Op bezoek bij de Groot-Mogol
Twee hofreizen van de VOC naar de Groot-Mogol in India, 1662 en 1711-1713

By Hans Van Santen

Key Features:
· This Dutch language book discusses two diplomatic trade missions of the Dutch East India Company to the court of the Great-Mogol in India

The Dutch East India Company (VOC) is known for its spices imported from the Moluccans. It is less well-known that apart from spices the VOC also imported many millions of calicoes from India during the 17th and 18th century. For a long time the Dutch were the most important foreign trader in India, using dozens of trading stations ('factories') at which over 3000 Dutch company servants were deployed.

To be allowed to trade in India, so-called firmans were necessary, official orders by the Great-Mogol, laying down the trade privileges. These firmans had to be renewed regularly. After Aurangzeb became Great-Mogol, Van Adrichem undertook a journey to the royal court. In 1711-1713, fifty years later, Ketelaar did the same after Bahadur Shah, the successor of Aurangzeb, took office.

In this study both court journeys are analysed and compared. There are some similarities but the differences between both journeys are huge. In half a century India had changed quite dramatically, and so had the VOC. The central power of the Mogols was weakening and regional powers became more powerful. Many trade routes became too dangerous. At the same time India, and especially Bengal, became even more important within the overall trading system of the VOC. How did the VOC ambassadors, humble merchants by origin, behave at court?

Contrary to what one would expect, they adapted themselves quite successfully to the Mogol diplomatic culture. Both ambassadors were quite experienced, having worked as merchants for decades already in India. They had an extensive social network and were well-versed in Hindustani and Persian, the court language. Ketelaar even wrote the first grammar of Hindustani. This study depicts in detail the interaction between VOC ambassadors and the royal court. Also the extremely long and dangerous journeys from the coast to the royal court in the interior are described. The journey of Ketelaar has become famous for its length (two years) and incredible costs (over one million guilders). It was the most expensive court journey by the VOC in Asia ever.

About the Author:
After studying Indo-Iranian languages at Leiden University Hans van Santen wrote his Ph.D. in 1982 on the Dutch East India Company in Gujarat and Hindustan, 1620-1660.

After finishing his Ph.D. he joined the foreign service of the Netherlands and served as a diplomat in Saudi-Arabia, Belgium, India and Thailand. During his posting in India he wrote a biography of a VOC employee Geleynssen de Jongh as well as several articles on the Dutch East India Company in India and in Thailand.
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Dialog of a Veteran Soldier
By Diogo do Couto, Timothy J. Coates and M. N. Pearson

Fraud, scandal, theft of royal funds, official graft, and cover-ups: these are the subjects of the 1612 exposé written by Diogo do Couto in his Dialog of a Veteran Soldier. Couto revealed too much and as a result, this work had to wait more than 175 years until its first publication in 1790. This classic of overseas Portuguese history is a well-known source cited by historians of Portuguese Asia, yet it has remained beyond the reach of a larger audience until this translation — its first into any other language. Couto was never rewarded with any of the prized positions that viceroys and governors (according to him) showered on their underlings. This Dialog is his bitter response. In it, we can see the workings of official and informal administration of Portuguese Asia as well as the numerous remedies Couto suggests to correct these abuses.

About the Author:
DIogo DO CoutO (Lisbon, c. 1542 Goa, 10 December 1616) was a Portuguese historian.
M.N. PEARSON is Emeritus Professor at the University of New South Wales, Australia.