Recent Dutch-language Publications

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The Nederlands Instituut voor Militaire Historie, an independent research institute within the Nederlandse Defensie Academie has set itself the ambitious goal of publishing a comprehensive history of Dutch military history in a series of six volumes. The best expertise on the subject has been mobilized and funds have been allocated to ensure a beautiful implementation: lavishly illustrated in full color, with relevant maps and tables, a commensurate apparatus with notes, literature, and index, in a royal format, printed on quality paper, and weighing more than two kilograms. Four volumes deal with the exploits of the Dutch Republic and its succeeding Kingdom. The volume on the Eighty Year’s War against Spain (1568–1648) was published in 2014. Two volumes are devoted to the military deployment overseas, in Asia, the Americas, and Africa. The first on the years 1595–1814 has now been published, which concentrates on the East (founded 1602) and West Indies Company (founded 1621). About 60 % of the book, written by Gerrit Knaap, describes and analyses VOC activities. An introduction and epilogue draw comparisons, while the information in the chapters on the respective companies themselves is clearly and successfully coordinated and made comparable; thus similar patterns are discernable. The VOC, nominally a private enterprise, was vested with sovereign power by the Republic to enforce a trade monopoly in Asia, and thus was inevitably drawn into conflict, at first with the familiar foes of Spain and Portugal, and later Britain and France. It was also, often nolens volens, dragged into conflicts with indigenous rulers, which involved extensive land campaigns against, for instance, the Mataram realm. The result was rewarding, and with the division of Mataram in four principalities the rulers were reduced to vassals of the VOC. In general, the VOC depended on its superior sea power, supported by a network of fortifications.
of all kinds. The Iberian forces were ultimately no match and successively lost their strongholds in the Moluccas, Strait Malaka, India (Goa), and Ceylon. Until far in the eighteenth century British and French forces were unable to infringe on the VOC heartland, the Indies archipelago.

Only after 1780 VOC power crumbled and could not hide any longer that it was a giant on clay feet. It still took a number of years, caused by the European Napoleonic turmoil, before in 1811 the British occupied Batavia, a battle that resulted in 1200 Dutch and 1000 British casualties. Such stunning figures were no exception, and seen in the perspective of the limited total number of VOC military available certainly disquieting. As a consequence, the VOC more and more had to rely on indigenous military. Thus, trade and violence were inextricably linked. Knaap divides VOC history in four periods (and chapters): foundation (1602–1635), establishment (1635–1685), expansion (1685–1780) and downfall (1780–1811). In the process, the merits of ‘empire builders’ like Jan Pieterszoon Coen, Antonio van Diemen, Cornelis Speelman, and Rijcklof van Goens are acknowledged. In these chronological chapters the history of the VOC is related, and followed by a focus on military action. Details are given for these actions on the number of ships and soldiers, the military tactics, and the action itself with the number of casualties of VOC and its enemy. Such a systematic focus has not been applied before. The chronological part of the book is followed by thematic chapters on military and sailors, on the military infrastructure (ships, fortifications, and weaponry) and on the daily life on the ships and in the garrisons. As for the human factor, matters like recruitment, deployment, working conditions, mortality, quality, cost, and the growing dependence on Asian soldiery are discussed.

It is a pity that no attempt has been made to count the numbers of soldiers and sailors killed in action. With a lot of proviso—what to do, for instance, with deaths due to illness?—it might have added to our insight. Another matter that might have been discussed at more length is the logistics, or military commissariat. How, for instance, did the VOC succeed in supplying its inland expeditions on Java, of thousands of soldiers with food, shelter, and ammunition? As for the military part, yearly cost estimations come to 3.5 million guilders, well worth its money, when total VOC income is put at 11.5 million. These chapters are innovative and illuminating, and supported by tables, that summarize scattered findings. Thus we also find exact information on VOC personnel, specified by rank and station, and the ships and fortifications, by type. Also lists of weaponry are included for 1790, with exactly 6484 pieces of artillery and 184,769 rounds of ammunition ... As for the warfare, Knaap also discusses violence and atrocities during and after battle. He, as well as Den Heijer on the West Indies Company, are reluctant to make harsh judgements (also on Coen’s
Banda massacre). As to the European opponents, in a number of cases embryonic war-law principles were observed. In confrontations with indigenous foes, atrocities were more common, as was the killing of civilians. There are many such instances, all listed in Knaap’s narrative. And the opponents from another cultural and religious background retaliated in kind, or, in fact, were the first to act. In all, this is a worthy part of the series, and indispensable on the subject.


Jur van Goor (1939) was a lecturer at Utrecht University for 35 years, teaching the history of Dutch expansion and colonialism, and was the acclaimed writer of several books on the subject. He retired in 2004, and embarked on the ambitious and risky project of writing the biography of Jan Pieterszoon Coen, whose reputation is fraught with controversy, and who now in public opinion generally is seen as a colonial villain, competing with J.B. van Heutsz and Raymond Westerling for first rank. Coen’s ‘claim’ is based on his expedition to the Banda Islands in 1621, which ended in a large-scale massacre of the local leaders and the purposeful starvation of the Banda inhabitants. And the second case concerns the notorious Sarah Specx affair in 1629, when Coen had a young Dutch soldier executed for having sexual intercourse with Sarah Specx, one of the young ladies belonging to his household. But is it fair to judge the merits of Coen solely on the basis of these two incidents? And are they not to be placed into the perspective of his time? Van Goor does exactly this, in a biography of Coen, throughout which he uses ample space to sketch the background and explain the course of developments.

In fact, for the years Coen was in the Indies (1607–1610, 1612–1623, 1627–1629) this book is also a comprehensive history of the Dutch East Indies Company (voc). A Coen biographer is seriously handicapped by the lack of personal details on him. And worse still, details are almost completely absent about his youth in the city of Hoorn (1589–1600) and his apprenticeship in Rome (1600–1607). Still, these years must have been important in molding the personality and world view of young Coen. Van Goor, in his first two chapters, succeeds elegantly and convincingly in reconstructing Coen’s background, a trader’s son, who in Rome became well-versed in international trade rules. He learned a lot during his first stay in the Indies, when he was mainly in the Moluccas, and involved in the continuous strife for spices, with Spain, Portugal, England, and
local rulers. He became convinced that an Asian rendezvous was an absolute prerequisite. Bantam, where the VOC upheld a precarious presence, and Djakarta were possible candidates. In 1614 he forwarded his Discoers to the VOC Board in the Netherlands, exposing his grand plan for the development of the VOC. He emphasized the need for their own fortified settlement. He also pleaded for sending Dutch civilians to colonize the VOC settlements. The need to support trade with political action, backed by force, was indisputable. In all, it was a visionary statement, attesting to Coen’s ability as a writer. It may also have been an implicit application for a higher rank in the VOC hierarchy. The VOC Board took good notice of the Discoers. In 1613, he was made Director General, based in Bantam, in charge of all financial and administrative matters, and as such the competent manager, the spider in the web of all VOC dealings. He did not stop with his official authority but actively tried to influence the political initiatives, needed to maintain and expand the VOC’s position in the Indies. Crisis was almost permanent, with ongoing challenges from old foes.

In 1618 Coen was made Governor General, and at last became the ‘koopman-koning’ (trader-king). Against a lot of opposition he continued his plans to establish and develop Djakarta as Batavia, the VOC capital. It narrowly survived attacks by Bantam and the ruler of Mataram. Moreover, he kept Spain and Portugal at a distance, and grudgingly had to cooperate with British traders, the Dutch allies in Europe. He disciplined Banda, in a bloody expedition, and the Moluccas and Ambon accepted VOC dominance. He returned to the Netherlands in 1623 where he was overwhelmed with honors. He found himself a spouse, and was asked to become Governor General again. Upon arrival, in September 1627, he took up his routine again, now in the established stronghold Batavia, but with all kinds of threats still immanent. Before he was able to put his mark on developments, he died on 21 September 1629. Van Goor’s expertise is probably unsurpassed and impressive. As for the explanation of Coen’s personality, incentives, and actions Van Goor regularly refers to the notions of honor, pride, and prestige, which were of great importance in his time and which might also explain his extremely violent conduct. Van Goor does not come to such a judgement, but by including many similar incidents as the ones blamed on Coen, he shows that his actions did not deviate too much from the cruel rules of war of the time. Moreover, Coen’s views were firmly rooted in his religious beliefs. For him, the successes of the VOC were the result of God’s blessings, against the Catholics and heathens.

Carla van Wamelen, hitherto a specialist in contemporary Dutch family and juvenile law and child protection, by chance read a book on child protection in the Indies. Her interest was roused and after a search in vain to find relevant literature, she decided she would herself write a book on the subject. In the process she expanded the scope of her research to the intervention of the VOC in the family life of the subjects in its territory. And also this broader subject had never been systematically treated. It still took the author a number of years before she made her debut in the world of Indies law history, with a book of six hundred densely printed pages: *Family life onder de voc* (why was this awkward bilingual title chosen?). VOC influence on and intervention in the private life of its subjects went far, also by indirect means by way of the Gereformeerde Church, which was ultimately an instrument of the VOC too. In principle the rules of law in the Dutch Republic also applied in the East. But this Roman-Dutch law was in a number of respects not applicable or not adequate to deal with specific Indies problems concerning families. VOC subjects lived with slaves and indigenous women, not in matrimony but in concubinage, strongly condemned by both the VOC and Church. And their children posed another problem. How could they be saved for Christianity from the dangers of the Catholic or Islamic faith? Baptism and instruction were actively used to save the innocent souls. As well, child protection was practiced through medical care, the employment of VOC-paid midwives, and the opening of orphanages.

Van Wamelen uses ample space to explain the workings of the VOC law, its successive codifications, and the institutions that meted out justice, also those from the Church, with the Diaconate to relief the poor. She concentrates on Batavia. Its population of VOC employees, free citizens, slaves, foreigners, indigenes, Chinese, and Japanese posed for each group its specific problems. As for the slaves, in this case the household slaves, Dutch law could not be applied, as slaves were an unknown category in the Republic. The VOC had to turn to Roman law to find some guidance as to rules concerning possession, sale, treatment, and emancipation. Christian slaves, in the longer run, could expect to be emancipated, and when accompanying their masters to the Republic would be automatically freed when setting foot on Dutch soil.

As to children, a strong emphasis was placed on legitimacy. As for illegitimate children, strong efforts were made to pressure fathers and mothers, when
known, in order to legitimize these ‘speelkinderen’. This was not an easy matter. When legitimizing a child a European father knew he would not be allowed ever to repatriate. Strict rules forbade the entry of Asians and Eurasians in the Republic, for clearly racist motives. However, European fathers were ingenious in evading the rules, with some help from the Church and tolerance from the VOC, to extend paternal care, by means of guardianship and adoption. This even applied to some ‘overwonnen kinderen’, from adulterous and incestuous relations. But they and their mothers were more often sent to poor relief houses and orphanages. Adoption was unknown in Roman-Dutch law, but a regular feature in indigenous adat law. The Church embraced it as a means to save these Eurasian children from the heathens. The VOC again chose to overlook the breach of law it entailed, and never codified adoption, but as all parties involved—VOC, Church, children, mothers, and fathers—had a positive interest in it, it was a common feature. In general, the VOC male-dominated world favored an inheritance law that did not benefit women and Asian and Eurasian subjects.

Van Wamelen has written a scholarly book, and although with many quotations from sixteenth and seventeenth-century sources it is not easy reading, her arguments are chrystal-clear and systematically developed. This certainly will become the reference book on the subject. In that respect it is a pity that only a personal index is included—a more useful subject index is sadly missed.


Reggie Baay (1955) is a successful writer of fiction and non-fiction on the Indies. He became known for his monograph on the njai, the native concubines of many European men in the colonies around 1900. Without legal protection, the often tragic fate of a njai made her status similar to a slave, although slavery was officially abolished in the Indies on 1 January 1860. Her fate may well have brought Baay to look deeper into slavery in the Indies, and to tread on unknown ground. There are no studies on Indies slavery, no memorial site, no memorial day, no debates—it has simply not been studied. Nevertheless, upon
scrutiny it is clear that slavery was an essential feature of VOC rule in the East. It started earlier than in the West, and when adding up all figures it is clear that its magnitude, with between 660,000 and 1,135,000 people transported and traded in VOC territory, surpassed the West-Indische Compagnie (WIC) across the Atlantic (between 495,000 and 850,000). Furthermore, the number of slaves in active service was greater in the East.

Why has this story been forgotten? Reasons might include that the VOC trade was part of the greater Asian slave trade; that in addition to the VOC itself, its employees earned an extra income by trading slaves; that it all transpired far from the European public, who might have objected; and that most slaves were employed in the urban household, in a milder climate than the massive plantation labour. Baay intends with his book to open the discussion, and its title leaves no doubt as to his conclusions: Daar werd wat gruwelijks verricht.

By coincidence, Matthias van Rossum (1984) in his short monograph Kleurrijke tragiek joins him, probably inspired by his innovative book Werkers van de wereld (2014). And as for the legal framework on slavery, Van Wamelen’s Family life onder de VOC (2014) (reviewed above) is a welcome supplement. Both authors give numerous cases, from official documents, of slaves brought to court, and sentenced heavily. More than glimpses reveal the reign of terror slaves experienced in the households of their masters and mistresses. More than a few times their status as mere possessions collided with their humanity. In a perilous equilibrium maintained through fear, the Indies household had to function. Slavery was taken for granted during VOC rule. There were ‘liberal’ rules for the emancipation of slaves, especially those who had converted to Christianity, but a non-European free man also ran the risk of being abducted and sold as a slave. It took long before an abolitionist movement became active. As to the Indies, it was late and small. In the mother country the government only reluctantly took its measures, notwithstanding the vociferous action of Baron van Hoëvell. It took until 1860 before abolition was proclaimed, but regions indirectly ruled were exempted from the Decree. Baay also, in a last chapter, points at the semi-slavery that endured until almost the last years of the Dutch Indies—forced labor on plantations and on public utilities, trade in women, and contract labor with penal sanctions. Thus it differs from the earlier chapters in subject, but it also lacks the enlivening examples of VOC slave life of the first chapters. Van Rossum had a chance to read Baay’s book, shortly before his own study went to the press, and levels a few critical points. Baay places too much emphasis on the supposed ‘mild’ treatment in the urban sphere and the role of the VOC, and not enough emphasis on the economic relations of the VOC with its employees, working
across a complex spectrum of status ranging from slaves to free Europeans. In Van Rossum's view, slavery was part of a viable economic system, and firstly has to be judged from that premise, including the social and cultural consequences it produced. Thus, after decades of silence the VOC slavery has been put on the map, and Van Wamelen, Baay, and Van Rossum have paved the way for more studies on the subject. Van Rossum has already announced he will continue his research on the subject and has received a grant to do so.


At an Amsterdam book fair Salvador Bloemgarten (1924) happened upon a volume by the forgotten author Justus Swaving (1784–1835), which was one in a series, published from 1827 on, relating his own adventurous life-story. Swaving was a competent author, but was not averse to massaging the truth to suit his own interests. He defended these interests verbosely and emotionally, as he was plagued by debtors and the police of the Dutch Republic, the police of the French occupation, and the police of France, Britain, and the United States. Arrests, narrow escapes, shipwrecks, desertion, and amorous adventures made his books thrilling reading for his contemporaries. Bloemgarten has selected the most interesting parts of Swaving's stories, and has arranged them in a coherent whole. He summarizes, introduces the fragments, and also separates fact from fiction on the basis of impressive archival research in five countries and a wealth of published sources and comments. Swaving was an officer with the sea force, a plantation owner in Berbice (now Guyana), a soldier in the US Army, in Napoleon's army in 1814, changed to the new Netherlands Army, and to avoid another court case, he fled from the Netherlands in 1825. Only when he moved to South-Africa in 1827, and worked as an interpreter and translator with Cape Town’s Supreme Court of Justice, did he at last settle safely. His observations on Berbice are interesting, as are the daily practices in this slave colony. His description of the Cape Colony, shortly after the British take-over, and his efforts to promote and protect the position of the Dutch language offer new additional insights. He is, for instance, quoted as the first to note the spread of the Afrikaans language.

The circle of writers and readers around Indische Letteren, already in its thirtieth year, not only succeeds in publishing its journal, but the abundance of articles also needs other outlets. It is proof of the undiminished attraction of Dutch-Indies literature, often on the crossroads of literature, journalism, and culture. The pioneers of the working group and journal are gradually entering retirement, but with only more time available to continue their studies. In this trend fits Een tint van het Indische Oosten, with 23 articles of about ten pages, with notes and index, on the impressions of Dutch travellers journeying within the Indies, between 1815 (an anonymous marine officer) and 1946 (Johan Fabricius). The others are Maurits Ver Huell, Nicolette Peronneau (relating her travels as a nine year old), Sytze Roorda van Eysinga, C.L. Blume, F.W. Junghuhn, J.B.J. van Doren, W.R. van Hoëvell, Anna Abrahamsz (ten years old), Jan ten Brink, Augusta de Wit, Justus van Maurik, Marie van Zeggelen, Aletta Jacobs, C. Louis Leipoldt (South African writer in Afrikaans), Willem Walraven, Louis Couperus, Annie Salomons, Herman Salomonson, Beb Vuyk, E. du Perron, and A. Alberts. All authors were asked, in the wake of Said’s Orientalism, to apply the analysis in Mary Louise Pratt’s Imperial eyes: Travel writing and transculturation (1992) on the travel writing of the 23 authors named above to see in how far the colonial discourse shaped their narratives. It is obvious it did, and the focus Pratt has applied shows this all the more. Of course, the focus is one-sided. Of all 23, only E. du Perron is acquitted ... Ton Anbeek’s negative opinion on the highly praised A. Alberts is remarkable. Unfortunately, there are also some mistakes and inaccuracies. For instance, in the first article, Kampong Makassar is not part of Makassar—it is a Batavia kampong.


From June through September 2015 the Noordbrabants Museum in ’s-Hertogenbosch staged the exhibition ‘Uit verre landen’, which focused on a number of products that now play an essential role in the European households, but were almost completely unknown until the seventeenth century. Coffee, tea, tobacco, spices, cocoa, sugar, rubber, all came from Asia or America, first as lux-
ury goods, often with medicinal use. The East and West Indies Companies (VOC and WIC), earned their profits transporting these new goods. Slowly they penetrated society, from the rich elite down to ordinary people, first with tobacco, followed by coffee and tea. The eating culture changed radically forever. The exhibition illustrates these developments with a collection of maps, paintings, material objects, and promotional material. Many of these concern the beautiful porcelain and silverware used in the coffee, tea and tobacco culture. General background is supplied in short introductory chapters, followed by the objects, with captions.


Fenneke Sysling (1981), a historian with the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, wrote her PhD in 2013: *The archipelago of difference: Physical anthropology in the Netherlands East Indies, ca. 1890–1960* not (yet) available in a commercial edition. But she has abridged her study for a general Dutch audience, with a third, to become *De onmeetbare mens*. It is an overview of the discipline of physical anthropology in the Dutch East Indies, based on an impressive array of material in almost all West European languages, which are listed in 267 notes. Physical anthropology became a popular subject in the course of the nineteenth century. Studying physical differences and resemblances between humans could provide insight to assist the identification, classification, and spread of the human ‘races’ over time. These anthropologists believed in ‘objective’ measurements to draw conclusions. Their research concentrated on ‘primitive’ or ‘inferior’ races, many of which were found in the Indies. Thus, they went on expeditions and collected their data. With the backing of the colonial power, people of all ages and sizes, both men and women, were measured down to the most intimate details. Often data were obtained by force: prisoners were not in a position to refuse cooperation. Moreover, skulls, skeletons, and other body parts were collected, often in abject ways, and shipped to the mother country. The transport of these thousands of bodily remains was done in a secretive way, proof that those involved were aware that their actions were controversial. These remains still fill warehouses of Dutch universities and museums. Amazingly, the practice continued through the fifties, when even a prominent scholar like Jan van Baal actively supported skull transports from New Guinea to the Netherlands. Measurement was later supplemented by photographs and plaster-casts. The researchers published voluminous books, full of tables and
photographs, but were hardly able to draw definite conclusions from their data, and had to add their own subjective views to make sense of the data. Sysling describes the development and practices of the physical anthropologists in the first three chapters, followed by three chapters that focus on the leading practitioners of three generations: H. ten Kate (1858–1931), J.P. Kleiweg de Zwaan (1875–1971) and H. Bijlmer (1890–1959). This fine study is told in a neutral way, with an emphasis on facts and little, if any, editorializing. Sysling’s last sentence, however, does declare that practices like the transfer of the dead bodies of executed criminals to these anthropologists were among the most cruel of Dutch colonialism.

Paul van de Velde, Willem Imandt (1882–1967). De Indische romantiek van een Zeeuws-Vlaamse schilder. Special issue Zeeuws Tijdschrift, volume 65, no. 1–2, 2015, 70 pp. ISSN 0166-5154. Price: EUR 12.50 (to order from redactie@zeeuwstijdschrift.nl).

Willem Imandt was born in 1882 in a tiny village in Zealand Flanders, close to the Dutch-Belgian border. His father was the local schoolteacher, and Willem followed in his footsteps and successfully started a career as teacher, with posts in his birth region and Amsterdam. He was also a talented draughtsman, without more than a basic education in this field. In 1908 he went to the Dutch East Indies, where he was employed in a number of cities on Sulawesi and Java until his retirement in 1929. At that point, he took up his old vocation and had a successful career as a painter. Imandt developed his own style, instilling a mystical atmosphere in his works. He concentrated on a few themes—landscapes and marines—and earned growing appreciation, that was also reflected in the prices his works fetched. His income from painting soon surpassed his teacher’s salary. When he repatriated he was a wealthy man, who in Flanders continued to paint to fulfill the demand of other repatriates for a tangible and nostalgic memory of their Indies years. The Indies still were alluring Imandt, and in 1938 he returned as a famous painter. He was, as all Dutchmen, interned in a Japanese camp, as was his wife. They survived and returned for good in 1946. But as a painter oblivion was his fate. He died in The Hague in 1967. Now, Imandt is a respected part of the revival in interest (as well as a beneficiary of proceeds from the auctions). Coincidentally, author Van der Velde is a fellow-villager of Imandt, and in this monograph, he combines local, regional, colonial, and art history in an illuminating account. He also sketches the artistic landscape of the Indies, and the place of Imandt in this world. This is the first, well-illustrated (color) monograph on Imandt, the twelfth in a growing list of
Indies painters who were honoured with a monograph. To Van der Velde’s biography is added a chapter by art historian Frits de Coninck on the artistic merits of Imandt’s work.


Gerard Termorshuizen (1935) is the much acclaimed author of a two-volume reference work on the Dutch-language press in the Indies. These are packed with hitherto unknown information on the colonial press, and shed new light on forgotten events and developments, and force the reader to reinterpret this influential aspect of colonial life. And that all in the pre-delpher era ... A whole scale of Indies newsmen are given contours, and the biographical information that Termorshuizen supplies in many instances begs for full-fledged biographies. Termorshuizen himself has taken up the challenge and has written the biography of Herman Salomonson. The already collected data could be supplemented on the basis of hundreds of letters, still kept by the family, and a search in his published articles for relevant autobiographical material.

Salomonson was not an old-Indies hand, but was born in Amsterdam in 1892 in a liberal Jewish milieu. He took up an engineering study in Delft, but soon turned to journalism. He soon became well-known under his pen name Melis Stoke, especially as the prolific author of *rijmkronieken* (rhymed chronicles), in which the daily topics were discussed in light-heartedly and relativizing ways. Moreover, he published popular novels, now rightfully forgotten, and contributed to an impressive range of newspapers and periodicals. In 1923 he was offered the job of editor-in-chief of *Java-Bode* in Batavia, a newspaper almost on the brink of closure, with a bare 400 subscribers left. Salomonson accepted and succeeded in reviving *Java-Bode*, by steering a moderate course, without however being able to avoid becoming embroiled in the personal and bitter feuds that raged the Indies press. He managed to survive with honour and thus became a respected press man.

As with the Dutch colonial community at large Salomonson lacked contact with the Indonesian world, and he did not make serious efforts at rapprochement with the Indonesians. He adhered to the ethical ideals that were under attack at the time, and was thus the ‘humane colonial’ from the book title. He was not afraid to enter into polemics with the notorious H.C. Zentgraaff, and his propaganda for a ‘white front’. Salomonson returned to the Netherlands in 1926 and became the director of the Indies press agency Aneta. He was involved in
the struggle for a monopoly of news distribution, in which he sided with press tycoon D.W. Berretty, against, again, Zentgraaff and C.W. Wormser. Aneta matters brought him to the Indies three more times and he was again the source of a torrent of publications. As to his novels, *Zoutwaterliefde* has survived (a seventh printing in 2006), and a few more with an Indies background are ripe to be rediscovered according to Termorshuizen. In 1940 Solomonson was mobilized in the Dutch army, and soon arrested by the Germans as ‘an Indies hostage’, a reprisal measure against the internment of Germans in the Indies. He was sent to concentration camp Buchenwald, and in October 1942 met his death in Mauthausen. In detention he kept on writing poetry, which was posthumously published. Termorshuizen pays a lot of attention to the private life of Solomonson, whose marriage was often in crisis. In 1936 he converted to the Oxford Group of moral rearmament, of which he became a devoted follower. By using extensive quotations from letters and publications the life of Solomonson and his family are expounded. The result is a well-written, sympathetic account of an author who indeed deserves to be remembered. It is now up to Gerard Termorshuizen to select another man of the Indies press corps about whom to write a biography.


In 1923 Johannes ‘Pa’ van der Steur was elected by an Indies weekly as the ‘greatest man’ of the Indies—a surprising proof of popularity for an improbable candidate. Born in Haarlem in a pious, poor family, followers of an obscure Baptist sect, Johannes soon became an evangelist in the red-light districts of Dutch towns, in aggressive action against prostitution and alcohol. Harderwijk, the recruiting town of the *knil* shocked him, and inspired the always enterprising Johannes to develop plans to found a Military Home in the Indies, to offer an alternative for the sins of drunkenness and prostitution. With success, he solicited support, and went to the Indies in 1892, with neither knowledge of the Indies nor support there. And there, religious zealots were very much disliked—by the press, government, and public opinion. Still, Johannes managed to open his Home ‘Oranje Nassau’ in 1892, and by working tirelessly and publishing continuously on his achievements, he gained growing sympathy. He moreover collected the donations, mostly from the Netherlands, that allowed his Home to function. The next year his activities were widened when he admitted orphaned children in his Home—mostly Indo-European children of whom
the European father was not around anymore, and the mother had returned to her village. The children were ‘saved’, and sometimes simply taken away from their mothers. It fit in with the current views on race, in which the mixed-bloods were seen as inferior, and as a potential threat to colonial order. Van der Steur accommodated an ever growing number of children, reaching more than a thousand in 1937. They were lovingly called Steurtjes. Many found a job in the KNIL, or became faithful housewives. In his propaganda efforts—Johannes published a few journals—his activities on behalf of the children were emphasized, but his imperium still extended to the KNIL soldiers. In 1930, for instance, it operated 40 buildings for a range of purposes. It is a pity that in Van de Loo’s book no systematic information over the years is included (on number of pupils, employees, finance, subsidies, and so on). But Van de Loo has given a lot of body and background to the enigmatic Van der Steur, a unique figure on the colonial stage. She wrote a chronological biography (annotated with 415 notes) that contains more than 60 pages on the years 1892 to 1908, and a meagre thirteen pages on the following years until 1942. Why this restriction? She also explains the particular circumstances, which made his endeavours a success—and that is a clear colonial context. Pa van der Steur was immensely popular with his pupils—even today there are organizations with second- and third-generation Steurtjes that keep alive his memory. But, has there not been critique too among the Steurtjes? Is that nowhere to be found in present-day publications? Or do these pupils remain silent?


Affiliated with the History Department of Groningen University, Tity de Vries has produced a solid biography with 1079 notes of Sal Tas (1905–1976), most well-known as a journalist for Het Parool, the illegal publication, which became a prominent, progressive and widely-read newspaper after the German occupation. Sal Tas was for twenty-five years a star reporter with the newspaper, where among other things he covered current developments in Indonesia. His interest in Indonesia dates from before the war. Born in a Jewish working class family he studied Indology, before he became involved, almost as a fulltime politician, in the left wing of the social-democratic party SDAP. It resulted in the formation of the radical Onafhankelijk Socialistische Partij (OSP, Independent Socialist Party) in 1932, in which Tas, together with his life-long comrade and teacher Jacques de Kadt, was among the leadership. Their radical stance
concerning the independence of Indonesia brought them in close contact with the Indonesian students united in the Perhimpoenan Indonesia (P1).

Tas, and P1 foremen Hatta and Sjahrir were kindred spirits. At one point Sjahrir even moved in with Tas, his wife, and his two children. Sjahrir and Tas’ wife Maria Duchâteau fell in love with each other, and without too much grudging Tas acquiesced. Sjahrir returned to Indonesia, and Maria was to follow, but was denied entry in the Indies. This sad measure had one positive effect. Sjahrir wrote hundreds of letters to his wife who carefully kept them and used a small percentage of them to be published as *Indonesische overpeinzingen* (1945), when Sjahrir had risen to become Prime Minister of the Indonesian Republic. Now, at last, it appears that the complete letters will be published soon, edited by Kees Snoek. The OSP paid a lot of attention to Indonesia in its journals, and even offered Hatta a place on its list of candidates for the parliamentary elections of 1933. In the end Hatta refused, and it was Roestam Effendi, who on the communist ticket became the first Indonesian to win a seat in Parliament. The OSP did not even gain one seat. It is a pity De Vries almost completely neglects this interesting episode.

Tas and De Kadt left the OSP in 1933. For Tas, years of apprenticeship followed in which he enmeshed himself in the history and ideology of the left, all extending to the years of German occupation when for three years he was in hiding. He evolved in these years to a more moderate brand of socialism, combined with an abhorrence of Stalinist communism and an unshakable trust in American democracy, and the leadership it should provide, to withstand communism. He published the first of a number of books and brochures in which he expounded his views. Among these was a brochure on Indonesia (*Nederland-Indonesië, een analyse en een politiek*) supporting the Republic. He joined the Labour Party, the successor of SDAP, in which he was prominent and also among the opposition that did not agree with Labour support of military actions in Indonesia. In *Het Parool*, Tas was the authoritative voice on foreign developments, in which he found a format to combine facts and analysis. Tas, a man easily provoked to fight and articulate, but also self-centred and vain, ran into problems with his newspaper. A way out was found in making him a correspondent in Paris in 1949, which would last until he retired. He made a great number of reports on his travels to countries in Africa and Asia, including a number of times to Indonesia, also shortly before and after the 1965 regime change.

Sal Tas remained a staunch supporter of the US, and became involved in a number of government and probably CIA-subsidized bodies, that were to spread the American ideals of the free world in the Third World to counter communist advances. In this struggle unqualified support for the US was necessary, which Tas advocated, for instance in his enthusiasm for the Vietnam
Recent Dutch-language publications

War. De Vries has unearthed a whole body of American archival documents that shed light on these parts of Tas’ activities. It all ended in his estrangement from the Dutch left, Het Parool, and the Labour Party. For a few years he was a factotum of the Dutch Right, before he retired in his French residence. He worked on a book on Indonesian history, which was published in Dutch (De onderontwikkelde vrijheid, 1973) and English (The underdeveloped freedom, 1974), an ambitious attempt to analyze Indonesian society, from its roots to the critical evaluation of Sukarno, and his doubts on Suharto. The book was hardly noted and hardly sold. Tity de Vries has done a fine job writing this biography of Sal Tas, almost forgotten in contrast to his comrade Jacques de Kadt, and situating him in the political developments, press history, and American Cold War policies of his time.


J.J.P. de Jong (1941) was for many years head of the Indonesia Desk of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He accepted the challenge to give meaning to history, posed by the publication of the Officiële bescheiden betreffende de Nederlands-Indonesische betrekkingen, which was to result in twenty thick volumes, published between 1971 and 1995, of sources on the Indonesian decolonization conflict, with an emphasis on the developments on the Dutch side. Already in 1988 in his Diplomatie of strijd. Het Nederlandse beleid tegenover de Indonesische revolutie 1945–1947, he reconstructed, explained, and analyzed the complicated details of the first two years of the conflict, culminating in the failure of the implementation of the Linggadjati Agreement and a large-scale military action of the Dutch. De Jong’s initial opinion that hereafter the conflict for the greater part was a repetition of moves he had to revise. It resulted in 2011 in a sequel Avondschat. Hoe Nederland zich terugtrok uit zijn Aziatisch imperium. With these 1,300 pages De Jong’s quest had not ended. He now surprises his readers with a third volume, De terugtocht, which is a summary of the facts presented formerly, with a stronger analytical stress, as well as an incorporation of new material and new visions, and all that included in less than 400 pages ... It is indeed drama and trauma that characterize the conflict, but its specific content has to be reconsidered. Until now, the historiography has been fraught with misinterpretations, and even outright factual errors. A deep gap exists between reality and its image. Easy simplifications and easy clichés blur a balanced view of developments.
On the basis of careful scrutiny of the sources De Jong has come to a new and solid view of the decolonization conflict, that is multidimensional and integrates the input of the many actors in the dispute. Some of the misunderstandings he does away with: it took only a few months before H.J. van Mook, the highest Dutch official in the Indies, acknowledged that a restoration of the Dutch colonial regime was impossible vis-à-vis the power of the Republic of Indonesia. The politicians in The Hague had great trouble accepting this. It required extreme British pressure to bring the Dutch cabinet to the conference table. Still, a milestone was reached when at the Hoge Veluwe Conference of April 1946, generally considered a fiasco, the Dutch acknowledged the Republic as part of a new post-colonial order. Hence, the discussion was on the ‘details’, of which a transitional period was part and parcel. But the road towards such an agreement was not an easy one for Van Mook and the Commission that negotiated with the Republic. In the Netherlands the Catholic Party KVP, in a coalition cabinet with the Labour Party, blocked progress in an Echternach-like procession. Moreover, the Dutch Army under General S.H. Spoor, until the very last months believed that the conflict could be decided by force, if only the Army was given free rein. He failed to see, or turned a blind eye on the realities of the guerrilla war, which the Dutch would never be able to win.

On the Republican side it was also the Army that blocked an agreement time and again. It feared the loss of its strong position, and long believed in military victory. In the political arena of the Republican capital Yogyakarta opposition was strong too, often with a basis in the political power struggle there. In November 1946 the Linggadjati Agreement was provisionally signed. It ran into great trouble, in the Netherlands (again the KVP) and the Republic (Army and all parties not in the cabinet). Momentum was already lost, when a Dutch-amended Agreement was signed in March 1947. The Republican Provisional Parliament voted in favor, after great pressure by Sukarno, who here again used his unassailable position and great prestige to force a decision, as he did and was to do on more critical occasions—and always choosing a moderate course. With Linggadjati the British ended their direct interference in the Indonesian affairs. Mediators, and troops made their retreat. Within a few months now the stubborn parties ended in a deadlock. The Dutch in July 1947 started a military action, which was successful, but Yogya was not a target, to the chagrin of Army and KVP. In its wake, on its own Dutch initiative, regretted afterwards, the UN was directly involved in the conflict via its Committee of Good Offices, which was dominated by the US representative in it. In general, the USA supported the Dutch position, bearing in mind its essential position in West-Europe as an ally in the Cold War. The new Renville Agreement of January 1948 was clearly in Dutch favour, but after its conclusion momentum was lost again. Moreover,
Van Mook was dismissed, and Catholic politicians L. Beel and E. Sassen took over. Supported by Spoor, their main occupation was the annihilation of the Republic, without clear notions about policies thereafter. Military action was resumed in December 1948. Yogya was occupied; the Republican leadership was arrested. The expected support by moderate Republicans and the federalist movement did not materialize. The UN reacted with a very critical resolution that called for reinstatement of the Republic. The deadlock seemed to result in Dutch disaster.

Diplomatic developments between January and May 1949 have rarely been interpreted rightly, and therefore probably have received cursory treatment. De Jong sets the record straight, and shows how the Beel Plan, with a direct transfer of power, without a transitional period, was amended and turned in a Ruling of the Security Council. In this respect Foreign Affairs Minister, D. Stikker, played a pivotal role. He gained US approval of the Ruling by bringing Dutch participation in the NATO in question. The Republic, initially opposed the Ruling, but reluctantly, and under pressure, took part in the Van Rijjen-Roem talks, that in May 1949 brought an agreement. Public opinion in the Netherlands and Indonesia for the greater part had no inkling of what really had transpired. Again opposition gathered, but it was not able to block the implementation of the Van Rijjen-Roem arrangements. In a paradoxical conclusion De Jong argues that the prolonged military actions of the Dutch contributed to the ultimate agreement, as the Republican Army became aware that a military victory was far away and would involve enormous sacrifices. Many obstacles had to be surmounted, but in the end the Round Table Conference reached an agreement, if only to not solve a problem, as was the case with the status of New Guinea. Sovereignty was transferred in December 1949.

De Jong has admirably succeeded in writing a book on the decolonization, with an emphasis on the diplomatic part of it, that surpasses all that has been published before on the topic. As to his style: he is fond of some provocation and he does not spare his critiques. The main culprits are the Catholic leaders Beel, Sassen, and party leader C. Romme, as well as General Spoor. Stikker, in particular, along with Van Mook and the Labour leaders are given a better verdict, while Republican leaders receive their share of critique. De Jong also weighs policy alternatives. All in all this is a fascinating, often exciting, account that will be indispensable reading for anyone seriously interested in the subject. Hopefully, De Jong can get this book translated/adapted to English, and overshadow the Anglo-Saxon writings on the subject. Are there no critical remarks? Maybe De Jong’s narrative is too ‘deterministic’, in the sense that all events are ‘logically’ connected. In my opinion, there was a lot of chance, arbitrariness, misunderstanding, and personal action involved, often leading
to chaotic developments. As for the Republican side, archival material is still lacking to complete the picture. The interpretation of the pemuda role and the bersiap are in need of revision. And on another level, why is there no discussion about the Communist Madiun revolt, which the Republic tried to use as another positive argument to win US support?


The exact number of Dutchmen who lost their lives in the Netherlands and in territories abroad, in particular the Indies, during and since the Second World War is for a number of categories still very much a guess, sometimes a very wide guess, as well as a controversial subject, hotly debated. The Nationaal Comité 4 en 5 mei now endeavours in De doden tellen to take stock of the matter in eleven categories. Herman Bussemaker lists the civilian victims in the Indies, during the Japanese occupation and the decolonization war. Among them are the bersiap dead, the number of whom are given as between 3,500 and 20,000. This shocking margin attests to the then prevailing chaos, but also to the lack of serious efforts to come to a more reliable estimate. On the basis of the Nationaal Archief holdings it is now possible, in my opinion, to come to a number that more accurately reflects the facts. Thus also surviving relations might find more peace of mind. Petra Groen gives the facts on the military of KNIL and Navy who died in action or perished during their POW periods. Stef Scagliola takes stock for the military in the 1945–1949 war, with 2500 killed in action and 2200 victims of accidents. In both these military counts the Indonesian members of KNIL, Navy, and other Dutch forces are excluded, which explains the different numbers given by different institutions and researchers. Still, with this small book an authoritative source has become available, and it should help eliminate misunderstanding and controversy on this sensitive issue.


Kester Freriks (1954, Jakarta), a journalist with the cultural department of the daily NRC-Handelsblad, has a long-standing fascination with Indonesia and its past. He left Indonesia in 1957 with his parents and has no conscious memories
of his tropical first years. But his parents instilled him with their Indies past and an emotional bond with Indonesia. They, and he, were among the hundreds of thousands of people, from all backgrounds, whose life were uprooted first by the Japanese occupation (1942–1945) and then by the guerrilla war between the returning Dutch and the supporters of the Republic of Indonesia, as it was proclaimed by Sukarno and Hatta on 17 August 1945. Only after four years of struggle, on 27 December 1949, did the Dutch leave Indonesia for good. Freriks has done extensive research on these crucial years, and to commemorate seventy years of the proclamation, he published Echo’s van Indië. It gives a kaleidoscopic picture of the turbulent years of occupation and revolution, through the eyes of participants and observers, victims and victors. Thus, Dutch settlers, living their lives as colonial masters, cruelly ended by their internment in Japanese camps; Indo-Europeans, caught between the white rulers and the Indonesian masses; KNIL soldiers from the Moluccas; Chinese Indonesians in their traditional role as scapegoats; and the at last victorious Indonesian freedom fighters, after heavy losses, tell their—personal—stories. And it all had long-term effects, too. Until now, especially outside Indonesia, third- and fourth-generation children are influenced by the fate of their forebears. Freriks does add explanation and background to the memories, but does not do so in a systematic way, which may confuse the less-informed reader. Moreover, Freriks is a strongly involved writer, which leads to a highly readable account, but also to quite a number of simplifications and errors (even in the spelling of Indonesian words), that could and should have been avoided.


The commemoration of the end of the Pacific War seventy years ago has led to a flood of events, with a rising interest, not from the dwindling number of eye-witnesses, but from a second- third- and fourth generation audience. It is an international phenomenon, which as for Indonesia was reinforced by the train of events that followed the Japanese surrender. The proclamation of the Repub-
lic of Indonesia was followed by a decolonization conflict that lasted until the Dutch recognized the new Indonesian state in December 1949. Eight years of turmoil thus ended the once seemingly unassailable colonial status quo. All inhabitants of Indonesia—indigenous Indonesians, Dutch, Indo-Europeans, Chinese—paid dearly in their own specific manners, and the effects still linger today. Dutch and Indo-Europeans endured the Japanese occupation both in and outside camps, and their ordeal did not end with the Japanese surrender. Thousands became victims of the anti-Dutch terror, the bersiap, in the latter months of 1945. Even before 1949, many had taken refuge in the Netherlands, a country that many of them had never seen. Many followed in the following years until 1957, when the Republic ordered all remaining Dutch to leave the country. However, this did not mark an end to the relationship. There were a few hundred thousands of Indo-Europeans who, when possible, renewed their bonds with Indonesia. And in the Netherlands they held high their own specific cultural traits and left their indelible mark on the Dutch culture. This did not extinguish in the longer run. On the contrary, the new generations in manifold ways continue to value the relationship—inextricably linked forever. Many stories connected to the war and revolution years have not yet been told. The three titles reviewed here all tell forgotten stories.

Journalist Hilde Janssen, by chance, met Dolly Zegerius, a 85-year old Dutch woman, in Jakarta in 2010. In Amsterdam in 1943 she married an Indonesian student. In 1946 she followed him to Indonesia, and, as an Indonesian citizen, moved into Republican territory. On the same ship to Java, three sisters Kobus (Annie, Betsy and Miny) boarded, and all three married Indonesian sailors. Along with them, 57 Dutch partners of Indonesians also made the journey. Janssen tell the life-stories of these four women, first as one of the few white women in a Republic at war with the Dutch, later, after 1950, siding with Indonesia against the Dutch expats. Their lives were marked by ups and downs, divorce, death, poverty, and, for one husband, after the 1965 regime change, years of detention as a suspected leftist. Dolly’s spouse rose to become a general and wealthy businessman during the Suharto years. During all those years the four women remained in close contact. The special fates of these ‘ordinary’ women are told in gripping, sometimes moving detail, with fictionalized elements. An account of the working-method applied and sources used would have been helpful.

Wilma van der Maten, also a journalist and correspondent in Indonesia, focuses on another forgotten, and sad, story. In Indonesia there still live thousands of old Dutch nationals, many of them in deep misery, whose fate was destined by the war years in Indonesia. Of their parents, often a Dutch father and an Indonesian mother, the father in many cases lost his life in Japanese
internment or bersiap. Mother and children were destitute, and also suffered from anti-Dutch discriminatory measures. An application to be repatriated to the Netherlands, met with a chilly response from the Dutch consulates involved. Many bureaucratic obstacles were erected. The purpose was to block the entrance of these Dutchmen, who in racist terms were described as unfit to function in a white society. A shocking reflection of such thinking was the secretive abduction of children from their Indonesian mothers, when a father was not present anymore, to be placed in an orphanage, and to be raised in a western style.

Van der Maten has collected the life-stories of about twenty of these people, all with their own unique accounts. About 600 of them receive a monthly allowance of 40 euro, collected by the private foundation HALIN (Hulp aan Landgenoten in Indonesië, Support of Compatriots in Indonesia). Other organizations help, but not the Dutch government. It would be a humane act to reconsider the files of these old men and women, now with a sympathetic disposition, to make up somewhat for the disgraceful behavior in the past. Van der Maten presents here case in an almost neutral way. Here the facts speak for themselves. However, she does illustrate the difference between the decades of blockading entrance to these Dutchmen and the liberal asylum policy, which after 1965 allowed 3,000 Indonesian political refugees to settle in the Netherlands.

In Mijn naam is Nadra by Elle van Rijn, the story of another victim of the war is told. Bertha Hartogh (1937–2009), was entrusted by her Indo-Dutch mother to the care of a woman from Malaka, when she was sent, with four other children, to a Japanese internment camp in Cimahi (West Java) in 1942. Bertha, now named Nadra, was raised as an adopted child in the Islam family. Only in 1950, by chance, she was detected by a British official. The Dutch authorities interfered, and Bertha’s parents, now in the Netherlands, wanted her to be reunited with them. The stepmother did not want to release her daughter, and the conflict between natural and adoptive parents became a hot political issue, as hundreds of newspaper reports attest. On one side stood the Dutch authorities, supported by the British, and with strong input by the Catholic Church, on the other side Islam organizations, mobilized by the adoptive parents. To prevent extradition Bertha was married in an Islamic ceremony to an acquaintance. Emotions heated in Singapore during the court sessions that decided Bertha’s fate. Mass demonstrations paraded the streets, and when at last the verdict was given that Bertha had to be returned to her natural parents, violence broke out on a large scale with 19 casualties resulting. Bertha, against her will, went back to her parents, to lead a tragic and sad life. From a historical point of view her fate illustrates familiar themes:
decolonization, emancipation, Islamic consciousness, and religious strife. For the British authority in Singapore, it was a disquieting experience that had to be dampened as soon as possible. There are a few book publications on the affair, published in Singapore, but a publication on the basis of all available sources is not yet available. Van Rijn has consulted all the relevant sources and found some interesting new ones, but she has chosen to tell the story in the fictionalized words of Bertha, from toddler through old age, in a style that is not always convincing. From this limited focus the judicial and political developments in Singapore, Malaka and the Netherlands receive only scant attention, and are related as they impressed themselves on the 13-year old Bertha, as perceived by Van Rijn.


For over 70 years Ietje Go Pheek Thoo (1911–2000) carefully noted in an exercise-book recipes she encountered and which according to her were part of the culinary culture of the East Java Peranakan Chinese. These were the Chinese who had become Indonesianized to a great extent, but maintained strong Chinese roots. Its food culture was not exclusive, but it readily accepted influences from outside, incorporating or adapting these to contribute to what remained a distinctive Peranakan gastronomic culture, with important Javanese and Dutch input. Ietje came from a well-to-do Malang family, and reflected in her life-story the cosmopolitan culture of the Peranakan, with long residences abroad and later emigration to the Netherlands. Her granddaughter Koo Siu Ling has taken the initiative to preserve Ietje’s recipes, to save this cultural heritage from oblivion. With Culture, cuisine, cooking, she has erected a monument for her grandmother. In a trilingual edition (English, Indonesian, and Dutch) she presents 82 recipes, each with a historical, cultural, and culinary introduction, and an appendix with information on 35 spices and herbs. Max Freedman contributed an introduction (3 × 15 pages) about Peranakan history in Indonesia since the first encounters in the fourteenth century. It was the start of a relationship full of ups and downs, in which the Peranakan were often the traditional scapegoat, with tragic effects. The book is beautifully illustrated with historical photographs from the albums of Ietje’s family, as well as recent color photographs, mostly with a food connection. In this way, the book is somewhat of a hybrid. It is too beautiful to risk it becoming dirty in the kitchen, while as a coffee-table
book its recipes might not get used. Maybe the reader should try Ietje’s system and scribble in her/his own exercise book—to close the circle.


Sih Khay Hie (1851–1936), the great-grandfather of Patricia Tjiook-Liem (1939), who earned a Ph.D with a study on the legal position of the Chinese in colonial Indies, emigrated from mainland China to Semarang in 1878. He embarked on a long and successful career as a trader, first in textiles, later as an intermediate trader. His son Sih Tiauw Hin (1886–1964) next contributed to the growth of the firm, until war and anti-Chinese policies of independent Indonesia caused its downfall and ultimately its liquidation in 1970. The extended family of progenitor Sih Khay Hie then dispersed to Singapore, the Netherlands, United States, and Canada. Tjiook-Liem has recorded the history of family and firm on the basis of family documents and interviews. She follows the ups and downs of the firm, embedded in the general history of Chinese entrepreneurship in the Indies. Next she relates the specific Sih ancestor worship, with temples, altars, and artefacts still kept and venerated in Semarang and China. Her own personal memories of her forebears supplement this well-illustrated book, interesting as a rare insider’s case-study, with 169 footnotes. Its publication is also part of an effort to document the history of the Chinese in Indonesia, for which the Chinese Indonesian Heritage Center was founded, and in which KITLV is also involved.