

Cornelis van Veen in the East, 1602-1603

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In 1602, the States-General completed the fusion of the Dutch companies competing for the

Eastern trade, establishing to that effect a sole

majestical company the *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (Dutch East Indies Company) generally known as the VOC. The first fleet sent by the VOC to the Orient consisted of 14 galleons and a barge, with a total of more than 1000 men. It combined two armadas, which sailed from the Netherlands between March and June 1602. The first was under the command of Sebaldt de Weert (vice-admiral of the fleet) and the second was captained by Wybrand van Warwijck (supreme chief of the fleet). While De Weert had instructions to trade in Ceylon and Sumatra, Van Warwijck had, among other tasks, that of trying to establish commerce with China. Once he arrived in Bantam, in Java, this admiral sent two galleons – the *Nassau* and the *Erasmus* – and a barge to the Chinese coast in June 1603. The command of this flotilla was given to Cornelis van Veen, who, after a stop in Patane, reached Macao a month later. To his surprise, he found the “Black Ship” ready to follow to Nagasaki with a precious cargo of silk, gold, and other Chinese merchandise. The Portuguese ship was commanded by Gonçalo Rodrigues de Sousa and must have anchored in the outer harbour. The ease with which the Dutch took the vessel shows that most of the crew was not on board. After taking their prey, the Dutch transferred the cargo into their ships and set it alight returning to Europe in August 1604. The text herein transcribed corresponds to the adventures of the ships *Erasmus* and *Nassau*, and appeared for the first time in volume VIII of *Petits Voyages* published by Johann Theodor and Johann Israel de Bry (Frankfurt, 1606), reappearing in volume I of the collection *Begin ende Voortgang* of Isaac Commelin (Amsterdam, 1645).

Source: René-Auguste Constantin de Reneville, “Voyage de Corneille de Veen 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. 365-368]. The text was translated from the French to English by Maria Manuela da Costa Silva.

Em 1602, os Estados Gerais consumaram a fusão das diferentes companhias neerlandesas que disputavam

o comércio do Oriente, constituindo para o efeito

uma única companhia majestática, a *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (*Companhia Holandesa das Índias Orientais*), geralmente conhecida como VOC. A primeira frota enviada pela VOC ao Oriente era composta por 14 naus e um patacho, num total de mais de 1000 homens. Combinava duas armadas, as quais saíram dos Países Baixos entre Março e Junho de 1602. A primeira ia sob comando de Sebaldt de Weert (vice-almirante da frota) e a segunda era comandada por Wybrand van Warwijck (chefe supremo da frota). Enquanto De Weert levava instruções para comerciar em Ceilão e em Samatra, Van Warwijck tinha, entre outras incumbências, a de tentar estabelecer comércio com a China. Uma vez chegado a Bantam, na ilha de Java, este almirante, em Junho de 1603, fez seguir para o litoral chinês as naus *Nassau* e *Erasmus* e uma pinaça. O comando desta flotilha foi entregue a Cornelis van Veen, o qual, depois de fazer escala em Patane, atinge Macau um mês mais tarde. Para surpresa sua, depara com a *Nau do Trato* pronta para seguir para Nagasaki com uma riquíssima carga de sedas, ouro e outras mercadorias chinesas. A embarcação lusa era capitaneada por Gonçalo Rodrigues de Sousa e deveria estar fundeada no porto exterior. A facilidade com que os holandeses a tomaram indícia que não deveria ter a bordo a maioria dos seus tripulantes. Uma vez capturada a presa, os holandeses procederam ao transbordo da carga para os seus navios e deitaram-lhe fogo, tendo regressado ao seu país em Agosto de 1604. O texto que se transcreve de seguida corresponde ao relato das aventuras dos navios *Erasmus* e *Nassau*, que apareceu pela primeira vez no volume VIII das *Petits Voyages* dos editores Johann Theodor e Johann Israel de Bry (Frankfurt, 1606) e reapareceu no volume I da colectânea *Begin ende Voortgang* de Isaac Commelin (Amesterdão, 1645).

Fonte utilizada: René-Auguste Constantin de Reneville, “Voyage de Corneille de Veen 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. 365-368]. O texto foi traduzido de francês para inglês por Maria Manuela da Costa Silva.

On June 17 of the year 1602, nine vessels from Amsterdam and Enkhuizen set sail from the Texel bound to the East Indies. Three other vessels equipped in Rotterdam and designed to navigate under the same pendent joined them at sea, travelling together in order to pursue their objectives and their orders.

On October 12, this fleet was at the harbour of Ano Bom, where they cast anchor. They put people ashore by force and against the will of the Spaniards¹, who opposed it and defended themselves bravely. Six or seven Dutchmen were killed. Finally the enemy took flight to the woods and to the mountains; they got their water supplies and took as much fruit as they wanted.

On the 22nd they weighed anchor and followed their way towards the Cape of Good Hope. After doubling the Cape, they discovered the land of Agasembras [Agysimba]², from where, on December 15, they headed east. From then onwards they met variable winds and changeable weather until April 15, 1603, when the islands of Dromme [Engano] and Sumatra were sighted.

On the 29th of that same month of April, they cast anchor at the harbour of Bantam. There two vessels and one yacht separated from the fleet and on the 6th June set sail to China. Their course was to Sacatara [Jacatra] and from there to Sumatra, in the Balimboam [Palembang] Strait.

On the 21st they called at the island Pulo Tioman to get water supplies and provisions. In the afternoon of the 23rd they called at Pahang, where they were well received by the king.

On July 1 they called at Patane, where they loaded rice provisions and hired a Chinese pilot to take them to Canton, in China.

On the 11th they set sail again.

On the 30th they were in front of *Maccau* [which, undoubtedly, is Macao] and found there a carrack, richly loaded and ready to sail to Japan. The cargo comprised silks from China, silk fabrics, and other precious goods from the Indies. The Dutchmen greatly rejoiced with such a beautiful prey to lay their hands on.

Portuguese in Banten in 1596. In Willem Lodewijcksz, *Premier livre de l'histoire de la navigation aux Indes orientales, par les Hollandois...*, Amsterdam, 1598.



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The Portuguese, on the contrary, were greatly concerned, foreseeing what was going to happen and not feeling courageous enough to take the defence. After reflecting deeply on the matter, they believed that the most advisable [thing] for them was to save their lives. With this purpose, they got into their launches and rowed ashore, abandoning thus to the Dutch the carrack, the booty and twenty Moors that were still there. The Moors were also sent ashore to keep company to their masters, and they became busy unloading the carrack from the 2nd to the 9th of August³. On the 10th they put fire to it and had it burnt to water level.

This significant booty, which came unexpectedly, altered the plans of these three vessels of going to China. They turned back to Bantam, and on the 18th September they discovered a large junk. After approaching it, they ordered the crew to lower the sails and surrender as they suspected that there were Portuguese on board or some of their belongings. As the crew of the junk refused to obey, the Dutch fired their muskets against them, to which the Indians⁴ responded with a profusion of arrows and defended themselves so bravely that the others were obliged to fire the gun.

Notwithstanding the thunder-clap which threatened the junk, the people in it continued to hold out, defending themselves so bravely that the Dutch doubted whether they could defeat them. Finally they boarded the junk, and once the hook had been thrown, they jumped into the junk and killed all that came before them. There were seventy to eighty Indians

killed, and on the Dutch side only one man was killed, though they had about twenty-five injured, five of which for imprudence and due to their own fire.

On the 19th of the same month of August, the Indians still alive came on board and were examined. They declared that they were coming from China and going to Siam, where they lived; that their junk was greatly loaded with rich silks and silk fabrics. They considered that their unhappiness was the fault of their commander, who had forced them to this obstinate defence, but they recognised that he had received the appropriate reward for his stubbornness as he had been killed in combat.

When the Dutch became aware that the junk belonged to the Siamese, who were their allies and friends and with whom they traded every day, they were greatly distressed with what had happened and that such a great disorder had been caused to both sides. Thus, they released the Indians and their junk, allowing them to go where they wanted, which

they did, being grateful to those that behaved so well with them.

Meanwhile, the Dutch, after navigating among the different islands, on December 10 cast anchor at the harbour of Bantam, where they loaded what they required for their vessels.

Then, on January 27, 1604, they departed with their rich booty on their course to the Cape of Good Hope and from there to Holland, where they happily arrived on August 30 next. **RC**



Dutch trading post in Bantam. In Theodor de Bry, *Quinta Pars Indiae Orientalis*, Frankfurt, 1601.

NOTES

1 Most probably, the Portuguese were meant here.
2 *Agysimba* was the name attributed by Ptolemy to the southern parts of the African continent.

3 It seems quite strange that the Portuguese didn't budge for a week, while the Dutch unloaded their carrack.
4 I.e. Siamese.