

**G. L. Balk, F. van Dijk, D. J. Kortlang, F. S. Gaastra, Hendrik E. Niemeijer, and P. Koenders. *The Archives of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and the Local Institutions in Batavia (Jakarta)*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007. 572 pages, 16 color illustrations.**

Robert Van Niel

During my first visit to Indonesia in 1952, I attempted to pay a courtesy call on the state archivist to introduce myself as a researcher of Indonesian history. At that time, the state archive was located in the former country estate of Governor General De Klerck, Jalan Gaja Mada No. 111. I was informed that the archives were not open and that I could not meet the archivist. I was, however, given a guided tour of the building, a very charming eighteenth-century house.

My next attempt to enter the archives was in 1968 when I had a Fulbright grant to survey libraries and archives in Southeast Asia. On this occasion, I met Dr. Mohammed Ali, head of the archives, who permitted me to request some materials with a week's notice, so I requested a couple of bundles at random and came back a week later. I was directed to an upper-story room where a table, chair, and guard, along with the requested items, were awaiting me. I found that I had requested materials related to treaties with various rulers, not a subject of interest to me, so I returned these and selected a couple more items for the following week. When I returned, I was told that nothing was ready and that I should return in another week. When next I appeared, I was told that it was just too much work for the very limited staff to bring me the requested materials and that I should not expect to see anything more in the archive. My published survey of this archive and others shows my feeling about the shabby treatment I received in the Jakarta archive.<sup>1</sup>

A more positive achievement during my Fulbright year in Southeast Asia was organizing the Puncak Pass Conference in January 1969. This conference brought together librarians and archivists from several Southeast Asian countries who had never met each other before. This conference laid the groundwork for international cooperation to preserve and provide access to research materials in this region.

My next foray into the Jakarta archives was in 1986, when I spent a few months in Indonesia. Matters had greatly improved by this time. In 1975 a new archive building had been constructed on the fringes of Jakarta, and a European-trained archivist was in charge. This time I was welcomed into the archives. The Dutch East India Company (VOC) materials that I wanted to see were still in the old De Klerck house, not yet in the new building, but the whole atmosphere had changed. My Final Report to LIPI (Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia, Indonesian Institute of Sciences) in October 1986 best illustrates this by quoting from it.

In the *Arsip Nasional R.I.*, I have been most hospitably received and courteously treated. Formal permission to work in the archives was extended by Dra. Soemartini, the Head of the National Archives. Mr. Machfudi was most kind in

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Van Niel, *A Survey of Historical Source Materials in Java and Manila* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1970).

providing a general orientation and also in looking after my special requests ... I cannot say enough in praise of the changes that have been made in the administration of the Indonesian National Archives ... Eighteen years ago (1968) I attempted to work in these same archives and was unable to do so. I am very pleased by the change and much impressed by the progress that has been made.

My subsequent visits to Indonesia were too short to permit archival research, so my next insight into the progress that has been made is from this very large, handsome book that provides an inventory of the archives of the Dutch East India Company in the Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia (ANRI). The archive is now in its new quarters. The De Klerck house is memorialized by a photograph on the front of the book's dust jacket.

Readers of Cornell Southeast Asia Program's journal, *Indonesia*, certainly need no introduction to the VOC, for they will be very familiar with factories and settlements stretching from the Cape of Good Hope to Japan, and with governing centers in Batavia and Amsterdam. Company records were kept in many places. VOC archives exist in places other than Jakarta and The Netherlands, where the bulk of the records are now kept. These archives are also an important source of historical information for many parts of the world. Their importance was recognized in 2003 when UNESCO added the VOC archives to its *Memory of the World International Registry*.

The single largest depository of these records is in the ANRI, in Jakarta. Archived materials are now available to researchers by a cooperative enterprise between the Netherlands and Indonesia, which began in the year 2000. The results of this project are now presented in this book.

The book is divided into two parts. The first 200 pages consist of four essays that provide insight into the day-to-day functions of the Company, the functions that generated the flood of documents that make up the material of the archive. The book's next 350 pages comprise the actual inventory of the VOC and related archives held by the ANRI. I describe each of these two parts below.

However much one may know about the VOC, it is well to peruse the four essays before starting one's research into the archive. The first essay is by Dr. F. S. Gaastra and deals with "The Organization of the VOC." The second, by Dr. Hendrik E. Niemeijer, is concerned with "The Central Administration of the VOC Government and the Local Institutions of Batavia (1619–1811)." Those two essays provide insight into details of VOC governance and administration that will guide the researcher. The third essay is the product of three archivists who played a major role in formulating the structure of the newly produced inventory. They are G. L. Balk, F. van Dijk, and D. J. Kortlang, whose essay is entitled "History of the Archives." This fascinating essay brings a sense of intimacy into the condition and development of the archive. The fourth essay, by Pieter Koenders, on "TANAP and the cooperation between ANRI and *Nationaal Archief* [the National Archive]," tells the story of the cooperative arrangements between the Netherlands National Archive and ANRI as established by a program called *Towards a New Age of Partnership* (TANAP), which ran from 1999 to 2007. This essay explains what actually happened to bring order into the VOC archives in Jakarta. All four of

these essays are printed in three languages: English, Indonesian, and Dutch. The inventories of the archives are only in Dutch.

The second part of the book inventories fifteen archives. Each of these archives is provided with a table of contents within which matters are arranged topically and chronologically. The new inventory is based in the first instance on the point of origin of the materials, and not by subject and topic, as was done in the old nineteenth-century inventory. The first four archives listed below were an intimate part of the VOC. The remaining eleven were in some way regulated by the VOC. The archives vary greatly in size; the records of the High Government and the Notarial Records are the largest. The dates listed must be regarded as estimated limits and not as complete sequences, for there are great gaps in many archives due to losses and destruction. The fifteen archives are:

1. The High Government (Hoge Regering) 1612–1812
2. The High Commission (Hoge Commissie) 1791–1799
3. The General Audit Office (Algemene Rekenkamer) 1808–1811
4. The Court of Justice (Raad van Justitie) 1620–1809
5. The College of Aldermen (Schepenenbank) 1620–1809
6. District Council (Heemraden) 1664–1809
7. Governors of Orphanages (Weeskamer) 1624–1885
8. Trustees of non-European Deceased Estates (Boedelkamer) 1640–1885
9. Loan Bank (Bank van Lening) 1746–1808
10. Auction Office (Vendukantoor) 1737–1776
11. Opium Society (Amphioensociëteit 1745–1808)
12. Notary Records (Notarissen) 1621–1817
13. Church Records (Kerken)
14. Birth, Marriage, and Death Records (Burgerlijke Stand) 1616–1829
15. Nicholaas Engelhard (1750–1832)

The first of these archives, the High Government, contains the records of the governor general and Council of the Indies. It is the widest in scope, dealing with topics ranging from Batavia's contacts in Europe with the various Company offices in Asia, with the provinces and districts throughout the archipelago and Java, and with local matters in the Batavia area. It is the only archive in Jakarta that I personally have used; I have found materials here that have not made their way to the Netherlands National Archive in The Hague.

My experiences in ANRI, as noted above, have given me a keen sense of the condition of documents encountered by the archivists producing the new inventories. White ants, mildew, and acidic ink have exacted their toll on the documents. What now is available to researchers has been stored in acid free boxes. I cannot say enough to praise the work of all persons involved in bringing about these improvements in the

Jakarta VOC archives. May scholars of the future not only make use of this trove of materials but also experience the joy of archival research in discovering new facts and interpretations.