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A pictorial history of Indonesia in Rotterdam Prints, drawings & photographs in the Atlas Van Stolk collection

The city of Rotterdam is not only famous for its harbours, but also cherishes a variety of museums with wonderful art collections. One of these museums, the City Museum of Rotterdam, houses the collection of prints and drawings called the Atlas Van Stolk collection. This collection, referred to as "Atlas", was started by the Rotterdam timber merchant Abraham van Stolk (1814-1876). Van Stolk was a typical nineteenth century amateur, whose favourite pursuit was collecting prints and drawings. It was his aim to bring together illustrations about the history of the Netherlands starting with the original inhabitants called the Batavians and ending in his own time.¹ This also included prints and drawings, and later photographs, illustrating the exploits of the Dutch overseas. Visitors to the Atlas Van Stolk will therefore find material not only about Holland, but also about countries such as Brazil, Ceylon and South Africa. The illustrations depicting Indonesia are often of a very high standard, sometimes only of historical value. Others again are very fanciful, made by artists who never set foot on Indonesian soil. We offer here a brief survey.

Illustrated books

From the time of the first voyages to Indonesia at the end of the sixteenth century, books recounting the travels of the Dutch were published in the Netherlands. These books were usually illustrated with plates depicting the Indonesian topography and ethnography. One of the earliest and most important works is Jan Huygen van Linschoten's *Itinerario* (which was published in Amsterdam in 1596), with romanticized engravings of the people of Java. During his travels to India, in Portuguese service in 1583, Van Linschoten collected information which later became useful to Dutch travellers.

Another classic work is the *Begin ende Voortgangh van de Vereenighde Nederlandsche Geoctroyeerde Oost-Indische Compagnie* with descriptions of voyages made by Dutch travellers

around the world between 1594 and 1629 (ill. 1). The prints in the two volumes became very popular and were used over and over again up to the eighteenth century. In 1682 the *Gedenkwaerdige zee-en lantreise* by Joan Nieuhof was published in Amsterdam. Although Nieuhof lived in Batavia from 1667 to 1670 his engravings are not always reliable. Nevertheless his book was exciting travel literature for the seventeenth-century Dutch public in Holland.

The first book to give a comprehensive account, in text and illustration, of the people, places and natural history of Indonesia is François Valentijn's *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën*. The numerous engravings in these eight folio volumes, which were published in Amsterdam between 1724 and 1726, sometimes measure up to eighty centimeters and therefore have to be folded out.

In 1735 Johan Wolfgang Heijdt was appointed draughtsman and architect of the buildings belonging to the Dutch East India Company in Batavia (Jakarta). The drawings which he made in and around Batavia were used for his book entitled *Allerneuester Geographisch- und Topographischer Schau-Platz*, which was published in 1744.

Very informative is the book *Batavia*, printed in 1799. It consists of four parts. The sub-title informs us that the book gives information (and illustrations) about the geography, buildings, government, church, history, trade, customs, climate, diseases, animals and plants of the city. The etchings and engravings are by different artists. One of the illustrations shows the massacre of the Chinese population living in and around Batavia, on the 9th October 1740. From the end of the seventeenth century the officials of the Dutch East India Company become more and more dependent on Chinese tradesmen living in Batavia. The Dutch officials, however, did nothing to improve the appalling living conditions of the coolies working on the sugar-plantations. When, around 1730, the demand for sugar decreased, companies closed down.

The situation became explosive, with the uprising as a result. This drama has been depicted many times, not only by Dutch artists. On a French woodcut, we see the uprising as well as the resultant execution of the Chinese in front of the Town Hall.²

In the nineteenth century, after the invention of lithography, countless illustrated books about Indonesia were published.³ A most popular work is M.T.H. Perelaer's *Het Kamerlid Van Berkenstein in Nederlandsch Indië*, illustrated with chromolithographs after the drawings by Jhr. J.C. Rappard (ill. 2). The text gives a fictitious account of a Member of Parliament, Van Berkenstein, who refuses to make up his mind about Indonesian affairs before he makes a journey through the Indonesian archipelago. The plates offer scenic views, important buildings, temples and monuments, and illustrate how the Dutch lived during the second half of the nineteenth century. One of the lithographs shows a Dutch family enjoying an Indonesian *rijsttafel*.

Drawings

The tropical climate of Indonesia is far from ideal for the preservation of paper, and this explains why so few seventeenth-century drawings have survived. One of the earliest surviving drawings of Batavia is a map by Gilles Venant in 1629 (ill. 3). In 1619 the Dutch had started with the construction of a new fort or Castle which would serve not only as a fortification, but also as accommodation for the officials of the Dutch East India Company. On Venant's drawing we can see how the Castle and the town were situated on the banks of the Ciliwung.

Another seventeenth-century drawing in the Atlas Van Stolk Collection is a view of Batavia as seen from the water. It is an anonymous drawing in pencil dated about 1660. In the foreground we see a few sailing vessels. Later the silting up of the harbour caused the waterside to move away from the Castle.⁴

Nearly a century later, on July 11, 1752, a steersman (stuurman) called Mattheus Sager made a watercolour drawing of the same situation (ill. 4). This drawing, though perhaps not very professional, is very detailed and gives a legend referring to the buildings of Batavia and the ships and islands in the foreground. Sager probably made it after his return to Amsterdam, together with a drawing of the Cape of

Good Hope, which today belongs to the Africana Museum in Johannesburg.⁵ The only information we have about this artist is a reference in the Municipal Archives of Amsterdam to a Mattheus Sager (1689-1763).

Johannes Rach, who was born in Copenhagen, arrived in Batavia in 1762. It is thanks to him that we have such a vivid documentation of life in Batavia during the third quarter of the eighteenth century. Eight of his drawings are kept in the Atlas Van Stolk. They represent the Town Hall, the Castle, a Chinese religious procession and two islands situated in the bay of Batavia called Onrust and De Cuyper. One shows an enormous triumphal arch which was constructed by an engineer called C.A. Luepken for P.A. van der Parra, who became Governor-General in 1761.

The most important political figure during the nineteenth century was Dipa Negara, son of Sultan Hamengku Buwoma III of Jogjakarta. He was the major rival of the Dutch during the Java War of 1825-1830. During negotiations with the Dutch General De Kock on March 28, 1830, Dipa Negara was arrested. Some years later the Indonesian artist Raden Saleh made an India ink drawing of this dramatic moment (ill. 5).

Ernest Hardouin, who came to Batavia in 1837 with a French theatre company, was probably the company's scene painter. After the actors left Batavia, Hardouin stayed in Indonesia. He was a very competent artist who, although he only lived to be thirty-four, left numerous paintings and drawings. Two watercolours of Batavia are in the Atlas Van Stolk. One shows the Town Hall with its large overhanging roof, the other a bustling market scene at the Kali Besar.⁶ His drawings were also used for the lithographs in the book called *Java, toonelen uit het Leven* which was published in 1855.

In 1885 the Dutch artist Mari ten Kate sailed to Indonesia carrying a letter of recommendation from King William III. One of the drawings which Ten Kate made on this trip was of a school on the Sinagar Estate on Java (ill. 6). A group of children are seated around a table, trying to concentrate on their writing. After this watercolour a wood engraving was made, which was published in the magazine called *Eigen Haard*. It is interesting to note that the engraver did

not blindly copy the drawing, but made small alterations here and there.

Finally a twentieth century view of the old part of Batavia by Jan Frank (officially: Jan Frank Niemantsverdriet). Born in 1885 near Cirebon, of a Dutch father and a Javanese mother, Jan Frank received his education in Holland. In 1922 he returned to Indonesia. Jan Frank made town views, landscapes and portraits.

Children's world

The best way to teach children the letters of the alphabet is with an illustrated ABC book. A famous eighteenth century example is J.H. Swilden's *Vaderlandsch A-B boek voor de Nederlandsche jeugd*. With the letter *I* standing for *Indiaan*, here meaning Indonesian rather than Indian, the Dutch youth are introduced to the East Indies (ill. 7). While the fanciful engraving is of the island Onrust with Batavia in the background, the text refers to the tea and spices which brought Batavia its wealth.⁷

Much more accurate are the illustrations in *Het aardige Indisch A.B.C. voor aardige jong-Indiërs*, printed in Leiden around 1800, in which also Malay words are given. For instance *A* stands for *atap* (palm leaves), *G* for *gardoe* (shelter), *M* for *mandoer* (overseer) and *W* for *warong* (stall) to name a few exotic examples. The colourful lithographs lead the young readers around the house, onto the verandah and into the garden.

Equally instructive are the plates in J. van der Heijden's *Indisch Pretenboek* about various professions. The tailor or *toekang pakean*, the tinsmith or *toekang kaleng* and the coachman or *koessir* with his long whip are some examples.

Gambar-Gambar is the title of a series of twenty-four chromolithographs made for children. The plates represent domestic and social life of the Dutch and the Indonesians, with captions both in Malay and in Dutch.

During the last quarter of the eighteenth century optical prints, most produced in Augsburg, became very popular. These prints are easily recognised, as the inscription above the plate is printed in reverse. So when they are viewed through an optical mirror,

an instrument with a lens and a mirror, the text at the top becomes legible. The sometimes skilfully constructed optical mirrors, together with the prints, could be found in the homes of the wealthier families. As the prints usually depict famous cities, they were used to teach children geography. Of Batavia alone there are at least six different views (ills. 8, 9).

Photographs and postcards

The earliest photographs in the Atlas Van Stolk date from the end of the nineteenth century. The subjects vary from military scenes in Atjeh, where the colonial war lasted from 1773 until 1914, to street scenes in Surabaya (ill. 10). Monuments such as the Hindu-Javanese temple Borobudur were photographed not only for pleasure, but also for scientific purposes. Most of the photographs are anonymous; others are by photographers such as Cephas, Kaulfuss, Kurkdjian and Lambert & Co.

During the 1920's people started taking their own snapshots. They were pasted in albums, which were often bound with batik. Most of them are holiday photographs or snaps of festive occasions.

Press photographs cover the period between the surrender of the Japanese in May 1946 and the birth of The United States of Indonesia on December 27, 1949. They consist mostly of soldiers in action during the military campaigns and of the conferences which followed between Dutch and Indonesian political leaders. Finally there are photographs of the ceremony in the Palace in Amsterdam attended by Queen Juliana and Mohammed Hatta.

Postcards became very popular in Indonesia around 1900. And no wonder! For lazy letter writers, who had promised to keep anxious relatives back home informed, a few remarks scribbled next to some picturesque view was an ideal solution. Favourite illustrations were steamships, hotels, sugar, coffee and tea plantations, missionaries at work or famous buildings (ill. 11). In 1977 a selection of the postcard collection, given to the Atlas Van Stolk about thirty years ago by the historian Dr. H.J. de Graaf, was exhibited under the title *Groetjes uit Indië*.⁸

Every year two or three exhibitions are held in the Atlas Van Stolk. These can be viewed during the opening hours of the museum. Visitors wishing to

visit the reading room are advised to make an appointment. The Atlas Van Stolk is at Korte Hoogstraat 31, 3011 GK Rotterdam, The Netherlands, tel. 010-2176767.

REFERENCES

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¹ J. C. Nix, "De Atlas Van Stolk. Een verzameling historieprenten over de vaderlandse geschiedenis." *Ons Erfdeel*, vol. 39, no. 2, (1996).

² G. van Rijn, *Katalogus Atlas Van Stolk*, Vol. 5, Amsterdam, 1901, no. 3597.

³ John Bastin and Bea Brommer, *Nineteenth Century Prints and Illustrated Books of Indonesia*, Utrecht and Antwerp, 1979.

⁴ Illustrated in Bea Brommer, *Historische Plattegronden van Nederlandse Steden*. Part 4, Batavia. Alphen aan den Rijn, 1992, p. 69.

⁵ A third drawing by Sager is a map of Paramaribo. It belongs to the Maritime Museum in Rotterdam.

⁶ Illustrated in J. De Loos-Haaxman, *De Franse schilder Ernest Hardouin in Batavia*, Leyden, 1982, nos. 17 & 18.

⁷ L. J. Wagenaar, "Het eiland Onrust bij Batavia als onderdeel van het VOC-scheepsbedrijf in de 17de en 18de eeuw." *Antiek*, vol. 25, no. 2 (August/September 1990), p. 74.

⁸ *Groetjes uit Indië* (May 6 - August 7, 1977), Atlas Van Stolk leaflet no. 4. See also: H. J. de Graaf, *Nederlandsch-Indië in oude ansichten*, Zaltbommel, 1970.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Ill. 1, pg. 23. Map of the Second Voyage by Joris van Spilbergen, 1614-1616. Engraving in *Begin ende Voortgangh van de Vereenigde Nederlandsche Geoctroyeerde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, Amsterdam, 1645. 32 x 44,5 cms.

Ill. 2, pg. 24. Neogothic monument for General Michiels (1797 - 1849) in Batavia. Lithograph after J. C. Rappard, 1888. 17 x 23,5 cms.

Ill. 3, pg. 25. Plan of Batavia. Coloured drawing by G. Venant, 1629. 30 x 54,5 cms.

Ill. 4, pg. 26. View of Batavia. Coloured drawings by M. Sager, July 11, 1752. 45 x 57,5 cms.

Ill. 5, pg. 27. The imprisonment of Dipa Negara on March 28, 1830 by General De Kock, India ink drawing by Raden Saleh, 1856. 39 x 54,5 cms.

Ill. 6, pg. 28. Open-air school on the estate of Sinagar, Java. Watercolour by M. ten Kate, 1885. 31 x 42 cms.

Ill. 7, pg. 29. The letter *I* for *Indiaan* in J. H. Swilden's ABC book, 1781. Engraving by L. Brasser. 8,8 x 10,3 cms.

Ill. 8, pg. 30. Optical view of the Town Hall Square of Batavia. Coloured etching, c 1780. 219 x 40,5 cms.

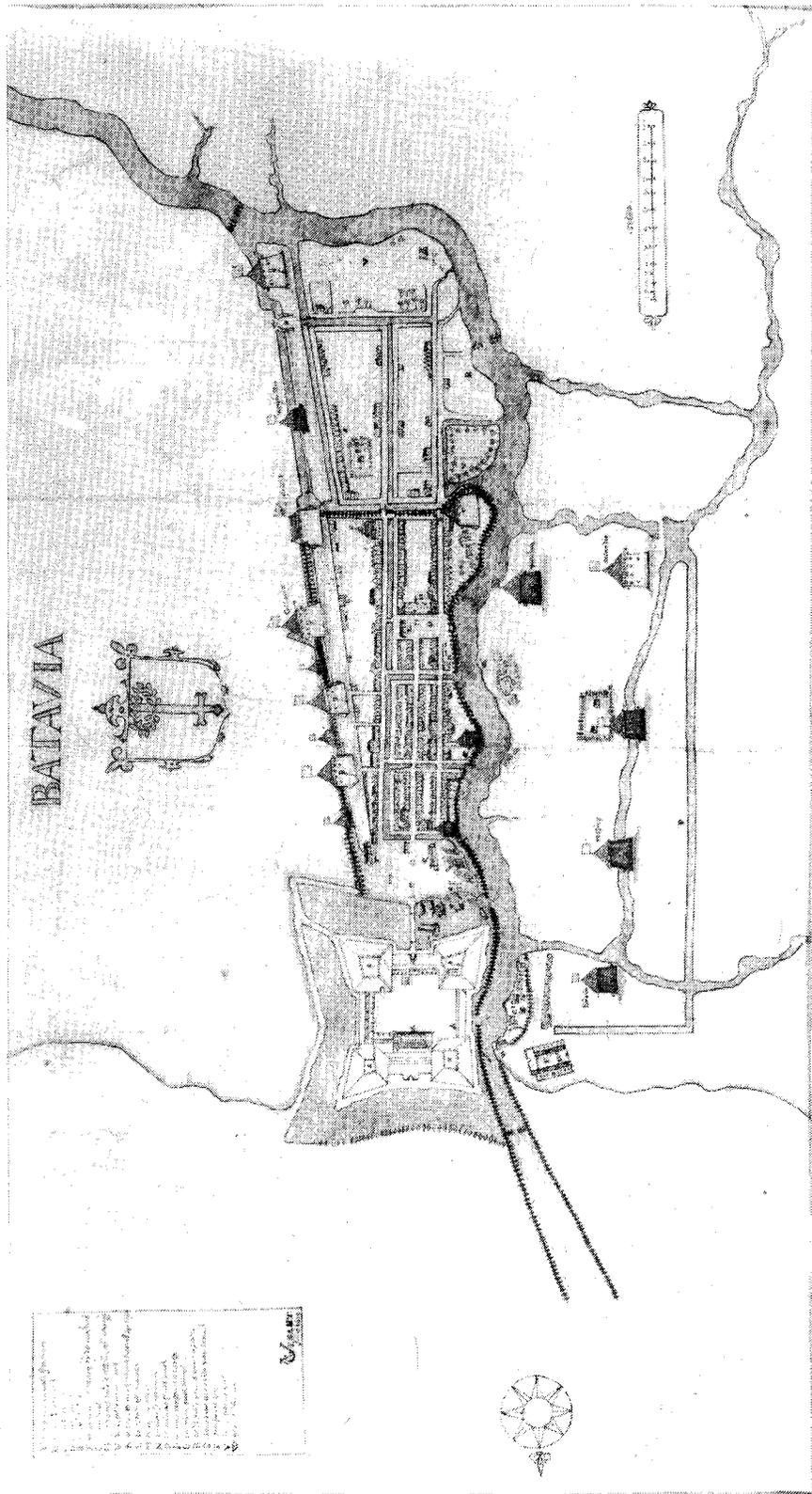
Ill. 9, pg. 31. Viewing optical prints. Aquatint after L. Boilly by F. Casenave, c 1780. 56,6 x 46 cms.

Ill. 10, pg. 32. Surabaya. Anonymous photograph c 1895. 25 x 30 cms.

Ill. 11, pg. 33. Soesohonan of Surakarta with the Resident. Postcard printed by De Gedeh, Weltevreden c 1910. 9 x 14 cms.



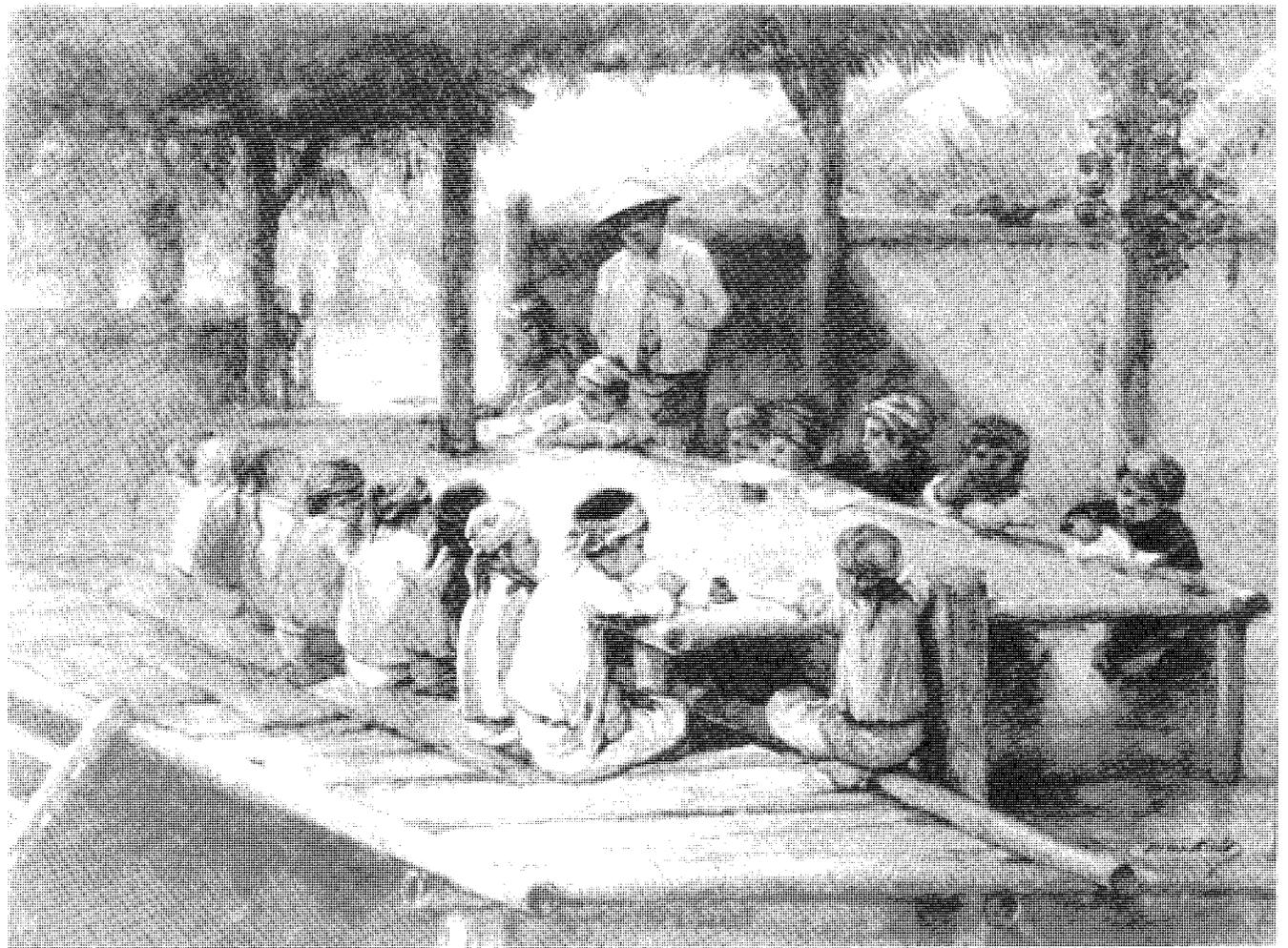


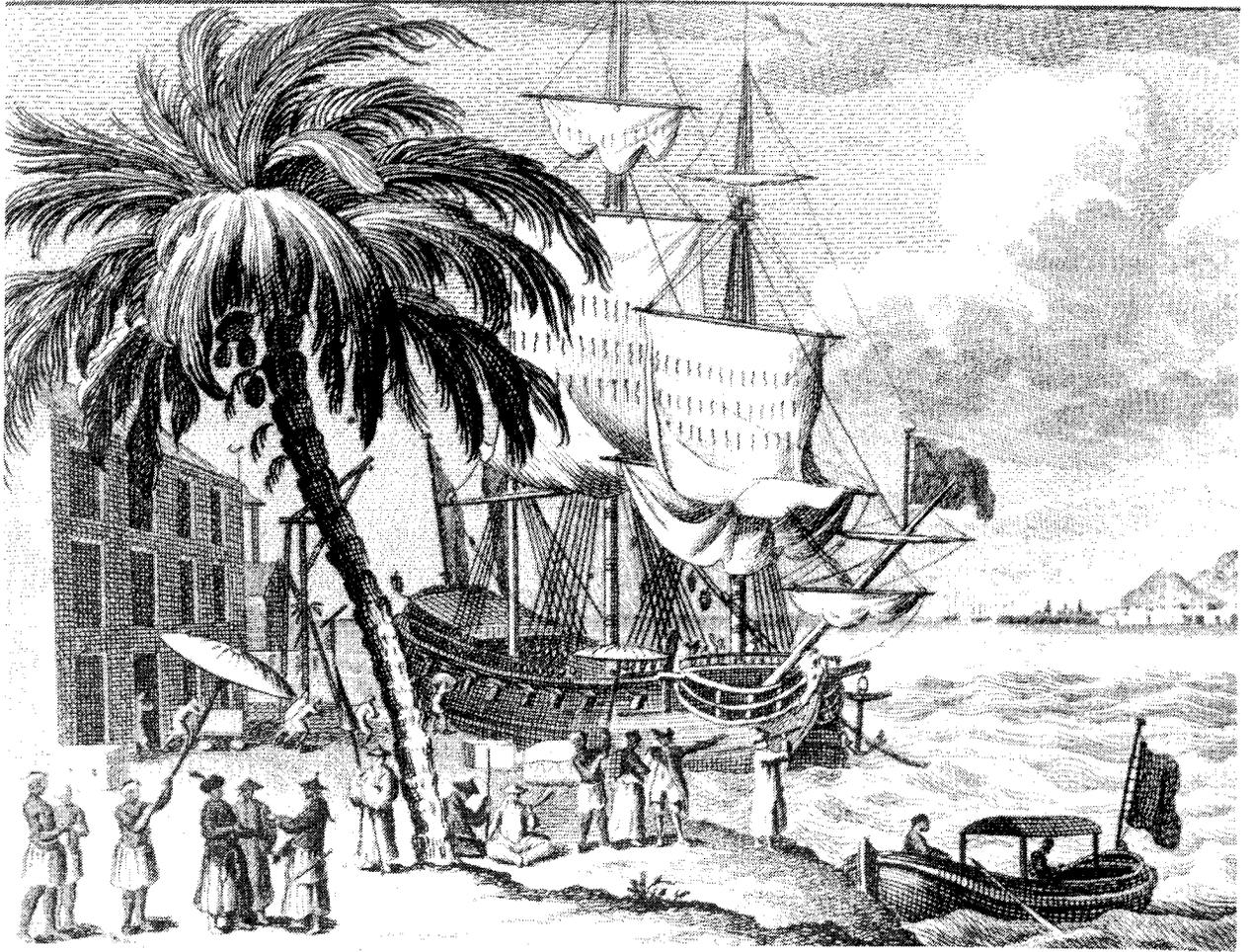




Rotterdam - 1848

Rotterdam - 1848





Indiaan, men haalt by u Thee en Specery;
Daarvan bloeit Batavia's ryke Maatschappy.

