

# The Maritime Cultural Landscape of Dutch Mauritius

Uncovering the VOC's prolonged interest in the 'failed colony' of Mauritius (1598-1710)

**Master thesis**

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# Table of contents

Introduction	3
Main historiography	4
Maritime cultural landscape	9
Archival material	10
1.0 Describing Mauritius' geography and structures	12
1.1 Geography	12
1.2 Flora	16
1.3 Fauna	17
1.4 Structures	18
1.5 Subconclusion	22
2.0 Sailing routes and maritime connections	23
2.1 Brouwerroute	24
2.2 Bypassing Batavia	28
2.3 Safe-haven	30
2.4 Avoiding risks	32
2.5 Portuguese and British networks	33
2.6 Facilitating exploration	34
2.7 Subconclusion	35
3.0 Dutch maritime knowledge	37
3.1 <i>Itinerario</i>	38
3.2 Accidental (re)discoveries	39
3.3 Francois Valentyn	40
3.4 Secrecy and censorship	41
3.5 Cartography	43
3.6 Subconclusion	44
4.0 European competition	45
4.1 Context of conflict	45
4.2 Mauritius' military-strategic role	47
4.3 Mauritius' economic role	49
4.4 Subconclusion	50
Conclusion	51
Bibliography	53

## Introduction

When the Dutch embarked on their first voyages to the East Indies, they were amazed by the sight of Mauritius. Ship journals and travel logs describe the island as being rich and fruitful, with a steady amount of wildlife, fish and fresh water. They could reach these supplies and access the thick and valuable ebony forests at the centre of the island through two natural and relatively safe bays. This place seemed to be a small paradise in the Indian Ocean that could be used by Dutch fleets to restock on supplies, repair ships and treat the sick and wounded. However, Dutch Mauritius is often perceived as a colonial disaster in maritime historiography. It was a minor refreshment station when compared to the Cape of Good Hope, the harvest of ebony did not turn out to be as productive as expected, there were periods of incompetent leadership and the island presumably had an awkward location within the network of sailing routes of the Dutch East-India Company (VOC). The history of Dutch Mauritius is now often overlooked and forgotten, but if this island was truly insignificant to the VOC and its colonisation was such a disaster, it is curious to note that they did decide to occupy the island for roughly a century.<sup>1</sup>

There is more to this VOC outpost than immediately meets the eye. When looking back at its entire history of Dutch occupation it might be true that its actual colonisation was more of a failure than a success. However, by taking a broader look at its maritime cultural landscape we discover that this island did play a more significant role in the Dutch overseas expansion than was previously thought. The archaeological concept of the maritime cultural landscape was introduced by Christer Westerdahl, and is used to analyse maritime communities through an overview of its structures, technologies, geography and connections. This is not the place to thoroughly discuss the ideas behind it, though; they will be properly introduced at the end of this introduction. However, by applying this concept in historic research this thesis shows that although Mauritius was not utilised to its full potential, it did play its part in securing VOC presence in the Indian Ocean and proved its value in its own ways. It provides a necessary nuance in an overpowering negative and neglected historiography by answering the following question: what does the maritime cultural landscape of Dutch Mauritius tell us about its roles and significance in the Dutch overseas expansion (1598-1710)? Although the VOC did not yet exist in 1598 and the company did not officially colonise the island until 1638, this chronological period is relevant to this research as the Dutch interest was sparked and the island was unofficially claimed during these years. As the VOC left Mauritius permanently in 1710, this thesis will also limit itself to this moment.

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<sup>1</sup> Perry Moree, *Dodo's en Galjoenen: de Reis van het Schip Gelderland naar Oost-Indië, 1601-1603*, Werken van de Linschoten-Vereeniging, deel 100 (Zutphen, 2001), 77-84; Idem, *A Concise History of Dutch Mauritius, 1598-1710: a Fruitful and Healthy Land* (New York, 1998); D. Sleight, *Die Buitenpost: VOC-buitenposte onder Kaapse Bestuur 1652-1795* (Haum, 1993), 639-642.

This introduction will first elaborate on the main historiography tied to Dutch Mauritius. Then, it also dives into the concept of the maritime cultural landscape and argues how this archaeological concept can be relevant for historic research. Last but not least, this introduction elaborates on the archival material that is used in this research. The following parts of this thesis cover different aspects that are relevant to the analysis of Mauritius' maritime cultural landscape. The first chapter answers the question of what the geography of Mauritius and the Dutch structures at this outpost tell us about the role that the island played for the VOC. Chapter two answers the question of how Mauritius influenced and was influenced by the VOC's network of connections in the Indian Ocean. While chapter one and two focus on elements that are borrowed directly from Westerdahl's concept, chapter three and four are based on elements from historic research that contribute to this concept by providing a new angle. Chapter three focusses on the question of how contemporary maritime knowledge shaped and was shaped by Mauritius' maritime cultural landscape. Chapter four answers the question of what Mauritius' value was in a landscape of European competition within the Indian Ocean. The conclusion shows what Mauritius meant to the company and why the concept of the maritime cultural landscape should be used more often in historic research. The last three chapters sometimes show some overlap as sailing networks, maritime knowledge and European competition often affected each other. This thematic approach has been chosen, however, to grant some focus to the arguments of this thesis and to keep a clear overall picture; a chronological approach would risk losing focus with such a broad analysis.

### Main historiography

As mentioned before, Dutch historiography tends to follow a trend of forgetting the Dutch occupation of Mauritius as this period is often omitted from the substantial publications that serve as standards within the fields of colonial and maritime history. H.T. Colenbrander overlooked Mauritius in the three extensive volumes of his *Koloniale Geschiedenis* in 1925, and almost seventy years later, J. van Goor excluded this history from his standard which served as an update to Colenbrander's work.<sup>2</sup> In the four comprehensive volumes of the *Maritieme Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* the island in question is also not mentioned.<sup>3</sup> Piet Emmer and Jos Gommans took three sentences to summarise the history of Dutch Mauritius as a failed colonisation, and Femme S. Gaastra dedicated ten words to this island in

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<sup>2</sup> H.T. Colenbrander, *Koloniale Geschiedenis, I: Algemeene Koloniale Geschiedenis* (Den Haag, 1925); Idem, *Koloniale Geschiedenis, II: Nederland: De West, De Oost tot 1816* (Den Haag, 1925); J. van Goor, *De Nederlandse Koloniën: Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse Expansie, 1600-1975* (Den Haag, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> F.J.A. Broeze, J.R. Bruijn and F.S. Gaastra, *Maritieme Geschiedenis der Nederlanden 2: Zeventiende Eeuw, van 1585 tot ca 1680* (Bussum, 1977); Idem, *Maritieme Geschiedenis der Nederlanden 3: Achttiende Eeuw en Eerste Helft Negentiende Eeuw, van ca 1680 tot 1850-1870* (Bussum, 1977).

his comprehensive standard on the VOC.<sup>4</sup> It becomes painfully clear that Mauritius is overlooked in many great works on Dutch colonial and maritime history.

Although this entire thesis could be filled with lists of books and articles that did not include Mauritius in their narratives, it might be more interesting to dive into those that did. Perry Moree produced the most recent and extensive research on the history of Dutch Mauritius in 1998, which was published with help from the Dutch government as the first Dutch person set foot on the island 500 years earlier. While his study is relatively extensive when compared with the rest of the historiography concerning Dutch Mauritius, Moree titled his work as being “*A Concise History*”<sup>5</sup>. In this publication he explicitly states that “this book is by no means a definitive study. On the contrary, judging by the surviving primary source-material, held in both state archives in The Hague and Cape Town, the study into this period is simply waiting to be begun.”<sup>6</sup> He provides a general overview of the VOC in its early years, the first voyages to the East Indies, and the main historiography. Moree also highlights the existing gap in the historiography concerning Dutch Mauritius. In his analysis of the island’s historiography of this Dutch period he mentions Charles Grant’s *The history of Mauritius* and prince Roland Bonaparte’s *T’Eylandt Mauritius* as notable sources that expand upon this period.<sup>7</sup> While these are interesting for his analysis to highlight this historiographical gap, Grant and Bonaparte provide little to no new relevant information for this thesis.

While leaning mainly on journals of Mauritius’ governors and the correspondence between them and Batavia and the Heren XVII, Moree creates a chronological journey through the history of Dutch Mauritius. One of his most striking conclusions which explains why the VOC failed to colonise this small paradise in the Indian Ocean is because the VOC at its core never had a large ambition to actually colonise. According to Moree, the VOC was based on commercial interests and maintaining monopolies, and the reasons behind the maintenance of some of its biggest colonies were often purely practical; Batavia was established at a strategic location from which they could organise their intra-Asian trade and seat their central government, while Cape Town was a central refreshment station that generally optimised the VOC voyages. It was also located at a point that every single vessel had to pass on their voyages to and from the Republic, regardless of the routes that they took on the Atlantic and Indian Ocean, which gave this settlement a highly strategic value. If this were completely

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<sup>4</sup> Piet Emmer and Jos Gommans, *Rijk aan de Rand van de Wereld: de Geschiedenis van Nederland Overzee, 1600-1800* (Amsterdam, 2012), 246; Femme S. Gaastra, *Geschiedenis van de VOC: Opkomst, Bloei en Ondergang* (Zutphen, 2012), 56.

<sup>5</sup> Moree, *Concise History of Dutch Mauritius*.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, 2; Grant, Charles, *The History of Mauritius or the Isle of France and the Neighbouring Islands From Their First Discovery to the Present Time* (New Delhi, 1995); Bonaparte, Roland, *Le Premier Établissement des Néerlandais à Maurice* (Paris, 1890).

true, however, this theory would have us believe that there probably also was a great commercial or practical interest in Mauritius, or else it would be unlikely for the VOC to keep such a continued interest in this particular colony.

The Dutch minister Francois Valentyn covered Mauritius in his grand narrative on the East Indies that he wrote between 1724 and 1726 after being sent to this region twice.<sup>8</sup> Although his work is still cited a lot and can be an incredibly useful source in certain circumstances – and quite an entertaining one to read because of his notorious sense of humour - his information on Mauritius specifically contains quite some errors. For instance, as Moree points out, Valentyn mentions that “the Dutch took possession of Mauritius four times and left again.”<sup>9</sup> Actually, the VOC only halted their occupation once in 1658. We know now that the official periods of colonisation were in the periods of 1638-1658 and 1664-1710. Errors such as these indicate a certain level of ignorance concerning Valentyn’s knowledge on Mauritius. Although his information on the Moluccas is quite broad and informative - and makes up half of his complete narrative that spans over these five volumes - there is a certain risk to using Valentyn’s *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën* in this particular research as his part on Mauritius is full of inconsistencies. This is of course still a valuable source when used to analyse how this island was perceived in that time, and the inconsistencies might also indicate that the general knowledge on this particular colony was questionable even among people that spent large amounts of time in the East Indies. In the case of this thesis, his work is used as a primary source to examine what knowledge concerning this colony was circulated and what was passed on to others. It does not, however, qualify as a reliable secondary source on the use, function and general history of Mauritius due to these same errors and inconsistencies.

One of Valentyn’s contemporaries, Pieter van Dam, who had a long career as secretary of the chamber of Amsterdam and also spent quite some years as secretary of the Heren XVII, produced an overview of VOC history which was meant to be accessible exclusively to the Heren XVII themselves. Because of his intended audience it is reasonable to assume that Van Dam could speak freely about certain subjects on which the VOC normally would have to remain quite secretive, and he had the liberty to be as honest and truthful as he could be. The Huygens Institute for Dutch History that was responsible for the complete digitalisation of the four out of five volumes of the *Beschryvinghe* which have survived for over three centuries, mention that this work contains unique details that can no

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<sup>8</sup> Valentyn, Francois, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën, vervattende een naaukeurige en uitvoerige verhandeling van Nederlands mogentheyd in die gewesten, benevens eene wydlustige beschryvinge der Moluccos, Amboina, Banda, Timor, en Solor, Java en alle de eylanden onder dezelve landbestieringen behoorende : het Nederlands comptoir op Suratte, en de levens der groote Mogols; als ook een keurlyke verhandeling van 't wezentlykste, dat men behoort te weten van Choromandel, Pegu, Arracan, Bengale, Mocha, Persien, Malacca, Sumatra, Ceylon, Malabar, Celebes of Macassar, China, Japan, Tayouan of Formosa, Tonkin, Cambodia, Siam, Borneo, Bali, Kaap der Goede Hoop en van Mauritius ...* (Dordrecht, Amsterdam, 1724-1726).

<sup>9</sup> Moree, *Concise History of Dutch Mauritius*, 2.

longer be found in other historiographies.<sup>10</sup> In the second volume he gives a fairly detailed overview of the coastline which can be used well to analyse the maritime cultural landscape.<sup>11</sup> Van Dam remains very descriptive in his work and rarely provides his reader with backstory or analysis. His reason behind the descriptive nature of his work probably depended on his targeted audience.

Most historic research that has been done on Mauritius, besides the work of Moree, comes from French, British, and South African perspectives. The French and British periods of occupation were more successful and left more traces that are still visible in contemporary times.<sup>12</sup> When scholars from these countries write on this subject, they often have a focus on the history of their own period of colonisation. South Africa, though, shares a history with this island as the Cape government had a short period of direct control over Mauritius, which Daniel Sleigh expands upon in his extensive work on the Cape's *Buitenposte*.<sup>13</sup> Other Dutch works on the first period of Dutch occupation have been produced by Leupe and Heeringa during the second half of the nineteenth century, and by Arlette Kouwenhoven in 1991. They are quite limited in size as well as in the chronological period they cover, and because of the fact that they are dated and the most relevant information has been used and passed on in more recent work, these articles will not be of much use for this thesis.<sup>14</sup> As mentioned before, narratives that are written from these British and French perspectives rarely cover the periods of Dutch occupation, so information on this period is still scarce. The most extensive works on Mauritius that also elaborate on the Dutch presence have been written by Albert Pitot in 1905 and Daniel Sleigh in 1993.<sup>15</sup>

Albert Pitot constructed his extensive history on Dutch Mauritius through some impressive research in VOC archives and by leaning mostly on the works of Heeringa and Valentyn. By translating passages from the journals and correspondence of Mauritius' governors, Pitot was able to write a chronological history of the Dutch occupation.<sup>16</sup> His reliance on Valentyn as a secondary source is worrisome and endangers the reliability of some of his argumentation. Nevertheless, Pitot still managed to publish an impressive work which must have provided quite some new insights in its time. It is a bit dated – and nowadays also a bit redundant – as Moree managed to capture Pitot's most

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<sup>10</sup> [http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/vocbeschrijvingvandam/index\\_html\\_en](http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/vocbeschrijvingvandam/index_html_en) (23-02-2019). The fifth volume, which is lost, gave a description on the conflicts between the VOC and the English.

<sup>11</sup> Pieter van Dam, *Beschryvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie* (Den Haag, 1927-1954), 580-597; <https://www.vocsite.nl/geschiedenis/handelsposten/mauritius.html> (23-02-2019).

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/zeemansdroom-mauritius-voc-verleden~b0ef2245/> (27-04-2019).

<sup>13</sup> Sleigh, *Die Buitenposte*.

<sup>14</sup> Moree, *Concise History of Dutch Mauritius*, 2; K. Heeringa, 'De Nederlanders op Mauritius en Madagascar', *De Indische Gids*, vol.17(2) (1895), 1005-1036; A. Kouwenhoven, 'De Nederlandse Kolonie op Mauritius in de 17de Eeuw. Wrede Meesters Verdreven door hun Slaven', *Spiegel Historiae*, vol.26, (1991), 281-285.

<sup>15</sup> Albert Pitot, *T'Eylandt Mauritius: Esquisses Historiques (1598-1710): Précédées d'une Monographie du Dodo* (Port-Louis, 1905); Sleigh, *Die Buitenposte*.

<sup>16</sup> Pitot, *T'Eylandt Mauritius*.

relevant arguments in his own work and was able to use a larger body of primary sources through the luxury of the organised and largely digitalised VOC archives in The Hague and Cape Town.

Daniel Sleight produced the most recent work compared to Grant, Bonaparte and Pitot. By concentrating on the *Buitenposte* that were under control of the Cape government, he manages to provide some new details on Mauritius during the second period of Dutch occupation. He does so by tapping into the VOC archives of Cape Town to examine relevant documents that are not available in the National Archives in The Hague. His analytical work mostly brings a new perspective into this historiography by looking further into the lives and narratives of the *vrijburgers* that were housed on Mauritius, instead of maintaining his focus on the VOC governors and the correspondence between them. According to Sleight, the VOC's failure on Mauritius was caused by its awkward location and due to the company's austerity policy which led the permanent "*pioniersfase*"<sup>17</sup> of the island. The fact that the VOC decided to hold on to Mauritius in its constant pioneer phase while dealing with budget cuts could imply that this colony was not as insignificant to the company as the historiography might suggest.

In *Globalisation and the South-West Indian Ocean*, Sandra J.T. Evers and Vinesh Y. Hookoomsing wanted to re-assess the "Dutch legacy"<sup>18</sup> in this region and aimed to gain a better understanding of the role of Madagascar, Mauritius and La Réunion in the process of globalisation. With the contribution of many other historians they were able to question the negative view that always dominated the historiography on the Dutch influence on these islands.<sup>19</sup> With articles on social and cultural aspects that are influenced by the periods of Dutch occupation, Hookoomsing and Evers succeeded in expanding our knowledge of this shared Dutch-Asian history that is often omitted from historiography. By doing so, they show us that although there are next to no traces of the Dutch on Mauritius visible today - neither in language or in colonial architecture – their presence on the island had a bigger influence than was originally thought.<sup>20</sup> This observation makes it all the more interesting to dig deeper in our knowledge of what the VOC actually did there, and perhaps even more interesting, why their interest in Mauritius remained for so long and even rekindled after they moved on to the Cape of Good Hope.

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<sup>17</sup> Sleight, *Die Buitenposte*, 677-678.

<sup>18</sup> Sandra Evers and Vinesh Y. Hookoomsing eds., *Globalisation and the South-West Indian Ocean* (Leiden, 2000), 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, 1.

<sup>20</sup> Perry Moree, 'Discovering the Undiscovered Country: Dutch Mauritius 1598-1710' in: Sandra Evers and Vinesh Y. Hookoomsing eds., *Globalisation and the South-West Indian Ocean* (Leiden, 2000) 3-4.



## Maritime cultural landscape

To analyse the history of Dutch Mauritius from a new angle, this history thesis leans on the field of archaeology by borrowing the concept of the maritime cultural landscape. A maritime cultural landscape exists of all the maritime structures, technologies, connections and relevant geography that are a part of a maritime community. This term is gaining popularity in the field of maritime archaeology as it is being developed into a whole different way of doing research that goes beyond the excavation of shipwrecks. After the concept was introduced by Christer Westerdahl in 1978 to define “the network of sea routes and harbours, indicated both above and under water”<sup>21</sup>, it has evolved into a concept that also includes factors such as anchorages, inns and taverns, ballast sites, shipyards, wharfs, piers, landing places and place names. The concept has been evolving since then, but it still has to be developed further. As David J. Stewart phrased it: “a lot of us – myself included – have jumped on the bandwagon, but I am not sure that we have gotten it to roll just yet.”<sup>22</sup>

While Westerdahl has promoted this concept as one that invites interdisciplinary insights to provide a complete and holistic overview of a certain cultural landscape, other fields of research lag behind in the implementation of the concept. Aside from the journal that was produced on this subject by Ben Ford in 2011, which included articles from archaeologists, historians and anthropologists, it has rarely been used explicitly outside of the field of archaeology.<sup>23</sup> Since maritime archaeology and maritime history share the same subject matter, but differ in their methods, historic research such as this is able to profit greatly from this concept.<sup>24</sup> The same goes the other way around; the concept can be developed even further by incorporating elements of historic research that are less physical than those examined by archaeologists.

Due to the size of this thesis it is impossible to incorporate all the different elements that make up Westerdahl’s definition of his concept. This thesis specifically borrows the elements of geography, structures and sailing routes from this concept as means to analyse the maritime cultural landscape of Mauritius. It adds the elements of maritime knowledge and European competition from a historic angle to complement the analysis and form a more extensive picture of the landscape. By doing so, this analysis shows us what drove the prolonged Dutch interest in Mauritius and what function the island had within the larger maritime network of the VOC.

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<sup>21</sup> Christer Westerdahl, ‘The Maritime Cultural Landscape’ in: Ben Ford, Donny L. Hamilton, and Alexis Catsambis eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Maritime Archaeology* (2013), 4; Joe Flatman and Mark Staniforth, ‘Historical Maritime Archaeology’ in: Dan Hicks and Mary C. Beaudry eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Historical Archaeology* (Cambridge, 2006), 172-174.

<sup>22</sup> Ben Ford, *The Archaeology of Maritime Landscapes* (New York, 2011), vii.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>24</sup> Domingues, Francisco C., ‘Maritime History and Maritime Archaeology’ in: Ben Ford, Donny L. Hamilton, and Alexis Catsambis eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Maritime Archaeology* (Oxford, 2013).

## Archival material

As mentioned before by Moree: there is still a wealth of information to be obtained on Dutch Mauritius from documents in the extensive VOC collection of the National Archive (NA) in The Hague. Correspondence between high functionaries within the VOC provide a perspective which is valuable to this research as the development of the company and its maritime cultural landscape was often dictated from these levels. W. PH. Coolhaas has collected and indexed the missives that were sent between *Gouverneurs-Generaal*, multiple *raden* and the *Heren XVII* in his comprehensive and impressive works.<sup>25</sup>

Ship journals and travel accounts are also great sources that display contemporary knowledge. For instance, in 2001, Moree was responsible for the publication of the journal of the *Gelderland*, which travelled to the East Indies in 1601 and dropped its anchor for a couple of days in the south eastern bay of Mauritius. Even though this ship was not a part of the VOC, as the company would come into existence a year after the *Gelderland* left the Republic, it does provide us with an excellent understanding of how the island was perceived by the people onboard and gives a fair description of its environment.<sup>26</sup> The works that were published in 1663 after the shipwrecked crew of the *Arnhem* made their way back to the Dutch Republic have also played their role in the changing maritime cultural landscape of Mauritius.<sup>27</sup> These stories by Andries Stokram, Johan van Hal and Simon van den Kerkhoven have been digitised and are easily accessible online. The *Itinerario* of Jan van Linschoten, which made these first Dutch voyages to the East Indies possible, also provided a lot of insight on the issue of Dutch maritime knowledge.<sup>28</sup> Other written sources that have been examined for their insights into the Dutch contemporary knowledge on Mauritius are the aforementioned works of Valentyn and Van Dam. Despite their relatively limited use as secondary sources in this context, they proved to be valuable as primary sources for the analysis of the maritime cultural landscape.

Besides the textual primary sources that are available within this VOC archive, visual sources in the form of maps and drawings are also extremely useful for the analysis of Mauritius' maritime landscape. Cartography played a large role within the functioning of the VOC. Good maps and clear directions were essential to successfully navigate a vessel towards the other side of the globe. Having this knowledge and maintaining a monopoly on this information is how Portugal managed to remain

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<sup>25</sup> W. PH. Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, Deel II: 1639-1655* (Den Haag, 1964).

<sup>26</sup> Moree, *Dodo's en Galjoenen*.

<sup>27</sup> Andries Stokram, *Korte Beschryvinghe van de Ongeluckige Weer-om-reys van het Schip Aernhem* (Amsterdam, 1663); Johan van Hal, *Wonderlijck en Seltsaem Verhael van het Schip Aernhem* (n.b., 1663); Simon van den Kerkhoven, *Historisch Verhael, der Wonderlike ende seer Zeldsame Voor-vallen, den gene bejegent die met het Retour-schip Aernhem, van Batavia na het Vaderland verrest zijn den 23 Decem. 1661* (Middelburg, 1663).

<sup>28</sup> Jan Huygen van Linschoten, *Itinerario: voyage ofte schipvaart van Jan Huygen van Linschoten naer Oost ofte Portugaels Indien, 1579-1592*. Dl. 1-2 (Den Haag, 1910).

the only European state to succeed in tapping directly into the trade network of the Indian Ocean for most of the sixteenth century. The NA has an immense amount of cartographical material in its storage, some of which was produced by Johannes Vingboons, Isaak de Graaf and Joan Blaeu, who were seen as some of the best of their time.<sup>29</sup> Most of the maps that were used for this analysis were consulted through the comprehensive works of Bea Brommer, Günter Schilder and Hans Kok.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Joan Blaeu, *Atlas Maior of 1665* (Köln, 2017); Martine Gosselink, *Land in Zicht: Vingboons Tekent de Wereld van de 17<sup>de</sup> Eeuw* (Zwolle, 2007); J.R. Bruijn et al., *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries: Volume 1, Introductory Volume* (The Hague, 1967), 61; Kees Zandvliet, *Mapping for Money: Maps, Plans and Topographic Paintings and their Role in Dutch Overseas Expansion during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Amsterdam, 1998).

<sup>30</sup> Bea Brommer, *Grote Atlas van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, V: Afrika* (Voorburg, 2009); Günter Schilder and Hans Kok, *Sailing for the East: History and Catalogue of Manuscript Charts on Vellum of the Dutch East India Company (VOC), 1602-1799* (Houten, 2010).

# 1. Describing Mauritius' geography and structures

Before this thesis dives into the thorough analysis of Mauritius' maritime cultural landscape, it will start of by providing most of the necessary context which is needed to understand the rest of this thesis. This chapter answers the question of what the geography of Mauritius and the Dutch structures at this outpost tell us about the role that the island played for the VOC. First, the most relevant geography of the island itself is discussed.

## 1.1 Geography

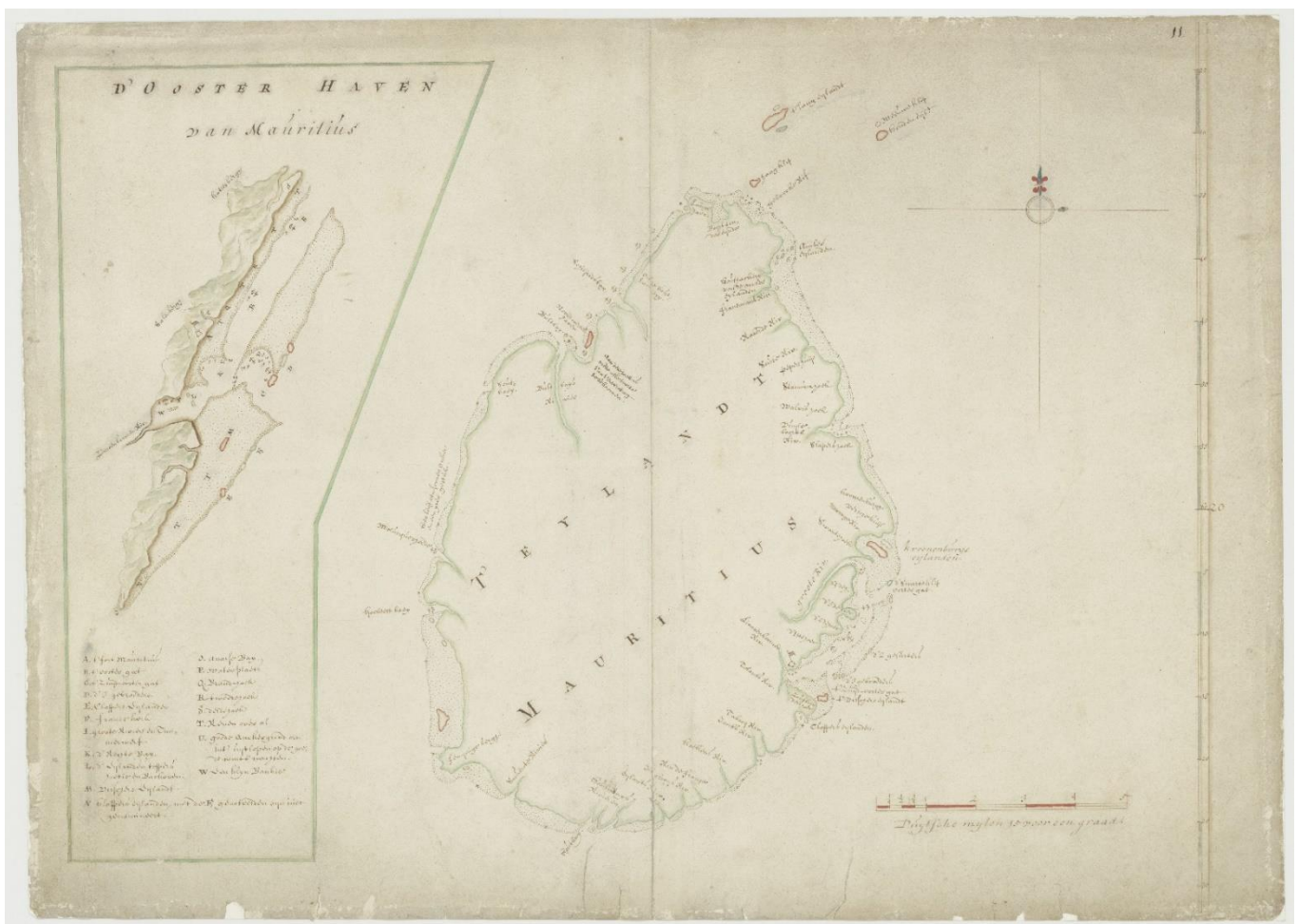
Mauritius is found on the western side of the Indian Ocean, located about 1000 kilometres east of Madagascar. The island is approximately 70 kilometres long, and 50 kilometres wide. The coastline ascends into a plateau without much irregularities, aside from some sudden peaks.<sup>31</sup> The cliffs that made up the largest part of the coastline and the reefs that surrounded them made it almost impossible to reach the land. However, relatively easy access to the island was possible through two natural bays; one located in the north west, and the other was located in the south east. The latter of these two was called the *Haven van Warwijck* – which was named after the vice-admiral of the first Dutch fleet to reach Mauritius in 1598, Wybrant Warwijck – and became the VOC's harbour of choice. Both of these harbours had deep anchoring grounds which were accessible to both small and large vessels, but the geography of the south eastern bay gave an advantage in its security. The *Haven van Warwijck* was largely closed off by two smaller islands and a series of sandbanks. This enclosure provided shelter from the elements as the wind had less negative effects and waves would not get as high as they would in the north western bay. It also served as a bottleneck point where all incoming ships had to get through the same opening, which gave it a strategic advantage by making the harbour easier to protect from invaders. Besides these advantages in safety, the two enclosing islands also made the harbour recognisable by serving as beacons for incoming ships. Furthermore, there was a suitable piece of land at shooting distance from the fort in this bay which was ideal for the construction and repair of small to medium sized vessels. The north western bay was enclosed for a part by a stone reef, but this offered no protection from southern winds. Pieter van Dam describes the island as being triangular in shape, and while Mauritius is indeed displayed as a triangular island on many seventeenth-century maps, we now know that it comes closer to resembling a semicircle. Cartographer Isaak de Graaf managed to produce the most topographically correct map near the beginning of the eighteenth century.<sup>32</sup> This means that Van Dam's information on the shape of the island was already dated when he started writing his *Beschryvinge*. The island could be circled in six

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<sup>31</sup> Sleight, *Die Buitenposte*, 639.

<sup>32</sup> Brommer, *V: Afrika*, 409.

days' time, and it would take half as long to reach the north western bay from the south eastern, and vice versa.<sup>33</sup> Details on these two bays seem to be disproportionate as the VOC eventually settled in the *Haven van Warwijck*, and had some trouble establishing their dominance in its north western counterpart. As early as 1638, when the VOC had just started constructing a fort in the south eastern bay to establish their dominance, missives reported that a French flute with fourteen cannons and a crew of 74 had arrived at the other side of the island to harvest ebony. Gooyer, the first commander of Mauritius, was unsure how to react to this French presence and asked the Heren XVII for orders and possible reinforcements.<sup>34</sup> The north western bay seemed to be the bay of choice for European visitors who often avoided the Dutch monopoly to gain access to the rich ebony forests, and was later dubbed the *Engelse Reede* because of the frequent visits by the English.<sup>35</sup>



[Late seventeenth century map of Mauritius, with a detailed display of the *Haven van Warwijck*. By Isaak de Graaf, late seventeenth century.]<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Van Dam, *Beschryvinge*, 580-590.

<sup>34</sup> W. PH., Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, Deel I: 1610-1638* (Den Haag, 1964), 727-728.

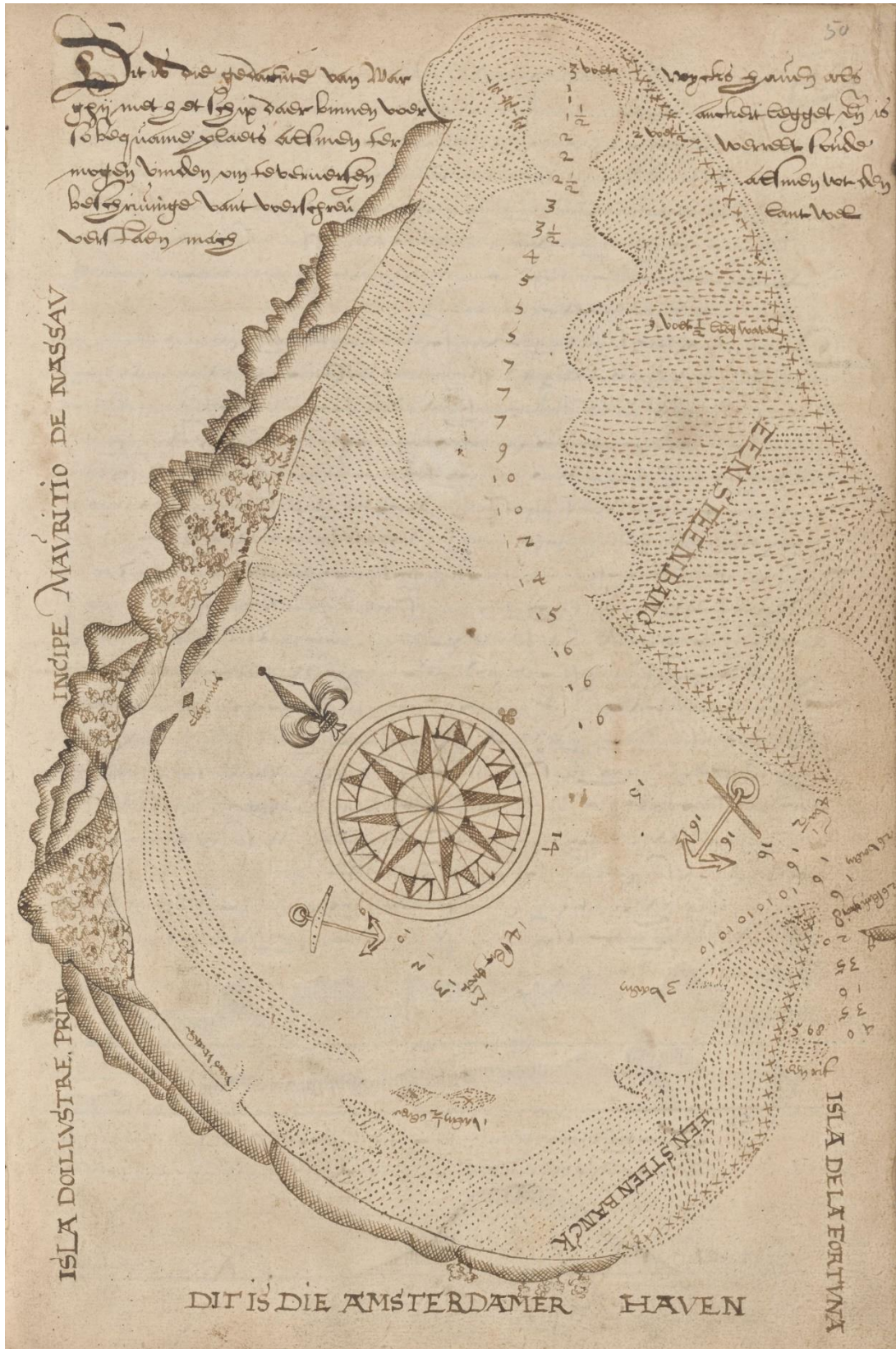
<sup>35</sup> Sleight, *Die Buitenposte*, 642-648.

<sup>36</sup> Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Verzameling Buitenlandse Kaarten Leupe, nummer toegang 4.VEL, inventarisnummer 334.



[Map of Mauritius made by an anonymous creator in the second half of the seventeenth century. The typical triangular shape suggests that this map was produced before the previous one by Isaak de Graaf.]<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Verzameling Buitenlandse Kaarten Leupe, nummer toegang 4.VEL, inventarisnummer 333.



[Drawing of the *Haven van Warwijck* from the journal of Heyndrick Derrecksen Jolinck van Zutphen, held on the *Vriesland* and *Amsterdam* respectively during the *Tweede Scheepvaart*. 1598.]<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Compagnieën op Oost-Indië, nummer toegang 1.04.01, inventarisnummer 60.

## 1.2 Flora

These ebony forests were the company's largest commercial interest on this island as this high quality wood proved to be a valuable commodity at times – at times, because the wood was sometimes difficult to sell in Europe which led, due to the VOC's economic system of the staple market, to a fluctuating supply and demand.<sup>39</sup> These forests were accessible through both bays which made it difficult for the company to protect its monopoly. Beside the ebony wood there were four more types of trees to be found which proved to be useful to the Dutch. The first was a certain kind of *Bajoer* wood which was very suitable for the construction and repair of ships and carts. When the ship *China* arrived at Mauritius in 1690 in need of severe repairs, its carpenters mentioned that it far exceeded the quality of Dutch wood because it was much tougher while it was as light as oak.<sup>40</sup> The second type of timber from the *leverhoute boomen* – which were named as such because of their colour resembling liver – were easy to model and turned hard when submerged under water. The third type which were named *Stinckboomen* – aptly called 'stink trees' because of the bad odour they emitted after being harvested – were very resilient against wind and rain without needing a coat of tar or paint. The fourth type was a type of pear tree of which the timber was very hard and tough and, according to Van Dam, were almost imperishable when used in the construction of ships.<sup>41</sup> In 1683, the *Adrichem* and *Stavenisse* were specifically ordered to visit Mauritius to replace their low quality masts with new ones made from local timber. These would be far greater than the timber they used in the Dutch Republic, which was becoming more inferior over the last couple of years.<sup>42</sup> Although ebony was the only type of wood which held a commercial value to the VOC, these four other types of wood offered to be of value in the repair of ships.

The company tried to grow lots of different crops and produce to see what would work best in this climate and started to experiment with different seeds when they occupied the island. Wheat, rice and barley were planted to see what would grow best as their main source of nourishment, and mainly the rice seemed to do well.<sup>43</sup> The climate also seemed to be suitable for the production of sugar cane, which grew thick and strong. The only downside was that no one on the island seemed to know how the process of crystallisation worked, so their only choice was to cook it into a syrup. Palm trees were harvested for their coconuts and the trees themselves could be drained for 50 to 60 days. The liquid that was produced from this draining was distilled into arak. The diet on Dutch Mauritius could

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<sup>39</sup> Gaastra, *Geschiedenis van de VOC*, 109.

<sup>40</sup> Van Dam, *Beschryvinge*, 584; W. PH., Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, Deel V: 1686-1697* (Den Haag, 1964), 376.

<sup>41</sup> Van Dam, *Beschryvinge*, 584.

<sup>42</sup> W. PH., Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, Deel IV: 1675-1685* (Den Haag, 1964), 645.

<sup>43</sup> Coolhaas, *Missiven, Deel II*, 119.



be enriched with mangoes, oranges, limes, lemons, and bananas that grew in abundance.<sup>44</sup> While van Dam seems to be extremely positive on the cultivation of crops on Mauritius, it has to be mentioned that this place was not always the paradise that many people on the first voyages thought it would be – and for the contemporaries of van Dam, the fertile paradise that it presumably was.

The colonisers sometimes fell victim to floods and hurricanes, often in the months of January, February and March, which ruined the crops by ripping them out of the ground and dragging them into the sea. Rats were also a big problem as they caused a continuous destruction of crops after they were unintentionally brought to the island by European voyagers. In the 1650's, the Dutch outpost on Mauritius was sent new sorts of produce from the Cape of Good Hope. After receiving the batch of cabbage, potatoes and different kinds of plants and vegetables, the harvest was demolished by a plague of caterpillars and locusts.<sup>45</sup> The people seemed to be resilient enough to keep surviving and rebuilding though, and the crops seemed to recover in a decent manner after such floods and hurricanes. It is therefore not the paradise that van Dam sketches, but it would also be unfair to see cultivation on Mauritius as a complete disaster.<sup>46</sup> In over a century of occupation, there was only one period in the 1690's in which the conditions became abysmal after the island was hit by the most intense hurricane that would reach Dutch Mauritius in its lifespan. Reports on the Mauritian produce that was exported to the Cape became increasingly negative.<sup>47</sup> It would, however, be fair to see Mauritius as being a colony that was in a constant state of repair.

### 1.3 Fauna

Wildlife was found in abundance on the island. Besides the native animals such as the dodo that were present before Portuguese and subsequently Dutch voyagers reached Mauritius, a lot of imported livestock roamed the island as well. During the first voyages, fleets would often release some livestock on the islands they came by to raise a supply for future voyages that might be in need of more food. Because of this system, Mauritius became home for goats, deer, pigs, chickens, geese, rabbits, pigeons and cows that supplied the settlers with more than enough food and the surplus could be offered to passing ships to restock. During the first period of occupation, surplus food was also shipped off to the Cape to combat their shortage and aid in the successful construction of this transit station.<sup>48</sup> Most of the meats and dairy that these animals produced seemed to be of decent quality and could easily be

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<sup>44</sup> Van Dam, *Beschryvinge*, 584-586.

<sup>45</sup> Sleight, *Die Buitenposte*, 645.

<sup>46</sup> Pieter M. Floore and Ranjith M. Jayasena, 'In Want of Everything? Archaeological Perceptions of a Dutch Outstation on Mauritius (1638-1710)' *Post-Medieval Archaeology*, vol.44(2) (2010), 338.

<sup>47</sup> Coolhaas, *Missiven, Deel V*, 731.

<sup>48</sup> Sleight, *Die Buitenposte*, 642.

salted and preserved.<sup>49</sup> The native wildlife also played their part in the food supply of the Dutch settlers. Fish was found in abundance in the *Haven van Warwijck*. Recent research points out that, despite the import of foreign livestock and experiments in cultivation, fish were probably the biggest source of food on Dutch Mauritius.<sup>50</sup> The turtles that inhabited the island - that according to sailors from the first Dutch voyages were so big that four men could easily ride them at the same time – dwindled in number. The dodo was incredibly easy to catch. The bird presumably lost its ability to fly due to a lack of natural predators and it did not even flinch when caught. Because of this passive nature, the creature received a name that is derived from the Portuguese *doudo*, which means ‘fool’ or ‘simpleton’. The Dutch also called this bird the *walgvogel* – *walg* meaning ‘disgust’ or ‘nausea’ - as its meat was not very tasty despite the fact that it was very easily caught.<sup>51</sup>

#### 1.4 Structures

Pieter Floore and Ranjith Jayasena’s recent archaeological work on Dutch Mauritius provide some new insights concerning fort Frederik Hendrik, which was supposed to be built to defend the company’s monopoly, but eventually “seems to have been little more than a façade with bastions facing the sea.”<sup>52</sup> The construction of this fort started after the VOC decided to officially colonise the island in 1638. Commander Gooyer was instructed to build a stronghold in the *Haven van Warwijck* and was sent 4 brass cannons for defensive measures, but the instructions allowed a certain freedom in choice of what model of fort should be built. The first model, which consisted of earthen palisades in the shape of a four-pointed star, was not resilient enough against storms and tended to fall apart after exposure to heavy rainfall. Documentary sources mention that the next and longest standing model was a square fort with four bastions.<sup>53</sup> A map that was made of the *Haven van Warwijck* by Isaac Gilsemans in 1642, who was part of Abel Tasman’s expedition, shows a fort that clearly resembles the original plans of commander Georg Wreede.<sup>54</sup> However, archaeological evidence questions if the land facing bastions were ever completed. The fort was burned down after the Dutch abandoned the island in 1658, and was rebuilt in the same manner when they returned in 1664. It was still, however, in a constant state of repair because in the second period of occupation, Mauritius was under control of the Cape government which opposed a permanent outpost on this island. Commander Lamotius’ request to strengthen the fort because of a growing English threat in 1683, and his request for

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<sup>49</sup> Van Dam, *Beschryvinge*, 587.

<sup>50</sup> Floore and Jayasena, ‘In Want of Everything?’, 336.

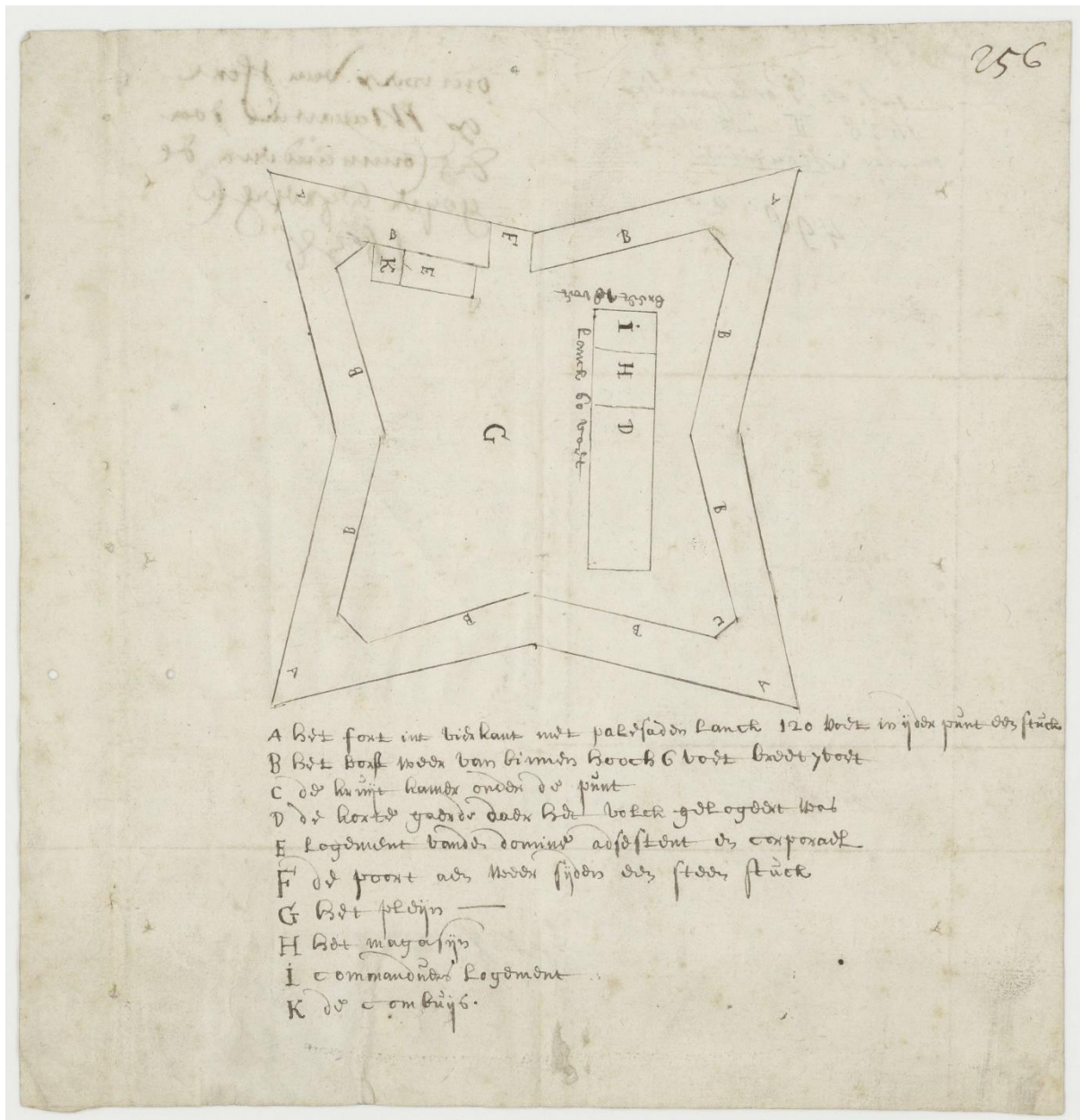
<sup>51</sup> Kouwenhoven, ‘De Nederlandse Kolonie op Mauritius’, 281-282; Sleigh, *Die Buitenposte*, 639.

<sup>52</sup> Floore and Jayasena, ‘In Want of Everything?’, 336.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, 322-337.

<sup>54</sup> Brommer, *V: Afrika*, 405-407.

permission to build stone warehouses that could actually withstand fires were both denied.<sup>55</sup> Although Dutch settlers did experiment in the firing of bricks and some pieces of the fort were strengthened by these, every formal request that came from Mauritius' governors for the construction of a permanent fort was overruled by the Cape.<sup>56</sup>



[The initial design of the first version of fort Frederik Hendrik on Mauritius, made by Commander De Gooyer in 1638. This fort was replaced by one of commander Georg Wreede's design in 1642.]<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Coolhaas, *Missiven, Deel IV*, 638.

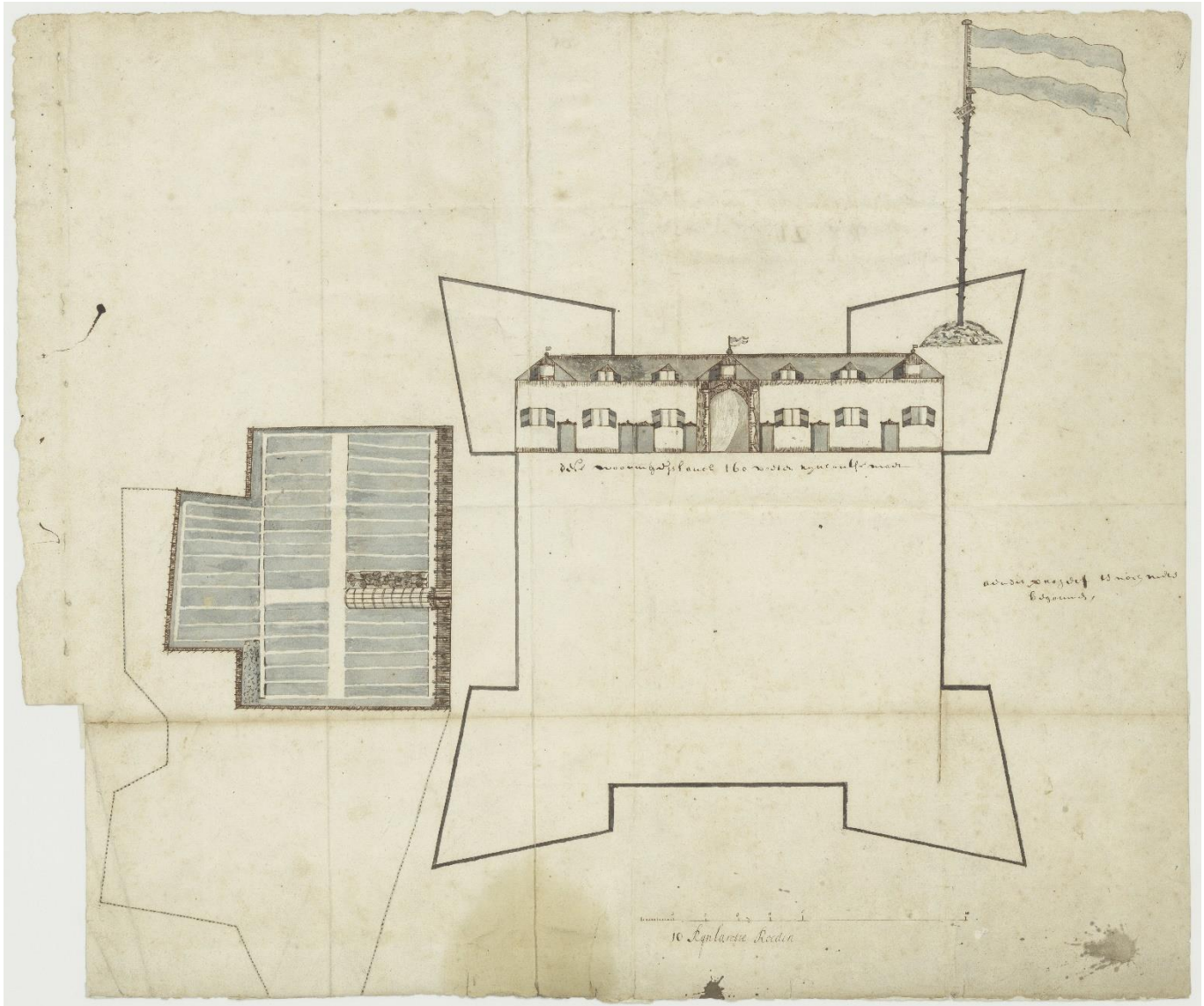
<sup>56</sup> Floore and Jayasena, 'In Want of Everything?', 322-337.

<sup>57</sup> Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Verzameling Buitenlandse Kaarten Leupe, nummer toegang 4.VEL, inventarisnummer 1131.



[Map of Mauritius made by Johannes Vingboons between 1665 and 1668, depicted in the Blaeu-Van der Hem atlas. The close-up I have added of the *Haven van Warwijck* in the top left corner clearly shows a square fort with four bastions.]<sup>58</sup>

<sup>58</sup> <http://www.atlasofmutualheritage.nl/en/Map-island-Mauritius.7438> (01-07-2019).



[Drawing of the square fort with four bastions and an adjacent *woonhuys*. Made in 1671 by an anonymous creator.]<sup>59</sup>

Other structures, as well as some infrastructure, were created to assist these settlers in life and production on the island. During the stay of Van Neck and Warwijck's fleet in the south eastern bay, a beacon was constructed on one of the small islands that enclosed this harbour to make it more recognisable and ease the passage into the bay.<sup>60</sup> Commander George Wreede issued the construction of a smaller second office somewhere between the years of 1665-1672, because the ebony forest which was close to the south eastern bay had been harvested and they needed to move on to another location.<sup>61</sup> A road was eventually built between these two locations to make the transport between the second lodge and the south eastern bay easier. In 1673, Hubert Hugo, who governed the island in

<sup>59</sup> Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Verzameling Buitenlandse Kaarten Leupe, nummer toegang 4.VEL, inventarisnummer 1133.

<sup>60</sup> Moree, *Concise History of Dutch Mauritius*, 15.

<sup>61</sup> Sleight, *Die Buitenposte*, 644; Moree, *Concise History of Dutch Mauritius*, 77-79.

the period of 1673-1677, issued the construction of a water driven sawmill north of the *Haven van Warwijck*. While the construction of such a mill shows a certain interest and serious investment in the harvest of ebony, the mill did not turn out to be a success as the water level of the river was only high enough for three months a year to make the mill functional.<sup>62</sup> When Mauritius was inspected in 1679, the report that was sent to the Heren XVII mentioned that there was rarely nothing wrong with the mill, even at times when there was enough water for it to function.<sup>63</sup> A tannery was built to process all the hides of slaughtered livestock and wildlife into leather. While at some times the tannery would show its value after VOC personnel would go hunting with the main aim of gathering hides to process, it seems that later on in the seventeenth century the tannery would sometimes be out of order due to a lack of expertise on the island. For instance, it was noted in 1676 that no one at the outpost knew how to work the tannery, and it took seven years before the tanner Poulus Bex was granted permission to practice his trade on the island.<sup>64</sup> Another group of buildings which functioned as kitchen, slaughterhouse, smith, barn and cooperage were located near the fort.<sup>65</sup> In 1683, the Cape sent an expert to Mauritius to examine the repairs that were needed for the sawmill and the arack distillery – which must have been in a bad state as well – to function properly again.<sup>66</sup> Missives from the following year indicate that the sawmill was running again, but the distillery is not mentioned.<sup>67</sup>

### 1.5 Subconclusion

Dutch Mauritius had quite a versatile landscape in the sense that there was wildlife and livestock in abundance, the land seemed to be quite fertile, there was a varied array of useful timber and its geography limited the access to the island while creating a safe space at the *Haven van Warwijck*. Yet, floods and hurricanes would sometimes ruin the crops and demolish the VOC settlement, especially during the 1690's.<sup>68</sup> Moree stresses that the value of this colony did not lay in it being a commercial interest, but it did provide some ebony, fought European competition and served as a safe-haven for shipwrecked crews and cargoes.<sup>69</sup> This thesis covers the European competition later on, but will first move on to an analysis of the network of sailing routes and maritime networks; because if Mauritius was indeed so disconnected from the Dutch network as is often claimed, why would it be a suitable location for such a safe-haven?

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<sup>62</sup> Sleight, *Die Buitenposte*, 646-647; Van Dam, *Beschryvinge*, 584; Moree, *Concise History of Dutch Mauritius*, 80.

<sup>63</sup> Coolhaas, *Missiven, Deel IV*, 365.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*, 96 and 584.

<sup>65</sup> Sleight, *Die Buitenposte*, 654; Van Dam, *Beschryvinge*, 583-584.

<sup>66</sup> Coolhaas, *Missiven, Deel IV*, 638.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*, 703.

<sup>68</sup> *Idem*, *Missiven, Deel V*, 810-811.

<sup>69</sup> Moree, *Concise History of Dutch Mauritius*, 97.

## 2. Sailing routes and maritime connections

As we have just covered the geography and settlements of Dutch Mauritius it is time to take a step back and look at how this island was connected to the bigger network of the VOC. This chapter answers the question of how Mauritius influenced and was influenced by the VOC's network of connections in the Indian Ocean. The maritime cultural landscape extends beyond the physical natural boundaries of the locations that are researched through this concept. Maritime history in itself connects different maritime communities and landscapes over the globe, which on one hand makes it difficult to analyse as one landscape can connect to multiple national histories, but on the other hand makes them incredibly fascinating to examine due to this international same nature.<sup>70</sup> This chapter covers an analysis of the sailing routes and maritime connections that were tied to Dutch Mauritius. It is important in this case to focus on more than just the Dutch connections. By also looking into the Portuguese and British maritime networks – as these were the competing European forces that the VOC had to look out for - we gain more insight into the maritime cultural landscape of this Dutch colony.

The dominant argument that is used to explain the failed colonisation of Mauritius is that it was located on the far periphery of the VOC's maritime network in the Indian Ocean, which led to a limited usefulness. Moree mentions that *“the island Mauritius never played a significant part in the maritime traffic between the Netherlands and the East Indies. At the beginning of the seventeenth century it may have seemed that Mauritius could be important as a station between these two parts of the world, but from the moment that Jan van Riebeeck called at the Cape this role was thought of no longer.”*<sup>71</sup> Sleight argues that Mauritius was not located en route as it would be located too far to the north on the way from the Republic to Batavia, and it was located too far south on the way from Batavia to the Republic. It was only conveniently located for ships that were travelling directly to India or Ceylon.<sup>72</sup> He comes to this conclusion because of his focus on the second part of Dutch occupation in which the island was mostly overshadowed by the Cape – in which Moree seems to agree completely. While this might have been true in theory due to the introduction of the Brouweroute, reality shows that a more nuanced stance should be taken in this respect.

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<sup>70</sup> Flatman, Joe and Mark Staniforth, 'Historical Maritime Archaeology' in: Dan Hicks and Mary C. Beaudry eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Historical Archaeology* (Cambridge, 2006); Polónia, Amélia, 'Maritime History: A Gateway to Global History?' in: Maria Fusaro and Polónia Amélia eds., *Research in Maritime History*, vol.43 (Liverpool University Press, 2010).

<sup>71</sup> Moree, *Concise History of Dutch Mauritius*, 96.

<sup>72</sup> Sleight, *Die Buitenposte*, 639.

## 2.1 Brouweroute

This Brouweroute deserves an extensive introduction as Moree's and Sleight's arguments – and mine – rely heavily on this specific sailing route. In 1610, Hendrik Brouwer discovered a path over the Indian Ocean which could serve as some sort of shortcut on his way to the East Indies. VOC ships often followed a route that would lead them from the Cape towards the southern point of Madagascar, from which they navigated towards Mauritius and continue their route in a straight line to Batavia. This means they had to cross the Indian Ocean straight across the middle. Brouwer, however, discovered that if you would maintain a course to the east after rounding the Cape, and then turn north east after nearing the same longitude as the islands of St Paul and Amsterdam, ships were able to reach their destination much faster. Because of the fairly constant winds to the east around the latitude of 40 east combined with the south eastern trade winds, this particular route enabled the VOC to cut the length of their voyages to the East Indies from ten to approximately seven months. Because of this advantage, this route became mandatory for outbound voyages in 1617.<sup>73</sup> The hurricanes and storms that were typical for the region surrounding Mauritius were also circumvented through this route, which is sometimes seen as one of its additional advantages. It turns out, however, that the hurricane season did not pose such a great threat at all when examining the periods in which ships departed from the Cape on their way to Asia. *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping* shows that in the period of 1650-1699, the majority of VOC ships departed from the Cape in the months of April and May. The period of 1675-1699 even shows a peak in October.<sup>74</sup> This means that the hurricane season was already avoided as much as possible through strategic planning of departures. For instance, in 1681, the Heren XVII prohibited the departure from Batavia after the 15<sup>th</sup> of December so that these hurricanes would be avoided.<sup>75</sup> The time that was saved by plotting this course led to the Brouweroute becoming the mandatory route to take when heading to Batavia. Only the outbound voyages could profit from these favourable winds. Return voyages would more or less have to cut across the Indian Ocean as the winds and currents were more favourable in these parts, which becomes apparent after examining used charts that show plotted courses.<sup>76</sup> The Brouweroute would indeed put Mauritius in an awkward position as the detour on an outbound voyage to this island would cause a massive delay.

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<sup>73</sup> Robert Parthesius, *Dutch Ships in Tropical Waters: the Development of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) Shipping Network in Asia, 1595-1660* (Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 114.

<sup>74</sup> Bruijn et al., *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping*, 70.

<sup>75</sup> Coolhaas, *Missiven, Deel IV*, 490.

<sup>76</sup> Schilder and Kok, *Sailing for the East*, 294-308; Gaastra, *Geschiedenis van de VOC*, 111-114; Parthesius, *Dutch Ships in Tropical Waters*, 114; Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Pathfinders: a Global History of Exploration* (New York, 2006), 212; Bruijn et al., *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping*, 70-71.



The Brouweroute came with some risks though. The eastern winds that were followed after rounding the Cape posed no threat and actually must have made the voyage quite a pleasant journey. Instead, it was the moment where the eastern winds would be abandoned to set course for the south eastern trade winds which could provide trouble. If the course would be altered too late, ships were at risk of stranding on the notorious and deceptively hidden Houtman-Abrolhos islands. Multiple ships became shipwrecks on these shores, of which the *Batavia* might be the most famous example, because in these times it was incredibly difficult to determine one's measure of longitude. Ships even made it as far as the western shores of Australia on which they came to an abrupt stop because of these fatal miscalculations.<sup>77</sup> There were two important islands that could be spotted while taking the Brouweroute: the islands of St Paul and Amsterdam. The moment these islands came into sight indicated the moment where ships should divert their course towards the Sunda Strait. However, because these islands were difficult to spot and their positions were only accurately described in the eighteenth century, the risk of taking this route remained.<sup>78</sup> If the course would be altered too soon, however, VOC crews had to face another risk. Turning north east too soon could mean that the opening to the Sunda Strait would be missed which would, in turn, drive vessels to the coast of Sumatra. From there, it was near impossible to reach Batavia due to the south eastern monsoon.<sup>79</sup>

While in theory Mauritius' location would result in exclusion from the VOC maritime network because of this route, reality shows that this exclusion has been exaggerated in historiography. A collection of *Graedkaerten* (Latitude charts) that were produced by Joan Blauwe show that despite the fact that the Brouweroute was a mandatory path to take, it was not the only route. These charts show the locations and measures that VOC personnel needed to plot a course from the Cape to the Sunda Strait. Only the most relevant locations are shown on this chart like the southern tip of Africa, the island of St. Paul and Amsterdam, the southern tip of Madagascar, some isolated outposts on the east African shore, the Mascarenes, Mauritius, a fragment of the Australian west coast and Sumatra with the opening to the Sunda Strait. These same charts were used from 1654 until at least 1730, and the users of these charts plotted their course by regularly measuring their location and consequently connecting the dots. A small collection of early eighteenth century charts show that, in a time where the Brouweroute was still mandatory, some ships sailed a course that did not follow this route, but instead cut off a significant portion by heading somewhat straight to the Sunda Strait rounding the Cape.<sup>80</sup> It is not known why these particular courses were plotted instead of following the

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<sup>77</sup> Fernández-Armesto, *Pathfinders*, 212; Bruijn et al., *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping*, 71.

<sup>78</sup> Bruijn et al., *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping*, 70-71; Schilder and Kok, *Sailing for the East*, 206.

<sup>79</sup> Knaap et al., *Oorlogen Overzee*, 35.

<sup>80</sup> Schilder and Kok, *Sailing for the East*, 348-375.

Brouerroute, but the important part for this argument is the fact that they did steer clear of this mandatory course.



[*Graedkaart* which was used to plot a course through the Indian Ocean. Mauritius is mentioned in the navigational comments on the left/in the interior of Africa. By Joan Jansz Blauwe, 1674.]<sup>81</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Verzameling Buitenlandse Kaarten Leupe: Eerste Supplement, nummer toegang 4.VELH, inventarisnummer 147.

FAC-SIMILE EENER TEEKENING

van  
ANTHONIO VAN DIEMEN,

voorkomende in het Journaal zijner reize naar Indië,

1632 - 1633.

*Alles vertoont zich het eiland  
St. Paul, als het 1/2 West  
van W is 5 1/2 mylen Westhoek.*

*Westhoek.*



*Westhoek.*

*Alles vertoont zich. Nieuw Amsterdam, Oudewater en Veenhuizen.  
Nieuw Amsterdam is 1/2 West van W is 5 1/2 mylen Westhoek.  
Oudewater is 1/2 West van W is 5 1/2 mylen Westhoek.  
Veenhuizen is 1/2 West van W is 5 1/2 mylen Westhoek.*

*Westhoek.*

N.B. De namen der schepen zjgn: Nieuw Amsterdam, Oudewater en Veenhuizen.

Letterbode 1854. N<sup>o</sup> 20.

[Facsimile of the islands St. Paul and Amsterdam with notes from the journal of governor-general Anthonie van Diemen on his voyage towards the East Indies, 1632-1633.]<sup>82</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Verzameling Buitenlandse Kaarten Leupe, nummer toegang 4.VEL, inventarisnummer 336.

Another chart that raises questions about the assumed disconnectedness of Mauritius is a map that was produced by Joan Jansz Blauw in 1674. Mauritius' south eastern bay was explicitly mentioned in the navigational comments on the chart – which is already unusual as such comments were normally included in a journal. These comments also admit that Amsterdam island is not featured on the map, which might be a result of the inability of VOC personnel to accurately measure longitude in the seventeenth century.<sup>83</sup>

Furthermore, there have been certain voyages that were allowed by the Heren XVII to steer clear of the Brouweroute and instead cut straight across the Indian Ocean. A document from Batavia shows that Mauritius was still frequented by mentioning that in 1642, the VOC ship *Arent* came from the Republic via Mauritius, which was tasked to bring provisions to the island along the way.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, the Heren XVII created a system in 1613 that would improve the circulation of information within the VOC's maritime network by sending out annual *adviesjachten*. While the circulation of knowledge is extensively discussed in chapter three, this is a short and relevant sidestep to make. These *adviesjachten* were solely sent out to deliver information to Batavia, and they were allowed to make a stop at the *Haven van Warwijck* to collect ebony as well.<sup>85</sup> While the purpose of these ships was to deliver their mail as fast as possible, it is surprising to see that they weren't advised to follow the Brouweroute, but instead were allowed to visit Mauritius.

## 2.2 Bypassing Batavia

Until 1636, some ships seemed to ignore Batavia as being the official rendez-vous point in the East Indies and instead would set out a direct course to Coromandel, Surat or Gamron.<sup>86</sup> As these colonies were located in present day India and Iran, following the Brouweroute would mean that these ships would have to circle by the edges of the Indian Ocean. A direct course to Coromandel and Surat could bring ships in the vicinity of Mauritius, while a direct route to Gamron might take them on a course between the African east coast and Madagascar after rounding the Cape. After nearly thirty years had passed, Ceylon became the official second rendez-vous point in the VOC's Indian Ocean trade in 1665. Robert Parthesius points out that a direct course to Ceylon or Coromandel probably did not mean that ships would cross the Indian Ocean straight across, but they would still follow the Brouweroute. They would pass the opening to the Sunda Strait and follow the favourable winds towards the bay of Bengal instead.<sup>87</sup> However, the *Spaarpot*, which left the Cape on a direct

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<sup>83</sup> NL-HaNA, Kaarten Leupe, 4.VEL, inv.nr. 336; Schilder and Kok, *Sailing for the East*, 299.

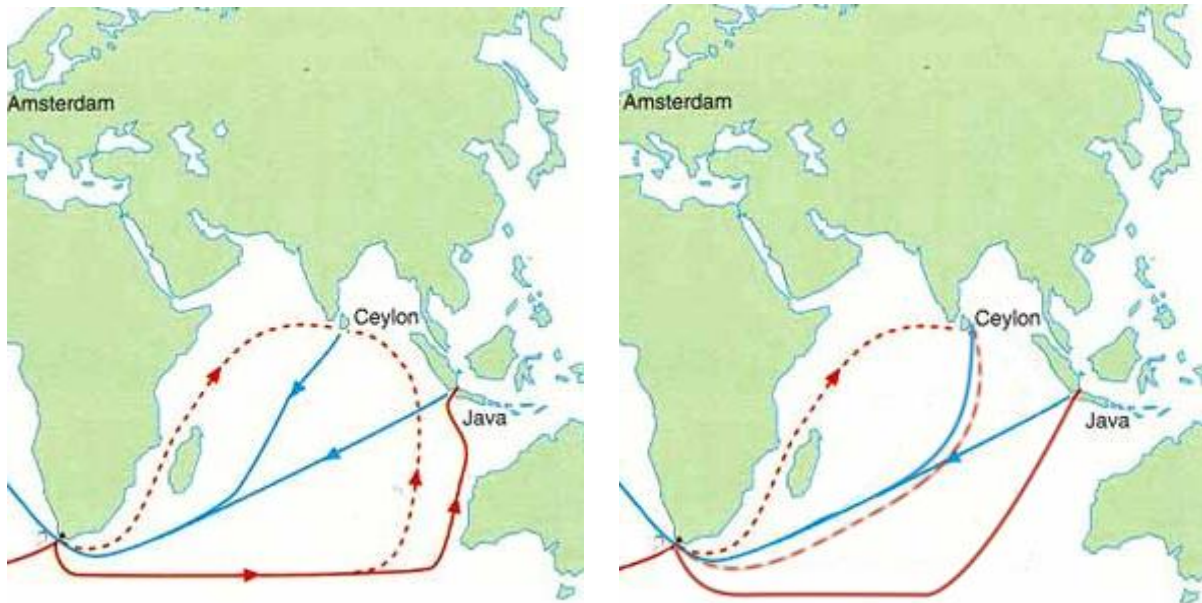
<sup>84</sup> Coolhaas, *Missiven, Deel II*, 184; Brommer, *V: Afrika*, 405.

<sup>85</sup> Parthesius, *Dutch Ships in Tropical Waters*, 76; Coolhaas, *Missiven, Deel: V*, 385.

<sup>86</sup> Gaastra, *Geschiedenis van de VOC*, 114.

<sup>87</sup> Parthesius, *Dutch Ships in Tropical Waters*, 138.

route to Ceylon in 1684, made a stop at Mauritius, which suggests that this was en route.<sup>88</sup> There seems to be some historiographic debate concerning these sailing routes as Sleight argues that Mauritius would have definitely been en route if a ship would head directly towards Ceylon or Suratte after rounding the Cape, while Parthesius argues that the Brouweroute would have been followed.



[The VOC's Indian Ocean shipping routes are often visualised like the left image above. The dotted line on the right corresponds with Parthesius' arguments of direct routes, while the straight blue line from Ceylon corresponds with Sleight's argument.<sup>89</sup> While this image is of course a generalised view of two centuries of VOC activity, it is not completely correct. The Brouweroute does not come that close to the Australian coast if followed correctly, but would divert north east after passing the islands of St Paul and Amsterdam. Return voyages from Ceylon would first head south until they reached a latitude of ten degrees, after which they slowly merged with the same course that is followed from Batavia to the Cape.<sup>90</sup> The altered image on the right would come closer to what is mentioned in VOC documentation.]<sup>91</sup>

Because the direct trade with Ceylon eventually turned out to be more profitable – due to the growing demand for pepper and the faster shipping which led to a higher quality cinnamon appearing on Dutch markets – the Heren XVII started experimenting with multiple other official rendez-vous points after 1665; these experimental points were Bengalen and Coromandel. Around the turn of the century this experiment came to an end, though, and Batavia and Ceylon remained the only two

<sup>88</sup> Coolhaas, *Missiven, Deel IV*, 753.

<sup>89</sup> Parthesius, *Dutch Ships in Tropical Waters*, 138; Sleight, *Buitenposte*, 639.

<sup>90</sup> Bruijn et al., *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping*, 70-72 and 81; Schilder and Kok, *Sailing for the East*, 348-375.

<sup>91</sup> [https://maritimeasia.ws/maritimelanka/galle/voc\\_shipping.html](https://maritimeasia.ws/maritimelanka/galle/voc_shipping.html) (30-06-2019);

rendez-vous points.<sup>92</sup> This means that for a majority of the time that the Dutch were present on Mauritius, there were at least two official rendez-vous points where outbound ships could set out a direct course for. These direct courses could urge sailors to cut across the Indian Ocean diagonally which potentially put Mauritius on their path. The Portuguese already discovered these direct routes in 1512 after Pedro de Mascarenhas plotted an emergency route to Goa. He also found out, however, that this route was only possible to take during the summer monsoon.<sup>93</sup> An important side note should be made here that although it might have put Mauritius on their path, this does not mean that stopping in the *Haven van Warwijck* would always be a desirable choice. After the Cape became the mandatory stop for supplies and refreshments, it started to eclipse Mauritius in this role - although Table Bay was actually to be the only port of call since 1616, this specific regulation was often avoided due to practical reasons.<sup>94</sup> Nevertheless, these routes show us that Mauritius was not as disconnected from the VOC's network of maritime connections as was previously thought.

### 2.3 Safe-haven

The role that Mauritius played as safe-haven for victims of shipwreck also suggest that Sleigh's point on Mauritius being too far north for outbound voyages and too far south for return voyages should be nuanced. One of the most striking examples that calls for this nuance must be the wrecking of the *Arnhem* in 1662. As part of a return fleet with six other ships, the *Arnhem* left from Batavia in December 1661. As they were crossing the Indian Ocean during the hurricane season, they were hit by a heavy storm and three ships from this fleet were never heard of again. A part of the *Arnhem* crew was able to reach Mauritius after the East Indiaman sank on the seas. Much like the sailors of the first voyages, they encountered a small paradise with an abundance of food and fresh water. Some years later, the stories that these sailors published in the Republic sparked the renewed interest to recolonise the island.<sup>95</sup> These stories are discussed in closer detail in the next chapter, but for now we should focus on the effort that it took for the *Arnhem* crew to reach this recently abandoned safe-haven.

The fact that shipwrecked crews were even able to reach Mauritius in time for repairs enforces the point of this haven being more en route on outbound and return voyages than is often thought, and seem to contradict Sleigh's and Moree's arguments on this point. The captain of the *Arnhem* mentions in his missive to the Heren XVII that after their ship on their return voyage reached a location that was located 370 kilometres north east of Mauritius, a storm blew them off course and two days

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<sup>92</sup> Gaastra, *Geschiedenis van de VOC*, 114.

<sup>93</sup> Fernández-Armesto, *Pathfinders*, 210.

<sup>94</sup> Bruijn et al., *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping*, 68.

<sup>95</sup> Moree, *Concise History of Dutch Mauritius*, 44-45.

later, the ship sank.<sup>96</sup> It took him a week to reach the *Haven van Warwijck* in the ship's boat after evacuating the sinking ship with 105 survivors.<sup>97</sup> We can only guess if the storm that blew the *Arnhem* off course for two days straight made them navigate away from or closer towards Mauritius. What we do know is that this over-encumbered vessel, which would have been slower than a fully functional East Indiaman, reached the island in a week's time. There are other cases where damaged or sinking ships managed to gain entry to the *Haven van Warwijck* in time before disappearing beneath the waves. The *Hof van Zeelandt* dropped anchor in this harbour in 1657 after they were forced to skip their stop at the Cape due to a storm. Twenty people were eventually left behind on the island because they were too weak to continue.<sup>98</sup> In 1625, the *Hollandia* wound up in a storm on the Indian Ocean during its return voyage, during which it lost its masts. The crew set a course for Mauritius where they constructed new masts with local wood with which they managed to reach the Dutch Republic.<sup>99</sup> Two years later, an English captain hailed at the Cape and told the commander there that he had encountered a ship from the chamber of Amsterdam that had damaged its masts and had to stop at Mauritius for repairs.<sup>100</sup> In 1609, the crew of the *Erasmus* discovered that their ship was leaking after leaving Batavia. They reached Mauritius with hope that the ship could be repaired, but the damages were too severe. Thanks to visits by the *Ceylon* on its return voyage and the *Brack* on its outbound voyage, the cargo and crew could find their way back home.<sup>101</sup> The *Hopewell* also reached Mauritius while it was in a very bad shape, and as the foreign name of this ship suggests, the *Hopewell* was not a VOC ship but instead flew a British flag.<sup>102</sup>

It is surprising to see that many of these example of ships that spotted damages or were even wrecked sought repairs at Mauritius on their return voyages. This is probably explained by the fact that on outbound voyages, the Cape would be the most sensible place to stop for repairs. However, with the *Haven van Warwijck* being the port of choice for damaged vessels on their return to the Dutch Republic, the value of this outpost raises greatly. VOC ships would have the most valuable cargo when heading back home from the East Indies. Therefore, the loss of a ship on its return journey would be significantly higher than the loss of an outbound ship that mostly carried supplies and ballast. It is mentioned in *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping* that "Mauritius played practically no role in shipping links

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<sup>96</sup> Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC), nummer toegang 1.04.02, inventarisnummer 1238.

<sup>97</sup> Moree, *Concise History of Dutch Mauritius*, 44.

<sup>98</sup> Parthesius, *Dutch Ships in Tropical Waters*, 99.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibidem*, 60-61.

<sup>100</sup> Coolhaas, *Missiven, Deel I*, 147.

<sup>101</sup> <https://www.vocsite.nl/schepen/detail.html?id=10322> (20-06-2019).

<sup>102</sup> Coolhaas, *Missiven, Deel II*, 232.

between Asia and the Republic,”<sup>103</sup> but the role that Mauritius played in saving crews and cargoes on their way to the Dutch Republic should not be underrated.

## 2.4 Avoiding risks

When the Dutch first established their connection to the Indian Ocean trade they were reliant on the travel accounts and routes from Portuguese travellers. Through the publications of Jan van Linschoten, who will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, the Dutch came in contact with the necessary knowledge that drove them to venture on their first voyages to the East Indies. When following the same routes as the Portuguese followed they would be exposed to a certain risk. Portugal and the Dutch Republic were at war with each other and the Portuguese had the upper hand with their superior knowledge of the Indian Ocean and their fortifications along the east African coast.<sup>104</sup> The Portuguese were clearly in control which endangered Dutch ships, so their best bet was to avoid confrontation if possible. The VOC’s primary goal was to establish their own connections with the spice markets and gain a foothold in Asia from which they could enforce their monopoly. This sounds like a commercial interest in its very nature, but the line between commercial and military goals could be thin. The fleets that were sent out towards the East Indies could sometimes outfitted with enough arms to mount a military expedition.<sup>105</sup> However, this is not the place to elaborately discuss the blurred lines between commercial and military interests. This thesis elaborates on this subject in chapter 4.

With their goal of reaching Bantam and with the story of Pedro de Mascarenhas in mind, the Dutch tried to establish a route that steered clear of the Portuguese threat and would instead bring them safely to the East Indies. Linschoten’s reluctance to travel along on the first voyage might be an indication that he opposed “the navigational risk to cut straight across to Java”.<sup>106</sup> On the second voyage, Van Neck and Van Warwijck accomplished this by avoiding the east African coast and instead set course to the East Indies via the Mascarenhas. With this safer route in mind, Mauritius became a frequent port of call and a trusted safe haven.<sup>107</sup> When the Brouweroute was discovered it became clear that this path had a lot of potential due to the fact that here they would certainly be safe from the Portuguese and because it made the voyages much faster. In fact, they were so fast that Portuguese traders in the Dutch Republic refused to believe that these ships actually made it to the

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<sup>103</sup> Bruijn et al., *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping*, 81.

<sup>104</sup> Gerrit Knaap, Henk den Heijer and Michiel de Jong, *Oorlogen Overzee: Militair Optreden door Compagnie en Staat buiten Europa, 1595-1814* (Amsterdam, 2015), 15-21.

<sup>105</sup> Bruijn et al., *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping*, 59.

<sup>106</sup> Arun Saldanha, ‘The Itineraries of Geography: Jan Huygen van Linschoten’s Itinerario and Dutch Expeditions to the Indian Ocean, 1594-1602’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol.101(1) (2011), 170.

<sup>107</sup> Fernández-Armesto, *Pathfinders*, 211-213; Moree, *Concise History of Dutch Mauritius*, 7-23.



East Indies, but instead believed that the goods they brought back must have been captured along the way.<sup>108</sup> As mentioned before, it was not the initial goal of the Dutch to challenge the established Portuguese dominance directly. It becomes clear that this was indeed the case when we compare this evolving Dutch maritime network to the relatively stunted network of the Portuguese.<sup>109</sup>

## 2.5 Portuguese and British networks

The Portuguese managed to connect themselves to the maritime network of the Indian Ocean trade quite early when compared to the Dutch and the British. They followed in the footsteps of Vasco da Gama who kept close to the east African shore after rounding the Cape. For more than 100 years Portuguese voyages would more or less plot the same routes, visiting their posts on this long shoreline and crossing the corner of the Indian Ocean by following the summer monsoon to Malabar or Goa.<sup>110</sup> This summer monsoon made it possible for the Portuguese to reach these colonies in the months between September and May, while returning to Europe was only able during the winter monsoon.<sup>111</sup> Some voyages looked for other ways to traverse the Ocean, such as the aforementioned emergency crossing of Pedro de Mascarenhas, but the majority of the Portuguese vessels seemed to prefer their traditional route.<sup>112</sup> This seems to be an immense contrast to the Dutch way of establishing their maritime network, who had to work around this strong and established Portuguese path, but the contrast is hardly surprising. The Portuguese being the first of these Europeans to establish their network had no European competition to worry about – while the Spanish were also on their way to establish an overseas empire, they did not have to worry about them because the Treaty of Tordesillas left them to explore everything to the west of the Atlantic Ocean while Portugal was left to colonise the East. After meeting one another at the Moluccas, another clear line was drawn to establish each other's territories. Another contrast between the Portuguese and the Dutch becomes apparent from these differing ways of establishing networks. While the Portuguese stuck to their traditional routes and gained dominion from north western side of the Indian Ocean and the accompanying shores, the Dutch kept to the south eastern parts of the ocean. North west against south east; a division that the Dutch also had to struggle with the British on Mauritius.

On Mauritius, the British tried to work around the VOC's monopoly by harvesting ebony from the north western bay – which, as is mentioned before, was eventually even dubbed the *Engelse Reede* due to their frequent visits. On a broader scale, however, the English presence formed a lesser threat

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<sup>108</sup> Schilder and Kok, *Sailing for the East*, 17.

<sup>109</sup> Fernández-Armesto, *Pathfinders*, 209.

<sup>110</sup> Fernández-Armesto, *Pathfinders*, 209; Bruijn et al., *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping*, 56.

<sup>111</sup> Parthesius, *Dutch Ships in Tropical Waters*, 120.

<sup>112</sup> Fernández-Armesto, *Pathfinders*, 210.

than the Portuguese did to the Dutch. Despite the fact that the British East India Company was founded before its Dutch counterpart – 1600 and 1602 respectively – the VOC managed to gain a firmer foothold in the East Indies and could enforce their monopoly more effectively. While they held an inferior position on Mauritius, the English did succeed in gaining control over the island of St Helena in the South Atlantic Ocean where they managed to create their refreshment post.<sup>113</sup> The English would, however, start frequenting Mauritius more than the Dutch during the end of the seventeenth century. While the Heren XVII were already discussing the possible abandonment of this outpost, the English instead would visit the north western bay more often.<sup>114</sup>

The first English voyages were determined to reach Sumatra, but the East India Company soon diverted their attention towards India as the trade with this region became regular and organised enough to enable the building of multiple trading posts. Here they founded Surat in 1611 and Madras in 1642, which were the greatest assets to the East India Company in the early seventeenth century.<sup>115</sup> The English did eventually end up with the greatest overseas empire, but the Dutch remained dominant for the greatest part of the seventeenth century. This is partly explained by the efficient structure of the permanent joint stock company of the Dutch and their way of rewarding revenue, which resulted in higher rewards for traders if they themselves yielded higher profits, but also by the fact that the VOC was able to send out more ships.<sup>116</sup> They were able to equip two times as many ships as the English to travel towards the East Indies, and send out five times as many ships as the Portuguese.<sup>117</sup> This thesis does not try to argue that the relatively small contribution of the English in the seventeenth century trade in the Indian Ocean was a result of external European competition. Their attention also simply gradually shifted to expansion towards America. While the trade with the east was never forgotten, the English sought most of their profits in the west.<sup>118</sup>

## 2.6 Facilitating exploration

Mauritius was not just a passive node of connection that lay isolated in the Indian Ocean; it was actively sought out to facilitate discovery. Before the first European would set foot on Australia in 1606 there was a widespread idea that there had to be a huge landmass near the South Pole, which would be as large as Asia and Europe combined and would have an abundance of gold, gems and

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<sup>113</sup> Niall Ferguson, *Empire: the Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York, 2002), 18-22.

<sup>114</sup> W. PH. Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, Deel VI: 1698-1713* (Den Haag, 1964), 283 and 337.

<sup>115</sup> T. O. Lloyd, *The British Empire 1558-1983* (New York, 1984), 2-14.

<sup>116</sup> Ferguson, *Empire*, 18-22.

<sup>117</sup> Ibidem, 20.

<sup>118</sup> Lloyd, *British Empire*, 14.

spices.<sup>119</sup> Discovering this Terra Australis Incognita was a point that appeared on the VOC agenda, but because the building and maintenance of the VOC monopoly required so much attention, no resources could be spared for an expedition to this mythical land until 1642. After much debate and deliberation, the governor of Batavia, Anthonie van Diemen, instructed Dutch explorer Abel Tasman to lead an expedition to this so-called *Zuidland*. He was issued two ships that were in a deplorable state - as was often the case with voyages such as these as all capable ships were needed for war and trade – and was ordered to first set a course for Mauritius. Here he could mend the ships and their damaged rigging, stock up on supplies and prepare for the journey that was ahead. While the two ships left Batavia on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August, the real expedition would not start until Tasman departed from Mauritius on the 8<sup>th</sup> of October.<sup>120</sup> The instructions that Tasman received show how important this expedition was to the VOC. Van Diemen stresses that the amounts of wealth and treasure that are to be found would be immense, and compared this expedition to those of Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci and Vasco da Gama. He was tasked to accurately map and describe “all lands, islands, corners, turns, coves, bays, rivers, dry spots, shallows, anchoring grounds, rivers, cliffs, rocks etcetera.”<sup>121</sup> This summary of details that Tasman had to report on goes on and on, but the message is clear: he has to report on as much as possible, as detailed as possible, and provide maps, advice and navigational comments for future expeditions. The VOC post on Mauritius was able to outfit and facilitate this expedition which would have to fulfil a lot of expectations.

## 2.7 Subconclusion

While the major part of the scarce historiography concerning Dutch Mauritius argues that the island played a marginal role in the VOC's Indian Ocean network and places it in this network's periphery, this analysis shows that this point is in need of a well deserved nuance. The Brouweroute would, in theory, exclude Mauritius from the maritime network, but reality shows that this mandatory route was not always followed. The voyages of vessels such as the *Arnhem* show that return voyages had a tendency to cut across the Indian Ocean instead of following the winter monsoon through the north western part of the Indian Ocean where the Portuguese presence could form a threat. Besides the greater exposure to this potential Portuguese threat, there were no monsoons that hindered vessels that plotted a straight course from the Sunda Strait towards the Cape of Good Hope.<sup>122</sup> The

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<sup>119</sup> Vibeke Roeper and Diederick Wildeman, *Het journaal van Abel Tasman 1642-1643* (Den Haag, 2006), 8.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibidem*, 17-23.

<sup>121</sup> Roeper and Wildeman, *Journaal van Abel Tasman*, 43. I translated this passage myself from the modernised publication of the instruction that Roeper and Wildeman published. The original quote is: “U zult alle landen, eilanden, hoeken, bochten, inhammen, baaien, rivieren, droogten, banken, zandgronden, rivieren klippen, rotsen enzovoort die u tegenkomt en passeert nauwkeurig in kaart brengen en beschrijven...”

<sup>122</sup> Knaap et al., *Oorloggen Overzee*, 35.

experimenting with multiple rendez-vous points to make trade with the East Indies more efficient also suggest that the consolidation of the VOC maritime network went through a process of trial and error. This network was everchanging for the Dutch due to expansion and exploration, but certainly also for other European powers that were tapping into this market. Chapter four will focus in more detail on the threats that they posed and what role Mauritius could play here, but this thesis first presents an analysis on the relevant maritime knowledge that was available to the Dutch and the issue of how this knowledge was circulated.

### 3. Dutch maritime knowledge

In the historiography on Dutch Mauritius the island is often portrayed as a failed colony as it did not live up to the potential that the VOC had seen in this outpost. This conclusion is often reached with the knowledge of hindsight as we now know that the Cape would eventually grow into a bigger and much more successful colony than Mauritius, and most VOC vessels would end up anchoring near Cape Town instead of Mauritius. Because of conclusions such as this, scholars seem to downplay the value of Mauritius in the endeavours of the VOC. A different view arises by analysing the VOC's seventeenth century maritime knowledge and its systems of spreading knowledge, which was possible through its flexible maritime network.<sup>123</sup> By focussing on the question of how contemporary maritime knowledge shaped and was shaped by Mauritius' maritime cultural landscape, this chapter emphasizes how important the acquisition, spread and control of information was for the Dutch expansion overseas. Adrien Delmas' contribution to the collection of essays on *The Dutch Trading Companies as Knowledge Networks* highlights the roles that writing down and circulating information played. There was a need for technical knowledge of geography and navigation, there was a commercial interest in information on potential markets, an efficient circulation of information was needed to simply govern possessions over such vast distances and there was an interest in claiming sovereignty as "representation meant possession" in the seventeenth century.<sup>124</sup>

The analysis of the contemporary maritime knowledge in this chapter also serves as an example to show in what new ways historic research can provide a unique and new angle to Westerdahl's concept. As this concept finds its origins in the field of archaeology, the factors that are analysed to sketch a landscape often have a physical form such as piers, taverns, wharfs, dams and shorelines. Even though visual documents like charts and maps are extensively studied as well, written documentation can also provide valuable insights in the formation of maritime cultural landscapes. To expand on the case of Dutch Mauritius, this chapter dives into some of the most relevant contemporary publications that signalled or sparked Dutch interest in this island, such as the publications that were produced by the shipwrecked crew of the *Haarlem* and the work of Francois Valentyn on the Dutch possessions in the East Indies. First, the relevance of such publications in the formation and alteration of the VOC's maritime cultural landscape will be emphasised by diving into the work of Jan Huygen van Linschoten.

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<sup>123</sup> Parthesius, *Dutch Ships in Tropical Waters*, 171.

<sup>124</sup> Adrien Delmas, 'Writing History in the Age of Discovery, according to La Popelinière, 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> Centuries' in: Elmer Kolfin, Jan de Jong and Siegfried Huigen eds., *The Dutch Trading Companies as Knowledge Networks* (Leiden, 2010), 315.

### 3.1 *Itinerario*

The *Itinerario* by Jan Huygen van Linschoten gave the Dutch an opportunity to travel to the East Indies and attempt to gain a position in the European spice market. Jan Huygen van Linschoten had spent some years in Goa while he was employed by the Portuguese, and spent his time writing about the culture, produce, geography after he repatriated. The knowledge he provided, combined with the knowledge of the Portuguese-Jewish diaspora in Amsterdam that resurfaced after Philip II's embargo ended, proved to be crucial for the Dutch to start their own operations.<sup>125</sup> Saldanha argues that "the *Itinerario* effectuated such a leap in knowledge for the Dutch, inaugurating a new struggle for the Indian Ocean and a new phase of globalization."<sup>126</sup> Van Linschoten passed on his knowledge on what spices could be found in what regions and provided navigational comments in the *Reysgeschifte*, while this information was heavily guarded by the Portuguese at this time. At the same time he confirmed the rumours that Portugal was losing its dominant grip on Goa.<sup>127</sup> By giving an extensive overview of important geographical and navigational factors he provided the necessary logistic information, but to successfully gain a foothold in the spice trade, he expanded on the economy, culture and history as well. Many Portuguese explorers had built steady diplomatic relations with local kings and merchants, which would mean that the Dutch needed more than just a route to follow in the Portuguese footsteps.<sup>128</sup>

The information that Van Linschoten provided thus made it possible for the Dutch to reach the East Indies and establish their own foothold in the spice trade but it did not, however, provide an extensive plan on how to do this exactly. Improvisation and exploration were important factors for the commanders of the first voyages. For instance, Linschoten suggested that it would be best to cut straight across the Indian Ocean when the Cape of Good Hope was rounded, but the fleet of the *Tweede Schipvaart* only neared Mauritius because they were blown off course by a hurricane.<sup>129</sup> By relying on Van Linschoten's descriptions, the fleet was able to identify the island as being Mauritius, even though the exact location that was found in the *Reysgeschifte* were apparently off.<sup>130</sup> The actual geographic information that Van Linschoten provided outdated relatively quick as more Dutch voyagers found their way towards the East Indies and produced newer maps of places that Van Linschoten himself did not even know of.<sup>131</sup> Nonetheless, his information did make it possible for the

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<sup>125</sup> Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall 1477-1806* (Oxford, 1995), 319-320.

<sup>126</sup> Saldanha, 'The Itineraries of Geography', 150; Knaap et al., *Oorlog en Overzee*, 24.

<sup>127</sup> Saldanha, 'The Itineraries of Geography', 150; Jan Huygen van Linschoten, *Itinerario: voyage ofte schipvaart van Jan Huygen van Linschoten naer Oost ofte Portugaels Indien, 1579-1592*. Dl. 1-3 (Den Haag, 1910).

<sup>128</sup> Saldanha, 'The Itineraries of Geography', 168; Van Linschoten, *Itinerario*.

<sup>129</sup> Saldanha, 'The Itineraries of Geography', 172.

<sup>130</sup> Keuning, J., *De Tweede Schipvaart der Nederlanders naar Oost-Indië onder Jacob Cornelisz. van Neck en Wybrant Warwijck 1598-1600, Deel II*, Werken van de Linschoten-Vereeniging, Deel 44 (Den Haag, 1940), LVIII-LXXVIII.

<sup>131</sup> Saldanha, 'The Itineraries of Geography', 172.

fleet of the *Tweede Schipvaart* to plot a course to this island which in turn became an important refreshment station and safe-haven for the voyages that followed. The previous chapter already mentioned that the Dutch maritime network in the Indian Ocean was formed through a process of discovery and experiment. It would not be surprising that such a secure, well supplied and uninhabited island as Mauritius was going to play a big part in the exploration overseas.

### 3.2 Accidental (re)discoveries

Shipwrecks would sometimes be the reason behind the establishment of new outposts due to the often detailed reports that were produced by the unfortunate crews. For instance, the potential of the Cape was only truly discovered after the *Haarlem* wrecked in Table Bay in 1647. When Portuguese explorer Bartholomeu Dias managed to round the Cape and find a route to India in 1488, he dubbed this region as Cabo das Tormentas (Cape of Storms) due to the difficult weather conditions he encountered here. Not to discourage people from embarking on more voyages to the East Indies, it was later rebranded as Cabo de Boa Esperance (Cape of Good Hope).<sup>132</sup> While this rebranding might have positively affected the voyages that followed, it did not necessarily result in plans to construct an outpost. The VOC frequented Table Bay since 1616 for supplies and to communicate through a system of postal stones, on which this chapter will elaborate later. Although the company already had a history with the Cape, its value as a potential outpost was only recognised by the crew of the *Haarlem* when they were forced to survive there for a longer period of time. Detailed reports found their way to the Heren XVII who in turn assigned commander Jan van Riebeeck to construct a permanent refreshment station at this point. This station would eventually overshadow Mauritius, and its growing success was one of the reasons why the VOC abandoned their outpost on the island in 1658.<sup>133</sup> However, a similar situation that would occur four years later renewed the VOC's interest and would once again send them towards the *Haven van Warwijck*.

In December 1661, the Arnhem left Batavia as part of a return fleet. Two months later, however, the ship was wrecked during a storm and a part of the crew survived the eight-day journey towards Mauritius in an over encumbered boat. Despite the fact that the island had been abandoned by the Dutch, the crew still knew of its location and its history, which caused them to set a course towards this former colony. Here they found an island which was still rich in supplies, and although some of the original livestock had become a bit wild, a large part was still timid and could be hunted very easily. The survivors eventually found their ways back to the Dutch Republic and published their stories. In 1663, three separate stories by seaman Andries Stokram, bookkeeper Johan van Hal and

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<sup>132</sup> Saldanha, 'The Itineraries of Geography', 167-168; Fernández-Armesto, *Pathfinders*.

<sup>133</sup> Moree, *Concise History of Dutch Mauritius*, 42; Sleigh, *Buitenposte*, 642-643.

almoner Simon van den Kerckhoven were printed and found their way to the Heren XVII.<sup>134</sup> Even though the VOC had abandoned Mauritius not so long ago because the island was eclipsed and became seemingly redundant due to the rise of the Cape colony, these stories sparked a renewed interest – especially in a time when they were at war with the English. The stories were not necessarily original; Stokram's *Korte Beschryvinghe van de Ongeluckige Weer-om-Reys van het Schip Aernhem* contained a lot of overlap with the accounts of the *Gelderland* that discovered Mauritius on the second Dutch voyage towards the East Indies. The most interesting to include in this analysis, however, is not the exact contents of these stories, but rather the impact they had on the VOC. After these stories found their way to the Heren XVII, the VOC found a renewed interest in Mauritius as it had proved itself to be a valuable asset. Even though the function of refreshment station had been shifted towards the Cape, Mauritius found its value as a safe-haven for shipwrecked vessels and as a strategic asset which hindered the English and French from gaining a firmer foothold on the island. In the same year these stories were published, the Heren XVII instructed the Cape government to reconstruct the outpost on Mauritius, which from then on would fall be governed by the Cape colony.<sup>135</sup> This specific case shows how much influence the circulation of information could have on the formation of the VOC's maritime cultural landscape, and that this factor can play a valuable role within Westerdahl's interdisciplinary concept. These publications can be seen as a sign of a renewed or continued interest in Mauritius, but the opposite can be seen as well within the work of Francois Valentyn.

### 3.3 Francois Valentyn

The colossal work that was produced by this Dutch minister became a commercial success in the Dutch Republic. Valentyn spent twenty years working in the East Indies, and after he repatriated in 1714 he started working on his extensive and somewhat unorganised *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën*. His history of Mauritius is riddled with errors, however, which possibly has something to do with the fact that Valentyn himself had never visited the colony. In fact, most descriptions that are featured in this work have been a product of plagiarism as he only had personally visited Ambon, Banda, the Cape colony, parts of Java and some islands surrounding Banda. Valentyn had to rely on plagiarism to produce a description of Mauritius, but it seems that the information that he copied was faulty.<sup>136</sup> This would mean that during the early eighteenth century, the knowledge about the island was already fading in the Dutch Republic before Valentyn's work was published in 1724. When introducing Mauritius he

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<sup>134</sup> Stokram, *Ongeluckige Weer-om-reys*; Van Hal, *Wonderlijk en Seltsaem Verhael*; Van den Kerckhoven, *Historisch Verhael*.

<sup>135</sup> Moree, *Concise History of Dutch Mauritius*, 44-47.

<sup>136</sup> E.M. Beekman, *Paradijzen van Weleer. Koloniale Literatuur uit Nederlands-Indië, 1600-1950* (Amsterdam, 1998), 132-133.



exclaims that he does not have a lot to mention about the island, which probably has something to do with a lack of sources on his part.<sup>137</sup> From his text it becomes clear that he did have knowledge of the voyage of the *Tweede Schipvaart* and of the expedition of Abel Tasman. Furthermore he did seem to have a decent understanding of who the most recent governors of Mauritius were and what valuable ebony wood could be harvested.<sup>138</sup> The gaps in his knowledge on the island and the omission of the *Arnhem* could indicate that Valentyn was not familiar with the works that were published by this shipwrecked crew. Whatever the reason behind this omission was, Valentyn's work does reflect a fading Dutch interest in the island.

### 3.4 Secrecy and censorship

Even though most of these journals and stories were widely publicised and sometimes even translated, a lot of secrecy was involved as well in the circulation of maritime knowledge. It was quite common for European states to limit the circulation of their knowledge of other continents to maintain a powerful position for themselves. Maintaining the upper hand in this maritime intelligence made it easier to enforce a monopoly. Through Van Linschoten, for instance, an opportunity was created to compete with the Portuguese monopoly in the spice trade. In turn, his work was translated in English and German, which made it possible for the English to voyage towards the East Indies as well. The people that were invested in this trade had to consider what information they would share and what they had to keep for themselves. As mentioned before, the publication of information could be used in a way to claim land, but at the same time this land could be reached by competitors which would threaten the safety of a certain route or outpost.<sup>139</sup> The Brouweroute for instance was an asset of which the VOC tried very hard to keep the navigational details for themselves. However, information on the route soon found their way to the English. In 1622, the *Trial* was already the second English ship that made an effort to navigate this route to see if the East India Company could also reduce the time they spent on their outbound voyages. The voyage did not turn out to be a success as the vessel ended up on a reef. Roeper and Wildeman argue that the ship must have wrecked on the Houtman-Abrolhos islands, but cartographic evidence from 1677 suggests that they struck a different reef which the Dutch dubbed the *Trijals Rudtsen* (Trial Rocks).<sup>140</sup> The value of controlling information was acknowledged by the VOC – and any other chartered company for that matter – which led to some strict measures to prevent leaks such as these.

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<sup>137</sup> Valentyn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën, Vyfde Deel: Thiende Boek*, 150.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibidem*, 150-153.

<sup>139</sup> Delmas, 'Writing History', 303-304 and 314-315; Moree, *Concise History of Dutch Mauritius*, 15.

<sup>140</sup> Roeper and Wildeman, *Journaal van Abel Tasman*, 14; Schilder and Kok, *Sailing for the East*, 304.

Strict rules and regulations were introduced to keep the VOC's knowledge inside the company. Having private mail or correspondence was often discouraged and sometimes even outright forbidden to protect the company's monopoly. The circulation of information had to go through official channels so the company could exercise some control over the streams of information. Possibly due to the *Trial* embarking on its expedition on the Brouweroute, The Heren XVII ordered the Batavian government in 1625 to never again let their mail that contained sensitive information be shipped by English vessels. In 1617, the government in Batavia had already decided that it would be forbidden for all VOC-personnel, even for the highest functionaries such as the governor-general, to include matters of the East Indies in their personal correspondence. This rule was becoming stricter throughout the years, and censorship was a common phenomenon. Breaking this rule resulted in the loss of two months pay, and just like the rules, the penalties became more severe over the years. In 1633 the policy was altered so that any kind of correspondence that was addressed to a location in Europe absolutely had to go through the official VOC channels so the circulation could be controlled and the company would have the possibility to censor information. Personnel that circumvented this rule and were caught posting private mail by themselves were penalised by withholding twelve months pay.<sup>141</sup> The implementation of these rules and the growing severity of the penalties that were tied to them show a certain need for control over the maritime knowledge that flowed within the spheres of the company. It shows that securing intelligence had a high priority which on one hand could help to enforce the VOC's monopoly and secure their foothold in the Indian Ocean. On the other hand, this system of collecting and censoring mail while only transporting it through secure channels had the downside of slowing down the circulation.

This slow speed of circulation that was caused by this need for censorship was contrasted by the system of postal stones. Mail that was not necessarily a threat to the Dutch monopoly was dropped off at central predetermined locations, which often came down to Table Bay, but the system was also employed on St Helena and Mauritius. With this system, crews would bury their letters and messages on the beaches and cover them up with heavy stones. These were often inscribed with information on who left it and where it had to go. Through this system, fleets were able to let their place of departure know if they arrived safely much faster than if they had to wait until their voyage was complete and then send their messages with another outbound ship. English, Portuguese and French fleets also communicated through these postal stones and they would often leave their mail on the beaches of Table Bay as well. Communication through these channels was of course not

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<sup>141</sup> Perry Moree, *'Met Vriend die God Geleide' Het Nederlands-Aziatisch Postvervoer ten tijde van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (Zutphen, 1998), 28-31.

incredibly secure as these stones were easily found by other Europeans, so this system was not used to relay the most crucial or secret messages.<sup>142</sup>

### 3.5 Cartography

Much like with private mail and correspondence, a certain matter of secrecy was involved in the VOC's control over its cartographic material. It was crucial to have the correct maps and charts on board of each vessel to successfully navigate to the other side of the globe, but since these could contain sensitive information it was also of importance that this visual documentation would not fall in foreign hands. The VOC's map policy was strict; the company's cartographers such as Plancius and Blaeu kept close control over the material that they produced and high functionaries had to examine all the cartographic material that came back from voyages. Some maps that were meant for publication were even censored.<sup>143</sup> Cartographic information was powerful knowledge to have control over. J.B. Harley stated in his work on secrecy in cartography that "maps became a part of 'an increasing repertoire of power techniques.'"<sup>144</sup> At the same time, Kees Zandvliet argues that the VOC was not at all that secretive with its visual material and instead allowed the cartographers in their employment to sell their maps for commercial purposes. According to Zandvliet, the company's strict policy concerning the circulation of their charts did not have a secretive nature, but were a product of practical thinking. He argues that the cartographers exercised close control over the proper return of their charts because "the VOC simply wanted their expensive charts returned."<sup>145</sup> Cartography was an element of the VOC's knowledge network with conflicting purposes. While it could contain sensitive information that had to remain within close circles, at the same time there was a certain commercial interest as well in the sale of charts.<sup>146</sup> It is difficult to argue that the entire map making business was incredibly secretive as Blaeu and De Graaff published their atlases with commercial interests, and especially Vingboons' success would be hard to explain as his maps had a higher decorative value than that they were actually useful for navigation. While cartography has these conflicting elements of secrecy and openness, one thing is certain; the VOC's maritime knowledge was incredibly valuable for both navigational and commercial purposes, and maintaining control over the circulation over this knowledge was important for the success of the company.

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<sup>142</sup> Moree, *Postvervoer*, 32-37.

<sup>143</sup> J.B. Harley, 'Silences and Secrecy: The Hidden Agenda of Cartography in Early Modern Europe', *Imago Mundi*, vol.40 (1988), 60-63.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibidem*, 71

<sup>145</sup> Zandvliet, *Mapping for Money*, 129.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibidem*, 128-130.

### 3.6 Subconclusion

This chapter has emphasized the important part that the gathering, circulation and control of maritime knowledge played for the operations of the VOC. Provided with the information of the *Itinerario*, the Dutch were able to take their first steps towards the establishment of a maritime network between the Dutch Republic and the East Indies. Through planned exploration, accidental discoveries and extensive documentation, the company was able to shape this network into a steady maritime cultural landscape that would surpass that of the Portuguese. While some information was widely publicised to claim a certain sovereignty, secrecy was also enforced through strict rules and severe punishments to protect the company's monopoly. The circulation of intelligence could shape maritime cultural landscapes – and sometimes even revive them such as in the case of the *Arnhem*. This analysis shows that historic research can provide a valuable new factor in Westerdahl's concept.

## 4. European competition

In chapter two, this thesis briefly touched upon the subject of how European threat and competition influenced the formation of the VOC's maritime connections within the Indian Ocean. In fact, this competition becomes visible throughout almost every aspect that has been examined so far – not just in the manner in which the Dutch maritime network was formed, but also in the maintenance of company monopolies on spices, goods and information. Voyages to and from the East Indies were far from safe due to these European threats. Niall Ferguson commented on this turn of the sixteenth century that “Asia was about to become the scene of a ruthless battle for market share”<sup>147</sup>. Because of the great part that this competition played in this context, it has to be included more extensively in this research into Mauritius' maritime cultural landscape. This chapter answers the question of what Mauritius' value was in a landscape of European competition. Chapter one briefly mentions how the European competition hindered the VOC in enforcing their claim on the island, and shows how the *Engelse Reede* is an excellent example of how this competition affected the maritime landscape. This chapter argues that this competition influenced Mauritius' maritime landscape in a deeper way than these examples show. To do so, it first presents a concise contextual overview. Then, it provides an analysis of Mauritius' military-strategic and economic roles within this area of European competition.

### 4.1 Context of conflict

Seventeenth-century Europe spawned quite some wars between different European states. When the Dutch were outfitting their fleet to make a first attempt to reach the East Indies, they were already at war with the European state which had the most dominant presence in the Indian Ocean: Portugal. While the Eighty Years' War (1568-1648) between the Dutch Republic and Spain technically also pitted the Dutch against the Portuguese, as Spain had control over Portugal since 1580, little to no conflict existed between these two states until 1601. However, when the Dutch managed to tap into the Indian Ocean trade through the Portuguese knowledge that was passed on by Jan Huygen van Linschoten, they knew that conflict with the Portuguese would be inevitable. The Dutch-Portuguese War (1601-1663) found its origins within the context of the Eighty Years' War and through Hugo Grotius' argumentation in his *Mare Liberum*.<sup>148</sup> The war consisted of a series of battles which were fought on the southern hemisphere, near Dutch and Portuguese key positions on the coasts of the Indian Ocean and West-Africa. This war sparked more violence between these two states than the list

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<sup>147</sup> Ferguson, *Empire*, 18.

<sup>148</sup> Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude, *Nederland 1500-1815: de Eerste Ronde van Moderne Economische Groei* (Amsterdam, 1995), 450-453; Emmer and Gommans, *Nederland Overzee*, 19-21.

of official battles might suggest. It also legitimised the act of privateering, meaning that Dutch and Portuguese fleets risked being captured with their wealthy loads.<sup>149</sup>

Although the Dutch Republic was supported by England through their Eighty Years' War, the two eventually turned on each other through a series of Anglo-Dutch wars. These maritime wars were mostly triggered by economic interests, but other than the Dutch-Portuguese Wars, the battles between the Dutch and the English were mostly fought on the northern hemisphere. The First Anglo-Dutch War (1652-1654) was caused by the violent Dutch reaction to the English Navigation Acts. These violent measures sparked a 25-year period in which these two states fought each other for economic primacy. The Second Anglo-Dutch War (1665-1667) was issued by the English side with the intent of crippling the VOC's economic primacy, which in turn would give the English the opportunity to step in to a leadership position. The rivalry that became apparent through these first two wars also affected the VOC's renewed interest in Mauritius. The third war in this series was a result of the Franco-Dutch War (1672-1679). Although the English were still recovering from their defeat in the previous war, they were pulled into a new one as the Treaty of Dover – which made them allies with France – forced them to send out their fleet to invade the Dutch Republic. The Third Anglo-Dutch War (1672-1674) ended sooner than the one between the Dutch and the French though. Through failure on the naval battlefield combined with the opposing public opinion that was prevalent even before the outbreak of the third war, the English parliament made their king to sign a peace treaty.<sup>150</sup> Though these wars were mainly fought in Europe, the results of these wars were also felt in the context of the Indian Ocean through privateering and fluctuations in fleet strength due to the destruction and capture of ships in Europe.<sup>151</sup> Anglo-Dutch violence came to a halt after the Glorious Revolution of 1688 when William of Orange took place on the throne in London.

As mentioned before in the chapter on sailing routes and maritime networks, the English and Portuguese were often found on the shores of east Africa and south Asia. Initially, the VOC would try to steer clear of them and only seek confrontation where they thought it would be necessary to establish their monopoly, which they partly achieved through the route that cut across the Indian Ocean and through the Brouweroute.<sup>152</sup> However, even before the Brouweroute was discovered it became apparent that armed conflict with Portugal was inevitable; the first two Dutch voyages to the East Indies already had violent encounters with this dominant European force.<sup>153</sup> Between 1602 and 1611, the VOC took an offensive stance and tried to fight the Portuguese at their own strongholds

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<sup>149</sup> Knaap et al., *Oorlogen Overzee*, 85-95.

<sup>150</sup> De Vries and Van der Woude, *Nederland 1500-1815*, 476-477.

<sup>151</sup> Knaap et al., *Oorlogen Overzee*, 96-97.

<sup>152</sup> Saldanha, 'The Itineraries of Geography', 169-171; Fernández-Armesto, *Pathfinders*, 211-213.

<sup>153</sup> Knaap et al., *Oorlogen Overzee*, 36-37.

along the east African coast. Violent encounters reduced in number after these years, until the company commenced with a yearly blockade of Goa and an offensive on Ceylon.<sup>154</sup> In this VOC network - especially during the early seventeenth-century – Mauritius did play a valuable role in the Dutch expansion overseas. It did so on an economic level by boosting that of the VOC while battling that of the Portuguese and English, but Mauritius also showed potential in offensive and defensive military-strategic ways.

#### 4.2 Mauritius' military-strategic role

The VOC explored the offensive and defensive potential of the island. Its military-strategic potential might not immediately become apparent because of the fact that the Dutch outpost at the *Haven van Warwijck* was unable to fight off the European competition in the north western bay. Recent research by Floore and Jayasena also show us that fort Frederik Hendrik was hardly a military force to be reckoned with, despite the VOC's initial intentions to build a stronghold from which they could defend their monopoly. While being in an almost constant state of repair due to the reoccurring hurricanes, floods and fires, they describe the Frederik Hendrik as being more of a façade than an actual fort.<sup>155</sup>

Nevertheless, the offensive military-strategic potential should not be disregarded because of the fort not living up to its foreseen capability. Correspondence between Batavia and the Heren XVII shows for instance that in 1639, Batavia got news of a Portuguese return fleet that was being outfitted to leave Goa, stay for the winter in Mozambique, and would continue their voyage home when spring arrived. Since Batavia could not spare the resources that were required to capture this fleet, they requested that a fleet should be outfitted in the Republic with the intent of intercepting these vessels near Mozambique. As Mauritius and Mozambique are located relatively close to each other, the Batavian functionary proposed the idea of housing the fleet at the outpost on Mauritius.<sup>156</sup> Here, they could easily last through the winter without running through all the supplies the outpost had to offer, and they would be in a position to act fast enough when the seasons transitioned to intercept the Portuguese fleet on their voyage between Mozambique and the Cape. Although the plan was not actually executed, it does show how Mauritius was viewed as a possible military-strategic asset.

Circling back to the earlier analysis of the VOC's Indian Ocean sailing routes, it also becomes clear that the defensive strategic potential of the island might have been greater than its offensive assets. Chapter two shows that return fleets from Batavia would often cut across the Indian Ocean to reach the Cape, which would bring them in the vicinity of Mauritius. These fleets would be the ones that carried the spices and exotic goods that European markets were craving. This made them a target

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<sup>154</sup> Parthesius, *Dutch Ships in Tropical Waters*, 134-135.

<sup>155</sup> Floore and Jayasena, 'In Want of Everything?', 336.

<sup>156</sup> Coolhaas, *Missiven, Deel II*, 54 and 110.

for other European trading companies and privateers that roamed in the area. Intercepting return fleets could yield great profits – and losses for the other side – when captured, of which the VOC was well aware. While Floore and Jayasena rightly point out that the fort Frederik Hendrik itself was certainly not that impressive, it might not have to be. The true defensive power of the *Haven van Warwijck* was found in its geography. The geographical analysis in chapter one shows that this south eastern bay was surrounded by a group of small islands and sandbanks, which would have funnelled invading ships through a bottleneck. Even though the structural integrity of the fort itself might not have been much and its walls and bastions were indeed some sort of façade, the fort's cannons were functional and had a fairly steady supply of ammunition. With four bronze cannons arming the fort and 150 cannonballs and 600 pounds of gunpowder in storage, the garrison was certainly able to put up a fight.<sup>157</sup> The combination of these two assets make it plausible that the *Haven van Warwijck* could be defended against attacks from the sea. This gives Mauritius' aforementioned role as a safe-haven an extra dimension; the VOC outpost provided shelter from storms and repairs for shipwrecked vessels, but it also granted protection to return fleets that were chased or attacked.

When considering the island's military-strategic role in a larger perspective, it also becomes clear that Mauritius was one of the few hubs between the Dutch Republic and Batavia where the VOC had a decent and relatively stable foothold. Despite the fairly constant presence of other European vessels in the north western bay, the outpost at the *Haven van Warwijck* was pretty stable, especially when compared to other outposts that the VOC would use. Plans to construct the outpost at the Cape that would overshadow Mauritius later in the seventeenth century were not made until 1652. After that, it also took quite some time to become the strong and stable colony that it would eventually become. In its first years, the Cape relied on Mauritius' food supply to grow as it was not yet self-sufficient. This need for resources and supplies that the Cape government could not fulfil led to a renewed interest in the development of outposts on Mauritius, but also on Madagascar and the east-African coast.<sup>158</sup> Even though the amount of food that Mauritius could supply was stagnating in the 1660's, and a plague of rats brought the island to a point where they also had to import their food in 1667, the outpost did play its part in setting up the new refreshment station at the Cape.<sup>159</sup> The stone fort at the Cape was built in the period of 1666-1674, which gave the VOC a more stable foothold than the wooden fort that was replaced. Another hub that lay en route for return voyages was St Helena. In 1633, the VOC claimed the island as their possession, but there is no evidence that they actually

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<sup>157</sup> Pieter M. Floore and Ranjith M. Jayasena, 'Dutch Forts Of Seventeenth Century Ceylon And Mauritius: An Historical Archaeological Perspective' in: Eric C. Klingelhofer, *History of Warfare, First Forts: Essays on the Archaeology of Proto-colonial Fortifications* (Leiden, 2006), 254-255.

<sup>158</sup> Parthesius, *Dutch Ships in Tropical Waters*, 143.

<sup>159</sup> Coolhaas, W. PH., *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, Deel III: 1656-1674* (Den Haag, 1964), 572.



inhabited the island. The English displayed great interest in this particular island, and gained a superior foothold after they founded Jamestown in 1659. The VOC captured the island during the Third Anglo-Dutch War, but the English in turn recaptured St Helena two months later.<sup>160</sup> With St Helena being in English possession and an outpost at the Cape that was not yet self-sufficient, Mauritius appears to be a relatively stable and familiar outpost on which the VOC could fall back. Considering the role that Mauritius played in the overseas expansion of the Dutch – especially in the early years of the VOC – and the way in which it proved itself to be a safe-haven for shipwrecked vessels and rich return fleets, the island was a solid and reliant plan B.

### 4.3 Mauritius' economic role

The continued presence of other European trading companies on Mauritius was primarily caused by their motivation of harvesting the ebony forests. Since 1620, they frequently visited the north western bay through which they gained easy access to the island, and the VOC personnel on the outpost in the *Haven van Warwijck* were unable to prevent them from cutting down the forests because they were occupied with their own problems and harvesting operations. One of the reasons why the VOC initially colonised the island was because they wanted to ensure their continued access to this supply of ebony wood. One of the primary reasons why they renewed their interest in the colony after they abandoned it in 1658, however, was because they wanted to prevent their English and French competitors to reach this exact same goal. While the VOC could not properly enforce their monopoly by driving away the visitors in the north western bay, they could limit them in their operations and prevent the possibility that the VOC would lose access to this rich supply.<sup>161</sup>

The VOC outpost on Mauritius was not only used to prevent their European competitors from reaching their economic goals on the island, but in a larger perspective, it also had potential in limiting the economic goals of these competitors elsewhere in the Indian Ocean. Earlier in this chapter the example of how Mauritius could possibly function as a facilitator of an offensive military operation to intercept a Portuguese fleet from Goa has been discussed. Military and economic goals were often closely intertwined in these struggles between seventeenth-century European states, which becomes visible through the wars that are mentioned in the contextualisation of this chapter, but also through the mixed nature of the operations that were carried out to secure a dominant position in the Indian Ocean trade. In another attempt to cripple Portugal's economic endeavours in this trade, the VOC turned their attention towards Mozambique where the Portuguese were extracting gold. A serious attempt to hinder this extraction and gain a Dutch foothold in Mozambique to begin their own mining

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<sup>160</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20120716231341/http://www.sthelena.se/history/cron.txt> (15-06-2019).

<sup>161</sup> Gaastra, *Geschiedenis van de VOC*, 109; Sleight, *Die Buitenposten*, 639-644; Moree, *Concise History of Dutch Mauritius*, 22-23.

operation was only initiated after 1686, when the *Stavenisse* wrecked on the coast of a region where the outpost of Rio de la Goa would eventually be constructed. However, in 1654, the Jesuit Martinus Martini saw a potential role for Mauritius in the hindering of this Portuguese operation. In that year, he wrote to the Cape commander Jan van Riebeeck to explain how this island, or maybe even the new VOC outpost at the Cape, could battle the Portuguese in their gold trade.<sup>162</sup>

#### 4.4 Subconclusion

It is unfair to state that Mauritius never really played a significant role for the VOC when looking at its roles and position within the competitive European scene of the Indian Ocean. In a century where the Dutch had to fight their way into a position where they could enforce their monopoly while fighting off an established and dominant Portuguese authority and an upcoming English trading company, Mauritius was one of the few places where the VOC had a reliable and stable foothold. While they were unable to keep French and English vessels out of the *Engelse Reede*, they were certainly able to defend the superior bay at the *Haven van Warwijck* if necessary. This made it a potential safe haven for the return fleets with incredible amounts of wealth on board that was much more reliable than St Helena which was under control of the English most of the time. Although eventually overshadowed by the Cape in Mauritius' role as a refreshment station, the island played a role in the facilitation of the Cape's growth towards a self-sufficient colony. Furthermore, Mauritius' role was not just that of a refreshment station. It also had offensive military-strategic and economic potential which becomes apparent through plans and suggestions in the correspondence between high VOC functionaries. Mauritius was a steady foothold, a safe-haven and a potential plan B within what Ferguson called a "scene of a ruthless battle for market share".<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Coolhaas, *Missiven, Deel II*, 739.

<sup>163</sup> Ferguson, *Empire*, 18.

## Conclusion

The analysis in this thesis has been focussed around the question of what the maritime cultural landscape of Dutch Mauritius tells us about its roles and significance in the Dutch overseas expansion (1598-1710). The curious contrast between the great gap that exists in colonial and maritime historiography concerning Dutch Mauritius and the fact that the VOC had a dominant presence on the island for over a century has been the main reason to dive into this question. While leaning on the archaeological concept of Westerdahl's maritime cultural landscape by analysing the elements of geography, structures and sailing routes, and by complementing this landscape through historic research into the elements of maritime knowledge and European competition, this thesis shows that Mauritius was more important to the Dutch overseas expansion in the Indian Ocean than was previously thought.

The favourable geography, flora and fauna of Mauritius made the island a reliable refreshment station and safe-haven. When the Dutch started frequenting this island, they initially saw Mauritius functioning as a refreshment station with a minimal commercial interest in the ebony forests. While the significance of this colony is often marginalised in historiography as the Cape would eventually surpass and overshadow its function as supply station, this thesis' analysis of the VOC's sailing routes and the island's military-strategic and economic roles show that the historiography is in need of a drastic nuance. It is unfair to marginalise Mauritius' role in the Dutch seventeenth century overseas expansion as this safe-haven was the main refreshment station in the early expansionist years, it saved crews and valuable cargoes that would otherwise have been lost on return voyages due to shipwreck, it prevented the English and French from establishing a firmer foothold, it facilitated the growth of the Cape colony in the years that this new outpost was not yet self-sufficient, it provided possible shelter for distressed and wealthy return fleets, and it was not as disconnected from the VOC's maritime network as some historians might suggest. The outpost on Mauritius was also one of the most stable ones that the VOC had on the route between the Dutch Republic and Batavia. While Table Bay was also frequented before the Cape colony was constructed, this bay also housed foreign vessels, and the English eventually showed their dominance on St Helena. Mauritius, however, had been a safe-haven for the Dutch since the *Tweede Schipvaart*, and proved itself to be a reliable plan B to fall back upon in a violent and everchanging maritime network.

This thesis also shows that the concept of the maritime cultural landscape has a lot to offer for historians, and in turn, historians have a lot to offer for the further development of the concept. Implementing this concept challenges historians to examine their subject of research from multiple different angles and switch between different scales in order to sketch a certain landscape. In this particular case, a detailed look into Mauritius' geography, the outpost at the *Haven van Warwijck* and

the island's connection to the VOC's grander maritime network through the examination of contemporary documents and charts has shown that Mauritius was more important to the VOC than what the historiography suggests. Furthermore, historic research can provide new angles for analysing maritime cultural landscapes. While archaeologists often rely on physical, non-written source material to support their arguments, the reliance on written documentation that historians experience can be used to answer different questions concerning the formation and alteration of a maritime landscape. The production and circulation of knowledge has been a big factor in the Dutch overseas expansion of the seventeenth century. Mauritius' maritime cultural landscape was revived through a spark of renewed interest in 1663, which was the result of the widely publicised stories of the shipwrecked crew of the *Arnhem*. The contemporary knowledge of a particular maritime cultural landscape can also indicate a certain level of significance that might be difficult to spot through pure archaeological research. Francois Valentyn's brief and erroneous description of Mauritius in his monumental work on the Dutch presence in the East Indies is an example of how the Dutch interest in the island was waning during the end of the seventeenth century.

By providing sketches of maritime cultural landscapes through historic or archaeological research, surprising angles can be uncovered. Historic research can profit greatly from this perspective in cases where written documentation on a certain subject can be scarce, and even in cases where historians are faced with an abundance of sources, a fresh and new angle can always be found by looking through the lens of the maritime cultural landscape.

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