

The Dutch 'golden age' of Batavia

Using Johannes Vingboons' painting as a window into
the history of VOC controlled Batavia

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Content

Introduction	3
Chapter 1: The Dutch East India Company.....	5
1.1 History Voorcompagnien	5
1.2 The Dutch East India Company	5
1.3 The succession of the VOC.....	6
1.4 Batavia: the perfect city for the Dutch VOC.....	7
Chapter 2 The city of Batavia	8
2.1 Coen's Dutch City in the Tropics.....	8
2.2 The canals of Batavia	8
2.3 The plan of Batavia	9
2.4 The Bastide	10
Chapter 3 Life between the walls	11
3.1 Servant of the Dutch Batavians	11
3.2 Dutch Minority.....	12
3.3 The wealthy of the city.....	12
3.4 The downfall of the VOC.....	13
Conclusion	14
Bibliography	15

Introduction

Amongst the events that took place in the Dutch history, the Dutch Golden age is known to be one of the most flourishing periods to this date. Marked by trade, science, military and art they were acclaimed to be the world leaders of that time (Arts&Culture, 2022). Entangled in the Thirty Year's War, a war fought across Europe, they let humanity to one of the most destructive conflicts in human history. The bloodshed was not for nothing, because, in 1648 the Netherlands gained their independence. Breaking from the old monarchist and Catholic cultural traditions resulted in the Dutch having to artistically reinvent itself. They left their entrusted religion inspired paintings and set food for the discovery of new secular subjected styles.

Characterized by their detailed realism, they depicted and specialized in all sort of subject matter such as landscapes, townscapes, flowering paintings, maritime paintings and still lifes (Arts&Culture, 2022). Besides the enlightenment in the artistic word, the Dutch also established their first trade routes to the Indian archipelago. Sailing under the Dutch flag, they ravished through the Asian territories looking for new trade. These two completely different aspects of live close hands in the many artworks that were made of the Dutch trading era.

On the foreground of Johannes Vingboons's *view on Batavia* (fig.1), a sea filled with ships sailing under the Dutch flags is shown. Most of the ships are smaller size boats, mainly used for trade in the local area of Batavia. In between these smaller vessels rise three larger ships that contrast in appearance to the surrounding boats. Their sheer size necessitates two masts to move their carriage through the rough oceans, which they had to conquer before arriving in the East India Archipelago. These Dutch ships are part of the biggest trading company at that time, The United East India Company (VOC). After a journey that lasted around eight months they finally arrived at their destination. As a celebration of surviving this harsh journey, they fire their cannons before entering the port. The location they arrive at is Batavia, a town that serves as the VOC's headquarter and is the center for all trade done in East India. This meant that all trading ships had to pass by this coastal city before they arrived or departed from the archipelago.

When shifting view from the foreground to the center of Vingboons' painting, one is welcomed by a view of the Batavian castle. This fortification protected the city from sieges by attacking rival nations over sea such as the Spaniards, Portuguese and English. Attached to the fort, city walls enclose the homes of the population and protect them from native tribes. In between the walls lay a Dutch-like city structure consisting of typical Dutch canals and vernacular architecture. The sea connected canals made it possible for cargo ships to enter the city more easily. Outside the walls lay the "Ommelanden" which referred to the area surrounding the cities. For Batavia this meant the Island of Java, one of the bigger islands of the archipelago.

Johannes Vingboons' painting is a depiction of the city of Batavia around 1665. The buildings, which originally consisted of only a trading post, have grown into a city with a monologue theme. In addition to depicting the city of Batavia, the painting is also clearly a display of the glory brought by the Dutch East India company (V.O.C.). After all, it were the exploits of the VOC that provided the financial foundation of the city. Elements in the painting, such as the Dutch flags, typical canal system and Dutch architectural style, prove the authoritarian role that the Netherlands had in this city.

From studies and history books, everyone today knows that the VOC era was far less glorious than it was told to be (Rossum, 2015). Slavery, occupation and exploitation are some examples that belong on the black pages of VOC's history. Besides that, the relationship within the social hierarchy proves that the Netherlands behaved elitist and placed themselves above the natives in their colonies (Kehoe, 2015).

These black pages in Dutch history are becoming increasingly relevant. In recent years, the past of the Dutch colonial era in Indonesia and its' consequences have been structurally debated. The most recent event is King Willem-Alexander's apology to Indonesia (NOS, 2020), a long-awaited apology on behalf of the king about the Dutch colonial past. Besides that, another article deals with the abolition of the golden carriage through an image that the refers to the pride about the colonial past (RTL,2020). To add one last example, the controversy around the education of the colonial past because the books were written from the perspective of the "white" ruler (Heilbron, 2019). The discrediting in the media mainly relates to the perspective in which the Netherlands look back at the past, which often is labeled as "proud and positive" (Heilbron, 2019). The increasing media attention has also raised a voice for an explanation of certain historical events, which, for the Netherlands, relate to the "Golden Age" era.

In this history thesis I will use Vingboon's painting *Gezicht op Batavia* as a window into the history of the VOC presence in Batavia. It will reveal a segment of history dominated by the Dutch. The research will be split in three main chapters that derive their topic from the different elements that are depicted in the painting. The VOC (United East Indian Company) and explains how Batavia became an integral part of this company as a trading settlement. The second chapter will continue the story by explaining how that trading settlement evolved to a Dutch city in the tropics. In the third and final chapter an exploration is done of the town's daily life to get a better understanding in the social-economic and social-cultural aspects of Batavia.

Multiple primary sources, consisting of paintings, cartography maps and urban maps, will support and help this study by creating a perspective and perception of Batavia. The ultimate aim of this research is to present the urban elements that were important for the formation and development of Batavia, in which the emphasis lays on the impact of the VOC's presence. Although the presence of the Dutch in Indonesia lasted longer throughout history, this research focuses on the period of 1595-1796, the period in which Batavia fell under VOC rule.

Chapter 1: The Dutch East India Company

In 1619 Jan Pieterszoon Coen conquers the city Jayajakarta and founded Batavia. He describes “Jacatra de treffelycxte plaetse van gansch Indein”, which translates to the most amazing city of the whole Indies. As the Portuguese had Goa as a central organization centre of their trade, Jan decided to do the same in Batavia. Batavia had to be the largest trading town of the indies, but he envisioned much more than just a trading center. It had to be something of Dutch prestige.

1.1 History Voorcompagnien

The discovery of the first trading route via sea by the Portuguese in combination with the growing demand of spices caused a race for the domination of the European spice market. Multiple European countries tried to join this market by establishing a overseas route that could bypass the overland routes, which already were at hands of eastern merchants (Parthesius,2010). Establishing such a overseas route meant a cheap supply for the European market. It ultimately came down to a few competitors, mainly consisting of Portugal itself, Spain and England. Portugal and Spain were also partnered competitors in the Dutch war for independence from Spain. As royal partners the two countries were not only competitors, but also military and political enemies (Parthesius, 2010).

At the end of the 15th century, most of the spice trade was managed in Lisbon, Portugal’s capital. This, however, changed at the beginning of the following century, when Antwerp took the position as Europe’s spice trade center (Parthesius, 2010). As a result of the Spanish war, Antwerp fell into the hands of the Spanish. To make a statement, the Dutch tried to relocate the port center to Amsterdam. This would bring all trade to the republic, ensuring them more economic stability. Even though Amsterdam became the trading center for spices, most of spices were still imported by the Portuguese. The Portuguese, however, were unable to maintain their level of imports from Asia, which caused the price of pepper to rise exponentially in Europe (Parthesius,2010).

This development resulted in the Dutch trying to enter the market in 1595. With their first expeditions to Asia, a fleet of four ships under the name *Compagnie van Verre* (Far Distant land Company), succeeded in establishing a trading route to the Spice Islands. This, however, was not the success they were hoping for, since more than half of the initial crew died. This left one of the fleet’s ship behind because there were not enough crewmembers to man all four ships (Roeper & wildeman 1997, pp. 16-21). Nonetheless, they succeeded in finding a trading route, allowing multiple new companies to follow in their path. These companies would later become the so called *Voor-compagnieën* (Pre-Companies), because they were the forerunners of the VOC.

1.2 The Dutch East India Company

The aspect of competing on two fronts, against the other voor-compagnieën and foreign traders, caused a significant increase in the price of pepper and spices on the Asian markets, whilst bringing down the price in Europe (Parthesius,2010). Because the market was a risky and costly enterprise it formed a weak economic foundation. To organize these unwanted developments, the *Staten-Generaal*¹(General General) decided to take

¹ The highest body of the then Dutch Republic

precautions, thereby, making it a case of national importance. The *Staten-Generaal* had interest in a well-organized enterprise to create economic stability in the Dutch Republic. But above all, the goal was an enterprise with a strong Dutch position in Asia, which would have effects on the Spanish-Portuguese power alliance.

In 1602, the various existing companies were united under the Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC) or United East Indian Company (Parthesius,2010). From that point onward, the company would become a decentralized platform that sailed under the constitution of the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands. It was organized around the six chambers that represented the cities or regions Amsterdam, Zeeland, Hoorn, Enkhuizen, Delft and Rotterdam. Each of these chambers would have their own board of directors. Together with the VOC's general management it formed a central board that went by the name of *Heren Zeventien* (Gentleman of seventeen). Each chamber would be a self-functioning organ but had to obey general legislation set up by the company.

1.3 The succession of the VOC

The Dutch had a broad and successful tradition of shipping in Europe. Their efficient assimilation into the changing circumstances in the European shipping trade is seen as the most important quality of the Dutch shipbuilders and skippers (Davids 1991, pp.22-24; Unger 1978, pp.41-68). The development of new ship types resulted in the opportunity to scale up on ship building during the second half of the 16th century. These new ships were cheap and easy to manufacture. Altogether, these developments together resulted in achieving an upper hand over their rival countries.

For the VOC, It quickly became clear that Europe had a limited market in spice trade. What feared the company was the fact of multiple parties selling their spices in Europe. The company feared a splintering of the spice market in Europe across multiple selling parties, which could result in a major reduction of the price of spice. To keep the market under control, The VOC decided to monopolize the spice trade (Parthesius,2010). Under the control of the first governor-general Pieter Both and Jan Pieterszoon Coen a plan was constructed to aggressively monopolize the Indian archipelago (Parthesius,2010). To achieve this goal, Coen waged war against European rivals and Indonesian monarchs. This was possible due to the permissions they were granted when the VOC was founded. Accordingly, the Company was granted the right to wage war to obtain the trade monopoly. In addition, it could negotiate treaties with native princes and exercise jurisdiction on behalf of the Dutch Republic.

The methods the VOC used for obtaining monopoly varied; rather than aim for territorial acquisition they opted for domination of trade. An example of this was overtaking the Mollucan island Ambon from the Portuguese, an island known for having the largest clove production. Similarly, the Spanish were expelled from the island Ternate. In the lands that were not conquered by European settlers, they placed outposts and warehouses at key locations for exclusive trade with local merchants. When this method did not succeed, VOC officers massacred or enslaved local producers, after which they were replaced by Dutch settlers. Another frequently used strategy was the destruction of spice trees outside the Dutch controlled areas to ensure their goal towards monopoly.

1.4 Batavia: the perfect city for the Dutch VOC

The founding of Batavia was a key success for the VOC. Founded by a new general Jan Pieterszoon Coen (1587-1629) it was the beginning of long lasting consequences, as it would remain the capital of the colonial Dutch east Indies till the nineteenth century. A series of events that led to the establishment of the city. At first, it was Coen's recognition of a need for an eastern capital for the VOC. This meant that Batavia would become an administrative center and warehouse, where goods could be stored and collected before they were shipped back to Europe. It followed a similar concept as the Portuguese occupied city of Goa. The VOC used this approach to make a more efficient administration of trade.

When founded, the main priority of the company was to have a good location for a harbor, town and fort. This concept would remain until two centuries after the dissolution of the VOC, when formal governmental colonization led to the demand in land expansion for plantation farming. When Coens discovered the site, there already was a centuries old city named Jayajakarta, a known trading center within the archipelago. It was inhabited by locals as well as Arab, Chinese, Portuguese and English merchants. The city was built around the mouth of the Ciliwung river, which gave easy access to the inland area and at the same time delivered a fresh supply of water.

The location of the future Dutch settlement was also chosen strategically, as it was located close to the Sunda strait (*fig.3*), which was a strait that made it possible to bypass the heavily contested strait of Malacca. A map from 1584 by Abraham Ortelius (*fig. 4*) can give us a better understanding of the significance of these straits. The Malacca strait connects the Java sea with the Bay of Bengal – the bay that lays in front of India - and is geographically the most ideal route to India. India were of importance since it was, together with Cape Town, one of the checkpoints along the Asian trade route. The Sunda strait, that was located between the islands of Sumatra and Iava, served as a perfect alternative to the Malacca strait.

The ships at the foreground of Vingboon's painting are the first layer behind the history of Batavia. This chapter explains why the Dutch were interested in the spice trade and how the *compagnie van Verre* ultimately led to the establishment of the United East Indian Company (VOC). Besides that, it also explains how the Dutch state became an integral part of the company, which made it possible to use force and wage war in their strategies for monopolizing spice trade. The interest in having a monopoly was not only of economic interest but also was closely related to the war for Independence of the Dutch Republic. As part of the stages of developing the company, an introduction of the relevance of the city Batavia is done. It tells the political interest and strategies in which Batavia will operate in the future.

Chapter 2 The city of Batavia

2.1 Coen's Dutch City in the Tropics

The story behind the founding of Batavia by Jan Pieterszoon Coen was a little more complicated than just sailing to the city and occupying it. Rather than a single, decisive action, it was a chain of events that led to the overtaking of the then-known-as Jayakarta. In 1610, Coen, together with the English, got permission from the local ruler of Jayakarta to build a trading post in the city (Wiryomartono, 2020). The city had many ethnicities making Jayakarta a multicultural city. In 1618, this led to tensions between Coen's man and the natives, forcing them to escape the city and find shelter in Molucca. To not show a sign of defeat, he made his return to the city five months after the incident. With the aid of local supporting troops, he decided to completely conquer the town and its 'Ommelanden'. With the city now under Dutch control, Coen started working towards the expansion of the VOC trading network. In 1621, he managed to achieve superiority in the spice trade between Jayakarta and Molluca (Wiryomartono, 2020). As the new General-commander of the city he decides to rename it into Batavia, named after a region in Holland. When Coen renamed the city to Batavia he had plans besides that of a normal trading city. At first, it only had to be a rendezvous for the company, a simple place for meetings and arrangements (Parthesius, 2010). Coen, however, wanted to create a city that had the Dutch identity (Wiryomartono, 2020).

This 'Dutch identity' is depicted in many paintings of that era, Vingboons painting is one of them and provides a glimpse of Coen's vision. It shows the Dutch style vernacular architecture, channels and a grid plan that all derive from Dutch urban planning concepts (Kehou, 2015). *Gezicht op de Tijgersgracht te Batavia* (fig. 5) is another painting that further illustrates these concepts. The painting shows a view of the *Tijgersgracht* (Tiger canal) with typical Dutch architecture on both sides. The center bridge suggests the connection between the grid plan structures, an element derived from Dutch city planning. Scattered throughout the scene are palm trees, referring to the tropical locale of the city. In the bottom center, a prosperous Dutch ship is sailing away accompanied by another Dutch ship, which is still waiting for a couple to board the vessel. This event seems to be the main event of this painting, indicating yet again the dominant Dutch identity. Even though there was a diverse population in Batavia, the city felt and looked like a Dutch city. To the Dutch Batavians, this was a pleasant display; as it was a way to stay connected to the Republic in Europe through a collective identity. Yet, it was far less idealistic for the non-Dutch inhabitants of the city, since it was a stark reminder of the dominating character of the Dutch social group.

2.2 The canals of Batavia

The canals were one of the key characteristics of Batavia, and can be seen in the Dutch cities to this day. The canals were used as drainage system, for transportation and protection, and are an immediate aspect of typical Dutch. Back home in the republic the canals functioned as a means of draining the low countries, much of which lies below sea level, in order to carve out more usable land for building agriculture (Kehou, 2015). With the port of Batavia lying below sea level, the Dutch decided to adapt the same solution. The canals in Batavia were long and straight, and were adored by many because they were prettier than those in the republic. If you compare *Gezicht op de Tijgersgracht te Batavia* (fig. 5) to the *De bocht van de Heerengracht* (fig. 6). *De bocht van de*

Heerengracht depict one of Amsterdams most famous and prosperous canals and, can be seen as the Tijgersgracht of city. Both were painted during the second half of the 17th century and share similarities such as the vernacular architecture style and the urban structure alongside the canals. What differs from the painting in Amsterdam is the presence of tropical greenery and linear structure of the canal, aspects which probably were preferred by Europeans.

Besides being more pretty than those of the Republic, they were also more efficient (Kehou, 2015). The reason for this being that the canals were established before the construction of buildings, in contrast to Dutch canals that were organized around existing buildings. However, in practice the channels did not function as successfully as home. Proper Dutch canals regularly flush their contents out to the larger body of water. Batavia's canals, however, became less functional over time because of irregular water flow from inland, leading to canals with shallow, stagnant water that were unable to flush the city's sewage into the sea. This resulted in the canals having a horrible smell, which people blamed for diseases.

2.3 The plan of Batavia

Many cities in the Indian archipelago were built among trees, forests and rice fields. Batavia, on the other hand, formed a great contrast: the entire area surrounding the city was flattened and deforested. The settlement gave preference to open land to build canals, roads, lots and sewers. Batavia's city plan derives from Dutch island cities such as Leiden, with parallel roads along rivers and canals enclosed by a city wall (Prince, 2014).

In the center of *the view on Batavia* (fig.1), the castle and walls of Batavia show themselves. The plan and design is derived from a French medieval *bastide* (Hilton 1995, 36-37; Morris 1975/2013).

Outside the walls of the bastide, the immediate surrounding land functioned as the city's backyard. This is where the plantations and houses were located. In the southern part of the city the VOC gave permission for the Chinese to make their own district here, which later became known as Glodok. It was overseen and controlled by Chinese headman who reported to the VOC officers on taxes, gifts and tributes. Besides the Chinese quarters, the area had indigenous *kampongs*² and slave slums.

Most of the banks, insurance companies, trading offices, private houses, storehouses and warehouses were located on the other side of the river at the west side of the bastide. The public buildings that were present in Batavia followed a stripped down version of a Neo Classicist style. Vernacular architecture recalled the domestic architecture of the home country. As in the Netherlands, plots were narrow and deep giving them small street facades. These facades had a spout gable that featured a range of aesthetic ornaments depending on the wealth of the owner. Step and stout-gables provided a recognizable Dutch marker, elements that *view on Batavia* and *Gezicht op Tijgersgracht te Batavia* show as well (fig.1&5). However, these early adaptations were not sufficient for the tropical climate. The extreme heat and sun forced these concepts to change. The orientation of the roofs was turned by 90 degrees, resulting in a steep roof with overhang. It is likely that architects drew inspiration from native architecture. The overhang facilitated shadow against the sun and deflected heavy rainfall from the building's walls. The materials that were used consisted out of brick that originated from the republic and was transported as counterweight by the VOC ships from Europe.

² Derived from Malay kampung 'enclosed yard, village'. In cities and other larger settlements, several indigenous kampongs were often scattered among the settlers' buildings, but in the interior, kampong could become synonymous with village. (Philippa, 2009)

2.4 The Bastide

The Dutch settlement provided territorial control of the hinterland of Java. It also contributed to the authoritarian image of the Dutch. Spatially, the bastide was divided into three parts of land use. The northeastern part consisted of an island for a chateau, and the east and west parts provided space for settlements to support trading activities. In a city map of Batavia (*fig.3*) there is a clear indication that the bastide had a town house, town square, Dutch church and residences of the Gouverneur-general and councilor, which as a whole were core elements of the bastide.

A 1682's painting (*fig.7*) of the town square can give a better understanding on how the spaces inside the castle were divided. On the left the house of the director general, on the right the residence and the service quarters of the governor general or government. In the middle back the castle church is visible, which stands out by its' decorative elements, such as the classic pillars and the coat of arms that surround the entrance. The settlement was organized into blocks consisting of lots for two- or three-story buildings. The eastern part was mainly occupied by civic buildings. This was also the place where the city hall, the church, government offices and houses for the VOC officers were located.

Chapter 3 Life between the walls

3.1 Servant of the Dutch Batavians

The presence of the Dutch had a major impact on social-economic and social-cultural aspects in relation to the pre-existing population. As mentioned before, Batavia had a multicultural population that originated before the VOC's arrival. There were many layers in the society and they intermingled in their daily lives. Starting from the bottom, at the lowest point of the social hierarchy were the slaves. Slavery was already rampant throughout the city's history and was not something that Dutch cruelty brought to the islands. Raging wars on other islands of the archipelago resulted in the transportation of prisoners of war from Bengal, Arrakan en Cormandel.

Indigenous people from Java could not be slaves according to the law. This prevented potential clashes between local tribes, which could have a negative impact on the trade. Additionally, it also prevented the clustering of slaves from one region so they could not revolt and cause difficult situations. By using slaves from different continents or regions there was a natural restriction on the congregating of slaves, which made the suppression of these groups easier.

The slaves of European owners were not used as fieldworkers, but executed task that their owners did not want to do. They could be a shop worker, baker's assistant or shoemaker. The most common slaves were appointed to household tasks. Surprisingly, slaves even had their own rights; they were allowed to marry non-slaves, which made them, according to the state, a free man. The children of slaves had the opportunity to attend company-schools. Their rights even made it possible for slaves to hold their own store and possess their own slaves. These privileges, ultimately, led to frustration by other European workers. In 1665 the shoemakers in the city started complaining because there was too much competition by the slaves that preformed the same job (Oud Batavia, p. 457).

Slaves also functioned as a status symbol, as the wealth of a slave owner was measured by the amount of slaves he brought with him in public. Thus, when the slaves were exhibited, they were elegantly dressed. This status display was abolished in 1732 by the government of Republic. However, this abolishment failed in practice, because after the introduction of legislation the practice only got worse (Oud Batavia, p. 460).

As far as this story goes, the live of a slave does not look as bad in theory, but this unfolded rather differently in practice. Many of the slaves did not speak Dutch or Malaysian and, therefore, did not know what was asked of them. This resulted in frustration by their master, after which the slaves were beaten with a canes in order to get the things done that were asked from them. In 1625, a law was introduced to protect slaves from these cases of assault. This law was extended in 1642, making it possible for a slave to take legal actions when mistreated by their owner.

You could imagine that being presented on a table and being sold under drunken jokes made their position as slave was pretty demoralizing. This led to occasions where slaves would misbehave in public or against their owners. In combination with the boredom of slaves during their spare time, they started to deal in opium, got drunk, were stealing, and started selling their clothes so they could gamble. When slaves misbehaved the owners

could punish them or sell them on the market. What was most feared by the owners was the misbehavior to other non-slaves. If this happened, and fell into the hands of justice, the owner had to pay the court costs.

3.2 Dutch Minority

In terms of urban planning, Batavia was meant to be a city that served the Dutch inhabitants first (Kehou, 2015). The remaining population was spread across the different quarters that were separated by the canals. A diverse population was the result of the established trading network of the VOC. This attracted many merchants from different nationalities. But even before the arrival of the Europeans in the archipelago, the indigenous population worked among Chinese and middle European merchants. When the Europeans discovered the East Indian archipelago, merchants from Portugal, Netherlands and English settled in the port city. After the Dutch claimed control of Batavia, much of this diverse population remained intact. A survey from 1673 shows that 27000 people lived between the walls of which 2000 Dutch, 2800 Chinese, 5000 Indians, 700 Euroasians, 3000 Javanese, and 13000 slaves (Abeyakera, 1987).

Ten percent of the Batavian population was Dutch. The legal classification of 'Dutch' included people that were born in the Dutch Republic, children born with Dutch parents (creoles), wives of a Dutchmen, children from a Dutchman in general. Because of this relatively lenient classification, the size of the Dutch group increased exponentially (Wirjomartono, 2020). Ultimately, even the most undesirable people were considered to be Dutch. These also included sailors and soldiers, which according to Dutch standards had a very low status in society. Even though they were 'undesired', they formed the larger body of the 'Dutch' population in Batavia. Being Dutch meant that you were part of the leading elite of Batavia, but in practice most of them dressed and behaved in ways not compatible with the image of the elite.

3.3 The wealthy of the city

The most wealthy inhabitants were European-derived merchants, officials and Chinese merchants (Kehou, 2015). They lived among the Tijgersgracht in the southwestern part of the city, or at the Jonckersgracht in the southwest quarter. The Chinese of the Jonckersgracht lived north of the Utrechtstraat and the European south of the street. Slave craftsman worked at the Ambachtskwartier (craftworking quarter) in the southern corner of the city. Aside from the wealthy Chinese living at the Jonckergracht, most of the Chinese were spread across the city but mostly concentrated in the western half. Chained slaves lived inside the fort and the remaining slaves lived either where they worked, or in the quarter outside the city walls south of the Ambachtskwartier. Not everyone could choose where to live: some groups, for example slaves, were compelled to live in specific neighborhoods by law (Kehou, 2015).

During the course of the 17th century most of the product sugar were in the hands of Chinese businessman. The sugar was produced on sugar fields in the Ommelanden³, where cheap labor force koelies⁴ helped in maintenance. In 1720, this all changed when the Javanese sugar trade collapsed because of cheaper sugar from Brazil (Krul, 2017). The demand of sugar had a strong relation with the size of the Chinese population. The Chinese workers that became unemployed, therefore, moved to the already overcrowded Chinese quarters of Batavia. This event caused problems, because the so called 'sugargang' started to raid the city out of a necessity

³ The area surrounding a city or settlement

⁴ an offensive word for an Indian or Chinese labourer/laborer.

to obtain food. The board of the VOC had major concerns and made a desperate attempt to combat this issue. They decided to arrest all wandering Chinese and ship them to the Cape colony in South Africa. In fact, the truth was that many of the imprisoned never arrived because they were thrown overboard in the middle of the sea. Logically, rumors quickly started to spread amongst the Chinese population and caused tensions in and around the city. This, ultimately, led to various riots and even an attempt in overtaking the city. This attempt at overthrowing the Dutch authority left Governor-General Adrainen Valckenier in shock, causing him to propose a “cleanse of the Chinese population” (Krul, 2017). This was rejected by the council of Indies, who preferred a more gentle approach. They suggested a search of all the houses to avoid potential threats. Whilst this sounded like a innocent approach, this, ultimately, led to a catastrophic event. On the 9th and 10th of October 1740 a massive search party, consisting of the VOC military and citizens of the city was carried out (Krul, 2017). Many of the citizens had already developed hatred towards the Chinese, because they often had better economic positions and thus welfare. The fact that Chinese had civil rights was something that most European citizens considered to be a superior privilege and, therefore, was not meant for the Chinese. These preconceptions led to the murdering of 10 000 Chinese man, woman and children in the span of two days (Krul, 2017). The end of the event was marked by setting fire to the house of the ‘captain’ of the Chinese in which he had entrenched himself with 400 followers. The Chinese who managed to escape fled with the koelies into the mountains of Central and East Java. Remaining victims of the slaughter were relocated to Glodok, a district on the outside of Batavia. The turmoil continued until the sugar trade rebounded after a period of time (Krul, 2017).

3.4 The downfall of the VOC

After 1680, the advantageous and well-balanced trading system of the VOC fell victim to various influences that started the downfall and end of the Dutch trading era. Bad management from the republic’s executive board, as a result of poor accounting, let to major losses and value of the company (Gaastra, 2008). However, this was not the only cause of problems: In Asia, the corruption under commanding officials started to take its toll. Corruption was not something new; the salaries had always been low, which made corruption present throughout the whole VOC’s reigning period. There was also a shift in trading patterns (Gaastra, 2008). The most noticeable to the VOC came from the trade with Japan. In 1685, the Japanese cut ties with international trade by setting a limit on the import of goods. This was a problem for the VOC, since they heavily relied on the trade with Japan for purchasing gold and copper. In addition, the European market started to prefer cotton, silk and European cloth, which overtook the market of sugar, pepper and cotton yarn (all from Java).

The final blow to the VOC’s reign came from the fourth war with England that broke out in 1780. The cause of this war came from the ‘smuggling support’ by the republic in the American war for independence. Even though the only Asian possessions they lost were Negapatnam at the coast of Coromandel, a lot of costly returns fell into the hands of the English (Gaastra, 2008). Eventually, England succeeded in the establishment of free sailing on the Eastern seas, which meant the end of the spice monopoly by the Dutch. In 1795, the republic was not capable of financially supporting the company’s actions and was declared bankrupt. Because the republic was heavily relying on the revenues of the VOC, the support lasted over decades and was bankrupted with a debt of 219 million guilders (Gaastra, 2008).

Conclusion

It could be said that the Dutch republic, as integral part of the VOC, is responsible for events that far overshadow the prosperous gains of the “Golden age”. From the start, the journey to the Indonesian archipelago was for nothing but the state’s financial interests. They neglected everything and everyone that stood in their path of reaching their own glory, and even went as far as forcing others to participate in achieving their goals. Batavia can be seen as a mockup of all that is wrong in this concept. To unravel all these deeper layers, I used Johannes Vingboon’s painting *Gezicht op Batavia* as a window into the history of the VOC in Batavia. I discovered that from the moment they set foot on the tropical lands to the bankruptcy of the company, the dominating character echoed throughout this whole segment of history.

The first window into a deeper layer started with the establishing of a spice monopoly. After the Dutch government got involved in the formation of the Dutch East Indian company, the company was allowed to use force for achieving an upper hand over their rival countries. This concept in its essence alone revealed that the Dutch were not just here to trade but were after complete superiority.

As the second layer of Dutch domination is the VOC’s headquarter city of Batavia. Chosen for its geographical advantage, the site already had a coastal trading city, Jayakarta. Instead of keeping the city intact as a trading establishment, they completely wiped the city to the ground to make way for a Dutch inspired city. In this process they acted out of own egocentric morals, completely neglecting other aspects, such as for instance the existing population and their needs.

This is continued by Jan Pieterszoon Coen’s vision of “A Dutch city in the tropics”. Every aspect of the city had to be inspired and replicated in line with Dutch architectural standards. As this was in Coen’s words ‘a place where the Dutch Batavians stay connected to the republic’, it was also a tool to show Dutch superiority, as it reminded other inhabitants that they were under the command of the republic.

Not only the city planning and vernacular architecture were aspects that contributed to the Dutch dominating character. The Dutch reign and leadership had influence on all aspects of regular daily life in the city. Batavia had to be a city that served the Dutch inhabitants, but being a minority was cause for great concerns and they did everything in their power to stay on top of the hierarchy. This was reflected by their expression of rank, for instance showing the amount of slaves when exhibiting the public streets. It could be stated that this behavior was a way to compensate for their minority in numbers within Batavia. Another example of how desperate the Dutch were in controlling their power is the Chinese massacre. This act was a desperate measure and reaction to a potential overthrowing of their power. It shows that the Dutch were capable of horrible events, all to assure that their position of domination remained intact.

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