CHAPTER THREE

THE LOG AS A REFLECTION OF THE PRACTICE OF NAVIGATION

Introduction

In December 1640, John Anderson left the Netherlands on board the East Indiaman ‘s Hertogenbosch destined for Asia. The ship was built for and equipped by the Delft chamber of the VOC. It was normal practice for Dutch East Indiamen to sail in convoy during the transit between the United Provinces and Asia, both outward bound and homeward bound. The overall command of each fleet was under the charge of an Admiral. He was usually a senior merchant or a high-ranking Company servant, lacking in any nautical expertise or knowledge. To ensure the safe conduct of the fleet, the Admiral was assisted by the so-called brede raad, a privy council comprising senior servants and officers, including a Vice-Admiral, the merchants and the ships’ masters. When they were assembled onboard the flagship it flew a white flag.

The safe, timely, and economical operation of a Dutch East Indiaman was the overall responsibility of the master. Fortunately, he could share this burden with two to four masters’ mates. These men played a variety of roles: the more experienced ones would participate in the daily chores, such as standing watch, making observations, calculating positions, correcting charts and drawing up the sailing directions. The younger members of the team studied and memorised the appearance of the sea and coasts. The sea is a telltale of all sorts of information, as John Anderson observed:

this day in ye morning by brecke of day wee Did see the watter changed, then wee lookit out about .9. in ye Morning, and discrayed land. berand

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1 We would like to thank Karel Davids and Anton Scheele for their comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this chapter.

2 Anderson’s Log, fol. 19r (19 July 1641), fol. 22r (7 August 1641); fol. 24r (27 August 1641); H. Ketting, Leven, werk en rebellie aan boord van Oost-Indiëvaarders, 1595–1650 (Amsterdam, 2002), p. 98.
Northen to East from ws some 24. Myles distant Euen low land not heighe, wich wee Esteimed to be ye land by west Baya de La Goa lyand be East Cap de Aguilias being ye Southmost land of Affrick. quher wee threw out our lead and found 65. fathome Gray ousie clay and sand mixed, heir wee did see Infinit Numbers of sea foulles As Alcatrazes, Soland geeisse, and whyte Mewes. & Pictarnes, with grate Numbers of Sealls suiming about our shippe.3

The senior mates had to learn operational skills: how to operate an observation compass, judge speed, leeway, and drift, mark the passing of time and tides, interpret the weather, sound with lead and line to determine the depth and nature of the seabed, make celestial observations, and keep a daily reckoning (the so-called Day’s Work). The log of Captain John Anderson reflects this daily practice of navigation.4 This chapter deals with the art of navigation, which developed out of the art of pilotage, to meet the needs of the oceanic sailor who wished to find his position when out of sight of land.5

The Outward Bound Voyage

The most important source of information for the sea route to Asia was the aforenoted Jan Huygen van Linschoten. He returned to the Netherlands in 1592, having spent thirteen years abroad, including five years in the Indian port of Goa. His Reysgheschrift was prepared for publication in March 1595 for the benefit of Cornelis de Houtman. The book is ‘a kind of seaman’s manual with sailing instructions and descriptions of harbours, compiled from Portuguese and Spanish seafaring manuals’.6 It is apparent from Anderson’s log that he was familiar with the writings of Van Linschoten.7

The voyage undertaken by the ‘s Hertogenbosch was a typical one for the mid-seventeenth century. Upon leaving the roads of Goeree on 29 December 1640, the shortest route south was that through the English Channel. After that, the first point of reference was the Canary Islands, which Anderson sighted on 11 January 1641.8 Having passed

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3 Anderson’s Log, fol. 63r (22 February 1643).
6 DAS, I, p. 59. For De Houtman’s voyage, see Chapter 4.
7 Anderson’s Log, fol. 32r. See Chapter 2.
8 Anderson’s Log, fol. 2r (29 December 1640); fol. 4r (11 January 1641).