

## LETTERS FROM READERS

My doctoral dissertation (*De Westindische plantages van 1720 tot 1795; financiën en handel*, Nijmegen, 1973, 367 pp., bibliography, tables, charts) was privately published at the time of my defense. Very few copies were printed but the book was available through normal trade channels for a few years until it went out of print. Since there now seems to be a growing interest in the work, I am prepared to have a reprint produced, provided at least 150 copies can be sold. The book would then cost 50 to 60 guilders, excluding postage and packing.

Those interested in this work are requested to write me. Notice will be given in a future *Itinerario* regarding the decision to reprint and, if the response is positive, when the book will again be available. (Most likely at the end of this year or beginning of 1983.)

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## IN MEMORIAM W. PH. COOLHAAS

Died on 12 April 1981, after a long illness

Willem Philippus Coolhaas, a former official of the Binnenlands Bestuur in the Netherlands Indies and emeritus Professor in the History of the Relations between The Netherlands and Other West European Countries with the overseas world, has died in Bilthoven at the age of 82. His sickness did not prevent him from remaining active till the end in the field in which he had won most renown, namely colonial history. With the publication of the *Generale Missiven* of the Dutch East India Company, Coolhaas made available a series of historical sources which will remain essential for the study of Asian history in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Even so, Coolhaas

was not trained as a historian. After following in Leiden the education for an official in the *Binnenlands Bestuur* of the former Dutch Indies, he served from 1921 to 1934 in the Moluccas, Flores, Java and Sumatra. With the exception of the year in Java, he was employed in this first period in the Outer Provinces, those areas of the Indonesian archipelago outside Java which had often only been under Dutch rule for a short period. This time spent in the Outer Provinces was a long-lasting influence on Coolhaas's later historical work. In these areas the changes which Java had endured in the nineteenth century were far less acute. There were still all sorts of traces and survivals from the situation before Dutch rule. In a large part of the area, Dutch rule was not applied directly but through the so-called self-rulers, princes who had recognised Dutch sovereignty and in return had retained a large number of powers in internal matters. Moreover in large parts of the Outer provinces, Dutch rule only began to be effective at the end of the nineteenth or the beginning of the twentieth century. Coolhaas was one of the first officials in Central Flores.<sup>1</sup> Old local institutions of government still existed, or lived in the opinions of the people. Old patterns had not yet been fully broken down or put aside. In that respect the situation did not greatly differ from that which the Dutch had met on their arrival in the Indonesian archipelago in the seventeenth century. According to one nineteenth century author so little had changed in the Moluccas since the seventeenth century that the famous description given by Valentijn was still usable. Coolhaas read Valentijn while travelling from island to island in a *prahu*; in this way past and present flowed over into each other.<sup>2</sup>

History and administration had frequent contacts. One regular problem in the 'self-governing' areas was the choice of a successor to the throne. On such an occasion, the various factions and groups within the ruling families attempted to influence the administration with their own versions of tradition, or with an appeal to genealogy. The solution of such problems required not only tact but also historical and anthropological insight. As a by-product of his concern with the 'self-governing' states, Coolhaas

published a chronicle of the Batjan principedom.<sup>3</sup> He was not the only official who engaged in this sort of work; for others it even provided their doctoral theses.<sup>4</sup>

In 1936, Coolhaas made use of a furlough to take his doctorate under Gerretson in Utrecht with a study of the 1827 government regulations.<sup>5</sup> The form of dissertation was typical of many of the works which had to be written in a very short time, a year or less. It consisted of an introduction followed by a collection of documents.

After his return to the Indies he worked in the department of Internal affairs in Batavia and was for a while a member of the Volksraad. On the basis of his acquaintance with the *buitengewesten*, he followed Van Vollenhoven in opposing the over-speedy introduction of western administrative models in those areas. After the war, which he spent in the Netherlands, he was until 1950 head of the *Landsarchief* (nowadays *Arsip Nasional*) and extraordinary professor in the new University of Indonesia, in Jakarta. In 1955 he succeeded Gerretson as Professor in the History of the Relations between The Netherlands and the Overseas World in Utrecht. The old title for this chair, Colonial History, was consciously avoided. This was not only as a result of the revulsion that the concept of colonialism produced at that moment, but also of a revision of the 'job description'. Older colonial historians had too easily confused the history of the Dutch in the Indonesian archipelago with the history of Indonesia. Before the war Van Leur had heavily attacked this view, and then decolonisation had brought an end to the political system in which the Dutch had been in the foreground, to the exclusion of their Indonesian counterparts. This reappraisal was reflected in the description of the chair. It recognised that the earlier colonial history was often no more than a *pars pro toto* in the sense, that the relations of the Europeans with a particular area were made equivalent to the history of that area. In his view of the place of the colonial period in Indonesian history, Coolhaas was therefore a precursor of the ideas later developed in the United States.<sup>6</sup>

Coolhaas's professorial career began under the most unfavourable conditions. In the Netherlands, under influ-

ence of the trauma caused by the unexpected decolonisation of Indonesia, this part of the past was neglected. The worsening relations with Indonesia as a result of the New Guinea crisis made it impossible that in the Netherlands a reappraisal of the Dutch colonial past was developed or widely accepted. In these conditions, Coolhaas's services should not be measured by the number of his students. Rather he opened up areas which have given the Netherlands their own place in colonial history.

Coolhaas was in the full sense of the word a man with his own character. Sensitive to the boundaries of insensitivity he quickly retired behind his shield from where he fired off his bolts. His involuntary brusqueness turned many against him before they had a chance to break through to him, but for those who did he was always prepared to put his time and his great knowledge at their disposal.

This sensitivity was of importance in the formation of his work. Like many of his generation, Coolhaas found it difficult to accept that their work in Indië was not properly appreciated. The negative vision of Dutch colonial policy in the Anglophone literature of the time touched him in a sore place. Although he would never speak in terms of a mission that had been cut off, as an old colonial official he felt attacked. During his career in Indonesia, he had had enough experience of the qualities of both Dutch and Indonesians to value them equally, but nevertheless he had no doubts as to the tasks of the Dutch in Indonesia. These two poles - interest for and knowledge of the Indonesians and belief in Dutch ability - were indissolubly linked to each other. In the same years that he published an important article on the scant attention paid to the native population in the older colonial literature, he held his inaugural lecture on the lost chances for Dutch cultural expansion in Latin America.<sup>7</sup> He was pugnacious in setting right what he considered to be wrong done to the Dutch in the historiography, whether it concerned the Ambonese massacre of 1623 or the British share in the Palembang attack on the Dutch in 1811.<sup>8</sup> This pugnaciousness did, however, lead to more important initiatives, such as that for the publication of a series of sources on Dutch colonial policy in the twentieth century.

Coolhaas's own magnum opus was the publication of the *Generale Missiven* of the VOC.<sup>9</sup> This important contribution to the history of both Asia and Dutch colonialism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries contains more than six thousand pages in seven massive volumes. In these letters the Governors General and Council of India gave a survey of the state of affairs between the Cape of Good Hope and Japan. In addition to matters of trade, there is a large proportion concerning the political and social circumstances in the areas in which the company was active. This broadness makes the source publication a *Fundgrube* for everyone who works on Asian history, while they are often the only source for particular information. Moreover, they form an inventory to the information that can be expected in more extended form in the Dutch colonial archives, which are among the richest in the world.

Coolhaas was an ideal editor for this work, with his great experience of different parts of the archipelago and his lifelong interest in men and women and their history. In a time when there was little interest in the early Dutch colonial past, with great tenacity and stamina he opened up material for international research, and indeed refuted the criticism of Dutch colonial history.

There have recently appeared studies of various of the greater or lesser states of the eastern Indonesian archipelago, written with the help of sources from the time of the Dutch East India Company.<sup>10</sup> In this way, the circle has been closed. Coolhaas has made available to researchers information on precisely those areas where his career as a young colonial official began.

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1. W.Ph. Coolhaas 'Bijdrage tot de kennis van het Manggaraïsche volk (West Flores) *Tijdschrift van het Koninklijk Nederlandsch Aardrijkskundig Genootschap* 1942 (148 - 177, 328 - 360).
2. About his stay in the Moluccas, see: W. Ph. Coolhaas,

- 'Ervaringen van een jonge bestuursambtenaar in de Molukken' in S.L. van der Wal ed. *Besturen Overzee* (Franeker, 1977) 73 - 109.
3. W.Ph. Coolhaas 'Kroniek van het Rijk Batjan' *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal- Land- en Volkenkunde* (1923) 474 - 512
  4. H.G. Schulte Nordholt, *Het politieke systeem van de Atoni van Timor* diss. Vrije Universiteit 1966, 1 - 5.
  5. W. Ph. Coolhaas, *Het regeeringsreglement van 1827, het werk van 1818 aan de ervaring getoetst*. Diss. Utrecht 1936.
  - 6.. W.Ph. Coolhaas, 'Van Koloniale Geschiedenis en geschiedenis van Indonesië; van historici en taalamt-naren'. *Bijdragen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 1951, 135 - 160. See also John R.W. Smail 'On the possibility of an autonomous history of Modern South East Asia', *Journal of South-east Asian History* 1961, 72 - 102.
  7. W.Ph. Coolhaas, *Verloren Kansen*, (Groningen 1955).
  8. W.Ph. Coolhaas, 'Aanteekeningen en opmerkingen over den zoogenaamden Ambonschen moord' *BKI* 1942, 49 - 93; —, 'Baud on Raffles' *Journal Malaysian Branch Royal Asiatic Society* 1951, 109 - 120.
  9. *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* 7 vols. ('s Gravenhage 1960 - 1979).
  10. James J. Fox, *Harvest of the Palm, Ecological Change in Eastern Indonesia* (Cambridge Mass. 1977).

## A LETTER FROM CANADA

19 april 1982

Dear Editors,

I have delayed replying to your letter of March 8th until plans for the 1983 conference of the Consortium for