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# MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

TRACES OF A COLONIAL PAST  
IN THE CITY OF ROTTERDAM<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

From the beginning of the seventeenth century until well into the twentieth century, Dutch entrepreneurs and the Dutch government traded with and ruled over various countries in Asia, Africa and the Americas. Testimonies of these connections remain in the form of buildings, memorials and street names; indeed, in many Dutch towns and villages entire districts can be found that hark back to this period in general and colonization in particular. Despite the complete erasure of its historic urban core in the German bombardment of 14 May 1940, the city of Rotterdam is no exception.

## TRACES OF THE EAST AND WEST INDIA COMPANIES (SEVENTEENTH-EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES)

Colonial traces are not always overt and, as Rotterdam shows, can be ambiguous. For although Rotterdam's city centre does not overtly present its colonial links, they are there for those who know where to look and what to look for. An interesting example is the twelve large merchants' dwellings on Haringvliet 78-98 (Ill. 5.1). The houses annex warehouses, which miraculously survived the German bombardment, are situated on a street where, after Hoogstraat, the most directors of the Dutch East

India Company, Dutch West India Company and Maas Admiralty resided during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although the specific connection between the houses and their former residents requires further investigation, it is safe to assume the homes are connected to Rotterdam's colonial past — and consequently demonstrate the affluence and the social status of high-ranking colonial officials in the city of Rotterdam.

In another area of Rotterdam, at numbers 405-407 on Rechter Rottekade, the interior of a relatively modest eighteenth-century merchant's house clearly hints at its colonial connections.<sup>3</sup> On the first floor, a ceiling painting depicts Mercury, the Roman god of trade, and two female figures: Liberty and perhaps Victory. For a colonial connection, the trunk pictured with 'N° 6' on the front and the East India Company logo on the side is an obvious reference. Two walls on the second floor contain more colonial references. The first has a mural of a ship under full sail. The ship, a frigate with a lion figurehead and an American flag on the stern, can be dated to c. 1800 and is a reference to trade with the Americas. The second mural, albeit stylistically different, contains a further hint of the building's relationship with the colonies. Set in a fantasy landscape, it shows a flag on a European-style building (a church or fort), a bridge, a hut, a long pole with a basket-like object in the top, and palm trees in the background. In the foreground, a figure of African origin is wearing a feather hat and riding a camel, while another figure holds a parasol over the rider's head and a third leads the camel (Ill. 5.2). The iconography offers a glimpse into Rotterdam's entrepreneurial connection with the Dutch colonies.<sup>3</sup>

However, contemporary references to the colonies such as the houses on Haringvliet and Rechter Rottekade are rare in Rotterdam. This is not only because the German bombardment razed most of the buildings in the historic city centre to the ground but also because (until the nineteenth century) Rotterdam's governing body took a lax attitude to their preservation. As a result, many historic edifices have disappeared, leaving irreversible gaps in the city's urban fabric. All that remains of the buildings today are images and texts. Given the disappearance of so many historic buildings, those that remain are precious, not only because of their physical presence but also because of the stories they tell.

One such building is the office annex storehouse in Delfshaven that was built for the Delft branch of the East India Company in 1672. The building exudes the importance and influence of the East India Company at the time of its construction. Even though it has lost much of its

impact due to the increasing scale of adjacent buildings and the loss of the opulently decorated roof, it is easy to appreciate how this and other East and West India Company buildings shaped, if not dominated, their urban surroundings. For this reason, it is regrettable that the equally monumental premises of the Rotterdam Chamber of the East India Company on the street called Boompjes and the Maas Admiralty on the former corner of Oostplein and Nieuwe Haven were destroyed during the 1940 bombardment. If these edifices had survived, they would have provided a wonderful opportunity to understand how these commercial organizations helped shape the city of Rotterdam physically as well as economically. Unfortunately, the few remains that did survive fail to reflect the buildings' true influence. The paintings that once adorned the walls of the East India Company premises on Boompjes (now kept in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam) and the segment of the main entrance to the Admiralty's premises (now incorporated in the entrance to an underground station near the Admiralty's former site) are important; however, they are by no means capable of conveying the colonial connection in the way the buildings that they were once part of would have been.



5.1 Historic merchants' houses on Haringvliet (Photo: Isabelle Boon, Rotterdam, 2020).



5.2 Mural in a house on Rechter Rottekade (probably mid-eighteenth century) (Photo: Isabelle Boon, Rotterdam, 2020).

## BUILDINGS AND URBAN DEVELOPMENTS AFTER 1850

The 1940 bombardment devastated Rotterdam's historic heart but caused much less damage further from the centre. Compared with the few scattered remains of buildings from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the historic core, the later colonial buildings and urban expansion plans that were realized outside the city centre provide more visible and tangible links to Rotterdam's role in the colonies.

Two poignant examples are situated outside Rotterdam's city limits. The first is a country house commissioned by Jacob van Hoboken in 1851 on Westzeedijk, the southern border of the family's private country estate of Dijkzigt — also known as *Land van Hoboken*. The second is *Schoonhoven*, a mansion set in a vast garden just south of Westzeedijk on number 17 Parklaan, where Jacob's sister Hendrika and his brother-in-law lived from 1854 to 1926. The two estates are relevant here because their owners were the children of Anthony van Hoboken. Van Hoboken was a successful shipping magnate and a major shareholder in the Dutch trading company *Nederlandsche Handel-Maatschappij* (NHM). Because NHM was the Dutch government's preferred handler for all shipping and trading activities with the colonies of European countries, it held a virtual monopoly on colonial trade. While Hendrika's mansion was demolished and rebuilt shortly after its owner's death, the grounds remain an important and recognizable element of Rotterdam's colonial connections. Today, the former garden is a spacious and mature public park that is accessible via the gate that once fenced off Hendrika's estate (Ill. 5.3). The traces of Jacob's estate left even more impressive marks. The former estate is now known as Museum Park and the house has been home to the Natural History Museum since 1987. As such, the Van Hoboken estates are visible and tangible reminders of Rotterdam's colonial past, and how colonial enterprise shaped and expanded the city.

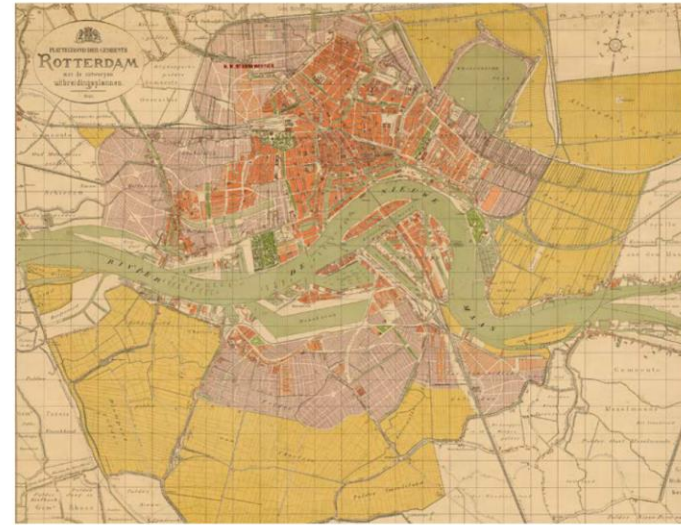
With regard to the urban expansion, the building erected in 1930 as Unilever's headquarters (and that is now part of Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences) is interesting not only because it was built just outside the former estate of Jacob van Hoboken — and thus consolidated within the wider development of Rotterdam — but also because the building was commissioned by a company whose core business was margarine and soap. Unilever, which was created from the merger of the Dutch *Margarine Unie* and the British *Lever Brothers*, relied on palm oil, a commodity imported in large quantities from the Dutch East Indies and various



5.3 Entrance to the Schoonoord historic garden (Photo: Isabelle Boon, Rotterdam, 2020).

colonies in West and Southern Africa. One of the bas-reliefs that were commissioned to frame the headquarters' main entrance candidly refers to this. Entitled 'Culture', the relief portrays two African women carrying baskets with what appear to be palm nuts and coconuts: an unmistakable reference if ever there was one to the countries, people and crops that were (and are) crucial for Unilever.

These and other buildings are interesting, but modest compared to the way the colonial enterprise steered Rotterdam's spatial development, most notably the expansion plans for the area immediately adjacent to the west of the historic city centre and similar plans across the river. Prompted by the need for more and larger docks to accommodate the growing number of large ships, the First and Second New Works and the first four wet docks in Feijenoord were built thanks to the vision, resolve and effort of several prominent local colonial entrepreneurs. The plans, which were conceived and realized between 1847 and 1875, had a significant impact on Rotterdam's spatial development. Firstly, they doubled Rotterdam's built-



5.4 Rotterdam city plan with envisaged expansions (1903) (Rotterdam city archives).

up area. Secondly, they incorporated the district of Feijenoord on the left bank of the Maas, an area that until then had never been thought of as part of Rotterdam's urban fabric.

Feijenoord's character and appearance were very different from the city of Rotterdam on the right bank of the river. While the historic city centre, as well as the First and Second New Works, were mixed residential and functional areas, Feijenoord was destined for utilitarian buildings related to shipping and trade. The headquarters of the trading company *Rotterdamsche Handelsvereniging* (Stieltjesstraat, 1879) and the nearby entrepôt building *De Vijf Werelddelen* (Handelsplein, 1874-79) demonstrate this. Set in a landscape of wet docks and quays, their scale and sober architecture match their somewhat utilitarian purpose and surroundings. The buildings were commissioned by Lodewijk Pincoffs, a Rotterdam-based politician and businessman who, driven by commercial concerns, pushed Feijenoord's development to assist his personal shipping interests in West Africa and the Congo. To symbolize his relevance for the development of Feijenoord, a statue of Pincoffs was erected in 1998 in a square at the point where the two wet docks meet. Inevitably though, the statue also links Feijenoord's development to Pincoffs' commercial activities — and thus to the colonies.

Rotterdam's expansion did not stop at Feijenoord. To sustain its prominent position in the international and colonial shipping and cargo industry, Rotterdam annexed two municipalities that were historically tied to the city's maritime and colonial endeavours: Delfshaven in the west (1886) and Kralingen in the east (1895). In addition, Rotterdam also implemented expansion plans to the north and south of the existing city (Ill. 5.4). As Rotterdam's urban area expanded, companies increasingly settled in districts further removed from the historic city centre. One of these companies was *De Erven Wed. J. van Nelle*, colloquially known as 'Van Nelle'. Van Nelle was a Rotterdam-based company with colonial ties that went back to 1782, when Johannes van Nelle started selling coffee, tea and tobacco on Leuvehaven. By the early twentieth century, the once modest shop had developed into an international company that processed coffee, tea and tobacco. By the 1920s, despite several enlargements of its premises, the company had outgrown its original location and it decided to resettle elsewhere. The new location was situated in Overschie, a neighbouring municipality to the northwest — which Rotterdam annexed a decade later. Situated on the Delfhavense Schie waterway, which allowed raw materials and products to be brought in and collected, the vast site also offered sufficient space for

state-of-the-art offices, but above all a factory and warehouses. Hailed internationally as an example of Modernist architecture, the complex is much more than that: it is an example, if not the epitome, of colonial trade.

Although contemporary-built testimonies of Rotterdam's connection with the colonies are predominantly limited to the area outside Rotterdam's historic city — i.e. the 1940 Fire Boundary — this does not imply that the area within the Fire Boundary is devoid of colonial references. Far from it, for although their construction dates and architectural appearance seem to suggest otherwise, many post-war buildings are no less connected to the colonies than the Van Nelle complex, the Unilever office, the Van Hoboken estates, or the merchant town houses on *Rechter Rottekade* and *Haringvliet*. Particularly in the case of post-war buildings, there is often more than meets the eye.

Two noteworthy post-war buildings are the offices of NHM — whose initial stakeholders in the early nineteenth century included King William I and Anthony van Hoboken — on *Blaak* at number 34 (1941-50), and the offices of *De Twentsche Bank* at number 28, *Blaak* (1950). These two companies, founded in 1824 and 1830 respectively, were established with the explicit aim of facilitating trade and trading goods with Asia in general and the Dutch East Indies in particular; the buildings are therefore important landmarks not only of Rotterdam's post-war reconstruction but also of Rotterdam's colonial past and what emerged from that past. Regarding the latter, it is worth pointing out that NHM and *De Twentsche Bank* merged in 1964 to form the *Algemene Bank Nederland* (ABN). ABN was one of the two banks that merged to become ABN-AMRO in 1991 and has since been one of the largest banks in the Netherlands. The newly formed ABN bank connected the buildings of the two predecessor companies via a skyway bridge. As a result, ABN incorporated the administrative and built inheritance of two companies with longstanding colonial connections and interests.

Other landmark buildings from the post-war period with striking, though not necessarily obvious, connections to the colonies are the office buildings of the oil company *Royal Dutch Shell* (*Hofplein* 19, 1956-60), the bank *Rotterdamsche Bankvereniging* (also known as *Robaver*, *Coolsingel* 119, 1941-49) and the insurance company *Aon Nederland* (*Admiraliteitskade* 62, 2000-03). While it is safe to assume many people are familiar with the connection between Shell and colonialism, Shell's 1960 office building towering over this petrol station is easily overlooked due



5.5 Office of the Rotterdamsche Bankvereniging (1946) on the corner of Coolsingel and Beurstraverse (Photo: Isabelle Boon, Rotterdam, 2020).

to its architecture — and absence of a company logo. It is Shell's petrol station beneath the building that most clearly identifies the building as having colonial relations. A similar situation applies to the buildings of Robaver and, in a slightly more intricate way, Aon Nederland. Robaver emerged in 1911 out of a merger of various banks, including the Rotterdamsche Bank. The Rotterdamsche Bank was founded in 1862 by Marten Mees, a descendant of a prominent Rotterdam banking family with a track record in financially supporting colonial trade. The Rotterdamsche Bank's sole objective was to grant credit to companies in the Dutch East Indies. Robaver followed in these footsteps and, twenty years after its foundation, participated in the foundation of various other banks with vested interests in the colonies, including the Bank voor Indië ('Bank for the East Indies'), the Hollandsche Bank voor West-Indië ('Holland bank for the West Indies') and the Hollandsche Bank voor Zuid-Amerika ('Holland bank for South America'). Because of this explicit business model and because of its connection to a prominent banking family, the Robaver building is thus very much part and parcel of Rotterdam's colonial history (Ill. 5.5).

The colonial connection of Aon Nederland, and consequently the building where the company currently resides, is similar. Although the company's name no longer suggests this, its origins go back to the Hudig family, another Rotterdam dynasty of financiers, shipbrokers and insurance brokers that facilitated and benefitted from Rotterdam's colonial efforts. Aon Nederland's roots date back to 1825, the year in which Ferrand Whaley, one of the grandsons of the Hudig family's founding father, set himself up as an insurance broker. Due to his untimely death, the company was renamed after his younger brother Dirk. Over time the company, D. Hudig & Co., developed into one of the Netherlands' largest insurance brokers. After several mergers, it evolved into the Hudig-Langeveldt Group, Aon Hudig and, more recently Aon Nederland.<sup>4</sup> Because of this pedigree, it is fair to argue that the twenty-first-century building on Admiraliteitskade is as much a testimony to Rotterdam's colonial past as the company's earlier, but no longer existing, successive historic premises on Wijnhaven at numbers 105b, 23 and 61.

### STREET NAMES

In addition to buildings and town plans, street names and their position in the urban grid also offer interesting references and indications of colonial



5.6 Street name sign, Djeroekstraat, on the corner with Pleretstraat (Photo: Isabelle Boon, Rotterdam, 2020).

connections. Admiraliteitskade, the address of Aon Nederland, is a good example. Although the name refers to the Maas Admiralty (*Admiraliteit*), the organization whose premises with storehouse were positioned slightly to the north on the opposite quay, the street itself borders on a harbour once jam-packed with ships of the Admiralty, the East India Company and, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, local shipping magnates. As such, Aon Nederland's offices attest to Rotterdam's colonial past, firstly through the company's history, secondly through its location and last but not least through the name of the building it occupies: De Admiraal ('The admiral').

Other than helping people to find their way through the built environment, street names can also be helpful when identifying traces of local history. An analysis of Rotterdam's current 6,337 street names shows that 181 names refer in some way to the colonies. The references include people (93), toponyms (33), ships that sailed to the colonies (23), companies that produced, shipped and traded colonial products or facilitated this financially (18), crops and minerals that are unique to the colonies (12), and the occasional non-Dutch word related to these colonies (2). Of this set, far more names refer to Asia than to the Americas. The analysis furthermore shows that in addition to the categories identified here, a fair number of street names also relate directly or indirectly (but not necessarily exclusively) to the colonies: references to the country estates of prosperous colonial entrepreneurs and shipowners, the artists who portrayed these men and their spouses, the architects who designed their offices, homes and gardens, but also craftsmen like sailmakers and dockworkers, and the equipment they used (rope, anvils and saw mills).

Another category concerns streets that are related to the colonies although their names do not initially suggest this. A prime example is Boompjes ('Little trees'), the quay where the East India Company built its new offices in 1698. After the building was ruined beyond repair in the 1940 German bombardment, no tangible remainder of the East India Company's presence in the quay was left — unless you count the *Indisch straatsieraad* ('Indies street ornament'), a sculpture that commemorates Japan's surrender on 15 August 1945. Because of its position near the former East India Company building, it also embodies the *longue durée* and complex character of Rotterdam's colonial history. For anybody unfamiliar with Rotterdam's colonial past, though, the name 'Boompjes' only refers to the trees that have lined the quay since its early days.

As Admiraliteitskade and Boompjes demonstrate, where a street is po-

sitioned in the urban fabric can also be a helpful indicator of a colonial reference or connection, particularly when the name of a district refers to the colonies, as for example Rotterdam's Transvaal, or Afrikaander ('Afrikaner'), District. Built in Feijenoord around 1900, the quarter provided housing for labourers employed in the nearby wet docks. The name of the district and the names of its streets are overt and conscious references to Transvaal; a republic in Southern Africa established by the descendants of Dutch and other European settlers after Great Britain incorporated South Africa as a colony of the British Empire. To commemorate the longstanding historical ties between the republic, its inhabitants the Afrikaners (or Boers) and the Netherlands, and to express allegiance to the Afrikaners' military efforts in the late nineteenth century to prevent the British taking control of the republic, the new neighbourhood was endowed with streets named after East India Company officials, Transvaal toponyms and prominent Boer military figures and politicians. Individually, these names do not necessarily stand out as references to Rotterdam's connection with Southern Africa, but in combination with other names nearby the connection is relatively easy to identify.

Unlike in many other major cities in the Netherlands, identifying *Indisch* (Dutch East or West Indies) colonial references in Rotterdam is less easy. In contrast to other cities, Rotterdam does not have an *Indisch* District — one where names refer to islands, provinces or towns in the Netherlands Antilles, Suriname or the Dutch East Indies. Although plenty of street names refer to the East Indies, they are spatially scattered and the connections are not always clear. Examples are Djeroekstraat and Pleretstraat (Ill. 5.6). Although the words 'djeroek' (*djeruk*, meaning orange) and 'Pleret' (a place name) are Malay, the street names in their vicinity are not, nor do they contain any clues linking them to the Dutch Indies. According to Rotterdam's street registry, the names refer to *Indisch* assets of Belia Elisabeth Clara and Margaretha Josephina van Meekeren; two sisters after whom the adjoining Van Meekerenstraat is named. Although their assets were most likely to have been plantations, the registry does not mention this, let alone provide more detailed information about those assets. As a result, any urban explorer, although made aware of a connection between the Van Meekeren and the Indies, is little the wiser about the nature of a connection that could potentially reveal interesting aspects in the lives of the Van Meekeren — and thus add a further dimension to their lives and Rotterdam's colonial past.

Easily identifiable references to the Dutch East Indies are the recently

chosen street names in the Lloyd District. From 1870 to 1942, the district was the point of departure and arrival for passenger and cargo ships of the Rotterdamse Lloyd (RL) company sailing to and from the Dutch East Indies. Since the municipality started transforming the area in the 1990s into a combined residential and working district, many of the area's original buildings have been razed to the ground. One of the few remaining original buildings, the robust former RL head office, is surrounded by streets whose names all start with the word *loods* ('shed'), followed by the name of an East Indies island: Bali, Borneo, Celebes and Java. As the street index explains, the street names refer to the RL sheds that once occupied this redeveloped district.

### SCULPTURES, ARTWORKS AND MEMORIALS

In addition to buildings, urban fabric and street names, Rotterdam is also replete with a variety of objects that directly or indirectly testify to Rotterdam's colonial connections. The largest group of objects are sculptures that portray prominent Rotterdam entrepreneurs, politicians, seafarers and the occasional scholar or artist. As these sculptures were erected to commemorate their sitters' contribution to Rotterdam's development, they are physical evidence of Rotterdam's colonial past — even if this is barely mentioned. They include the abovementioned statue of Pincoffs in Feijenoord and the busts of Anthony van Hoboken and Marten Mees in the city's Maritime District as well as a plaque on the façade of the town hall commemorating one of Rotterdam's East India Company directors, Johan van der Veeken, and a statue of Gijsbert Karel, Count van Hogendorp nearby on Beursplein. The statue of Van Hogendorp is particularly interesting because it can easily be interpreted as much more than 'just' a portrait of a man with political merits. It can also be seen as a portrait of somebody who published about the colonial trade in the Dutch East Indies and who was the son and brother of two East India Company officials who published extensively, including very critical treatises, about the colony's administrative regime, trade, healthcare and slavery. By highlighting these aspects of his life, Van Hogendorp's statue stands for much more than merely his advocacy of free trade and his role in drawing up the Dutch Constitution.

A second category of objects connected to the colonies consists of artworks and decorations on buildings that relate directly to trade. The interior decoration at Rechter Rottekade and the relief on Unilever's 1930



headquarters, both mentioned earlier, are cases in point, as are the contemporary bronze NHM relief at Blaak 34, the toponyms Celebes, Borneo, Java and Sumatra on the facades of warehouses on Wilhelminakade, and the (inaccurate) copy of the original fence that flanked the main entrance to the East India Company premises in Delfshaven. There is also a 2017 mural of a sugar bag on Voorhaven, another street in Delfshaven. The mural is a visual reminder of a factory that occupied this site from the 1950s until 1987, and whose origin goes back to 1734 when Hendrik van Oordt started a sugar refinery in Rotterdam. The raw sugar Van Oordt and his successors used was imported from Java. By relocating its factory to Delfshaven two centuries later, the company became part of Delfshaven's longstanding history of colonial import and export. Now that the factory has been demolished, the mural is the only remaining locally visible reference. It is a direct reference to Van Oordt but also, albeit much more indirectly, a clear reference to the colonies.

The third category consists of memorials to commemorate war, liberation, the loss of lives, and independence — often implicitly embodying the *longue durée* and the complex character of colonialism. Within this group, two objects in Rotterdam stand out. The first is the sculpture *Indisch straatsieraad* on Boompjes mentioned earlier. It commemorates Japan's surrender of the Dutch East Indies after three years of occupation. The second monument is the Slavery Memorial, *Clave*. Commemorating slavery in Suriname, the Netherlands Antilles and the Cape Verde Islands and the forced labour that was introduced after slavery's abolition in 1863, the monument also refers to the colonies. Although the memorial does not explicitly refer to the colonies or colonial practices, the monument nonetheless also refers to the colonies implicitly because of the close connection between slavery and forced labour and colonial morals and societies.

The variety of objects in the public realm illustrates how Rotterdam's relationship with the colonies is not only tenuous but often also ambiguous. Of particular interest in this respect are the two statues of Piet Hein (1577–1629) that adorn the city of Rotterdam: one on a square named after him, Piet Heynsplein in Delfshaven, the other between St. Jobskade and Müllerkade. Hein, who was born in Delfshaven, was an admiral who served in the East India and West India Companies. After defeating the Spaniards in a battle in the Bay of Matanzas (Cuba) in 1628, he returned home on a ship loaded with silver. Until recently, Hein was considered a hero in the Netherlands. Hein's first statue, which dates from 1870, reflects

this. It is set on a high, decorated stone pedestal and shows Hein in full regalia with his right arm stretched forward, holding his admiral's staff. The second statue, from 1998, was commissioned by Willem van 't Wout, a successful Rotterdam exporter and broker of Cuban nickel in Europe. The 1998 statue is far more accessible than the earlier one. It sits on a square pedestal made of six layers of brick and portrays Hein as more modestly dressed and less forceful. Holding his right hand on his heart while his left hand resting loosely on his belly while holding his admiral's staff, Hein seems even contemplative when compared to his 1870 representation.

What is also interesting about Hein's 1998 statue is that another copy sits on the bank of the Bay of Matanzas in Cuba, the country where Van 't Wout made his fortune and the site where Hein experienced his finest hour. Knowing Van 't Wout presented Hein's statue to Cuba as a token of appreciation for helping him to become a successful businessman, it is almost inevitable one starts speculating about Van 't Wout's motives when commissioning Hein's sculpture and how these motives did, or did not, influence the sculptor, or the sculpture's beholders.

Because perspectives and interpretations constantly evolve, it is interesting to contemplate what messages statues, for instance of Piet Hein, potentially convey. Do their differences, for example, tell us something about the time in which they were created, or the audience they serve? What caused these differences: did history change, or did our perspective and consequently our interpretation of history change? What led to these changes, and what does that tell us about us? These and other questions are relevant when conceiving, creating and interpreting sculptures and memorials — and for that matter, buildings and even urban layouts. For it is the answers to these questions, even when inconvenient, that indicate and demonstrate the relevance of perspective and context, and how that perspective and context steer our gaze and our interpretation, and ultimately define what we see. This is why, particularly when examining hitherto relatively unknown topics, it is important (if not imperative) and always interesting to scratch below the surface.

### TRACES OF ROTTERDAM IN FORMER COLONIES

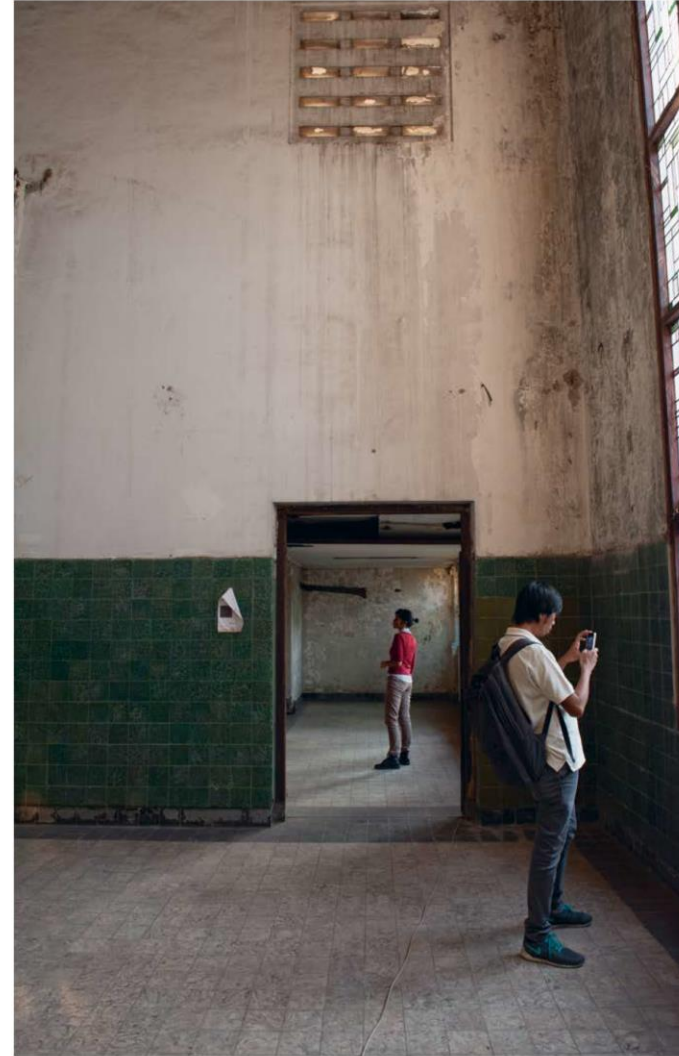
As Piet Hein's statue in Cuba demonstrates, Rotterdam has also left traces in the colonies. Halfway around the globe in Indonesia, the East India Company's Fort Rotterdam in Makassar and various former Rotterdamse Lloyd buildings throughout the Indonesian archipelago demonstrate

this. The fort in Makassar was built after the Dutch East India Company admiral Cornelis Speelman (1628-84) subjugated this part of the island of Celebes (now Sulawesi) in 1669. Speelman named the fort after his native city. Although the fort has undergone various physical and functional transformations since its construction, its name continues to recall the historical bond between Makassar and Rotterdam. The buildings of the Rotterdamsche Lloyd shipping company testify to a similar connection. What is particularly interesting about both the Rotterdamsche Lloyd buildings and Fort Rotterdam is that because of their historical significance and architectural quality, they are all listed buildings in Indonesia.

As in Rotterdam itself, buildings and towns in the colonies have also disappeared over time. The settlement of Nieuw Rotterdam ('New Rotterdam') in Suriname, for example, was built and abandoned twice (it was built in 1820 and rebuilt in 1870) at two different locations at the mouth of the Nickerie River near the Atlantic Ocean. But nature had other ideas and these first two settlements were destroyed by the ocean. A third settlement was built in 1879; it was situated further inland and on the left bank of the river and renamed Nieuw Nickerie ('New Nickerie'). It has fared better than its two predecessors, and although it may not necessarily be recognized as such, the town remains a tangible, though distant, reminder of Nieuw Rotterdam, which now only exists in the archives (Ill. 5.8).

## CONCLUSION

This chapter identifies several elements that make up Rotterdam's built environment and bear witness to the city's colonial past: buildings, urban layout, street names and sculptures. They demonstrate that traces of Rotterdam's colonial past in the built environment occur in many shapes and forms. Moreover, these traces are not always straightforward and therefore require closer scrutiny. What the examples also show, however, is that Rotterdam's built environment provides ample evidence of the city's colonial connections for those who know where, and how, to look.



5.7 Interior of the former office of Rotterdamsche Lloyd in downtown Jakarta (Indonesia) (Photo: Isabelle Boon, Rotterdam, 2015).



5.8 Nieuw Rotterdam (top right bank) and Nieuw Nickerie (bottom left bank) in Suriname, 1879 (Leiden University Libraries, Leiden KIT Collections).

## NOTES

- 1 This chapter is an abridged and revised English version of Van Roosmalen: 'Een ander Rotterdam. Sporen van het koloniale verleden in architectuur en stedenbouw', in Oostindie (ed.), *Het koloniale verleden van Rotterdam*. Please refer to that chapter for a full overview of references.
- 2 I would like to thank Jozanneke Clarijs for referring me to the house on Rechter Rottekade and for sharing her initial research findings about its interior decoration schemes.
- 3 Although Langenberg's house was not a humble abode, its dimensions and decoration were considerably more modest than the residences of the East India Company director Josua van Belle (1637-1710) at Leuvehaven 103 and sugar trader Hendrik van Oordt (1710-1805) at Boompjes 18, for example. Elements of the interiors of Van Belle and Van Oordt belong to the collection of Museum Rotterdam. Museum Rotterdam, inv.nos. 36417, 11305.
- 4 Introduction to the archive 'D. Hudig & Co. en de overige Rotterdamse voorgangers van de Hudig-Langeveldt Groep'. Rotterdam city archive: 1280 'Archieven van de firma D. Hudig & Co. en de overige Rotterdamse voorgangers van de Hudig-Langeveldt Groep'; 'Geschiedenis Aon Nederland', <https://www.aon.com/netherlands/over-aon/geschiedenis.jsp> (accessed on 9 April 2021).  
Outside the city centre, the premises of Hudig & Veder on Debussystraat 2 are less prestigious, but constitute a very direct reference to the Hudigs' involvement in overseas business. The company is the successor of Veder & Blokhuyzen, a shipbroking company established by Jan Hudig, Ferrand Whaley's son, and Cornelis Gebrand Blokhuyzen in 1795. To emphasize the current company's pedigree, the logo incorporates the phrase 'since 1795'. According to its own website, it is still a family-owned company. Introduction to the archive 'Hudig en Blokhuyzen, vanaf 1903 Hudig & Veder N.V. te Rotterdam en van dochtermaatschappijen'; <https://www.hudigveder.nl/about/our-company/> & <https://www.hudigveder.nl/about/225-years/> (accessed on 10 March 2021).

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