



BRILL

Winner of the Mattingly Prize, 2019:  
Philip Post, *Leiden University*

**How did you get into your current research field?**

*Philip: My doctoral research concerns the mentality of colonial officials in the Moluccas in the period 1770-1870. It reconstructs how colonial officials conceived of the colonial system and perceived their own role within it. My research zooms in on the transition from rule by a trading company, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) to rule by the Dutch colonial government. Traditionally, researchers have zoomed in on either one, without spending too much attention on the continuities between them. In my dissertation, I argue that it is important to zoom in on these. The Dutch colonial officials in the Moluccas in the early nineteenth century constantly had to reflect on how they positioned themselves vis-à-vis the VOC. Equally important, local rulers in the Moluccas had obtained important roles within the Dutch colonial bureaucracy from the early seventeenth century onwards, meaning that the collapse of the VOC not only affected the Dutch colonial officials, but also the local regents and Sultans.*

**What have been the main challenges for the kind of research that you do?**

*Philip: The main challenges for my research concern a lack of locally produced sources and colonial biases. There are not many documents that give insight into how Moluccan regents and Sultans negotiated with the Dutch. As a result, it is hard to reconstruct their strategies concerning the Dutch. However, documents produced by the colonial government show that diplomacy played an important role in their interactions. Minutes of meetings show that negotiations formed a crucial part of their dealings. Although these minutes often contain all kinds of colonial stereotypes, it is possible to look beyond these and reflect on the strategies of local rulers in relation to the Dutch colonial government.*

**Did the article for *Diplomatica* make you think differently about your research?**

*Philip: Definitely! It required me to engage with literature on diplomacy and reflect on the room for diplomatic interactions within a colonial context. Furthermore, scholars working within New Diplomatic History have stressed the importance of considering non-state actors, such as the VOC, and have emphasized the importance of culture within diplomatic encounters. As a result of this, I gained a better understanding of continuities between the VOC and the colonial state within the realm of cultural diplomacy.*

**Regarding periodisation, what do you think, as an early modern historian, that the contribution of New Diplomatic History is in terms of the early modern / modern-contemporary history divide?  
What does the consideration of diplomacy as a subject of study over a longer time space bring to the field?**

*Philip: Because New Diplomatic History brings such a different perspective into the history of diplomacy, it does not only foreground different actors, institutions, and concepts, but it also allows for challenging traditional periodizations. In my research, this applies to how the periods of the VOC*



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*and the Dutch colonial state have been studied in isolation. Colonial officials in the early nineteenth century rhetorically distanced themselves from the practices of the VOC, but in practice, they studied its archival records to understand how the infamous Dutch trading company had interacted with Moluccan rulers. And while the records of the VOC and the Dutch colonial state are now stored in different archives, it is important to keep in mind that this was not the case in the nineteenth century. In my research, I show that the Dutch colonial state constantly had to relate to the VOC, up to a century after the trading company had officially disappeared. New Diplomatic History can challenge us to rethink traditional periodizations and show important continuities between different periods in history.*

[Governors, Regents, and Rituals: an Exploration of Colonial Diplomacy in Ambon at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century in: \*Diplomatica\* Volume 3 Issue 1 \(2021\) \(brill.com\)](#)