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IN SEARCH OF A VOC SERVANT

How to search for data on a servant* of the Dutch East India Company (VOC)

* The VOC used the term "servant" (dienaar) in its personnel records for any employee of the Company, from the lowest to the highest rank.

Searching digitally for VOC servants: see the websites listed below.

The VOC archive is described in **inventory 1.04.02**.

The inventory numbers below can be found at that inventory (unless otherwise stated).

The organisation of the VOC

The VOC was founded in 1602. The States General granted the Company a trading monopoly for the area east of the Cape of Good Hope to the Magellan Straits. It was also granted certain sovereign rights, viz. the right to keep an army in its trading area and to enter into diplomatic contracts with Asian administrators. The organisation of the VOC in the Republic was decentralised. There were six administrative units known as "Chambers" (Amsterdam, Zeeland - i.e. Middelburg -, Delft, Rotterdam, Hoorn and Enkhuizen). Each Chamber was independently run by directors ("Bewindhebbers") and had, inter alia, its own equipment department and its own payroll system for the servants in Asia and the Cape, who were employed by one of the six Chambers. The highest VOC authority in the Republic and Asia rested with Heren XVII ("the Seventeen"), who were elected by the six Chambers (eight members by the Amsterdam Chamber, four by Zeeland and one by each of the other Chambers; the seventeenth post was awarded in rotation). The organisation of the VOC in Asia was highly centralised. The Board of the Governor General and Councils (GG&R), known as the "High Government", had its seat in Batavia. The High Government had substantial powers, but ultimately had to report to Heren XVII. The VOC was abolished in 1795.

When searching for data on a VOC servant you need to know that the VOC archive is in three sections forming an interconnected whole:

A. The general muster rolls for land and sea personnel

B. The ships' payroll books

C. The rolls of qualified civil and military servants

A mention in the muster rolls of the name of the ship on which the servant arrived in the Indies provides the vital link to the ships' payroll books; a mention of the place of work (a VOC settlement or a Company ship on the inter-Asian route) provides the vital link to the rolls of qualified servants.

A. The general muster rolls for land and sea personnel (1691-1791)

A "muster roll" in the VOC was a written annual list (as of 30 June) of the entire land and sea personnel in the Indies, on which each servant was listed by name. All the settlements in Asia, also the Cape, sent their muster rolls to Batavia, where they were copied into a single general muster roll, which was kept as a parent document in the VOC records in Batavia. From this six copies were made for the six Chambers in the Republic. Only the Zeeland and Amsterdam rolls are extant.

<i>Chamber:</i>	<i>period:</i>	<i>inv. nos.:</i>
Amsterdam	1720-1791	5168-5239
Zeeland	1691-1791	11534-11820

When searching pre-1720, you need to consult the rolls of the Zealand Chamber; post-1720 both Chambers are possible (the contents are identical). We advise using the Amsterdam rolls, however (the Zealand volumes are not so easy to handle, on top of which Zealand kept the land and sea muster rolls separate up to the end of 1779). The 1790 and 1791 rolls are far from complete. No rolls are extant for the years 1792-1795. On a muster roll you will find a servant's:

<i>* first name and family name</i>	<i>* place of birth or place of origin</i>
<i>* rank in the year to which the roll relates ("presente qualiteyt")</i>	<i>* the monthly pay for that rank</i>
<i>* the name of the ship on which he arrived in the East (in some cases the mention "in dienst" (in service), i.e. the servant was born in the Indies or arrived there while not in the service of the VOC).</i>	<i>* year of arrival in the East</i>
	<i>* rank on joining the VOC</i>
	<i>* Chamber at which he joined</i>

B. The ships' payroll books (1633-1795)

The muster rolls show the VOC ship on which the servant arrived in the Indies, and this piece of information provides access to the ships' payroll books. The people on board each VOC ship from the Netherlands to the East were recorded in a separate book, the ship's payroll book, which belonged to a particular ship and bore its name. Two identical copies were made: the first was deposited in the VOC records in Batavia when the ship arrived; the second was sent back to the fatherland, to the respective Chamber. During the voyage the ship's payroll book took on the character of a muster roll, but after the ship arrived any change in a servant's status was recorded (i.e. transfer from one settlement to another, from one inter-Asian ship to another). The central personnel department in Batavia informed the various Chambers of these changes once a year. At the beginning of a ship's payroll book is an "alphabet" or register of first names (not in standard alphabetical order and not always reliable). The collection of ships' payroll books from all six Chambers numbers 2991 volumes, only 198 of which relate to the seventeenth century, and even then essentially only the last thirty years. The ships' payroll books of over 90% of the ships that sailed in the eighteenth century are extant.

Inventory 1.04.13 contains a list of all the Chambers' ships' payroll books.

The index (from p. 529) at the back of the inventory of the VOC archive lists the names of the ships as key words.

The ships' payroll books of Delft (inv. nos. 13876-14080), Rotterdam (14101-14296) and Zealand (12672-12928) have been microfilmed. The microfiches are in the stacks by the self-service Reading Room in cupboard D16.

The ship's payroll book contains the following data on each person on board in two columns, debit and credit:

first name; family name; place of origin; rank on joining; pay; duration of voyage to the Indies; mention, if appropriate, of a will or "maandceel", cost of kit (if any), any benefits paid by the VOC in the Republic to relatives, last payment to servant, and date of death or date of departure from the Indies.

Page 113 of inventory (1.04.02) shows the layout of a page in a ship's payroll book, with explanations of the information contained in the various columns.

C. The rolls of qualified civil and military servants

In the case of a member of the land personnel we know from the ship's payroll book or the muster roll where he worked. This piece of information provides access to the roles of qualified civil and military servants (qualified civil starts at the rank of "young assistant", qualified military at the rank of sergeant). Every year (generally as of 30 June) all the settlements in Asia sent their lists of qualified civil and military servants to Batavia, where they were copied into two separate lists, one of qualified civil and one of qualified military servants, and sent to the Chambers in the Republic. Only the rolls from the Amsterdam and Zeeland Chambers are extant.

<i>Chamber:</i>	<i>period</i>	<i>inv. nos.:</i>
Amsterdam	1720-c.1789	5240-5261
Zeeland	1699-1791	11821-11928

As is the case with the general muster rolls, the Amsterdam Chamber series is easier to handle than the one from the Zeeland Chamber archive. Apart from data also shown on the muster rolls (e.g. rank and pay in the year of enrolment), the rolls of the qualified servants provide additional information, viz. previous qualified ranks, pay, years of promotion and by whom promoted.

D. Payment rolls of those on board ships that sailed for the Zeeland Chamber (1703-1794), inv. nos. 11959-12109

The rolls are organised by ship and show the payment of two months' pay, the so called *handgeld* [in earnest-money] to soldiers and sailors, who signed for it.

E. Application books of sailors and soldiers for ships of the Zeeland Chamber (1671-1794), inv. nos. 12227-12321

The application books show the official applications to the directors of the Zeeland Chamber made by sailors and soldiers for payments to be made to specified persons during their absence. The applicants signed their names under the applications.

F. Collection of East Indies wills (1698-1807), inv. nos. 6847-6897

This collection contains copies of wills made in Asia that were also recorded at the Weeskamer (Orphan Chamber) in Batavia (even if the will was actually authenticated elsewhere).

It has an **index by family name** (inventory **1.04.14**).

There is also an **inventory of VOC servants** in the first half of the seventeenth century (**1.04.23**). This is a card index containing handwritten fiches, in alphabetical order of name/patronymic with references to mentions of and/or data on these servants (mainly higher ranks).

Literature

BESCHRYVINGE VAN DE OOSTINDISCHE COMPAGNIE (Description of the East India Company) by the advocate of the VOC, Pieter van Dam. *RGP* large series, nos. 63, 68, 74, 76, 83, 87 and 96.

DUTCH-ASIATIC SHIPPING. *RGP* large series nos. 166 and 167. Overview of voyages of the VOC and its predecessor companies between the Netherlands and Asia and the Cape, 1595-1795. This does not provide any information on the use of VOC ships on the inter-Asian routes. For an introduction to these overviews see *RGP* no. 165.

GENERALE MISSIVEN VAN GG&R AAN HEREN XVII (General missives from Governor General and Councils to Heren XVII), 1610-1737. *RGP* large series nos. 104, 112, 125, 134, 150, 159, 164, 193 and 205. Substantial overviews of the fortunes of the VOC in the Indies generally sent back twice a year.

The above publications all have indexes by names of persons and ships.

Lequin, F., *Het personeel van de Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie in Azië in de achttiende eeuw, meer in het bijzonder in de vesting Bengalen* (The personnel of the VOC in Asia in the eighteenth century, in particular the Bengal fort), 1982.

Schouwenburg, K.L. van, *Het personeel op de schepen van de Kamer Delft der VOC in de eerste helft der 18e eeuw* (The personnel on the ships of the Delft Chamber of the VOC in the first half of the 18th century), *Tijdschrift voor Zeegechiedenis*, Vol. 7, 1988, pp. 76-93.

Idem, *Het personeel op de schepen van de Kamer Delft der VOC in de tweede helft der 18e eeuw*, *Tijdschrift voor Zeegechiedenis*, Vol. 8, 1989, pp. 179-186.

See also the detailed introduction in inventory 1.04.02.

Websites on the VOC

Uitgevaren voor de Kamers (sailed for the Chambers of the VOC). On this site you can search for data on persons on board the ships that sailed for the East from the Republic between 1700 and 1794. The information currently available there is taken from the ships' payroll books of the **Delft, Hoorn and Rotterdam Chambers** and some from the **Zealand Chamber**.

<http://voc.mindbus.nl>

Projecten over de VOC (Projects on the VOC). This site of the Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis (ING, Institute of Dutch History) shows the ING's publications on the VOC. It includes an on-line glossary of VOC terms.
www.inghist.nl/Instituut/VOC

VOC-Kenniscentrum (VOC knowledge centre). A site of the Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology (KITLV) containing detailed information on various aspects of the VOC. <http://voc-kenniscentrum.nl>

Project: "Towards A New Age of Partnership" (TANAP). On this site you find information about the several VOC archives
www.tanap.net

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