

# The Importance of Being a Good Employee: Georg Everhard Rumphius, the Dutch East India Company, and Knowledge in the Late Seventeenth Century

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## Abstract

This article analyses the complex interrelation between the VOC and scholarship by investigating the relationship between the Company and Georg Everhard Rumphius (1627-1702). First, it will consider the line Rumphius drew between himself as scholar and as a VOC employee. Secondly, the Company's policy of secrecy is scrutinised in order to show how and to what extent it was in conflict with the habit of sharing knowledge and objects in the Republic of Letters. The third facet examines how the VOC context influenced Rumphius's scholarly work and how his scholarly ambitions shaped some of his occupational writings. Building on these three aspects, this article argues that it was of paramount importance for Rumphius to maintain the image of his being a 'good employee' in order to obtain assistance from influential people within the VOC that might allow him to achieve his scholarly goals. However, the case of Rumphius also proves that doing research under the auspices of the Company came at a price, because in the process he lost control over his works.

*Keywords:* Dutch East India Company, Rumphius, history of knowledge, secrecy

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When Georg Everhard Rumphius's *Amboinsche Kruid-boek* (The Ambonese Herbal) appeared in 1741, it was adorned with an engraved frontispiece (fig. 1). Left of centre, Natural History absorbs herself writing above the clouds overlooking the harbour of Fort Victoria in Amboina. Her gaze is directed to the personification of the Dutch East India Company (hereafter VOC, *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*), a majestic lady holding the flag of the Company. She is surrounded by putti carrying books and baskets filled with exotic flowers. The VOC personified points towards a plant, as do Minerva and Aesculapius, who are both placed behind Historia. While Aesculapius talks to Apollo, Minerva is accompanied by Liberty. Above this scene, Fama heralds the fame of the author. Below, Mercury converses with Chronos, whose gesture draws attention to the harbour. The meaning of this composition is clear: trade, especially that of the VOC, empowers natural history backed by the arts, science, medicine, and liberty. Trade also opens up regions previously unknown to Europeans. This arrangement is supposed to create eternal fame for both the VOC and the writer of natural history.

The frontispiece celebrates the VOC as a patron of natural history. Around the middle of the eighteenth century more than one publication praised the Company in a similar manner.<sup>1</sup> However, little of its former fame survives in today's history of science. Research has drawn a picture of a trading company that employed men who achieved extraordinary scientific results, but which, as an organisation, had no interest in scholarship.<sup>2</sup> There is a dissonance between this view and those of studies such as Harold Cook's *Matters of Exchange*, which postulates that the Dutch commercial mentality enhanced interest in empirical enquiries. To strengthen his argument, Cook even refers to scientific works conducted by employees of the VOC. Klaas van Berkel, in contrast, characterised

<sup>1</sup> Compare for instance the frontispiece in Valentijn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën*.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., most contributions in Huigen, De Jong, and Kolfin (eds.), *Dutch Trading*. Blussé and Ooms (eds.), *Kenis en Compagnie*, deal with employee's initiatives. Research is explicitly rated as a by-product of expansion in Van Berkel, 'Een onwillige mecenas?'. For the eighteenth century, Van Goor, 'Handel', 8, assesses the role of the Company more favourably.



G.E. RUMPHII HERBARIUM AMBOINENSE.  
HET AMBOINSCH E KRUYD-BOEK VAN G.E. RUMPHIUS.

Fig. 1 Adolph van der Laan, frontispice, copper engraving, in: Georg Everhard Rumphius, Het Amboinsche Kruidboek, Amsterdam 1741, Göttingen, Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek.

the attitude of the Company towards scholarly research as that of an ‘unwilling Maecenas’: although it created the infrastructure that enabled research, it had no serious regard for scientists.<sup>3</sup> Cook and Van Berkel in fact exemplify two conflicting interpretations of the voc’s role in promoting scientific research. While the Company as an organisation is often considered as part of a movement propagating empirical knowledge, in studies of individual researchers it is often deemed an obstacle, especially if one avoids confusing single supporting directors or high-ranking officers with the Company. Therefore, a more nuanced interpretation of the relationship between the voc and scholarship is needed, one that distinguishes between the goals of the Company and those of the men connected to it, as well as between the kinds of knowledge that interested the different parties. This also helps us to understand the distinct practices they applied for the handling of knowledge.

The fields in which the voc was engaged – trade, navigation, the military, and governance – required a certain amount of knowledge that took very particular forms, and the files of the Company reveal that it collected that knowledge quite eagerly. Therefore, even when it did not promote scientific projects, it favoured the accumulation of knowledge.<sup>4</sup> Was it, however, also interested in sharing this knowledge, as the frontispiece suggests for natural history? The policy of secrecy often ascribed to the voc raises some doubts.<sup>5</sup>

This article presents an analysis of the complex interrelations between Company and scholarship by investigating the relationship between the voc and Georg Everhard Rumphius (1627-1702). Rumphius was a German-born employee of the voc. Thanks to a solid education he was able to climb the ranks from soldier (1652) via second merchant in Larike from 1657 until he was advanced to *opperkoopman* (senior merchant) in Hila in 1660. Both villages are on Ambon, one of the Maluku Islands, in present-day Indonesia. Rumphius became intrigued with the natural environment there. Ten years later, he became blind, but kept his membership in the council of the governor of Amboina, where he performed his duties until his death in 1702.<sup>6</sup> An advancement like this was not extraordinary, even for a foreigner.<sup>7</sup> Yet besides being a diligent employee of the voc Rumphius was also a passionate botanist. He was not the only voc employee interested in natural history, history, chorography, or the languages of the region he was assigned to, though when compared to his peers he was exceptional, both in his scholarly approach and in the

3 Van Berkel, ‘Een onwillige mecenas?’ The article became a point of reference for the company’s relationship to research. See for instance: Van Gelder, ‘Nec semper feriet’, 212. Leonard Blussé and Ilonka Ooms also hint at the article in *Kennis en Compagnie*, 7.

4 The role of merchant companies in knowledge gathering is emphasised by Harris, ‘Long-Distance Corporations’, 271-272, 278-280, 285-289; Raj, *Relocating Modern Science*, 15-18; Cook, *Matters of Exchange*.

5 Delmas, *Voyages*, 19, 121-129, and 249-251 states that the ‘dispositif de l’écrit’ of the voc went against publications. For cartography and geography, Zandvliet, *Mapping for Money*, 95-97 and 128-130, claims a short duration for the Company’s policy of secrecy.

6 For his biography, see Buijze, *Leven en werk van Rumphius*; Beekman, ‘Introduction’.

7 Many Germans were in the service of the voc: Van Gelder, *Oost-Indisch avontuur*; Van Lottum, Lucassen, and Van Voss, ‘Sailors’. Van Dam, *Beschryvinge*, I.1, 580, claims that going to the Indies in a minor rank was a means for those having no possibility for bettering themselves in Europe.

support he received from his superiors.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, his case serves as a good example for examining the opportunities and limits to a scholarly life within the *voc*.

Studies in the history of knowledge have shown that science and knowledge production cannot be disentangled from its cultural setting.<sup>9</sup> In cases like that of the *voc*, the importance of structures and organisation for processes of codifying, accumulating, ordering, and processing practical knowledge should not to be underestimated.<sup>10</sup> The Company, founded in 1602, was privately financed, though its charter empowered it to act in the name of the United Provinces. Its operations were based on borrowed authority in a double sense: the States-General only granted monopoly privileges of limited duration, and as a joint stock Company it was subject to the fluctuations of its stock quotation. After half a century the Company was established, developing from a high-risk venture into a kind of annuity. This success story raises another question, namely from what rationale the Company acted: was it a colonial power or a (chartered) merchant company? In fact, around 1700 it was both. While the *voc* ruled in some smaller regions like Amboina, it had to subordinate itself to the will of the rulers in regions like India, Persia, or Japan.<sup>11</sup> Besides, most of the directors in Europe were more concerned with the financial outcome and therefore acted on the mercantile aspect, while the Governors-General and the High Council drew their powers from the colonial side.<sup>12</sup> It was not only in the years around 1700 that we find competing interests and views on what the Company actually was, what its aims were, what kind of knowledge it needed, and what parts of this knowledge was shareable, as these debates continue in modern scholarship.<sup>13</sup>

It is important not only to take notice of these competing views, but also to understand it as a constitutive component of the interrelation between the Company and scholars belonging to the Republic of Letters.<sup>14</sup> Changing discourses on the usefulness of knowledge, the good conduct of employees, secrecy, and profitability affected the scholarly work of men like Rumphius. They could alter the interpretation of or even the actual formulation of the Company's rules. Immediate forms of impact, such as giving or denying support or publication grants, existed alongside the more indirect impact produced, for instance, by compliance with Company rules.

8 For other examples, see Cook, *Matters of Exchange*, 305-377; Huigen, De Jong, and Kolfin (eds.), *Dutch Trading Companies*; Blussé and Ooms (eds.), *Kennis en Compagnie*.

9 See for instance Park and Daston (eds.), *Early Modern Science*.

10 See also Valleriani, 'Epistemology'.

11 Scholarship on the *voc* is extensive. For an overview, see Gaastra, *Geschiedenis van de voc*; Emmer and Gommans, *Rijk aan de rand van de wereld*. On the mercantile side, consult Gelderblom, De Jong, and Jonker, *Formative Years*; Gommans, 'Continuity and Change'; for its military side: Knaap, *Expansie*; Brandon, *War, Capital, and the Dutch State*, esp. 51-52. For India, especially Malabar, see Singh, *Fort Cochin*, 88-89. Singh argues that the *voc* in Malabar was functioning as a proto-colonialist. On Amboina, highlighting administrative aspects, see Knaap, *Kruidnagelen en Christenen*.

12 A compelling example of the director's view is Van Dam, *Beschryvinge*, written between 1693 and 1701/1706.

13 Highlighting the imperialist mentality: Knaap, 'Core Business', 24. For other views see also the titles mentioned in footnote 11.

14 The early modern term 'Republic of Letters' refers to the community of scholars exchanging knowledge and objects: Bots, *Republiek der Letteren*.

To get an at least rudimentary grasp of this complexity, this article will consider four facets, illustrating each with examples from Rumphius's work. It is by no means a complete picture, but opens up a window on some of the circumstances and conditions that knowledge projects conducted within the VOC had to deal with. First, one has to look at the dividing line Rumphius drew between himself as scholar and as a VOC employee. Secondly, this article considers the Company's policy of secrecy so that we may analyse how and to what extent it was in conflict with the habit of sharing of knowledge and objects in the republic of letters. The third facet explores how the VOC context influenced Rumphius's scholarly work and how his scholarly ambitions shaped some of his occupational writings. Building on these three aspects, the fourth facet argues the importance of being perceived as a good employee by the VOC.

### *Roles in Conflict: A Scholar Employee?*

'Rumphius' encompassed different social roles, for instance, a husband and a father, a VOC employee, or a natural historian, each of them with concomitant and diverging norms and behaviors. Rumphius himself divided his activities in two parts. In the preface to his *Amboinsche Kruid-boek* he emphasised that his studies in botany were his hobby, while he called 'political service' his actual livelihood.<sup>15</sup> This proposition fits well with the following passage where he compares himself to Pliny.<sup>16</sup> This comparison shows his classical learning, names his role model, and alludes to the cognomen he acquired as a member of the *Academia Naturae Curiosorum – Plinius Indicus*. Yet, there are some flaws in this parallel.<sup>17</sup> For instance, Rumphius spent most of his professional life in the service of a chartered company whereas Pliny was active in state service. One could argue that a merchant in Hila and a member of the council of the governor of Amboina had, in fact, governmental responsibilities. The merchant of Hila was in charge of all affairs of the Company in the places of the coast and the fortress of Loehoe. This included the exercise of the VOC's rights, but also the acquisition of cloves, the selling of textiles, rice, and salt.<sup>18</sup> Rumphius's silence about the economic side of his position is striking, and was probably the result of the image merchants and trading companies had, rather than a reflection of his actual activities.

In the last decade, historians of science have discussed whether and how long-distance trade was linked to the turn towards empirical research in the early modern period. For the Dutch Republic the concept of *mercator sapiens*, the learned merchant who profited from various branches of philosophy and shared his knowledge in turn, has been evoked to prove this connection. Harold Cook, for instance, has linked merchant's values with the rise of empiricism by arguing that commerce fostered a specific Dutch empirical

<sup>15</sup> Rumphius, *Amboinsche Kruid-boek*, I, dedication, fol. \*\*v.

<sup>16</sup> Rumphius, *Amboinsche Kruid-boek*, I, Voorrede aan den Leser, fol. \*\*\*r.

<sup>17</sup> Leuker, 'Im Buch der Natur lesen', 246-247.

<sup>18</sup> Valentijn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën*, II.1, 100.

mentality.<sup>19</sup> Caspar Barlaeus formulated the concept in his 1632 opening address for the Athenaeum, the illustrious school of Amsterdam.<sup>20</sup> This reference is difficult, as, on the one hand, the connection is not actually covered by the speech, which presented an ideal type. On the other hand, Barlaeus' vision of the merchant who shared information in order to have it interpreted by scholars did not necessarily agree with the views of the merchants themselves. Furthermore, the speech still bears traces of an older, negatively tinted image of merchants, as one of the aims of Barlaeus' educational efforts was to enhance their moral attitude.<sup>21</sup> Mostly merchants were not treated as equals in scholarly contexts. Even in British scholarly discussions of political economy the data collected by merchants were considered partial and therefore not wholly reliable, as Thomas Leng has shown.<sup>22</sup> From this point of view it is clear why Rumphius did not highlight his economic tasks.

Judging from his silence, Rumphius seems not to have cherished his mercantile duties too much. He called his employment with the VOC the 'mask' he needed to wear in order to nourish his family and himself.<sup>23</sup> The last is a hint that he accepted what early modern societies saw as the duty of a husband and father, namely to earn the family's keep. For his research, he needed the specimens from the islands of Amboina. From a practical perspective, working for the VOC was the easiest way of achieving both. Thus, he did not return home, but renewed his contract. In letters to other scholars in Asia, however, Rumphius lamented the overall mentality of the VOC. In 1680 he complained to Andreas Cleyer, the well-connected head of the pharmacies of Batavia, that learned studies were not appreciated in a surrounding as prone to avarice.<sup>24</sup> This cry would be heard more than once within the Company, and signalled a bad reputation within scholarly circles rather than proved its disregard for scholarship.<sup>25</sup> When Rumphius wrote this, he was frustrated. His son Paulus Augustus could not help his blind father because of his workload in service of the VOC. The statement was part of a passage where he wrote about a new, but unlearned draughtsman sent to him from Batavia 'to recoup the figures of my herbal book that were destroyed by fire'.<sup>26</sup> Obviously, he got assistance from his superiors using the Company's resources, although his assistants were mostly not as qualified for drawing and writing as he wished. In the dedication of his *Kruid-boek* to the *Heren xvii* (the VOC's board of directors) he named the Company and especially the governors of Amboina his patrons.<sup>27</sup>

19 Cook, *Matters of Exchange*, 69-73. Similar, yet more nuanced, is Rauschenbach, 'Elzevirian Republics', 83-87. For a critical approach, see Van Berkel, 'Dutch Republic', 100-103.

20 Barlaeus, *Mercator Sapiens*.

21 Secretan, *Le 'marchand philosophe'*, 77-98. For the 'image' of merchants, see Lis and Soly, *Worthy Efforts*, 238-243, 259-262.

22 Leng, 'Epistemology'; Dear, 'Totius in verba', 156.

23 Rumphius to Cops, 18 July 1669, cited in Leupe, *Rumphius*, 14.

24 Rumphius to Cleyer, 15 May 1688, cited in Valentini, 'Oost-Indianische Send-Schreiben', 58.

25 Compare Witsen's lament to Cuper, 1 August 1712, cited in Gebhard, *Leven*, 340; Cleyer to Scheffer, 20 December 1683, cited in Michel, 'Ein Ostindianisches Sendschreiben', 71.

26 Rumphius to Cleyer, 15 May 1688, cited in Valentini, 'Oost-Indianische Send-Schreiben', 58: 'umb die verbrandte Figuren von meinem Herbariö wieder zu ersetzen'.

27 Rumphius, *Amboinsche Kruid-boek*, I, dedicatio, fol. \*\*r.

However, the courtesy of his superiors had its limits, as an employee's efforts should be focused on the benefit of the Company. Rumphius experienced these limits when he asked to take an eight-to-ten-months leave of absence so he could finish his studies before returning to Batavia in 1667. The Company did not grant this rather unusual request.<sup>28</sup> Instead, he was ordered to go to Batavia directly, and Governor Jacob Cops was not amused when he learned that Rumphius had not done so at the earliest opportunity. He reminded him that the VOC did not appreciate idling merchants.<sup>29</sup>

While it was clear that a merchant must always be busy, it was not equally clear where his business responsibility actually ended. For scholarly work, the dividing line between private interest and VOC duty was obviously drawn differently. This is especially true in discourse, as not only employees interested in doing research, but also some of their superiors and directors adopted a more broad-minded stance. Some of them were always eager to learn more about the East. Governor-General Johannes Camphuijs had alluded to these directors when he wrote to Rumphius in 1695 that 'the herbarium will be demanded before long for the homeland'.<sup>30</sup> The accuracy of this prediction is demonstrated in a letter by Rumphius, who remarked that every year he received demands from the homeland to finish his opus.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, the board of directors took an economic interest in botany, because they wished for the trading posts in Asia to become less dependent on expensive medicine imported from the Dutch Republic. This encouraged the search for local substitutes.<sup>32</sup> Many of the Company's employees believed that acquiring and processing information and establishing useful knowledge was a service that constituted merit and would result in a promotion.<sup>33</sup> The time allowed for such work was always contested, however. For instance, while Hendrik Adriaan van Reede tot Drakenstein, collector of the *Hortus Malabaricus*, insisted that his botanical work belonged to his duties towards the VOC, others like his rival Rijcklof van Goens rated his studies as futile and mere pleasure. In fact, Van Reede's view was more nuanced. When on inspection of the Cape colony in 1685 he praised Simon van der Stel's enthusiasm for the natural history of the Cape, yet warned

28 Rumphius to Cops, 18 July 1669, cited in Leupe, *Rumphius*, 13; Beeckman, 'Introduction', LXVII.

29 Cops was referring to Rumphius's designated successor, who was now without a task: Cops to Rumphius, 10 July 1669, cited in Leupe, *Rumphius*, 12; Rumphius to Cops, 18 July 1669, cited in Leupe, *Rumphius*, 13-14.

30 Camphuijs to Rumphius, 2 March 1695, cited in Leupe, *Rumphius*, 48: 'ŪE. Kruidenboeken eerlange expres uyt het vaderland sullen worden geÿscht.'

31 Rumphius to Saint-Martin, 9 July 1696, cited in Leupe, *Rumphius*, 56.

32 Cook, *Matters of Exchange*, 304-338. More than once the directors complained about the cost of sending medicine and encouraged the search for local substitutes. See for example The Hague, Nationaal Archief (hereafter NA), Archief VOC (hereafter VOC) 320, directors to Council of the Indies, 16 May 1676, NA, VOC 321, directors to Council of the Indies, 8 and 24 June 1682, fols. 63v, 176v; NA, VOC 323, directors to Council of the Indies, 27 August 1692 and 14 July 1695. Rumphius alluded to such letters in his *Amboinsche Kruid-boek*, 'Voorrede aan den lezer'.

33 This hope was justified. In Rumphius' case his scholarly work did not lead to his own promotion, but to that of his son, who in 1697 became *opperkoopman* 'in consideration of the efforts and work of his father': NA, VOC 112, resolution of the *Heren XVII*, 1 October 1697; protocol Haags Besogne, 16 August 1697, cited in Leupe, *Rumphius*, 27. See also Van Dam, *Beschryvinge*, I.2, 357-358.



him against conducting research at the expense of other duties.<sup>34</sup> Rumphius was working within these strictures when he separated his professional life from his private studies in a letter of 1663. Nonetheless, he asked the Company for support as his ‘private’ research might bear fruits for them.<sup>35</sup>

When considering Rumphius’s statements on the compatibility of natural studies and VOC service, a gap between those made to superiors and those to fellow researchers becomes visible. While he presented his studies as a service for the Company towards his superiors, he distanced himself from his employment when he spoke to other natural historians. Both self-representations, as a scholar and as a Company employee, must be seen in the context of the different expectations and rhetoric that accompanied the two roles, and Rumphius continuously balanced both sides. However, this also opened up a field for negotiations.

### *Different attitudes towards sharing of knowledge*

While one could argue the usefulness of researching natural history and whether this was part of an employee’s duty or waste of their time, the rules the Company prescribed for the sharing of knowledge and objects were set in stone. They were part of the *Artykel-Brief*, or labour contract. Every employee had to hand over all his notes on geography and navigation (article 91). No-one was permitted to write about the economic status of the Company (article 92), which included information on goods such as spices. It was forbidden to bypass the official post-box for the delivery of private correspondence (article 93), a rule which was connected to the Company’s assertion of its right to read and withhold all letters (article 94). The articles 52 to 56 aimed to inhibit competition from employees by interdicting private trade, which restricted the exchange of things, and ordering the control of chests.<sup>36</sup> All of these rules were obstacles for a scholar who wanted to publish about Asia and to stay in touch with European scholars by participating in the conventional circulation of letters and objects.

Around 1700, the VOC was one of the most important providers of a maritime infrastructure capable of transferring goods and people between Asia and Europe under early modern conditions. Altogether, the network enabled connectivity, but also limited it by including or excluding places and determining how frequent, how intense, and how fast the connections between these places were.<sup>37</sup> When everything went well – which was quite seldom – a cycle of correspondence, that is the time between sending a letter and

34 Heniger, *Hendrik Adriaan van Reede*, XII, 74-75; Singh, ‘Botanical Knowledge’, 195.

35 Rumphius to chamber of Amsterdam, 20 August 1663, cited in Leupe, *Rumphius*, 41.

36 The numbering follows the *Artykel-Brief* of 1650, in NA, Archief Radermacher 21. When the Company employed Rumphius in 1652, the valid version was that of 1650. For the nearly identical version of 1658, see *Groot Placaet-Boeck*, 1277-1316. The alterations to the *Artykel-Brief* for the articles cited in this article mostly concerned numbering.

37 Bruijn, Gaastra, and Schöffers, *Dutch-Asiatic Shipping*; Parthesius, *Dutch Ships*.

receiving an answer to it, amounted to at least two years. In learned contexts where the answer often required some inquiry, it usually took longer.<sup>38</sup>

In the Dutch Republic or Batavia, private letters were supposed to be checked for undesirable content, and chests for forbidden goods. Letters and parcels had to be registered. According to prescriptions dating from 1623, private letters from Asia to Europe had to be transported in the letter-box stationed in Batavia. Letters to Asia should be handed over to the chambers. The directors had the right to read and censor all letters.<sup>39</sup> When screening their employees' correspondence, they had a certain way of reading, being alert to everything that went against their interest: private trade, abuses of office, violation of orders or disrespect towards one's superiors, as well as treachery and betrayal of secrecy.

The notion the directors adhered to when it came to those pieces of knowledge can be traced back to ideas of business secrets and intellectual property. They were convinced that every bit of knowledge produced within the Company was legally theirs. The East India trading companies that predated the foundation of the VOC had already claimed to be the owners of all the achievements of their employees, and therefore the ones who should decide on their publication.<sup>40</sup> Such lines of thought were at the very heart of numerous privileges that protected inventions and discoveries.<sup>41</sup> The Company's policy of secrecy reached its climax when, in 1619, it acquired the infamous privilege that prohibited printing anything concerning the East Indies without its consent.<sup>42</sup> In a way, this exclusive right of publication was the logical consequence of the claim to own the knowledge of their employees. It was a further protection in case this claim could not be entirely enforced. Legally considered, the privilege expired with the second monopoly, but attempts to enforce secrecy did not come to an end, as the *Artykel-Brief* shows.

Even a director as renowned for his scientific ambitions as Nicolaas Witsen submitted himself to the rules of the Company when citing passages from Rumphius's *Antwoordt en rapport* (Answer and report) in his *Noord en Oost Tartarye* (North and East Tartary). Although he did not mention our merchant, a comparison reveals that he used his text with just a few alterations. In doing so, however, Witsen scrapped the hint at the expedition Johannes Keys led to New Guinea in 1678, the remark that no perfect journal of Tasman's voyage could be found and every allusion to the trade with *massoy* (used as medicine), as well as some of the references to maps.<sup>43</sup> Anything that could hurt the VOC's reputation, its trading interests, or its regime of secrecy was omitted. In a similar way

<sup>38</sup> Nicolaas Witsen, a director of the Amsterdam chamber, warned his friend Gisbert Cuper that getting an answer to his question from Siam would need at least two years: Witsen to Cuper, 5 December 1710, cited in Gebhard, *Leven van Mr. Nicolaas Cornelisz. Witsen*, II, 331.

<sup>39</sup> Moree, 'Met vriend die God geleide', 28-31.

<sup>40</sup> See for instance NA, Archief Compagnieën op Oost-Indië 34, Akte van belofte van geheimhouding, 24 April 1598.

<sup>41</sup> Long, 'Invention, Authorship', 858-881; Long, *Openness, Secrecy, Authorship*. For the Dutch Republic, see Davids, 'Patents and Patentees'; Davids, 'Craft Secrecy'; Buning, 'Inventing Scientific Method'; Buning, 'Between Imitation and Invention'. On copyrights, see Schriks, *History of Copyright*, esp. 11-83.

<sup>42</sup> NA, VOC 369, privilege dated 24 January 1619. Delmas, *Voyage*, 102, 133 dramatises the consequences.

<sup>43</sup> Compare Rumphius, *Antwoordt*, 23-28 with Witsen, *Noord en Oost Tartarye*, 165-169. See also Peters, *Wijze koopman*, 245-247.

Andreas Cleyer explained to his correspondent Sebastian Scheffer that there was, in fact, a lot of data on Tartary, China, or Japan contained in the diaries and journals stored in the archives of the *voc*, and that not only would wrestling that information from the papers would be tedious, but only a few officials had access to those materials.<sup>44</sup>

What is being discussed here is the deliberate concealment of knowledge that is available and thus knowable as such. To prevent something actually knowable from circulation is the goal of a regime of secrecy. The intention of concealing certain bits of knowledge proves a reflective approach to them, one that requires consideration of their potential danger and value.<sup>45</sup> Obviously, the Company treated some pieces of knowledge as resources that lost their value when known by too many.

Although officially restricted, different social incentives stimulated the transmission of information and objects between Asia and Europe. One of these was being part of the Republic of Letters. The constant exchange of letters was usual between fellow natural historians.<sup>46</sup> Rumphius was convinced that doing serious scholarly work in Asia necessitated maintaining connections to European scholars as well as with his fellow researchers doing fieldwork in Asia. In all their letters they asked for descriptions and samples of plants, seeds, or animals to compare them with what they found in the region they were surveying.<sup>47</sup> Botanical samples and knowledge circulated in letters and parcels within Asia as well as between Asia and Europe and were de- and re-contextualised in every place they reached.<sup>48</sup> Michael Bernhard Valentini, the contemporaneous editor of some of these letters – including some of Rumphius's – highlighted that the correspondents not only discussed and compared their knowledge, but also disagreed and encouraged further examination.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, cooperation is visible in these letters, but so is competition.

Scholarly exchange was guided by unwritten rules of conduct.<sup>50</sup> In the network of learning, a balanced reciprocity of gifts was important. For this reason, Rumphius apologised to Herbert De Jager, who had sent him some important information, that he was not able to fulfil his wishes for certain descriptions, though he sent him some rare cloves by way of compensation.<sup>51</sup> More than once he presented his correspondents with shells and other rarities. In the dedication for Hendrik d'Acquet in his *D'Amboinsche Rariteitkamer*, for instance, he explained in 1699 that he sent him shells 'to nourish a true and

44 Cleyer to Scheffer, 20 December 1683, cited in Michel, 'Ein Ostindianisches Sendschreiben', 71.

45 For a short overview on secrecy, see Jütte, *Zeitalter des Geheimnisses*, 10-14, 24-41; Vermeir and Margócsy (eds.), 'States of Secrecy'; Van Netten (ed.) 'Geheime Praktijken!?' Galison, 'Removing Knowledge', has coined the term anti-epistemology to describe such phenomena.

46 Findlen, 'Natural History', 454-459.

47 Some of the letters in Valentini, 'Oost-Indianische Send-Schreiben'. Valentini got hold of the letters of Herbert de Jager which he translated and edited. While sick, De Jager was looked after by Johann Gottfried Vitus who later took the letters with him: Peters, *Wijze koopman*, 230-231.

48 Brendecke and Friedrich, 'Introduction'. For similar approaches, see Secord, 'Knowledge in Transit'; Safier, *Global Knowledge*. Highlighting the 'hybridity' of knowledge: Raj, *Relocating Modern Science*.

49 Valentini, 'Oost-Indianische Send-Schreiben', preface.

50 Some early examples for this growing field in Shapin, *Social History*; Daston, *Moral Economy*; Goldgar, *Impolite Learning*.

51 Rumphius to De Jager, 20 May 1683, cited in Valentini, 'Oost-Indianische Send-Schreiben', 3.

tried friendship'.<sup>52</sup> Another rule demanded precision in naming sources and acknowledging achievements by other (European) observers. In the context of his and De Jager's ongoing discussion about the origins of *drakenbloet* (a red resin, named 'dragon's blood'), Rumphius protested in a letter to Isaac de Saint-Martin that he did not mean to doubt De Jager's diligence or even adorn himself with borrowed plumes.<sup>53</sup> The very fact that he felt it necessary to explain himself in such terms makes it obvious that competition played a role when it came to winning laurels for one's discoveries.<sup>54</sup>

The ambition of some of the men interested in natural history did not stop at the acknowledgement of other researchers located in Asia; they wanted a reputation in Europe as well.<sup>55</sup> Next to an extensive exchange of letters, contact with a scientific society was a good starting point for winning wider recognition. One who had such a contact to the *Academia Naturae Curiosorum*, a scientific society founded in Germany in 1652, was Andreas Cleyer. He supervised both of Batavia's pharmacies and brokered articles and observations on the nature of the Dutch East Indies for the journal of the society.<sup>56</sup> Through Cleyer's mediation, Rumphius became a member of the society in 1681, heightening his reputation within the scientific community.<sup>57</sup> While between 1683 and 1698 the society's journal published thirteen of his letters, Rumphius also sent objects and letters with observations to various members of the society.<sup>58</sup> There is no evidence that he ever got into trouble for this sharing of information on the natural history of Amboina, suggesting that his activities remained within the Company's strictures.<sup>59</sup>

In his letters and books, Rumphius not only disseminated his own observations to European scholars but also acted as a mediator of local knowledge and objects, his ability to speak Malay presumably benefitting him greatly in this aspect of his work.<sup>60</sup> As Genie Yoo has shown, the actual range of his local informants must have been broader than the local and travelling merchants, Muslim high-ranking men, and other members of the local elite he was in contact with due to his administrative and mercantile duties, and to

52 Rumphius, *Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet*, 3. He also offered shells to Isaac de l'Ostal de Saint-Martin: Rumphius to Saint-Martin, 8 June 1664, cited in Leupe, *Rumphius*, 47.

53 Rumphius to Saint-Martin, 15 September 1692, cited in Leupe, *Rumphius*, 45.

54 Ten Rhijne and Cleyer both accused each other of plagiarism: Cleyer to Scheffer, 20 December 1683, cited in Michel, 'Ein Ostindianisches Sendschreiben', 72-73; Cook, *Matters of Exchange*, 362-369. For other contexts, see Biagioli, 'From Ciphers to Confidentiality'.

55 There is an ongoing discussion about these natural historians' intended audiences. While Raj, *Relocating Modern Science*, 57, states that they wrote for people on the spot, Singh, 'Botanical Knowledge', points to the fact that all the publications appeared in Europe.

56 For Cleyer, see Cleyer, *Tagebuch*; Peters, *Wijze koopman*, 220-226; Buijze, *Leven en werk van Rumphius*, 228-247.

57 In 1698 Paul Hermann referred to him in his *Paradisus Batavus*, 209, as the 'Clarissimo Rumphio, "Plinio Indico" dicto'.

58 For a list of Rumphius's letters, see: Beekman, 'Introduction', LXXVII-LXXVIII. To Johan Michael Fehr, for instance, he sent the shell of a paper nautilus, alluding to Fehr's name of Argonauta by comparing the shell to the Argo: Leuker, 'Im Buch der Natur lesen', 250. For help in solving the riddle of why twice a year the water around the Banda Islands becomes luminescent white, he transmitted a sample to the Society: Rumphius, *Antwoort*, 28.

59 In one letter he refused to provide the information he was asked for, as he deemed it forbidden: Rumphius to Mentzel, 20 September 1680, cited in Valentini, 'Oost-Indianische Send-Schreiben', 118.

60 Yoo, 'Wars and Wonders', 566; Valentijn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën*, IV, 110.

whom he referred to on rare occasions.<sup>61</sup> Not all of his informants were reliable, however, though Rumphius himself alerts his readers when, for example, he is quoting the fables of old women.<sup>62</sup> While he was usually careful with word of mouth information, he was nevertheless sometimes fooled into believing something incorrectly, such as stories about the poison tree.<sup>63</sup>

To sum up: while the Company tried to establish a regime of secrecy, a constant flow of knowledge and objects poured out to Asia into Europe. It quickly turned out that the VOC lacked the ability to truly control either publishers or ships. Letters and parcels were often smuggled, as there were many ways to avoid being searched. Legal and illegal exchanges created a double structure within the business network of the VOC, a fact well known to the directors, who to a certain extent ignored these dealings.<sup>64</sup> The transfer of knowledge was not always contrary to the rules, however, and employees knew that they needed to be sure not to overstep the boundaries of tolerance. Therefore, some sensible information was suppressed by self-censorship. Yet undeniably, there was a tension between the VOC's attitude to keep knowledge to itself and the Republic of Letters' attitude of sharing it.

### *Rumphius's writings*

Rumphius's oeuvre encompasses *D'Amboinsche Rariteitkamer*, *Het Amboinsche Kruid-boek*, *De Amboinsche Historie*, and *De Amboinsche Lant-Beschrijvinge*, yet none of these books were published in his lifetime. Some of the books were written for the Company and it did not intend them for publication. Some were forbidden. Yet others were intended for publication, but this was difficult to achieve with the author living far away. Other works were presumably unpublished because they were unfinished. His 'Amboinsch Dierboek' (Ambonese Bestiary) is even lost. Some historians look at these books as parts of a program imitating Pliny and another even describes his work as a *Historia Naturalis Tropicæ*.<sup>65</sup> These are mere speculations. In fact, Rumphius's writings should rather be subdivided into occupational and scholarly works.

Most of his life, Rumphius had been a professional scribe. In his various functions within the VOC he always had to document his doings and the doings of others. The *Instructie voor de Commiezen en Kooplieden* (Instruction for Commissaries and Merchants) for instance, contained most of the duties a merchant should perform. A merchant had to keep many different records. Next to those dedicated to merchandise he had to write journals in which he should note everything that was going on in the region he was posted in (article 30). Every year several reports were expected (article 60) and at the end of his employment he

61 Yoo, 'Wars and Wonders', esp. 567-577.

62 Rumphius, *Amboinsche Kruid-boek*, I, Voorrede aan den Leser, fol. \*\*\*v.

63 Dove, *Dangerous Plants*, 29-42, has shown that this derives from a co-production of knowledge entangling indigenous interest and guile with European fear and imaginations.

64 Van Dam, *Beschrijvinge*, I.2, 1-9; Moree, 'Met vriend die God geleide', esp. 31.

65 Schulze, 'Rumphius', 5-6; Beekman, 'Introduction', passim, suggests he wanted to write a *Historia Naturalis Tropicæ*.

had to write a final report, containing everything he had observed about the countries he had visited (article 46).<sup>66</sup> The administrative tasks also required plenty of documentation. Quite apart from all this, his advice was sought on more than one occasion, such as in his 'Advys over den Ambonsche landtbouw' (Advice on the agriculture of Ambon) and a response to the questionnaire that Antony Hurt sent out in 1684. As the director Nicolaas Witsen issued it, he was obliged to answer.<sup>67</sup>

While most of the workplace writing demanded a concise style, some could be performed in a more 'learned' way by integrating classical learning or using scholarly tools and schemes, especially when there were connecting points between the task and scholarly work. A good example is Rumphius's *Generale Lant-Beschrijvinge* (General Geography). It clearly stands within the tradition of chorographical descriptions within the *voc*, a tradition that can be traced back to the *Memorie voor de Koopluyden* (Memoir for Merchants), a questionnaire that the Company directors launched as a tool for writing proper final reports.<sup>68</sup> It had the formal structure of a questionnaire that stipulated the subjects to be treated 'in order to inform the gentlemen directors, their masters, about everything precisely'.<sup>69</sup> At that time, using a questionnaire for gaining knowledge was quite common in administrative contexts as well as in the *ars apodemica* or natural history. It is obvious that the directors used some of these as a model.<sup>70</sup>

We find the first traces of the *Memorie* in 1614 when it was sent to Asia in handwritten form, accompanied by an order that all high-ranking employees should write their reports accordingly.<sup>71</sup> In 1649, it was printed for the first time, and it accompanied a revised instruction for merchants in 1670.<sup>72</sup> The questionnaire consisted of six chapters. The first demanded a description of the topography, the second of the government, foreign relations and laws, as well as religion, customs, and clothing of the region under review. The third was concerned with its trade, crafts, and navigation, while the fourth focused on plants, animals, woods, and indigenous know-how about building houses or ships. The

66 For the versions of 1642 and 1670: *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakaatboek*, II, 57-72, 528-530.

67 Rumphius, *Antwoort en Rapport*.

68 For this tradition, see also the contribution of Huigen to this special issue, and Huigen, *De weg naar Monomontapa*, 27-33. I sincerely thank Siegfried Huigen for the information about his studies on the questionnaires for South Africa. In addition, many other well-known descriptions such as François Caron's description of Japan or Joost Schouten's description of Siam were also based on the *Memorie*.

69 *Memorie voor de Koopluyden*. An undated copy is kept in NA, VOC 4928.

70 Without claiming to be exhaustive, see Stagl, *Geschichte der Neugier*, 31-37, 59-62, 68-70, 84-94; Stagl, 'Vom Dialog zum Fragebogen', 617-626; Fox, 'Printed Questionnaires'; Burke, *Social History of Knowledge*, 121-122, 126-128, 137-138. On visitations, see: Lang, 'Reform im Wandel'; Brakensiek and Simon, 'Visitation'. For the relaciones geográficas, see Brendecke, 'Fragebögen'. For personal data: Underwood, 'Youth'; Friedrich, *Lange Arm Roms*, 309-340, 442-447. Huigen, *De weg naar Monomontapa*, 17-33, already connected a younger version of the *Memorie* with the *ars apodemica*.

71 NA, VOC 312, *Memorie van't geene daer op de commisen ende andere officiers in het stellen van haer lieder rapporten, ofte discoursen sullen hebben te letten om de bewindthebberden van alles punctuelyck te onderrichten*, 1614, 53-55; NA, VOC 312, orders to Jaspas Jansz., Wemmer van Berchem, Steven Doens van Groenendijck, and Hendrick Jansz, 21 November 1614, 88, 92, 103, 108.

72 *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakaatboek*, II, 530-534; NA, VOC 7347, resolution of the *Heren XVII*, no. 23, 6 September 1649.

fifth set of questions dealt with the power and trade of the enemies of the Dutch, and the final chapter was dedicated to the power and trade of the VOC. Taken together, fifty-nine different points were to be taken into account. The overall interest was well-focused, as the questions directed attention to economically useful data. The second question of the third chapter, for instance, asked for tables of prices and the third which Dutch products could be sold.<sup>73</sup>

When he became governor of Amboina in 1672, Anthonie Hurdt directed Rumphius to write the *Generale Lant-Beschrijvinge*.<sup>74</sup> It might well be that this was inspired by the reminder of the *Memorie* in 1670.<sup>75</sup> A comparison between its questions and Rumphius's *Beschrijvinge* makes it highly probable that he took the questionnaire as reference, but rather than following it blindly, blended it with classical learning. He structured his text geographically by dealing with each district of Amboina separately.<sup>76</sup> Within the passages, he addressed nearly all the topics of the *Memorie*. As it required, he usually began by naming the district or village, giving distances and directions towards other locations, naming fortresses, describing the topography, the soil and – if existent – resources and products. He explained government structures, including the contemporary Dutch and former Portuguese, as well as the conduct of the indigenous peoples towards the Europeans. As ordered by the *Memorie*, he provided information on religion, clothing, and sometimes habits. Products, tradable goods, and trading connections were mentioned, if there were any.<sup>77</sup> The description of districts demanded (according to the *Memorie*) certain data that he did not always have at hand. In the version finished in 1678 the numbers of inhabitants and men to be provided for service were often missing, shown by blank spaces. They were added after the census of 1691.<sup>78</sup> In 1693, a revised description was sent to Batavia.<sup>79</sup> It is probable that a map, as desired by the *Memorie*, was part of the *Lant-Beschrijvinge*.<sup>80</sup>

Sporadically, however, Rumphius interspersed curiosities and tales. These were not required by the *Memorie*, yet this information fitted within his scholarly approach.<sup>81</sup> In a second volume he even added the history of the region since the arrival of the Dutch. The geographical description was extensive, yet the *Ambonse Historie* (Ambonese History) went far beyond the usual requirements.<sup>82</sup> In Batavia it was praised.

73 *Memorie voor de Koopluyden*, 3.

74 Rumphius, *Generale Lant-Beschrijvinge*, xxxix. Sometimes a passage from the 'Dagh-Register van het Casteel Batavia' dated 7 January 1672 is cited, according to which Pieter Overtwater wanted to be discharged from 'the description of Amboina'. This is a mistake, because the passage has no bearing on the *Lant-Beschrijvinge*.

75 *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakaatboek*, II, 530-534.

76 Rumphius, *Generale Lant-Beschrijvinge*, 1-162.

77 For example, he mentioned goldsmiths in Jha (Rumphius, *Generale Lant-Beschrijvinge*, 63), clothing or its lacking in Amet and the Alfurs (65, 104), trade and goods at Assaheodi or Ceram Laut (67, 95), and 'furniture' and marriage at the Alfurs (106).

78 Buijze, 'Geschiedenis', xl.

79 Leupe, *Rumphius*, 21-22.

80 In 1696 a draughtsman was asked for 'copying the Ambonese geography and large map': cited in Leupe, *Rumphius*, 25. A map was also demanded by the *Memorie voor de Koopluyden*, 1. De Haan, 'Rumphius', 18, suggests that the maps of Ambon in Valentyn's *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën* might be copies of Rumphius's.

81 Leuker, 'Koloniales Wissen', 75-76.

82 Rumphius, 'De Ambonse Historie'.

In 1680 he received a promise that he would remain 'in good esteem' on account of the history and for his work on the herbarium.<sup>83</sup> This could be understood as a confirmation of the order to complete the *Kruid-boek*. Rumphius was provided with assistants and draughtsmen on the Company payroll.<sup>84</sup> He acknowledged the help of his superiors, but this assistance changed the character of his project. What started as a private enterprise, exploring the botany of Amboina, was now taken under the aegis of the Company. He switched the language from the scholarly Latin to Dutch accordingly.<sup>85</sup> Rumphius's scholarly work became part of his duties, and the herbarium, when completed, just as much the property of the VOC as the explicitly commissioned *Lant-Beschrijvinge*.

The influence of the VOC on the herbarium runs deeper than just ordering and financing its completion, however. Compared to other herbals, we find in Rumphius's oeuvre many hints at uses and benefits that might be drawn from the plants under description.<sup>86</sup> It is because of these comments that the herbarium had been labelled an early piece of economic botany.<sup>87</sup> In fact, one could call his approach one comparable to that of merchants towards trading goods. Handbooks for merchants insisted that merchants know a lot about the area they were trading with. According to the British merchant Lewes Roberts, a main part of the profession 'consists in the knowledge of commodities'.<sup>88</sup> Their qualities should be known 'in their colours, goodness, substance, virtue, taste, seeing, or feeling'.<sup>89</sup> What he demanded was a close sensual examination. Here the practices of merchants were totally in line with the methods Rumphius used for properly identifying plants. One of the main problems was to establish the sameness of diversely named plants in different regions of Asia as well as Europe and to relate existing documentation, whether Ancient, Asian, or European, to one's own observations. For illustrative purposes Rumphius likened exotic plants to European ones, while highlighting differences. He even warned against assuming sameness when tropical plants looked like European ones, as some European scholars had done.<sup>90</sup> Thus, it is more a question of congruence between merchants' and scholars' practices and approaches towards objects than a typically Dutch empirical mentality that fostered empirical studies in Dutch trading companies.<sup>91</sup> In Rumphius's writings the

83 High Council to Governor, 17 February 1680, cited in Leupe, *Rumphius*, 18-19.

84 From 1679 on Daniël Crul was his draughtsman. He left before 1683: Rumphius to De Jager, 20 May 1683, cited in Valentini, 'Oost-Indiatische Send-Schreiben', 4. His son Paulus Augustus helped, yet also had other work at hand. In 1688 Philip van Eyck took over as draughtsman, followed in 1694 by Pieter de Ruijter. Cornelis Abramsen was a further assistant. Particularly helpful was Johan Philip Sipman, who knew Latin and served as assistant to Rumphius for four or five years: Buijze, *Leven en werk van Rumphius*, 325, 329. Rumphius acknowledges the help of the Company and the governors of Ambon in *Het Amboinsche Kruid-boek*, voorrede aan den lezer. When this work was sent to Batavia, the Council of the Indies considered the task completed, so it was surprised when Rumphius asked for a new draughtsman and assistant to finish his writings: Leupe, *Rumphius*, 25-26.

85 Rumphius to Mentzel, 20 September 1680, cited in Valentini, 'Oost-Indiatische Send-Schreiben', 117.

86 This is emphasised in De Wit, 'Rumphius', 14; Van Benthem Jutting, 'Rumphius', 183.

87 E.g. Van Slooten, 'Rumphius'; Kalkman, 'Economic Botany', 50; Wickens, *Economic Botany*, 2.

88 Roberts, *Merchants Mappe*, 42.

89 Roberts, *Merchants Mappe*, 45.

90 Rumphius, *Het Amboinsche Kruid-boek*, VI, 178.

91 Cook, *Matters of Exchange*, 69-73.



influence of his studies on some of the more specific VOC-texts was as visible as the influence of his professional surroundings was on his studies in natural history.

### *Rumphius and Rules, or on the Importance of Being a Good Employee*

While practices and tools of knowledge acquisition in the scholarly and economic spheres were quite comparable, there were differences in assessing data and contrary attitudes towards the sharing of knowledge and objects. As noted above, the Company's rules designed to prevent knowledge from being propagated were often circumvented. But there is evidence that Rumphius complied with the VOC's regime of secrecy – at least sometimes. For example, in a letter from 1680 to Christian Mentzel, the personal physician of the Elector of Brandenburg, Rumphius answered a request for some information on the cultivation of cloves. He apologised for not writing about how cloves were planted and cultivated – not because he did not know, but because 'this is forbidden by the superiors'.<sup>92</sup>

When he wrote that, he had been blind for ten years.<sup>93</sup> This circumstance has to be considered as crucial not only for his personal life but also for his relationship with the VOC. Such a disability usually terminated active service. The reaction of the governor of Ambon, who wanted to send him back to Europe, was absolutely in line with the rules. At Rumphius's request, however, Governor-General Joan Maetsuycker overruled the governor and ordered that his salary should continue to be paid because of his 'lasting, good, and irreproachable services'. He was kept on as a member of the governor's council, because Maetsuycker perceived him to be a good employee.<sup>94</sup>

In the years before, Rumphius had portrayed himself as an obedient employee. Naturally, all suppliants did this, but within the Company an ongoing discourse of bad employees prevailed, depicting 'the others' as disloyal, avaricious, villainous, and deviant.<sup>95</sup> In order to be considered loyal, it was necessary to avoid the impression of any involvement in private trade. In 1663 Rumphius asked the directors for permission to buy books that he could use as reference material. Additionally, he wanted to acquire some instruments he needed for his research. Both would need to be transported on a VOC ship, so only the consent of the directors could guarantee an intact and correct delivery. Rumphius justified his request by alluding to 'friends' who advised him to do so, as otherwise the chests would not be admitted for transport on the ships. The other motives mentioned were his fear of coming under suspicion of trading privately as well as fearing loss and damage of his acquisitions. It would be wiser to play according to the rules. Besides, he promised that he would use both the books and the instruments in such a way as to enhance the Company's credit, if not its profits.<sup>96</sup> Rumphius presents himself as dutiful employee, having the best

<sup>92</sup> Rumphius to Mentzel, 20 September 1680, cited in Valentini, 'Oost-Indianische Send-Schreiben', 118.

<sup>93</sup> Buijze, *Leven en werk van Rumphius*, 96-102.

<sup>94</sup> Leupe, *Rumphius*, 14-16, citation on 16; Beekman, 'Rumphius', LXIX.

<sup>95</sup> Van Goor, 'God and trade', 215-216. This is also a leitmotiv of Van Dam, *Beschryvinge*.

<sup>96</sup> Rumphius to chamber of Amsterdam, 20 August 1663, cited in Leupe, *Rumphius*, 40-41. His wish was granted: NA, VOC 237, resolution of the chamber Amsterdam, 21 May 1665.

interests of the Company in mind. The governor-general supported his request, highlighting that Rumphius had ‘the fame of being a qualified and studious person, furthermore of good living habits’.<sup>97</sup>

From that time on, the directors knew that he was cataloguing the plants of his dwelling place. As official deliveries like the one requested by Rumphius were quite unusual with the Company, the allowance the directors gave constitutes a sign of interest. The book deliveries continued.<sup>98</sup> In 1666 the governor of Amboina, Pieter Marville, also gave him credit for leading a ‘good and modest life’, having a ‘humble and civil manner’, a ‘conscientious and upright mindset’ and for not being greedy, that is: for being a good employee.<sup>99</sup>

Rumphius’s compliance with the rules and his reputation of leading an exemplary life safeguarded the goodwill of his superiors. In 1667-1668, however, rhetoric and action fell apart. His reaction to the order to leave for Batavia could be described as insubordination: he simply stayed put, and was rebuked for it.<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless, he did not lose his job. Rules could be negotiated on a limited scale, as superiors could give some leeway. His blindness enhanced Rumphius’s dependency on his superiors and limited the possibilities of negotiation. He experienced this in 1682 when he sold most of his collection of rarities to Duke Cosimo III de’ Medici on the request of some friends to whom he owed some obligation.<sup>101</sup> Pieter Blaeu acted as a broker and corresponded about prices and other details of sale and transportation.<sup>102</sup> He also secured the consent of the *Heren XVII* for the transaction. The rarities were specified in a list, as were the books that the seller should get as recompense besides some money.<sup>103</sup> Yet, unlike the *Heren XVII*, the chamber of Amsterdam only allowed the acquisition made by the duke, refusing to transport either books and money in return.<sup>104</sup> Rules again had become stricter.

In contrast, the support of his superiors in Asia was liberal. Even in a phase of budgetary rigour in 1679 the governor kept two assistants to help Rumphius ‘for the progress of the Ambonese History’.<sup>105</sup> This indicates that the governor valued Rumphius’s knowledge and wanted to profit from it. One might wonder whether the purpose of his continuation in 1670 was merely to secure a knowledgeable man for the VOC or if this was not a means to keep his knowledge within the Company as well.

97 Generale Missive, 19 December 1663, cited in Leupe, *Rumphius*, 7: ‘den naem heeft van een bequaem ende leergierig persoon, daerenboven van een goet leven is.’

98 Buijze, *Rumphius’ Bibliotheek*.

99 Marville to Council of the Indies, 28 January 1666, cited in Leupe, *Rumphius*, 8: ‘Van een goet en statigh leven en en van een onbillycken (sic) maer nedrigen en heusschen ommegangh, en vooral ven een conscientieus en oprecht gemoet, niet gierigh ofte inhaligh.’

100 Beeckman, ‘Introduction’, LXVII.

101 Rumphius sent six chests with rarities for the Duke for 650 Reichstaler; three more chests followed later: Rumphius, *Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet*, 223. Baas and Veldkamp, *Pre-Colonial Botany*, 14, interpret this as a sign that European collectors knew and valued Rumphius’s skills.

102 Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek, Ms. B110, Rumphius, *Catalogus Rerum Exoticarum*, fol. 24v.

103 NA, VOC 108, resolution of the *Heren XVII*, 20 June 1680.

104 NA VOC 241, resolution of the chamber of Amsterdam, 8 August 1680.

105 Valentijn, *Oud en nieuw Oost-Indiën*, II.1, 271: ‘tot vervolg der Ambonsche Historie’.

As a scholar Rumphius wanted his works to circulate. Yet his *Amboinsche Lant-Beschrijvinge* and the *Historie* remained unpublished, and languished in the archives of Amboina and Batavia. The Council of the Indies that assisted the Governor-General in ruling the Asian dependences rated them very useful, which meant that they should stay secret.<sup>106</sup> In the dedication of the *Amboinsche Kruid-boek* to the directors, Rumphius drew a comparison between the *Historie* as the first of his political writings and the herbal as the first of his botanical studies. While the first was too sensitive to be circulated, being 'more appropriate as information and speculation for the rulers of this land than as a pleasure for readers', he hoped that the second could be published.<sup>107</sup> The passage shows his fear that his main work might also remain unpublished. The publishing history of the *Kruid-boek* justifies this fear. When the last part of the manuscript finally reached the Dutch Republic in 1697, the *Haags Besogne*, a VOC commission given the task of reading incoming correspondence, reviewed the work. The commission members seemed quite impressed and ordered that it should be brought to the next assembly of the *Heren xvii*, because it was of 'special curiosity'. They were supposed to decide what to do with it.<sup>108</sup> In 1700, the *Heren xvii* refused to release the books for publication, even though 'some amateurs and printers' wished to do so, because the directors considered it 'detrimental'.<sup>109</sup> What they rated 'detrimental' they did not say, yet the then lawyer Pieter van Dam described Rumphius's work in 1701 as 'put together with great knowledge, diligence, and effort' that not only contained interesting information, but also information of special usefulness that give insight in the cultivation of spices.<sup>110</sup> Obviously, the directors feared that too much knowledge about 'their' spices might spread. Two years later they allowed it to be printed, but they refused to pay the costs and reserved themselves full censorship rights. All passages which might hurt the interests of the Company should they be published were to be deleted.<sup>111</sup> Unsurprisingly, no one stepped forward to finance their publication on those terms. Finally, Johannes Burman, who held the chair of botany at the Athenaeum Illustre of Amsterdam, reworked and edited the volumes from 1736 onwards. On his request, the chamber of Amsterdam consented to the publication on 27 August 1736, provided it would be done 'without expenses for the Company'.<sup>112</sup> Up to that moment, most of Rumphius's works were exclusive to those with close ties to the inner circle of the Company.<sup>113</sup>

106 Beekman, 'Introduction', LXXII; Leupe, *Rumphius*, 19.

107 Rumphius, *Amboinsche Kruid-boek*, opdracht: 'Dog aangezien het zelve werk geoordeelt wierd meer te strekken tot narigt, en speculatie voor de Regeerders dezer landen, dan tot vermaak van den Lezer.'

108 Protocol, 16 August 1697, cited in Leupe, *Rumphius*, 27: 'bysondere curieushey'.

109 Resolution of the *Heren xvii*, 19 February 1700, cited in Leupe, *Rumphius*, 32-33: 'ondienstigh'.

110 Van Dam, *Beschryvinge*, I.2, 357: 'een werk met veel kennisse, studie en applicatie tesamen gestelt'.

111 NA, VOC 158, resolution of the *Heren xvii*, 15 September 1702.

112 Resolution of the chamber of Amsterdam, 27 August 1636, cited in Leupe, *Rumphius*, 33: 'buijten kosten van de Comp.'

113 Some of his writings circulated as handwritten copies. Nicolaas Witsen owned one of the *Lant-beschrijvinge* which Peters, *Wijze koopman*, 356, proved to be the copy now kept at the Royal Library in The Hague, MS 75 H 37. Pieter van Dam, the lawyer of the VOC, used Rumphius's description of the sago palm for his monumental description of the Company: compare Van Dam, *Beschryvinge*, II. 1, 216, to Rumphius, *Amboinsche Kruid-boek*, I, 76.

## Conclusion

The example of Rumphius shows that being an employee of the VOC had considerable influence on how, when, and under what circumstances scholarly knowledge could be produced and circulated. A sophisticated economy of secrecy prevailed within the Company, which was affected by social correlations and changing ways of thinking. Research on the natural world under the auspices of the VOC became distinguishable from other contexts because actors had to deal with a specific set of rules.

Rumphius proved to be quite good at it. He managed to maintain the perception of his person as a 'good employee' with changing superiors and he received assistance from the Company to achieve his scholarly goals. At the same time, his case warns us about mixing up his writings for the VOC and his scholarly studies – as is often done with his *Lant-Beschrijvinge* – and demonstrates that this division is difficult, especially when we take developments and altering circumstances into account, as his long-lasting work on the *Amboinsche Kruid-boek* illustrates. The interest his superiors took in the unsolicited knowledge production of their employee proves their interest in knowledge and also gives reason to reconsider the character of those endeavours. We have to look carefully at the impulses for these studies and distinguish between commissioned work and studies initiated of one's own accord. In the latter case, we should not credulously follow the self-portrayal of authors who claim to be disinterested scholars. While on the one hand knowledge projects in the service of the VOC could be rewarded by it, on the other hand traditions of scholarly discourse induced VOC employees doing research to distance themselves from the contamination of business. In writing a conflict of roles is visible between scholar and VOC employee.

In practice, the employee scholar Rumphius was constantly bargaining with his superiors about time, wages, loading capacities, assistants, and patronage. In many cases he succeeded, because in the eyes of high-ranking officers and directors his project promised to be an asset to the VOC. They phrased this as Rumphius being a 'good employee', ranking the interest of the Company higher than his own, and aiding him in finalising his works. However, the case of Rumphius proves that with this aid came costs. While he was free to research nature and to exchange his findings with fellow researchers in Asia and Europe as long as he did not spread 'secrets', he lost the power to disseminate his works as he saw fit. In this respect, Klaas van Berkel's description of the VOC as an 'unwilling Maecenas' seems inapplicable to Rumphius's case.<sup>114</sup> First, his superiors knew quite well what they did and they decided to assist him in his research, and secondly, they did not act as a disinterested patron. In fact, they had a great interest in that knowledge, but not in its free circulation as they considered it a part of their capital, something best kept to itself.

114 Van Berkel, 'Een onwillige mecenas?'

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