

**MEMOIR LEFT BY JACOB
CHRISTIAAN PIELAT TO
HIS SUCCESSOR, DIEDERIK
VAN DOMBURG, 1734**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649334483

Memoir Left by Jacob Christiaan Pielat to His Successor, Diederik Van Domburg, 1734 by R. G. Anthonisz

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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R. G. ANTHONISZ

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Memoirs and Instructions of Dutch Governors, Commandeurs, &c.

MEMOIR

LEFT BY

JACOB CHRISTIAAN PIELAT

TO HIS SUCCESSOR,

DIEDERIK VAN DOMBURG,

1734.

*Translated by SOPHIA PIETERS,
Dutch Translator.*

With an Introduction and Notes by the Government Archivist.

'S-GRAVENHAGE
MARTINUS NIJHOFF

Price 25 cents.

INTRODUCTION.

THE following memoir, left by Jacob Christiaan Pielat for the guidance of his successor, Diederick van Domburg, is neither one of the earliest of the series of memoirs of Dutch Governors extant, nor is it one of the largest or most comprehensive; but it may, I think, be reckoned among the more important of these documents, on account of the status and authority of the compiler, as well as of the circumstances attending his appointment to the Government. Pielat's position in Ceylon, as Special Commissioner, was higher than that of Governor. As he himself states in his Memoir, "the appointment by the Supreme Government (of India) of a Commissioner to administer the affairs of the Island was an unusual one." Only two other instances of such appointments are recorded during the Dutch occupation of Ceylon, and these occurred during the early years of their rule. Pielat's appointment in 1732 was induced by a state of affairs which required a strong head and a strong hand to cope with. From 1726 to 1729 the Island was governed by the infamous Petrus Vuyst. During his three years of misrule and tyranny, accompanied by acts of murder and treason, discipline both among the civil and the military, the administration of justice, and the smooth working of the various departments were sadly interfered with. When he was removed to Batavia, where he was tried and ignominiously executed, Stephanus Versluys was sent here with instructions to restore order and see that justice was done to the sufferers. But his rule did not give satisfaction either to the inhabitants of the country or to the authorities at Batavia. His attitude towards the officers of the Government brought about dissensions, and the Government of India had already resolved to remove him, naming the Commandeur of Galle, Diederick van Domburg, as his successor. The resistance offered to van Domburg's assumption of duties by several officers of the Government, and the necessity he was put to to appeal to Batavia, will be found referred to in the footnote to page 4.

It has not been convenient, for various reasons, to publish the memoirs of the Dutch Governors in consecutive order. It would be sufficient to state that some of the manuscripts have been found to be in a bad condition, while others, owing to their ancient and peculiar caligraphy, require considerable time and labour to decipher. The whole series of these memoirs and the memoirs of the Commandeurs of the principal stations in the Island are now being translated by Miss Pieters, who has been specially appointed to make translations of the most important of the Dutch records. It is to be hoped that the information contained in these quaint and interesting documents, so long buried among the archives, will before long be available to the English reader.

R. G. ANTHONISZ.

Colombo, August 8, 1903.

MEMOIR or Report on the state of this Government and other matters relating thereto, compiled by the undersigned Jacob Christiaan Pielat, Extraordinary Councillor of India and Commissioner on behalf of the Honourable the Government of Batavia, and left by him on his departure from the Island for the guidance, as far as possible and pending further orders, of his successor, Diederick van Domburg, Governor and Director of this important Island.

SIR,—WHEREAS it has pleased our authorities at Batavia to send Your Excellency here by the vessel that has just arrived from the Bay of Galle on its way to the Netherlands to succeed me in the rule of this valuable and important Government, as decided upon by Their High Mightinesses the Directors of the East India Company; and as they have also, after expressing their great satisfaction with my work as Commissioner, allowed me to return to Their Excellencies; I should perhaps have easily excused myself from the task of compiling a memoir or account of my residence here, because I could have hardly gained during this short period sufficient experience relating to all matters concerning the Company as to be able to instruct Your Excellency; the more so, as I do not resign this Government to one who has newly arrived here, or is a novice in matters relating to the Company, but to one who, by long service as Dossave of Matara and Commandeur of Galle, is sure to have a full knowledge of the basis on which this Government should be carried on. Yet for many good reasons, and on account of the fact that the appointment by our Supreme Government of a Commissioner to administer the affairs of the Island is an unusual one, I have considered it desirable before my departure hence to leave to Your Excellency such a memoir as this. I have accordingly prepared it in compliance with the latest instructions received by us, without deeming it necessary to recapitulate the manner in which the Company had conquered this valuable Island and its dependencies, or how it had by God's mercy ruled it thus far, or, again, by what right we have settled here. These are matters which may be found treated of in the memoirs and other documents left by former Governors. It seemed to me, besides, that if such details were required, they could be furnished in a more satisfactory way by those who had

resided here for longer periods and had gained more knowledge of these circumstances than myself. I will, therefore, not treat of the mode of Government of the country, or the rule over the natives, or of their laws and customs, as all these must be matters within the knowledge of Your Excellency. I will, on the other hand, state the condition in which I found this Government, and mention the most important occurrences during my Commission, as also the state of the Government on my retirement from it; at the same time occasionally expressing my opinion with regard to points which require special attention, if the Government is to be carried on successfully.

The principal reasons which induced the Government of Batavia in the year 1732 to decide on appointing me Special Commissioner are no doubt known to Your Excellency; because they are to be found stated in detail in the letter written by Your Excellency and the Council of Galle to Their High Mightinesses on the 31st July of that year* and despatched by the chialoup "Cornelia Anthonia." In agreement with these are the advices sent during the same month from Colombo to Batavia by the yacht "Colombo." I will, therefore, not enter upon a repetition of these matters, but only state that I arrived here on the 2nd December, 1732, and found that, although the Company's affairs generally were taking their usual course, the Government of the Island was in a state of great confusion, not only owing to the dissensions which had arisen between the Council of Galle and the Government here at that time, but also owing to the maladministration which had crept in during the last few years. In my opinion this was chiefly caused by the continual deterioration in the capacities of the Company's principal officers. For some time their appointments had been subject to many changes, so that they had no opportunity to qualify themselves or cause their subordinates to do so, and thus perform their duties in a proper manner, or to replace those persons

* Neither this letter, unfortunately, nor the resolutions of the Political Council of Galle of this date are preserved; but the correspondence between the seat of Government at Colombo and the Commandeur of Galle and his Council throw sufficient light upon the circumstances. The Supreme Government of India had decided for certain reasons to recall the Governor Stephanus Versluys and to appoint as his successor Commandeur Diederick van Domburg of Galle. Versluys, who appears to have been unfriendly towards van Domburg, took advantage of a proviso in the letter from Their Honours at Batavia and refused to give over the Government to van Domburg. He summoned Commandeur Gualterus Woutersz of Jaffnapatam to administer the Government on his departure, pending further instructions from the Council of India. Van Domburg, who, on proceeding to Colombo, found the gates of the castle closed against him, had to return to Galle and make his complaint to his superiors at Batavia.

who were unfit by capable men. As this scandal caused great confusion and inefficiency in the service, it has been one of the chief points which Their Honours had recommended to my notice, and which they specially desired me to first of all see remedied. This I have done to the best of my power, and as far as time and circumstances permitted. Much yet remains to be done, and it will take considerable time before everything is arranged on a sound basis ; because all the old and evil practices can be but gradually discovered in this extensive Government, and therefore new and better ones have to be introduced, and these also only gradually. I have experienced great difficulty in this matter, because every one here performs his duties as well as he is able to ; and, during the short period I have been here, I have not been able to bring about all the necessary changes. Your Excellency must gradually accustom the officers to a strict performance of their various duties. It may be necessary to issue a special order to all those who have been furnished with instructions for their guidance to submit these to Your Excellency, so that you may note down in the margin any new rules which are to be observed or any of the old ones which are to be omitted, stating the reason in each case. After further consideration, and with due regard to time and circumstances, such permanent rules may be framed for the guidance of the officers as Your Excellency may find necessary in order to put the Company's service on an orderly and systematic basis. This, in my opinion, will prevent many of the abuses which at present are almost daily committed here. No Governor can prevent these unless he is well acquainted with all that relates to the department of each of the officers. New rules or any alterations or amplifications must be submitted to the Government at Batavia for approval. (1)*

As I observed shortly after my arrival that the Chief Administrator† assumes the authority of directing affairs, although this is undoubtedly reserved in all Governments to the Governor alone, I wished to make a beginning with this officer, as being one of the highest officials, and to compel him to perform his duties in the way I considered proper, and as I found it done in the Moluccas, and as I learned it is usual in other Governments. I found quite a different course followed here. This officer signed all orders on his own responsibility and without my knowledge, in so far as the

* These numbers refer to the comments on this memoir by the Council of India given at the end of the book.

† This was the *Hoofd Administrateur*, the chief revenue officer of the Government, who took precedence in the Political Council of Ceylon next after the Commandeurs of Jaffnapatam and Galle

amount of the articles issued on those orders did not exceed that issued in the years 1710 to 1715. His Excellency the late Governor, Isaac Augustin Rumpf, had given orders in the year 1722 that all articles issued during that year to the counting-houses, administrators, work-masters, &c., might in future be issued every year, but no more. Most likely this was done because at that time the quantity in demand had reached its maximum, but the good intentions of Governor Rumpf have been misinterpreted. How prejudicial this has been to the Company has been expressed in the resolutions passed by the Political Council and myself on this subject at the meeting of the 29th July last year, as also in the letters sent to Batavia and Holland in August and November last, the latter of which was indicted and signed by Your Excellency. I would write this memoir more compendiously if I did not consider it necessary to enter into detail in order to show how prejudicial the former arrangement is for the Company, though it apparently was introduced with the best intentions. The rule of issuing the same quantity of articles every year is wrong—first, because, for instance, the same amount of writing is not always done, nor is the number of repairs needed every year fixed, nor the number of ships to be loaded or unloaded, nor is the quantity of medicines required for the hospital the same every year.

Secondly, I found that the last financial year had hardly expired when all those who had received the full supply as specified for the years 1710-1715 actually came for orders for a half or a quarter of the supply due for the next year. These orders would certainly have been signed by the Chief Administrator, and the articles issued, if I had not beforehand given instructions to the contrary. I did so because I found that the full amount of articles had been drawn, whether required or not, the surplus being appropriated by those who received it, while the same people would send orders to me for signature, as they had done to the former Governors, for an extra supply of those articles of which the supply was not sufficient. As the articles were really required the orders had to be signed, which is a clear proof that such a rule is of no advantage to the Company.

Thirdly, this rule appears to me most absurd. In order not to be too prolix I will quote here only a few instances by way of proof. According to this arrangement not a single sheet of blue scribbling paper can be issued to the Secretariat, while ten quires are allowed to the Trade Office and five quires to the Pay Office. Not a single sheet of Persian vamp may be issued to the Dutch hospital, while ten pieces are issued to the Surgeon in the town. Many other such instances may be given, which time and space do not permit