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

Introduction

Having studied and analyzed the careers of two Dutch colonial governors over the course of the seventeenth century, it is now time to take a step back and zoom out. What does this detailed study teach us about issues such as career-making in general in the seventeenth century and the nature of the Dutch chartered companies? And what does the nature of the career paths of the selected individuals tell us about the origins, trajectory and future of what we may call the early modern Dutch empire? This study began by posing the question of how the chartered companies selected their overseas governors, and how governors, once in position, managed to sustain their careers. I developed the hypothesis that appointments of colonial governors of the chartered companies were related much more to the factional politics of the Dutch chamber cities than to the appointment of agents in long-distance trades. Working from this premise, I hypothesized that successful governors needed to develop mutually supporting relations with various different networks and groups of people – directors, colleagues, local states and colonial society – at different points in their careers. So how do these hypotheses hold up after the careers of two such governors have been studied in some detail? In the introduction I argued that there were four sets of networks that were important for making a career overseas: networks with company directors, with colonial colleagues, with colonial society, and with local states and rival European powers. These networks were critical at different points in time during a career. And this development is the common thread running through the introduction, based around the three career moments (appointment, tenure and dismissal) that have structured this research as a whole.

Career beginnings

The beginnings of the two men's careers in the respective companies present perhaps the strongest contrast between the selected governors. Rijckloff van Goens worked his way up through the VOC's Asian hierarchy from the early 1630s onwards, while during that same decade Johan Maurits van Nassau-Siegen entered the WIC's service at the highest level, being appointed governor-general of Brazil. Van Goens used marriage as a crucial tool to forge new contacts and acquire new patrons, whereas Johan Maurits never married. The differences at this phase thus loom large. But a closer examination also reveals good grounds for comparing and connecting the two.

One aspect that has repeatedly come up in the course of this research is the entanglement of the companies' commercial policies with political debates within the Republic and visions of empire in the colonies. Commerce, Dutch politics and empire all exerted pressure on the networks that supported colonial governors in office. But the strongest of these was the influence of Dutch domestic politics, governed by the rules of factional strife. In both cases, the hypothesis that appointments to colonial governance were closely linked to the political, factional game of the urban elites vying for honorable appointments proved sustainable. The appointment of Johan Maurits to Brazil, for example, can only be understood by taking into account the relationship between the city of Amsterdam and the stadholder during the first half of the 1630s.

But the exact ways in which Dutch domestic politics influenced individual careers half a world away differed quite markedly in the two cases. Johan Maurits started his WIC career at the

highest rung in the company's overseas career ladder, while Rijckloff van Goens worked his way up from a lowly position to reach the top. In the latter case, marriage was a crucial tool for early advancement as it opened the way for a skilled company servant to come into contact with powerful individuals who could realize his talent and see to it that his career advanced in leaps and bounds. Family played a different but no less important role in Johan Maurits' case as he came equipped with a powerful set of familial ties – the Nassau name – that would open most doors for him. The fact that Johan Maurits did not marry does not in itself disprove the importance of familial connections; instead, it shows that, in the case of the high nobility, these ties operated rather differently than in the case of a man like Van Goens.

The motivations for advancement in the two cases were also quite different. I have argued that the initiative taken by Albert Coenraetsz. Burgh to appoint Johan Maurits as governor-general of Brazil was inspired by his wish to repay a favor to stadholder Frederik Hendrik and to show the stadholder he was a faithful ally. In the case of Van Goens, the motivations were more direct: he belonged to a network of Amsterdam directors for whom his appointment would mean an expansion of their faction overseas. While the appointment of Johan Maurits was thus inspired by *party*-political considerations, the appointment of Rijckloff van Goens was inspired by *factional* politics. And these backgrounds pursued the two men throughout their careers.

Mid-career: tenure in Brazil and Ceylon

The second phases of the two men's careers are more readily comparable. Once in power in Brazil and Ceylon, both governors needed to maintain a number of important connections in order to retain power. First and foremost, the ties with their principals in the Netherlands needed to be preserved. I refer here to principals rather than to company directors as Johan Maurits clearly thought that, besides the company directors, he was also accountable to the States-General and the stadholder. Access to networks in the Republic allowed governors to remain in office, but, more than that, it meant they could wield the power of patronage to build loyal followings in Brazil and Ceylon respectively.

This immediately brings us to the second important network: colonial colleagues and subalterns. The ways in which the two cases constructed a clientage were different. Johan Maurits built a court and, in so doing, tied the WIC officers and important Portuguese citizens of the colony to himself in his capacity as 'the count in Brazil' – much like Willem Lodewijk could offer patronage in his public capacity as stadholder of Friesland, or in his private role as a nobleman. Within the WIC, however, this duality was unusual and created discord between Johan Maurits and the directors. Van Goens, lacking noble status, did not have the option of creating a personal court. This is visible in the description of the large palace built in Colombo, which was always referred to as 'the governor's palace'. Van Goens could bestow patronage only in his capacity as governor of Ceylon (or superintendent). Yet in this capacity he certainly had a powerful position as Ceylon became one of the largest VOC governorships in terms of the number of personnel, while the sheer size of his command meant there were many positions needing to be filled. Furthermore, his familial links to the Pitt and Hartsinck families in Coromandel meant that favored underlings could also be put forward for advancement there. Both tenures thus reveal the dual position of colonial governors as patrons and clients and thus highlight the two networks that were crucial for long-term success.

In both cases, the original motivations and interests behind their respective appointments continued to exercise great influence on the men's careers. In the case of Johan Maurits, the motivation for his appointment made his position vulnerable to a change in the relations between the stadholder and the dominant faction in Amsterdam. And this indeed materialized in the early 1640s. Since Johan Maurits had not developed personal relations with important directors, he depended on the stadholder and the States-General to sustain him in his position. This vulnerability was compounded by the treatment of Christoffel Artichewsky in 1639. Though the directors were to blame for the latter's unclear instructions and the lack of a distinct hierarchy between the governor and the new general of the artillery, Johan Maurits is likely to have eroded his own base of support by his brusque eviction of Artichewsky from Brazil. Albert Coenraetsz. Burgh had overseen the appointment of the latter, while Artichewsky's draft letter complaining about his treatment in Brazil was also addressed to Burgh – and this was certainly no coincidence. In the case of Van Goens, changes in the factional make-up of the council and chamber in Amsterdam could potentially undermine his position in Asia. Although the events of 1672 certainly had an effect on the council and the chamber, the slow replacement of directors meant a delay of several years before this percolated to Asia. Initially, Van Goens' position was strengthened by the ascendancy of Gillis Valckenier, but this changed after a number of years. Indeed it was precisely those individuals brought in through their factional allegiance to Valckenier – Hudde, Huydecoper and, ultimately, Van Beuningen (who, incidentally, was a grandson of Burgh) – who proved to be the undoing of Van Goens, his policies and the career of his son Rijckloff junior. The factional nature of Dutch domestic politics thus did not guarantee stable policy-making in the companies. This effect had been noticed earlier, when the directors became increasingly critical of the policy proposals of Van Goens, while nevertheless supporting him personally. Personnel policy and grand strategy were thus poorly integrated even in the VOC. That Van Goens did not seem to have contemplated changing his policies is also evidence of his stubbornness.

The colonies at the heart of the stories of Johan Maurits and Rijckloff van Goens – Brazil and Ceylon – were in many ways completely different. But they were still closely linked: the open hostilities in Brazil in the 1640s prompted renewed Dutch-Portuguese warfare in Asia from 1652 onwards, and the VOC's conquest of the remaining Portuguese strongholds on Ceylon, in Coromandel and Malabar, was a direct result of the war in Brazil. If the WIC's attempt to conquer Brazil thus marked the 'imperial moment', as Wim Klooster has argued, that imperial moment was transferred to the East in the 1650s, when the VOC conquered a string of Portuguese-controlled towns on Ceylon and in southern India. In both cases, the fundamental problem facing the companies, and their governors, was control over territory and people. In Brazil, the pressing questions included how to secure the cooperation of the Luso-Brazilian mill-owners and sugar planters and how far to extend the borders of the colony. In his construction of a nobleman's court, Johan Maurits gave one possible answer to these questions. In Ceylon, the problem was slightly different: should the company try to exert territorial power at all and, if so, to what extent? Van Goens continued to advocate conquest of the entire island and a much more aggressive, territorial stance for the VOC in the entire South Asian theater of operations. Burgeoning company trades needed to be supported by a strong territorial base and a population of Dutch (or at least European) colonists. Governing over territories with mixed populations of company employees, free Europeans, local inhabitants and a large enslaved population (African in Brazil, and Indian in Ceylon) meant that the companies in Brazil and Ceylon needed to

develop intricate levels of governance that went well beyond running a trading firm. For the governors involved, the creation of local administrations meant there were also more positions available to be filled by patronage. With the exception of Batavia, both Brazil and Ceylon outranked any other company possessions in terms of numbers of employees. Within VOC Asia, Ceylon could even form a credible threat to the supremacy of Batavia in terms of the numbers of soldiers posted, free citizens settled and the value of return goods.

But governing over large numbers of company officials presented risks as well as advantages. Negative news from the colonies could fatally undermine the support for an individual's continued tenure in office among directors in the Republic. Various different strategies were available to mitigate against disgruntled underlings complaining to Europe. A first strategy was, of course, to use patronage to appoint only supportive underlings. And both men applied this strategy while in office, with Van Goens' refusal to accept Lucas van der Dussen's appointment as fiscal and the conflict between Johan Maurits and Christoffel Artichewsky being good examples of this.

A second strategy was to try and control the flow of information from the colony to the Republic. This was much more feasible on Ceylon than in Brazil. There were fewer ships making the voyage from Ceylon to the Netherlands, and the only place of departure was Galle. In addition, these were all company ships, whereas the presence in Brazilian waters of licensed private traders meant a possible loss of information control. In the case of Johan Maurits, therefore, a conscious strategy of discrediting critics, instead of seeking to control information, seems to have been followed, with his outraged reaction to the letter of Artichewsky again being an excellent example.

Similarly, colonial populations needed to be placated so that they would not complain directly to the directors of mismanagement. Johan Maurits was an expert at presenting a picture of support for his policies and his person from the population of Brazil. All his offers of and requests for dismissal were accompanied by protestations from – carefully selected – colonists who argued that his departure from Brazil would mean the immediate ruin of the colony. This policy of purposely sending conflicting information ensured that the fractious WIC would not quickly come to a decision to honor his request to leave. And this leads on to the next level of comparison: the ways the companies operated in the Netherlands.

The companies compared

Turning from the overseas world to the Dutch Republic itself, this research has highlighted the very different ways in which the companies operated in the Republic itself. The most important and most striking outcome is that comparison with the WIC immediately makes clear how harmonious relations between the various chambers of the VOC were. In the case of the WIC, the interests of the individual chambers were often poorly aligned. This resulted in frequent disagreements between the chambers, while the organization of the company meant these disputes could not be adequately resolved by the XIX. At times, therefore, chambers consciously tried to politicize the company's affairs by appealing to the States of Holland or the States-General. Decisions were frequently overturned if underlying factions within the company temporarily held a majority owing, for example, to meetings of the XIX being held in Zeeland and not all members from other chambers showing up. This meant that even before the company's finances became an inextricable mess, the WIC did not operate as it should have, not least because of the enormity of the task it had burdened itself with. As Jan Glete put it, the WIC

failed to aggregate the interests behind Atlantic trade, colonization, trade and privateering properly. In other words, the company did not become a platform on which these interests could meet, agree on policy and pursue their shared interests. Instead, it became a platform where various interests fought over primacy and tried to subsume others to their particular goals. Instead of being released from the burden of protecting these interests in the Atlantic, the Dutch state thus became ever more responsible for supporting and protecting the interests of the company abroad. This led to the very situation that the company had been designed to prevent, with events in the Atlantic threatening the concord between the allies at home. Despite its institutional shortcomings, however, the WIC was still able to maintain a large army in Brazil for nearly quarter of a century. This is a surprising feat and a topic worthy of further study.

By contrast, the VOC in the Netherlands seems to have been a very consensual and stable organization. There were, of course, differences of opinion between chambers and between factions within individual chambers, but the overall relations between the chambers were much more harmonious than in the case of the WIC. As noted, however, these more amicable relations in the Netherlands did not necessarily make for stable policy-making. The XVII had been critical of the position of Rijckloff van Goens since the early 1670s, yet remained supportive of Van Goens as a person. This made for schizophrenic policy-making, with the VOC being unable to decide whether it was a merchant or a colonial-state. These questions dogged the company for the entirety of its existence.

As the WIC did not survive failure in Brazil, it is worth contemplating whether the continued presence of Johan Maurits in Brazil would have made any difference to the outcome there, as has sometimes been suggested. Given the problems of the WIC, this seems difficult to imagine. Even though he may have enjoyed more loyalty and support from the Luso-Brazilians, Johan Maurits would still have needed money, supplies, fresh recruits and ships from the Netherlands. And all of these were assets that the WIC was increasingly unable to provide. The only conceivable succor for Brazil was a fundamentally different relationship between the Republic and the overseas world, so that the armies and navies of the Republic and its treasury would be used directly to sustain an overseas empire. And it was exactly a change of this magnitude that Johan Maurits proposed when he sent his private secretary to the States-General in 1642. It is no surprise that his proposals to this effect were never implemented as this was exactly what the creation of the companies had been intended to prevent. The early modern Dutch empire, which certainly existed, was predicated on cooperation between the companies and the state. But just as the companies could not function without the Dutch Republic, so, too, was the Republic unable to operate in the overseas world without the companies and their governors.

Career end and recollection

In both cases, dismissal was requested by the governors themselves. In neither case, however, was this their preferred course of action. In the case of Johan Maurits, I have argued that his offer of resignation was not genuine, while Van Goens' return to the Netherlands seems to have at least been partly inspired by a wish to influence the directors to support his elder son, Rijckloff junior. In both cases, a collapse of different networks was at the core of their loss of office. For Johan Maurits, it was his troubled relationship with the directors that led to his departure, while for Van Goens, the trouble started in Asia itself, among his colleagues, and only

then spread to Europe, with the conflict with Van Reede showing the limitations of Van Goens as a patron and the extent to which these undermined his position.

The careers of both individuals within the chartered companies thus ended in acrimony. Indeed, this discord was the reason for my selecting them as research cases in the first place. But their lives beyond the companies also diverged in interesting ways. Van Goens died shortly after returning to the Netherlands in 1682, with his death, and that of his son Rijckloff junior, being followed by a roll-back of some of the policies he had advocated and by the dismantling of his network of clients by the Van Reede mission in the late 1680s and early 1690s. In another way, however, Van Goens had a lasting impact on the VOC. The conquest and fortification of many formerly Portuguese strongholds in Ceylon and southern India fundamentally changed the position of the VOC in the area, with Malabar in particular remaining an unresolved issue for the coming century. On Ceylon, meanwhile, the relationship between the VOC's focus on the procurement of cinnamon and its control over territories and populations remained a point of debate for many years. In the eighteenth century, governor Van Imhoff advocated a return to the agricultural policies advocated by father and son Van Goens, as well as advocating a conquest of Kandy.⁶¹³ Despite the purges by Van Reede in the 1680s and 1690s, rivalry between Batavia and Colombo remained a permanent feature of internal VOC relations in Asia, with Van Goens' unfinished business continuing to haunt the company until the end of its existence.

Johan Maurits presents a completely different picture: although the loss of Brazil in 1654 precluded his decisions and tenure from having any long-term effects, he was expertly able to influence the way in which Dutch Brazil was remembered, such that his tenure came to be seen as the 'good period' of the colony. Through the dissemination of his collections of curiosities and art, and the publication of the *Rerum per octennium*, Johan Maurits won the battle for recollections of Brazil and, as a result, was until very recently practically synonymous with the colony. From the ashes of Dutch Brazil, Johan Maurits was able to construct an flattering image of himself that proved a sound basis for his dealings with the elite of Europe over the coming decades.

Visions of empire

By contrasting the ways in which two individuals made their careers within the chartered companies and by comparing and connecting the colonies they governed and the companies they served, this research contributes to a clearer picture of the early modern Dutch empire. East and West were connected through the entangled elite in the Netherlands, which had a stake in both companies. In addition, events in Brazil had a significant impact on events in Asia, while the VOC's conquest of Cochin and Cannanore had important ramifications for the WIC's ability to collect payment from Portugal for Brazil. Brazil was the 'imperial moment' for the Dutch in the Atlantic, while during his tenure on Ceylon Van Goens made the clearest articulation of the benefits of empire for the VOC in Asia. Through the careers of these governors, therefore, a different view arises of the Dutch Republic as an actor on the world stage in the seventeenth century.

The two governors had visions that are difficult to reconcile with a view of primarily commerce-oriented companies. Van Goens was adamant that securing the VOC's control of the cinnamon trade required colonization of the island by Dutch settlers. In addition, he was not content with merely controlling the island's coastal lands as his ultimate goal was to conquer the

⁶¹³ Van Dulm, 'Zonder eigen gewinne en glorie', 42.

island in its entirety. This support for colonization changed over time. Initially, in the 1660s and early 1670s, Van Goens had wanted colonists to engage in agriculture as well as commerce. To this end, the VOC needed to help them set up farms and plantations and allow them to become involved in the intra-Asian trades, primarily with Madurai, Malabar, Coromandel and Bengal. By 1675, however, this vision had changed. The colonists' lack of success in setting up farms contrasted with their success in the intra-Asian trades from Ceylon. Though the colonists had initially been unable to compete with local merchants, especially those from Bengal, the VOC's support in the 1670s created a protected market, with the result that trade by colonists flourished to such an extent that it threatened the VOC's own trades. By 1675, therefore, Van Goens was no longer in favor of measures intended to support the colonists in their trade. This shows the difficulty of reconciling ideas of settlement and the rights of settlers with the very jealous protection of the company's privileges. All the same, Van Goens' insistence on the need to secure the VOC's possessions in Asia by means of sovereign control of territory, colonization and strong armed forces seems far removed from a supposedly pacific, mercantile Dutch version of empire-building. The strength of the VOC's self-image as a merchant firm rather than an Asian state is reflected in the backlash against Van Goens' ideas that continued to dog the VOC for more than a century.

Johan Maurits, too, developed a vision of empire that was unpleasant to the WIC's directors. In the case of the WIC, this vision was made more difficult by the company's signal inability to make up its mind on any issue for any length of time. Johan Maurits insisted, for example, that the rights of the Portuguese planters be respected since any successful colony would require their cooperation. Combined with his support for free trade, this presents a vision of an empire more concerned with control of territory and production than with the monopoly on shipping that the WIC pursued. Though Johan Maurits was in all likelihood correct in his assessment, these suggestions are likely to have harmed his base of support in Zeeland, which was in favor of strict adherence to the monopoly. This lack of realism in the chambers of the WIC is especially striking. Furthermore, Johan Maurits correctly grasped the integrated nature of the South Atlantic system. He understood that, after its capture, Angola should resort under Brazil. But the insistence of the WIC directors that the *de facto* organizational model should be maintained, whereby all regions reported to the Netherlands separately, meant that Angola was separated from Brazil. Without enslaved Africans Brazil could not function, and only Angola could provide them; arguing for the inclusion of Angola in the Brazilian government was thus a logical position to take.

Principals and agents

The appointments, career sustainment and dismissals of Johan Maurits and Rijckloff van Goens also shed new light on the principal-agent problem in the early modern world. While the historiography, such as it is, focuses on institutionalized solutions (contracts, bonds and salaries), the two cases studied point to different solutions in the Dutch context. In the case of Van Goens and the VOC, direct familial links between directors and important agents overseas (governors, commanders and members of the High Government) ensured that VOC agents overseas were at least committed to serving a familial interest that went well beyond short-term financial gain. By offering the prospect that service in the East would mean possible accession into the urban administrations in the Netherlands, the company directors were able to present company service as a viable method of both intragenerational and intergenerational social mobility.

Another way to achieve this same effect was by extending patronage links from directors to governors overseas. This was a logical extension to the overseas area of client networks that leading regents were supposed to support. By connecting to overseas agents through patronage, directors could at the very least try to ensure that agents overseas remained loyal to their interests within the company by, for example, helping family members to gain promotion. Again, there are multiple examples from the career of Van Goens where this was clearly on display. As a consequence of this patronage, future research should pay far more attention to divisions within the body of directors.

As long as the goal remained a return to the Netherlands, high company officials needed to keep their self-enrichment within limits deemed by the directors to be acceptable. This did not mean, however, that private trade was impossible or always problematic. By allowing specific individuals to profit from private trade, the directors could reward servants seen as useful or loyal. This last point is especially clear in the case of Van Goens. He was seen as a loyal servant of the VOC, but was still able to amass a fortune of one hundred thousand guilders by the mid-1650s. Surely this was the result of illegal private trade? But allowing higher officials to transfer such sums to the Netherlands after years of service in the East was a way of encouraging other employees to sign up for another tour in the East in the hope that they, too, would be allowed to acquire and bring home a fortune. The close relations between Van Goens and at least some of the VOC directors meant that he could be trusted not to bankrupt the company in Asia, given that this would have harmed his connections in the Netherlands who were important to the future prospects of Van Goens and his children.

The reverse may have applied in the case of Johan Maurits. By appointing an outsider to the highest position, the WIC directors communicated to their employees in Brazil and elsewhere that their career prospects would encounter a ceiling, thus encouraging them to increase their short-term profits by embezzling funds and engaging in private trade to the detriment of the company. Regardless of the personal merits of Johan Maurits, his appointment clearly communicated to all WIC personnel that there was a very real limit to their ability to effect social mobility through the company. This while the opportunity to achieve social advancement, for oneself or one's children, was a crucial motivation for individuals to enlist with the companies in the first place. In the WIC's case, appointing an outsider undermined this motivation and so also undermined the empire that the company hoped to build. In both cases, therefore, the failure or success of the companies that the two men served were crucially influenced by the careers and career opportunities of their servants.