

# COSMOPOLIS

## Connecting Histories, Archives and Heritage in Monsoon Asia

We already are and have always been cosmopolitan,  
though we may not always have known it.<sup>1</sup>

### *Introduction*

COSMOPOLIS is the common research and policy agenda for Colonial and Global History at the Institute for History of Leiden University. As such it follows in the footsteps of the TANAP- and ENCOMPASS-programmes that were subsequently executed from 1999 onward. In these two programmes numerous young Asian scholars were trained at the History Institute of Leiden University and the National Archives in The Hague. During the last decade the programmes produced more than twenty PhD dissertations with many more to come during the years ahead. In the years ahead ENCOMPASS (TANAP stopped in 2006) will continue to offer talented students the unique opportunity to engage in a one-year training-programme for the acquisition of specific language and research skills to study Dutch colonial sources on Asia and South Africa. From September 2012 onwards, this foundation year can be combined with any BA, MA, Research-MA or PhD-track of the History Department at Leiden University.<sup>2</sup>

### *Objectives*

First of all, COSMOPOLIS is meant as an overall framework to guarantee the cohesion of the various educational and research tracks of Colonial and Global History at Leiden University. In the near future this will include the interdisciplinary two-year MA-programme on Heritage Studies that is now being developed together with the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS), the Leiden Institute of Area Studies (LIAS) and various partner universities in Asia. This programme will broaden the scope of the archival track of ENCOMPASS.

At the same time, COSMOPOLIS represents a common endeavour of Leiden University and the National Archives to extend the accessibility and study of the Dutch colonial archives to Asian countries by deepening the cooperation with Asian universities, archives and local cultural institutions. For example, to enhance the accessibility of Dutch source materials in Asia, COSMOPOLIS stimulates the spread of small Dutch expertise centres in Asia (together with strategic partners like *De Nederlandse Taalunie*) and the digitization of Dutch archival materials

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<sup>1</sup> Carol Breckenridge, Sheldon Pollock, Homi Bhabha and Dipesh Chakrabarty in: *Cosmopolitanism* (Duke University Press, 2002), p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Non-EU Students may seek financial support through various national scholarship-agreements (as in the case of Indonesia), MoU's (as in the case of India) or through more specific scholarship-programmes such as Erasmus-Mundus or Fulbright fellowships.

accessed through the internet. By building tripartite partnerships between universities, archives and local cultural institutions COSMOPOLIS hopes to achieve a substantially widened, international accessibility to Dutch archival resources, and to build a sustainable international and interdisciplinary network for cultural cooperation and heritage studies that is rooted in and supported by local civil society.

Finally, COSMOPOLIS pursues an interdisciplinary and innovative research agenda that explores the much neglected transnational and cultural dimension of intra-Eurasian encounters through Dutch sources. It starts from the recognition that political, social-economic, ethnic and religious processes, both in the colonies and the metropolis, were moulded by the global connections through the highly cosmopolitan middleground of Eurasian networks and port-cities.

#### *The theme: Eurasian middleground*

The identity of the Netherlands has grown out of four centuries of intensive cosmopolitanism. Starting from its independence in the sixteenth century, the Dutch Republic has a long history of attracting and marketing commodities and ideas from across the globe. Thanks to several decades of historical research, there is a broad awareness now that the Netherlands developed into the hub of a vast commercial empire encompassing the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. At the same time, though, the spotlights on the economic and national dimension of Dutch colonial history, has led historians to overlook the transnational, cosmopolitan character of the Dutch empire in Asia. Only in recent years, there emerges a new alertness for the crucial Eurasian interface of European expansion. In the context of what has been labelled a New Imperial History, scholars have gradually shifted attention to the various interregional networks that connected the metropolis to the colonies, the colonies to each other, and the latter to their respective hinterlands. Without denying asymmetrical power relationships, the result will be a better understanding of a more balanced, brokered Eurasian world in which Europeans, Asians and Eurasians exchanged ideas about and with each other. By highlighting various aspects of cross-cultural conflict and/or commensurability, COSMOPOLIS aims to restore this entangled Eurasian voice in the grand narrative of Dutch expansion in Asia. With this in mind, COSMOPOLIS proposes two major themes: (a) Eurasian networks, and, as epitomes of these, (b) Eurasian port-cities. Both these topics highlight cultural encounters and connections and can only be studied in a global and comparative context. Although the Dutch archival lens will be prominent, research must be informed as much as possible by non-Dutch and in particular Asian sources as well.

#### *Eurasian Networks*

This theme focuses on the extensive Eurasian networks that stretched across and even beyond the Indian Ocean, often outside immediate colonial control. In 2012 Leiden University and Universitas Gadjah Mada launched a PhD programme on *The Making of Religious Traditions in Indonesia: History and Heritage in Global Perspective (1600-1940)*. This project also starts

from the awareness that transnational connections are crucial in coming to grips with the process of **identity formation**. Far from only autonomous developments, religious reconstruction was often the result of the unprecedented growth of human interaction across the entire Indian Ocean mainly through trade and pilgrimage. This more historical and more global perspective on what so far seemed to be only a contemporary and regional experience will tremendously deepen our present-day understanding of it. For example, beyond the Dutch East Indies, fascinating comparative research, by historians and social-scientists alike, could be conducted regarding the diverging experiences of Hindustani and Javanese communities in the West Indies and the Netherlands.

What also stands in need to be done is a critical analysis of the various circuits of **Eurasian cultural brokers** who made the Dutch empire in Asia work. These Eurasian go-betweens not only operated at the various interstices of colonial rule but also served as crucial intermediaries who transmitted information within Asia and from Asia to Europe and vice-versa. A new focus on Eurasian and Asian agency should not only open up new opportunities for biographical and prosopographical research on these go-betweens, but also give rise to a more critical and text-based analysis of the published and unpublished Dutch discourse on Asian polities, religions and societies. With a sensitive eye on Asian agency and intercultural dialogue, COSMOPOLIS will start to address the construction of **Dutch (proto-) orientalism**. This will not only fill in the awkward *Dutch* gap in the study of European orientalism but also the even more yawning *Asian* gap in the study of e.g. the Dutch Radical Enlightenment and other Dutch intellectual movements that so far have been analyzed from an exclusively Western perspective only.

Very much in line with this approach is the study of **colonial knowledge production and science**. Here again, the Dutch contribution was tremendously important but still remains to be studied in earnest. Behind the Dutch institutions that launched various expeditions into the Tropics, are hidden intricate transnational networks that connect Western science to Asian agents and their ways of information gathering and knowledge production. Obviously, the critical enquiry of the complicated relationship between empire and information will also tremendously strengthen the Heritage Programme of COSMOPOLIS.

Other network-related research may revisit various neglected cross-cultural aspects of Chinese, Indian, Arabian, Armenian and other **diasporas**. The same goes for the transnational movement of people for labour and pilgrimage. A major but still neglected topic is the Indian Ocean **slave-trade**. The important Christian Mardijker community of former slaves in Batavia still stands in need of thorough analysis. Mardijkers played an important role in building Batavia, opening up its Ommelanden, and serving in its militia. Bringing in the military aspect, one other very important topic remains the circulation of people on the Southeast Asian military labour market. The recruitment of e.g. Madurese, Buginese and Moluccan soldiers for the colonial armies

triggered interesting mechanisms of **ethno-genesis** which deserve to be studied through a Dutch archival gaze.

### *Eurasian Port-cities*

All along the maritime margins of all the world's continents, the Dutch administered a string of burgeoning port-cities. In Asia these Dutch emporia served as major cosmopolitan gateways that connected Europe to the old civilizations of Asia. Although ruled by Dutchmen, the population of these port-cities had wide-ranging ethnic and religious backgrounds. As a result, these so-called *Dutch* were actually *Eurasian* cities: nodal points in a vast web of Chinese, Indian, Armenian, Arabian, Jewish, Malay, Buginese, Portuguese, English, French and many more interregional networks that stretched the entire Indian Ocean.<sup>3</sup> COSMOPOLIS aims to study the Dutch colonial port-city from an interdisciplinary angle which pays full tribute to its multicultural capacity and its Janus-faced identity at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. The overall result should be **integrated urban histories** of towns formerly under Dutch rule and with extensive transnational ties. Cities that come to mind are Capetown, Kochi (Cochin), Colombo, Malacca, Jakarta (Batavia), Guangzhou (Canton) and Nagasaki (Deshima).

Interdisciplinary research may involve a study of e.g. the urban planning, the cultural landscape and the military and civilian architecture in these towns. As such COSMOPOLIS seeks synergy with other academic disciplines such as cultural anthropology, art-history and archaeology. The agenda of integrated urban histories should also seriously engage with the changing relationships of ethnic, social and religious communities: to what extent these were open or fluid categories? Were they allowed to intermingle or were they completely segregated from each other? How much of the organization of these urban societies was actually the product of the colonial government's social engineering? To what extent the communities managed to retain or change their identities as a result of colonial policies and what role should be attributed to increasing trans-regional and ever more global connections. During the last two decades various interesting case-studies have appeared on these issues but what is still missing is a **comparative and connective** approach that (a) systematically fills in the still substantial gaps in this research, and (b) is sensitive for the (dis)continuities in both time and space. As a result, it is to be hoped for that a major synthesis on colonial Dutch port-cities can be realized within the next decade.

One very attractive aspect of these integrated urban histories is the splendid opportunity it offers for making Dutch archival materials both more interesting and more accessible to both a wider

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<sup>3</sup> This focus conveniently links up COSMOPOLIS to another Leiden-based project on the Atlantic World: "Dutch Atlantic Connections: The Circulation of Peoples, Goods and Ideas in the Atlantic World, 1680-1795" (see <http://www.kitlv.nl/home/Projects?id=19>). Staff of the Leiden Institute for History is in the process of bringing together Atlantic and Asian research on networks and port-cities in a monograph provisionally entitled "The Global Dutchman" (to come out in 2013).

and more local audience. Although COSMOPOLIS emphatically aims to explore *all* cosmopolitan characteristics of Dutch port-cities in past and present, it also stems from a particular Dutch awareness that several centuries of collective memory have been created by, first, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and, later, the Colonial Government of the Dutch East Indies. Furthermore there are, although maybe less known, important archival collections of colonial, but non-state agents of for instance societies for scientific research, churches and missionary work. Unfortunately, this unique archival material is hardly accessible to the local populations since almost all of it is written in the Dutch language and preserved in distant archives. Although these are Dutch archives on specific Asian port-cities, the collective memory of these Dutch port-cities in histories, archives, and heritage is nobody's particular but actually humanity's shared property. Hence COSMOPOLIS emphatically wants to link up academic research and archival accessibility to effective cultural policies on the ground. As such COSMOPOLIS pursues close cooperation with local organisations *in situ*.

*Materials: Histories, Archives and Heritage*

In line with the mentioned themes, the archival program of COSMOPOLIS will also focus on Eurasian networks and port-cities. Archives mirror former activities of peoples and organizations. The colonial archives still at our disposal in the archival repositories are the products of trading activities, state machineries, missionary work, scientific observations, migration and personal alliances, with separated networks and circuits of knowledge. These tangible administrative deposits of human activities contain and provide valuable information for historical research. Archives themselves are however hardly regarded nor studied as products of historical processes. Archivists' main task is to produce access-tools and they tend to work according to the lines and structures of the individual records creators. The inventories they produce are indispensable tools for historians, but based in a nineteenth-century tradition: institutions and individuals were important agents and pillars of and for the empire and the nation state. There are plenty reasons why archivists should intervene more actively into the historical debate, why they should operate on a different level than only from the perspective of the record creating agencies. The challenge for the archivists within the COSMOPOLIS program is to work on the development of access tools that meet the requirements of current research that is more and more rooted in a global approach. Information-creation, information-gathering and information-exchange are and were by nature dynamic processes. This is particularly clear in a colonial context. Every ship that sailed across the globe did not only transport people and goods but had also a great deal of information on board in the form of letters, memorandums, accounts etc. The interesting thing of the so-called 'colonial archives' is that they appear as a prototype for a global system of communication through circulation, an apparatus for controlling territory by producing, distributing, and consuming information.<sup>4</sup> By taking the flow of information instead of the creator of information as the main perspective to study the archives, it will be possible to

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Richards, 'Archive and Utopia' in *Representations* 37 (1992) 104-135, 108-109.

discover and reconstruct the original flow of information and, as a consequence, to restructure information networks of the past. Therefore it is necessary to do more research on the history of the context and creation of these archives. In the TANAP-ENCOMPASS programmes most attention has been given to the archives of the central state agencies (VOC and the COLONIAL STATE<sup>5</sup>). These large ‘state-archives’ form the backbone of the administrative network between Batavia, Amsterdam and The Hague. These archives are of great importance not only for the study of the relations between the metropolis and the colonies, but at the same time for the regional historiography in Asia.

In the case of Indonesia, historians and archivists tend to overlook what Peter Carey once called the “most important sources for information on local history (...) [s]panning the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries [which] cover the day-to-day activities of Dutch administrators in trading posts (factorijen) and residencies throughout the Indonesian archipelago”: the 41 separate residency archives or *arsip daerah*.<sup>6</sup> A better understanding of the archival production in these trading posts and residencies will make it possible to connect the far ends of the information network in the Indies to the backbone of the information exchange between Batavia and the metropolis and provide historians with unknown information about the local situation and will give more insight in local, regional and interregional connections as well.

Digitization of archives can play a decisive role in reconstructing these former networks of information gathering and information exchange. The physical distance between the existing collections in different repositories can be lifted. The tangible traces of previous fluid information networks – nowadays solidified and most of the time scattered and transferred to artificial archival warehouses – can be connected again to the original networks from their information perspective. By reconstructing these information networks new issues can be addressed: what kind of information was exchanged within the different networks, who were the key-players within these networks, how and by whom was information collected, how did the colonial servants codify and translate the collected information into the language of the state, in what form was information written, how was the collected information used, who read the information, how was information processed, aggregated and forwarded, which information was transferred or available for different networks?<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The archives of the VOC worldwide have been inventoried within the TANAP program; in the ENCOMPASS program the scope changed to colonial Indonesia. In Indonesia the archives of *Burgerlijke Openbare Werken* are inventoried and a program is running to make the archives accessible of the *Algemene Secretarie*.

<sup>6</sup> P.B.R. Carey, ‘The Residency archive of Jogjakarta’, *Indonesia* 25 (1978) 115-150.

<sup>7</sup> Kerry Ward, *Networks of Empire. Forced Migration in the Dutch East India Company* (Cambridge 2009)

Still on a more basic level, digitization of archives may contribute significantly in detecting transnational networks such as those of indentured labourers to the West Indies or those of Asian shipping in the Indian Ocean at large. A systematic study of the remaining shipping lists – often containing information on the kind, ownership, tonnage, cargo, origin and destination of ships – in the VOC-archive may shed new light on when and how these networks changed their course during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This will facilitate a perspective that goes beyond that of present nation states and focuses instead on the various circuits of people and ideas that connected Asian societies through the monsoon ‘mediterraneans’ of the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal and the South China Sea.

Studying the long history of transnational networks and port-cities will also draw attention to the phenomenon of transmission and spread of habits, values, customs and traditions to different parts of the world in space and in time. When people move from one place to another they come and go with their language, their religious beliefs, their housing traditions, their food and clothing culture, material and immaterial symbols etc. Power relations, social- and ethnic relations, economic- and religious interests determine to a large extent whether different groups are able to (partly) conserve or have to give up their old traditions, beliefs etc. in the new context. These continuous cultural processes of accepting and rejecting, of creating, merging and wiping out customs, beliefs and values raises questions on how groups of people gave meaning to the world they lived in and what role symbols, artefacts and customs played. The ongoing discourse on heritage (tangible and intangible) compels to initiate a critical analysis of the attributed value, meaning and importance of the traces and sources of the past. This study of attributed value, meaning and importance to tangible and intangible traces from the past takes place on different levels. Without aiming to be exhaustive here, we can study the HISTORICAL PROCESSES of how groups of migrants used or invented (new) modes of identification; how existing customs, beliefs, values and traditions were adapted to new contexts or in short how groups of people managed to give meaning under changing circumstances and which symbols and language they used for this. At a different level there is an urgent need to critically analyze the HISTORIOGRAPHY OF HERITAGE TRACES. In the long tradition of using traces of the past for creating contemporary, often contested images of the past, COSMOPOLIS aims to stimulate a critical debate on the use (in the past and in the present) of the traces and sources historians have to their disposal; to analyze which attributed values these traces and sources have from different perspectives and investigate for what purposes these traces and sources have been used.