

In the Netherlands National Archives series of Dutch Sources on South Asia c. 1600-1825, Volume 2 has been published: *Archival Guide to the Repositories in The Netherlands Other than the National Archives*. In contrast to Volume 1, it covers records created by Dutchmen beyond the official confines of the Dutch East India Company, such as treatises by excited scholars, drawings by inspired artists, and reports by diligent missionaries.

# Bogus sadhus and famous rhinos: early-modern Dutch scholars, artists, and missionaries on South Asia

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On Sunday the 13th of May 1714, a 32 year old Hindu holy man or *sadhu* called Anand Barti, together with eight disciples, arrived in a village near the port of Surat, on the West Coast of India. He installed himself under a big tree and started digging a hole. When curious onlookers asked him what he was up to, Barti announced that he would be buried alive in the hole in nine days time and that after three days, he would miraculously reappear on the bank of the Ganges River, hundreds of miles away. He was doing this for the general wellbeing of all who suffered and to prove his holiness. Soon, the news spread to Surat and environs. During the next days, thousands of Hindus came to see Barti under the tree and donated all kinds of gifts, including beautiful carpets and pillows for him to rest on. The *sadhu* blessed everyone who visited him, including a number of Muslims. Some people tried to persuade him to forget about his plans and not to put his life at risk, but Barti would not hear of it. He seemed determined to perform his miracle, subsequently making him seem even more holy to his visitors.

The day prior to Barti's burial - with more and more people gathering to witness the miracle - the Muslim authorities of Surat decided that it was getting out of hand. To stop the crowds around the *sadhu* from growing any further, they shut the town gates and sent a number of soldiers together with a Muslim cleric to Barti. They told him he was not allowed to carry out his plan as it was against Islamic rules, and they asked him to leave the village. To the great disappointment of the excited Hindu crowd around him, the *sadhu* hardly protested. He did not try to convince the Muslim authorities of his good intentions nor was he able to exert his holiness. The crowd, their expectations now shattered, grew angry and started throwing stones at Barti. Hereupon, one of his disciples drew his sword to take revenge. Within moments, there was complete chaos. The *sadhu* tried to escape but was killed, together with a large number of his disciples. More than 50 other followers were imprisoned by the Muslim authorities, and were later circumcised and forced to convert to Islam. While the fighting was going on, a number of onlookers were robbed of their clothes and other belongings. Some other *sadhus*, who had been living in the village for many years, were chased away and their possessions were either burnt or sold. In the end, most of the inhabitants of Surat were very satisfied with the intervention by the Muslim authorities, especially because it turned out that Barti's so-called grave had been fitted out with a hidden underground passage from where he could escape at night!

## In the wake of the Dutch East India Company: alternative sources

This event is of academic importance in several fields. It tells scholars of Hinduism something about ascetic rituals performed centuries ago. Social historians may be interested in how a marginal figure could have such an impact on the people of one of the biggest ports in Asia. The event may be fascinating to political scientists studying the historical roots of South Asia's current religious conflicts. However, Barti's story is not described in a document held at a mosque or a temple. Neither is it found among the records of the Surat authorities. In fact, the account of the event is not kept in India at all. The story was actually reported by some Dutch traders and written down in the diary (*dagregister*) of the Surat establishment of the Dutch East India Company, or VOC. Unfortunately, virtually all the Dutch diaries from Surat have been lost and therefore the event is not even mentioned in the vast archives of the VOC. We only know about it because this particular section of the diary was copied for unknown reasons and somehow found its way into the private archives of the then Amsterdam-based Huydecoper family of merchants, scholars, and officials. As the family shifted its focus to the Dutch province of Utrecht in the 19th century, the document in question ended up in the holdings of the Utrecht Archives.<sup>1</sup>

As such, the report is one of the papers included in the second volume of the series of *Dutch Sources on South Asia c. 1600-1825*. These guidebooks aim at encouraging the use of the rich Dutch archival sources concerning the Indian subcontinent and Sri Lanka dating from the period between 1600, when the Dutch first appeared in the region, and 1825, when they abandoned their last remaining trading stations. The series' first volume, authored by Jos Gommans, Gijs Kruijtzter, and myself, and published in 2001, covers the great quantity of relevant records stored at the Dutch National Archives in The Hague. Volume 2 deals with materials scattered in other repositories in the Netherlands: provincial, regional, and municip-

pal archives; university libraries and other libraries; ecclesiastical organisations; museums and other public institutions; and companies, private organisations, and individuals.

Whereas Volume 1 mostly covers the archives of the VOC and related institutions, largely consisting of series of consecutive papers, Volume 2 rather concerns separate documents. These were chiefly created by institutions and people whose activities took place almost literally in the wake of the VOC, such as local governments and companies, notaries, orphanages and orphan boards, churches and their missions, artists, scholars and scientific societies, independent travellers, and also VOC servants and their relatives in their private capacities. Therefore, these materials often contain additional information to what can be found in the official VOC records and may offer an alternative view. The remark made in 1985 by the Indian historian Ashin Das Gupta with respect to this kind of documents still holds true: 'Researches based on the Dutch archives, so far almost exclusively confined to official papers, may ... gain important new insights from the private archives ...'<sup>2</sup>

Focusing on archival texts, maps, drawings, paintings, and prints, the research for this archival guide has yielded many unexpected results and unearthed several hitherto relatively unknown treasures. In addition to perhaps obvious records of institutions such as town governments, notaries, orphan boards, and ecclesiastical organisations, it covers a wide and colourful range of other sources dealing with numerous aspects of early-modern South Asia. These not only include trade, shipping, economics, monetary matters, and the like, but also religion, linguistics, flora and fauna, ethnology, politics, art, meteorology, warfare, etc. The story of Anand Barti and his religious practices at Surat is just one example. Numerous other texts and images listed in the archival guide would be worth mentioning here, but a few more examples should suffice.

## Indophile Rembrandt and erratic holy rivers: pictures and maps

To begin with pictures, several museums and university libraries keep beautiful oil paintings, water colours, and other drawings that concern



Pen drawing of a sadhu near the village of 'Oxkaij' (one mile from Surat), found in the 'Wonderen der natuur' collection of depictions of exotic animals and people as seen at the hostelry of Jan Westerhof in Amsterdam and elsewhere, c. 1695-1709 (University of Amsterdam, Artis Library (University Library, Special Collections): Legkast 238 no.7

both the Dutch presence in South Asia and indigenous matters. Mostly produced by Dutchmen, these pictures often seemingly not only served a practical purpose but should be considered works of art. With regard to people, there are for example drawings of Malabari pilgrims and soldiers, Ceylonese traders and beggars, Bengali widows and ascetics, Tamil musicians and dancers, and Dutch judges and tourists. Portraits include various Mughal emperors drawn by Rembrandt (who was inspired by Indian painting), Rajasthani nobles and Deccani Sultans (on Indian miniatures with Dutch captions), the Cochin-based Jew Ezekiel Rabbi, and of course a host of Dutchmen serving in the region.<sup>3</sup> Animals, too, have been depicted in large numbers: examples are insects and scorpions from Bengal; butterflies and snakes from Coromandel; and monkeys, birds, and crocodiles from Ceylon.<sup>4</sup> In a few cases, exotic South Asian animals were shipped alive to the Dutch Republic, appeared at fairs all over the country, and attained star status: pictures of the Ceylonese elephant Hansken and the Assamese rhinoceros Clara can be found at various repositories.<sup>5</sup> Flora is also well represented, with hundreds of drawings of tropical trees and plants, and even original dried specimens, partly collected for their possible medical qualities.<sup>6</sup>

Topographic materials and depictions of man-made structures abound as well and come in the shape of water colours, ink drawings, paintings on cloth, pencil sketches, and so on. Represented are for instance Bengali villages; Sinhalese, Tamil, and Oriya temples (the latter serving as useful landmarks for sea vessels); courts at Udaipur, Golkonda, and Kandy receiving Dutch envoys; graves near Ahmadabad and Chidambaram; a hospital in Colombo; and Buddhist and Hindu statues.<sup>7</sup> There are also a large number of (bird's-eye) views of towns, forts, and other settlements - both indigenous and Dutch - all over South Asia, ranging from Bharuch and Cambay in Gujarat to Chhapra (where the Dutch had a saltpetre factory) and Monghyr in Bihar, and from Cranganur and Cannanore on the Malabar Coast to Cossimbazar and what is probably Chittagong in Bengal. Furthermore, there are upwards of 400 maps, plans, and sea charts (both manuscript and printed), covering the entire region, be it an atoll in the Maldives (where a Dutch ship was wrecked), Kathmandu Valley (a sketch map by the Zeeland traveller Samuel van de Putte, probably the first European to visit it), Tuticorin and its fortifications on the Fishery Coast, the constantly shifting mouths of the Ganges River, or Kandy and its surroundings depicted circularly (probably based on a local tradition), to mention a few examples of manuscript maps.<sup>8</sup>

## Sinhalese phrasebooks and unashamed Dutchmen: manuscript texts

Maps and pictures make up only a minor part of the archival guide, however. Manuscript texts constitute the largest category of sources. As said, they are partly held in certain kinds of records that are available in repositories all over the Netherlands (mostly provincial, regional, and municipal archives), such as the papers of provincial and town governments, notaries, orphan boards, and Classes of the Dutch Reformed Church.<sup>9</sup> In particular the latter two groups maintained a regular correspondence with their representatives in India and Ceylon. Whereas these kinds of records are rather businesslike and mainly deal with the overseas activities of Dutchmen, another body of materials reflects the academic fascination with South Asia in the Dutch Republic. This seems to have flourished especially in the second half of the 18th century, when several scientific societies were founded, most notably those of Holland and Zeeland.<sup>10</sup> Their meetings frequently concerned South Asia as returning VOC servants held lectures, submitted treatises, and donated all kinds of objects to the societies. Thus, the societies' archives include papers on such diverse subjects as Ceylonese Buddhism, astronomical observations made at Cochin, temperatures in Bengal, Indian embroideries, and a wild Surat cat's eye.

Already from the outset of the VOC's presence in South Asia, however, there were Dutchmen - many of them burgomasters - with a scholarly interest in the region. In the first half of the 17th century, Burgomaster Ernst Brinck of Harderwijk collected information on the Indies, which he arranged in small notebooks, each devoted to a specific topic. The maritime volume for example contains short references to Maldivian shells and Coromandel mermaids.<sup>11</sup> A few decades later, Burgomaster Hendrik d'Acquet of Delft set up a collection of naturalia from all over the world. Drawings made from these specimens, including Indian reptiles, plants, and insects, are now kept at various Dutch repositories.<sup>12</sup> Around 1700, Gijsbert Cuper and Nicolaas Witsen, burgomasters of, respectively,



Chalk drawing of the rhinoceros Clara (caught in Assam in 1738, shipped to Rotterdam in 1741) by the physician Petrus Camper, c. 1748 (University of Amsterdam, University Library: manuscript collection, inv. no. Port. A X).



Cover illustration of Volume 2: water colour with a bird's-eye view of Masulipatam, defended by a Dutch-led coalition of the town's inhabitants against a Maratha attack in 1742, c. 1753 (Feikema Collection, Amersfoort: Canter Visscher manuscript).

Deventer and Amsterdam, exchanged dozens of letters on new thrilling discoveries in the fields of ethnology, religion, linguistics, biology, history, and so on. Their correspondence clearly shows the broad range of subjects that fascinated these two men: from Hindu deities and the Anuradhapura ruins to the Mughal throne and an undecipherable Ceylonese script.<sup>13</sup>

Speaking of scripts, several South Asian languages and scripts are represented among the materials described in the archival guide. These include Bengali, Devanagari, Hindustani, Malayalam, Pali, Persian, Sanskrit, Sinhalese, Tamil, and Telugu, albeit mostly on a limited scale.<sup>14</sup> They chiefly appear in manuscript glossaries and grammars (compiled by Dutchmen), in religious texts, and occasionally in letters sent by South Asian rulers and clergymen to VOC officials. Some of these texts are inscribed on palm leaves, with sometimes intricate bindings or beautiful seals.<sup>15</sup> In addition, there are papers in languages and scripts like Estrangelo, Jacobitical, Nestorian, and Syriac, deriving from Indian Christian communities in Malabar.<sup>16</sup>

Numerous other documents, archives, and collections from many different backgrounds could be touched upon here. Again, only a few examples can be given. There is a description of jewellery usually worn by Hindu and Muslim women in Surat that was sent to the Dutch Prince William IV of Orange in 1754.<sup>17</sup> There are rubbings of 18th century inscriptions in a temple at Tirukkalukundram carved unscrupulously by Dutchmen who spent their weekends off exploring the countryside around their coastal trading stations.<sup>18</sup> The reports by Johann Winckler of the Dutch Missionary Society, who in 1822 went to Bengal and Coromandel to spread the Gospel, are oozing with enthusiasm and optimism even though three years later the Dutch left India for good.<sup>19</sup> A judicial file concerning a case of adultery in the 1730s among the Dutch in Bengal was deemed so shocking by the archivist who inventoried it in 1906, that he classified it as 'immoral'.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, there are dozens of relevant Dutch family and personal archives (largely to be found in provincial, regional, and municipal repositories), which deal with all kinds of both private and public matters. These papers may include deeds of appointment to VOC positions, personal letters sent from South Asia to spouses and other relatives in the Dutch Republic, travel reports, baptismal documents, death announcements, and so on.

A number of documents merit special mention not just for their contents, but also because of their unexpected location. For instance, the so-called Fraternity of Freemasons under the Grand East of the Netherlands keeps foundation charters, regulations, speeches, and other documents deriving

from the eight Masonic lodges that were set up in the second half of the 18th century by Dutchmen in Surat, Ceylon, Coromandel, and Bengal.<sup>21</sup> A particularly special occasion during the preparation of the archival guide was my visit to the home of Mr and Mrs Tutein Nolthenius, who still keep their ancestral family papers in private possession. A reference in an early 20th century book and a genealogical internet search led me to them in the hope of finding some relevant documents. After a cup of tea, the proverbial chest in the attic was opened and 23 personal letters sent between 1737 and 1742 from Cochin, Colombo, Nagappattinam, and Hooghly appeared, much to my excitement and my hosts' amazement.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, another not very obvious repository is the library of the well-known Artis Zoo at Amsterdam, which stores some texts and pictures relating to South Asian flora and fauna, including a water colour of a Bengal tiger and tigress. A highlight is a collection of drawings of unusual animals and people as seen around 1700 in the menagerie at the Amsterdam hostelry of Jan Westerhof (also known as Blue Jan) and at some other locations. One of the drawings shows a sitting *sadhu* in a village near Surat.<sup>23</sup> Could this possibly be Anand Barti preparing for his mysterious escape? Probably not: this *sadhu* seems to have been sincere and was left undisturbed. According to the accompanying note, he sat in the same position for two years - longer than it took for a Dutch ship to sail to India and return home...

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#### References

- 1 Utrecht Archives (Utrecht): Huydecoper family archives (access code 67), inventory number 622.
- 2 Das Gupta, A. 2001. 'Indian Merchants and the Western Indian Ocean: The Early Seventeenth Century'. *idem, The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant 1500-1800. Collected Essays of Ashin Das Gupta* (eds. Das Gupta, U. and S. Subrahmanyam). New Delhi, p. 282. First published 1985. *Modern Asian Studies* 19.
- 3 University of Amsterdam, University Library; Rijksmuseum Amsterdam; Zeeland Museum (Middelburg); Museum Boijmans van Beuningen (Rotterdam).
- 4 Royal Tropical Institute (KIT, Amsterdam) and Teyler's Museum (Haarlem).
- 5 University of Amsterdam, University Library; Rijksmuseum Amsterdam; North Holland Archives (Haarlem); Boerhaave Museum (Leiden); Van Stolk Atlas (Rotterdam).

6 For instance: National Herbarium of the Netherlands (Leiden); Wageningen University Library.

7 Rijksmuseum Amsterdam; Royal Tropical Institute (KIT, Amsterdam); Maritime Museum Amsterdam; North Holland Archives (Haarlem); Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology (KITLV, Leiden).

8 In addition to the National Archives, the major map collections are kept at the Leiden University Library and the University of Amsterdam, University Library.

9 For example: Municipal Archives of Amsterdam, Delft, The Hague, Leiden, and Rotterdam, and the North Holland, Utrecht, and Zeeland Archives (in Haarlem, Utrecht, and Middelburg respectively). Ecclesiastical records are also kept at the Archives of the Diocese of 's-Hertogenbosch (Den Bosch) and the Netherlands Province of the Jesuits (Nijmegen).

10 North Holland Archives (Haarlem) and Zeeland Archives (Middelburg) respectively.

11 Regional Archives Northwest Veluwe: Harderwijk.

12 University of Amsterdam, University Library; Royal Tropical Institute (KIT, Amsterdam); Wageningen University Library.

13 University of Amsterdam, University Library.

14 For instance: Leiden University Library; National Museum of Ethnology (Volkenkunde, Leiden); Utrecht University Library.

15 For example: Royal Tropical Institute (KIT, Amsterdam); Meermann Museum (The Hague); Archives of the Royal Family (The Hague); National Museum of Ethnology (Volkenkunde, Leiden).

16 For instance: University of Amsterdam, University Library; Leiden University Library.

17 Archives of the Royal Family (The Hague).

18 Leiden University Library.

19 Utrecht Archives.

20 State Archives in Limburg (Maastricht).

21 Fraternity of Freemasons under the Grand East of the Netherlands (The Hague).

22 Tutein Nolthenius (Doorn).

23 University of Amsterdam, Artis Library (University Library, Special Collections): *Legkast* 238, no. 7.

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