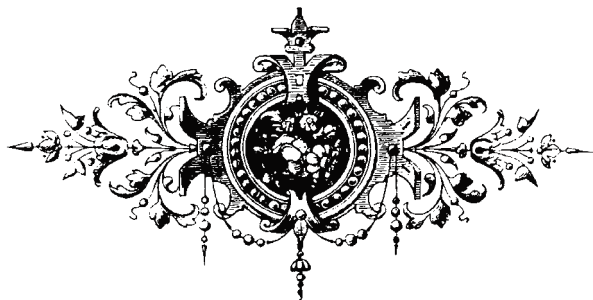


Jacob van Neck's Fleet on the China Coast, 1601

Roelof Roeloffsz



In June 1600, Jacob van Neck sailed from the Netherlands bound to the East Indies as the admiral of a fleet

composed of six vessels. This armada was commissioned by the *Oude Compagnie*, or Old Amsterdam Company. On the equatorial area, the three fastest ships sailed ahead, arriving in Bantam, on the island of Java, in March of the following year. There, the fleet was again divided: while one of the ships sailed back to the Netherlands filled with a shipment of pepper, the remaining two – the *Amsterdam* and the *Gouda* – headed to the Moluccas islands. In Tidore, Van Neck would attempt to conquer the Portuguese fortress. Defeated, he chose to head to Patane, together with a ship that should have arrived at Ternate in the meanwhile. A sudden storm threw the ships towards the coast of China. On 27 September they were in sight of Macao. The Dutch tried to land twice but were prevented from doing so by the defences of the city, under the command of the captain-general of the annual Japan voyage, Dom Paulo de Portugal, who was also governor of the territory while waiting for the monsoon that would take him to Nagasaki. Besides immediate casualties, some seventeen out of the twenty Dutch prisoners were executed in Macao. Jacob van Neck returned to Holland in July 1603. The following passage is taken from the account of this voyage by Van Neck written by Roelof Roeloffsz, who was on board the flagship. It was published for the first time in volume VIII of *Petits Voyages* by Johann Theodor and Johann Israel de Bry (Frankfurt, 1606), and was again printed in the collection *Begin ende Voortgang* of Isaac Commelin (Amsterdam, 1645).

Source: René-Auguste Constantin de Reneville, “Relation du Second Voyage de Jaques van Neck, Amiral Hollandois, aux Indes Orientales” [1606], in *Recueil des Voyages qui ont servi à l’établissement & aux progrès de la Compagnie des Indes Orientales* [Tome II, I Part, Amsterdam: Frederic Bernard, 1725, pp. 174-177]. The text was translated from the French into English by Maria Manuela da Costa Silva.

Em Junho de 1600, Jacob van Neck partiu dos Países Baixos com destino às Índias Orientais como almirante

de uma esquadra de cinco naus e um patacho, armada por conta da Oude Compagnie ou Companhia Velha de Amesterdão. Na zona do equador, os três navios mais rápidos tomam a dianteira, chegando a Bantam, na ilha de Java, em Março do ano seguinte. Aqui, produz-se nova separação da esquadra: enquanto uma das naus vai regressar aos Países Baixos carregada de pimenta, as duas restantes – a *Amsterdam* e a *Gouda* – dirigem-se para as ilhas de Maluco. Em Tidore, Van Neck tentará conquistar a fortaleza portuguesa. Derrotado, opta por dirigir as suas duas naus para Patane, juntamente com um patacho que entretanto deveria ter chegado a Ternate. Uma tempestade imprevista acaba por lançar estes três navios de encontro às costas da China, chegando à vista de Macau a 27 de Setembro. Os holandeses tentam desembarcar por duas vezes, mas são impedidos pelas defesas da cidade. Estas actuavam sob as ordens do capitão-mor da viagem anual ao Japão, Dom Paulo de Portugal, que exercia o cargo de governador do território enquanto esperava a monção para seguir para Nagasáqui. Além de terem sofrido de imediato várias baixas, uns 17 de entre os cerca de 20 holandeses que foram aprisionados pelos portugueses nessas duas ocasiões acabaram por ser executados em Macau. Jacob van Neck regressou à Holanda em Julho de 1603. O trecho seguinte é retirado do relato desta viagem de Van Neck escrito por Roelof Roeloffsz, que seguia a bordo da nau capitânia. Foi publicado pela primeira vez no volume VIII das *Petits Voyages* de Johann Theodor e Johann Israel de Bry (Frankfurt, 1606) e voltou a ser impresso na colectânea *Begin ende Voortgang* de Isaac Commelin (Amesterdão, 1645).

Fonte utilizada: René-Auguste Constantin de Reneville, “Relation du Second Voyage de Jaques van Neck, Amiral Hollandois, aux Indes Orientales” [1606], in *Recueil des Voyages qui ont servi à l’établissement & aux progrès de la Compagnie des Indes Orientales* [Tome II, I Parte, Amesterdão: Frederic Bernard, 1725, pp. 174-177]. O texto foi traduzido de francês para inglês por Maria Manuela da Costa Silva.

On September 20, at about two o'clock in the afternoon, they were near the islands of the great Chinese Empire, where they cast anchor. The general¹ sent his launch with rowers and his pilot to check whether they could go any further. On its way, the launch met a small fishing boat and asked the fishermen where the island of Saint John [Shangchuan] was. The fishermen showed seven fingers and indicated the east, from which they concluded that they meant that the island was seven leagues to the east. When separating, the fishermen offered a big fish, for which the pilot wanted to pay, but they refused to take the money.

On the 27th, while travelling around the islands, they saw a big city built very much like the Spanish cities. They were very surprised and cast anchor at about half a league from the city. One hour later they saw two Chinese boats coming with an entire family in each boat, meaning the husband, the wife and two or three small children. These people said that the city they were seeing was called Macao, which increased even more the Dutch's surprise, who did not understand how they had advanced so much up the Canton river or passed beyond so many islands and shoals. But their happiness was as large as their surprise. They promptly sent a dinghy with a man who spoke Malay and another one who spoke Spanish to find out how things stood in that city.

The dinghy did not return to the ship on that day. The next morning they discovered from the top of the ships many people assembled on the top of a mountain, which caused annoying suspicions, the sailors fearing that their comrades who had gone ashore were to be killed, as they had heard from Jan Huygen van Linschoten that the town of Macao was inhabited by the Portuguese and that they had there a commander and a bishop². Thus, it was everybody's opinion that they should go and cast anchor nearer the town. With this purpose, they sent the big launch with the first pilot to sound the bottom. Once the pilot had sounded the bottom, he made a signal to indicate that it was deep enough. But it was not possible to go any further as a result of the strong wind that was blowing, and instead of weighing anchor, it was necessary to cast yet another one.

The city inhabitants, seeing that neither could the vessels approach nor the launch get back to the ship, sent five junks equipped to attack it. The crew of

the launch, seeing them approach furiously, lifted the hook and set sail. But the junks, which were better sailing-ships than the launch, grappled it and took it under the eyes of the vessels in spite of the brave defence put up by the crew and having driven off the junks twice. This deadly adventure deprived the Dutch of their first pilot, named Jan Dirckszoon of Enkhuisen, a leading seaman of the admiral, and some yacht sailors....

On October 3, the Dutch had developed their best efforts to take a junk and to send letters to Macao asking for the return of the prisoners, and having been many times in danger as a result of the bad weather and at risk of running aground on the river bank, it was decided to pursue the course to Patane and there seek for the means to retrieve the prisoners. With this purpose, the ships followed their course between the islands and the Chinese mainland. After passing with great difficulty and nearly always with the sounding line nearby, between banks and shoals, with no indication from the natives, at three o'clock in the afternoon they were at the same place where they had cast anchor for the first time in Chinese waters. It was rather constraining to find themselves in a place of which they had no knowledge.

The general then decided to assemble the crews and ask them whether they were aware of a means that could get the prisoners back. No one was able to give an idea, and it was then decided by common consent to continue the voyage. The general had them as witnesses for their endeavours to get their companions back from captivity. [By letters found later, in a carrack taken by the Dutch, it became known that the two most important persons among these twenty prisoners were transferred to Goa, and that the others were hanged in Macao.] **RC**

NOTES

- 1 Jacob van Neck.
- 2 A reference to the *Itinerario* of the Dutch traveller Jan Huygen van Linschoten, published in 1596 in Amsterdam.