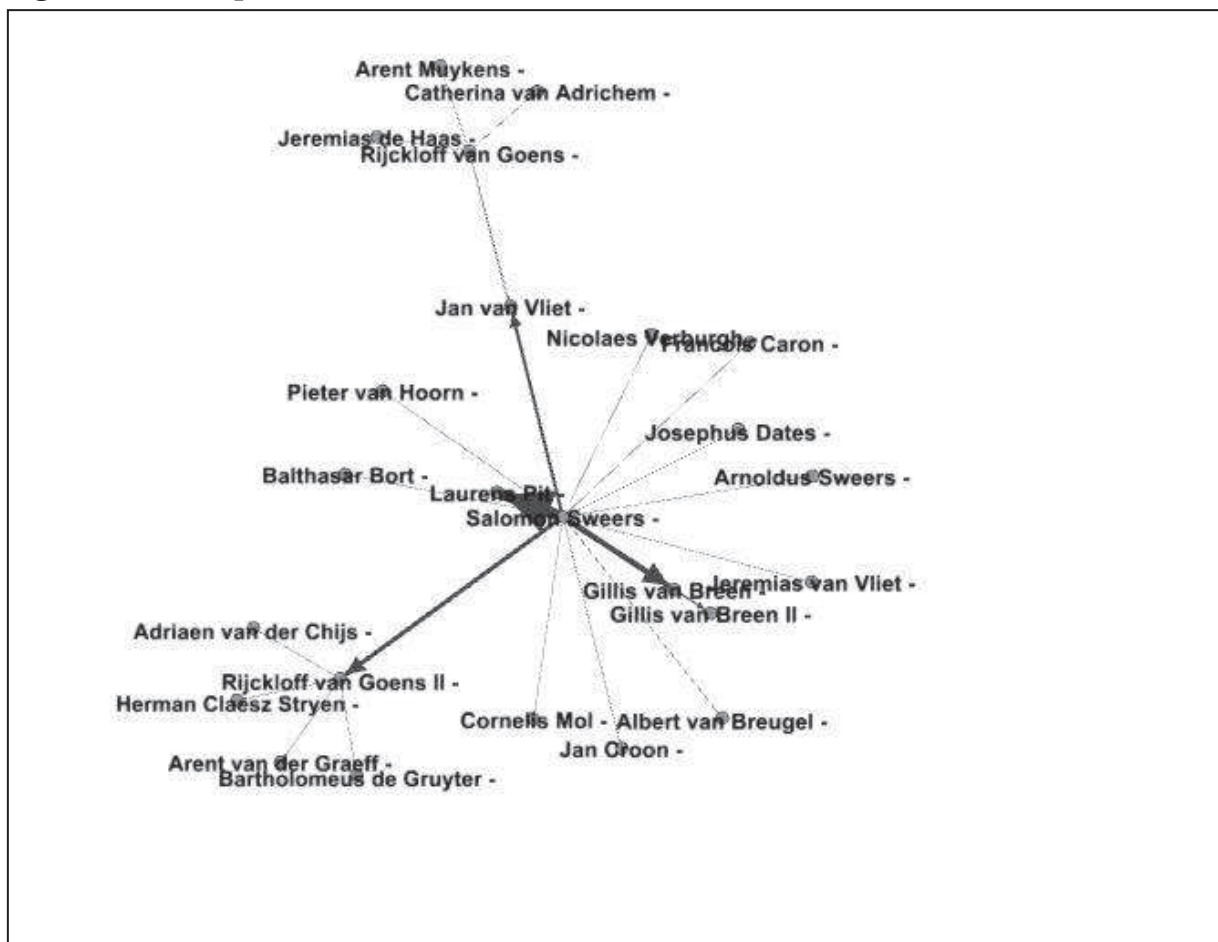
<sup>447</sup> Van der Aa, *Biographisch woordenboek der Nederlanden. Deel 7*, 244.

<sup>448</sup> NL-HaNA, 1.04.02, VOC, inv.no 1262, folio 155. 'Originele missive van R. van Ommeren in de bhay van de Caep de Bona Esperance aen de beren bewintbebbere ter camer Amsterdam in dato 21 Februarij 1662.'

many private letters have probably been lost, a valuable set of letters has been preserved in the collection of Salomon Sweers, which was also mentioned in chapter three.<sup>449</sup> This source is valuable for a number of reasons. In the first place, it contains five letters *from* Rijckloff van Goens senior to various correspondents in Amsterdam in the early 1670s. In addition, there are two letters *to* Van Goens, also from the early 1670s, along with five letters from Rijckloff van Goens junior to various correspondents in the Netherlands in the period 1670-1673. These letters provide useful information about events and persons. Although slightly outside the 1655-1670 timeframe, they will be dealt with here as they tie in very well with the patronage networks that Van Goens senior used in building the Ceylon government and the associated familial relations.

Among other things, they provide valuable insight into the way Van Goens operated as a patron to his correspondents on Ceylon and as a client to those at home, and this aspect will be examined in the next section. Lastly, the correspondence book as a whole contains many more letters to and from Salomon Sweers and others, thus revealing the extent of the network of correspondents centered on Sweers and of which Van Goens was a part. This network is mapped out in Figure 18 for the period 1660-1674.

**Figure 18: Correspondence network around Salomon Sweers**



Source: NL-HaNA, 1.10.78, Sweers, inv. no. 2. Network of correspondence in the Sweers archive, 1660-1674. Figure made with GEPHI software. Thickness of arrows indicates intensity of contacts, as measured by the number of letters.

<sup>449</sup> NL-HaNA, Collectie Sweers, 1.10.78, inv. no. 2.

Of great interest is the fact that both Francois Caron and Frederick Coyett were part of this network. Francois Caron became the director of the French East India Company and sailed with a French fleet to Asia in 1671-1674. There, as we have seen, he came up against Rijckloff van Goens in the inner bay of Trincomalee, and the French fleet was ultimately beaten by an alliance of the VOC and the Sultan of Bijapur at St. Thomé on the Coast of Coromandel. Both Caron and Van Goens were in close contact with Sweers in the period leading up to this confrontation. There is more, however: from his personal files it is apparent that Salomon Sweers was one of the backers of the French East India Company and tried to rouse Dutch interest in this enterprise.<sup>450</sup> We are thus confronted by the fact that a leading VOC official in Asia was in close contact with the leading figures in a major attempt to break the company's privileged position in the intercontinental carrying trades. Van Goens junior referred to Salomon Sweers as *Mijn Heer en Neve* (my lord and cousin). The familial connection between the two families ran through Arent Muykens (see below). Regardless of the actual link, it is clear that, in addressing Sweers in this way, Van Goens tried to create a sense of familiarity or friendship<sup>451</sup> as the word *neve* was not only used to denote 'real' familial connections, but also to appropriate a sense of connection and friendship. It is interesting to see that the Pit family from Coromandel also corresponded with Sweers. By marrying into the Adrichem-Hartsinck-Pit families, Van Goens thus consolidated his position within this network as well. There is also another familial link: Arent Muykens, to whom Van Goens addressed one letter, was married to Adriana van Adrichem, the sister of Dirck van Adrichem. Dirck, of course, had been the first husband of Van Goens' second wife, Esther de Solemne. It is thus no coincidence that Van Goens' stepdaughter Catherina van Adrichem was raised in the home of the Muykens family. It is also interesting to note that Van Goens referred to Arent Muykens as a 'cousin'; in other words, the deceased first husband of his second wife was sufficient cause for new familial links.<sup>452</sup> The link with Muykens is striking for another reason as well: he was the successor of Cornelis Weylandt as head of the Surat factory in 1644. There is thus a recurrent pattern of links to heads and former heads of Surat: Weylandt, Muykens and Van Adrichem. Muykens also maintained contacts with other former high VOC personnel in the Netherlands and was a witness to the baptism in 1664 of Johan Andreae Cunaeus, son of a former member of the Council of the Indies, Joan Cunaeus.<sup>453</sup>

I will now focus on the contents of some of the letters and examine how Van Goens used his position of power on Ceylon to act as a patron to his subordinates and, in turn, how he sought to please his patrons in the Republic. Since the letters from Van Goens in the Sweers archive are all from the early 1670s, it is on this period that I will concentrate. In the late 1660 and early 1670s, Van Goens was at the pinnacle of his power on Ceylon. Although the Kandyan counteroffensive was a severe blow, he still had the support of the directors in the Republic and could still largely dictate policy on Ceylon. This makes these years a fascinating period in which to look for patronage networks within the VOC. The letters in the Sweers archive shed some light on this. To this end, therefore, I will examine some letters sent by Van Goens in December 1670 more closely.

<sup>450</sup> NL-HaNA, Collectie Sweers, 1.10.78, inv. no. 4, fol. 280-288.

<sup>451</sup> NL-HaNA, Collectie Sweers, 1.10.78, inv. no. 4, fol. 232-233. Van Goens jr. in a letter to Salomon Sweers, January 4, 1673.

<sup>452</sup> The link was later strengthened by the marriage of Rijckloff jr. to the daughter of Esther de Solemne and Dirck van Adrichem.

<sup>453</sup> A.J. van der Aa, *Biografisch Woordenboek der Nederlanden, deel 3* (Haarlem 1858) 914. Erfgoed Leiden en omstreken, 1004, Dopen NH Pieterskerk, inv. no. 222, fol. 103.

The first letter dates from December 15, 1670 and was sent by Van Goens in Colombo to Arent Muykens and his wife in Amsterdam. It contains some interesting insights into the networking of Van Goens. Strikingly, Van Goens does not mention the attack by Kandyan forces on the outlying forts at Arandore, Ruanwella and so on. This supports the assertions in the literature that Van Goens was careful to present only good news (or at least to present news with a positive spin) to the directors back home.<sup>454</sup> The letter does, however, contain personal information; Arent Muykens was the uncle of Van Goens' stepdaughter Catherina van Adrichem, and the latter lived with the Muykens family in Amsterdam. Van Goens enquires into her upbringing, asks Muykens to tell her to write to him and says *'I want to assure You that I will keep to my fatherly affection and the promises I made and expect from her all due obedience that a daughter owes to a father.'*<sup>455</sup> Van Goens thus clearly communicated that he saw Catherina as his own daughter and that he expected her to respect him as the patrimonial head of the family. This created a set of reciprocal obligations between Van Goens and Catherina and, in so doing, confirmed the link with her uncle, Arent Muykens. The familial ties with the Muykens family needed to be ensured, and this could be done by assuring them that Van Goens regarded Catherina, who was after all not his biological daughter, as his own, even though, in 1669, he had recently married his third wife, Johanna van Ommeren, and had a daughter of his own, Esther Ceylonia van Goens (born of his second marriage). He went on to mention that Cornelis van den Boogaart had a position in Ahmadabad and had married, and assured Muykens that Van den Boogaart would always have his favor. This is interesting as it is a pattern that also recurs in other letters. Three days later, on December 18, Van Goens wrote to Jeremias de Haas (also known as Jeremias de Haze or Jeronimo de Haes), a VOC director in the Amsterdam chamber, to inform him that *'Joan [de Haas?] has died and, because of that, I no longer have a way to show you my friendship.'* This is a key phrase: it illustrates how the concept of friendship, as studied by Kooijmans, worked in practice, while a close reading of this and other phrases like it also shows that the etiquette of friendship and intimacy that Francesca Trivellato identified as key characteristics of merchants' letter-writing also worked in the correspondence between families bound by patronage and familial bonds rather than trade.<sup>456</sup> This is illustrated by another relative mentioned by Van Goens in the same letter: *'Your honorable cousin Papensouw has apparently not been able to give Commander Voss such contentment, so we have had to prefer the merchant [Coopman] Montaig in his stead for this time.'* Here, Van Goens is explaining to an important patron why he could not advance his cousin. He goes on: *'I offered to make him head of Trincomalee, which would have made him equal in rank to Montaig, but it seems his wife made him turn it down, as she thought Trincomalee rather too isolated.... Your honor should rest assured that I am doing all I can for him, but I regret to say that he has not been able to make himself loved here. I think he is a fine chap, but his wife does not relate well to the other wives and through the fighting of women, it's often the men who are made to suffer.'*<sup>457</sup> Besides providing a fascinating insight into gender relations in the period, this shows that Van Goens tried to explain the faltering career of an important patron's cousin in terms that would not direct any blame to the cousin in question. Blaming the wife was a convenient fig leaf for avoiding having to tell a patron his cousin was inept. Van Goens could thus use his power on Ceylon to advance certain individuals and so please his patrons in Amsterdam. This example also shows that this patronage could not be given lightly or

<sup>454</sup> As argued in Arasaratnam, *Dutch Power in Ceylon*, 54-59.

<sup>455</sup> NL-HaNA, Collectie Sweers, 1.10.78, inv. no. 2, fol. 195-196.

<sup>456</sup> Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers*, 177-193.

<sup>457</sup> NL-HaNA, Collectie Sweers, 1.10.78, inv. no. 2, fol. 193.



unconditionally. The reciprocity of the patronage relations was still key, while Van Goens also had to listen to his subordinates and could not simply appoint people who were not in themselves qualified for the job.

Van Goens was successfully able to play the role of patron for another young man, Jan van Vliet, son of Jeremias van Vliet who had been married to Salomon Sweers' sister. Jan van Vliet sailed to Colombo without an assignment in the hope of getting a job on Ceylon. Van Goens was able to help him and indeed started off the latter's career in the VOC by appointing him to the position of assistant bookkeeper in Colombo.<sup>458</sup> By using patronage Van Goens was thus able to create a loyal cadre of company officials who shared his ideas on policy and who were bound to him by family ties or perhaps through private trading ventures. The issue of private trade will be taken up in chapter seven.

### Conclusion

This chapter has analyzed the career of Rijckloff van Goens in the period 1655-1670, during which time Van Goens underwent a remarkable transition, going from admiral of the homeward-bound fleet to commander-in-chief and inspector for the *Werkkwartieren*, and ultimately becoming governor of Ceylon. The governorship of Van Goens on Ceylon is crucial for our understanding of the development of the VOC as an organization as it represents perhaps the only occasion where a governor of a subordinate command was able to sideline 'Batavia' and set policy for himself. This was only possible through the combination of the particular circumstances of the VOC in Ceylon and the personality of an ambitious governor such as Van Goens. When arriving in Ceylon in the late 1650s, Van Goens came with a special, but carefully circumscribed set of orders. As commander-in-chief and inspector for the Western Quarters, Van Goens was able to conduct military operations and visit VOC commands in these areas to inspect the books, but not much else. Specifically, the regular day-to-day administration of the government fell outside the scope of his assignment. This was the responsibility of the governor of the island, Adriaan van der Meijden. Van Goens was not satisfied with the latter's suitability for the position, however, and rivalry for actual control of administration and diplomacy quickly ensued. In the end, Van Goens had Van der Meijden sent to Batavia to answer for his actions on no fewer than two occasions, with Van der Meijden being ordered to return to the Netherlands during his second trip to Batavia in 1663. In both instances, Van Goens took upon himself the task of overseeing the administration of the government of Ceylon. These temporary tenures as governor were crucial, however, as they allowed him to overhaul the administrative model of the colony during its formative phase. Jos Gommans has argued that, in his wish for fortifications, Van Goens showed he wanted to separate the VOC physically from its Asian surroundings. On Ceylon, however, he proved very willing to borrow from previous Portuguese and pre-colonial administrative practices if these could be modified to serve the VOC's needs.<sup>459</sup> Still, Gommans' argument that the fortification of Cochin was an attempt to control and separate people can also be applied to Ceylon as a whole. By fortifying the entire coastline and the interior, Van Goens attempted to clearly designate what was the company's and what was not. The early attempts to merge Jaffna into the Coromandel Coast government indicate, however, that Van Goens did not

---

<sup>458</sup> NL-HaNa, Collectie Sweers, 1.10.78, inv. no. 2, fol. 199.

<sup>459</sup> J. Gommans, 'South Asian Cosmopolitanism and the Dutch Microcosms in Seventeenth-Century Cochin (Kerala)', in J. Gommans and C. Antunes (eds.) *Exploring the Dutch Empire: Agents, Networks and Institutions, 1600-2000* (Bloomsbury: London and New York 2015) 3-26, 10-14.



have a clear-cut vision of the future of the Ceylon government. Indeed it was not until the first half of the 1660s that he developed the ambitious vision for which he gained notoriety.

This vision entailed a single, large Ceylon government encompassing all the VOC's conquests on the island, as well as on the Malabar Coast, the Madurai Coast and the southern Coromandel Coast. Van Goens' ambitious idea was to be able to control all maritime traffic between Cranganore and Negapatnam, including the whole of the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Strait. This control was to be enforced by fortifications that would serve as bases for maritime patrols in the area and would themselves keep important ports directly in check. Diplomacy would be crucial in bringing in those local rulers who could not be conquered outright or brought to agree terms by the threat of force. The Kingdom of Kandy on Ceylon itself would need to be conquered to make Ceylon a suitable location for a Dutch settlement colony. Colombo, he argued, was a much better, healthier city than Batavia and, if Kandy was conquered, there would be no rival powers to threaten the VOC's position on the island. This was in marked contrast to Batavia, which was hemmed in by Bantam and Mataram, as Van Goens knew only too well.

But having a vision and bringing it about are two completely different things. If he was to put theory into practice, Van Goens needed to be able to override the objections of Batavia. The creation of privileged routes of communication, first by sending letters overland and later by the direct voyages inaugurated from 1665 onwards, offered Van Goens the opportunity to speak directly to the directors. This direct link with the directors enabled him to disregard opposition from Batavia in many instances, with a good example being his refusal to let Lucas van der Dussen take up his position as fiscal in the council in Colombo. The wavering policy-making by the directors is in itself interesting. Although they frequently agreed with Batavia's admonitions to keep costs under control, they never responded when Van Goens disregarded orders from Batavia, thus indirectly legitimizing the latter's actions. This allowed Van Goens largely to conduct his own personnel policy on Ceylon by appointing loyal followers and thus playing the part of the powerful patron whom potential appointees needed to placate. Indeed, when VOC secretary Pieter van Dam wrote his history of the VOC towards the end of the seventeenth century, his main complaint about the company's policy-making and the directors was that they did not let themselves be informed on the situation on Ceylon by anyone other than Van Goens.<sup>460</sup> This more negative perception of Van Goens will be examined in more depth in chapter seven, which deals with his career after 1670, and how this increasingly became synonymous with Ceylon.

By marrying Esther de Solemne, in 1667, Van Goens was able to ally himself to the powerful Hartsinck clan within the VOC, with connections both in Batavia and in Coromandel. The daughter born of this marriage in 1668 was baptized Esther Ceylonia van Goens, thus showing how enamored Van Goens had become of the area under his command. Indeed, the close association between Van Goens and Ceylon is remarkable and further testifies to the extraordinary position that he had been able to build up. As argued in chapter three, it had been VOC policy since the outset to regularly move its highest officials between areas so that they would not become too much at home in any one area. The latter, however, is exactly what happened in the case of Van Goens.

Although the personal wealth that he was able to acquire has not yet been touched on in depth in this chapter, some indications have already been given. Though Van Goens presented

---

<sup>460</sup> Van Dam, *Beschryvinge* 2.2, XI-XII.

himself as a hardliner in the case of Van der Meijden, he was later more than willing to ignore what he saw as minor offenses if he judged the offender to be valuable to the government. It is perhaps no coincidence that many of these offenders had also been appointed by him. By allowing them, too, to acquire a personal fortune, Van Goens could bind them all the more closely to him personally.

By the 1670s, therefore, Van Goens seemed well placed to make the case for his ultimate project: moving the seat of the High Government from Batavia to Colombo, a city that he had rebuilt. This is the point where chapter seven takes up the narrative and, in many ways, complements the current chapter by looking at the personal capital that Van Goens acquired. It firstly examines the careers of his two sons, Rijckloff junior and Volckert, and secondly analyzes why and how Van Goens' most ambitious schemes ultimately did not materialize. The main conceptual issue in this discussion will be the idea of information control and how this could be used by an ambitious and contentious governor such as Van Goens.