

Company of Missives: the Epistemic Potential of Colonial Records in the Dutch East India Company (1727-1770)

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Introduction

It must have been an arduous task for the Dutch East India Company (hereafter VOC) officials tasked with dissecting the documents that arrived in Patria, the Dutch Republic, with the return fleet from Asia in the summer of 1736. The annual fleet that arrived during the final days of July carried a total of 33,159 pages of administration from Asia, spread over 26 volumes.¹ From the relatively small *kantoor* of Malabar, a regional establishment of the VOC on the southwest coast of the Indian subcontinent, 3,784 pages were received.² Some of those were sent directly from Malabar, while others were received indirectly from Batavia, the administrative centre of the company in Asia. The committee in the Republic tasked with reading these received letters and administration (hereafter OBP after *Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren*) was the *Haags Besogne*, comprised of ten members from the six governing chambers of the company.³ They read the information within the OBP and turned them into summaries and policy recommendations, the *Haagse verbalen*, for the directors of the company, the Gentlemen XVII.⁴

Within a month of arrival the directors held the first meetings in which they initiated preparations for the return fleets to Asia. Luckily the directors, *bewindhebbers*, could rely on a summary from Batavia. Since most of the OBP had been first sent to Batavia from the various establishments, before they were forwarded to Patria, a summary called the *general missive* or general letter had already been written there. The directors relied on this summary and delegated further scrutiny to the *Haags Besogne*, whose members were tasked with analysing every single page of the OBP during the spring of the following year, a process which could take up to several months.⁵ The committee had to work rapidly, since their reports had to be completed before the next fleet arrived in the early summer and the next cycle began. Therefore they usually only had a few days for each VOC establishment to process and filter their OBP. For example, they handled the 3,784 pages of Malabar in only a few days in late June 1737.⁶ The daunting task of the *Besogne* in the spring of 1737 was not even the hardest of that time period.

¹ National Archives (NA), The Hague, Dutch East India Company (VOC), 1.04.02, inventory numbers 2325-2358; J. R. Bruijn e.a., *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping in the 17th and 18th Centuries. Vol. III: Homeward-Bound Voyages from Asia and the Cape to the Netherlands (1597-1795)* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1979), 326.

² I use 'pages' in a present-day sense, as referring to the actual amount of pages and not the amount of sheets of paper, or folios. See appendix 4 for more information on how I use these terms in this thesis.

³ Throughout this thesis I refer to the OBP as synonymous for the annual company administration that was sent over the official information network of the company to Patria. Furthermore, the OBP-years refer to their arrival in Patria. The OBP of 1736 for example therefore largely contained documents written in 1734 and 1735.

⁴ M. A. P. Meilink-Roelofs, R. Raben, and H. Spijkerman, *Inventaris van het archief van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC), 1602-1795 (1811)* (The Hague, 1992), 30.

⁵ Meilink-Roelofs, Raben, and Spijkerman, *Inventaris van het archief van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC), 1602-1795 (1811)*, 30-31.

⁶ NA, VOC, 4471, Haagse Verbaal 1737, Malabar, unfolliated.

In 1733 and 1743 the amount of volumes received were 50 and 40 respectively, almost double the amount of 1736.⁷ The enormous amount of paper received annually and the limited time the committee had raises the question of how effectively company officials used the OBP to produce knowledge of the company's activities in Asia.

Historians contending with archival practices in the shaping of knowledge have been on the rise in the past few decades. According to them, researchers have too often overlooked that archives were not passive containers of the past, but actively shaped what could be known about the past.⁸ This turn to archives has been labelled by anthropologist Ann Stoler as moving from 'archive-as-source' to 'archive-as-subject'.⁹ Academics within this approach usually define the archive in broad terms, which do in this thesis as well: as documents made, received and maintained by institutions as active evidence in business and organisation, as well as collections preserved permanently because of the enduring value they contain.¹⁰ The OBP can be classified as an early modern archive under this definition, since it both pertains to the actively used yearly administration of the company and to the OBP as a monolith of preserved documents, kept and maintained in Patria. A sub strand of this approach has started to integrate 'documentary practices' within this overarching approach to archives. In a recent historiographical contribution on archival issues in an early modern colonial context, historian Maria Pia Donato summarised this documentary approach as integrating how company officials used, processed, collected and classified specific documents within these archives to reveal new ways of scrutinising the archive and its knowledge producing capabilities.¹¹

⁷ These figures were calculated by adding up the amount of volumes received in Patria through the inventory of the VOC archives in The Hague made by Meilink-Roelofs. Meilink-Roelofs, Raben, and Spijkerman, *Inventaris van het archief van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC), 1602-1795 (1811)*, 208-309.

⁸ Both *Past & Present* and the *Journal of Early Modern History* devoted an entire issue to early modern archival practices in recent years. A. Walsham, "The Social History of the Archive: Record-Keeping in Early Modern Europe", *Past & Present*, 230 (2016): 9-48; M. P. Donato, "Introduction: Archives, Record Keeping and Imperial Governance, 1500-1800", *Journal of Early Modern History*, 22, 5 (2018): 311-326. *Archival Science* furthermore devoted an issue to early modern archives in 2007. A. Blair and J. Milligan, "Introduction", *Archival Science* 7, 4 (2007): 289-296, 289.

⁹ This term was first coined by Ann Stoler. A. L. Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance", *Archival Science* 2, nr. 1 (2002): 87-109; Donato, "Introduction: Archives, Record Keeping and Imperial Governance, 1500-1800", *Journal of Early Modern History* 22, 5 (2018): 311-26, 313-314.

¹⁰ Walsham, "The Social History of the Archive", 13.

¹¹ Donato, "Introduction", 319-321. Other historians and archivists have labelled similar approaches as looking at the 'cultural' or 'social' history of the archive. See for example Dutch archival scientist Eric Ketelaar's assessment of the topic: E. Ketelaar, 'Prolegomena to a Social History of Dutch Archives', in A. Blok, J. Lucassen and H. Sanders, *A Usable Collection: Essays in Honour of Jaap Kloosterman on Collecting Social History* (Amsterdam, 2014).

Questions and Definitions

It is with these insights in mind that I focus in this thesis on the OBP as an early modern colonial archive and the documentary practices related to it that shaped knowledge in Patria of the Malabar *kantoor* in South-Asia. The main question of my thesis is therefore: What do documentary practices regarding the OBP reveal about its epistemic potential and actualisation thereof, from selection in Malabar to dissection by the *Haags Besogne*, regarding the eighteenth-century *kantoor* of Malabar?¹² With this question I trace the documentary practices of the OBP through multiple stages: creation in Malabar, presentation within the information network of the company and usage by company officials in the Dutch Republic. Since Donato's description of documentary practices seems more of a rebranding of archival practices through the specific lens of documents, my approach to documentary practices incorporates standard archival practices such as well. I am convinced the specific label of a documentary approach has merit though, since it shifts the focusses particularly to documents, which are the focal point of this thesis.

I also integrate the company's official information network in this research, the transfer of OBP with the trade vessels to Patria, because historian Sylvia Sellers-Garcia argued that 'knowledge was produced over long distances.' With this statement she meant that knowledge was not an inherent property of texts, but subject to change whenever documents travelled vast distances and traversed through many hands.¹³ Since the OBP were created and dissected months and thousands of kilometres apart, it is useful to integrate the information network as an object of study rather than as an inconsequential bystander.

My third analytical focus is the epistemic potential of the OBP. Information scientist Karl Fast defined this term as the potential knowledge within a system that is not unmitigatedly accessible, but needs to be actualised through usage of the system.¹⁴ I use the term to refer to how well Malabar could be known through the OBP in theory. It refers to how the OBP reflected the records and information created on Malabar and to how both the information network of the company and documentary practices by company officials affected the actualisation of this potential. My three sub questions integrate these various approaches. Firstly, what sorts of records were produced and maintained by the company on the Malabar Coast? Secondly, how did Malabar's selection and presentation of the OBP and its dispersion over the VOC's

¹² I use OBP as a singular here, because I refer to the OBP as the whole 'archive'.

¹³ S. Sellers-García, *Distance and Documents at the Spanish Empire's Periphery* (Stanford University Press, 2013), 15-18.

¹⁴ K. Fast and K. Sedig, 'Interaction and the Epistemic Potential of Digital Libraries', *International Journal on Digital Libraries* 11, 3 (2010): 169–207, 169-172.

information network affect its epistemic potential? Thirdly, how did the practices of the *Haags Besogne's* actualise the epistemic potential of the OBP?

Material

In this section I introduce the various primary sources I use throughout this thesis, order by sub question. Firstly, to examine what sorts of records and information the *kantoor* of Malabar created, I look at two inventories of company archives in Malabar. The first of which is an inventory from 1795, written shortly before the *kantoor* of Malabar was taken over by the English.¹⁵ In this inventory the author wrote down the documents present in Fort Cochin (Kochi), the main establishment of the Dutch in Malabar. This inventory was published in 1906 and I use this publication to access the inventory.¹⁶ The second inventory was made by Indologist Lennart Bes in the early 2000s, as part of the TANAP (Towards a New Age of Partnership) project, a collaboration between the National Archives in The Hague, Leiden University and various archival institutions in Asia that maintained Dutch records.¹⁷ Bes wrote an inventory of Dutch sources kept in the Tamil Nadu Archives in Chennai, India, where the British centralised all South-Asian Dutch documents in the nineteenth and twentieth century. His inventory on the archive of Cochin overlaps quite well with the 1795 inventory, but includes a few extra archival documents on other various institutions in Cochin is therefore a useful addition. This inventory is accessible through the TANAP website.¹⁸

To analyse the second sub question, I use the OBP received in the Amsterdam chamber of the company, since the *Haags Besogne* used the OBP from Amsterdam. The received letters from Asia are part of the *Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren* section of the VOC records in the National Archives in The Hague.¹⁹ When I refer to 'OBP' in this thesis it can relate to either the singular OBP as the overarching archive of administration from Malabar in Patria or to specific years of forwarded administration from Malabar. For this thesis it is important to divide the OBP twofold, between volumes that were sent directly from Malabar and volumes that were first sent to Batavia and later forwarded from Batavia to Patria. These two streams of

¹⁵ The original inventory is kept in the Tamil Nadu Archives in Chennai and was digitised by employees of the National Archives in The Hague, as part of the TANAP project, during the early 2000s. National Archive, The Hague, Dutch possessions in India: Digital Duplicates of Archives present in: Tamil Nadu Archives in Chennai, access number 1.11.06.11, inventory number, 1629. A published version of this inventory is also available. *Selections from the Records of the Madras Government. Dutch Records, nr. 6* (ed. P. Groot) (Madras, 1909).

¹⁶ In this thesis I use the anglicised names for cities and titles. For its first mention I give the present-day name in brackets.

¹⁷ Organisation of TANAP, <http://www.tanap.nl/content/about/organization.cfm>.

¹⁸ Archief van het VOC - kantoor Malabar (te Cochin) en rechtsopvolgers, http://databases.tanap.net/ead/html/Chennai_DutchRecordsDUT/index.html

¹⁹ NA, VOC, Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren, 1056-4447.

information are discernible, because the indirectly shipped volumes bear the title *Batavia's ingekomen brievenboek*, while the direct ones are named after the VOC establishment they were sent from. In this thesis the tables of contents, or indices, on these OBP are important. These indices have been published on typescript by the National Archives in the late twentieth century and are still available in their reading room. In the early 2000s the TANAP project almost completely renewed these indices with an online database, accessible both through the TANAP website as well as the website of the National Archives.²⁰ See appendix 1 for a comparison of the various ways to access these tables of contents.

Aside from these indices and the OBP as a unit, I also use and analyse individual documents from these OBP. First and foremost the various missives of the company. These letters were the first document in every shipment and presented a short overview on the other documents within the OBP. Secondly, I use resolution books, records which contained the proceedings of the council of Cochin. Lastly, I analyse the *inlandse dagregisters*, local diaries, of Cochin. These voluminous records contained all correspondence with the various local rulers in Malabar. The OBP usually contained these larger records as the final documents within the OBP.

For the final chapter, in which I look at the practices of the *Haags Besogne*, I focus on various primary sources. Foremost are the manuscripts in which the meetings of the committee were recorded, the so called *Haags verbalen*. These are available in the National Archives in The Hague.²¹ Since the committee provided a clear overview of which documents they read and used to write their reports, even as detailed as referring to which specific pages were consulted, these reports are invaluable for this thesis. However, they only detail the results of all meetings. To further grasp how this committee functioned I also look at the personal notes of various *bewindhebbers*, directors, within the committee. These are the notes of directors Jacob van Ghesel (1703-1771), Samuel (1693-1763) and Daniel (1722-1803) Radermacher, and Thomas Hope (1704-1779). All these sources are present in the National Archives in The Hague.²²

To further understand the workings of the committee I also use two eighteenth-century works. First the famous *Beschryvinghe van de Oostindische Compagnie* by VOC *advocaat*,

²⁰ TANAP Database of VOC documents, <http://databases.tanap.net/vocrecords/>; VOC: overgekomen brieven en papieren; <http://www.gahetna.nl/collectie/index/nt00348>.

²¹ NA, VOC, Haags Verbalen, 4455-4506.

²² National Archives, The Hague, Inventaris van het archief van mr. Jacob van Ghesel, 1757-1773 (Collection Van Ghesel), 1.10.31; Inventaris van het archief van de familie Radermacher, 1460-1800 (Collection Radermacher), 1.10.69; Inventaris van het archief van T. Hope; J. Hope, 1602-1783 (Collection Hope), 1.10.46.

secretary, Pieter van Dam (1621-1706), who wrote a history of the company and its institutions by order of the Gentlemen XVII in the early-eighteenth century.²³ In this work van Dam presented an overview of the *Besogne*, its foundation and tasks, based on archival documents of the company. I also use a relatively unknown anonymous and untitled manuscript from the early 1750s available in the Leiden University special collections as *Handboek voor het Haags Besogne*.²⁴ It was an instruction manual for members of the committee. Within this manuscript the author gave an overview of the important resolutions passed by the Gentlemen XVII on the committee up to 1750, as well as gave a step by step guide on how to read the OBP and write the reports. He furthermore included an overview of each establishment, its history, value and other important reminders to provide the *Besogne* with context for their deliberations.

Historiography

This thesis is anchored most prominently on the historiography of knowledge.²⁵ Since an all-encompassing overview is too broad and derives from the focus of my thesis, I limit myself mostly to the intersection of the production of knowledge and early modern colonialism through documentary practices.²⁶

As historian and archivist Francis Blouin stated in *Processing the Past*, his work on the authority of archives in the historical discipline, the 1960s marked an important demarcation in the appraisal of archives. In the light of postmodernist critique and the linguistic turn, its authority of representing a shared and unified past came under pressure.²⁷ Since the linguistic turn of the 1960s and 1970s, thought on how archives and documents represented knowledge of the past has been severely altered. These developments emerged in colonial historiography as ways for understanding how archives and the documents within them were used throughout history as tools of the coloniser to oppress the colonised, under the likes of post-colonial theory and subaltern studies for example. Antoinette Burton coined colonial archives eloquently as ‘a dense but uneven body of knowledge scarred by the cultural struggles and violence of the

²³ Pieter van Dam, *Beschryvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie*, Part 1, trans. F.W. Stapel (M. Nijhoff, 1927).

²⁴ Leiden University (LU), Special Collections, D H 604, *Handboek voor het Haags Besogne*.

²⁵ See renowned cultural historian Peter Burke’s work on the social history of knowledge in the early modern era for a historiography of knowledge up until the turn of the millennium. P. Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge. I: From Gutenberg to Diderot*. (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2000).

²⁶ I am indebted to the two important historiographic overviews of archival practices in an early modern context. By Walsham and Donato. A. Walsham, “The Social History of the Archive: Record-Keeping in Early Modern Europe”, *Past & Present* 230, 11 (2016): 9–48; M. P. Donato, “Introduction: Archives, Record Keeping and Imperial Governance, 1500-1800”, *Journal of Early Modern History* 22, 5 (2018): 311–326.

²⁷ F. X. Blouin, *Processing the Past Contesting Authority in History and the Archives* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 97-98.

colonial past.²⁸ These fields of historical research have grown to be amongst the largest fields of colonial historiography.

Another engagement that emerged in that period, and came into fruition around the turn of the millennium, used these insights to reimagine how the knowledge production of by colonial administrations was shaped through archival practices. As historian Ann Blair stated in a contribution for *Archival Science* in 2007, academics too often overlooked the archive and its practices as sites of ‘political and epistemological power’.²⁹ Over the last two decades historians have started to contend more with the colonial archive in the broadest sense and its relation to colonial knowledge. I propose a twofold division in these approaches to contextualise on which aspects of the colonial administration these historians focussed. Firstly, they studied the sources that colonial administrations in the colonies themselves used to produce knowledge and they looked at how colonial officials used their records.³⁰ Especially enlightening in this regard is Miles Ogborn’s *Indian Ink*, in which he looked at how colonial records in English factories were not objective carriers of information, but actively created knowledge. This documentary-based approach showed that colonial knowledge was highly dependent on the medium through which it transferred.³¹ Similarly, Sylvia Sellers-Garcia research on documentary practices in the eighteenth-century Spanish Empire showed how colonial records were used by colonies in different ways than officials in the metropole preferred them to be used. Colonial questionnaires, sent out from Sevilla to the outskirts of empire to gather knowledge on local politics and commerce, were used by officials to write on various other subject they found more pressing.³² Ann Stoler’s work on Dutch nineteenth-century archival documents went further by exploring how even the unwritten word shaped the epistemologies within colonial archival documents.³³ According to historian Alexandra Walsham, an approach to documentary practices has proven that archives were shaped by ‘the participation of multiple other actors and their capacity to utilize them for purposes at odds with those of officialdom.’³⁴

²⁸ Antoinette M. Burton, *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation* (Duke University Press, 2003), 102.

²⁹ A. Blair and J. Milligan, “Introduction”, *Archival Science* 7, 4 (2007): 289

³⁰ The EIC has a strong tradition in this regard. See for example C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870*, Cambridge Studies in Indian History and Society (Cambridge University Press, 1996); B. S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge the British in India*, Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

³¹ Ogborn’s third chapter was especially useful in this regard. M. Ogborn, *Indian Ink Script and Print in the Making of the English East India Company* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 71-90.

³² S. Sellers-García, *Distance and Documents at the Spanish Empire’s Periphery* (Stanford University Press, 2013), 16-18, 25-38.

³³ A. L. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain, Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, Course Book (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 3-5.

³⁴ Walsham, “The Social History of the Archive”, 21-22.

Secondly, historians have been looking more thoroughly at how the colonial administrations at home in the metropole used their archives to gather knowledge of their colonies. The main historiographical contention in this field, as Donato pointed out, is how effective the colonial archive was integrated within the knowledge production of colonial administrations.³⁵ Hew Bowen's research on the East India Company in the eighteenth and nineteenth century gave an important role to the handling of information in London. Bowen argued that institutional reforms in mid-eighteenth century, in which new institutions were created to deal more thoroughly with incoming material from Asia, played a crucial role in improving the EIC's knowledge of India and its subsequent expansion in South-Asia.³⁶ Recent studies that specifically explored documentary practices in relation to colonial knowledge in an eighteenth-century French context, have risen doubts on how effective colonial administrations gathered knowledge however. Both Marie Houllémare and Loïc Charles found that the colonial administration at home had difficulties dissecting and integrating information from French colonial records.³⁷ Houllémare even argued that officials only got a thorough epistemological grasp on their colonies after the French empire was severely reduced in size as a result of the Seven Year's War.³⁸ Before that period archival documents were not systematically integrated in the colonial bureaucracy. Similar sentiments related to epistemological scepticism can be found in Iberian historiography according to Donato.³⁹ Arnd Brendecke for example found that in seventeenth-century Spain documents pertaining to the conquest of the Americas were considered unimportant as sources of knowledge of the past, but were more important as legal documents.⁴⁰ My research is mainly concerned with this final branch, how effective colonial administrations at home could gather knowledge through the colonial archive, as I aim to find where the VOC can be situated in this regard through an analysis of the epistemic potential of the OBP through documentary practices. However, I aim to bridge the gap between both approaches by overlooking the whole journey of the OBP, from their creation to dissection, thereby not only looking at the final stage of dissection, but also integrating how actions in Asia shaped how Malabar could potentially be known.

³⁵ Donato, "Introduction", 312-314.

³⁶ Bowen, *The Business of Empire*, 152-160, 189-190.

³⁷ L. Charles and P. Cheney, "The Colonial Machines Dismantled: Knowledge and Empire in the French Atlantic", *Past & Present*, 219 (2013): 127-163; M. Houllémare, "Seeing the Empire Through Lists and Charts: French Colonial Records in the Eighteenth Century", *Journal of Early Modern History* 22, 5 (2018): 371-391.

³⁸ Houllémare, "Seeing the Empire Through Lists and Charts", 382-385, 390-391.

³⁹ Donato, "Introduction", 320. Donato referred to a wide variety of Spanish literature. See for example N. B. Martín, *Juan Bautista Muñoz (1745-1799) y la fundación del Archivo general de Indias* (Valencia, 2000).

⁴⁰ A. Brendecke, "'Arca, Archivillo, Archivo': The Keeping, Use and Status of Historical Documents about the Spanish Conquista", *Archival Science* 10, 3 (2010): 267-83.

Within the context of Dutch East India Company historiography an approach to documentary practices surrounding the OBP in relation to the production of knowledge on the company has hitherto not been done. Historians have contended however with the wider production of knowledge surrounding the VOC. An approach thus far has been looking at how records other than the OBP were used by officials to produce knowledge on the company in Asia. Nigel Penn and Adrien Delmas for example looked at how company directors used all sorts of documents, such as travel literature and natural histories for knowledge production.⁴¹ Unfortunately, they did not look at how the OBP were handled.⁴² Günther Schilder researched how cartographic knowledge was produced through the information network of the company.⁴³ Others have theorised how the VOC can be situated as part of wider knowledge networks that transcended the official information network of the company.⁴⁴ Unfortunately they did not focus on the knowledge production of the company per se, but more on how its network functioned as a vehicle for all sorts of knowledge.⁴⁵

Historian Nico Vriend has provided the most valuable contribution in regards to the subject of my thesis, with his research on the eighteenth-century information system of the VOC through the archival practices of the company in Batavia and Patria.⁴⁶ In his analyses he specifically focussed on how the OBP were archived and his findings are therefore invaluable for my thesis. I add to Vriend's findings by analysing how specific colonial records were used by the information system he described, adding a distinct focus on documentary practices, and I focus especially on the *Haags Besogne*, which Vriend did not deal with. That he did not contend with the *Besogne* is unsurprising, since it has been largely ignored in VOC historiography. Femme Gaastra's institutional analysis of the committee in his monograph on the history of the VOC and his dissertation on the organisation of the VOC in the late-seventeenth century have been the most thorough analyses of the *Besogne*.⁴⁷ These works by

⁴¹ A. Delmas and N. Penn, 'From travelling to history: An outline of the VOC writing system during the 17th century' in A. Delmas and N. Penn, *Written Culture in a Colonial Context Africa and the Americas, 1500-1900*, African History (Brill Academic Publishers) (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

⁴² Delmas and Penn, 'From travelling to history', 112-114.

⁴³ G. Schilder, 'Organization and Evolution of the Dutch East India Company's Hydrographic Office in the Seventeenth Century', *Imago Mundi* 28 (1976): 61-78.

⁴⁴ L. Blussé and I. Ooms, *Kennis en Compagnie: de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie en de moderne wetenschap* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2002); S. Huigen, J. L. de Jong, and E. Kolfin, *The Dutch Trading Companies as Knowledge Networks*, Intersections (Boston, Mass.); v. 14 (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

⁴⁵ See for example Siegfried Huigen's introduction. S. Huigen, J. L. de Jong, and E. Kolfin, *The Dutch Trading Companies as Knowledge Networks*, Intersections (Boston, Mass.); v. 14 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 2-3.

⁴⁶ N. Vriend, "Het informatiesysteem en - netwerk van de Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie" (Master's thesis, Leiden, 2011).

⁴⁷ F. S. Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid bij de VOC: de financiële en commerciële politiek van de bewindhebbers, 1672-1702* (Zutphen: Walburg Press, 1989), 48-50, 60-61; F. S. Gaastra, *Geschiedenis van de VOC: opkomst, bloei en ondergang* (Zutphen: Walburg Press, 2012), 150-155

Gaastra have been used primarily by historians to understand the committee, together with Meilink-Roelofs general overview of the tasks of the committee in her inventory of the VOC archives in The Hague.⁴⁸ Unfortunately the findings of these studies were mostly based on van Dam's *Beschryvinghe* and only handful of other sources, such as resolutions passed by the Gentlemen XVII or the *verbalen* themselves. Most academics mention either Gaastra, Meilink-Roelofs short paragraph on the committee in her inventory of the VOC archive in The Hague, or the few pages written by Van Dam. An important contribution however is Tristan Mostert's thesis on military policy in the seventeenth-century.⁴⁹ He integrated the *Besogne* in his narrative by researching how they shaped policy. Unfortunately, a thorough institutional study on the committee is still lacking. This is why I not only use van Dam and the *Haags verbalen*, but also the neglected *Handboek voor het Haags Besogne* and the notes of several directors. My aim is to integrate the *Haags Besogne* with the wider historiography on the knowledge gathering of colonial administrations.

Methodology

Central in this thesis is a documentary approach to knowledge production that encompasses the whole information network of the company from conception to dissection, through a case study of the eighteenth-century Malabar OBP. The main reason why I chose Malabar is because it had access to both the direct and indirect information network of the company and because of my familiarity with the establishment from previous research. There is nothing else besides its usefulness within the information network that makes Malabar intrinsically more important for this study than other *kantoren*. I chose the timeframe 1727-1770 because this range encompasses important changes in the information network, which I deal with in chapter 2.

I analyse how documentary practices regarding the OBP and its journey from selection to dissection affected its epistemic potential, the extent to which Malabar could be known by Patria through the OBP. Since this is a broad topic I analyse a closed information network from Malabar to Patria. In this approach the information and records created on the Malabar Coast serve as the starting point, or input, of my model. This starting point is the focal point of my first chapter, in which I first present a short historical overview of Malabar to contextualise all the information and records that appear throughout this thesis. After that I analyse the records that were created and maintained on the Malabar Coast, through an analysis of the inventories

⁴⁸ Meilink-Roelofs, Raben, and Spijkerman, *Inventaris van het archief van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC), 1602-1795 (1811)*, 30-32.

⁴⁹ T. Mostert, "Chain of command. The military system of the Dutch East India Company 1655-1663" (Master's thesis, Leiden University, 2007), 40-41.

I described above. The conclusion of the first chapter therefore forms the full epistemic potential of Malabar, since it encompasses all that could in theory be known about Malabar.

In the second chapter the focus shifts to the OBP and how multiple variables influenced its epistemic potential. Here I analyse the selection of bookkeepers on which documents to include OBP to Patria and how accurately the OBP gave a representation of the total amount of information maintained in Cochin. Furthermore, I look at the structure of the OBP and how it presented itself for dissection by readers, by analysing the web of references between documents, which made certain documents and topics more visible than others. For this chapter I use a quantitative case-study of eight years of OBP material, with intervals of six years, ranging from 1727 to 1769. I chose this period because in the mid-eighteenth century the OBP changed drastically due to reforms in Batavia, which I deal with in detail in this chapter. I chose these specific years because they give an overview of years with more than average OBP sent to Patria and years with less than average OBP.⁵⁰ Aside from calculating the amount of documents and pages the OBP contained in these years I also arranged documents in tables, classified by types of documents. See appendices 2, 3 and 4 for more information on how I made those and how I dealt with methodological issues. Lastly, I look at how the information network through which the OBP traversed affected its contents. In the conclusion to this chapter I infer how the documentary practices of selection and presentation and the company's information network altered the new epistemic potential of the OBP.

In the final chapter I analyse how the practices of the *Haags Besogne* affected its epistemic potential further and how the *Besogne* actualised this potential. I study which documents and topics they focussed on and how they formed their views on Malabar. For this I primarily use the *verbalen* which were written on the OBP discussed in the previous chapter and therefore I look at the years 1728-1770 through intervals of six years.⁵¹ I add to these sources by also looking at notes of *bewindhebbers*, Van Dam's *beschryvinghe* and the manual for the *Haags Besogne*. From this specific documentary approach to which documents from the OBP the *Besogne* used and how they used them, I infer the final epistemic potential and its actualisation, the knowledge output of my model, as visible through the *verbalen* of the

⁵⁰ To get a rough estimate of the length of the OBP, I graphed the amount of books with administration Patria received annually from Malabar, both directly and indirectly. I got this data from Meilink-Roelofs inventory of the OBP, Meilink-Roelofs, Raben, and Spijkerman, *Inventaris van het archief van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC), 1602-1795 (1811)*, 208-309. From there I chose an interval in which both the highs and lows were represented. I am aware that the amount of volumes with administration is not a perfect proxy for the amount of OBP, but it was reliable enough in this regard.

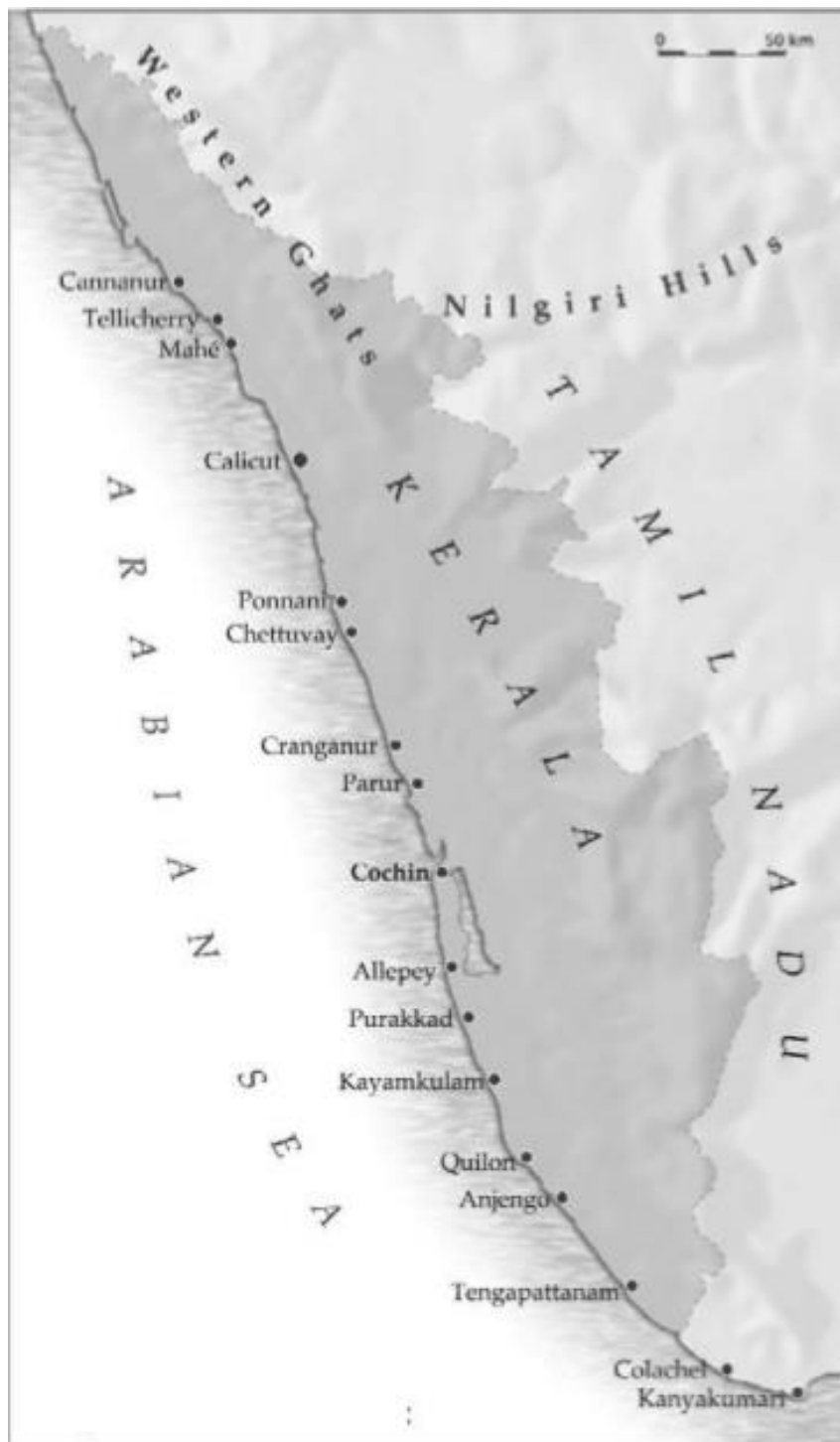
⁵¹ These years are not the same as the ones in chapter two, because the *Haags Besogne* did not convene until a year after the OBP arrived in Patria.

company. In the conclusion I tie everything together to answer how the OBP's epistemic potential was affected by the various ways through which company officials selected, presented and used its contents and through its journey from selection to dissection. I infer what my findings contribute to the historiography of early modern colonial knowledge production. Finally, I also relate what my findings on the documentary practices of the OBP in the eighteenth century can contribute to our understanding of how twenty-first century researchers can engage with the OBP.

A final note on my methodology is that my approach is fixed on a closed model of inquiry, where I only look at the official information network of the company, the OBP, that were transferred along with the trade vessels to Patria. I acknowledge that many other networks existed through which information ended up in Patria, such as personal networks, the postal service of the VOC which has been studied by Perry Moree, or the networks of other trade companies. I limit myself to the VOC's official information network however to keep my thesis manageable.⁵² In Patria I treat the *Haags Besogne* as the main institution whose members processed the OBP into knowledge for the company directors, the end point or output of this information network. Also, even though I treat the information network of the company as a linear journey from Malabar to Patria, the information can more authentically be represented as a continuous cycle, without a fixed beginning or end. To keep my approach focussed and manageable I use a closed linear model of information from Malabar to Patria. My findings therefore only reflect the homebound information network and do furthermore not apply to the transfer of information from Asia to the Dutch Republic through other networks.

⁵² See historian Nico Vriend's overview of the various networks associated with the VOC for more information on this topic. N. Vriend, "Het informatiesysteem en - netwerk van de Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie" (Master's thesis, Leiden, 2011), 11-14; P. Moree, "*Met vriend die God geleide*": *het Nederlands-Aziatisch postvervoer ten tijde van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1998).

Figure 1) The VOC in Malabar



Note: A. Singh, *Fort Cochin in Kerala, 1750-1830* (Brill, 2010), xxi.

1. Records and Rajas: the Dutch on the Malabar Coast

‘I send you then this letter, as the first showing of our strong friendship, with the intention to show you the origin of Malabar, as the nation itself shows through its traditions.’⁵³ This passage was part of the first letter of Dutch reverend Jacobus Canter Visscher, who worked as a pastor on the Malabar Coast in the early eighteenth century. During his six-year stay he wrote 37 letters to friends and family back home in which he described the culture of the Malabar Coast. After his death in 1735 these letters were published. He wrote on the different people living in the region, their traditions, the geography of the land, the cosmopolitan political landscape and the activities of the VOC. The first part of this chapter serves a similar function as Visscher’s *Mallabaarsche Brieven*: to show the diverse political and economic context of the Malabar Coast, as well as the VOC’s operation: its organisation, institutions and businesses on Malabar. In the second part I look closer at the archive the Dutch created there, which serves to comprehend the vast amount of records and information present in Malabar. This establishes the entry point of the information network to Patria, its full epistemic potential, with the question: what sorts of records were produced and maintained by the company on the Malabar Coast?

Divided Landscape

The historical region known as Malabar lined up almost completely with the present-day Kerala state of South-West India, a long and narrow stretch of land between the Arabian Sea and the mountains of the Western Ghats.⁵⁴ From north to south it stretches around 550km from the region of Cannanore (Kannur) to Cape Camorin (Kanyakumari). The distance between coast and the mountain range varies from barely 30km to around 120km. With only several mountain passes, Malabar was secluded from the rest of India, which gave it a separate identity and a focus towards the sea. Due to its location the ports on the Malabar Coast were important commercial junctions for sailors travelling between the Middle-East and South-East Asia.⁵⁵ With roughly fifty local kingdoms, the region was politically fragmented in the early modern era.⁵⁶ For the Dutch the most important rulers in the eighteenth century consisted of: the Zamorin of Calicut (Samoothiro of Kozhikode), the Raja of Cochin (Kochi) and the Raja of

⁵³ J. C. Visscher, *Mallabaarse brieven, behelzende eene naukeurige beschrijving van de kust van Mallabaar* (Leeuwaren: Ferwerda, 1743).

⁵⁴ H. K. s’Jacob, *The Rajas of Cochin 1663-1720: Kings, Chiefs and the Dutch East India Company* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2000), 1.

⁵⁵ s’Jacob, *The Rajas of Cochin*, 2-3.

⁵⁶ G. D. Winius and M. P. Vink, *The Merchant-Warrior Pacified: The VOC (the Dutch East India Company) and Its Changing Political Economy in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), 36.

Travancore (Thiruvithamkoor).⁵⁷ The English in Tellicherry (Thalassery), Calicut and Anjengo (Anchuthengu) and the French in Mahé (Mayyazhi) also maintained factories on the Malabar Coast.⁵⁸ These European and local powers vied for commercial and political power in this fragmented region.

The Dutch only established themselves on the Malabar Coast in the mid-seventeenth century. In 1602 the Dutch East India Company was founded as a representative trading company, licensed for trade and diplomacy in Asia in name of the Dutch Republic.⁵⁹ In the first few decades the VOC conquered and built important settlements in South-East Asia, most notably Batavia in 1619, which became the administrative centre of the company in Asia.⁶⁰ In the 1650s their gaze turned to South-Asia, against a backdrop of commercial interests and European conflicts with the Portuguese who were present in that region.⁶¹ The conquest of the region was deemed vital for the Dutch. Both commercially, for the lucrative pepper trade in Malabar and geopolitically, as a strategic location on the Indian Ocean.⁶² In five conquests during the early 1660s the Dutch took over all Portuguese holdings on the Malabar Coast.⁶³

Malabar was ruled by the *commandeur*, commander, of Cochin and his council.⁶⁴ A large body of civil service administrators, such as bookkeepers and translators, assisted him.⁶⁵ Dutch Cochin was one of the larger establishments of the company in South-Asia, housing a few thousand inhabitants in the mid-eighteenth century.⁶⁶ As a town it not only maintained commercial buildings, such as warehouses and offices, but also institutions such as a school, church, orphan board and hospital. Besides Cochin the Dutch held various smaller establishments in Malabar, ranging from larger forts in some cities to small lodges in others. Most importantly were Cannanore in the north, Cranganore (Kodungallur) just outside of the city of Cochin, and Quilon (Kollam) in the south.⁶⁷

⁵⁷ A. Singh, *Fort Cochin in Kerala, 1750-1830* (Brill, 2010), 18.

⁵⁸ Singh, *Fort Cochin in Kerala, 1750-1830*, 19-21.

⁵⁹ F. S. Gaastra, *Geschiedenis van de VOC: opkomst, bloei en ondergang* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2012), 32-35.

⁶⁰ F. S. Gaastra, *Geschiedenis van de VOC*, 39-42.

⁶¹ s'Jacob, *De Nederlanders in Kerala, 1663-1701*, xxxvi.

⁶² Idem, 52-53.

⁶³ Winius and Vink, *The Merchant-Warrior Pacified*, 36-37.

⁶⁴ For this thesis I use the Dutch term '*commandeur*', since the English translation to 'commander' carries an implicit militaristic tone. Since the office was in practice more an administrative one, I prefer the original Dutch term that carries less weight.

⁶⁵ F. Lequin, *Het personeel van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie in Azië in de 18e eeuw: meer in het bijzonder in de vestiging Bengalen* (Alphen aan den Rijn: Canaletto, 2005), 60.

⁶⁶ Singh, *Fort Cochin in Kerala, 1750-1830*, 23.

⁶⁷ Koshy, *The Dutch Power in Kerala*, 26-28.

The political and commercial power of the Dutch was mostly reduced to these forts on the coastline and the city of Cochin.⁶⁸ By establishing contracts and passes with local rulers, the Dutch tried to control the pepper trade.⁶⁹ Most local rulers, especially the stronger Zamorin of Calicut and Raja of Travancore, proved unwilling to either sign contracts with the company or enforce the signed terms.⁷⁰ Despite its potential commercial opportunities, the Dutch could not fund their stay on the Malabar Coast. Aside from a short boom during the late-seventeenth and mid-eighteenth century, Dutch commercial activities on the coast only brought financial losses for the VOC.⁷¹ Politically, the Dutch held influence in the divided region and were considered one of the more potent forces in the early-eighteenth century. The emergence of strong local rulers, most notably the Raja's of Travancore, slowly eroded Dutch political power in the region during the mid-eighteenth century. The establishment took a turn for the worst due to the fourth Anglo-Dutch war of 1780-1784 and was eventually taken over by the English in 1795, in light of the French Revolutionary Wars in Europe.⁷²

Reflection in the Records

On 21 October 1795 the capitulation of Fort Cochin was signed by *commandeur* Jan Lambertus van Spall (1793-1795) and the Union Jack was raised on top of the fort. In response to the invasion of the Dutch Republic by the French, and the subsequent establishment of the Batavian Republic, Dutch Malabar was taken by the English and ceased to exist.⁷³ Sometime before, most likely during the rising tensions between the English and the Dutch in the preceding months, a bookkeeper in Cochin wrote down an inventory of all records present within the fort.⁷⁴ In a twist of fate, the downfall of the Dutch on the Malabar Coast therefore indirectly contributed the most to our contemporary understanding of company archives in South-Asia. In this section I look at the archive of Dutch Cochin, using this inventory and Bes's twenty-first century inventory of the Dutch records in Chennai. This section therefore serves in my model as the origin in the information network to Patria, because the knowledge producing apparatus in Patria can only be understood by understanding what sorts of records and information the

⁶⁸ Jacobs, *Koopman in Azie*, 56.

⁶⁹ Idem, 57.

⁷⁰ Koshy, *The Dutch Power in Kerala*, 29-30, 33; s'Jacob, *The Rajas of Cochin 1663-1720*, 168-174.

⁷¹ s'Jacob, *De Nederlanders in Kerala, 1663-1701*, xxxv; Winius and Vink, *The Merchant-Warrior Pacified*, 157.

⁷² Singh, *Fort Cochin in Kerala, 1750-1830*, 161-174

⁷³ Ibidem. Singh laid out a very detailed account of the final days of Fort Cochin.

⁷⁴ The original inventory is kept in the Tamil Nadu Archives in Chennai and was digitised by employees of the National Archives in The Hague, as part of the TANAP project, during the early 2000s. National Archive, The Hague, Dutch possessions in India: Digital Duplicates of Archives present in: Tamil Nadu Archives in Chennai, access number 1.11.06.11, inventory number, 1629. A published version of this inventory is also available. *Selections from the Records of the Madras Government. Dutch Records, no. 6* (ed. P. Groot) (Madras, 1909).

company gathered and maintained in Malabar. My aim is not to describe in detail every type of record that was created or maintained in Cochin, but rather distil the important records through which the Dutch archive in Malabar can be understood in relation to the OBP and the actions of the *Haags Besogne* in later chapters.

The 1795 inventory, the *Hollandsche handschriften, brieven en officieele stukken*, gives researchers nowadays the most authentic insight into the office of the *commandeur* and the archival practices of an eighteenth-century Dutch *kantoor*. That its contents are authentic and most likely represented most of the records present in Cochin was verified by Bes, whose twenty-first-century inventory of the survived Malabar records, now held in Chennai, India, overlaps quite well with this inventory.⁷⁵ The only tenable difference between these inventories is that the present-day archive encompasses more documents from the various institutions of Cochin than were mentioned in the old inventory, such as the orphan board or the hospital. Most likely their archive was kept at these institutions themselves and not in the office of the *commandeur* and only put together with the other records by the British at a later date. Also, the present-day archive contains Dutch records that were made after 1795, by Dutch citizens and officials who stayed in Cochin after the English takeover. I limit myself to the 1795 inventory and Bes's inventory of the Dutch records in Chennai and do not include other dispersed Dutch archival documents still present at various institutions in Kerala.⁷⁶

Archival practices in Malabar were most likely done by the various civil administrators such as bookkeepers and translators, who also wrote and copied the archival documents. The most important part of the archive was made up by the decision-making aspect, the proceedings, of the *commandeur* and his council.⁷⁷ Most early modern archivists implemented a system in which proceedings, or resolutions, formed the backbone of the archive. Other records within the archive served as appendices to these proceedings. As Historian Nico Vriend noted in his thesis on the information system of the VOC, this system was only partially incorporated in Asia.⁷⁸ While there were many records archived as appendices to the resolutions in Batavia, many documents had their own separate series. The Cochin archive is comparable with the

⁷⁵ L. Bes, "Hundreds of Rosetta Stones and Other Patient Papers. The Dutch Records at the Tamil Nadu Archives, Chennai (Madras)", *Itinerario*, XXVII, 1 (2003): 93–112. This paper also provided more information on how these records eventually ended up in their present location of Chennai.

⁷⁶ L. Bes, *Dutch Sources on South Asia, c. 1600-1825. Volume 3: Archival Guide to Repositories Outside The Netherlands* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2015). This volume gives an in-depth overview of all known South-Asian repositories that still maintain Dutch sources.

⁷⁷ For this section I mostly use the record order established by Bes, who slightly rearranged the 1795 inventory to twenty-first century standards.

⁷⁸ F. van Dijk and L. Balk, *The Archives of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and the Local Institutions in Batavia (Jakarta)* (Brill, 2007), 219-229, 250. Vriend, "Het informatiesysteem en - netwerk van de Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie", 29-30.

archive of the High Government in Batavia in this regard, since the appendices to the resolutions only made up a minor part of the archive.⁷⁹

The largest series of records maintained was actually that of missives, both in quantity as well as in how bookkeepers archived them. These incoming and outgoing letters to VOC officials take up the first, and largest, part of the 1795 inventory. Correspondence was separately ordered for Patria, Batavia, other VOC *kantoren*, as well as for the various smaller forts and residencies in Malabar. Bookkeepers maintained both the incoming and outgoing letters, and for the correspondence with Patria and Batavia they also maintained copies.⁸⁰ According to Sellers-Garcia such detailed divisions in the archiving of correspondence underlined their importance.⁸¹ Correspondence with locals was also a large series, yet translators did not order these by kingdom. Despite the large amount of local kingdoms and their importance for the Dutch, servants lumped all correspondence, contracts and agreements together in series for all kingdoms combined.⁸²

Company personnel also wrote and maintained general reports of the company in Cochin. Memoirs of Succession, lengthy documents in which the *commandeur* presented his term in charge to his successor, were one of those.⁸³ Bes put these together with *stadsdagregisters*, diaries or journals, in which bookkeepers wrote down important events pertaining to Cochin.⁸⁴ In Malabar the administration also used *inlandse dagregisters*, local diaries. Within these diaries translators wrote down correspondence with local rulers. These records were unique for Malabar and most likely made to grasp the divided political landscape of the Malabar region.⁸⁵ Other various forms of diaries were also present, such as diaries of embassies, expeditions and other missions.

⁷⁹ Vriend stated that a good example of an archive that did incorporate this system was that of the States General in the Dutch Republic. T. Thomassen, “Instrumenten van de macht. De Staten-Generaal en hun archieven” (Dissertation, Amsterdam, 2009), 283-284.

⁸⁰ *Dutch Records No. 6*, 1-5, 10-11, 19-24.

⁸¹ Sellers-Garcia researched the archival practices of scribes in colonial Guatemala. Garcia, *Distance and Documents*, 147-151.

⁸² *Dutch Records No. 6*, 8-9. While not the focal point of my thesis, such archival practices have been brought to the forefront over the last few decades, most notably by Ann Stoler. See A. L. Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance”, *Archival Science* 2, nr. 1 (2002): 87–109, 96.

⁸³ *Dutch Records No 6*, 6-7.

⁸⁴ L. Bes, *Inventaris van de digitale duplicaten van een selectie uit de archieven van de VOC-kantoren Malabar, Coromandel, Surat en Bengalen en rechtsopvolgers, aanwezig in de Tami Nadu Archives te Chennai (1647) 1664-1825 (1825)* (The Hague, 2014), 15-16.

⁸⁵ I researched this claim more in depth in a research paper on the usage of diaries within the VOC. R. van Tilburg, “Panopticon or Palimpsest? The usage of dagregisters in the Dutch East India Company (1730-1740)” (unpublished research paper, 2019), 14, 17.

Bookkeeping was kept within *Grootboeken* or *kassaboeken* for financial data such as revenue, civil administration and *negotieboeken* for commercial overviews.⁸⁶ Besides these general accounts, we find records pertaining to financial issues, such as the leases of company lands and *venduboeken*, overviews of public auctions. As shown in the previous section, Malabar was heavily involved in commerce with the surrounding kingdoms. Unsurprisingly tolls and passes for local ships are therefore also a separate series in the archive. Furthermore, the archive reflected more than just the functioning of the company. As shown in the previous section, Fort Cochin was a city with thousands of inhabitants and personnel. This is reflected by the various records pertaining to the population, such as census data, *monsterrollen* and payrolls, *soldijboeken*. *Monsterrollen*. The vast amount of judicial records further show that the archive was more than mere business, but reflected the lives of individuals as well. Within the archive are various annual registers of wedding licences, birth certificates and wills as well as a vast corpus of legal documents, such as court procedures and testimonies.⁸⁷ Moreover, it housed the records of multiple institutions, most notably that of the hospital and orphan board. The latter maintained the possessions of company personnel. The archive in Cochin was therefore not only a reflection of the business of a trading company, but that of an eighteenth-century society and individual lives as well.

Conclusion

As the first half of this chapter showed, the VOC operated on a small, yet divided landscape on the Malabar Coast. In a cosmopolitan region, with various European and local powers, the Dutch tried to attain and maintain commercial hegemony. At the centre of its operations stood Fort Cochin, which was not only a trading post, but one of the larger Dutch settlements in Asia. Its archive reflected this eighteenth-century society, showing the commercial and political landscape in which the company operated, as well as the social conditions of Cochin. Its archive resembled that of Batavia, partially structured around the resolutions, but mostly centred on correspondence through missives with Patria, Batavia, other *kantoren* and establishments subservient to Cochin. Furthermore it represented the business side of company activities, such as the commercial nexus of the *kantoor* of Malabar. The records and information the Dutch created was more diverse than that however. Documents also dealt with personal lives, aside

⁸⁶ Within this thesis I use a distinction between ‘financial’, as relating to income and expenditure of revenue and civil administration and ‘commercial’ as relating to all sorts of commercial income and expenditure. While they could both be described under ‘financial’, I use ‘commercial’ as distinct because this was the most important branch of bookkeeping for the company and I want to keep it distinct from other sorts of bookkeeping.

⁸⁷ *Dutch Records, No 6*, 16-19.

from company business, such as legal documents, marriage licences and birth certificates. This diverse archive, which reflected the commercial and political enterprise of the Dutch in Kerala as well as the society of Cochin itself formed the totality of potential information and records that Malabar could forward and was therefore the input of the information network to Patria. With this knowledge of the archive in mind, chapter two takes the records onto the next step: their transportation to Patria.

2. Web of Connections

In early November 1750 the sloop *Maria Laurentia* sailed from Cochin to the port of Colombo on the island of Ceylon.⁸⁸ There its cargo was loaded over on the larger ships of the return fleet and forwarded to the Dutch Republic, where it most likely arrived on the East Indiaman *Krabbendijke* in June 1751.⁸⁹ Two months later in late January 1751 and 8500km away from Cochin, the East Indiamen *Gouverneur-Generaal* and *Admiraal de Ruyter* departed from the Sunda Strait near Batavia for Patria as well, where they arrived in the fall of 1751.⁹⁰ Two voyages, months apart and departed from ports separated by thousands of kilometres, but with one important thing in common: they both carried copies of the administration of the *commandement* of Malabar.

This chapter deals with the company's intricate information network of the VOC between the port of Cochin and the Dutch Republic, specifically through an analysis of the OBP. The *kantoor* of Malabar had a unique position within the company's network, since it both had a direct line of communication to Patria and one indirectly through Batavia. In this chapter I look at the makeup of the OBP and its presentation of its contents over both these lines, with the question: How did Malabar's selection and presentation of the OBP and its dispersion over the VOC's information network affect its epistemic potential? If we want to characterise the epistemic potential OBP, we need to understand how bookkeepers in Cochin selected and presented its contents and how this was affected by the long journey to Patria. By analysing these documentary practices of selection and presentation and the influence of the company's network, I believe it is possible to trace the epistemic potential of the OBP.

I start with an overview of the intra-Asian information network of the VOC and its homebound shipping to the Dutch Republic to give proper context to the company's information network. After that I analyse what sorts of documents the OBP to Patria contained. First I compare the OBP with the total amount of records on the Malabar Coast, to distil which documents the bookkeepers selected for transport. This selection altered the epistemic potential of the OBP. Then I analyse the annual stream of documents to Patria. This section shows what information these annual documents contained, how they referred to information within other documents in the shipments and how visible or invisible information was based on these

⁸⁸ NA, VOC, 2758, *Register der papieren*, 1.

⁸⁹ Bruijn e.a., *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping in the 17th and 18th Centuries. Vol. III*, 398-399.

⁹⁰ Idem, 400-401; *Generale missiven van gouverneurs-generaal en raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie. Dl. XII: 1750-1755*, Edited by J. E. Oosterling (Den Haag: 2007), 3.

references. I am convinced that analysing presentation through visibility and references sheds more light on the epistemic potential of the OBP.

In the last section I look at how this stream of records differed between direct and indirect shipping and how it changed throughout the eighteenth century. Most *kantoren* only had indirect contact with Patria through Batavia and during the eighteenth-century Batavia changed which documents it forwarded to Patria. Researching how both these variables affected the stream of documents to Patria enlightens us on how certain records functioned within the information network of the company. It furthermore establishes how ones position within the information network as well as different time frames made for different epistemic opportunities and challenges for Patria.

Dispersal of Information

Before delving into the actual contents of the documentation sent to Patria, it is important to understand these shipping lines more thoroughly. Copies of the administration of Malabar were shipped alongside the trade goods in the fleets of the company and therefore largely followed the existing trade networks in Asia.⁹¹ While the company employed vessels strictly for quick postal services between major establishments, the administration of the various *kantoren* was sent along with the larger vessels and trade goods, similar to the other European colonisers.⁹² Since these records were shipped alongside trading goods, I use the intra-Asian trading network of the VOC as a proxy for the information network of the company.⁹³ Despite there also being an information network over land to Patria, it shrank in size and importance over the eighteenth century according to Perry Moree.⁹⁴

Batavia had been the administrative headquarters of all VOC activities in Asia, and the rendezvous point for the return fleet to Patria, ever since the early seventeenth century.⁹⁵ The VOC *kantoren* were required to keep Batavia informed about their daily procedures and therefore sent multiple shipments with copies of their administration every year to the city on Java.⁹⁶ Batavia's combination as both the main trading hub and administrative centre made it so that in practice the documentation of all VOC *kantoren* was gathered in Batavia and from

⁹¹ Moree, *Met vriend die God geleide*, 25.

⁹² Idem, 172; Bowen, *The Business of Empire*, 154-156; Sellers-Garcia, *Distance and Documents*, 79-82.

⁹³ For a useful article on the distinction between the transfer of information as the primary unit in a network versus information as a bystander or secondary unit, see: G. D. S. Sood, "The Informational Fabric of Eighteenth-Century India and the Middle East: Couriers, Intermediaries and Postal Communication", *Modern Asian Studies*, 43, 5 (2009) 1085-1116, 1094-1095.

⁹⁴ Moree, *Met vriend die God geleide*, 46, 57.

⁹⁵ Gaastra, *Geschiedenis van de VOC*, 39-50, 114.

⁹⁶ LU, D H 604, Handboek voor het Haags Besogne, 8-9; Vriend, "Het informatiesysteem van de Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie", 22.

there forwarded to Patria: indirect shipping. An important position here was that of the main administrative board, the *generale secretarie*, where the VOC clerks dealt with the incoming letters. They read, compiled and selected the documents from all *kantoren* that needed to be forwarded to Patria and bundled them together, accompanied by a general state of the company from the previous period known as the *generale missive*.⁹⁷

The position of Batavia as the central hub of the return fleet was threatened by the conquest of multiple settlements on Ceylon in the mid-seventeenth century.⁹⁸ For the *kantoren* in South Asia, such as Persia, Surat, Malabar, Coromandel and Bengal, also known as the *westerkwartieren*, Ceylon was better located as the rendezvous for the return fleet than Batavia. The detour through Java was disadvantageous for these *kantoren*, since the collected trade goods needed to arrive in Europe as fast as possible. Therefore the Gentlemen XVII allowed Ceylon to become a second rendezvous for the return fleet for these *westerkwartieren*.⁹⁹ This allowed Malabar access to a direct communication line with Patria through the rendezvous fleet of Ceylon: direct shipping.¹⁰⁰ Despite these practices, Batavia remained the administrative centre of the company's activities in Asia and Malabar kept sending its administration to Batavia multiple times per year.¹⁰¹

As historian Robert Parthesius showed in his work on the intra-Asian shipping network of the VOC in the seventeenth century, Malabar maintained a connection with Batavia as part of the intra-Asian trading network between Persia and Batavia.¹⁰² The voyage from South-India to Batavia would usually take up to one month to complete.¹⁰³ The OBP of the years 1727-1769 show that this voyage was undertaken on a monthly or bimonthly basis.¹⁰⁴ Despite this continuous inter-Asian trading network, the company only employed a few annual return fleets to Patria. According to the database of VOC shipping, 180 ships departed from Ceylon to Patria during the period concerned here.¹⁰⁵ Two or three fleets were dispatched from the island

⁹⁷ Moree, *Met vriend die God geleide*, 24; Vriend, "Het informatiesysteem van de Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie", 25-26.

⁹⁸ Gaastra, *Geschiedenis van de VOC*, 52-55.

⁹⁹ van Dijk et al., *The Archives of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and the Local Institutions in Batavia (Jakarta)*, 56.

¹⁰⁰ The fact that the OBP remained sealed and unaltered during their short stay on Ceylon before they were forwarded to Patria justifies the term direct shipping.

¹⁰¹ Vriend, "Het informatiesysteem van de Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie", 23.

¹⁰² R. Parthesius, *Dutch Ships in Tropical Waters the Development of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) Shipping Network in Asia 1595-1660* (Amsterdam, 2007), 49.

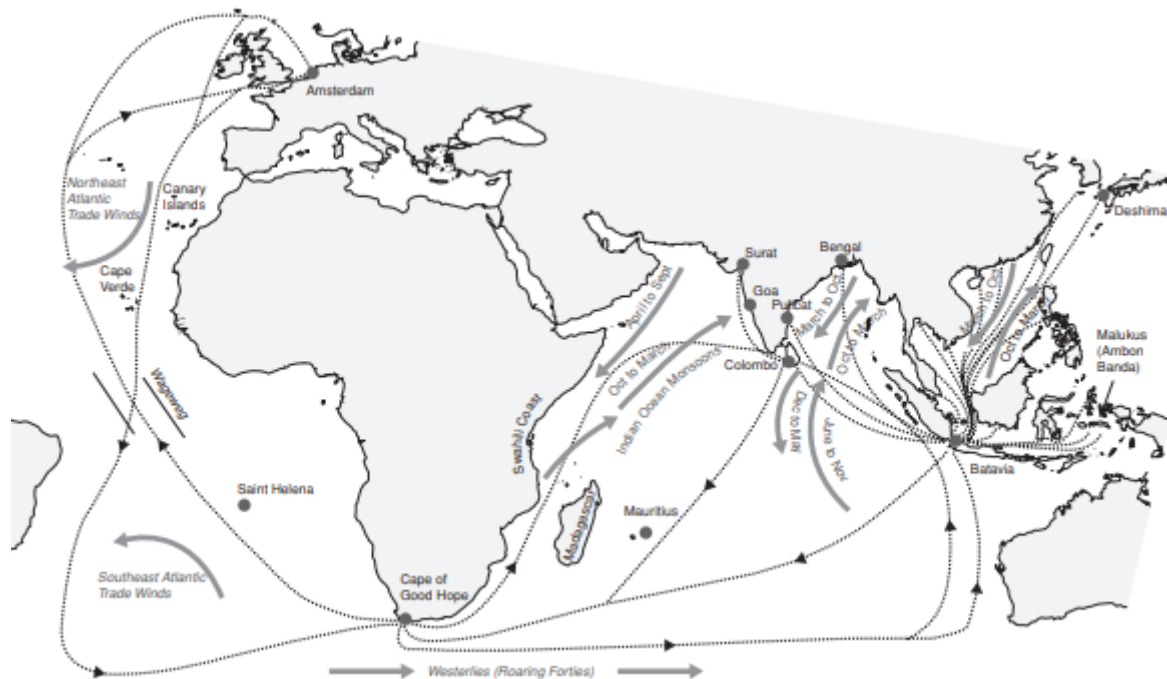
¹⁰³ Parthesius, *Dutch Ships in Tropical Waters*, 50.

¹⁰⁴ NA, VOC, 3086, 36-38; NA, VOC, 3086, 38-39; NA, VOC, 3086, 39-49; NA, VOC, 3086, 197-203; NA, VOC, 3086, 204-206; NA, VOC, 3086, 207; NA, VOC, 3086, 49-51; NA, VOC, 3086, 52-196.

¹⁰⁵ Dutch-Asiatic Shipping in the 17th and 18th centuries, <http://resources.huynens.knaw.nl/das>; These voyages are also available in print: J. R. Bruijn e.a., *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping in the 17th and 18th Centuries. Vol. III: Homeward-Bound Voyages from Asia and the Cape to the Netherlands (1597-1795)* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1979).

annually, ranging from late September to early January.¹⁰⁶ They reached the Cape of Good Hope between February and May, where the company vessels got refreshments. The 730 voyages from Batavia to Patria in the same period followed a similar trajectory. At the Cape of Good Hope the fleets from Ceylon and Batavia usually converged and sailed as one convoy to the Republic, where the fleets arrived between June and October.¹⁰⁷ During his term as governor general, Gustaaf Willem van Imhoff (1743-1750) decided that the first fleet had to depart to Patria before the end of October. This ensured that there would always be an arrival in the Republic in June. On average the voyage from Batavia to Patria took 239 days, slightly short of eight months, in the decades from 1720-1770, whereas the voyage from Ceylon only took 220 days on average.¹⁰⁸

Figure 2) Dutch Shipping Networks



Note: K. Ward, *Networks of Empire: Forced Migration in the Dutch East India Company*, Studies in Comparative World History (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 17.

¹⁰⁶ Moree, *Met vriend die God geleide*, 26.

¹⁰⁷ J. R. Bruijn, "Between Batavia and the Cape: Shipping Patterns of the Dutch East India Company", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 11, 2, (1980) 251-265, 258.

¹⁰⁸ Bruijn, "Between Batavia and the Cape", 265; Bruin, *Dutch Asiatic Shipping I*, 89.

The OBP: An Extracted Archive

Last chapter ended with an overview of the records and information that were created and maintained in Cochin. In this section I look at the amount of records forwarded to Patria, tables 1 and 2, and the types of documents forwarded, tables 3, 4, 5 and 6.¹⁰⁹ I compare the OBP with the Dutch archive in Cochin to distil how the OBP represented the records on the Malabar Coast. This analysis is critical to examine how the epistemic potential of the OBP, the ways through which Malabar could be known through these documents, changed the moment the shipments of documents boarded the homebound fleet and left the Malabar Coast.

Table 1) Directly Shipped OBP of Malabar

	Year of arrival in Patria							
	1727	1733	1739	1745	1751	1757	1763	1769
Documents	45	922	53	43	22	46	59	48
Pages	1303	4803	2338	1171	803	489	1109	650

Note: Made with the following indices on the OBP: NA, VOC, 2047-2049, 2226-2234, 2432-2435, 2624-2626, 2758-2759, 2877, 3055-3056, 3236-3237. See appendix 4 for some methodological considerations on the usage of 'pages'.

Table 2) Indirectly Shipped OBP of Malabar

	Year of arrival in Patria				
	1727	1733	1739	1745	1751
Documents	88	217	128	15	13
Pages	667	5821	1522	1111	931

Note: Made with the following indices on the OBP: 2054, 2248-2250, 2446, 2632, 2765. See appendix 4 for some methodological considerations on the usage of 'pages'.

Unsurprisingly, the principal records within the archive of Cochin returned within the OBP. As shown in tables 3, 4, 5 and 6 the proceedings of the *commandeur* and his council and the local diaries maintained in Cochin were annually sent over in full copies. Tables 4 and 6 show that these two records made up the bulk of the OBP in pages. Correspondence, mostly in the form of missives, made up a portion of the OBP. Most importantly were the missives to Patria and Batavia, but further included were missives to and from the various VOC establishments, as well as correspondence with local rulers and Europeans. As Bes noted in his research on the Dutch sources in Cochin, not all correspondence kept in Cochin was forwarded. While there were always some of these letters in the OBP, plenty of them never left the Malabar Coast.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ I put tables 3, 4, 5 and 6 at the end of this chapter. I wanted these tables within my narrative, but their size breaks the flow of my chapter. I did not include them as an appendix at the end of my thesis, because they are critical for understanding my argument.

¹¹⁰ Bes, 'Hundreds of Rosetta Stones and Other Patient Papers', 100-101.

Bookkeeping was forwarded as well, but not as complete copies of the *grootboeken* and *negotieboeken* maintained in Cochin. The OBP contained extracts of these records, transformed into new records as partial copies or summaries of these volumes. Instead of sprawling tomes of bookkeeping, the OBP contained shorter financial balances of Malabar as a whole, of various institutions, and balances divided by commodities. The general financial bookkeeping of Malabar was put in short *Staetreekeningen* of the *kantoor* as a whole, sometimes called the *generale winsten en lasten* and of various smaller institutions. Furthermore present from commercial bookkeeping were short records with the general overviews of commerce in the preceding period, *samentreckinghen*, and yields of specific commodities such as pepper and textile, called *rendementen*. The 1795 inventory did not mention these and bookkeepers most likely only made them for their journey to Patria and not to be kept for posterity in Cochin. A similar approach to the demographic, or census, data is visible. In Cochin clerks gathered these data in *monsterrollen*, voluminous lists on company personnel. In the OBP they included smaller lists, *rollen*, divided by citizens, company personnel, students and deserters. Again, bookkeepers made extracts of these larger records instead of full copies.

A small minority of document types almost never made it to the Dutch Republic however. Most prominent among those were records pertaining to the lives of individuals, such as the various legal documents or wedding licences for example. While these made up a considerable portion of the archive in Cochin, they OBP almost never contained those records. These findings are not surprising however, since Malabar did send them to Batavia, the administrative centre, just as the complete copies of the previously mentioned larger tomes, the *grootboeken*, *negotieboeken* and *monsterrollen*.¹¹¹ While I do not contend with the flow of administration between Malabar and Batavia in this thesis, it is important to understand that the flows of information to Patria and Batavia contained many differences. In conclusion, the OBP to Patria did not present an authentic representation of the records that company servants maintained in Cochin. The administration in Cochin left some document types out of the OBP, they did not forward all correspondence and they reconstructed bookkeeping and census data into completely new records. The OBP therefore never had a full epistemic potential regarding Malabar.

¹¹¹ I analysed the records sent from Malabar and Ceylon to Batavia for a research paper last semester. This was possible by looking at the *register der papieren*, a table of contents of the documents sent to Batavia, that was included in the indirectly shipped volumes from Batavia to Patria. Analysing those revealed that the larger administrative tomes as well as legal documents were actually sent to Batavia. R. van Tilburg, "Efficiency or Deficit? Changes in direct and indirect shipping in the eighteenth-century Dutch East India Company" (unpublished research paper, 2018).

These findings can be illustrated visually by looking at the curious case of the 1733 OBP. When compared with other years this year stands out, both in the amount of documents shipped as well as in the sorts of records. The OBP to Patria contained 10,624 that year, more than triple the amount of the second largest OBP. With a total of 1,139 documents the OBP of 1733 also contained twice more documents than all other years within this research combined. The curious makeup of the 1733 OBP had to do with *commandeur* Jacob de Jong (1723-1731). He was removed from office in 1731 by the High Government in Batavia because of charges of mismanagement, nepotism and corruption, through which he made numerous enemies with local rulers and company personnel in Malabar.¹¹² A committee under Wouter Hendrix, the governor of Ceylon, was set up to investigate these charges. Not surprisingly, this resulted in a spike of documents sent to both Batavia and Patria in the early 1730s. What this case shows is the enormous amount of records that could potentially be forwarded to Patria, but were usually kept on the Malabar Coast. Especially telling is the staggering amount of correspondence. 449 letters from within the *kantoor* were received in Patria in 1733, when usually they only received a handful. This year was also the only case when legal documents were forwarded to Patria. It almost seems as though the temporary committee in charge was unaware of how the OBP were normally compiled in Cochin or they wanted to be thorough in their investigation. Nevertheless, the case of the 1733 OBP shows us that in most years the OBP only reflected a small portion of the amount of correspondence and did not represent some record types at all. Before the packages with the OBP left the harbour of Cochin, its contents were already considerably different than what was maintained in the office of the *commandeur*.

Presenting the OBP

Now that the differences between the archive in Cochin and the OBP have been analysed, I look in this section further at the records that were forwarded over the various communication lines. I aim to recreate the annual stream of documents within the OBP, as visible in tables 3, 4, 5 and 6. From this stream I not only distil their contents, but also their structure and visibility within the whole of the OBP, through the way these documents ‘presented’ themselves to their readers. This is especially important because Marie Houlemare has shown in her dissection of the eighteenth-century French colonial archives that the visibility of information is an important nexus in order to understand how officials in the metropole could utilise the incoming piles of paper and I deem presentation therefore a useful variable within documentary practices.¹¹³

¹¹² *Generale missiven van gouverneurs-generaal en raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, IX: 1729-1737*, Edited by J. van Goor. (The Hague, 1988), 239.

¹¹³ Houlemare, “Seeing the Empire Through Lists and Charts”, 373-374, 382, 385.

Every year the bookkeepers structured the OBP to Patria in a semi-fixed order.¹¹⁴ Every shipment of documents started with a table of contents, the *register der papieren*. The first ‘real’ document was the missive, the letter from the *commandeur* of Malabar addressed to the recipient of the shipment, usually the Gentlemen XVII or the High Government in Batavia. This missive was followed by other missives from the past period between Malabar and the High Government. Missives summarised the documents within the shipment and should therefore be seen as the primary document within every shipment of documents. After these missives came most of the extracted records detailed in the previous section, such as the extracted bookkeeping and census data from the administration in Malabar. Various other documents were annually part of the OBP, such as reports by company personnel, contracts with other entities, and various documents concerning naval business. The bookkeepers in Cochin put the two largest records, which they copied entirely, at the end of the OBP: resolution books and local diaries. To understand how the OBP and its contents formed connections with each other I analyse the missives, resolution books and local diaries.

Missives: The Prime Document

Missives formed the entry to the OBP. Written by the *commandeur* of Malabar, they provided a summary of the previous period for the administration in Patria. Bookkeepers based these summaries on the contents of other documents within the OBP. As the first document in each shipment, the way in which it presented all other documents in the OBP, tells a lot about how the OBP were structured and made visible to readers. For this section I discuss the contents of three missives written from the commander in Malabar to the Gentlemen XVII, of 1738, 1744 and 1750.¹¹⁵

As was customary, missives began with an overview of which missives were sent and received on Malabar in the previous period. The commander stated when they sent their last missive to the Republic as well as which missives they had sent and received to and from the High Government in Batavia. After that introduction the missives went on to discuss the contents of the OBP. Based on these missives I have two general findings that relay how these

¹¹⁴ The order of these records can be checked by looking at the tables of contents, the *register der papieren*. For example: NA, VOC, 2432, Register der papieren naar patria in dato 4 November 1738, 1-14; NA, VOC, 2624, Register der papieren naar patria in dato 22 October 1744, 1-5.

¹¹⁵ NA, VOC, 2432, Origineele Missive door den Commandeur Julius Valentijn Steijn van Golonnesse benevens den Raad tot Cochim, aan de vergaderingh van Seventiene in dato 25 October 1738, 15-59; 2624, Origineele Missive door den Commandeur R Siersma en raad tot Cochin aan de vergaderingh van seventiene geschreven in dato 22 October 1744, 6-23; 2758, Origineele missive door den provisioneel gezaghebber Christiaan Baldewijn Fredrick van Wiesberg benevens den raad te Cochin aan de vergadering der heeren 17 geschreven in dato 31 October 1750, 4-34.

missives were used: Content-wise business information took precedent over other information and form-wise the missives created an integrated web of references with other documents within the OBP.

Financial, especially commercial information was by far the most important topic within each missive. Clerks wrote these topics at the front of the missives and gave them the most space. The missive of 1738 started with an overview of the company leases of land, *pachten*, the pepper contracts with local rulers and multiple reports from officials regarding these contracts.¹¹⁶ Furthermore it discussed the Dutch trade on cardamom, indigo, textile and timber, ending with the overall profits and losses, the *generale winsten en lasten*, of the company in Malabar as a whole from the extracted bookkeeping discussed previously.¹¹⁷ The missive of October 1744 also dealt primarily with the profits of the company, the company leases, and the yields, *rendementen*, of the different trade commodities.¹¹⁸ It listed these figures in a digestible few pages for quick access to these numbers. Just as in 1738 the important pepper trade was widely discussed.¹¹⁹ The missive of 1750 focussed more on the textile trade, but trade was the most important subject in this missive as well.¹²⁰ These financial, and especially commercial, accounts made up roughly the first half of the missives, clearly establishing their importance.

Where the first part followed a strict business narrative, the topics of the second part of the missives read more ad hoc. In 1750 this second part of the missive was called ‘De Huijselijke Saken’, clearly demarcating two intently different halves of the missive.¹²¹ This part had some annually returning topics, such as reports on the general state of the fortifications on Malabar, census data on citizens and students and some general summaries of various institutions, most notably annual state of the leper house near Cochin.¹²² These were however always dealt with after most of the financial reports and always less thoroughly, which shows that these various ad hoc subjects were less important than the first part of the missive. Hew Bowen showed for the East India Company that despatches, letters comparable with missives, diversified more over the course of the eighteenth century and that diplomacy, government and military topics within them became the more important because of the increased political activity of the EIC in India. Despite political tensions in Malabar in the 1740s and 1750s,

¹¹⁶ NA, VOC, 2432, Missive 25 October 1738, 16-22.

¹¹⁷ NA, VOC, 2432, Missive 25 October 1738, 19-38, 43.

¹¹⁸ NA, VOC, 2624, Missive 22 October 1744, 8-13.

¹¹⁹ NA, VOC, 2624, Missive 22 October 1744, 17-23.

¹²⁰ NA, VOC, 2758, Missive 31 October 1750, 4-14.

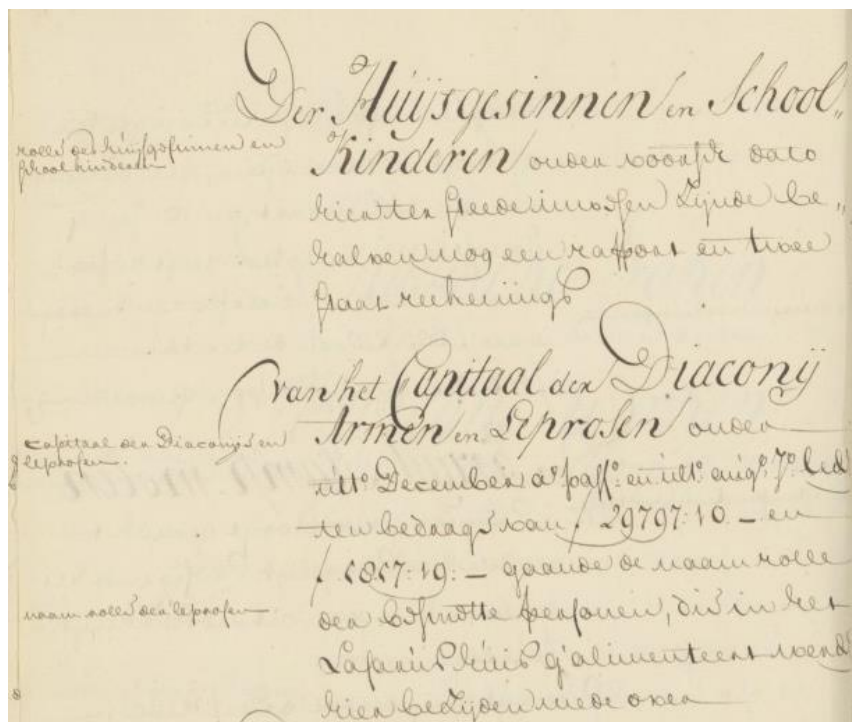
¹²¹ NA, VOC, 2758, Missive 31 October 1750, 14.

¹²² NA, VOC, 2432, Missive 25 October 1738, 46, 57; 2624, Missive 22 October 1744, 14-15; 2758, Missive 31 October 1750, 16, 20.

politics is kept to a minimum in these missives of the VOC and only mentioned in relation to commercial activity.¹²³

More interesting than the contents of the missives are the ways that bookkeepers inserted formal tools to open up the contents of the OBP to readers. The missives had various formal tools to represent information within the OBP. Marginalia, short sentences in the margins that summarised the body text, were used throughout these records as well as headings for important subjects. These were utilised to bind together all documents through connections with the missive. Take for example figure 3 below. The contents, census data, are made clear by the header stating 'Der Huijsgesinnen en School Kinderen' and the margin stating 'rolle der huijsgesinnen en schoolkinderen.'¹²⁴ The table of contents at the start of the OBP, showed company officials that the records pertaining to these topics within the OBP were called 'Origineele rolle der huijsgezinnen' and 'Origineele rolle der schoolkinderen'.¹²⁵ By referring in their margins and headers to the titles of documents further in the OBP, the missive acted as the gateway to the OBP which made the pile of documents accessible and digestible for readers.

Figure 3) References within Missives



Note: NA, VOC, 2758, Missive 31 October 1750, 16.

¹²³ Bowen, *The Business of Empire*, 158.

¹²⁴ NA, VOC, 2758, Missive 31 October 1750, 16.

¹²⁵ NA, VOC, 2758, Register der Papieren, 2.

The other example, below the census data in figure 3, shows a similar structure. The header, ‘van het Capitaal der Diaconij Armen en Leprosen’ and margin, ‘capitaal der diaconij en leprosen’ overlapped almost perfectly with their document titles in the table of contents: ‘Staat reeckening van de diaconie armen’ and ‘origineele staat reeckening van ‘t leprosen huijs tot Paliaporto.’¹²⁶ Furthermore, bookkeepers wrote the main balances of these institutions down in the short overview in the missive. Those bookkeepers provided most of the noteworthy information of these documents already in the missive and checking the original document was only necessary for proof or elaboration. Documents in the OBP should therefore be thought of not as documents on their own, but as intrinsically connected to the missives. I believe the value of the various documents further in the OBP was not as documents on their own, but rather as proof, justification or elaboration on their summary in the missives.

Such formal tools were critical for the functioning of imperial information networks. Vriend stated that effective digestion of the missives required these margins and headers, since officials were reprimanded by Batavia if they presented incoherent missives without them.¹²⁷ Sellers-Garcia also showed that colonial administrations relied on uniform documentary protocols through formal attributes, because it was impossible for clerks to comprehend the vast amount of information from all over the Spanish empire without them.¹²⁸ However, both authors also stated that misuse, either by deliberately misrepresenting information in a missive or by accidentally forgetting to include margins, paralysed the workings of colonial administrations.¹²⁹ From the point of officials in Patria who had to digest these OBP to gather knowledge on Malabar, using these missives meant quick concise knowledge, but also vulnerability to epistemic attrition if the bookkeepers in Cochin had made vital errors. Missives and appended documents therefore intrinsically reinforced one another.

Analysing how missives, the gateway to the OBP, presented other records within the shipment, gives a first indication of how the bookkeepers in Cochin made the OBP accessible to readers. Business information was presented as the most important information and margins and headers were utilised to tie the missives with the other documents in the OBP. These practices made the OBP digestible for company officials, making the actualisation of its epistemic potential easier. However, such systems were also prone to error, either deliberately

¹²⁶ NA, VOC, 2758, Register der Papieren, 2-3.

¹²⁷ Vriend, “Het informatiesysteem van de Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie”, 84.

¹²⁸ Sellers-Garcia, *Distance and Documents*, 31-32.

¹²⁹ Sellers-Garcia, *Distance and Documents*, 32; Vriend, “Het informatiesysteem van de Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie”, 83-85.

or accidentally, and the next section further investigates how this web of references sometimes obscured documents in the OBP.

Local Diaries and Resolution Books: Invisibility through Abundance

The previous section showed that most documents within the OBP functioned as appendices to the missives of the *commandeur*, easily traceable by margins and headers. Sometimes the connections between missive and record were harder to trace however. Paradoxically, the two largest series of records every year were the hardest to trace back to the missive: the proceedings of the council in Cochin and the local diaries of correspondence with local rulers. In this section I explore how bookkeepers presented these records in the OBP the least visible, even though they accounted for two thirds of the amount of pages within the OBP.¹³⁰

Resolution books and local diaries can be considered atypical for the general makeup of Malabar's OPB to Patria. Bookkeepers in Cochin generally made a selection instead of sending all documents of a certain type, as happened with correspondence, or restructured the voluminous sources into smaller, more concise reports, like they did with bookkeeping. They copied the resolution books and diaries in their entirety however, instead of selecting a small amount of proceedings or important letters with local rulers and only sending those. These books covered the complete administrative year. The local diaries of Malabar also differed from other records in the sense that only Malabar shipped them annually to Patria. For the other *kantoren* it is unknown if they even produced these sources in the first place. Since they only contained correspondence with local rulers and no *kantoor* had such a wide network of correspondence with local rulers as Malabar, it seems likely that only Cochin produced them.

Every diary of the period concerned here started with an alphabetical table of contents of all local rulers that the VOC had contact with on the Malabar Coast, accompanied by a chronological list of the correspondence between them and the *commandeur*. Every entry started with a short note by the bookkeeper, which mentioned on which day and from or to whom a letter was addressed, followed by a copy of the letter. The bulk of these entries were mere copies of *olas*, letters on a palm leaf. The information within these local diaries is too broad to pin down completely, because translators wrote all correspondence down in them, from political events to commerce, in the form of official statements to rumours and from eloquent writing to staccato statements. By reading those diaries it is clear that most correspondence concerned commercial topics. This is not surprising considering the importance

¹³⁰ Established by calculation how much of the OBP was comprised of these resolution books and local diaries. The proceedings made up roughly 32% of the OBP, and the local diaries 33% over the period 1727-1769. Since local diaries were only sent directly and not indirectly this figure is only for the directly shipped OBP.

of trade with local rulers on the coast. An *ola* of the Raja of Porca (Purakkad) to Cochin concerning logistical arrangements for the pepper trade is exemplary for the mostly trivial entries within these diaries.¹³¹ Diplomatic or political information was common in these letters as well, for example the correspondence between the Raja of Cochin and the *commandeur* concerning problems that the Raja had with the Zamorin of Calicut.¹³²

Since these local diaries were shipped in their entirety to Patria and not merely as extracts for specific sections within the missive, they contained a lot of redundant information from the perspective of the company narrative within the missive. This meant that to make the important entries stand out, the bookkeeper's references needed to be clear when writing the missive. The local diary of 1744 contained no less than 93 letters to and from Travancore, 50 to and from Calicut and 184 to and from Cochin and only a fraction of those ever appeared in a missive.¹³³ For example, the Moeriannattij Nambiaar, the Raja of Alangadu (Alangad) within the kingdom of Cochin, was mentioned in the 1738 missive because he was reluctant to deliver the agreed amount of pepper to the Dutch in Cochin.¹³⁴ The margins and header only referred to the name of the local ruler. Only within the body text did the bookkeeper refer to letters of 16 July and 23 July, yet no further clues were given to where these could be found. The *register der papieren* did not list *olas* with those dates. Even the report by company merchant Nicolaas Bowijn about his contracts with local rulers did not contain anything on this specific ruler.¹³⁵ Only by knowing that these letters were usually part of the local diary could these letters be found. Since the table of contents at the start of the local diary of 1738 already spanned more than ten pages, finding the right letters was made even more of a chore.¹³⁶ The absence of explicit references to the local diaries in the missive as well as the sheer amount of irrelevant letters in these diaries, made the contents of the diaries less visible for company personnel than their size would suggest.

Most of these findings also apply to the proceedings in the resolution books. These contained the proceedings of the *commandeur* and his council in Cochin. They met up to twice a week, discussed all recent events, correspondence, reports and made decisions on how to act

¹³¹ NA, VOC, 2433, Copia inlandsch dagregister zedert primo October 1737 tot ultimo september 1738, 777.

¹³² NA, VOC, 2433, Inlandsch dagregister 1737-1738, 857.

¹³³ NA, VOC, 2433, Inlandsch dagregister 1737-1738, 212, 969.

¹³⁴ D. Jong, 'Great kings, little king en de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie. Een kijk op de relaties in en rond het gesegmenteerde Cochinse rijk in de periode 1725-1750.' (Master's thesis, Leiden University, 2017), 25, 79; NA, VOC, 2432, Missive 25 October 1738, 26.

¹³⁵ NA, VOC, 2432, Rapport van de commissianten Nicolaas Bowijn en Marcellis Bles wegens hun verrigtingen in 't sluijten van peper contracten met de koopliujden van Coilan, Cailicoilan, Peza en Porca dato 27 September 1738, 175-204.

¹³⁶ NA, VOC, 2433 Inands dagregister 1737-1738, 212-226.

upon them. Bookkeepers present at these meetings wrote down the notes and bundled them together in chronological series. In the eighteenth century they added tools to traverse these resolution books: a table of contents ordered by meeting at the front, with a short summary or title of every decision made during these meetings as well as marginalia. Readers needed those to traverse their contents, because length ranged from 135 to 919 pages.

It is impossible to exactly pinpoint the information within these resolution books, since they could contain information on any topic. The *commandeur* and council discussed a wide array of topics such as commercial events, logistics, encounters with non-company officials, the contents of reports and letters, rumours and gossip. In the resolution book of October 1743 to August 1744 the bookkeeper recorded 65 meetings, which prompted no less than one thousand decisions by the council.¹³⁷ Every meeting started with a short introduction by the commander and subsequently dealt with all the agenda points of the day. Sometimes events were discussed in a few sentences, yet other times bookkeepers copied full reports in the resolutions. Most of these entries within the resolution books related to daily company life Cochin, such as a report by senior merchant Nicolaas Bowijn about the poor relief of the deacon in Cochin.¹³⁸ Most of these were informative, such as the meeting of 30 March 1744 in which the council discussed the arrival of Jacob Dam, a company official from Cannanore and the information he had brought from that VOC settlement.¹³⁹

Just as with the local diaries, the missives only mentioned a small minority of the resolutions. When bookkeepers mentioned resolutions, they did not integrate them into the margins or headers of the missives, but only wrote them passingly in the body text. An example is in the missive of 25 October 1738 on the subject of the cardamom trade. In the body text the bookkeeper referred to a resolution made on 22 August. None of the margins or headers referred to this resolution however. Considering the vast amount of proceedings, one would expect more references to them within the missives. Glancing over the missives reveals that references to proceedings were only included only a handful of times per missive. Considering the vast amount of proceedings it seems unlikely that only so little proceedings contained relevant information to back up the content of the missives.

The resolution books and local diaries therefore served as a paradox for the presentation of information to Patria. On the one hand they contained detailed information on wide-ranging

¹³⁷ NA, VOC, 2626, *Resolutien in rade van politie genomen binnen de stad Couchim zedert 15 October 1743 tot 31 Augustij 1744 met een register daarvoor*, 847-866.

¹³⁸ NA, VOC, 2626, *Resolutien in rade van politie*, 960-961.

¹³⁹ NA, VOC, 2626, *Resolutien in rade van politie*, 996-997.

topics on almost a daily basis. However on the other hand, information within them was almost never specifically alluded to by the missives. Whenever bookkeepers included resolutions in the missives, they only referred to them in the body text and not in the margins or headers. How this influenced the epistemic potential of these two records for company officials should not be understated. Hew Bowen argued that one of the most important changes in the information system of the EIC was that from the mid-eighteenth century onwards clerks were mandated to refer to all ‘consultations’ and ‘proceedings’, records comparable with diaries and resolution books, in the margins of their despatches. According to him the integration of clear references to these detailed workings of the company drastically increased their assessment of how directives were followed by officials in Asia. In turn, this increased policy effectiveness and the company’s grasp on its assets in India.¹⁴⁰

Where other documents seemed to have been included specifically to support information within the missives, these books were forwarded as complete copies. This raises questions on how the *commandeur* intended these records to be used. Most likely Malabar was mandated to forward these complete series annually. Yet, by forwarding these books in their entirety made the important proceedings and letters with local rulers less visible. This was exacerbated by only referring to these in the body text, instead of in the margins and headers as was the case for other documents. Marie Houllémare stated that when French colonial officials finally started forwarding detailed registers to Paris in the mid-eighteenth century, visibility and policy effectiveness was greatly increased.¹⁴¹ While I agree with her that these records had epistemic potential for the company, Bowen more convincingly showed that visibility was furthermore affected by the way in which information was presented within a system of clear references. I conclude that based on their presentation as full copies that were less integrated with the missives than other documents, the full epistemic potential of these records was not presented by the missives. Since these were the most important documents in each shipment and provided access to the rest of the OBP, its failure to integrate them decreased epistemic potential and resulted in epistemic attrition of the OBP as a whole. I hypothesize furthermore based on my findings that a distinction can be made on intent for the shipping and usage by of these records, with the resolution books and diaries on one side and the other documents in the OBP on the other side.

¹⁴⁰ Bowen, *The Business of Empire*, 152-154, 158-160.

¹⁴¹ Houllémare, “Seeing the Empire Through Lists and Charts”, 377-378.

Changing Networks

After analysing the contents of the documents in the OBP, I now return to the OBP as a whole. In this section I analyse how the annual stream of documents, distilled in the previous section, changed over the course of the eighteenth century. In this section I analyse those changes, how they affected the information flow from Batavia to Patria, and I infer what they reveal about the importance and use of certain records within the OBP as well as its effect on the epistemic potential of the OBP.

Whereas the same types of documents kept making up the directly sent OBP from 1727 to 1769, indirect shipping changed drastically.¹⁴² The indirectly shipped OBP showed many similarities in types of documents to the directly shipped OBP, with the chief difference being that local diaries were never forwarded indirectly, only directly. However, important developments in Batavia during the 1740s and 1750s radically changed the makeup of the indirectly shipped records to Patria drastically. During van Imhoff's reign as governor general (1743-1750) the workings of the administration in Batavia changed profoundly. In the general missive of 15 October 1743 van Imhoff stated that 'Concerning the outer settlements we will only forward the missives and resolutions from now on. The books have become so voluminous over the past few years, that we could not handle them anymore.'¹⁴³ Tables 5 and 6 show how that change caused a thorough reduction in the amount of documents sent from Malabar to Patria. Company-wide the indirect OBP changed from a total of 1,511 documents received in 1743, to 460 in 1744, which were sent after the reform of 1743.¹⁴⁴ The *generale secretarie* was clearly having difficulties digesting and copying the OBP. This decision to cut down the OBP in size coalesced with Vriend's findings that in 1743 the *generale secretarie* also changed how it archived the incoming administration from the *kantoren* in general. He also framed these developments within broader reforms to curtail the growing mass of paper in Batavia.¹⁴⁵ Another likely reason for these changes can be found in the wider enlightened ideals and

¹⁴² Based on tables 1 and 4 one could argue that there was an important drop in amount of directly sent pages to Patria over the course of the eighteenth century. Table 4 reveals that the local diaries shrank in size, containing only 96 pages in 1769. However, the local diaries of 1770 and 1771 both contained 337 and 464 pages respectively, making the downward trend in pages seem more like annual fluctuations. See NA, VOC, 3296, Inlandsch dagverhaal zedert 2 October 1769 en eindigende 29 September 1770, 1-337; NA, VOC, 3327, Inlandsch dagverhaal zedert 2 October 1770 en eindigende 27 September 1771, 1-464.

¹⁴³ *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, XI: 1743-1750*, Edited by J. E. Schooneveld-Oosterling (The Hague, 1997), 21.

¹⁴⁴ Calculated by looking up the inventory numbers of these two years in the OBP index on the website of the National Archives. This index shows the amount of documents in each inventory number. By adding those up manually I got these numbers. NA, VOC, 2565-2589, 2605-2611.

¹⁴⁵ Vriend, 'Het informatiesysteem van de Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie', 30.

reforms of van Imhoff and his successors to make the company more efficient, as detailed by Jacob Johan Steur in his analysis of reforms in the final decades of the company's existence.¹⁴⁶

After 1743 the OBP from Batavia to Patria only contained missives and resolutions books. This reaffirms my argument that the value of most records lied in how clerks portrayed them in the missives, instead of as standalone documents, since after 1743 their contents only reached Patria through summaries in the missives. While Van Imhoff framed the reform as a measure to regain control of the piles of paper, an increase in efficiency can be argued as a result of these changes, since the removed documents were already mostly dealt with by the missives. This process hinged on the faithful adaptation of these documents into the missives however, which I have shown was always a concern. Patria could in theory request that certain documents were to be forwarded from Batavia, since besides the missives and resolution books they also obtained a *register der papieren* of all documents left behind in Batavia.¹⁴⁷ Considering that such requests took years before they resulted in the arrival of the necessary documents in Patria, Patria was mostly reliant on the summaries of these records in their missives. I believe this shows that the value of the OBP was almost completely expressed by the missives. Furthermore it shows that the resolution books most likely had a different function than the other records within the OBP. If bookkeepers included these as well to support the missives, they would most likely have been cut as well. Since proceedings were vital for records to establish how the *commandeur* governed Malabar it seems likely that they were still considered important to have in Patria.

The consequences of the 1743 reform for Malabar should not be overstated however. Even taking into account the possible mistakes in missives and the inability to crosscheck them with other documents, Patria could still rely on the direct shipments from Malabar that contained almost all those documents anyway. For the *westerkwartieren* these reforms can therefore be considered efficient, since it gave the *general secretarie* a better grasp on their administration, while not limiting the epistemic potential of Malabar for Patria. Furthermore, information was always secured since the missives still reached Patria from Batavia. Patria still received the most vital documents from Malabar, even if the fleet from Ceylon wrecked. These developments were more impactful from an epistemic point of view for the *kantoren* that only

¹⁴⁶ J. J. Steur, *Herstel of ondergang: de voorstellen tot redres van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, 1740-1795* (Utrecht, 1984), 43-47; See also Jonathan Israel's section on the enlightenment in Batavia in the 1740s and 1750s, J. Israel, *The Dutch Republic, Its Rise, Greatness and Fall (1477-1806)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 1057-1060.

¹⁴⁷ See for example NA, VOC, 2765, Register der Papieren gedateerd 22 October 1749, 1-6. This tabel of contents was not of the shipment itself, but of the records that were received in Batavia. Comparing this table of contents with the table of contents of the shipment reveals which records were not forwarded to Patria.

shipped documents indirectly through Batavia, which applied to the vast majority of establishments.

The contents of the indirectly shipped OBP of these *westerkwartieren* changed again a few years later, because from 1756 onwards indirect shipping of OBP to Patria for Malabar stopped completely. Direct shipping became the sole communication line.¹⁴⁸ It is important to note that the disappearance of indirect shipping only happened for *kantoren* that had direct shipping. For all other *kantoren* the situation stayed as it had been since 1743. The general missives did not explain why Batavia stopped forwarding the OBP of these *westerkwartieren*. The missive of 13 April 1756 stated that for Coromandel, another *kantoor* in South-Asia for which indirect shipping stopped in this period, the letters would only be sent directly through Ceylon, but no reason was given.¹⁴⁹ Likely arguments for the disappearance of indirect shipping are twofold. Firstly, Batavia deemed it too costly or overburdening on the *generale secretarie*. Steur's analysis of wider administrative reforms aimed at reducing costs in Batavia shows that the reforms of the OBP can be interpreted in this light as well.¹⁵⁰ A second argument can be made that the High Government made these changes in a conscious effort to increase the network's efficiency. The elimination of indirect shipping only happened for *kantoren* that had a direct shipping line through which the same records were forwarded. Even the missives of Malabar to Batavia, that were sent indirectly from Batavia to Patria, were always sent as copies directly as well. By eliminating indirect shipping from these *kantoren*, clerks in Batavia saved a lot of seemingly redundant time copying. Despite the disappearance of the missives, which made the administration in Patria completely reliant on the safe arrival of the fleet from Ceylon, the general missives from Batavia still summarised the missives of Malabar in their narrative. The reliance on the general missives should only be thought of as a last resort for Patria however, since the presentation of information within the general missive was based on two layers of summaries, first from document to missive and then from missive to general missive. This process of crunching information through two layers of summaries was bound to bring up errors in the general missive.

This all did not matter if the fleet of Ceylon reached Patria safely, because the directly shipped OBP contained all documents. These findings indicate that despite the changes in the

¹⁴⁸ According to Meilink-Roelofs inventory Malabar, Coromandel and Bengal disappeared from 1756 onwards, Persia from 1757 onwards and Surat from 1766 onwards. Indirect shipping for Ceylon had already stopped in 1743 during the first reforms.

¹⁴⁹ *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, XIII: 1756-1761*, Edited by H. K. 's Jacob (The Hague, 2007), 3.

¹⁵⁰ Steur, *Herstel of ondergang*, 50-54.

indirect shipping line of Batavia to Patria, the information flow to Patria stayed relatively similar for Malabar. Their access to a direct communication line made the reform of 1743 an efficient one for them, where it most likely had considerable epistemic implications for other *kantoren* without direct communication. The changes of 1756 were most likely a continuation hereof, since the directly shipped OBP still provided Patria with all the administration of Cochin. Despite the clear reduction in OBP shipped, these developments most likely had no real epistemic consequences for Malabar.

Conclusion

The moment the OBP left the harbour of Cochin, they already significantly differed from the archive in Cochin. Answering how documentary practices and the information network altered the epistemic potential of the OBP needs the disclaimer that the OBP never authentically represented the full extent of Dutch records on the Malabar Coast in the first place. This lowered the epistemic potential of the OBP to some extent, since it did not incorporate legal records and documents pertaining to individuals. With that in mind, the OBP did have recurring contents however, which I analysed through the missives, local diaries and resolution books. My approach to documentary practices revealed that the missives should be regarded as the most vital documents for the information network of the company. Every analysis of the epistemic potential of the OBP therefore needs to incorporate these missives. Their inclusion of summaries, with structured references in margins and headers to the documents they summarised, could increase visibility and epistemic potential. I hypothesise that most other documents in those shipments were not important as documents on their own, but only to the extent to which they provided further justification, proof or elaboration to information within the missives. However, by bad implementation of these structures the OBP's presentation and visibility was weakened, resulting in a decrease in epistemic potential, or epistemic attrition. The analysis of the two larger series of records, the resolution books and local diaries, showed epistemic attrition in practice. Despite being full copies and the largest documents in the OBP, they were the least visible. Bookkeepers integrated them poorly into the missives, making their contents less visible and their detailed day-to-day information on Malabar less integrated and most likely known to Patria.

Reforms in Batavia in the 1740s and 1750s radically changed the OBP in the information network of the company. First the *generale secretarie* removed most documents from the indirectly shipped OBP and only forwarded the missives and resolution books. Some years later they stopped indirect shipping completely for the *westerkwartieren*. While these changes seem

impactful at first glance, they most likely had no effect for the epistemic potential of the Malabar OBP, since direct shipping still provided all documents to Patria. I argued therefore that we can consider them as efficient means of saving time for Batavia and reducing costs. These changes most likely had more impact on *kantoren* that had no access to a direct communication line and were from 1743 only represented by the missives they indirectly sent to Patria.

Overall, documentary practices and the information network altered epistemic potential in multiple ways throughout this chapter. Firstly, the OBP never represented the full extent of records and information on the Malabar Coast. Secondly, missives, which need to be regarded as the lifelines of the information network had both the ability to increase epistemic potential through digestible summaries, but did also obscure and limit epistemic potential through a bad implementation of references. Lastly, while not being impactful for Malabar, the information network of the company most likely had profound effect on the epistemic potential of the OBP from *kantoren* with no direct shipping. By understanding how these factors influenced the epistemic potential of the OBP, I now shift my focus to the arrival of the OBP in the Dutch Republic and the way in which they were used there by the *Haags Besogne* as sources of knowledge on Malabar.

Table 3) Direct Shipping of Malabar in documents

Types of documents	Amount of documents received per year							
	1727	1733	1739	1745	1751	1757	1763	1769
Diaries*								
Regular diaries		1		(1)				
Local diaries	2	3(1)	1	1	1	1	1	1
Resolutions*	1	1(8)	1	1	1	1	1	1
Correspondence of Malabar								
With Patria	1	1	2	1	2	2	2	2
With Batavia	7	4	7	8	3	11	13	10
Within <i>kantoor</i>	14	449	2	2				10
With other <i>kantoren</i>		63						
With other Europeans		5	1	1				3
With local rulers		245	3	6	1	10	8	
Misc. Documents								
Agreement, Contract, Requests		3	4	1			3	
Report of Mission, Instructions	8	51	15	6	2	2	8	3
Legal Documents		57						
Demographic and Census Data								
<i>Monsterrollen</i>			1			1		
Citizens	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1
Students	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Various (mostly deserters)	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2
Bookkeeping								
Accounts								
Demands						2	2	1
General overviews	3	6	1		2	3	1	1
<i>Grootboeken</i>		1						
Balance of <i>kantoor</i>		1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Balance of institutions	1	3	3	3	3	3	2	2
Yields, <i>Rendementen</i>	4	5	1	4	1	1	1	1
Misc. bookkeeping			1			3	3	4
Naval Documents								
Ship movements		1					1	1
Naval power				1				
Other naval related documents		2	2					

Note: NA, VOC, 2047-2049, 2226-2234, 2432-2435, 2624-2626, 2758-2759, 2877, 3055-3056, 3236-3237. My classification was made through a rearrangement of TANAP's classification system. See appendices 2 and 3 for how I rearranged them.

* For the diaries and resolutions the numbers reflect a series of documents instead of just one document. The amount of extracts are in brackets.

Table 4) Direct Shipping of Malabar in pages

Types of documents	Amount of pages received per year							
	1727	1733	1739	1745	1751	1757	1763	1769
Diaries								
Regular diaries		430		14				
Local diaries	524	905	1017	354	313	158	416	91
Resolutions	479	661	919	300	338	135	286	293
Correspondence of Malabar								
With Patria	83	115	50	17	36	15	45	20
With Batavia	156	90	106	73	84	112	250	118
Within <i>kantoor</i>	13	974	10	10				26
With other <i>kantoren</i>		212						1
With other Europeans		14	9	1				3
With local rulers		280	7	11	2	13	21	
Misc. Documents								
Agreement, Contract, Request		24	10	1			6	
Reports and Instructions	22	611	171	25	6	2	21	6
Legal Documents		347						
Demographic and Census Data								
<i>Monsterrollen</i>			3			12		
Citizens	1	1	1	10	1	7	9	8
Students	3	3	3	1	1	2	2	2
Various (mostly deserters)	1	37	2	1	3	3	3	4
Bookkeeping								
Accounts								
Demands	3	7	1	9	3	3	3	2
General overviews			19			3	1	1
<i>Grootboeken</i>		1						
Balance of the <i>kantoor</i>		1	14	10	5	8	8	5
Balance of institutions	13	7	4	6	4	4	4	5
Yields, <i>Rendementen</i>	1	2	4	8	4	5	5	9
Misc. bookkeeping		16				4	3	6
Naval Documents								
Ship movements		1		1			13	42
Naval power								
Other naval related documents		5	4					

Note: NA, VOC, 2047-2049, 2226-2234, 2432-2435, 2624-2626, 2758-2759, 2877, 3055-3056, 3236-3237. See furthermore appendix 4 for a detailed overview of the pros and cons of the usage of pages in this regard.

* For the diaries and resolutions the numbers reflect a series of documents instead of just one document. The amount of extracts are in brackets.

Table 5) Indirect Shipping of Malabar in documents

Types of documents	Amount of documents received per year				
	1727	1733	1739	1745	1751
Diaries					
Regular diaries	(10)	2			
Local diaries		1(2)			
Resolutions		1(7)	1(4)	1	4
Correspondence of Malabar					
With Patria	1				
With Batavia	10	3	9	8	5
Within <i>kantoor</i>	34	77	18		
With other <i>kantoren</i>	1	4			
With other Europeans	1	4	1	1	
With local rulers	3	23	9	1	
Misc. Documents					
Agreement, Contract, Request		3	8		
Reports and Instructions	9	21	39		
Legal Documents		20			
Demographic and Census Data					
<i>Monsterrollen</i>			2		
Citizens	1				
Students					
Various (mostly deserters)					
Bookkeeping					
Accounts		3			
Demands	1	2			
General overviews	2	5	1		
<i>Grootboeken</i>					
Balance of the <i>kantoor</i>	1		1		
Balance of institutions	3	4			
Yields, <i>Rendementen</i>	4	5	6		
Misc. bookkeeping		5	4		
Naval Documents					
Ship movements	1	2	1		
Naval power		1	4		
Other naval related documents		21	6		

Note: NA, VOC, 2054, 2248-2250, 2446, 2632, 2765.

* For the diaries and resolutions the numbers reflect a series of documents instead of just one document. The amount of extracts are in brackets.

Table 6) Indirect Shipping of Malabar in pages

Types of documents	Amount of documents received per year				
	1727	1733	1739	1745	1751
Diaries					
Regular diaries	62	836			
Local diaries		1123			
Resolutions		244	629	919	735
Correspondence of Malabar					
With Patria	89				
With Batavia	206	387	126	145	166
Within <i>kantoor</i>	62	1660	102		
With other <i>kantoren</i>	40	56			
With other Europeans	3	23	13	4	
With local rulers	17	335	35	5	
Misc. Documents					
Agreement, Contract, Request		23	24		
Reports and Instructions	83	352	390		
Legal Documents		477			
Demographic and Census Data					
<i>Monsterrollen</i>			31		
Citizens	3				
Students					
Various (mostly deserters)					
Bookkeeping					
Accounts		6			
Demands	3	18			
General overviews	18	42	2		
<i>Grootboeken</i>					
Balance of the <i>kantoor</i>	13				
Balance of institutions	17	55	1		
Yields, <i>Rendementen</i>	9	13	8		
Other bookkeeping		15	23		
Naval Documents					
Ship movements	7	8	4		
Naval power		1	50		
Other naval related documents		85	23		

Note: NA, VOC, 2054, 2248-2250, 2446, 2632, 2765.

* For the diaries and resolutions the numbers reflect a series of documents instead of just one document. The amount of extracts are in brackets.

3. Actualising Malabar

‘For 66 years this establishment has not made profit’. With this short entry Jacob van Ghesel summarised the 1752 OBP of Malabar in his personal notes.¹⁵¹ Van Ghesel (1703-1773) was one of the twenty directors of the Amsterdam chamber from 1757 to his death and one of the four representatives for that chamber in the *Haags Besogne*. He had many tasks as a member of the *Besogne*, most notably dissecting the OBP and writing summaries and policy suggestions for the Gentlemen XVII. Since the various records converged into the hands of its members, understanding the workings of the *Haags Besogne* is critical for assessing how the OBP were used to produce knowledge on Malabar. The central question of this chapter is therefore: how did the practices of the *Haags Besogne*’s actualise the epistemic potential of the OBP? First I give a general overview of how the OBP moved through the various institutions in Patria, from the arrival to their departure as policy a year later. Those insights serve to contextualise how the *Haags Besogne* tied in with the wider administration. After that I focus on the *Besogne* itself, where I give context to its origin and tasks before I analyse how they wrote their *verbalen* through a documentary approach to usage: which records they used, how they used them and what information they focussed on. Finally, I infer how this methodology actualised the epistemic frame through Malabar was known by the Gentlemen XVII.

Internal Flow of Information

On 10 June 1751 the vessels *Krabbendijke* and *Herstelde* arrived on Texel from Ceylon and Batavia, loaded with the cargo and administration from the *kantoren* in Asia for the Amsterdam chamber of the company.¹⁵² In the same period vessels docked in other regions of the Republic with cargo for the other five chambers of the company: Zeeland, Delft, Rotterdam, Hoorn and Enkhuizen. Clerks immediately dispatched reports to the various bodies of the company after the fleet’s arrival from Asia. On approval of the directors and shareholders the packages with administration were opened and sorted by the clerks of the writing office of the Amsterdam chamber. They bound the OBP in distinct tomes and gave them a new table of contents.¹⁵³ They divided the OBP from Asia threefold, between the directly sent *Brievenboeken*, the indirect *Inkomende Brievenboeken* from Batavia and a collection of outgoing missive from Batavia to

¹⁵¹ NA, Collection Van Ghesel, 48, Extracts from the OBP, Malabar, klyne annotation of abstracten uyt verbaalen gemaakt, unfolliated.

¹⁵² Bruijn, *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping in the 17th and 18th Centuries. Vol. III.*, 398

¹⁵³ Vriend, “Het informatiesysteem van de Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie”, 48-49; The OBP that can be accessed in the National Archives got their final form at the writing office.

the various *kantoren*, the *Afgaande Brievenboeken*.¹⁵⁴ The directors in the Amsterdam chamber discussed the missives only two days later in their meeting of 12 June 1751.¹⁵⁵ Here the directors noted the general contents of the letters and dispatched them to the Gentlemen XVII for further examination.

This governing body was made up of delegates of the six chambers.¹⁵⁶ The influential Amsterdam chamber provided eight representatives, Zeeland four, the other chambers one and one rotating member made seventeen representatives in total.¹⁵⁷ The Gentlemen XVII assembled two to three times per year for several weeks, usually in the spring, summer and autumn, where they discussed incoming letters and deliberated on policy. They discussed the missives from Asia in September 1751 in their autumn meeting. Only the most vital matters were deliberated in these meetings. They forwarded the vast majority of issues to several advisory committees and made decisions on them at a later meeting. Their second agenda point involved reading the letters that had arrived from Batavia in the preceding months since their last spring meeting.¹⁵⁸ On 21 September 1751 they read the directly sent missives from Malabar to Patria as well as one of the general missives from Batavia, but they were immediately forwarded to the *Haags Besogne* because ‘thereby nothing required a swift response’.¹⁵⁹

The *Haags Besogne* was the one of the many advisory committees of the Gentlemen XVII. Besides directors, various shareholders, also known as *participanten*, participated in this committee, just as the two general secretaries, or *advocaten*, of the company.¹⁶⁰ Since the *Besogne* was occupied with the autumn sales of the company as well as the general demands of Batavia, they did not assemble until all the sales were finished and discussed, which was after the spring meeting of the Gentlemen XVII. Only a full year after the OBP’s arrival did they dissect their contents, from April to August 1752. They deliberated in their lodge in The Hague, every Monday through Saturday from 9-12am and from 3:30-5:30pm.¹⁶¹ Malabar was handled after their recess in late July. By that time however a new information-cycle already begun, since the main return fleet of that year had already arrived in Patria. This overlap became common during the eighteenth century and eventually the Gentlemen XVII had to lay off their

¹⁵⁴ These outgoing missives, although technically part of the OBP, were archived as distinct tomes and are not part of the OBP section of the National Archives. See NA, VOC, 849-1052 for the full series of these *Afgaande Brievenboeken*.

¹⁵⁵ NA, VOC, 264, Proceedings the Amsterdam Chamber 14 may 1750 – 22 July 1751, 12 June 1751, unfoliated.

¹⁵⁶ Gaastra, *Geschiedenis van de VOC*, 149, 151-152.

¹⁵⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁵⁸ NA, VOC, 171, Proceedings Gentlemen XVII 15 March 1751 – 12 October 1753, 20 September 1751, unfoliated.

¹⁵⁹ NA, VOC, 171, Proceedings Gentlemen XVII 21-9-1751, unfoliated.

¹⁶⁰ Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid bij de VOC*, 23-25.

¹⁶¹ NA, VOC, 4475, Haags Verbaal 1752, Introduction, unfoliated.

usual summer meeting to prevent a delay of the departures to Batavia in the fall.¹⁶² The Gentlemen XVII therefore only turned the recommendations of the committee into policy in late September 1752.¹⁶³ By the time this cycle within the Dutch Republic was completed, some of the information discussed during those final days of September had already been written down in Cochin three years before.¹⁶⁴

The *Haags Besogne*: An all-encompassing View?

This example of the circulation of documents in 1751-1752, which was nothing out of the ordinary compared with other years, shows that the various records from the OBP went through a long journey before the Gentlemen XVII turned their contents into policy. Furthermore it shows that they only read the missives from Malabar and Batavia and that they ignored all other records within the OBP. The *Haags Besogne* had therefore the sole responsibility of dissecting the full contents of the OBP.

Already in 1630, only a few decades after the foundation of the company directors foiced the first concerns that the annual administration from Asia had become too voluminous to be handled only by the Gentlemen XVII.¹⁶⁵ The first mention of a separate committee tasked with dissecting the incoming administration was in 1644 and in 1648 they officially formed the first *Haags Besogne*.¹⁶⁶ Compared with other early modern European colonisers, the VOC was one of the first with a separate institution where the overseas administration was centralised and dissected. A comparable institution in the East India Company, the Examiner's Office, which compiled all administration and forwarded concise reports of them to the directors, was only established in the 1770s under similar pressure of increasing paper from Asia.¹⁶⁷ Houllémare showed that the French only attained administrative centralisation over the course of the eighteenth century, which made her sceptical of the knowledge production by company clerks through the French colonial archives.¹⁶⁸

During its formative years the *Besogne* changed members and practices various times, but from the end of the seventeenth century onwards it comprised of ten delegates from the Gentlemen XVII, accompanied by two *advocaten*, and two *participanten* from Amsterdam and

¹⁶² Gaastra, *Geschiedenis van de VOC*, 155.

¹⁶³ NA, VOC. 171, Proceedings Gentlemen XVII 25-9-1752, unfolliated.

¹⁶⁴ NA, VOC, 4475, Haags Verbaal 1752, Malabar, unfolliated. According to the *verbaal* the *Besogne* discussed a missive from Cochin to Batavia from 22 October 1749.

¹⁶⁵ LU, D H 604, Handboek voor het Haags Besogne, 1.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶⁷ Bowen, *The Business of Empire*, 189-192.

¹⁶⁸ Houllémare, "Seeing the Empire Through Lists and Charts", 378-381.

Zeeland to oversee procedures.¹⁶⁹ The Hague was chosen as a place of residence to alleviate travel time from Amsterdam and Zeeland as well as making sure that the members would not be distracted by other pressing matters.¹⁷⁰ This attempt proved futile because meetings were often interrupted for days by incoming correspondence from the chambers, which took precedence over the OBP.¹⁷¹ Meilink-Roelofs has suggested that The Hague was also chosen for its proximity to the States General of the Dutch Republic to foster informal exchanges of information, but this relationship has not been studied yet.¹⁷²

The *Besogne* was not only interrupted frequently by incoming correspondence from the chambers, but its wide array of tasks also considerably burdened its members. I only mention these other tasks as context to show the tight schedule of these directors, which is important to keep in mind. First and foremost they dissected the annual administration from the regional establishments in Asia, where they used the OBP sent to the Amsterdam chamber.¹⁷³ Other tasks included inspection of the financial and commercial books, writing the annual state of the company, mapping the company's naval power, allocating the demands from Batavia, organising the shipments to Asia and lastly supervising the autumn sales.¹⁷⁴ According to Gaastra their tasks and power only grew during the eighteenth century and it is therefore not surprising that they were interrupted frequently, even when tucked away in The Hague.¹⁷⁵

Spring marked the beginning of the *Besogne*'s meetings, when they settled in The Hague roughly till summer. Time was of the essence, since the *verbalen*, their summaries of the OBP, had to be written and sent to the *bewindhebbers* before the arrival of the return fleet in late June. From that point onwards resources needed to be allocated for the first fleet's return to Asia in late September, so the committee could not afford to prolong its meetings until after the arrival of the fleet.¹⁷⁶ When they finished the *verbalen*, they sent them to each chamber, where the directors discussed and amended them. With those amendments the *advocaat* wrote the concept missive for the Gentlemen XVII, which they used as the first version of the outgoing missive

¹⁶⁹ Van Dam, *Beschryvinge*, 310-312.

¹⁷⁰ Van Dam, *Beschryvinge*, 312-313.

¹⁷¹ NA, Collection Van Ghesel, 47, Notes on the Haags Besogne, 6 May 1761, unfoliated; Notes on the Haags Besogne, 19 July 1769, unfoliated.

¹⁷² M. A. P. Meilink-Roelofs, 'De Europese Expansie in Azië; Enkele Beschouwingen Naar Aanleiding van Holden Furbers Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600-1800', *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde*, 135, 4 (1976): 403-442, 410.

¹⁷³ This is evident from the references in their *verbalen* to the books they consulted. Since the books with OBP from Amsterdam and Zeeland were given different names by their respective administrations, it is clear that The Hague relied on the OBP received in Amsterdam.

¹⁷⁴ Van Dam, *Beschryvinge*, 309.

¹⁷⁵ Gaastra, *Geschiedenis van de VOC*, 149-154.

¹⁷⁶ Van Dam, *Beschryvinge*, 310.

to Batavia. For the seventeenth century these can be found at the end of the *verbalen*, but the bookkeepers only rarely included them in the *verbalen* of the eighteenth century.¹⁷⁷

As hinted at by the previous remarks, the *Besogne* was entangled in a constant struggle with time in the eighteenth century. First and foremost, both Gaastra and Meilink-Roelofs have mentioned the increased workload of the *Besogne* from the end of the seventeenth century onwards.¹⁷⁸ Through the notes of Thomas Hope (1704-1779), *bewindhebber* of the Amsterdam chamber, who possessed a manuscript of summaries of the *Haags verbalen* of 1701-1740, we can see how this increased workload influenced the committee's practices.¹⁷⁹ Over the course of the eighteenth century the committee started their meetings later, from March in the early decades to April as the standard from the 1720s onward. As a result the *Besogne* almost never finished their deliberations before the arrival of the homebound fleet. Around 1740 the meetings in The Hague even pushed into late July and early August. Their long deliberations, ranging from 80-90 days on average, with a month recess on top of that, tended to clog up the whole information cycle. As a result the Gentlemen XVII had to drop their summer meetings altogether and moved the discussion of the *verbalen* to the autumn meetings, prolonging decisions even more.¹⁸⁰ Since the committee's members were directors of the company as well, with various other tasks, a delay of one task or institution clogged up the whole information cycle in Patria.

Their multitude of other tasks as both directors of the company as well as members of the *Haags Besogne*, meant that attendance was spread thin. Even though their location in The Hague was supposed to keep them focussed on the OBP, a quick glance at the notes of *bewindhebbers* in the *Besogne* reveals that the committee only rarely convened with all members. Out of the ten delegates there were always at least two or three absent.¹⁸¹ In extreme cases, such as the meeting of 27 July 1767, only three delegates attended the meetings.¹⁸² From the 1720s onwards, around the same time the final *verbalen* became considerably prolonged, the Gentlemen XVII passed resolutions to incentivise directors in the committee to attend more meetings. The handbook compiled these resolutions, which concerned strict rules regarding

¹⁷⁷ Gaastra used these concept missives to show the power dynamics between the *Besogne* and the Gentlemen XVII. Since this does not concern my thesis, I can do without these concept missives. I tried to find them within the minute resolutions of either the Amsterdam chamber and the Gentlemen XVII, since they were discussed there, but they are not present in those sources either.

¹⁷⁸ Gaastra, *Geschiedenis van de VOC*, 145; Meilink-Roelofs, Raben, and Spijkerman, *Inventaris van het archief van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC), 1602-1795 (1811)*, 32; Gaastra, *Bewind en Beleid*, 48.

¹⁷⁹ NA, Collection Hope, 9, Extracten uit het Haags Verbaal, met alfabetische indices, unfoliated.

¹⁸⁰ Gaastra, *Geschiedenis van de VOC*, 155.

¹⁸¹ NA, Collection Hope, 102, 11, meeting of 8 July 1754; 12, meeting of 9 July 1765.

¹⁸² NA, Collection Hope, 102, 13, meeting of 27 July 1767.

payment and working hours. Members only received payment if they actively worked from 9 to 12am and 3:30 to 5:30pm and could only invoice their travel costs after they worked at least two full weeks in the *Besogne*.¹⁸³ Directors willing to work on Sundays received extra monetary compensations.¹⁸⁴ If a director was not present, his money was divided between present members. These rules can be found throughout the personal notes of the directors as well. Samuel Radermacher (1693-1763), *bewindhebber* of the Zeeland chamber, even included calculations of the extra money allocated to him whenever members were absent.¹⁸⁵ These strict rules on time schedules, payment, the frequent absence of directors, and the vast range of tasks allocated to members of the *Besogne*, show that there was a pressing tension in the company regarding the workings of the *Besogne* and time allocated to the OBP. I argue that an analysis of the committee must keep this tension in mind.

Table 7) References within the *Haags Verbalen*

Documents Consulted	Year							
	1728	1734	1740	1746	1752	1758	1764	1770
Company Correspondence								
Malabar to Batavia	7	4	6	7	10	11	13	10
Malabar to Patria	1	1	2	1	2	2	2	2
Batavia to Malabar	2	2	5	3	3	9	11	3
Batavia to Patria	2	3	2	3	2	2	3	3
Patria to Batavia	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Other Correspondence								
With Europeans				2				
With Locals				5	2			
Reports, Instructions		1		3	1	1		
Commercial Accounts			1	1		1	1	
Length in pages*	10	7	10	13	10	7	23	62

Note: This table was compiled using the lists at the start of each *verbaal* that stated which documents were read during the meetings of the committee. NA, VOC, 4469-4471, 4473, 4474, 4478, 4481.

* This total is the amount of pages devoted to commentary on the letters. Excluded is the overview at the start of which letters were consulted.

A Structured yet Narrowed Gaze

Whenever the directors deliberated on the OBP, they employed an intricate methodology of scanning and recording the information from the administration of Malabar. In this section I analyse how they made sense of the piles of paper from all the different communication lines

¹⁸³ LU, D H 604, Handboek voor het Haags Besogne, 6-7

¹⁸⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁸⁵ NA, Collection Radermacher, 50, Stukken betreffende de verblijfkosten en zittingsgelden van de leden van het Haags Besogne, 1725, unfoliated.

employed by the VOC. I relay which documents they used (table 7), how they used them and lastly on what information from these documents they reported on.

Every year the committee employed the same reading order to dissect the OBP. First they read the outgoing orders from Patria to Batavia from the past three years, which gave them a precise overview of whatever was directed and asked by Patria and ‘to become familiar with the matters of each establishment.’¹⁸⁶ Then they read the circulating missives between Malabar and Batavia. Lastly they read the missives to Patria, first from Malabar and then the general missive from Batavia. This exact structure was put forward by the 1750s handbook and was carried out annually, but differed slightly from the one put forward by Van Dam in the early-eighteenth century. He stated that the missives from Patria to Batavia had to be read as the final document, instead of the first document.¹⁸⁷ This new order was most likely seen as superior in providing context and information for the *Besogne*. It established a cycle of information through which the committee could grasp in a chronological order how information moved between the various actors in Asia and how directives were carried out. Hew Bowen described similar systematic approaches to the dissection of company records for the East India Company as critical for increasing the company’s grasp on commerce and politics in the colonies. According to Him information was organised and dissected in structures which gave ‘a full and accurate picture of events in Asia.’¹⁸⁸ This clear methodology differed however from how historian Tristan Mostert characterised the *Besogne* in his thesis on seventeenth-century decision-making in the VOC. He framed the reading practices of the committee as ad-hoc, a frame which certainly does not hold up for the eighteenth century, because the *Besogne* used a rigorously structured methodology.¹⁸⁹ That Mostert studied the formative years of the committee in the mid-seventeenth century is the most likely explanation for the absence of strict procedures.

From their practices we see that the *Besogne* ignored the majority of the OBP. Table 7 shows that at most a few extra documents were also mentioned and read, ranging from correspondence with other companies and local rulers to reports of missions and commercial overviews. A plausible reason for their consultation is that these documents provided more context on matters of high importance and that the summary from the missive alone did not suffice. In 1746 for example, the *Besogne* read multiple documents pertaining to the aftermath of the lost war with the Raja of Travancore, an important war for the company since it severely

¹⁸⁶ LU, D H 604, Handboek voor het Haags Besogne, 9.

¹⁸⁷ LU, D H 604, Handboek voor het Haags Besogne, 8-9; van Dam, *Beschryvinghe*, 314.

¹⁸⁸ Bowen, *Business of Empire*, 151-152.

¹⁸⁹ Mostert, “Chain of Command”, 40.

limited Dutch access to the important pepper trade in Southern Malabar.¹⁹⁰ This suggests that for important topics the summaries in the missives did sometimes not suffice.

Directors did not limit themselves to Malabar with these procedures, but applied them to all *kantoren*. A glance at some of the *verbalen* for the *kantoor* of Ambon, an island in the Maluku archipelago and important for its production of clove, reveals the same reading practices.¹⁹¹ The *bewindhebbers* consulted the missives and only a handful of other documents. For Ambon the only document they consulted besides the missives in 1728, was a report on the declining production of clove.¹⁹² For the commercially important *kantoor* of Bengal in South-Asia, the directors also applied the same reading practices.¹⁹³ They only read three extra documents in 1770 for example, relating to difficulties with the English in the region, who severely limited Dutch commercial power in Bengal according to Winus and Vink.¹⁹⁴ The examples of Ambon and Bengal reaffirm that the *bewindhebbers* only read documents besides the missives when important matters were concerned. It shows furthermore that the methodology used by the *Haags Besogne* was company-wide and that important *kantoren* were not given a more thorough reading than less important ones.

Despite the structured methodology of the *Besogne*, both Van Dam and the handbook actually laid out more rules for the committee. Van Dam stated that the information in the missives had to be verified by the resolutions of Batavia, since these contained reports, correspondence and deliberations on the OBP of the various *kantoren*.¹⁹⁵ Nothing in the *verbalen* or notes of the directors suggests that the *bewindhebbers* actually consulted them. Vriend has shown furthermore that Batavia only partially implemented this system, so the members of the *Besogne* could only increase their gaze of Malabar by a small amount through the incorporation of the resolutions of Batavia, if they even included them at all.¹⁹⁶ The handbook, written half a century later, went even further: the missives had to be ‘verified with the resolutions, diaries, financial accounts etc’ of all respective *kantoren*.¹⁹⁷ While this implies that the practice of the *Besogne* became more elaborate and thorough over the course of the eighteenth century, there is nothing within the sources that supports that the *directors* actually

¹⁹⁰ NA, VOC, 4473, Haags Verbaal 1746, Malabar, unfoliated.

¹⁹¹ Jacobs, *Koopman in Azië*, 20; NA, VOC, 4487, Haags Verbaal 1770, Ambon, unfoliated; 4473, Haags Verbaal 1746, Ambon.

¹⁹² NA, VOC, 4469, Haags Verbaal 1728, Ambon, unfoliated.

¹⁹³ NA, VOC, 4487, Haags Verbaal 1770, Bengal, unfoliated; 4473, Haags Verbaal 1746, Bengal; 4469, Haags Verbaal 1728, Bengal, unfoliated.

¹⁹⁴ Winus and Vink, *The Merchant-Warrior Pacified*, 131.

¹⁹⁵ LU, D H 604, Handboek voor het Haags Besogne, 9

¹⁹⁶ Vriend, “Het informatiesysteem van de Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie”, 29-30.

¹⁹⁷ Van Dam, *Beschryvinghe*, 313-314.

used these records. While the *verbalen* grew considerably in size from the 1760s onwards, the methodology stayed exactly the same.¹⁹⁸ The resolutions and diaries were ominously absent within both the *verbalen* as well as the notes of the directors in the committee, which raises doubts about the practices of the *Besogne*.

There are multiple reasons why they did not include those documents. The overburdened character of the *Besogne*, as laid out in the previous section, is the most likely reason. Directors could simply not afford extra time to these records, since they already struggled with finishing their meetings before the arrival of the return fleet. Here the company stood in stark contrast to the French and English colonial administrations, since the institutions in those companies responsible for dissecting incoming administration were in the late eighteenth century staffed by clerks who had no further obligations.¹⁹⁹ That the VOC used its own directors to dissect the OBP, instead of clerks who actually had the time to do so diligently, most likely hampered the actualisation of the OBP's epistemic potential. While the *Haags Besogne* did have a staff with several clerks on its own, these did not participate in the dissection of the OBP and only facilitated meetings and procedures.

As I pointed out in the previous chapter, bookkeepers integrated the resolution books and local diaries poorly into the missives. This further bolsters my argument that crosschecking those documents would have taken too much time, if it was possible to digest the resolutions without proper references at all. One could argue that *directors* checked these records, but did not report on them within the *verbalen*. This seems unlikely however since the personal notes of Jacob van Ghesel as well as the Hope and Radermacher families never mentioned these records either. Thomas Hope included a note of all records he read prior to the meetings of the *Besogne* in 1753, and while this note included some records besides missives, Hope did not mention resolutions or diaries.²⁰⁰ If these men had consulted those records they must have referred to them in their notes. An overburdened *Besogne* seems the most likely reason why these instructions were not put into practice. These findings relate to Charles's and Cheney's statements on the knowledge production of colonial administrations in that 'any attempt to link knowledge and empire must take account the frequent mismatch between bureaucratic structures, means and ends'.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ The *verbalen* were always bound together in units of two to four years, until 1764. From that year onwards every year was bound in its own book, due to their increased length.

¹⁹⁹ Houllémare, "Seeing the Empire Through Lists and Charts", 380; Bowen, *The Business of Empire*, 189-191.

²⁰⁰ NA, Collection Hope, 102, 17, Overview of consulted records, unfoliated.

²⁰¹ Charles and Cheney, 'The Colonial Machine Dismantled', 160.

It is difficult to grasp the epistemic impact of the *Besogne*'s procedures to only focus on reading missives, instead of the full extent of the OBP. There was certainly some efficiency in the system, since the missives already summarised the important information from most documents. Missives gave in theory a concise overview of the OBP through summaries and references. Since the *Besogne* read each and every single missive, which undoubtedly contained overlapping information, *bewindhebbbers* could spot mistakes and errors. On the other hand, I showed in the previous section that missives never employed those systems completely. Had the missives integrated the resolution books and local diaries into their narrative, then the *Besogne*'s practices would have actualised the epistemic potential of the OBP quite well. However, since the resolution books and local diaries were not integrated well within the missives, they disappeared from the *Besogne*'s gaze. Their day-to-day coverage of how the Dutch governed on Malabar seems like an important loss since their detailed entries on commercial, social and political events would have contributed to an increased knowledge of Malabar. Furthermore, integrating these volumes would have most likely increased how effective the *Besogne* spotted errors in the missives, since they could check the detailed proceedings related to topics in the missives. Fraud and accidental errors were undoubtedly easier to find if the *Besogne* corroborated the few lines in the missives with the detailed proceedings. This shows that the actualisation of the epistemic potential of the OBP was the result of the interplay of varying documentary practices by various actors on different continents. It shows the added benefit of analysing the OBP through its full journey from selection to dissection.

That not integrating these records resulted in epistemic attrition is bolstered by Bowen's earlier mentioned analysis of the East India Company's administration. Bowen showed that in the mid-eighteenth century new systems were implemented for a thorough implementation of the proceedings and consultations in the margins of the despatches, which increased the company's grasp on its colonies greatly.²⁰² Given the vast similarities between the VOC and EIC record-wise and the length and detail of the resolution books and local diaries, I argue that the VOC lost out on potentially valuable information by not integrating these sources and were more prone to miss fraud and accidental errors.

Reconstructing the Information Cycle

Despite their practice of primarily reading missives, there were still hundreds of pages annually for Malabar that the *bewindhebbbers* had to deal with in a short amount of time. Thomas Hope

²⁰² Bowen, *The Business of Empire*, 152-153, 158, 189-192.

calculated for example that he had read 396 pages for Malabar alone during the meetings of 1770.²⁰³ Considering this large amount it is therefore also important to look at how the directors used those missives. Luckily they left traces of their methodology within the margins of their texts. For all years except 1728 the officials referred in the margins of the *verbalen* to the books and pages from which they got their information, divided between the multiple books that were made by the writing office. The *verbalen* referred to *Mallabaars brievenboek*, the *Afgaande brievenboek*, *Inkomende* or *Bataviaas brievenboek* and the *Generale brief*. Sometimes the *Generale brief* was mentioned under *Bataviaas brievenboek*, but the text clarified which document was referenced.

Usually information stemmed from one source, but sometimes the *verbalen* referred to multiple sources at once in the margins. From this practice multiple findings can be inferred. Most importantly, the committee showed no preference towards either directly or indirectly shipped information, but actively integrated all of them into one narrative. For every year in which margins were included, the committee referred in their reports to information from all books. Moreover, the committee coalesced corresponding information from different missives together into one coherent narrative. Moreover, whenever missives wrote about the exact same issues, the *verbalen* referred in the margins to all documents that contained information on this topic. Figure 4 below shows half a page from the *verbaal* of 1764 about the pepper trade of the previous period.²⁰⁴ The numbers in the margins point to four different missives from the *Mallabaars brievenboek* in which the pepper trade was discussed.²⁰⁵ In the body text these different missives were restructured into one coherent narrative. Both the restructuring of information and the crosschecking across various missives reveals an emphasis on thoroughness and conciseness from the *Haags Besogne*, increasing the actualisation of its epistemic potential. Their gaze oversaw the flow of the missives and integrated them into concise summaries of summaries.²⁰⁶

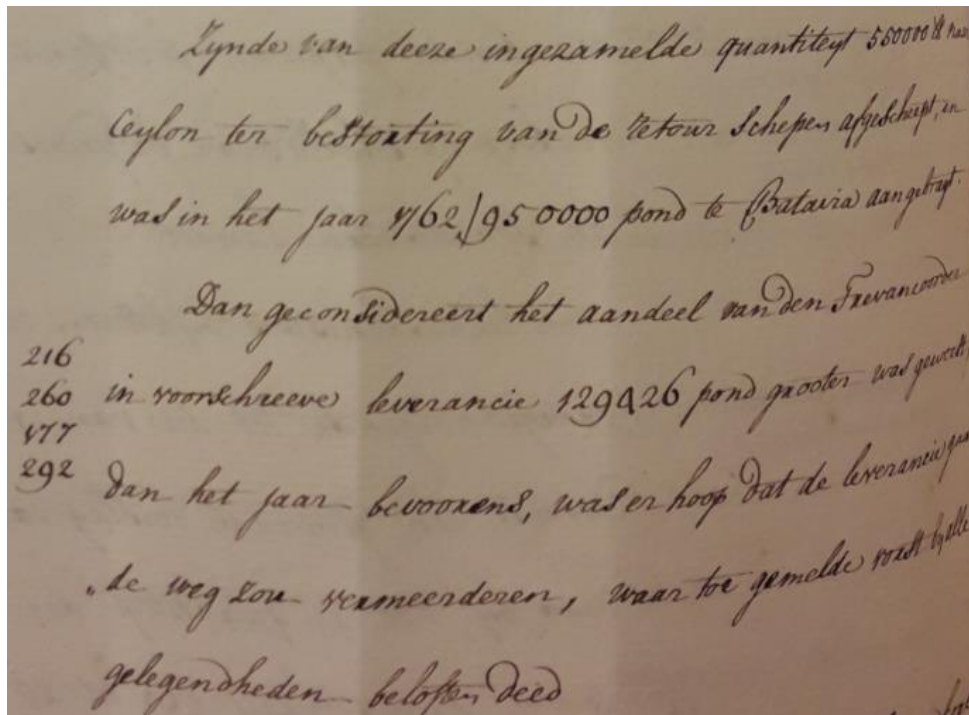
²⁰³ NA, Collection Hope, 102, 18, Overview of consulted records 1770, unfoliated. To grasp the full extent of the workings of a committee member in these months, multiply that amount by the roughly 30 *kantoren*.

²⁰⁴ NA, VOC, 4481, Haags Verbaal 1764, Malabar, unfoliated.

²⁰⁵ NA, VOC, 3055, Een missive van den commandeur G. Wijerman beneevens den raad aan generaal en raden in dato 24 Julij 1762, 175-188; Een secreete brief van den commandeur Weijerman aan generaal en raden in dato 25 Februarij 1762, 209-237; Een secreete brief van den commandeur Weijerman aan generaal en raden in dato 29 April 1762, 250-263; Een secreete brief van den commandeur Weijerman aan generaal en raden in dato 24 Julij 1762.

²⁰⁶ Labelling the *verbalen* summaries of summaries is justified since they summarise the missives, which were already mostly summaries in their own regard.

Figure 4) References in the margins of the 1764 Haags Verbaal



Note: NA, VOC, 4481, Haags Verbaal 1764, Malabar, unfoliated.

Framing Malabar

Considering that all missives were used to write the *verbalen* and that hundreds of pages per year were read for Malabar alone, it is curious that the final reports were only a handful of pages in length. Clearly not everything was deemed important enough to summarise in their reports. To better grasp how the *Besogne* used the OBP to understand Malabar, I analyse the contents of the *verbalen* in this section.

All *verbalen* principally focussed on financial information, of which most importantly on commercial figures. Every *verbaal* included an overview of profits and losses, balances on important commodities, such as pepper, cardamom and textiles and revenue and other balances of the various institutions in Malabar, such as the earlier referenced board for poor relief and leper house.²⁰⁷ Local rulers such as the Zamorin of Calicut or the Raja of Travancore were mentioned frequently, yet only in relation to their trade agreements with the company. The *verbaal* of 1764 for example included a summary of multiple pages about the hostilities between

²⁰⁷ NA, VOC, 4469, Haags Verbaal 1728, Malabar, unfoliated.

Travancore and Calicut, but in the end only mentioned it to justify the commercial policy of the company during those times.²⁰⁸

Despite many important political developments for the Dutch in Malabar in the 1740s and 1750s, only in the final two *verbalen* of 1764 and 1770, which were considerably longer, did the committee present more elaborate overviews of the divided political landscape. Thomas Hope was especially concerned with the rise of the kingdom of Mysore and its Sultan Haider Ali (1720-1782) and the ongoing rise of Travancore.²⁰⁹ As Winius and Vink showed in their political history of the VOC in South-Asia, these political developments in the 1760s and 1770s had dire consequences for Dutch activity on the coast and it is therefore unsurprising that they were included.²¹⁰ The *verbaal* of 1769 actually started with local politics, instead of the commerce in Malabar and the 1770 *verbaal* included an overview of the political landscape. Even in these larger reports the amount of references to events with no business consequences for the company were limited.²¹¹ Despite a few reports on political developments, business remained the main narrative of these *verbalen*. According to Mostert the *Besogne* had considerable impact on military policy in the mid-seventeenth century, which contrasts with the findings presented here.²¹² Most likely the ad hoc character of the committee in that period applied to the topics discussed as well.

Moreover, by reading the notes of the various *bewindhebbers* it becomes even more clear that business was their prime concern. It reveals that for them Malabar was not a far-away region in South-Asia, but a yearly incoming table of commercial figures. Jacob van Ghesel and Thomas Hope both kept summaries of the already short *verbalen* in their personal notes, in which they almost exclusively noted financial figures.²¹³ Van Ghesel and Hope both kept various tables in their notes, spanning decades of the annual profits and losses of Malabar, the profits of all factories in Malabar and the profits and losses of various commodities.²¹⁴ Whenever Samuel Radermacher and his son Daniel (1722-1803) included commentary on the OBP in their personal notes, it was only about the pepper trade.²¹⁵ Daniel Radermachers notes

²⁰⁸ NA, VOC, 4481, Haags Verbaal 1764, Malabar, unfoliated.

²⁰⁹ NA, Collection Hope, 102, 33, unfoliated; NA, VOC, 4487, Haags Verbaal 1770, Malabar, unfoliated.

²¹⁰ Winius and Vink, *The Merchant-Warrior Pacified*, 109.

²¹¹ NA, VOC, 4487, Haags Verbaal 1770, Malabar, unfoliated.

²¹² Mostert, "Chain of Command", 41.

²¹³ NA, Collection Ghesel, 48, Malabar, klyne annotation of abstracten uyt verbaalen gemaakt, unfoliated; NA, Collection Hope, 102, 11, unfoliated.

²¹⁴ NA, Collection Hope, 102, 35; 36; 37; 38; NA, Collection Ghesel, 48, Malabar, Extract uijt de memorie door den commandeur op Mallabaar nagelaten.

²¹⁵ NA, Collection Radermacher, 49, Haagse Besoinje aldaar bij wij begonnen den 23en junij 1740 tot den 23en julij daar aan, 5; Notulen Agendorum Haagse besoinjes 26 junij 1752 tot den 7en August daar aan, 7-8.

on the *verbaal* of 1769 are most telling. Malabar could apparently be summarised that year with ‘Peper word duurder’.²¹⁶

An emphasis on commerce was not limited to Malabar. The contents of the handbook made clear that all *kantoren* were to be known through their commercial value. In their short summaries of each *kantoor* every establishment was summarised similarly. First the book provided the commodities it produced, then the general profits of the establishment over the past few decades, followed by descriptions of company personnel, revenue and local rulers, who again were only referred to in relation to their trade with the company.²¹⁷ The *verbalen* on other *kantoren* further bolster this point. The directors similarly discussed Bengal and Ambon through their business potential. The 1728 *verbaal* of Bengal only gave a summary of commercial matters and revenue and the 1746 report only focussed on the commercial activity of the Dutch in Bengal.²¹⁸ Especially saltpetre and opium were thoroughly reported on, which were the most important commodities for the Dutch in Bengal.²¹⁹ Similarly, the 1740 and 1746 reports of Ambon focussed predominantly on the production of clove, coffee and indigo and the financial data of the various institutions on Ambon.²²⁰ The specific commercial frame was not limited to Malabar, but an integral part of the epistemological gaze of the *Haags Besogne*. Furthermore it shows that the *Besogne* not only focussed on business because the missives predominantly showed business information, but that they were incentivised through the handbook to focus on it.

Moreover, the business information reported on was not picked randomly. The committee wrote specifically on Malabar’s fulfilment of Patria’s demands. Since the outgoing missives with demands from Patria were read first, the incoming missives from Batavia and Malabar could be read as answers to these demands. On multiple occasions the committee referred to this circular activity by explicitly stating how Malabar responded to specific questions or demands. The directors even opened various *verbalen* with this information.²²¹ Reading the *verbalen*, notes of the directors and the handbook gives the impression that the *Besogne* was never meant to hoard all sorts of information from Asia, or to establish an all-

²¹⁶ NA, Collection Radermacher, 49, Notaas van de Haagse Besoinjes den 1 augustus 1769, Verbaal van de Malabaar, unfolliated.

²¹⁷ The most telling of these are the short entries on China, Malacca and Persia, which only mentioned commerce. LU, D H 604, Handboek voor het Haags Besogne, 52-55, 59-62, 114-116.

²¹⁸ NA, VOC, 4473, Haags Verbaal 1746, Bengal, unfolliated.

²¹⁹ Jacobs, *Koopman in Azië*, 90-96.

²²⁰ NA, VOC, 4469, Haags Verbaal 1728, Ambon, unfolliated; 4473, Haags Verbaal 1746, Ambon, unfolliated.

²²¹ See for example the first entry for Malabar in the *verbaal* of 1758 or the first entry in the *verbaal* of 1764. Both reference the answer to the demands of Patria.

encompassing view of Asia as most historians have tacitly assumed, but that it was meant to report solely on the business of the company, and especially Patria's directives.

What these findings reveal is that Malabar was consistently framed through its business outcome. The *Besogne* unsurprisingly had more access to these figures since the missives already put an emphasis on business, but it seems this focus also came from Patria itself. My analysis of the handbook and the personal notes of the various *bewindhebbbers* shows that the *Besogne* was almost completely focussed on business alone, which was not limited to Malabar, but applied to the whole company. For some *bewindhebbbers* the whole *kantoor* could even be understood as a mere table with balances of certain trade goods, or as short sentences on its financial status. These findings are in line with Houllémare's overall assessment of the French colonial administration, whose primary activities in the late eighteenth centuries were rearranging the incoming letters almost purely into tables of commerce and revenue.²²² According to her such rearrangements were very effective for policy-making. This most likely holds up for the *Haags Besogne* as well, since by the time they were done with the OBP they had rearranged those enormous piles of paper into concise, digestible reports. However, it does mean that the actualisation of the OBP's epistemic potential was limited to business, and that the potential of the OBP to grant knowledge on social or political issues was not actualised.

Conclusion: Reconceptualising the *Haags Besogne*

By applying an emphasis on the documentary practices of the *Besogne* I have shown that it never actualised the full epistemic potential of the OBP. Its methodology relied almost solely on the missives of the company, furthermore showing that these documents were the lifeline of the company's information network. Most of the records in the OBP were most likely never read after their arrival in Patria. The *Besogne* was supposed to verify the information from the missives with the resolution books and diaries, but failed to do so, most likely due to time constraints. The overall usage of missives to produce knowledge and restructuring them into concise reports could be labelled as an efficient way to grasp the OBP, but since the missives themselves were flawed in representing the OBP and were prone to error or fraud, reading missives alone could never actualise the full epistemic potential of the OBP. Moreover, the resolutions and diaries possessed vital day-to-day information about Malabar. Had the bookkeepers on Malabar integrated the resolutions and diaries more thoroughly into the missives, the *Besogne's* actualisation of the OBP's potential would have been greater, despite them not reading the resolutions and diaries themselves. With this analysis I have shown that

²²² Houllémare "Seeing the Empire Through Lists and Charts", 391.

integrating the whole journey of the OBP is vital to fully understand its epistemic potential and actualisation thereof.

Furthermore, by looking how Malabar was framed by various actors in the *Besogne* it becomes clear that business took precedent over all other information. It seems moreover that the directors especially focussed on reporting on the directives of Patria. I argued therefore that we should reconceptualise the *Haags Besogne* as an institution focussed primarily on business, that only sporadically integrated other narratives. This reconceptualisation means that the *Besogne* only ever actualised the business side of the OBP and that the epistemic potential of the OBP on other subjects remained unfulfilled. This reconceptualisation of the *Haags Besogne* was only possible by looking at the documentary practices they employed. Tracing documentary practices allowed for a complete revision of the knowledge production of the *Haags Besogne*.

Conclusion: Unbinding the OBP

The aim of this thesis was to analyse how documentary practices on the OBP, throughout the whole information network from selection to dissection, affected its epistemic potential and actualisation thereof by company officials in Patria. Throughout all chapters I have shown that documentary practices on the *Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren* reveal not a monolith of paper, but a well-structured, hierarchical web of documents with vastly differing usage and importance, which influenced its epistemic potential and actualisation.

As the first chapter showed, the VOC maintained a sprawling archive of more than merely company-related material, but also records that gave insight into the individual lives of inhabitants of Fort Cochin. I presented this as the total epistemic potential of the information network. By not including legal documents and restructuring bookkeeping and demographic data into concise reports, the OBP were never an authentic representation of the total archive created and maintained in Fort Cochin. Even at their conception OBP never had full epistemic potential regarding the *kantoor* of Malabar. I coined missives the lifelines of the information network of the VOC, because they summarised most documents in the OBP and referred to them through references within the margins and headers. Analysing how these missives ‘presented’ the OBP as a whole was therefore important for understanding the epistemic potential of the OBP for officials in Patria. My most important finding here was that the bookkeepers did not integrate the resolution books and local diaries into the missives as well as other documents, despite their length and uniquely detailed information. Their practices made these records largely invisible in the missives and by extension to officials in Patria, which reduced their epistemic potential.

Connecting these insights with reforms to the indirectly shipped OBP in the mid-eighteenth century, made me argue that these were most likely efficient reforms from an epistemic point of view. The missives already summarised the documents that disappeared from the OBP, while the resolution books remained in the indirect OBP. The changes of 1743 and 1756 can be labelled efficient ways of reducing the workload in Batavia, because they had no epistemic bearings for Malabar. While the stark reduction in OBP seemed impactful at first glance, a documentary analysis showed otherwise. These changes most likely had more impact on the *kantoren* that only used indirect shipping. Researching how their epistemic potential changed because of the 1743 reforms is an interesting topic for future research, because it adds more insight on the role of the information network on the OBP’s epistemic potential.

In the final chapter I discussed that once upon arrival in Patria, *bewindhebbers* left most of the OBP out of the information network of the company in the Republic, except for the missives of the various establishments. While the resolution books and diaries were supposed to be part of the deliberations, revealing efforts to implement a thorough gaze of their overseas possessions, they directors never used them due to time constraints. This created the paradox where the largest documents in the OBP were the least visible to the directors in the *Haags Besogne*. An overburdened committee made efficient execution of this methodology impossible. This did not need to have been an issue had the missives contained thorough references to the voluminous resolution books and local diaries. The double exclusion of these records, in the references within the missives and while dissecting the OBP, had an impact on the actualisation of its epistemic potential.

Lastly, I proposed a reconceptualisation of the *Haags Besogne* to an institution that primarily focussed on the directives of Patria and the business information from Asia, instead of an institution that gathered all sorts of knowledge indiscriminately. While these insights give more clarity on how directors produced knowledge in the *Haags Besogne*, it leaves lingering questions on who or which institution dealt with the remaining OBP, if anyone did at all. The sprawling OBP, housed in the National Archives, should therefore not be thought of as vast monolith that the company produced knowledge on. The OBP's contents, the presentation of its documents and usage by the *Besogne* all eroded in various stages the epistemic potential regarding Malabar. Its contents did not authentically reflect the sorts of records produced in Malabar, its presentation made certain documents more visible than others and its usage was limited to missives. It did not offer complete knowledge and officials never used the OBP thoroughly. Most of its contents were at worst completely unknown to the *bewindhebbers* in Patria and at best only known through multiple layers of possibly flawed summaries.

My main question of this thesis was: what do documentary practices regarding the OBP reveal about its epistemic potential and actualisation thereof, from selection in Malabar to dissection by the *Haags Besogne*, regarding the eighteenth-century *kantoor* of Malabar? I can confidently answer that documentary practices reveal that epistemic potential was severely altered on multiple instances throughout the journey from selection to dissection, which raises doubts on the actualisation of knowledge in the *Haags Besogne* and the capabilities of Patria to truly grasp Malabar through the official information network. Unbinding the OBP furthermore through usage of documents reveals documents of varying importance, most prominently a company of missives on which the epistemic potential of Malabar hinged. Only looking at how the OBP were archived together as one volume obscures these nuances and a documentary

approach is useful in this regard. Furthermore it shows an actualisation of potential that was limited to business knowledge and hints that we must find knowledge production on other topics outside of the OBP and the official information network of the company.

My findings take a middle ground in relation to the recent inquiries that have raised scepticism on the role of the colonial archive in the link between knowledge and colonial administrations. The findings presented here should not be seen in regards to the appraisal of archival documents as unimportant, like Brendecke argued, or the lack of centralised institutions, like Houlemare showed. The directors in the company deemed the OBP important sources of knowledge and an institutional framework was present for a thorough integration of the OBP into the wider administration of the VOC. My scepticism comes from the workings of the bureaucratic structure, while efficient in its design, was flawed by an overburdened *Besogne*. The comparison with the EIC showed that the VOC also had a less efficient information network by not incorporating the larger records into the missives and meetings of the *Haags Besogne*, even if at a first glance both companies seem comparable. My scepticism towards the actualisation of the epistemic potential of the OBP is furthermore the result of the epistemic attrition that hampered the OBP's epistemic potential at various points in the information network. For Malabar this was partially mitigated by the presence of direct shipping, but still present in how the OBP gave no authentic representation of the Cochin archive and were only dealt with in Patria through missives, whose summarised contents could potentially misrepresent knowledge in all sorts of ways. My approach to documentary practices revealed that we must be sceptic towards claims regarding the equation of knowledge and empire through colonial archives, but in other ways than historians have hitherto argued.

Furthermore, my research reveals that the equation of knowledge and empire through documentary practices must be accounted for differently based on which topics were concerned. If my argument on the reconceptualisation of the *Haags Besogne* to an institution that primarily had a narrowed gaze on business information holds true, then we must look outside of the OBP for insight on how other topics were made known to the directors. Historians must therefore separate topics when researching the equation of knowledge and empire. Knowledge on business was actualised better than political knowledge for example. The loss of political knowledge on Malabar within the official output of the system, the *verbalen*, hints that such information might have been gathered more prominently through means outside of the official company network and its documents. These nuances show the benefit of my approach to the whole information network of the company and its documentary practices and show that

epistemic potential and its actualisation by colonial administrations can only be assessed by integrating the complete information network of the company.

The deconstruction of the OBP that I have attempted throughout this thesis is also valuable for the wider approach to documentary practices in historical research. If there is one important feat that contemporaries have made possible it is the increased access to the OBP through the databased indices of the TANAP project. With the digitisation of the indices of the *Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren* historians can with one quick search, locate, compare and dissect tables of contents that beforehand needed hours, if not days, of work. Especially the various tools that let researchers search on geographical areas or record types, completely reimagines the OBP, which allows for a whole new way of engaging with the source material. As archivist and historian Charles Jeurgens argued in his article on the dilemmas of digitisation, this panoptic view of all archival material within the click of a button, is the dream of every historian.²²³ Without a doubt, TANAP has in many ways given historians those tools. However, there are serious consequences to the rapid digitisation of archival material and the unmitigated access of information to historians, when the results of these thesis are kept in mind.

As Jeurgens pointed out in his study, one of the most glaring downsides of archival digitisation is the loss of the original context, hierarchy and structure.²²⁴ Since information is unmitigatedly available through a search engine, which does not have those contexts, hierarchies and structures built into its algorithm, a bland list of documents becomes available. Although TANAP has engines made to structure documents within your search based on establishment, region, or inventory number, the generated list is devoid of the original structure and hierarchy that original creators gave those documents. Throughout this thesis I have shown that when documents within the OBP are scrutinised based on their eighteenth-century usage, structures and hierarchies become visible. The production of knowledge ran through the information and usage of missives. Unfortunately this hierarchy mostly disappears within the TANAP database. Having resolutions and *dagregisters* pop up in the same list as missives whenever researchers use these databases, presents those records had the same importance, function and visibility, which is juxtaposed to their eighteenth-century usage. Researchers need to be aware that behind these generated lists lies a social history, wherein documents and information had their own structure, hierarchy and usage. My thesis makes a first attempt to show that these variables are important and is a much needed addition in this time of

²²³ C. Jeurgens, "The Scent of the Digital Archive: Dilemmas with Archive Digitisation", *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review* 128, 4 (2013): 30-54, 34-35.

²²⁴ Jeurgens, "The Scent of the Digital Archive", 36-38.

digitisation. Including tools or disclaimers on these issues would help researchers for whom such nuances are important for their research.

Undoubtedly there are many things that I was not able to address in this thesis. First of which, as I already pointed out in the introduction, is the problem with the model I used for this research. I took Malabar as the entry point of the information cycle and Patria its end. Of course the company's information structure was cyclical and my results have shown multiple times how important that cyclical aspect was in regards to how certain documents and their information were treated. However, an analysis of the whole cycle, where I would have incorporated how Patria responded to the OBP and made new directives and policy on them and how those documents were used in Asia subsequently, would have simply been too much work. Even with my current methodology I struggled, especially in the second chapter, to provide enough analysis of the contents of the OBP in order to bolster my arguments. I have made many generalisation about the OBP, its usage, meaning and structure that might be contested by looking at other *kantoren* than Malabar. Integrating more missives and resolutions into research might shed other lights on the epistemic potential of the OBP. Especially considering the impact of the 1743 reforms on establishments other than the *westerkwartieren*, looking further than Malabar is necessary to further understand how knowledge was produced on Asia. Furthermore, I did not touch upon the connections of my research with the wider historiography on the decline of the VOC in the eighteenth century or the incorporation of the practices of the *Haags Besogne* within wider discourses on epistemology in the early modern era, especially with the advent of the enlightenment. While these topics were too much to cover for me in this thesis, I acknowledge they would have elevated the findings of my research.

Despite these topics that could provide more insight on the relationship between early modern colonialism and knowledge, I am confident that my thesis has provided new insights, methodologies and raised new questions though which researchers can engage with the VOC. I myself look forward the most to new studies on the various records the VOC employed and the ways in which those documents were used and shaped epistemologies for *kantoren* other than the *westerkwartieren* and on topics other than business. I am convinced that my thesis has shown the diversity of the OBP, the value of an approach to documentary practices and the claim that knowledge is produced over long distances. Researchers should only further engage with the OBP, because hidden under its sprawling archive is more epistemic potential, waiting to be actualised.

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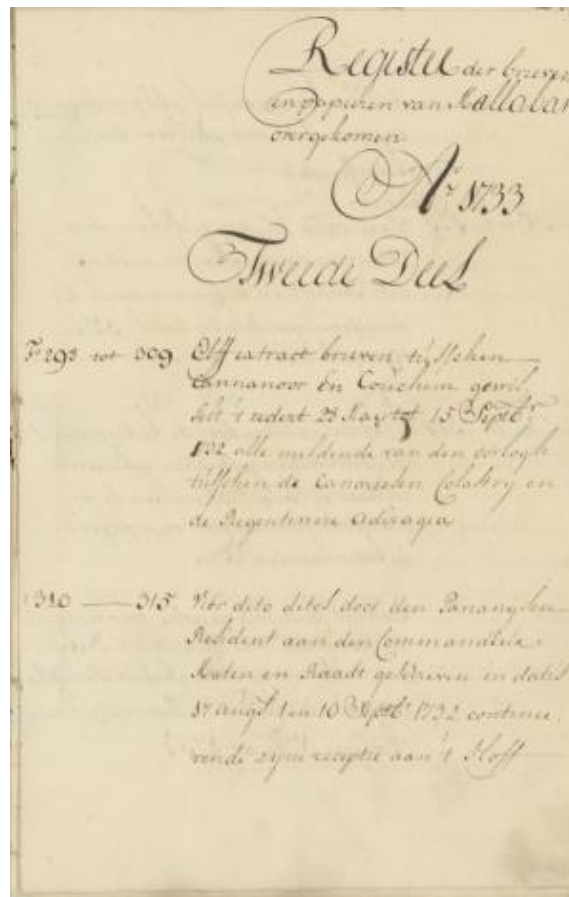
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Appendix 1: Accessing the Indices on the OBP

There are currently four ways of accessing the Indices on the OBP. All have their respective pros and cons. The first option is consulting the original index. While this gives the most authentic insight into the OBP, they are impractical for large-scale research on the indices of the OBP. The typescript transcriptions of these indices, which are available in the reading room of the National Archives, provide a good alternative. With these indices researchers can quickly scan multiple years of tables of contents. However, with the launch of the TANAP online databases, these have been almost completely removed. Only the indices of the early eighteenth century, which TANAP did not cover completely, still remain. Below is an overview of the first page of an original index and its typescript counterpart.

Figure 5) Original Index on the OBP



Note: NA, VOC, 2227, Register der Papieren, 1.

Figure 6) Typescript Index on the OBP

Brieven en papieren van Mallabar overgekomen in 1733.	
XXXXXX ²²	
TWEE EN TWINTIGSTE BOEK	
TWEED DEEL	
298 a 309	Elf extract brieven tussen Cannanoor en Couchin gewisseld sedert 28 Maj tot 15 September 1732 alle meldende van de oorlog tussen de Canaressen Colaastrij en de regentinne Adirag
310 a 315	Vier ditos door de Pananijse resident aan de commandeur Maten en raed geschreven van 17 Augustij, 1 en 10 September 1732 continerende sijn receptie aant hoff des samorijns als mede enige saken voormelde oorlog betreffende.
316 a 323	Twee copie brieven tussen de commandeur Maten nevens de raed en de Cannanoorese hndiendens gewisseld van 12 en 19 September 1732.
324 a 327	Extract missive door de bediendens tot Chettuwa na Couchin geschreven van 21 Julij 1732 meldende de clandestine vervoer van peper naar de bovenlanden etc.
328	Extract Couchinse negotiejournalen aantonde wat quantijt nelij voor eieren gerechtigheijt is ingekomen van de landen in Paponettij sedert 1729/30 en 1731/32.
329 a 337	Copie rapport van twee gecommiteerden aan de commissaris Hendrix en raed overgelevert gedateert 28 Junij 1732 continerende de examinatie der geschillen tussen de regia van Oranganoor, de Couchinse rajiadoor en Bachij Caymael.
338 a 345	Dito door de gecommiteerden Francois Torburg en Jan Finia aan alsvooren gedaen 21 Junij 1732 belangende hun verrichtinge in het ondersoeken der geschillen tussen de koning, de tweede en derde prins van Berkenkoer.
346 a 354	Dito van de gecommiteerden: Willem van den Berg van 22 Julij 1732 aan alsvooren gedaen wegens sijn verrichtinge tot Porca in het wederzoek na de oorsak waerom althans so wijnig peper gelevt wordt in vergelijck van vorige jaren.
355	Extract Tengapatnamsse missive na Couchin geschreven van 15 Julij 1732 belangende het verlenen van twee sauvegards door de koning van Trevanoor aan Compagnies logie.
356 a 362	Copie instructie voor de gecommiteerden Willem Teeling en Jan Finia gaende na Coilang om zich bij ontmoeting van de koning van Trevanoor en andere zuijdvorsten daarna te reguleren en des doenlijk hare geschillen te assopieren.
363 a 403	Copie missive door der resident tot Mocha Jan Willem van der Sturk aan de gouverneur generael en raden van Indien geschreven van Augustij 1732 met een appendix van 15 dito.
404 a 408	Dito door alsvooren aan de commissaris Wouter Hendrix en raed tot Couchin van 15 Augustij 1732.
409	Copie resolutie bij de scheepnaed vant schip het Landt van Belofte genomen op 13 September 1732 om vermits gebrek aan ankertouwen de rhede van Couchin aan te doen en ontzet daar van te versoeken.
410 a 412	Copie missive door de commandeur en raed tot Couchin na Colombo van 20 September 1732.

Note: Typescript of the 1733 OBP of Malabar, 2227.

The indices on the OBP are also accessible through the TANAP project's database. It is important to note that the same database can be accessed in two differing iterations: through the TANAP website and through the website of the National Archives. The index on the TANAP website can be found through the 'reference codes' option.²²⁵ This database offers a very clear overview of the amount of documents in a volume. The year refers to when the document was made and is a helpful addition to the original. The downsides are that the results are ordered by year and not by the original order of the volume. This is especially problematic when one volume contains OBP from multiple *kantoren* or when multiple inventory numbers are searched for at once. Furthermore, researchers have to go back to the homepage for every new query. The database is slow and this takes up quite some time when having to look at a multitude of inventory numbers.

²²⁵ Reference Codes, <http://databases.tanap.net/vocrecords/>.

Figure 7) Index on the OBP from the TANAP website

Index	Document Title	Year	Pages	Language
1745	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1745	1745	Dutch
1744	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1744	1744	Dutch
1743	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1743	1743	Dutch
1742	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1742	1742	Dutch
1741	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1741	1741	Dutch
1740	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1740	1740	Dutch
1739	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1739	1739	Dutch
1738	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1738	1738	Dutch
1737	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1737	1737	Dutch
1736	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1736	1736	Dutch
1735	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1735	1735	Dutch
1734	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1734	1734	Dutch
1733	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1733	1733	Dutch
1732	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1732	1732	Dutch
1731	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1731	1731	Dutch
1730	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1730	1730	Dutch
1729	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1729	1729	Dutch
1728	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1728	1728	Dutch
1727	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1727	1727	Dutch
1726	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1726	1726	Dutch
1725	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1725	1725	Dutch
1724	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1724	1724	Dutch
1723	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1723	1723	Dutch
1722	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1722	1722	Dutch
1721	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1721	1721	Dutch
1720	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1720	1720	Dutch
1719	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1719	1719	Dutch
1718	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1718	1718	Dutch
1717	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1717	1717	Dutch
1716	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1716	1716	Dutch
1715	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1715	1715	Dutch
1714	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1714	1714	Dutch
1713	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1713	1713	Dutch
1712	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1712	1712	Dutch
1711	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1711	1711	Dutch
1710	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1710	1710	Dutch
1709	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1709	1709	Dutch
1708	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1708	1708	Dutch
1707	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1707	1707	Dutch
1706	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1706	1706	Dutch
1705	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1705	1705	Dutch
1704	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1704	1704	Dutch
1703	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1703	1703	Dutch
1702	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1702	1702	Dutch
1701	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1701	1701	Dutch
1700	Overgekomen brieven en papieren van de VOC naar de OBP van Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.	1700	1700	Dutch

Note: Index made on the 1745 OBP of Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624.

The final iteration is the index on the OBP on the website of the National Archives in The Hague.²²⁶ This version of the TANAP database is the most useful for multiple reasons. First of all, Researchers can filter on VOC establishment. This is helpful, because some volumes contained multiple establishments. Furthermore, this overview gives the original order of the documents in the volume. Lastly, it is possible to search for a new inventory number without going back to the homepage of the index. The only downside is that the amount of pages of each document is not readily available and can only be checked by clicking on a document. Since they are in the right order, this is in practice not too much of a burden. One only has to click on the final document to see the total amount of pages of the volume.

²²⁶ VOC: overgekomen brieven en papieren, <http://www.gahetna.nl/collectie/index/nt00348>.

Figure 8) Index on the OBP from the website of the National Archives

VOC Hoofdvesting	Beschrijving	Jaar
Malabar	Register der papieren [naar patria] de dato 22 October 1744.	1744
Malabar	Origineele missive door den commandeur R. Siersma en raad tot Cochim aan de vergaderingh van seventiene geschreven in dato 22 October 1744.	1744
Malabar	Een copia brief door commandeur Siersma en raad aan generaal en raden geschreven in dato 19 October 1743.	1743
Malabar	Een copia brief door commandeur Siersma en raad aan generaal en raden geschreven in dato 11 Maart 1744.	1744
Malabar	Een copia brief door commandeur Siersma en raad aan generaal en raden geschreven in dato 2 Meij 1744.	1744
Malabar	Een copia brief door commandeur Siersma en raad aan generaal en raden geschreven in dato 10 Meij 1744.	1744
Malabar	Een copia brief door commandeur Siersma en raad aan generaal en raden geschreven in dato 17 Junij 1744.	1744
Malabar	Een copia brief door commandeur Siersma en raad aan generaal en raden geschreven in dato 7 Augustij 1744 daar onder bij de brief van 2 meij een marginale beantwoording op een extract brief van Cormandel na 't patria gecarteert den 9 October 1742 in so verre de daarbij vervattende aanmerkingen en consideratien tot verbeetering van den staat der zaken en handel daar ter kuste haar betrekking hebben op het Mallabarse commandement.	1744,1742
Malabar	Copia contract van vrede en vriendschap aangegaan en gesloten met den Ragia van Mangattij op den 14 Maart 1744.	1744

Note: Index made on the 1745 OBP of Malabar, NA, VOC, 2624. Found through the database on the website of the National Archives. <http://www.gahetna.nl/collectie/index/nt00348>.

Appendix 2: TANAP's Classification system

The function 'Reconstruction of VOC establishments' on the TANAP website provides a tool in which all documents in the OBP are categorised on document type. The full classification system of TANAP is given below.

Dagregisters en registers (inhoudsopgave) op dagregisters

- Algemene dagregisters, serieel
- Algemene dagregisters, extracten of enkele data
- Inheemse dagregisters, serieel
- Inheemse dagregisters, extracten of enkele data
- Dagregisters van missies of (militaire) expedities, serieel
- Dagregisters van missies of (militaire) expedities, extracten of enkele data

Resoluties en registers (inhoudsopgave) op resoluties

- Algemene resoluties, serieel
- Algemene resoluties, incidenteel
- Algemene resoluties, bijlagen
- Resoluties van departementen, serieel
- Resoluties van departementen, incidenteel
- Resoluties van departementen, bijlagen
- Resoluties tijdens missies of (militaire) expedities, serieel
- Resoluties tijdens missies of (militaire) expedities, incidenteel
- Resoluties tijdens missies of (militaire) expedities, bijlagen
- Resoluties van onderkantoren, serieel
- Resoluties van onderkantoren, incidenteel
- Resoluties van onderkantoren, bijlagen
- Notulen of besognes
- Notulen of besognes, bijlagen
- Secrete resoluties, serieel
- Secrete resoluties, incidenteel
- Secrete resoluties, bijlagen
- Secrete notulen
- Secrete notulen, bijlagen
- Resoluties aan boord van schepen, serieel
- Resoluties aan boord van schepen, incidenteel
- Resoluties aan boord van schepen, bijlagen
- Resoluties van kerkenraad, schoolmeesters of weesmeesters, serieel
- Resoluties van kerkenraad, schoolmeesters of weesmeesters, incidenteel
- Resoluties van kerkenraad, schoolmeesters of weesmeesters, bijlagen
- Resoluties of notulen tijdens vergaderingen met inheemsen, serieel
- Resoluties of notulen tijdens vergaderingen met inheemsen, incidenteel
- Resoluties of notulen tijdens vergaderingen met inheemsen, bijlagen

Brieven, rapporten en instructies ontvangen uit en verzonden naar Nederland

- Correspondentie met de Heren XVII
- Correspondentie met de Kamers
- Correspondentie met overige autoriteiten in Nederland
- Registers der papieren verzonden naar Nederland

Brieven, rapporten en instructies ontvangen uit en verzonden naar Batavia

- Correspondentie met de gouverneur-generaal of de Hoge Regering met bijlagen of registers der marginalen

- Secrete correspondentie met de gouverneur-generaal of de Hoge Regering met bijlagen
- Overige correspondentie met Batavia
- Registers der papieren verzonden naar Batavia
- Registers der papieren ontvangen uit Batavia

Brieven, rapporten en instructies verzonden binnen het gebied van de vestiging of gewisseld met andere vestigingen

- Correspondentie met, tussen en binnen onderkantoren van de vestiging
- Correspondentie met andere vestigingen
- Overeenkomsten
- Passen verleend aan kooplieden, schepen en anderen
Rekesten
- Correspondentie binnen het gebied van de vestiging en andere daar opgemaakte documenten (bijvoorbeeld memories van goederen, secretariële verklaringen en generale opneem van effecten)
- Registers der papieren verzonden binnen het gebied van de vestiging of gewisseld met andere vestigingen

Overige brieven, rapporten en instructies

- Memories van overgave
- Rapporten beschouwend van aard
- Rapporten van missies en (militaire) expedities en andere verslagen (bijvoorbeeld remonstranties, visitaties van schepen, diverse papieren betreffende een bepaalde zaak en verantwoordingen)
- Instructies, memories, seinbrieven, zeilorders, ordonnanties, reglementen, bevelschriften of mandaten aan individuen
- Correspondentie tijdens missies en (militaire) expedities
- Correspondentie met gezaghebbers of andere opvarenden van schepen
- Correspondentie met andere Europeanen
- Correspondentie met inheemsen
- Overige correspondentie of brieven aan onbekenden

Wetgeving

- Interne wetgeving, serieel
- Interne wetgeving, losse stukken
- Wetgeving ontvangen van Batavia, serieel
- Wetgeving ontvangen van Batavia, losse stukken

Stukken van de Raad van Justitie te Batavia

- Notulen of resoluties, met inbegrip van extracten
- Rekesten
- Rollen civiel, serieel
- Rollen crimineel, serieel
- Rollen gemengd of onduidelijk, serieel
- Appointementen civiel
- Appointementen crimineel
- Appointementen gemengd of onduidelijk
- Processtukken civiel, serieel
- Processtukken crimineel, serieel
- Processtukken gemengd of onduidelijk, serieel
- Sententies civiel, serieel
- Sententies crimineel, serieel
- Sententies gemengd of onduidelijk, serieel
- Sententies civiel, incidenteel
- Sententies crimineel, incidenteel
- Sententies gemengd of onduidelijk, incidenteel
- Overige losse stukken civiel

- Overige losse stukken crimineel
- Overige losse stukken gemengd of onduidelijk

Stukken van andere rechtbanken dan de Raad van Justitie te Batavia

- Notulen of resoluties, met inbegrip van extracten
- Rekesten
- Rollen civiel, serieel
- Rollen crimineel, serieel
- Rollen gemengd of onduidelijk, serieel
- Appointementen civiel
- Appointementen crimineel
- Appointementen gemengd of onduidelijk
- Processtukken civiel, serieel
- Processtukken crimineel, serieel
- Processtukken gemengd of onduidelijk, serieel
- Sententies civiel, serieel
- Sententies crimineel, serieel
- Sententies gemengd of onduidelijk, serieel
- Sententies civiel, incidenteel
- Sententies crimineel, incidenteel
- Sententies gemengd of onduidelijk, incidenteel
- Overige losse stukken civiel
- Overige losse stukken crimineel
- Overige losse stukken gemengd of onduidelijk

Stukken betreffende personeel en bevolking, en lijsten en staten van personen

- Monsterrollen of samenvattingen van een vestiging of onderkantoor
- Monsterrollen of samenvattingen van schepen
- Rollen van gekwalificeerden
- Akten van verbetering en/of indienstneming
- Overige akten of andere stukken betreffende individuele personen
- Lijsten of samenvattingen van bevolking of burgers
- Lijsten van scholieren
- Lijsten van gerepatrieerden
- Lijsten of rollen van vrijburgers
- Overige lijsten van personen

Stukken betreffende handel

- Facturen
- Eisen
- Overzichten en vergelijkingen

Stukken betreffende boekhouding en financiën

- Grootboeken algemeen
- Grootboeken negotie
- Grootboeken personeel
- Grootboeken kas
- Grootboeken, overigen
- Journalen algemeen
- Journalen negotie
- Journalen personeel
- Journalen kas
- Journalen, overigen
- Extracten boekhouding
- Memorialen

- Balansen of staatrekeningen van de vestiging
- Balansen of staatrekeningen van onderkantoren of instellingen van de vestiging
- Liquidatie of egalisatie op de retouren
- Rendementen
- Lijsten en andere stukken betreffende geschenken
- Lijsten van wissels en betalingen
- Overige berekeningen en specificaties

Stukken betreffende schepen en equipage

- Lijsten van scheepsbewegingen
- Lijsten van navale macht
- Consumptie- of onkostenrekeningen
- Manifesten en lijsten van lading
- Scheepsjournalen
- Inventarissen van de uitrusting
- Rekeningen betreffende de uitrusting

Overige stukken

- Verklaringen betreffende handel, of boekhouding en financiën, of schepen en equipage
- Varia

Appendix 3: Reformatting TANAP's Classification System

The following table shows how the classification system of TANAP as shown in appendix 2, were restructured into new classifications for tables 3 through 6.

Table 8) Overview of the merger of the TANAP classification system

Regular Diaries	Everything under 'Dagregisters en registers', except 'Inheemse dagregisters
Local Diaries	'Inheemse dagregisters'
Resolutions	Everything under 'Resoluties en Registers'
Correspondence with Patria	Everything under 'Brieven, rapporten en instructies ontvangen uit en verzonden naar Nederland', except 'Registers der Papieren verzonden naar Nederland'
Correspondence with Batavia	Everything under 'Brieven, rapporten en instructies ontvangen uit en verzonden naar Batavia', except 'Registers der papieren'
Correspondence within <i>kantoor</i>	'Correspondentie met, tussen en binnen onderkantoren van de vestiging', 'Correspondentie binnen het gebied van de vestiging en andere daar opgemaakte documenten (bijvoorbeeld memories van goederen, secretariele verklaringen en generale opneem van effecten' and 'correspondentie tijdens missies en (militaire) expedities, 'correspondentie met gezaghebbers'.
Correspondence with other <i>kantoren</i>	'Correspondentie met andere vestigingen'
With other Europeans	'Correspondentie met andere Europeanen
With local rulers	'Correspondentie met Inheemsen'
Agreement, Contract, Requests	'Overeenkomsten', 'Passen verleend aan kooplieden, schepen en anderen', 'Rekosten'
Reports and Instructions	'Memories van Overgave', 'Rapporten beschouwend van aard', 'Rapporten van missies', 'Instructies, memories, seinbrieven'
Legal Documents	Everything under 'Wetgeving' and 'Stukken van andere rechtbanken dan de Raad van Justitie te Batavia'
<i>Monsterrollen</i>	'Monsterrollen of samenvattingen van een vestiging of onderkantoor', 'Monsterrollen of samenvattingen van schepen'
Citizens	'Rollen van gekwalificeerden', 'Overige akten of andere stukken betreffende individuele personen', 'Lijsten of samenvattingen van bevolking of burgers'.
Students	'Lijsten van scholieren'
Various (mostly deserters)	'Lijsten van gerepatrieerden', 'Overige lijsten van personen'
Accounts	'Facturen'
Demands	'Eisen'
General Overviews	'Overzichten en vergelijkingen'
<i>Grootboeken</i>	Everything marked as 'Grootboeken'
Balance of the <i>kantoor</i>	'Balansen of staatrekening van de vestiging'
Balance of institutions	'Balansen of staatrekening van onderkantoren of instellingen van de vestiging'
Yields, <i>Rendementen</i>	'Rendementen'
Other financial data	Everything else under 'Stukken betreffende boekhouding en financiën'
Ship movements	'Lijsten van cheepsbewegingen'
Naval power	'Lijsten van navale macht'
Other naval related documents	Everything else under 'Stukken betreffende schepen en equipage'

There are also TANAP classifications that are not included in the final tables. For most of these there were no documents that matched the classifications. Some were present in the OBP however, yet I chose to not include them in my research. The following classifications were present, but not included: 'Registers der papieren verzonden naar Nederland', 'Registers der papieren ontvangen uit Batavia', and everything under 'Overige stukken'. The first two are merely tables of contents and therefore unnecessary to include and the latter one contained all sorts of various documents that the TANAP employees could not categorise in any other category. All other classifications that are thus far not mentioned did not contain any documents and were therefore omitted from this research.

Appendix 4. Calculating Documents and Pages in the OBP Indices.

The amount of documents within a volume does not correspond well with the amount of entries in the index of each volume, since VOC scribes commonly put multiple documents together as one entry. The entries within the tables contents presented the amount of documents, but sometimes multiple documents were put under one entry. To get the actual amount of documents in an inventory number, I manually added up the amount of documents and did not. For example, the typescript transcription below in figure 9 contains fourteen entries, yet this does not correspond to the actual amount of documents. The third entry is already three documents in itself for example. The actual amount of documents on this page is twenty-six, almost twice as the amount of entries.

For the total length of the OBP I just manually added up the amount of pages of all documents in a volume. Unfortunately, sometimes documents used present-day page counts, but other times they referred to the sheets of paper, the folios of two pages each. At first I wanted to check which system was used per year and calculate everything to present-day pages. This was impossible however, since documents within one shipment sometimes used different systems. Checking every document within my case study was impossible. I decided therefore to keep the original pages as outlined by the indices on the OBP, while I acknowledge that these are flawed and that differences in page-size of the OBP might also have been the result of using a different page-metric. I assume however that most likely similar metrics were used throughout

For me it was important to look at the relative growth of the OBP throughout time for the sake of illustration, not for analytical purposes. I am convinced that this was still possible with my data, since it seems that most document types used the same metric throughout time. Differences in size within a record type are therefore comparable throughout time. This also makes comparing the total amount of pages of all document types combined possible.

Figure 9) Example of Typescript Index

VOC 2226/2101

Brieven en papieren van Mallabaar overgekomen in 1733.
 XXXXXI
 EEN EN TWINTIGSTE BOECK
 EERSTE DEEL

1 a 10	Register der papieren.
11 a 126	Originele missive door de commandeur Adriaen Maten en raed tot Couchim aen de vergadering der Seventiene geschreven 20 October 1732.
127 a 217	Drie copie brieven door de raed extraordinair en commissaris over de saken van Mallabar Wouter Hendrik en raed aen de gouverneur generael en raden van Indien van 28 Februarij, 21 April en 31 Maij 1732.
218 a 221	Copie missive door generael en raden aan voornoemde commissaris Hendrix en raed geschreeven van 6 Junij 1732.
222 a 223	Extract missive door de residenten Hendrik de Jongh en Leonardus Bleser tot Barassaloor aen de commandeur Maten en raed geschreven 2 September 1732 continerende de wijnige apperentie ter bekoming van de schuld van Junderadas Wistnada.
224 a 230	Copie sententie door de raed van Justitie tot Couchim van 5 September 1732 gevelt ten laste van de gewesen Calicoilangse resident Johannes Batta.
231 a 232	Copie bericht van de provisionele hoofdadministrateur Daniel Sijmons van 11 September 1732 aan de commandeur Maten overgelevert betreffende de reparatien successive gedaen aan de fortreszen Coilang en Cranganoor.
233 a 234	Copie missive door voornoemde raed extraordinaris Hendrix uijt Cranganoor aan de commandeur Maten geschreven van ultimo Julij 1732.
235 a 237	Dito van opgenoemde commandeur Maten aen de heer Hendrix geschreven van primo Augustij 1732.
238 a 241	Twee extract brieven tussen Couchim en Cannanoor gewisseld van 6 Maij en 14 Junij 1732 nevens een rapport van gecommiteerdens van 25 April 1732 alle sprekende van de slechte gesteltheit vant buskruijt ter laatstgenoemde plaatse.
242 a 250	Seven dito ditos tussen alsvooren gewisseld sedert 10 Julij tot 15 Augustij 1732, continerende de aankomet tot Cannanoor van de Franse chaloup le Suptile dies overwintering binnen de baar en wedervertrek na de Mascarinjas, mitagaders het gedrag dier natie aldaar gehouden.
251 a 256	Copie missive door het opperhoofd Adriaen Harstede en raed tot Cannanoor aan de commandeur Maten en raed geschreven in dato 5 October 1732.
257	Opstel vertonende de Mallabaarse lasten en winsten gedurende het boekjaar 1730/31 nevens de differentie met die vant vorige jaar.
258	Vier stux rendementen der verhandelde coopmanschappen so tot Couchim als de onderhorige comptoiren in diezelve tijd.

Note: Typescript of the index of the 1733 OBP of Malabar, NA, VOC, 2226.

Appendix 5: From TANAP to Table

Tables 3, 4, 5 and 6 were made with many methodological considerations in mind, as explained by appendices 3, on which types of documents to include, and 4, the calculation of documents and pages. In this appendix I explain how I retrieved the data from TANAP and restructured it into tables.

First I looked up the inventory numbers that corresponded with the years of my research. Then I looked up those inventory numbers in the index of the OBP on the website of the National Archives to see how many documents it consisted of. Then I added up which entries contained more documents to get the actual amount of documents. The pages were retrieved by looking the inventory numbers up in the ‘reference codes’ section on the TANAP website. I just looked at which document was put at the end of the OBP and I wrote down on which page it ended.

To find out which types of documents were in the OBP, I used the ‘reconstruction of VOC establishments’ tool within the TANAP database.²²⁷ In the PDF-file of Malabar all entries in the tables of contents of Malabar are categorised by type of document, along the lines of appendix 2. By searching in this PDF-file on inventory numbers, I could trace how many documents of each type were part of the OBP every year. I noted this down in a spreadsheet and later rearranged some types of documents based on my findings.

This process had two important possible pitfalls which should be taken into consideration. Firstly, the classifications within the ‘reconstruction of VOC establishments’ tool were made by employees of the National Archives in The Hague and not by company officials. While I believe these categories to be well thought out, the classification of records was inherently arbitrary because of this. No absolutes should therefore be derived from these classifications without checking if the process was done well. Secondly, the TANAP database did not include tables of contents of the OBP from Amsterdam for the years between 1702-1734. The years 1727 and 1733 were therefore categorised by myself with the use of the typescript tables of contents of the reading room at the National Archives. I categorised these after I had done all previous years so I was accustomed with how TANAP employees had classified certain documents. I believe this had no impact on the final tables, but such differences in data collection must be pointed out.

²²⁷ Reconstruction of VOC establishments, <http://databases.tanap.net/vocrecords/>.