Recent Dutch-Language Publications

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This book contains the printed version of Andreas Everardus van Braam Houckgeest’s (1739–1801) report about his embassy to the Chinese Qianlong Emperor, who ruled China from 1735 until 1799. To commemorate his sixty years of rulership, the emperor invited the Western powers with a representation in China to pay respect to him in Peking. For the Dutch nation, this invitation was addressed to the VOC, which ran a factory in Canton. The director of this trading post was Van Braam Houckgeest, since 1757 in VOC service, and on his this third term in Canton. In 1795 he had built up more than twenty years of experience and knowledge of China. He had a lively interest in China, its society and its arts. He was labelled as a Sinophile, and when the invitation was extended he eagerly hoped to become head of the Dutch delegation. This was not to be, as Isaac Titsingh was nominated by the VOC in Batavia. Van Braam joined the delegation as the second man. They managed to sustain a tense but workable relationship, all during the journey from Canton to Peking (November 1794-January 1795) and from Peking to Canton (February–May 1795). In Peking they stayed for 35 days and received a friendly treatment, meeting with the emperor no less than nine times. This differed from the British embassy, whose behavior annoyed the Chinese. All through the journey Van Braam kept a diary. When back in the West, his notes soon became a highly valued source on China, with editions in French, English, German and Dutch. None of these were complete, and there were textual differences as well. Moreover, three versions of the handwritten manuscript were available, from which the editor selected the four-volume manuscript, held by the Dutch National Archives. The editor (1948) is a direct descendant of Van Braam, and has occupied herself with this extensive labor for about fifty years. The result is exemplary. At last, a scholarly
text has now become available, made accessible through all the instruments a text edition require. A solid introduction of eighty pages supplies information on the author and his family, the preparations and the journey itself of 5,500 kilometers, an expedition with more than a thousand servants in all kinds of capacities, the stay in Peking, and the intricate publication history of the memorial. There are lists of words with extensive explanations, including on the approach taken, alongside many illustrations and finally an index. The text retains the original spelling and vocabulary, but these are not forbidding. One strange omission: why is Van Braam Houckgeest not mentioned in the book’s title?


Together, the titles above are the 2021 additions to the impressive collection of travelogues that the Van Linschoten-Vereeniging has published since 1908. The emphasis was at first on the Dutch naval exploits in the East, but has now shifted to include a much broader field of interest. Thus the two volumes with the diary and drawings of Pieter van Oort (1804–1834) have also rightfully been included in the series. Van Oort was a painter by profession and signed to become a member of the Physics Committee for the Dutch East Indies (Natuurkundige Commissie voor Nederlandsch-Indië), which was charged with collecting and documenting information on flora and fauna of the Indies. Van Oort’s main task was to make drawings on which scientific research and conclusions could be based. However, he was involved in all the diverse activities of the Commissie, which was a pioneer in this respect, even when compared with other colonial powers. The fruits of the Commissie are now preserved in Leiden’s Naturalis Museum. Among these are also seven volumes of notebooks with the diaries of Van Oort. They run to 1,500 handwritten pages. With the help of modern technology and a lot of experts, it took four years to complete transcription and annotation. It was well worth the effort. Van Oort set out for Batavia in November 1825 and arrived in June 1826. He travelled extensively,
mostly on Java, but with an eastward journey as far as New Guinea and Timor. In June 1833, he moved to West Sumatra, where he died of illness in September 1834. Of his eight years in the Indies, his diaries cover six years. He made about 250 drawings, a generous number of which are included in the books. He tells his story in a lively, personal way, with a lot of interest in the Javanese and Minangkabau society and its particular conditions. In Java, the Java War (1825–1830) was still raging and on Sumatra the less publicized Padri War (1803–1839) posed another threat to Dutch colonialism. Also the common Javanese and his culture were described with sympathy. Warm words are there for his Javanese concubine (njai) Sie Piet who probably had two children with him. In short, the diary is also informative from a historical and anthropological point of view. Almost 1,200 footnotes make the text accessible. Glossaries and maps still enhance this. The books share a bibliography, as well as four separate indexes: on personal names, ship names, geographical names, plants, and animals. As to the personal index, it is wrong to alphabetize the Javanese names on the basis of their aristocratic titles. The text is also digitally available: https://dh.brill.com/nco/


Adriaan Goekoop (1871–1912) was born into an influential family in the small marine town of Goedereede, in southwest Holland. He became a naval cadet in Den Helder and from 1892 until his death he was a marine officer following a meritorious but unobtrusive career. In 95 letters, he reported his family members in his home town about his exploits abroad. These letters were preserved and inspired Anthonie Heidinga (1942), a retired professor of archeology, to write the biography of his great-uncle. Highlights in Goekoop’s career were his visit to the Boer Republic of Transvaal in 1895, and three terms in the Indies, where he saw action. He patrolled the Aceh Coast (1895–1897), was active in the South Celebes and Bali campaigns (1905–1907), and fulfilled patrol duties in the Indies (1909–1912). Endless boredom, however, was for long periods the predominant feature of Goekoop’s service. Hunting became a favorite pastime, as well as taking part in the nightlife of Batavia and Surabaya. Regarding his action in Aceh no letters have survived. However, he wrote extensive letters about the South Celebes and Bali invasions. His lengthy account of the Bali *Puputan* is a useful addition to the available eyewitness reports. As for the contents of the letters, in general they could have profited from some editorial abridgment. The biography is expertly done and ends with a discussion of the motives of
Goekoop to commit suicide, until now rather shrouded in mystery. According to Heidinga, a depressive mood, sheer passion, a skin disease, and an official reprimand all may have contributed to the desperation that brought him to pull the trigger.


It took a long time before the Dutch colonial government showed any interest in inhospitable, far-away New Guinea. It was international competition and a desire to secure Dutch ownership that at last, in 1898, prompted the first permanent European settlement of the vast territory. Nothing was known about the island’s geography, its inhabitants, and its possible importance as a source of metals and oil. To explore all these blank spots, the Dutch organized 24 expeditions between 1903 and 1942. Their objectives differed and ranged from military, governmental, scientific, missionary, trade, and also to the challenge to be the first European to have climbed the highest mountain of the Indies, 4884 meters above sea level, covered year-round with snow (which is no longer the case today). The island was only fully conquered in 1962. The first expeditions mostly ended in failure and an inglorious return. Slowly the Dutch authorities adjusted themselves to the particular circumstances, and, helped by support from aircraft, the last blank spots were filled in, resulting in the ‘discovery’ of New Guinea’s spectacular lakes and plateaus. The clergyman Herman Tillemans and the officials J.P.K. van Eechoud and J.V. de Bruyn were instrumental in these explorations. Martin Fink gives a brief account of the expeditions, adequate to obtain a first insight into their background, course, and results. He includes 222 notes, an index, and a very useful bibliography, which is ordered thematically and by expedition.


For obvious reasons, this book is not reviewed in this rubric. I include the (translated) information as printed on the book’s back cover: “Under the slogan Merdeka, the Republic of Indonesia plunged itself into a struggle to become independent, of which nobody could predict the outcome. In this book, a
new account of the revolution is given, in which, next to the conflict with the Dutch, the uncertain rise of the Republic takes a central place. After the horrible years of Japanese occupation, the Republican leaders had to build up a new state. On the Dutch side, they had to cope with shortsighted politicians and a warlike Dutch military. In its own circle, the Republic had to face self-willed and militant youngsters, autonomous military leaders, conservative federalists, revolutionary communists, and radical Muslims. Coups, a civil war, and Dutch attacks threatened the survival of the Republic. In retrospect, the ultimate triumph of the Indonesian leaders might well be called a miracle.”


The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the most prestigious museum of the Netherlands, currently intends to broaden its scope to include a more international perspective in its exhibitions. Of course, the Dutch colonial past is excellently suited to be a subject of new research and new interpretations and conclusions. Thus an exhibition on slavery, drawing a lot of attention and discussion, was staged in 2021. The next such enterprise is Revolusi! Indonesië Onafhankelijk, which, after more than two years of preparation, was open from February until June 2022. The Museum’s curators Harm Stevens and Marion Anker were reinforced by Indonesian experts Amir Sidharta and Bonnie Triyana. In the accompanying book, in Dutch and English editions, Sidharta and Triyana are joined by Remco Raben, Anne-Lot Hoek, Yudhi Soerjoatmodjo and Aminudin T.H. Siregar to contribute substantial chapters. This book is not a catalogue, but a publication on its own, referring of course to the exhibition, in particular by including 150 of its illustrations: photographs, paintings, drawings, book covers, pamphlets, and posters. The last two categories provide ample examples of the support artists gave to the resistance against the Dutch, for a great part from hitherto closed Dutch archives, preserving these confiscated materials, made by famous painters like Sudjojono and Affandi, but also by anonymous amateurs as well. Revolusi! contains ten essays, together making an interesting, albeit somewhat heterogeneous collection.
Remco Raben opens and expertly sketches the political and cultural developments of the Indonesian-Dutch conflict. Next, Yudhi Soerjoatmodjo writes about the still extant photographs of the Proclamation and the number of attendants at the ceremony. Information on these crucial data was lacking and contradictory. Many authors (including myself) believed the number of photographs to be only three and the witnesses to be numbered no more than in the tens. Yudhi sets the record straight by including eighteen photographs, picturing and documenting this epoch-making event. The photographer was Soemarto Frans Mendur, who was among the leaders in the Indonesia Press Photo Service (IPPHOS), and documented the Revolution in thousands of images. The Proclamation photos were for the most part considered lost, but were rediscovered in Jakarta collections and in the Dutch National Archive and the Netherlands Institute for Military History (Nederlands Instituut voor Militaire Geschiedenis). In this book, all eighteen photographs are included in the right order, with expert explanations. Some questions remain, for instance on the number of participants in the ceremony. A careful scrutiny of all written sources by witnesses of the events of 17 August could help. But at the very least a separate publication of all the 18 photos, embedded in the testimonies of those who witnessed, is urgent. Yudhi also authored a chapter on the photographic legacy of the return of President Sukarno to Jakarta on 28 December 1949. The other chapters concentrate on the fate of politicians, military and common people of diverse background who relate their experiences in the turmoil of a revolution. Precedence is given to stories that have a connection with images that were part of the exhibition. In this way, a more or less balanced picture of the dazzling course of the revolution is presented. Thus curator and author Harm Stevens, directly involved in seven chapters, did a fine job. With many notes, a list of illustrations and an index, the book is up to high scholarly standards. The design of the book is also praiseworthy.


This title was first published as a PhD dissertation. In the bloody decolonization war between the Netherlands and Indonesia (1945–1949), 4,700 Dutch and an estimated 100,000 Indonesian military were killed. The enormous discrepancy between the number of losses may be explained by the excessive violence the Dutch applied. This general explanation has recently become commonly accepted, after the conclusions of the Research Program ‘Independence,
Decolonization, Violence and War in Indonesia 1945–1950 were made public. Harinck agrees with this view, and endeavors to look at the war from another angle. He focuses not only on politics, strategy, and the violence itself, but on the development of a doctrine to cope with the enemy. Such a doctrine is part and parcel of military ideology and action. Harinck reviews the development of the doctrine: the conceptual, tactical, and organizational tools with which to fight the Indonesian army. The doctrine turned out to be grossly inadequate. The highest military leaders, led by a dominating S.H. Spoor, long stuck to the KNIL doctrine, developed in the Aceh War more than half a century earlier. It proved to be a failure. Efforts to develop a new doctrine were weak and half-hearted. Successfully fighting the guerrilla tactics of Indonesia proved to be an arduous task, beyond the capacity of the Dutch army. A few decades later, this anti-guerrilla action was baptized as “counterinsurgency.” In 1949, Dutch military theorists made some very late efforts to develop such a viable approach, but it was too little and too late, as the conflict was already in its last decisive phase. The inability to react in an appropriate and timely way was also caused by the colonially-saturated or racialized opinion among the Dutch about the Indonesian enemy, which lead to their underestimation.

Harinck does not write in detail about the guerrilla theory developed by the Indonesian army, which was laid down in manuals and other writings. That is a pity, but understandable, considering the mass of material he consulted. With its ‘counterinsurgency’ proving to be a failure, the Dutch resorted to their original KNIL approach, which was likewise doomed to failure from the beginning. When this became common knowledge, however, no significant change in doctrine was developed. The old doctrine was invigorated, and was expressed through the titular words: Search, Attack, Annihilate. In itself, such a policy was destined to result in great enemy losses, especially since the army cadre did not restrain its military in action. The deployment of artillery and planes added to the number of casualties, especially among many innocent villagers. And these indiscriminate actions ended up strengthening people’s resistance against the Dutch. Thus the Indonesian death toll rose to unprecedented heights. Harinck has done a thorough job, with 130 pages of notes, literature, and indexes, opening up a rather neglected aspect of the war in Indonesia. In general, his approach is chronological, with a few chapters more specifically devoted to discussions and developments of doctrine. Studies like Harincks’ are rare, but indispensable to obtain a balanced picture of the conflict.