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Commercial Conflict
between
Persia and the Netherlands
1712-1718

by

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I. INTRODUCTION

European expansion (or, according to some, aggression) since the 16th century has been blamed for all the woes which are now besetting developing countries. European commercial Companies such as the Dutch and English East India Companies especially have been castigated as far as their power, behaviour, and objectives were concerned. It was their transgression, *inter alia*, of the national sovereignty of the Asian countries, that finally led not only to the backwardness of these countries but to their loss of independence and enslavement as well.¹ Such facile statements have been made possible by the use of models and theories which are an abstraction from historical reality. Now there is nothing wrong with theories and models, in fact I am all for them, but they sometimes lead to oversimplification and selective use of data and create a picture of the past that would be unintelligible and completely foreign to contemporaries of the historical period in question. To say, for example, that the Dutch East India Company (VOC) made Persia subservient to its worldwide trading connection is to state a belief that would not have been shared by either Dutchmen or Persians. It is therefore sometimes necessary to look at historical reality - at how things probably really were. For this purpose I have selected a Persian-Dutch conflict of 1712-1718. What follows shows that Europeans did not order the Persians about, but rather the other way around. It also shows that Europeans hardly had any protection, legal or otherwise, of their rights, but were totally dependent on the whims, needs, and political realities of the moment. The Europeans might take action in the face of such situations, in fact they did, but they were unable to create a structural improvement of their situation throughout the entire 140 years that the VOC was present in Persia.

The Dutch East India Company in Iran

Dutch trade in Persia was based on a simple formula. In exchange for an annual purchase of silk from the Shah at prices above the going market rate the VOC was allowed freedom of trade and exemption from customs duties. Notwithstanding this basic pattern of trading relations between Persia and the VOC, difficulties arose regularly between the two sides about the interpretation of the rights granted to the VOC. In what follows we shall deal only with those aspects of the earlier conflicts which have a bearing on the problems which emerged after 1712. At the same time it should be noted that there is a persistently recurring pattern in these conflicts between the VOC and the Shah, for these practically always focussed on the same issues.

When the Dutch came to Persia in 1623 they concluded an agreement with Shah 'Abbas, which stipulated, *inter alia*, that they should have complete freedom of trade in Persia as well as exemption from customs duties. Road-duties or *rahdari* were to be paid, however, but not at more than the usual rate. In exchange for these privileges, the Dutch would have to buy silk from the Shah at 50 *tomans* per *carga* (200 kgs), which was more than the market price.²

Under Shah 'Abbas, successor, his grandson Shah Safi I, serious difficulties arose for the first time about the interpretation of the treaty, which Shah Safi confirmed in 1629. Although Shah Safi had reduced the number of privileges which the Dutch had enjoyed under his predecessor, they nevertheless retained the most important rights, viz. freedom of trade, no restrictions on the volume of trade, total exemption from customs, permission to export specie and the right to transport their goods without examination by royal officials, although road duties had to be paid at the usual rate. In exchange the VOC had to buy silk from the Shah at a rate above the market price, viz. 50 *tomans* per *carga*. In 1632 Shah Safi granted the Dutch also exemption from payment of road duties and other similar imposts.

The conflict between Shah Safi I and the VOC was caused by the fact that the Shah could not deliver the annual amount of silk that was stipulated. Although the Dutch, who wanted to buy as much silk as possible, had given the Shah funds, the latter could not and did not deliver on time, so that he had fallen into arrears. The Dutch, who wanted to corner the Persian silk market, therefore also bought silk from private merchants with borrowed money without paying customs duties. In 1637,

Mirza Taqi, the *E'temad al-Douleh* (Chancellor and prime minister), therefore claimed payment of customs duties on all silk bought from private merchants. The Dutch refused and so Mirza Taqi took the money, 4309 tomans, from the Dutch director by force.

At the headquarters of the VOC in Batavia this was considered an outrage and the new director (and when he died his successor) was ordered to protest against this transgression of the commercial treaty and demand repayment of the money which had been extorted. Mirza Taqi, however, told the Dutch that they only enjoyed freedom of trade and from taxes on condition that they bought silk from the Shah. He even went so far as to force the Dutch to buy as much silk as he stipulated and at prices fixed by him. This position was unacceptable to the Dutch. Silk was becoming less important as an export commodity and the VOC wanted to buy as little as possible. In addition, it wanted to get rid of its burden of debt in Persia, which was the result of the silk-buying policy of previous years. Now that Mirza Taqi forced them to buy large quantities of silk at high prices, the Dutch had to continue to borrow money at 20 per cent interest per annum which meant that they were losing money. When Mirza Taqi refused to give in to Dutch protests, Batavia finally decided in 1644 to go to war against Persia, sending a fleet of seven ships into the Persian Gulf to blockade Bandar 'Abbas and other Persian ports, and to seize all Iranian vessels.

The appearance of this fleet and the seizure of some Persian ships, as well as the bombardment of the island of Qeshm caused consternation in Esfahan. The Shah offered favourable terms to the VOC, but before these could be granted the Dutch plenipotentiary died in Esfahan.³ The Shah (Abbas II who had succeeded his father in 1642) then decided to try for better terms by holding up the negotiations. As a result a Dutch mission in 1647 could not get an agreement to their proposal. The differences between the VOC and Persia were finally settled in 1652 when ambassador Cunaeus obtained new *firman*s (decrees) from Shah Abbas II. The new privileges stipulated that the Dutch would enjoy freedom of trade in Persia and exemption from customs, while their goods could be transported without inspection by the Persian authorities. Moreover, in future the Dutch would not have to pay road duties. However, the Shah had placed an upper limit on the customs-free import and export, viz. 20,000 tomans' value per year, and the Dutch were forbidden to export specie. Finally, the Dutch had to buy 300 cargoes of silk each year from the Shah at a price of 48 tomans per carga in exchange for these privileges.⁴

This treaty proved to be an effective basis for Dutch trade till the end of Shah 'Abbas II's reign. However, under his successor, Shah Soleiman, new problems arose. Under Shah 'Abbas II the stipulated 300 cargoes of silk had hardly ever been delivered by the Shah, a situation which was greatly appreciated by the Dutch. However, in 1670 the new Persian government insisted that the VOC buy the obligatory 300 cargoes of silk per year. This change of policy was caused amongst other things by the deterioration of the Persian economy and the court's need for money. At the same time the Dutch did not want the amount of silk contracted because they lost money on it.

In 1678 a conflict arose between the governor of Bandar 'Abbas and the VOC director about the former's claim for more gifts and 34 years of arrears of rent for the Dutch factory. The Dutch armed themselves and made ready to withdraw from Persia, but their protest to the Shah resulted in orders to the governor not to interfere with Dutch trade or traders.

However, the sale of the contracted amounts of silk to the Dutch continued, and although the VOC representatives asked for a reduction in silk deliveries, this was refused. In 1679 the Persian government claimed payment of *rahdari* or road duties from the Dutch, claiming that they had not been exempted from paying this impost. When the Dutch refused to pay, the Persian authorities took payment by force in 1680. Batavia wanted to take military action, but was occupied elsewhere at the time. It therefore ordered its servants to ask for annual silk deliveries of only 150 cargoes. When this request was presented to the *E'temad al-Douleh* in 1680, he became angry and said "You are dealing with a King, not with a merchant", and that if we did not like it we had better leave". At the same time he ordered 300 cargoes of silk to be

delivered to the Dutch factory. The Dutch refused to accept it, which led to an exchange of angry words as a result of which the Dutch representative was beaten and forced to receive the silk. He thereupon lodged a complaint with the E'temad al-Douleh and asked for a reduction in silk deliveries. The E'temad al-Douleh replied "that he could not understand what kind of rascally people we were, for he had informed us of his wishes in writing. Further, if we were not interested in sticking to the contract in this manner then we could go to hell and were free to leave the country". The VOC director in Persia advised Batavia to declare war on Persia, to which Batavia agreed. It sent a fleet (five men-of-war and a hooker) to blockade the Persian Gulf, while the flotilla also attacked and seized the island of Qeshm. The Shah then invited the Dutch to open negotiations in Esfahan, but the two Dutch representatives were confronted with a very hostile Persian government, which refused to talk unless the Dutch raised the occupation of Qeshm and the blockade of the Gulf. When the Dutch did so, the E'temad al-Douleh showed even less inclination to negotiate terms. He also did not allow the two negotiators to return to Bandar 'Abbas, nor the whole staff who had embarked on the ships. The choice which the E'temad al-Douleh put to the Dutch was: either to take the contractual amount of silk or to pay customs duties. He finally allowed the Dutch to return to Bandar 'Abbas after they had promised that an ambassador would be sent to settle their differences. Trade was resumed again in 1687 under the supervision of two royal inspectors who recorded all VOC imports and exports. Batavia therefore decided to send an ambassador, who arrived in Persia in 1690.

The ambassador, van Leene, managed to get new privileges after the payment of costly presents and lengthy talks; Shah Soleiman confirmed Dutch rights to freedom of trade in Persia, exemption from payment of customs up to a maximum annual import and export value of 20,000 tomans. Moreover, exemption from payment of road duties was granted as well. Finally Persian officials were forbidden to open Dutch packages, chests and boxes. In exchange for these privileges the VOC had to buy each year 300 cargas of silk from the Shah at 44 tomans per carga. However, these firmans had not yet been sealed by the Shah when the ambassador left, and the promise to send them after him was not honoured. In 1694 the Dutch sent a special mission to obtain these firmans, but then Shah Soleiman died.⁵

His successor, Shah Soltan Hosein, not only confirmed the privileges granted by his father, but also settled a dispute with regard to the wool trade with Kerman to the advantage of the VOC. When the Shah was unable to deliver any silk in 1696, the Persian government proposed that the obligatory delivery of silk would be abolished, and instead the VOC would pay an annual volume of goods to the Shah. The VOC declined to accept this change of the treaty, but Batavia nevertheless considered it opportune to send another ambassador, Jacobus Hoogkamer, to Persia in 1701.⁶ In a short time, Hoogkamer was able to conclude an agreement with the Shah by which the Shah would sell the VOC an annual amount of 100 cargas of *kadkhodapasand* silk⁷ at a price of 44 tomans⁸ per carga. In exchange the VOC was entitled to carry on its trade anywhere in Persia and to import and export a volume of goods, which were exempt from the payment of customs and other imposts, to the amount of 20,000 tomans per year. In addition, the VOC had to deliver to the Shah an annual amount of so-called 'recognitie doederen' or treaty goods of the following composition:

- 10,000 man-e Tabriz⁹ or 60,000 lb powdered sugar
- 1,120 man-e Tabriz or 6,720 lb lump sugar
- 119 man-e Tabriz or 864 lb cardamom¹⁰
- 119 man-e Tabriz or 864 lb cloves
- 289 man-e Tabriz or 1,704 lb cinnamon
- 289 man-e Tabriz or 1,704 lb pepper

- 1,000 methqals¹¹ or 10 lb nutmegs
- 130 methqals or 1.3 lb mace
- 650 methqals or 6.5 lb aguilwood¹²
- 4 man-e Tabriz or 24 lb benzoin¹³
- 24 man-e Tabriz or 144 lb white sandalwood
- 2,000 methqals or 20 lb radix china¹⁴
- 8 man-e Tabriz or 48 lb candied nutmegs
- 4 man-e Tabriz or 24 lb candied cloves

The VOC was not obliged to deliver these goods if the Shah did not supply the Company with the contracted annual amount of silk. However, if the VOC did not want to purchase any silk, it was still obliged to deliver the 'recognitie goederen'.

Although the Governor-General stated that until 1712 this treaty had enabled the VOC to carry on its trade quietly, this was not completely true. Compared with the problems which the VOC had to face after 1712 those prior to 1712 were indeed insignificant. Nevertheless, in these earlier difficulties were sown the seeds of troubles of a later date. The first difficulty occurred as early as 1703, when the *shahbandar* (customs master) of Bandar 'Abbas, Mirza Sadeq, accused the VOC of having carried on trade worth Dfl. 1,053,653 more than the amount of 20,000 tomans during the last five years. He therefore demanded the payment of customs over this amount at a rate of ten per cent or Dfl. 135,753.¹⁵ The farmer of the ducat trade in Esfahan also complained about the fact that the VOC bought too many golden ducats.¹⁶ Although neither of these accusations led to any action by the Persian government, they cast shadows over Persian-Dutch relations, for not only did they contribute to build-up of friction, but these same problems would be pivotal to the conflict between the two countries ten years later and would result in the revocation of the 1701 treaty.

In 1705, new difficulties arose when the Shah gave the right to buy all goods which the VOC imported into Persia for the Shah to two brothers and excluded from this trade all other merchants who now had to buy their goods from the Shah through the two royal factors.¹⁷ The governor-general ordered the director in Persia to protest strongly against this new scheme. If need be, the director should make his protest more palatable by giving presents. However, if the Persian government would not yield, the director was authorized to deal with the royal factors. This system of dealing with a royal factor to whom all imports were sold was not a new phenomenon for the VOC. Under Shah 'Abbas I a similar system had existed and the VOC had in those days greatly profited from its dealings with the royal factor. In fact the system which came into being later was a variation on it, for the VOC sold all its goods to a few principal merchants who in turn sold the goods to a great number of smaller merchants. However, a present of 300 tomans to the E'temad al-Douleh led to the restoration of the customary situation.¹⁸ Nevertheless, in 1707 the royal factor, Mir Morteza,¹⁹ tried to enforce his rights by demanding that the VOC deliver goods to the value of 4,000 tomans to him in exchange for which he would not bother the other merchants. The VOC director, Frans Castelijns, complained in Esfahan, but owing to the demise of E'temad al-Douleh the whole issue was dropped by Mir Morteza. The new E'temad al-Douleh, Shah Qoli Khan, who was appointed in June 1707, would play an important role in the conflict of 1712.²⁰

In June 1710 the farmer of the ducat trade again complained about excessive exports of golden ducats by the VOC. In response, the Shah issued a decree permitting him to control and examine VOC caravans. However, after a protest from the VOC the decree was revoked.²¹ Mir Morteza was appointed *vazir* (deputy governor) of Yazd in July 1710 and so the most likely source of conflict between the VOC and Persia was removed. As we have seen the Governor-General was right to be satisfied with the rather undisturbed nature of trade in Persia; after 1712 this picture would be totally changed. Before we look at these events let us first examine the nature of VOC trade with Persia.

As far as exports were concerned, Persia had not much to offer, for apart from silk the only other commodity which was worth exporting was gold. Deliveries of silk

experienced difficulties soon after the conclusion of the treaty of 1701. After 1701 the first silk delivery did not take place until 1704 and then after 1704 only 40 cargoes instead of the 100 cargoes contracted. No silk was delivered for a number of years after 1704. The Heeren XVII (the directors of the VOC) issued instructions in 1705 that the director in Bandar 'Abbas should not insist on the delivery of the silk because silk hardly yielded any profit in Europe. If the Shah demanded the supply of 'recognitie goederen' even when no silk was delivered, the director was authorized to comply. In this way the VOC would not be troubled by other problems. No more silk was delivered to the VOC until 1710, and thereafter silk deliveries were only resumed in 1714. After that date, no more silk was delivered to the VOC at all.²²

Apart from silk, the Company was also interested in Kerman wool. It ordered an annual volume of 60,000 to 70,000lb of red wool; the other varieties, especially the white wool, had to be declined wherever possible. However, this volume was never collected in one year, while the quality of the wool was low. This gave rise to a lot of complaints from Batavia and the Netherlands, but there was no change in the situation.²³

Further export goods were mainly small quantities of all kinds of dried fruit and nuts such as pistachios, almonds, hazel nuts and rhubarb. Goods like garden seeds, medicines, rose water and Shiraz wine were also regular export items.²⁴

Gold, or rather golden European ducats, was a very important export commodity. The VOC exchanged Persian money for the European gold, for Persian money yielded too much loss when exported. This was the result of an increasing debasement of the Persian currency by the government, especially of the silver *abbasi* due to the deterioration of Persia's economy.²⁵

Imports by the VOC were substantial and varied, but mostly consisted of spices and textiles. The goods listed below are representative of the variety of goods which the VOC imported into Persia during 1700-1720: pepper, mace, cloves, nutmegs, cinnamon, cotton and silk fabrics and broadcloth, rompen,²⁶ tin, camphor, copper, powdered sugar, lump sugar, zinc, indigo, cardamom, sappan wood, radix china, gum-lac,²⁷ benzoin, iron, steel, and sandalwood.

During the early years of the VOC in Persia imported goods were mostly transported for sale to Esfahan, especially when the merchants in Bandar 'Abbas did not offer high enough prices. However, sales increasingly took place in Bandar 'Abbas, and in 1692 Batavia prohibited the transportation of goods to Esfahan because of problems such as theft, short-measures, and obnoxious behaviour by customs farmers. After that, the sale of VOC goods took place exclusively in Bandar 'Abbas in the following manner: after the arrival of the VOC ships, the director in Bandar 'Abbas informed the principal merchants in Esfahan, Shiraz and Lar by letter. This held especially for the most important merchants dealing with the VOC, Hajji 'Abd al-Reza and Hajji 'Abd al-Wahab, both of Shiraz. Then negotiations were begun with these merchants or their agents, who usually came in April and May to Bandar 'Abbas for that purpose. If the director perceived that the principal merchants were trying to agree among one another to form a kind of buyers' cartel to enforce lower prices, he would threaten to transport the goods to Esfahan, which usually had the required result.

The VOC staff also had to see that the town officials did not interfere in the negotiations. These wanted only the best-selling items, on credit, and even then payment was only obtained with the greatest difficulty. The shahbandar, who each year bought some goods for the Shah, was the only official allowed to bid as well, though he had to pay cash.

The merchants usually got the goods on credit. They paid with drafts drawn on creditors in Esfahan. Despite repeated orders from Batavia to demand cash payments, this was impossible in practice, and implementation of this order would have meant that no trade could have been carried on. The usual credit period around 1715 was three months.

The decision to sell had to be cleared with the council of the Bandar 'Abbas office. The council would take into account such issues as last year's prices, the import of similar goods by other merchants since then, and the prices obtaining in

Esfahan. Each month the Esfahan office would therefore send a price list of a specified number of items to Bandar 'Abbas.

On this basis it was calculated what the merchants could pay after deduction of road-taxes, spillage etc. in order to provide the Hon. Company with a good profit and on the other hand to enable the merchants to stay in business by means of a modest profit, which would also induce them to trade.²⁸

Further the council also saw to it that merchants bought all the goods and not just the best-selling ones, so that the Company would not run the risk of being unable to sell the less desirable goods. If it would help sales, the council sometimes lowered the prices of the best-selling goods in order to animate trade. However, this did not hold for such goods as radix china, aguilwood, and sandalwood of which not much was imported, and could always be sold in small quantities to the shopkeepers in Bandar 'Abbas.

The sales themselves were concluded through the intermediary of brokers. These formed a kind of buffer between the VOC and the Persian merchants. The VOC always supported the brokers in difficult situations, if only to prevent disrespect being shown to the Hon. Company. Goods sold were weighed in the Dutch factory with Dutch weights before delivery to the merchants. The brokers were security for the payment of the drafts with which the merchants paid for the goods. If the drafts were not honoured the brokers had to pay. As recompense for their work and risk they received one per cent of the total receipts of sales from the VOC and the Persian merchants, but for some goods they only got 0.75 per cent.

The VOC set great store by good relationships with the Persian merchants, and so the director in Bandar 'Abbas maintained friendly relations with them. The gate of the VOC factory was always open to them, solely to induce them to trade. For the same reason the principal merchants were given presents of sugar and cloth after the sale had been concluded to confirm their good relations.

The political situation in Iran on the eve of Ketelaar's embassy.

The events to be described here occurred during the reign of Shah Soltan Hosein (1694-1722), during whose long reign the Iranian state gradually became weaker and lost respect and authority both internally and externally. The state's authority had already begun to decline during the reign of his father, Shah Soleiman (1666-1694) and Shah Soltan Hosein acceded to the throne at the age of 26 on his father's death, on 6 August 1694. Up till that moment, he had spent his whole life in the seclusion of the harem, and he had come under the influence of the eunuchs, the harem women and Mohammad Baqer Majlesi, the important theologian. The new Shah was a quiet, studious and sober-living young man, who was very pious, and somewhat of a bigot. He therefore became known as Molla Hosein.

Shah Soltan Hosein began his reign by forbidding the drinking of wine, but soon, led on by the eunuchs, he indulged himself in wine and a select choice of women. His other occupations were praying and the construction of pleasure-gardens and mosques.²⁹ Jan Oets, the VOC director in Iran³⁰ characterized the Shah as follows:

although he has reigned now for more than 28 years he is still of the same nature and has the same qualities as those which were described (by one of my predecessors) in 1705. For during my twenty-year stay in this country I have experienced that this Prince has a very quiet, peaceful, and moderate nature; he is very pious and greatly loves his religion and has an uncommon aversion to shedding human blood, of which one cannot find a single example during his whole reign. He is further indolent, cowardly, and a great squanderer and lover of building and demolishing of mansions and pleasure-gardens. It is about the only

thing he occupies himself with, leaving the care of the government in the hands of his prime minister or chancellor.²¹

Oets' opinion is confirmed by other sources such as Mar'ashi, who characterizes Shah Soltan Hosein as "simple-minded, preferring peace, and without any knowledge or part in state affairs."²² The Shah did not like to be confronted with the realities of life and those who forced him to do so ran the risk of disgrace. His urge to be left alone was so strong that he invariably agreed to whatever was proposed to him.

The first minister and most important adviser to the Shah was the chancellor or E'temad al-Douleh as he was usually referred to.

The Shah having entrusted his power and authority to the chancellor, it is easy to understand that this minister is the foremost and most important one to whom one addresses oneself to make requests for the Hon. Company. It is his favour one has to seek, for although occasionally one or another favourite has the Shah's ear and for a short time he directs affairs according to his liking, one often observes that this is only of short duration after which the power returns again to its first origin and source, namely the chancellor.²³

As is clear from Oets' memorandum, the E'temad al-Douleh was the most powerful minister, although his position was not an uncontested one. He was the chairman of the royal council (*majlis*) in which the most important bureaucratic, military, and religious leaders were represented. His voice in the council was not always decisive, however. Together with the *Moustoufi al-Mamalek*, or treasurer of the state provinces, another important minister, the chancellor was in charge of the administration of the so-called *mamalek* or state provinces. The E'temad al-Douleh was also charged with the direction of foreign affairs, which was the reason why the Europeans had so many dealings with him.²⁴

Oets therefore advised that:

one must be on one's guard, and it is not advisable to submit a request directly to the Shah without the foreknowledge or the assent of the E'temad al-Douleh, for the Shah after having read it will give the matter into the first minister's hands anyway to hear his advice. The latter therefore has ample opportunity to present affairs according to his own lights and to direct marginal glosses as he wants them.²⁵

After the E'temad al-Douleh, the four military commanders were the most powerful and influential. These were the *Qorchi bashi* (commander of the cavalry), the *Gollar aghasi bashi* (commander of the royal slaves), the *Tofangchi bashi* (commander of the matchlockmen), and the *Tupchi bashi* (commander of the artillery).²⁶

Apart from the *mamalek* or state provinces, there were in Persia the so-called *khasseh* or royal demesnes, which surpassed the state provinces in size. These royal demesnes were administered by the *nazer* or major-domo of the royal palace and the *Moustoufi-ye khasseh* or treasurer of the royal demesnes. The most important silk-producing areas were situated in the *khassah* provinces, so the VOC had many dealings with the *Moustoufi-ye khassah* who was in charge of the financial administration of these provinces. According to Oets:

the most important minister, apart from the chancellor, who can have a negative or positive influence on the affairs of the Hon. Company is Moustoufi Chasse, or Superintendent of the royal accounting and financial chamber, because this function gives him the opportunity and power to investigate and examine anything which has to do with the state revenues and imposts.²⁷

The governors of the royal demesnes were mainly known as vazirs or comptrollers. Apart from the above-mentioned ministers, the VOC had few dealings with other state officials in Esfahan. However, more or less regular contacts existed with the *Divan begi* (Lord High Justice), the *Ishik aghasi bashi* (chief mace-bearer), and the *Mehmandar bashi* (chief of the protocol department). For obvious reasons, relations were also established with those persons who enjoyed the favour of the E'temad al-Douleh. Of course, in cases of conflict with the E'temad al-Douleh the Dutch also tried to establish good relations with his opponents at court.³⁸

Under the E'temad al-Douleh as chief administrator of the state provinces, another class of officials were to be found. The most important ones were the *valis* or viceroys of whom there were only four in Persia. After them, one had the *beglerbegis* or governor-generals, who were each in charge of a province. Finally one had the numerous lower officials such as governors of towns, their deputies (*na'eb*), the sheriff (*darugheh*), the customs-master (*shahbandar*), and the subordinate officials (the *tabins*).³⁹

Contact with these officials was regular and a good relationship was important for the smooth carrying on of trading activities such as the loading and unloading of ships, the sale of merchandise, and the transport of merchandise to and from Esfahan. In their dealings with the Europeans, these officials sometimes intimated that they had orders from court, which was often untrue. In such cases the VOC director always asked for a copy of the royal decree (*raqam*), because he justly assumed that the officials were sometimes acting from selfish motives.⁴⁰

In order to maintain good relations the Dutch gave presents to various officials. The presents were given after the Dutch had sold their merchandise in order to prevent these officials from interfering with the market, for these presents were given in kind, mostly VOC goods such as spices and textiles. If one of the officials did not deserve his present in the view of the Dutch director, the customary annual present was not given "in order to show them that the present is not given out of duty or obligation, but rather because it is a civil acknowledgement of the assistance which these officials give to the Hon. Company".⁴¹

The position of the Dutch in Persia was not an easy one and the VOC staff were not always treated with the respect which, according to their own minds, was due to them. In the past the Persian court had made it clear to the VOC representatives that they were only merchants, who, although having a privileged position, were only tolerated for as long as they behaved themselves properly. The position of the Europeans became more difficult as the internal political and economic situation of Persia increasingly deteriorated. Apart from the insecurity on the roads (caravans were even robbed only 20 miles outside Esfahan), the deteriorating economic situation was indicated by the falling rate of exchange of Persian currency, the inability of Persian merchants to pay for their purchases with cash, and the poverty and hunger that prevailed throughout Persia. Because of the negligence of Shah Soltan Hosein the country "gradually was filled with wilful officials, discontented subjects, who finally during these last few years have organized themselves into a few groups and have fomented public rebellions".⁴²

Apart from the economic situation Oets referred in particular to the unstable political situation in Persia, which was demonstrated amongst other things by the frequent change of holders of important administrative and military functions. The government was increasingly confronted by local uprisings: in the Caucasus by the Georgians and the Lezgis; in the south-east Baluch marauding parties penetrated in greater numbers and more deeply into the country each year; in western Persia revolts broke out among the Kurds and in Khuzestan among the Arab tribes. The most important rebellion, however, was that by the Ghalzai Afghans.⁴³

The rebellion of the Ghalzai Afghans under their leader Mir Weis eventually led to the fall of the reigning Safavid dynasty. The Ghalzai tribe dominated the affairs of the city of Qandahar and its dependencies. This part of Afghanistan had been a bone of contention between Safavid Persia and Moghul India. In view of the more tolerant religious attitude of the Safavid state, the Afghans preferred Persian rule to that of the Moghuls, but this situation changed in 1698 when Shah Soltan Hosein began to favour a less tolerant policy towards the Sunni Afghans. The

resentment to which this change in policy gave rise was strengthened by the harsh behaviour of the Persian troops towards the Afghans. In 1709 the Ghalzais rebelled under the leadership of Mir Weis. He gradually ousted the Persian troops from the province of Qandahar and when he died in 1715 there were no longer Persian troops in that province. His struggle against the Persians would be continued, and with more success, by his eldest son Mahmud.⁴⁴

Notes

1. See e.g. Wallerstein, 1974
2. Meilink-Roelofs, 1974; for rahdari see Emerson & Floor, 1986; a carga is a camel load of two bales of silk each of 36 man-e shah with a total weight of about 200 kg
3. Floor, 1978-79, 46-51; Batavia, now Jakarta the capital of Indonesia, was the seat of the Governor-General of the VOC
4. Hotz, 1908; On Shah 'Abbas II see Luft, 1968
5. Van Dam, 1939; Coolhaas, 1975, 1980; Valentijn, 1724-26
6. *Ibid.*
7. The VOC distinguished between three qualities of silk. Khanbafi (first quality), kakhodapasand (second quality), and kharvari (third quality)
8. The toman was not a coin, but a unit of account equal to 10,000 dinars. The rate of exchange was one toman = 42.10 Dutch guilders at that time
9. One man-e Tabriz weighed 2.96 kg
10. Cardamom, the seed of the cardamom minus, a black-husked spice with medicinal properties
11. One methqal is equal to 4.6 grams
12. Aguilwood, a type of wood used for medicinal purposes and as incense
13. Benzoin, a sweet smelling gum resin from the storax benzoin with medicinal properties
14. Radix china, the dried root of the smilax china, used for medicinal purposes, especially against skin diseases
15. Coolhaas, 1980, 324
16. *Ibid.*, 378
17. *Ibid.*, 457
18. *Ibid.*, 521
19. This probably was Mir Morteza Khofaf, also known as Mo'tamen Seyyed Morteza Hoseini
20. Coolhaas, 1980, 521, 576
21. *Ibid.*, 727
22. *Ibid.*, 568
23. Algemeen Rijks Archief (ARA), den Haag, the Netherlands, VOC 199, Memorandum by Jan Oets, unfoliated (15/11/22)
24. *Ibid.*
25. 'Abbasis were silver coins; 50 'abbasis were equal to one toman
26. Rompen, inferior kind of Muscat nuts
27. Gum-lac, a dark red resinous incrustation found on certain trees formed by the action of an insect, *Coccus Lacca*, and used as a scarlet dye
28. See note 24
29. Lockhart, 1956, 35
30. ARA, VOC 1999, Memorie Jan Oets voor Johannes Krouse, Gamron, 15/11/1722, unfoliated
31. *Ibid.*
32. Mar'ashi Safavi, 1328/1949, 48
33. See note 30
34. Lockhart, 1956, 13
35. See note 30
36. Lockhart, 1956, 13

37. See note 30
38. *Ibid.*
39. Lockhart, 1956, 14
40. See note 30
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*
44. Lockhart, 1956, 80f

2. THE CAUSE OF THE CONFLICT

The cause of the commercial conflict between Persia and the VOC was a quarrel between Willem Backer Jacobsz, the VOC director at Bandar 'Abbas, and his deputy and chief of the Esfahan office, Pieter Macare Junior.¹ This quarrel had to do with both gentlemen's private interests in the export of specie. Moreover, the personal ambitions of Macare as well as the fact that he probably was not responsible for his actions, being slightly deranged in 1712, played a big role in it. In 1710 Macare had written to the Heeren XVII, the directors of the VOC, that Backer Jacobsz has organised a plot against his life. Macare tried to arrange that Backer Jacobsz should be dismissed and he himself appointed as director in Persia. In his turn Backer Jacobsz complained about Macare, but Batavia was not convinced by his accusations and replied that he must supply proof. In 1711 Backer Jacobsz asked to be allowed to resign; Batavia decided to appoint Macare in his place and hoped that this would put an end to the troubles.²

In the meantime, however, things had got totally out of hand in Persia. In July 1712 Macare accused the VOC interpreter, François Sahid, of having tried to poison him and his family. Macare appealed to the Persian authorities and had Sahid arrested together with five other Persian servants. He maintained close contacts with the authorities, especially with the renegade Portuguese priest, 'Ali Qoli Beg,³ the Shah's interpreter. On July 16, 1712 the Divan begi (Lord High Justice) came to fetch all the documents of the VOC interpreter from the VOC house, in defiance of the treaty with the VOC.⁴

In order to escape from the 'poisoned' atmosphere of the VOC house, Macare took lodgings in a garden just outside Esfahan. Adriaan van Biesum, his deputy, used this opportunity to take over the management of VOC affairs, and Macare, supported by two VOC employees who had remained loyal to him, complained about this usurpation of his authority to the E'temad al-Douleh, Shah Qoli Khan. The latter sent for van Biesum, who had to be forced to appear before him. Shah Qoli Khan, at the instigation of Macare, made use of this internal crisis of the VOC, and demanded that van Biesum allow him to examine the VOC books since Backer Jacobsz' departure as chief of the Esfahan office in 1707, for Macare had accused Backer Jacobsz of having illegally exported 188,000 golden ducats, not to mention silver 'Abbasis since 1701. Van Biesum refused to comply with this request, of course, since it was contrary to the commercial treaty, so Macare declared that he would be willing to supply the E'temad al-Douleh with the records, if he received some assistance in securing entry to the VOC house. Once this was achieved, Macare provided the E'temad al-Douleh with the VOC records which had been requested. The E'temad al-Douleh ordered the Mostoufi-ye khasseh and the English chief to examine the records in Macare's presence. He also ordered van Biesum to obey Macare who had been reinstated in the VOC with the help of the Persian authorities, in future.⁵

Macare also ordered the arrest of the VOC brokers, because he suspected them of having tried to poison him, and on August 1, 1712 he had van Biesum himself arrested. The E'temad al-Douleh also ordered the books of the VOC brokers to be seized in order to find out how many ducats had been exported. From the examination of the VOC records, which the E'temad al-Douleh had sealed and kept into his own custody, he had learnt that the VOC had not paid export duties on ducats. Macare hoped in this way to be able to prove his accusations against Backer Jacobsz.⁶

Because of this new development, the Shah issued a decree at the beginning of September 1712 in which Musa Khan, the tofangchi bashi, was ordered to check all caravans prior to their departure, for the presence of ducats and to seal all packages.⁷

In Bandar 'Abbas the director and his council, having been informed about the events in Esfahan by Macare and van Biesum, decided that Macare and his supporters must come to them to account for their behaviour. Moreover, Jan Oets was appointed as chief of the Esfahan office, and he arrived in Esfahan at the beginning of November and took up lodgings in the qahvakhaneh-nazar garden, for Macare had refused to give up his authority and hand over the VOC house to him.

Macare, apparently recovered from his (temporary) derangement, felt cornered. He had committed two serious crimes: he had given the Persian authorities possession of VOC records and he had allowed them to interfere with purely internal VOC affairs. He therefore appealed to the E'temad al-Douleh for help. In exchange for the assistance which was promised, Macare lent the Shah the enormous sum of 14,000 tomans or Dfl. 595,000 for a period of one month. Oets, with the help of friends of the VOC such as 'Ali Reza Khan, the governor of Bandar 'Abbas, tried to invalidate Macare's promise. It was of no avail, however. Macare made things worse when, on November 26, 1712, he made public the fact that letters had arrived in Bandar 'Abbas in which he was appointed as director of the VOC in Persia. The Shah sent Macare and his two supporters robes of honour by way of congratulation.⁶

On November 27, 1712 the VOC interpreter and the brokers were released, although not without the payment of money. Neither the investigation into their alleged poisoners' role nor the scrutiny of their records had yielded any proof of illegal activities.

Backer Jacobsz had written a letter to the E'temad al-Douleh informing him about the dismissal of Macare and the appointment of Oets. Oets, who presented this letter on December 21, was told that this information was superfluous, for the Shah had ordered the shahbandar to inquire in Surat whether Backer Jacobsz was in a position to give orders to Macare and the E'temad al-Douleh was waiting for the outcome of this inquiry. Oets did not believe him, for he knew quite well how the VOC organisation functioned, and was using this as a pretext to reap more profit from the unsettled situation.

On January 5, 1713, the E'temad al-Douleh sent for Oets and Macare was also present during the interview. The E'temad al-Douleh asked Oets to show him the royal decree (raqam), which dealt with the delivery of 100 cargoes of silk per year to the VOC, for the raqam could not be traced in the royal secretariat. He further wanted to know how the VOC had obtained freedom from tolls to the value of 20,000 tomans per year. Macare said that the royal decrees were kept in Bandar 'Abbas, but that there were copies in the VOC house in Esfahan. The toll-exemption had been granted in 1701 to ambassador Hoogkamer. The E'temad al-Douleh asked Oets whether he knew all this. Oets replied that he was surprised by this question, for the E'temad al-Douleh himself had forbidden him to speak to Macare or to enter the VOC house. He therefore was unable to give a satisfactory answer. At the same time Oets told the E'temad al-Douleh that he had been appointed in place of Macare, who was to return to Bandar 'Abbas. The E'temad al-Douleh asked Oets to show his credentials, which were examined by Macare and found to be in order. Macare stated that he did not contest the validity of Oets' appointment, but rather the order which Bandar 'Abbas had sent to him. For many merchants, as well as the English agent Locke, had declared that he had been appointed director and that Backer Jacobsz had no authority whatsoever over him. He therefore would only transfer the VOC assets to Oets when he had received his appointment as director. Oets countered by stating that if this appointment really existed it naturally would have been presented to Macare already. The E'temad al-Douleh replied that he would like to settle this problem amicably in his presence, so that Macare should not suffer because of the differences which had arisen. For the E'temad al-Douleh feared that Macare would be called to account if he did not protect him. Oets stated that all VOC servants in Persia had to obey orders from Bandar 'Abbas, and this was also true for Macare. He therefore asked the E'temad al-Douleh not to support Macare any longer and to permit him to take possession of the VOC house, so that he could finally get to work. The E'temad al-Douleh said that he would think about it and ended the interview. In the evening he informed Oets that he would discuss the matter with the Shah.

That same evening Oets asked the Divan begi to bring Backer Jacobsz' letter to the Shah's attention, which he promised to do. The next day the mehmandar bashi asked Oets on behalf of the E'temad al-Douleh whether he would guarantee that Macare would not suffer any consequences because of what had happened. If so, the E'temad al-Douleh would agree to his request. Oets said that he had only been ordered to take over the management of the Esfahan office and Macare would leave for

Bandar 'Abbas in peace. He urged a speedy decision and asked for support in his efforts to force Macare to hand over the VOC assets. Later the E'temad al-Douleh informed Oets that Macare would permit him to enter the VOC house on condition that he would only be accompanied by four persons. Oets refused, for he feared that Macare would imprison him.⁹

Oets' appeal to the Divan begi to intercede was more successful, because as a result of this intervention, the Shah had, on two occasions, ordered the E'temad al-Douleh in the imperial council to put an end to the Macare affair. The E'temad al-Douleh therefore invited Oets to dinner on January 18, 1713, and afterwards told Oets that he could enter the VOC house. Oets asked for his assistance, since he feared that Macare would refuse to hand over all the assets. The E'temad al-Douleh reassured him on this point, and was backed up by 'Ali Reza Khan, the Mostoufi al-mamatek. Oets, accompanied by van Biesum and Sahid, took possession of the VOC house that very night.

Macare had moved to the neighbouring house of the VOC broker. He still refused to hand over all the assets, for he wanted to receive his letter of appointment first. Since the E'temad al-Douleh promised Oets that the money borrowed from Macare would be repaid after the latter had handed over all the VOC assets, he appealed to the E'temad al-Douleh to force Macare to cooperate. After a visit by the Mehmandar bashi, Macare transferred the trade books, but he still kept the money, and it was only on February 27, 1713 that he transferred the remaining VOC assets. Oets nevertheless reported that Macare still had Dfl. 1,135,000 in his possession. Notwithstanding Oets' opposition, Macare moved to a house elsewhere in Esfahan with the help of Persian officials at the end of March 1713.¹⁰

Oets lodged a complaint about this interference with the E'temad al-Douleh who promised that he would send Macare to Bandar 'Abbas. Oets did not believe this, otherwise why had the E'temad al-Douleh taken all the trouble to move Macare to another house?¹¹

On March 21, 1713 the E'temad al-Douleh sent a letter to Backer Jacobsz stating that Oets had only signed the deed of conveyance after he had urged him to do so. The E'temad al-Douleh apparently was trying to support Macare, who had not been able to account for some items of expenditure. He also informed Backer Jacobsz that the shahbandar had been ordered to secure Macare's letter of appointment, and finally that Mirza Mohammad 'Ali, the Mostoufi-ye khasseh was ready to leave as ambassador to Batavia. Oets commented that he did not know what the purpose of the proposed embassy was, but that it quite likely had some relation to the Macare affair. He also suggested that the ambassador should negotiate a new commercial treaty in view of the fact that the E'temad al-Douleh had inquired after the VOC privileges.¹²

Meanwhile Mirza Mohammad 'Ali, the Mostoufi-ye khasseh, refused to return the trade books of the VOC brokers. He would only do so if the E'temad al-Douleh gave orders to that effect. The latter agreed that the books be returned on condition that he might examine them whenever he wanted and that they be kept in a sealed room in the VOC house. Although Oets did not like this arrangement, it was better than leaving the books in the hands of the Mostoufi-ye khasseh and he therefore agreed to it.

Oets also asked the E'temad al-Douleh whether the VOC caravan might leave without inspection as was its right, and would he be so kind as to inform Musa Khan to that effect? The E'temad al-Douleh replied that the Shah had recently issued the decree concerning the inspection of caravans, and he therefore could not change it. Oets complained that the treaty had been violated several times already, but the E'temad al-Douleh did not even bother to reply.

In various ways Oets tried to get the officials to adhere to the arrangements for VOC privileges, but it was of no avail. Musa Khan told him flatly that unless the Dutch could show him a new decree by the Shah he would inspect their caravan, and on April 3, 1713 Musa Khan's servants came to do so. Oets insisted on getting a certified copy of the Shah's decree, for he needed that to account for his behaviour to his director. Musa Khan, however, rejected this, for Oets had seen the original, and he also asserted that the VOC in Bandar 'Abbas already had a copy. Oets finally agreed

to the inspection fearing that otherwise the caravan would be too late to meet the sailing schedule of the ships. He informed the E'temad al-Douleh about this decision and the reasons for it, and stressed that the VOC was very displeased with this violation of its privileges. Again the E'temad al-Douleh did not deign to reply.

Oets' problems were not over, on the contrary they had only just begun, for on April 9, 1713 the Mostoufi-ye khasseh asked him to come to his house. Oets found that Mirza Rafi'a and 'Ali Qoli Beg were also there. The Mostoufi-ye khasseh told him that it was clear from the books of the VOC brokers, that since 1701, the VOC had exported more than had been permitted, and that the VOC had exported ducats without paying imposts. Oets replied that he had no knowledge about any violation of the treaty by the VOC, which stipulated that the VOC was allowed to export ducats. The Mostoufi-ye khasseh agreed that this was permitted, but not without paying imposts. Moreover, he said, if no silk was purchased by the VOC the export of ducats was prohibited; in former times imposts had been paid for exported ducats, but Oets denied this, for this would have been in defiance of the treaty. He added that the non-purchase or reduced purchase of silk by the VOC had not been its responsibility. The VOC had always been willing to buy silk, but the government had not always been willing or able to deliver the contracted quantities of silk. He asked that the claims be written down, so that he could send these to Bandar 'Abbas.¹³

With regard to the trade books, Oets submitted that as long as he was not allowed to examine them, they could not expect an appropriate reaction from him. The Mostoufi-ye khasseh assured him that the examination of the books had been very thorough. He had only asked Oets to check his results with the VOC trade books and to report to him if these were right or wrong. Oets avoided giving a direct answer and said that it was customary in all countries that a claim be presented in writing. If the Mostoufi-ye khasseh could do this, the VOC would be able to react properly. He further asked for the repayment of the Shah's debt, to which the Mostoufi-ye khasseh did not reply. The latter told Oets that he would send his deputy to show him what he had concluded from the examination of the trade books of Banyans, and this deputy indeed came to see him four days later. Oets told him that it was no use, for the books were sealed, and he added that he expected proof of the claim that the VOC had exported more than was legal, after which the deputy left.¹⁴ In May 1713, it became clear that the E'temad al-Douleh was not prepared to repay the Shah's debt to the VOC, or to send Macare to Bandar 'Abbas, notwithstanding the fact that Oets had urged speedy action on both issues. On May 18, 1713 the Mostoufi-ye khasseh informed Oets that he had discussed the matter of the Shah's debt with the E'temad al-Douleh and had proposed that if Oets could not pay the Shah's claim, an ambassador might be sent to Batavia. The E'temad al-Douleh had agreed to this, and he therefore asked whether Oets would pay the Shah's claim or not? Oets replied that such a weighty matter had to be decided in Batavia. The Mostoufi-ye khasseh informed him that he would discuss his reply with the E'temad al-Douleh in order to decide what must be done. Because Oets wanted to prevent an ambassador being sent to Batavia, he sent Sahid on May 19 to the Mostoufi-ye khasseh to inform him that as long as he did not know to what exactly the Shah's claim amounted he could not give a reaction to it. The Mostoufi-ye khasseh promised that he would see whether it would be possible to give him the claim in writing. He also promised that, if an envoy left for Batavia, Macare would accompany him.¹⁵

Meanwhile the control of the export of ducats had been intensified, for the supply of ducats had diminished so far that ducats had become hard to obtain in Esfahan, and the purchase of ducats by pilgrims aggravated this situation. On June 22, 1713, the annual amount for farming the ducat trade had been increased to 1,000 tomans and sometime later up to 1,200 tomans at the instigation of the Mostoufi-ye khasseh. The ducat farmer did not want to continue in office, and since there were no other candidates, the Mostoufi-ye khasseh was forced to take it himself. The Dutch hoped that soon somebody else would get this job, for the Mostoufi-ye khasseh had been instrumental in the proclamation of a decree (*ta'liqeh*) in August 1713 which prohibited Dutch, English and Armenian merchants from exporting ducats without the permission of the Mostoufi-ye khasseh on pain of a considerable fine. The reason for

passing this decree was the belief that the Dutch and English withdrew all specie from the market to the detriment of other merchants.

The Mostoufi-ye khasseh had appointed Kalb 'Ali Beg, the chief subordinate (tabin) of the E'temad al-Douleh to see that this decree was implemented. Kalb 'Ali Beg took his task very seriously and demanded that the VOC brokers sign a bond stating that they would abide by the terms of the decree. Oets forbade them to do so and threatened that he would write to the E'temad al-Douleh about this matter. The Mostoufi-ye khasseh wrote to Oets in reply suggesting a way of circumventing this difficulty. If the VOC brokers who arranged the transportation of the money informed him about these in writing, such a letter would be considered as being from a private person and not from the VOC. Although Oets needed to have permission from Bandar 'Abbas, he finally agreed to this arrangement, for the Mostoufi-ye khasseh had pointed out to him that otherwise Kalb 'Ali Beg might use force. An additional advantage of the arrangement was that in the letter only the transportation of money was reported, whilst the royal decree dealt with both transportation and exchange of cash. In this way Oets avoided handicapping the VOC in its trade in golden specie. He was very satisfied with the new arrangement and wrote to Bandar 'Abbas that the Mostoufi-ye khasseh had shown himself to be a good friend of the VOC, for he also had frustrated the attempt by the *farrash bashi* to demand poll-tax from the VOC Banyans who had been exempted by a royal decree obtained by Hoogkamer in 1701.

Meanwhile Oets had also tried to make headway with the repayment of the Shah's debt to the VOC. The E'temad al-Douleh had reacted positively to his repeated requests by promising that repayment would be made through silk deliveries, on the condition that the VOC paid the Shah's claim. According to the Dutch, this was only a pretext so that the Shah would not have to pay his debt at all - the more so, since Mirza Sa'id Mohammad, who was in charge of the royal silk deliveries, had supplied the VOC with only 12,665 lb of silk. The reason for the delay in silk deliveries was the fact that market prices were very high. The Shah was willing to sell silk to the VOC, but only against a higher price than the one contracted for, for he was losing money because of the disadvantageous treaty with the Dutch. The Mostoufi-ye khasseh tried to induce Oets to accept silk at the new price of 44 tomans per carga and to consider the higher price as a bonus for the freedom of trade which the VOC enjoyed in Persia. Oets refused, but nevertheless received 70 cargars of silk by March 10, 1714.¹⁶

Because the Mostoufi-ye khasseh continued to harass Oets about the higher price for silk, he demanded a certified copy of the Shah's decree with regard to the new silk price. Although the copy was promised, Oets did not get it in spite of Sahid's going almost daily to ask for it. Oets finally told the Mostoufi-ye khasseh that without this decree he would refuse to accept the silk deliveries. The Mostoufi-ye khasseh complained to Oets about his attitude. He had done his best for the VOC and did not even get a present for all his trouble. Since Oets continued to press for the decree he finally gave him a copy, but he refused to seal it. Because the text of the decree only ordered the Mostoufi-ye khasseh to negotiate a higher silk price with the Dutch, Oets replied that he had no authority to conclude a new treaty. Through the good offices of Mirza Sa'id Mohammad the Mostoufi-ye khasseh finally wrote on the copy of the decree that the Dutch would get the silk at the old price. He refused, however, to certify the copy. Moreover the silk was not of the same quality as the samples and Oets therefore refused to accept it. Mirza Sa'id Mohammad finally induced him to accept the silk since the difference was only slight.¹⁷

On April 23, 1714 there were 106 bales of silk in the VOC house ready to be transported. Oets refused to let the bales be examined by government officials a second time. Various officials inquired after Oets' objections and urged him to be flexible, since he knew well that it was a mere formality because the silk had already been checked before packing. Oets gave in to their arguments, but not without informing them that he was acting against orders.

Of the 100 cargars of silk contracted for annually, 30 were still lacking. The

Governor of Gilan, Fath 'Ali Khan the qollar aghasi,¹⁸ informed the VOC that he only wanted to deliver silk against payment in cash. The payment of the Shah's debt was the E'temad al-Douleh's affair not his. According to Oets the Mostoufi-ye khasseh had put the qollar aghasi up to this. He had advised him to sell the silk to private merchants. Oets tried to prevent this by appealing to the E'temad al-Douleh. The latter, who needed 2,000 tomans to finance the Shah's building activities, told Oets that he could have the silk if he paid 300 tomans in cash, the rest would be payment towards the Shah's debt. Oets refused claiming that he had no money and this attitude proved to be effective, for on November 10, 1714 the silk was delivered. But Oets' troubles were not over, for the Mostoufi-ye khasseh refused to sign the receipt which was required for the clearance of the transaction. Through the intercession of Mirza Zahed Mohammad, the Mostoufi-ye khasseh finally gave in and signed the receipt on April 13, 1715.¹⁹

Oets' victory was a pyrrhic one, for, after the delivery of the silk Mirza Zahed Mohammad told Oets that the Shah would not deliver any more silk to the VOC, for he lost too much on it. Silk deliveries in repayment of the Shah's debt would not take place either.²⁰

The reaction of the Governor-General of the VOC to the events in Persia was one of dismay. Batavia had ordered Backer Jacobsz and Macare to behave themselves and the turn of events of 1712 had been completely unexpected. Macare's actions were considered to be very damaging for the VOC, and Batavia therefore approved of Backer Jacobsz' decision to suppress Macare's appointment as director. A new director, Hendrick Grousius would be sent to replace Backer Jacobsz who was ordered to get back as much as possible of the money which Macare had lent to the Shah. He was also to try and get revoked the decree with regard to the control of caravans. Batavia hoped that the accusation of illegal gold exports were untrue, for in that case the Shah had a legal argument for cancelling the VOC's privilege in that respect.²¹

Oets, in whom Batavia had confidence, was ordered to inform the E'temad al-Douleh that if these illegal activities had taken place it had been against strict orders from Batavia. It would therefore be wrong to punish the VOC for these untoward activities to which it had been no party. The former privileges must be restored again and the new treaty proposed by the E'temad al-Douleh had to be revoked. To achieve these objectives, Oets was permitted to give modest presents and if these did not have the required result, he was to refuse to accept or transport merchandise, even if it would have to lie for more than a year in Esfahan. Permission was also given to allow the control of VOC caravans, but under protest, for the old privileges had to be restored.

With regard to Macare, the Governor-General believed that he had gone mad, and must be sent as soon as possible to Batavia. Backer Jacobsz was to ask for his extradition; and if this were fruitless he was to go with a suite of attendants to court to arrange the matter.²²

The Governor-General had also sent a letter to the E'temad al-Douleh asking for the restoration of VOC privileges. Oets tried to get a reply to this letter, but none was forthcoming. On July 15, 1714 therefore, he formally requested a reply, a request he repeated on August 19, 1714. The VOC was worried about the E'temad al-Douleh's attitude, for reportedly he had only examined the firmans issued by Shah 'Abbas I and Shah Safi I. Moreover, he had given in to those courtiers who had maintained that the VOC had arrogated privileges which had never been granted. As an example they raised the issue of the exemption of control of VOC caravans. The E'temad al-Douleh was convinced by these arguments and forbade VOC caravans to leave without prior examination.²³

These developments explain why Oets wanted a reply to the Governor-General's letter. After his August 19 request, Mirza Rafi'a, the secretary of the E'temad al-Douleh, informed Oets that the reply would be sent soon, and it would be in the form of a new commercial treaty, which Mohammad Ja'far Beg, who had been appointed envoy to Batavia, would hand over the Governor-General. Mirza Rafi'a suggested that it might be a good idea if the Governor-General sent an experienced negotiator to Esfahan.

On August 23, 1714, Mohammad Ja'far Beg visited Oets and presented him with the new treaty. All previous privileges had been revoked, and the new treaty gave the VOC the following choice: the Company would purchase 300 cargoes of *kharvari* silk per year at a price of 48 tomans per cargo, of which 20,000 tomans per year would be free of tolls. Or, if the VOC were not willing to agree to this arrangement, it must pay customs and other duties, and would be allowed to sell its goods only in Bandar 'Abbas. It was stated moreover that the VOC had never been granted the right of exemption from *rahdari*, which had only been granted occasionally as a favour. VOC caravans therefore would be checked in future and would have to pay all other imposts just like the other merchants. Finally, duties must be paid on the export of gold and silver.

The VOC staff in Persia were quite taken aback by the terms of the new treaty, notwithstanding the fact that the E'temad al-Douleh had declared that he was willing to continue to deal with VOC personnel as in former times as a favour to the Governor-General. The friends of the VOC said that they did not dare to intercede for the Dutch, because the E'temad al-Douleh had made up his mind. Backer Jacobsz therefore ordered Oets to refuse to move merchandise if *rahdari* were claimed from VOC caravans.²⁴

The VOC had more success with regard to the person of Macare. Because he was convinced that the E'temad al-Douleh would support Macare, who wanted to return to the Netherlands overland, Backer Jacobsz considered it useless to go himself to Esfahan. He therefore ordered Oets to ask various friendly officials to intercede for the VOC in this matter. Oets offered these officials 250 tomans if they could speed up Macare's departure from Iran. Though Oets had nothing to show for his trouble apart from promises, things were changing. For the Persian government also realized that without a solution to the status of Macare, a discussion on important matters such as the new commercial treaty would be very difficult. It helped matters that Macare was running out of money, so that he was becoming a liability instead of an asset. On June 6, 1714 Macare himself asked the E'temad al-Douleh to appoint someone to accompany him to Batavia. According to Oets, Macare realized that time was running out for him and had therefore taken the initiative himself. The E'temad al-Douleh after having inquired into the nature of the kind of reception such a Persian official would get in Batavia, announced on June 13, 1714 that Macare would leave shortly, but Mirza Rafi'a, a friend of Macare delayed matters. Oets therefore asked Safi Qoli Khan, the Divan begi, to intercede with the Shah. This had the required result, for the Shah ordered on June 18 that Macare must leave.²⁵

Another possible reason why Macare had become a liability, apart from his dwindling financial resources, was the fact that his behaviour had roused the ire of the mollahs. Macare's high-handed actions, culminating in the public arrest of Francois Sahid in March 1714, had not only upset the mollahs but also the court. The mollahs had been urging the Shah for a great many years to prohibit Christians from employing Moslems and used this incident as a pretext to resuscitate their demand. This time the Shah gave in to them as a result of which the darugheh (sheriff) informed Oets on April 22, 1714 that henceforth it was forbidden to employ Moslems on pain of the payment of a fine. Oets asked for a copy of the decree which was refused. The darugheh meanwhile ordered the *kadkhodas* (heads of city quarters) to supervise the implementation of the decree. Oets immediately protested against this decree which was contrary to the VOC privileges and asked for its revocation. The Governor of Bandar 'Abbas, 'Ali Reza Khan, promised Oets that he would intercede with the Shah and E'temad al-Douleh and he ordered the darugheh not to bother the VOC about this issue for the time being. Discussions with the Mostoufi-ye Mamalek and the Mehmandar bashi did not lead to a conclusion, for the E'temad al-Douleh was not willing to give in. On September 1, 1714, the darugheh officially informed Oets that the respite given to the VOC had expired and that he must dismiss all Moslem servants. Because the highest religious authority had praised the E'temad al-Douleh for this wise decision, Oets believed that he would not be able to do much about it. Since the English had already dismissed their Moslem servants, Oets decided to comply with the decree under protest. However, on September 4, the darugheh informed Oets

that he would not be very strict about the supervision and that as far as he was concerned Oets could employ a few Moslem servants. The Divan begi advised Oets not to employ Moslem outriders (*jeloudar*) for the time being and certainly not to present the E'temad al-Douleh with an official petition on this matter. He and other officials implied the whole matter would blow over, which indeed was exactly what happened. It would appear that outside Esfahan the matter was a non-issue, for example it was not even raised by officials in Bandar 'Abbas.²⁶

The departure of Macare and Mohammad Ja'far Beg on August 23, 1714 was an occasion for much merry-making, and they arrived on October 30 in Bandar 'Abbas. Their departure from that port took some time, however, due to friction between Macare and Backer Jacobsz. The latter moreover was not willing to allow Bos, one of Macare's supporters, to travel in Macare's company to Batavia, which angered Mohammad Ja'far Beg. He informed the E'temad al-Douleh about his reception in Bandar 'Abbas and complained about Backer Jacobsz who had delayed his departure and had even tried to poison him. On December 11, 1714 the ship finally departed for Batavia.

Batavia was even more vexed about this matter than the E'temad al-Douleh who asked both the shahbandar and Oets for an explanation. The shahbandar informed Backer Jacobsz that he had written to the E'temad al-Douleh telling him that Mohammad Ja'far Beg had lied, and the problems which he had suffered in Bandar 'Abbas had been of his own making. For though he was only a errand-boy who had 150 tomans to spend, he had behaved as if he were an ambassador, and lived far beyond his means. Batavia reprimanded Backer Jacobsz and his council for the handling of the whole affair. It had certainly not been handled with a view to promoting the Company's interests, Batavia commented, implying that private interests had been involved.²⁷

Meanwhile the relationship with the Persian government remained strained. The Mostoufi-ye khasseh had continually pestered Oets for presents, threatening to make the Company pay for its ingratitude for all his services. A similar attitude prevailed with the Shah and the E'temad al-Douleh. The Shah is reported to have said that all Europeans might leave Persia. The E'temad al-Douleh had replied that in that case sugar and spices would become more expensive. The Shah's reaction was that in that case his own subjects had better fetch these goods themselves. The E'temad al-Douleh had submitted that this was not easily done and that therefore the Europeans had better stay. Notwithstanding all this, the E'temad al-Douleh informed Oets that the VOC must leave Persia if it was true, as was rumoured, that Mohammad Ja'far Beg would not return alive from Batavia. Oets therefore decided not to present any more requests to the E'temad al-Douleh for silk deliveries in payment of the Shah's debt, for the invariable reply to each request was that they must wait for Mohammad Ja'far Beg's return. Oets had prepared himself for an increasingly hard attitude on the part of the E'temad al-Douleh. When the latter suddenly died on July 22, 1715 after lying ill for eight days, he believed that for the time being the VOC would be free from a troublesome Government. What he did not know was that his real troubles had not even begun.²⁸

Notes

1. For biographical details about Backer Jacobsz and Macare see Coolhaas, 1980
2. VOC 1818, f. 546 (22/10/10); *Ibid.*, f. 271 (29/6/13); KA 857, f. 1169-70 (17/8/11); KA 860, f. 671-72 (25/8/12)
3. 'Ali Qoli Beg, a former Portuguese priest, Father Antonio, who was converted to Islam around 1710. He died on March 10, 1734
4. VOC 1843, f. 88-89 (7/7/12)
5. VOC 1818, f. 304 verso; *Ibid.*, f. 307; VOC 1843, f. 89-91 (6/8/12); *Ibid.*, f. 52-53 (1/9/12); f. 53-55 (22/9/12); f. 89-91 (6/8/12); VOC 1818, f. 290-303 (24/7/12)
6. VOC 1818, f. 271-73 (29/6/13)
7. VOC 1843, f. 92-93 (6/9/12); tofangchi bashi is the commander of matchlockmen (tofangchis)

8. VOC 1818, f. 428 (15/3/13); VOC 1822, f. 428 (21/12/12). The real amount was Dfl. 618,239 consisting of Dfl. 69,578 golden ducats and 4,000 tomans. The E'temad al-Douleh had given Macare an IOU, in which he promised to repay the money three months after 26 December 1712
9. VOC 1818, f. 189-91 (21/1/13)
10. VOC 1818, f. 416, 419-20 (15/3/13); f. 436 (3/5/13)
11. VOC 1818, f. 240 (27/4/13)
12. VOC 1818, f. 277-81 (21/3/13); f. 236 vs (28/3/13)
13. VOC 1818, f. 240-44 (27/4/13)
14. *Ibid.*
15. VOC 1843, f. 157-60 (25/5/13)
16. VOC 1818, f. 289-91; VOC 1824, f. 2625 vs-29, 2631 vs-32, 2634-39 (23/4/14)
17. VOC 1834, f. 2682 (15/4/14)
18. Qollar aghasi or commander of the royal slaves (qollar)
19. VOC 1834, f. 2685 vs-86 (12/5/14)
20. VOC 1848, f. 2364-66 vs (13/4/15)
21. KA 869, f. 678 (20/7/17); VOC 1843, f. 2639-42 vs, 2646 (23/4/14)
22. KA 862, f. 503-21 (20/8/13)
23. VOC 1834, f. 2684 (12/5/14)
24. VOC 1848, f. 2266-69 vs (27/9/14)
25. VOC 1848, f. 2306-12 (10/12/14)
26. VOC 1834, f. 2687-vs (12/5/14); f. 2683 (15/4/14); f. 2362 (13/4/15)
27. VOC 1848, f. 2367-70 (13/4/15)
28. *Ibid.*, f.2375 vs

3. DETERIORATION OF THE SITUATION

After Shah Qoli Khan's death on July 22, 1715, important changes occurred in the government and administration of Persia which would also have important consequences for the VOC. On July 25, 1715, Fath 'Ali Khan Daghestani was appointed as E'temad al-Douleh; Backer Jacobsz described him as "a man of ripe age, who is a descendant of the Kings of Daghestan and who has experienced the consequences of court intrigues, both to his advantage and disadvantage". He added that he considered him to be a proud and relentless man, who did everything himself, and was greedy and who was feared by everybody.¹

Immediately after his appointment Fath 'Ali Khan introduced many changes in the administrative organisation of Persia. All subordinate officials (tabin) of his predecessor were dismissed, while the salaries of all courtiers and the royal slaves (qollar) were considerably lowered. The dismissed officials had to give an account of their financial administration and debts had to be paid immediately. Even beglerbegis such as 'Ali Reza Khan, Mostoufi al-mamalek were not excluded from this treatment. He was forced to sell his house and furniture to pay his debt to the State.² The Beglerbegi of Tabriz, Sa'id 'Ali Khan had to pay 16,000 tomans. When he could only pay half of that amount, he was given the bastinado and imprisoned until he could pay the other half. The most prominent case was that of Hosein Khan, the former governor of Shamakhi, who owed the Shah 7,000 tomans. Since Hosein Khan and his brother Musa Khan were enemies of Fath 'Ali Khan, he induced the Shah to reopen the investigation of Hosein Khan's fraudulent management. The new investigation (the earlier one had to be stopped on the Shah's orders, for he had forgiven Hosein Khan) led to the conclusion that Hosein Khan must pay 14,000 tomans, which he was unable to do. Fath 'Ali Khan ordered him to be imprisoned and to be given the bastinado as a result of which he lost a few toes. Oets remarked that never before had a beglerbegi been beaten in such a way. Hosein Khan was in such a bad condition that they feared for his life. But nobody dared to intercede for him, notwithstanding the hatred that was felt against the E'temad al-Douleh. He was finally allowed to go home at the request of Da'ud Mirza, a brother-in-law of the Shah, on condition that he would pay the money soon.³

However, not only government officials felt the change of government. The merchants and the Armenians of Jolfa also fell victim to the government's need for money. The Moslem merchant, Zein al-'Abedin, for instance had to pay 4,000 tomans, while many of his colleagues likewise had to contribute, although smaller amounts. The Armenians of Jolfa were told to pay 160 tomans. The Fariman family was singled out by the E'temad al-Douleh, although this family had been exempted from the payment of poll-tax in recompense for services rendered to Shah 'Abbas II (1642-1666). The E'temad al-Douleh revoked this exemption and demanded retrospective payment of poll-tax. After having received payment of a considerable sum of money, Fath 'Ali Khan agreed to reduce his demands for retrospective payment of the last three years, while henceforth the Fariman family would pay poll-tax just like everybody else.⁴

Those officials who retained their functions, such as the harem eunuchs and Mohammad Qoli Khan Shamlu, the Qorchi Bashi,⁵ lost many of their privileges as well as half of their salaries. As a result, this group became bitter enemies of Fath 'Ali Khan.⁶ In the Imperial Council, Mohammad Qoli Khan attacked the E'temad al-Douleh and accused him of leading the country to its ruin by his unwise policy. He said that Fath 'Ali Khan acted as if he were the Shah himself and that if this continued he would resign as Qorchi bashi and councillor. For he refused to serve under a catamite like Fath 'Ali Khan, who threw out old trusted servants such as Musa Khan (who had been dismissed on September 26) and who appointed his own kind. The Qorchi bashi concluded that everybody could fill the treasury by skinning people. The Shah asked Fath 'Ali Khan for his reaction to these accusations, and he replied that Mohammad Qoli Khan was mad and therefore did not deserve a reply. This led to a row between the two ministers, who even threatened one another in the Shah's presence, which Oets could not believe.⁷

According to Oets, Fath 'Ali Khan only respected the opinion of Mirza Rafi'a, his private secretary (*saheb-e raqam*) and Mirza Zahed Mohammad. Most people feared him, and the fact that the E'temad al-Douleh appointed many friends to important functions did not make him more popular with his opponents. Already on July 22, Safi Qoli Khan, governor of Tabriz and *sardar* (general) of the campaign against Kandahar, was appointed to the post of Qollar aghasi bashi and as Beglerbegi of Fars, Kohgiluyeh, Dashtestan, Lar and Bandar 'Abbas and as *sardar* against the Musqat Arabs. This was quite exceptional, for it had been a long time since one person had held all the southern parts of Persia under his jurisdiction.⁸

After Fath 'Ali Khan's appointment as E'temad al-Douleh, the Dutch in Esfahan tried to build a good relationship with him through a protegee of Fath 'Ali Khan, the recently appointed Safi Qoli Khan and Mirza Rafi'a, the *Saheb-e raqam*. On August 5, 1715 the Dutch gave the latter 50 tomans in cash for the E'temad al-Douleh as a present.

Since the English had given more, they were received one day before the Dutch by the E'temad al-Douleh. On August 29, 1715, the Mehmandar bashi came to fetch the Dutch and advised them not to raise the question of requests and only to congratulate him, which after all was the purpose of the audience. The Dutch were received at 16.00 hours and after the congratulations Fath 'Ali Khan asked when Mohammad Ja'far Beg would return. Oets replied that he expected him in about 50 days. After an exchange of generalities the Dutch left.⁹

On September 12, 1715 the Dutch got an inkling of what was to follow, for Mirza Mohammad 'Ali, the Mostoufi-ye khasseh, told the VOC interpreter that the E'temad al-Douleh would deal with the issue of the export of specie after he had studied all previous firmans which had been granted to the VOC.¹⁰

On September 23, 1715, the E'temad al-Douleh summoned the VOC interpreter and ordered him to bring all firmans granted to the VOC. When Francois Sahid appeared at the E'temad al-Douleh's palace, his private secretary, Mirza Rafi'a, told him that his master had decided to repeal all previously granted firmans and to conclude a new agreement with the Dutch. He was not willing to wait for Mohammad Ja'far Beg's return from Batavia. The main points of the new agreement were as follows: The VOC must buy 300 cargoes of kharvari silk per year at a price of 48 tomans per carga. In that case the VOC would be exempted from all taxes and imposts. However, if the VOC was not prepared to accept this offer, it would have to pay both taxes and imposts on all imports and exports. Moreover, the export of gold and silver was forbidden henceforth, while it was also forbidden to export goods for other merchants under the name of the VOC.¹¹

During the subsequent discussion with the E'temad al-Douleh, the Mostoufi-ye khasseh stated that the Dutch were guilty of fraud for transporting the goods of private merchants under the name of the VOC. Sahid denied this and said that all merchants and the two former shahbandars, who were at court at that time, could easily disprove this accusation. Najaf Qoli Beg, the E'temad al-Douleh's mace-bearer commented that he had heard that only the English were involved in such activities. Sahid also added that the Mostoufi-ye khasseh had several times studied the books of the VOC Banyans, and had found no proof of such activities. Although these arguments neutralized the Mostoufi-ye khasseh's attack, it did not silence him, since he had another string to his bow. The other string was the issue of exemption from tolls to the amount of 20,000 tomans per year. According to the Mostoufi-ye khasseh, this exemption only held good for import and export together, and was not valid for export and import separately, which meant a toll exemption of 40,000 tomans. He maintained that in former times this rule had been strictly adhered to. Mirza Zahed Mohammad, who was a friend of the VOC, corrected him and added that the E'temad al-Douleh had already agreed to the other interpretation. Finally, he said that, if the Mostoufi-ye khasseh was right, then why had customs duties never been collected from the Dutch in the past?

The E'temad al-Douleh did not react to the remarks of the Mostoufi-ye khasseh, but he made it clear that he did not consider the role of the VOC in Persia to be an important one. Whether this was a deliberate stratagem or merely out of ignorance as

the Dutch maintained, is not clear. However, he stated that the Dutch only imported tree-bark and husks of fruit, (meaning cinnamon and pepper) and other insignificant articles, while they exported spices. He no longer would tolerate this situation. The Dutch therefore had to make a choice, either to purchase 300 cargoes of silk per year with toll exemption or else to pay imposts. If the VOC would not accept this proposal then it had better leave Persia, for Persia could live without spices - it had done so before their arrival. Those spices which the Shah needed he could get from Astrakhan or Europe.

The Mostoufi-ye khasseh, hoping to bolster the E'temad al-Douleh in his stance, commented that this proposal would never be acceptable to the Dutch: they now had an advantageous agreement; if they were offered a less profitable one they would only state that they had no instructions and therefore could not react to it. He therefore urged that the Dutch be forced to make their choice there and then, but the E'temad al-Douleh did not want to act too hastily.

Mirza Rafi'a had told Oets that the E'temad al-Douleh had informed the Shah that the VOC had obtained its firmans through bribery, and that these must therefore be changed; supposedly the Shah had agreed to this policy. Mirza Rafi'a advised Oets to write to the E'temad al-Douleh and make it clear to him that the VOC staff in Persia could not conclude any new treaty. He added that the E'temad al-Douleh recognized the importance of the VOC to Persia and his remarks should be understood only in terms of his demand for a new treaty, which certainly would not be of the nature that he had stated. This advice was followed by Oets, but the E'temad al-Douleh wrote back: no silk, no exemption from tolls.

Mirza Rafi'a had also informed Oets that the E'temad al-Douleh had charged the Mostoufi-ye khasseh to calculate how much the customs, rahdari and other imposts would amount to for the VOC's annual trade. The Mostoufi-ye khasseh had replied that this was not easy to do, since VOC trade varied year by year.¹²

Not surprisingly, the Mostoufi-ye khasseh summoned Francois Sahid and asked him how much VOC imports amounted to each year. Sahid told him that he did not know, for such data were not kept at the Esfahan office. However, he could confirm that each year it had been less than 20,000 tomans, otherwise the shahbandars would have complained. The Mostoufi-ye khasseh said that he knew better and that the VOC would notice the results of refusing to give presents to him. He also put the same questions to the former shahbandars, Mirza Nur Allah and Safi Qoli Khan as well as to Mohammad Jamal, the representative of the acting shahbandar Mirza Zahed 'Ali. These all confirmed Sahid's statement. Mirza Nur Allah stated that no precise data had been kept, for there had been no orders to do so. This was contradicted by the Mostoufi-ye khasseh who added that the present shahbandar was keeping detailed records of all imports and exports. Mirza Nur Allah countered that this might be true, but he did not believe that the recorded data indicated a higher turnover than he and his colleagues had stated. This was confirmed by Mohammad Jamal who added that the records were kept only for imports. The Mostoufi-ye khasseh thereupon accused these officials of neglecting the Shah's interests. They replied that he was supplying the E'temad al-Douleh with false information with the sole intention of creating a dispute with the Dutch. If he wanted to take action he should do something about the English, whose breach of contract they could prove.

The Mostoufi-ye khasseh refused to listen to their arguments and said that since they had kept no records and could not prove their statements, he did not need to take them into consideration. He himself would provide the proof by using the books of the VOC Banyans, which would show that the VOC had a turnover of 40,000 and sometimes even of 60,000 tomans per year. Sahid intervened at this point and said that it was impossible and not true. The Mostoufi-ye khasseh told him to be quiet and continued to say that he would draw up a detailed account of the Shah's demand, which the subordinates

(tabin) of the E'temad al-Douleh would forthwith collect. Mirza Nur Allah tried to calm down the Mostoufi-ye khasseh and pointed out that his unjustified action would only lead to a conflict with the Dutch and a lot of misery. Neither this nor Sahid's summary of the services rendered by the VOC to the Shah had the desired result, however, and Sahid left.

The next day, October 4, 1715, Sahid visited Mirza Nur Allah and Mohammad Jamal to obtain information on the further course of the discussions. They told him that they had tried to induce the E'temad al-Douleh to take a moderate course of action. Sahid then went to see Mirza Sa'id Mohammad to brief him on what had happened. The latter said that the E'temad al-Douleh dealt so badly with the people and the merchants that he dare not interfere in this matter. Mirza Rafi'a, the keeper of the seal, said the same, although he confirmed his continuing friendship towards the Dutch. Mirza Rafi'a, the private secretary, told Sahid that he had done his best, but that the Mostoufi-ye khasseh had undone all he had achieved by his wild accusations. He advised the Dutch to speak to the assistant (*na'eb*) of the E'temad al-Douleh, Mirza 'Abd al-Karim. Oets, however, did not see any point in doing so, for Mirza 'Abd al-Karim only handled the E'temad al-Douleh's private affairs. Moreover, he would not do anything unless he got a present and all friends of the Dutch had told him that only by giving presents might he get results. Since Oets had no permission to do so, he thanked them for their advice and asked them for their support and intercession with the E'temad al-Douleh.

On October 5, 1715 Mirza Nur Allah told Sahid that he had spoken to the E'temad al-Douleh about the problems, but that the Mostoufi-ye khasseh had thwarted all he had achieved by his discussions. He was willing to try once more, but did not expect much from it, for the Mostoufi-ye khasseh would continue to frustrate him. He also told Sahid that the E'temad al-Douleh had charged him and the Mostoufi-ye khasseh to summon Sahid to the Mostoufi-ye khasseh's house to discuss the proposed new treaty and the Shah's claim. Sahid asked how much the Mostoufi-ye khasseh would wish to receive, to which Mirza Nur Allah replied that he thought that 200 tomans would be sufficient. He added that during that discussion he would take the same line as the Mostoufi-ye khasseh in order not to raise suspicion about his loyalties. The Mostoufi-ye khasseh found a willing ear with the E'temad al-Douleh because he did his best to show ways and means to get money for the Shah. Those who took an opposite view could be challenged for not having the Shah's interests at heart and would be ignored. He stressed however, that as deputy governor (*janeshin*) of Bandar 'Abbas he had the same interests as the VOC.

The next day the Mostoufi-ye khasseh sent for Sahid. He repeated the known accusations against the VOC and threatened that if the Dutch did not give him a present, things would go badly for them. He also asked whether the VOC staff in Esfahan really had no authority to conclude new agreements. He did not believe Sahid's negative reply and said that the E'temad al-Douleh had no intention whatsoever of waiting for Mohammad Ja'far Beg's return, for the Shah had sent the latter to Batavia to get an agreement to his demands and the VOC only reacted by sending an ambassador. He then ended the interview, for he had guests and told Sahid to wait. During dinner Sahid had the opportunity to talk with one of the guests, Mirza Sa'id Mohammad, who urged the Dutch to give a present to the Mostoufi-ye khasseh, otherwise he would not stop his anti-Dutch actions. A present of 500 to 600 tomans, however, would make him see the VOC in a more positive light.¹⁵

On October 8, 1715 Sahid informed Mirza Nur Allah about his interview with the Mostoufi-ye khasseh. Mirza Nur Allah told him that he had tried in vain to change the E'temad al-Douleh's views regarding the VOC on the previous night. Since he would be leaving for Lar, he advised the Dutch to give presents to both the E'temad al-Douleh and the Mostoufi-ye khasseh.

In the afternoon the E'temad al-Douleh summoned Sahid and told him that the Dutch must tell him whether they accepted his proposal or not. The old commercial treaty had been revoked, for it had not been to the Shah's advantage. Sahid repeated that the VOC staff in Esfahan could not take such a decision. The E'temad al-Douleh then asked the Mostoufi-ye khasseh to read out the Shah's claim, which had been calculated to amount to 26,000 tomans in customs duties for the export of millions of golden ducats, excluding the amount of rahdari, which he had yet to compute.

Sahid drew the E'temad al-Douleh's attention to the fact that any moment Mohammad Ja'far Beg would return with the Governor-General's reply to the Shah's demands. The E'temad al-Douleh, however, said he had nothing to do with that mission, for it had been his predecessor who had arranged it. If the Resident in Bandar 'Abbas would accept his proposal, relations between the Shah and the Dutch would be normal again. Although Mirza Rafi'a, the keeper of the seal, Mirza Rafi'a, the private secretary, and Mirza Nur Allah were also present they did not dare to intercede for the Dutch. Oets felt that without some gesture by the VOC he would not be able to change the E'temad al-Douleh's mind. He therefore asked the director in Bandar 'Abbas to agree to give 600 tomans to the E'temad al-Douleh and 200 tomans to the Mostoufi-ye khasseh.

On October 9, 1715 Oets sent Sahid to Mirza Sa'id Mohammad and Mirza Nur Allah to learn what had been said after the interpreter's departure. Mirza Sa'id Mohammad said that he had urged a moderate policy, while Mirza Nur Allah said that he had been afraid that the E'temad al-Douleh would not even have allowed a respite of 30 days. He would be leaving on October 10, and he would use the occasion of his farewell audience to attempt to induce the E'temad al-Douleh once more to be more moderate in his demands. Sahid asked him to report on the dispute to the beglerbegi of Fars and ask for his intercession. Mirza Sa'id Mohammad, who also had been relieved that the E'temad al-Douleh had granted as many as 30 day's respite, told Sahid that if the Dutch did not give a present to the Mostoufi-ye khasseh to silence him there would be nobody who would dare to contradict him in this matter.

Oets sent Sahid to Mirza Nur Allah to learn the outcome of his last interview with the E'temad al-Douleh before he left for Lar. Mirza Nur Allah reported that he had said that the Dutch were the most powerful nation in Europe, who could totally paralyze all traffic in the Persian Gulf. This would mean that the shahbandar would not be able to collect customs duties, which would be a loss for the Shah. Moreover, the Dutch would not oppose the Musqat Arabs when these had designs on Persian territory. He felt it his duty to inform the E'temad al-Douleh truthfully about this issue in his function of janeshin or deputy-governor of Bandar 'Abbas. The E'temad al-Douleh had replied that he did not want to create conflict between Persia and the Dutch, but they had obtained their previous treaty in a dishonest way, so that the Shah profited little by it. He therefore wanted to conclude a new treaty, which would also state that the Dutch must pay for the export of golden ducats. Finally he had ordered Mirza Nur Allah to discuss the whole matter with the VOC director in Bandar 'Abbas. Mirza Nur Allah had asked whether the E'temad al-Douleh would refrain from actions against the Dutch until he had received a report on the result of this discussion. To this question he had only received an ambiguous reply. Mirza Nur Allah promised Sahid that he would write from Lar to Bandar 'Abbas as well as to his master, the beglerbegi. The best course for the Dutch, he advised, was to give a present to the Mostoufi-ye khasseh. He added that the Dutch would be wise to obtain the support of Mirza Rafi'a, the keeper of the seal and Mirza Sa'id Mohammad who were well informed about the VOC activities and were enemies of the Mostoufi-ye khasseh.

It was not until October 14, 1715 that Sahid was able to speak to Mirza Rafi'a. He said that he would be willing to intercede for the Dutch, but before

he would do so the Mostoufi-ye khasseh had to be silenced first. The latter daily poisoned the E'temad al-Douleh's mind against the Dutch. Those who spoke in support of the Dutch therefore ran the risk of being accused of actions against the interests of the Shah. Under those circumstances nobody was willing to intercede for the VOC. Besides it was impossible for the E'temad al-Douleh to take a more moderate position, for he also would run the same risk. The only way to circumvent this obstacle was to give a present to the Mostoufi-ye khasseh.

The latter meanwhile informed Oets that he had him to thank for having been granted a respite of 30 days, for the E'temad al-Douleh had wanted to collect the Shah's claim immediately. The Mostoufi-ye khasseh made it clear to Oets that it would be better to give him a present. He gave Oets some time to think about it; if Oets would not give a present he would interpret this as deriding his benevolence, for which the Dutch would suffer. He finally asked whether it really was not possible to get a reply from Bandar 'Abbas in 30 days. Oets drew his attention to the current insecurity of the roads. The Mostoufi-ye khasseh therefore promised that he would speak with the E'temad al-Douleh if the 30 days' period proved to be inadequate.

After the discussion with the Mostoufi-ye khasseh, Oets sent Sahid to Mirza Sa'id Mohammad. The latter told Sahid that he had persuaded the E'temad al-Douleh to send Mirza Nur Allah an instruction (ta'liqeh) to discuss the dispute with the director in Bandar 'Abbas. Therefore it would be better that the Dutch should not bother the E'temad al-Douleh with requests until Mirza Nur Allah's reply. He added that his master would be much more moderate in his demands if the Mostoufi-ye khasseh did not set him up against the Dutch.

Sahid also went to see Mirza Rafi'a, the private secretary. He told Sahid that the E'temad al-Douleh was very angry about the attitude of the VOC, and that he could not do anything for the Dutch.¹⁴

On October 23, 1715 Oets received a letter from Bandar 'Abbas to the effect that the ships *de Rijxdorf* and *de Vlotter* had arrived there in September. They had brought information that Mohammad Ja'far Beg would arrive with the ship *'Geyn* and that Joan Josua Ketelaar would come as ambassador to Persia to settle outstanding differences. Oets immediately informed the E'temad al-Douleh about this, but he did not even acknowledge the receipt of this news. This attitude disconcerted Oets, the more so since it was also put about that Mirza Nur Allah had left for Lar without the E'temad al-Douleh's permission and that the instruction sent to him was useless.¹⁵

The English East India Company's chief in Esfahan, seeing how the Dutch were treated, gave many presents to the E'temad al-Douleh and the Mostoufi-ye khasseh. The latter therefore delayed his examination of the treaty with the English Company until the dispute with the Dutch had been solved. Besides, the E'temad al-Douleh did not want to enter into conflict with the two East India Companies simultaneously.¹⁶

On October 29, 1715 the E'temad al-Douleh sent for Sahid, who was received by Kalb 'Ali Beg, his first subordinate (tabin) and mace-bearer. Kalb 'Ali Beg told Sahid that he would come for the Shah's money shortly, and if the Dutch would not pay, he would occupy their house and collect the money himself. Oets felt that he was in trouble, which may have been the E'temad al-Douleh's intention, for only nine days of the grace period were left. Moreover the Mostoufi-ye khasseh was still sniping at the Dutch and creating a negative atmosphere, so there was no hope of getting an extension of the 30 days' period.

Oets therefore sent Sahid to Mirza Rafi'a the keeper of the seal, to ask him to intercede. The latter said that he and other friends of the VOC had told the E'temad al-Douleh several times already that the VOC staff in Esfahan could not act without permission from the director in Bandar 'Abbas. He could not do any more for the VOC except to suggest giving a present to the Mostoufi-ye khasseh. He finally advised the Dutch to speak with Mirza Esma'il Bagati, an important Moslem merchant, who did much business with the VOC and had the ear of the E'temad al-Douleh with whom he had already spoken about the dispute with the VOC.

Apparently Mirza Rafi'a had mentioned this suggestion to Mirza Esma'il, for that same day the latter sent for Sahid. The interpreter explained to Mirza Esma'il that the VOC could not pay the Shah's claim, and because the E'temad al-Douleh must

be aware of this as well, the Dutch could only conclude that he wanted to oust the VOC from Persia. Being himself a merchant Mirza Esma'il no doubt understood what it would signify for Bandar 'Abbas if the Dutch left. The VOC contributed to Persia's welfare and no less than 1,000 persons derived their livelihood from Dutch trade activities in Persia. It would only be fair therefore, if the Shah's claim were submitted in writing and supported by proof, while the VOC should be allowed the opportunity to refute the evidence. Likewise, it was only normal that the VOC should ask the E'temad al-Douleh to wait for the arrival of ambassador Ketelaar.

Mirza Esma'il said that he had had a long talk with the E'temad al-Douleh about the dispute on October 28. He had told him about the power of the VOC and the profit which the trade with the Dutch yielded for Persia. This profit would diminish considerably if the VOC left Persia. The E'temad al-Douleh had replied to these arguments by saying that he only wanted to secure the Shah's rights with regard to the export of golden ducats during the years that no silk had been purchased from the Shah, as well as the money due for customs and rahdari. Mirza Esma'il therefore advised the Dutch that talking about Ketelaar's arrival was not going to change the E'temad al-Douleh's mind. However, if they would give him a present of 1,000 tomans as well as an appropriate present for the Shah, the matter of the claim might be settled in a satisfactory manner. In that case it would also be possible to conclude a treaty acceptable to both parties.

On October 30, 1715 Oets informed Mirza Esma'il that he could not follow his advice and asked for his support and intercession. That same day the Mostoufi-ye khasseh sent for Sahid and asked him whether the Dutch had any further news about the activities of the Musqat Arabs in Bahrain. Having received a negative reply he said that the Shah needed the VOC Ships in order to expel the Musqat Arabs from Bahrain. If they made them available, the Dutch would render a great service to the Shah, implying that it would help their case.

The next day Oets informed the E'temad al-Douleh that he could make no commitments with regard to VOC ships. He added that it was not a very good idea to employ Dutch ships, which were merchantmen and not men-of-war. If they were attacked by the Musqat Arabs the Dutch would not be able to defend themselves, while the Persian soldiers had no experience in warfare at sea. Moreover, the ships sailed according to a tight schedule which could not be altered. The Mostoufi-ye khasseh, unperturbed, asked the Dutch to report this request to Bandar 'Abbas, so that the director himself could decide. The government officials in Bandar 'Abbas would decide whether to make use of an eventual offer of the loan of ships or not. He added significantly that such an offer would make a good impression on the Shah and the E'temad al-Douleh. A similar request had been put to the English, who had replied that they had no ships at that time in Bandar 'Abbas. In reporting this discussion, Oets advised the director not to raise the matter of the dispute with the beglerbegi, for in that case, he would undoubtedly request the loan of Dutch ships. He further reported that Mirza Nur Allah had received a counter order, while the order to the shahbandar had been revoked.

On November 2, 1715 Oets sent Sahid to Mirza Rafi'a, the keeper of the seal, and to Mirza Sa'id Mohammad to ask for information and help. Both officials told Sahid that they had the impression that the E'temad al-Douleh, at the instigation of the Mostoufi-ye khasseh, would implement his intention to collect the Shah's claim. They gave their opinion that Oets was acting very unwisely by not giving a present to the Mostoufi-ye khasseh as indeed they had said several times; now they could do nothing more.

That same day Kalb 'Ali Khan came to the VOC house to fetch Sahid and took him to Mirza Rafi'a, the private secretary. He informed Sahid that the grace period of 30 days had expired and that the E'temad al-Douleh had granted the Dutch an extension of six days. He further informed Sahid that his master wanted to know how many ships the VOC had in Bandar 'Abbas at the moment, what quantity of goods the VOC imported and how much their value amounted to? He added that it was no use to ask any government official to intercede. Finally he asked whether Sahid had spoken to Mirza Esma'il. On being told that he had, Mirza Rafi'a said that it would be

best to pay him another visit and follow his advice. On November 3, Oets sent a written reply to the E'temad al-Douleh's questions and once more drew the latter's attention to the fact that he was not authorized to conclude a new treaty. He did not get any response.

On November 4, 1715 Sahid was sent for by Mirza Mahdi, a rich and important Moslem merchant. Oets instructed Sahid to state the VOC's position in the same terms as he had done to Mirza Esma'il. Mirza Mahdi told Sahid that the Dutch should do the same as the English and give the E'temad al-Douleh a substantial present. For if the latter started something he would pursue it to the end, even if this called for the use of violence. This would result in a conflict between Persia and the VOC and that would not be in the interest of trade. Sahid reported this to Oets who sent him back to Mirza Mahdi with the message that he was willing to give a present, but he had no authority to do so. He therefore asked him to urge the E'temad al-Douleh to wait for Ketelaar's arrival, but Mirza Mahdi did not see much point in doing so.

On November 18, 1715, Sahid had another interview with Mirza Esma'il; apparently another period of extension had been granted. Mirza Esma'il said that he had again talked with the E'temad al-Douleh about the dispute with the VOC. The latter had told him that he would soon carry out his intention to collect the Shah's claim. The E'temad al-Douleh was not prepared to wait for the arrival of Mohammad Ja'far Beg or Ketelaar, although he had tried to induce him to do so. If, however, Oets was prepared to settle the Shah's claim, the E'temad al-Douleh was willing to wait for their arrival to settle the new treaty. Mirza Esma'il therefore urged the Dutch to give the E'temad al-Douleh a present, otherwise he would collect the money by force. Sahid pointed out that Oets could not do so and asked him to make this clear to the E'temad al-Douleh.¹⁷

Oets had tried to delay matters as much as possible. He had asked the director in Bandar 'Abbas to advise what else he could do apart from giving a present, and had told him what the consequences would be if the E'temad al-Douleh were to resort to force. He would, of course, refuse to pay customs duties or other imposts if these were demanded and let the merchandise lie where it was. However, if the E'temad al-Douleh forbade the export of any goods by the Dutch, he would be unable to send golden ducats. At that time it had already become very difficult for the VOC to find merchants willing to transport ducats for it, for the E'temad al-Douleh needed only a slight excuse to extort money from them. Oets informed Bandar 'Abbas that if the E'temad al-Douleh were to send his subordinates (tabin) to occupy the VOC house in addition to prohibiting the export of ducats, there would not be any merchant willing to have anything to do with the VOC. However, the main problem about which he wanted clear instructions was what he should do if 'Ali Beg came to collect the Shah's claim? Oets' director could not offer him any help for his appeal crossed with a letter from Bandar 'Abbas in which Oets was informed that the director and his council could not take any decision in this matter. Oets therefore decided to ask the friends of the VOC once again to ask for an extension of the grace period.

Both Mirza Esma'il and Mirza Mahdi promised to do their best, but gave their opinion that without presents their arguments would fall on deaf ears. However, if Oets would give presents they could guarantee success. Oets told them that he had no authority to do so and asked them to make this clear to the E'temad al-Douleh. If he would grant a new delay, Ketelaar undoubtedly would show his appreciation.

On November 29, 1715 Sahid went to see Mirza Rafi'a, the private secretary and Mirza Sa'id Mohammad to ask them to try and induce the E'temad al-Douleh to wait for Ketelaar's arrival. Mirza Sa'id said that he could not do anything further. Oets had been unwise not to silence the Mostoufi-ye khassseh with presents, in which case the situation would never have come to this. He had done his best, but the E'temad al-Douleh wanted to collect the claim even if this were to mean that the VOC would leave Persia altogether. Mirza Rafi'a told Sahid that the E'temad al-Douleh had said to him that he had not heard a single argument why he should wait. The shahbandar and others had pointed out to him that without the Dutch he could not deal with the Musqat Arabs, but he did not want to be under obligation to them. He was determined to go ahead with his plan to collect the Shah's claim. The Mostoufi-ye khassseh had

strengthened his determination, for he had pointed out that it was clear from the books of the VOC brokers in Bandar 'Abbas that the Shah's claim was even bigger than he had thought. These brokers were therefore to be summoned to have their books examined. Mirza Rafi'a did not know whether the E'temad al-Douleh had already decided to do so, but it would be wiser to give presents now in order to prevent this calamity.

On November 30, 1715 Sahid had again visited Mirza Mahdi. The latter had spoken with the E'temad al-Douleh, who did not want to change his mind. He had decided to summon the VOC brokers from Bandar 'Abbas with their books. For Mirza Mahdi's sake, the E'temad al-Douleh was willing to wait for Ketelaar if Oets would give the Shah a present of 3,000 tomans and himself 1,500 tomans. If Oets were not willing to do so, he would order the claim to be collected. After Sahid's report, Oets sent him back to Mirza Mahdi with the message that he really could not give presents. However, Ketelaar would be authorized to do so, although he felt that 3,000 tomans was too much. Mirza Mahdi replied that all these arguments were quite reasonable, but they were all known to the E'temad al-Douleh who had not responded. If Oets would give presents, the E'temad al-Douleh would feel morally obliged to support the Dutch, but if he did not get anything he would have no scruples in carrying out his intentions. Sahid nevertheless asked him to urge patience.

Oets was at his wits end; nobody was able or prepared to intercede for the VOC anymore. The E'temad al-Douleh acted as if he were the king himself and had not even responded to his letter of November 17, while he had no reaction either to his appeal for help from Bandar 'Abbas.

On December 5, 1715 the E'temad al-Douleh sent for Sahid and asked him whether Mohammad Ja'far Beg would have with him a written commitment by the Governor-General stating that Ketelaar would pay the Shah's claim. Sahid replied that this was not known in the Esfahan office. The E'temad al-Douleh reacted angrily, saying that Oets pretended not to have such information. He therefore demanded that Oets sign a statement in which he promised to pay the Shah's claim if Mohammad Ja'far Beg did not have such a written commitment. He reported back to Oets, who found the E'temad al-Douleh's behaviour disturbing and sent Sahid back with a request for a delay. Ketelaar had just arrived in Bandar 'Abbas and would soon come to negotiate about all their differences.

Later Oets sent Sahid to Mirza Sa'id Mohammad and to both Mirza Rafi'as to make it clear to them that Oets could not possibly sign such a statement. He requested them to persuade the E'temad al-Douleh to cease asking for such a statement. The keeper of the seal said that he would do his best, but only if the E'temad al-Douleh raised the matter with him. The other two gentlemen said the same. Oets then sent Sahid to Mirza Esma'il and Mirza Mahdi with the same request. They both said that it was no use, but promised to try.

Five days later the tabin Mohammad Reza Beg came to fetch Sahid who had come to collect the statement. Oets sent Sahid with a petition to the E'temad al-Douleh whom he could not see. On December 13, the Mostoufi-ye khasseh informed Sahid that he had been charged by the E'temad al-Douleh with the handling of the statement. Sahid told him that Oets had sent a petition about this matter to the E'temad al-Douleh and showed the text to him. When the Mostoufi-ye khasseh had read the petition, he said that the E'temad al-Douleh would not be satisfied by it and if he did not get the signed statement, he would send Kalb 'Ali Beg to come and collect the money. He ordered Sahid to come to him early next morning so that they could go and visit the E'temad al-Douleh together.

Oets immediately sent Sahid to Mirza Mahdi with a request to speak to the E'temad al-Douleh about this matter. Mirza Mahdi said that he had already tried several times to raise the matter, but so far no good opportunity had offered itself. He would make one final attempt on December 15, but that really would be the last time that he would raise the question, unless Oets would give 1,500 tomans to the E'temad al-Douleh. That same day a letter arrived from Bandar 'Abbas instructing Oets to hide the money belonging to the VOC in a secret and safe place.

On December 14, 1715 François Sahid together with the Mostoufi-ye khasseh went to see the E'temad al-Douleh. Sahid had instructions to ask the Mostoufi-ye khasseh to support the VOC, in which case the Company would not be ungrateful. After the E'temad al-Douleh had received the petition he said that he was not pleased at all. He would first discuss the matter with the Shah and then send his tabins to collect the claim. It was clear that the E'temad al-Douleh wanted to be covered by the Shah before risking an open conflict with the VOC, which would play into his enemies' hands.

Mirza Rafi'a, the private secretary, informed Sahid on December 16 that the E'temad al-Douleh had again discussed the matter of sending for the VOC brokers from Bandar 'Abbas, which he had advised against. Sahid was also sent for by Mirza Mahdi, who told him that he had spoken with the E'temad al-Douleh the previous night. The latter had been stubborn and said that if Oets did not give the presents he had asked for, he would carry out his plan. Mirza Mahdi said that he no longer dared to discuss this matter, unless Oets would give presents, in which case he might change his mind.

Oets and his council discussed their predicament and finally decided to give presents in order to minimize the damage to the VOC as much as possible. There were a number of reasons for this decision:

- (i) The E'temad al-Douleh's character and his behaviour so far, and the fact that he would send his tabins who would use force to collect the Shah's claim;
- (ii) Execution of the E'temad al-Douleh's intentions would do much damage to the VOC;
- (iii) Although hidden, the VOC capital would yield no interest, while drafts to an amount of 8,000 tomans could not be collected in that event;
- (iv) The VOC could not change gold ducats any more;
- (v) If ducats were changed secretly no merchants would be prepared to transport these to Bandar 'Abbas;
- (vi) The E'temad al-Douleh would not allow the VOC caravans to leave without payment of customs and rahdari. Moreover, the presence of his tabins in the VOC house would keep merchants from coming there;
- (vii) The E'temad al-Douleh would send for the VOC brokers with their books from Bandar 'Abbas;
- (viii) The E'temad al-Douleh would demand imposts and in case of refusal would prohibit the VOC from selling its goods;
- (ix) The E'temad al-Douleh was the VOC's main contact, and if he did not get a present, it would lead to strained relations with the VOC and interfere with Ketelaar's mission. If presents were given then that mission would become a success.

Although there was some truth in all these nine arguments they also served to protect Oets and his council against the wrath of the Governor-General. For Oets would not be able to deny that the E'temad al-Douleh might have played a very good game of bluff. The reverse could not and cannot be proved either.

After this decision Oets sent Sahid to Mirza Mahdi with the message that he wanted to give a present of 2,000 ducats, but he considered this to be too small a present and suggested an amount of 7,000 ducats. Sahid was also sent to the Mostoufi-ye khasseh, and to Mirza Rafi'a, the keeper of the seal, with the promise of a considerable present if they were able to change the E'temad al-Douleh's mind. After several days Mirza Mahdi informed Oets that the E'temad al-Douleh would accept 6,000 ducats, which matter he had discussed with him in the presence of the Mostoufi-ye khasseh and Mirza Rafi'a. On December 25, 1715 the E'temad al-Douleh sent for Sahid and told him that he had spoken about the issue to the Shah and he had ordered him to delay action against the VOC until Ketelaar's arrival. On December 27 Sahid handed over the following presents:

to the E'temad al-Douleh	6,000 ducats
to the Mostoufi-ye khasseh	800 ducats
to Mirza Rafi'a, <i>mohrdar</i>	50 ducats
to Mirza Rafi'a Saheb-e raqam	<u>50 ducats</u>
Total:	6,900 ducats

Mirza Mahdi informed Oets on behalf of the E'temad al-Douleh that the latter would henceforth show his friendship for the VOC. Indeed, until Ketelaar's arrival in May 1717, the VOC staff were given no more bother by the E'temad al-Douleh or other ministers. The Mostoufi-ye khasseh also promised the VOC his firm support.¹⁸

Notes

1. VOC 1886, f. 21, 24 (24/3/16)
2. VOC 1886, f. 209 (19/11/15)
3. VOC 1886, f. 312 (19/11/15)
4. VOC 1886, f. 277-78 (22/10/15); VOC 1879, f. 15 (30/11/16)
5. The Qorchi bashi is the commander of the mounted troops (qorchis)
6. VOC 1886, f. 278-79 (22/10/15)
7. *Ibid.*
8. VOC 1886, f.24 (24/3/16); Mirza Rafi'a, the saheb-e raqam, was the author of the important state manual Dastur al-Moluk, probably written in 1725, when he was appointed mostoufi al-mamalek by Ashraf Khan, the Afghan ruler of Iran
9. VOC 1886, f. 190-91; 200-203 (9/9/15); f. 22-23 (24/3/16)
10. VOC 1886, f. 215 (29/9/15); VOC 1875, f. 63 (3/12/16)
11. VOC 1881, f. 216, 219-20 (29/9/15); VOC 1879, f. 64-69 (3/12/16). Oets also stressed the fact that thousands of people in Iran earned a livelihood because of VOC trading activities, VOC 1881, f. 223-25
12. VOC 1886, f. 231 (29/9/15); f. 234-53 (9/10/15); VOC 1897, f. 69-77 (3/12/16)
13. VOC 1886, f. 253 (9/10/15); f. 268 (22/10/15)
14. *Ibid.*, f. 296-306
15. VOC 1897, f. 77, 90 (3/12/15)
16. VOC 1886, f. 292 (22/10/15)
17. VOC 1886, f. 333-345, 355-57 (18/11/15); VOC 1897, f. 78-81 (3/12/16); VOC 1886, f. 362 (24/11/15)
18. VOC 1886, f. 365-74 (1/12/15); f. 390-400 (2/1/16); VOC 1897, f. 82-106 (3/12/16). The 6,900 ducats paid by Oets were equal to 96,600 mahmudis or Dfl. 41,055.

4. THE MISSION OF MOHAMMAD JA'FAR BEG

On April 4, 1715 the ship *Charlois* had arrived in Batavia with Macare, Mohammad Ja'far Beg and 23 servants. The Governor-General and his council decided to arrest Macare immediately, but to begin the trial only after Mohammad Ja'far Beg's departure. Mohammad Ja'far Beg did not inquire after Macare anymore, so the Governor-General handed him over to the attorney-general on May 3, 1715.¹

The translation of Mohammad Ja'far Beg's credentials took some time, so the official discussions with the VOC only started on June 24, 1715. During these talks it became clear that Mohammad Ja'far Beg had no authority to negotiate with the VOC about the proposed changes in the commercial treaty. He informed the VOC negotiating team that if the Company could not agree to the new treaty, it must send a plenipotentiary to Persia to open negotiations with the E'temad al-Douleh.

Mohammad Ja'far Beg also presented the VOC with a calculation of a Persian claim on the VOC and VOC personnel, most of which was on account of Backer Jacobz. About the latter he lodged a complaint with regard to his behaviour in general and his contacts with the Musqat Arabs in particular. He added that Backer Jacobz' behaviour towards himself had been offensive too. Mohammad Ja'far Beg took offence at the arrest of Macare and asked that he be given more freedom of movement out of respect to the E'temad al-Douleh.²

The second round of talks took place on July 23, 1715. During this discussion the VOC delegation informed Mohammad Ja'far Beg that the Governor-General had decided to send *Inas Jansz Ketelaar*³ as ambassador to Iran to discuss the outstanding problems next year. Backer Jacobz would be recalled to Batavia to give an account of himself in view of the many complaints about him. Mohammad Ja'far Beg was very pleased with these decisions. He also presented the VOC with a new document which he had been charged to hand to the Company. In view of the fact that Mohammad Ja'far Beg was about to return and the time it would take to translate the document properly, the VOC delegation proposed that Ketelaar should discuss its contents in Persia. But Mohammad Ja'far Beg insisted on a response by the VOC, so he gave them a summary of the document. The text raised seven issues:

- (i) An enquiry as to whether the VOC would agree to the terms of the new commercial treaty.
- (ii) An enquiry as to whether the VOC would pay the Persian claim of 14,695 tomans.
- (iii) A request to have Backer Jacobz and the other VOC servants pay their share of the Persian claim.
- (iv) A complaint about the behaviour of Backer Jacobz towards Mir Morteza.
- (v) A request to present the Persian government with a certified and sealed list of all VOC imports.
- (vi) A request to be allowed to buy goods to the value of 50,000 rijksdaalders at cost-price.
- (vii) A request to send young elephants to the Shah as soon as possible.

The VOC delegation responded with regard to points i, ii, iii, iv and v that these would be discussed by Ketelaar. With regard to point 7 the delegation submitted that the elephants had already been ordered from Ceylon. With regard to point 6, the delegation replied that compliance with that request was impossible in view of the fact that the Shah received quite a volume of 'recognitic' goods each year. Mohammad Ja'far Beg, who appeared to be satisfied with these reactions, asked whether Ketelaar's credentials might also be written in Portuguese.⁴

On July 31, 1715 Mohammad Ja'far Beg left Batavia aboard *'Geyn* because the E'temad al-Douleh had asked that he be back at the earliest convenience. For his expenses during the return voyage the VOC accorded him 360 rijksdaalders per month, while he also received 600 rijksdaalders' value in goods as a present. However, due to

contrary winds 'iGeyn only reached Surat on November 2, where he met Ketelaar. He left Surat on November 25 and arrived in Bandar 'Abbas on December 25, 1715. The VOC staff welcomed Mohammad Ja'far Beg with much pomp; and the latter expressed his satisfaction about his reception in Batavia.⁵

From Bandar 'Abbas, Mohammad Ja'far Beg wrote to the Governor-General to thank him for his reception in Batavia and to announce his safe arrival. He further informed the Governor-General about the fact that a lot of illegal private trading was carried on by VOC personnel. These goods were imported as if they were VOC property and in this way payment of customs and other imposts was circumvented. Mohammad Ja'far Beg especially accused the VOC interpreter and brokers of this practice, but at the same time also accused the director and his main staff members of this untoward activity. Mohammad Ja'far Beg submitted that he had forgotten to raise this issue in Batavia; it had only been during a conversation with Ketelaar in Surat that he had remembered it. He had also informed the VOC staff in Bandar 'Abbas about this matter and had requested them to send his letter to Batavia. Because he had received no reply from them, he concluded that they were probably involved in this practice. He requested the Governor-General to instruct Ketelaar to see to it that these practices were stopped, for they gave the VOC a bad name.⁶

On February 2, 1716, Oets reported that the E'temad al-Douleh had not been displeased with Mohammad Ja'far Beg's arrival. Moreover the latter said that he had been received very well at all VOC establishments. His only complaint was that his payment had not been sufficient to cover the cost of travel between Bandar 'Abbas and Esfahan. Although the E'temad al-Douleh and other courtiers did not believe this, Oets asked Batavia to send him a detailed statement of all presents and payments which Mohammad Ja'far Beg had enjoyed for his use if need arose.⁷

Mohammad Ja'far Beg arrived on March 14, 1716 in Esfahan. There he sang a totally different song. He complained that he had been totally ruined by this voyage because of the high cost involved. Moreover he had not been properly received and treated by the VOC representatives anywhere. The presents he had been given had been damaged during the voyage, so he had suffered a loss. The E'temad al-Douleh's secretary, Mirza Rafi'a, told Sahid that he was convinced that Mohammad Ja'far Beg had been well received everywhere and that one could not expect any reaction except of ingratitude. He had clearly raised these matters for personal gain, but nobody at court believed him. On May 1, 1716 Oets reported that nobody talked about Mohammad Ja'far Beg any more. Ketelaar nevertheless sent him a note on his arrival to renew their friendly relationship, although Batavia commented that Mohammad Ja'far Beg had not reacted properly to the honours shown him which had been more than due to his station.⁸

The new firman brought by Mohammad Ja'far Beg contained a summary of all earlier firmans which had been granted as well as a calculation of alleged arrears in payments of customs and imposts in view of the volume of past silk deliveries. Moreover, the Shah claimed that VOC servants had misused the privileges which he had granted to the VOC for their own gain, so that the farmers of the ducat-export tolls could not pay him his due. The Shah, therefore, had decided that all VOC goods would have to be sold according to old tradition to the merchants in Bandar 'Abbas. The latter then would have to pay the customs rates as well as the one per cent impost on specie export.⁹

Secondly, if the VOC wanted to take goods to Esfahan itself it would have to pay the divani imposts in accordance with the stipulations of the old firmans.

Thirdly, in order to prevent fraudulent transporting of goods of private merchants amongst those of the VOC, as had been done in the past eleven years as shown by the books of the VOC brokers, the Dutch would have to pack all their goods in Esfahan under the eyes of two royal supervisors. These goods would only be allowed to be transported when these men had issued a properly sealed pass or permit, which was to be shown to the road-guards (*rahdars*). Fourthly, the VOC would be allowed to export specie from Esfahan, but only on the condition of payment of a seven per cent impost and accompanied by a permit issued by the two above-mentioned royal supervisors.

Table 1: Sale of Goods by VOC in Esfahan (1652-1714)

Year	Mahmudis	Guilders
1652/53	31,263	12,505
1653/54	-	-
1654/55	-	-
1655/56	-	-
1656/57	36,620	11,417
1657/58	55,974	19,591
1658/59	-	-
1659/60	103,358	36,175
1660/61	206,299	72,204
1661/62	2,280	798
1662/63	7,048	2,466
1663/64	23,034	8,061
1664/65	58	20
1665/66	450	157
1666/67	-	-
1667/68	320	116
1668/69	100	42
1669/74	-	-
1674/75	81,990	34,849
1675/76	159,724	67,883
1676/77	74,097	31,491
1677/78	34,720	14,756
1678/79	202,778	86,265
1679/80	77,702	33,023
1680/81	169,909	72,211
1681/82	22,800	9,690
1682/83	64,246	27,304
1683/90	-	-
1690/91	266,590	113,300
1691/92	1,271,141	540,234
1692/93	32,688	13,892
1693/96	-	-
1696/97	4,162	1,718
1697/1703	-	-
1703/04	618	262
1704/14	-	-
Total:	2,926,185	1,210,493

100 Mahmudis = 1 toman

The Governor-General and his council took the following position regarding these four points, which Ketelaar had to use to argue the VOC's case in Esfahan. The previous firmans all stated unequivocally that the VOC had the right to trade freely anywhere in Persia, a fact which the new firman did not deny. However, although since 1645 the practice had been to sell VOC goods in Bandar 'Abbas this did not mean that sales were not made elsewhere as well. As the data in Table I show, from 1652 to 1714 a total of almost 30,000 tomans' worth was sold in Esfahan as well. The VOC would oppose any restriction on this right, the more so since it would allow merchants to form a cartel and corner the market, thereby forcing the VOC to accept the terms of the cartel. This would be impossible if the VOC could transport its goods elsewhere in Persia without having to pay duties.

The Shah allowed the VOC to continue this practice, but only on condition that it paid divani impost just like other merchants. This, however, was contrary to the right granted in 1652 by Shah 'Abbas II, to van Leene by Soleiman, and to Hoogkamer by Soltan Hosein in 1701. Then it was stated that the VOC was accorded total exemption from duties for import and export of goods to the value of 20,000 tomans. Moreover, van Leene had also acquired a confirmation of the right granted in 1632 exempting the VOC from rahdari. Finally the VOC had never paid any duties, and so the Shah's claim was not based on any precedent.

With regard to the third point, the examination of the packing of the goods and the obligation to have a permit, the Governor-General allowed that the 1635 and 1652 firmans appeared to bear the Shah out. For there it had been stated that a sealed permit issued by the vazir,¹⁰ *kalantar*¹¹ and a representative of the *darughch*¹² must be obtained as proof that only VOC goods were transported. Although this presupposed prior examination, the Governor-General argued that in fact this practice had fallen into disuse, the more so, since the minting of coins in Esfahan had been stopped and instead the impost on export of ducats introduced. Besides, the VOC had been given the right to forbid Persian officials to open its cases, chests, and bales. The Governor-General was prepared to give in on this point, nevertheless, as long as this did not result in less respect shown to the VOC, and delays, inconvenience, and trouble, and as long as the fact that the necessary porters, packers and other labour would not have to be paid for by the VOC.

With regard to the fourth point, the payment of an impost of seven per cent on the export on specie, the Governor-General considered this to be totally contrary to the right granted in 1695, stipulating that all proceeds exceeding the cash needed for the payment of silk could be exported and no mention of any impost was made. The Governor-General rejected the Shah's claim that this had not been explicitly stated, and that therefore he now could claim such payment. The Persian government knew perfectly well that the VOC could not spend all of the 20,000 tomans on silk, especially when little or no silk at all was delivered. Consequently, the remaining cash had also to be included in the exemption from taxes. If this were not the meaning of the firman it would be, the Governor-General argued, a totally superfluous and preposterous 'right'; in fact, a right not worth arguing over, since in that case the VOC was free to export specie like any other private merchant, provided it paid one per cent export duty.

With regard to the contents of the E'temad al-Douleh's letter, as well as to those points raised by Mohammad Ja'far Beg, the Governor-General concluded the following:

The E'temad al-Douleh had maintained that during the last eleven years, the VOC and its servants had neither paid duties on the export of specie, nor on the annual import of VOC goods above 20,000 tomans to a total amount of 17,907 tomans.

To be precise, the Shah claimed that during the period 1701-1711 some 1,709,245 golden ducats had been exported by the VOC from Esfahan. According to the VOC Esfahan trade books, the VOC had only exported 1,605,000 ducats during the same period, or 104,245 ducats less. In addition the Shah claimed that goods valued 44,399

Table 2: The E'temad al-Douleh's claim on the VOC and its servants

A. Duty on the export of 1,709,245 golden ducats at 60 dinars per ducat		tomans	dinars	
		10,255	4,700	
B. Customs at a rate of 10% on imports in Bandar 'Abbas exceeding the 20,000 tomans maximum:				
	tomans	dinars	tomans	dinars
year 1	3,432	-	343	2,000
year 2	1,273	5,535	127	3,550
year 3	1,999	5,400	199	9,540
year 4	7,189	3,500	718	9,350
year 5)	2,161	8,825	216	1,880
year 6)				
Year 7	5,707	6,225	570	7,620
year 8	4,692	5,900	469	2,590
year 9	3,987	9,800	398	7,980
year 10	13,954	8,450	1,395	4,845
year 11	blank			
Total	44,399	3,635	4,439	9,355
Total to be paid by VOC			14,695	4,055
Total to be paid by VOC servants			3,212	3,786
Total claim:			17,907	269

Table 3: Export of golden ducats by the VOC from Bandar 'Abbas (1701-12)

year	number of ducats	value in guilders
1701/02	180,000	1,149,100
1702/03	162,000	1,034,494
1703/04	124,000	792,012
1704/05	172,000	1,098,395
1705/06	57,600	367,814
1706/07	270,000	1,724,120
1707/08	138,000	881,126
1708/09	129,000	823,734
1709/10	179,000	1,143,008
1710/11	97,000	619,429
1711/12	256,000	1,834,577
Total:	1,764,600	11,267,814

tomans had been exported by the VOC from Bandar 'Abbas during that same period on which the VOC had not paid customs duties.

The Governor-General countered that, indeed, as shown in Table 3, the VOC had exported 1,764,600 ducats from Bandar 'Abbas during the reference period, or 55,356 more than the Shah had claimed. He therefore ordered Ketelaar to counter the Shah's claim with the following arguments: in the first place the Shah should allow a reduction of the total amount of goods exported exceeding the 20,000 tomans' annual limit with the amounts of less than 20,000 tomans' annual turnover by the VOC, which had been the case in some years. If that argument was not convincing enough, Ketelaar made the point that even if the VOC accepted the Shah's figure of 1,709,245 ducats, the amount of money due to the Shah was less than he claimed (Table 4).

Using the amount of 350,911 ducats as the basis for calculation, an outstanding export duty of only 3,509 tomans instead of 10,255 tomans could be claimed by the Shah. However, Ketelaar was not to give in on this point, but to point out that in reality the VOC had exported less than 11 x 20,000 tomans during the contested period. The Governor-General said that Ketelaar should press this point strongly, because the Persian government had no idea at all how much had been imported and exported. Moreover, the same line of argument had worked successfully some ten years earlier.

With regard to the claim of 4,439 tomans for goods imported exceeding the annual 20,000 tax-free limit, Ketelaar must determine the annual average turnover since 1652, proving that this average was less than 20,000 tomans. In addition, Ketelaar must point out that drafts remitted to Bandar 'Abbas also included old debts, monies collected from past years, and other such items. For Ketelaar's information, the Governor-General added that the VOC had indeed traded more than the 20,000 tomans tax-free limit during the eleven year period, as is shown in Table 5. Thus, the VOC had in fact sold 91,414 tomans of goods more than was allowed without paying ten per cent customs duties. The Shah could claim payment of 9,141 tomans in customs duties, instead of the 4,439 tomans claimed by him. In addition, 4,522 tomans more had been sold, without paying customs duties, during the period of 1711-1714, over which 452 tomans could be claimed, or a total of 4,974 tomans. However, Ketelaar was instructed not to agree to payment of unpaid customs duties under any circumstances. He was to point out that since 1652 the VOC had sold less than 20,000 tomans worth on an annual basis, as well as to use whatever other arguments suggested themselves. Furthermore, Ketelaar must make it clear that a withdrawal of the VOC from Persia would result in a decline of the royal revenues.

The Governor-General also instructed Ketelaar to look into the claims made on the VOC interpreter and VOC brokers to ascertain whether these claims could be substantiated with documentary evidence. The same approach was to be taken with regard to the claims on the other (i.e. Dutch) VOC servants, even though some of them had died.

How to deal with the complaints made by Moslem merchants to the effect that the VOC gave them a worse deal than other non-Moslem merchants the Governor-General left to Ketelaar's judgement, since these complaints were unspecified and without evidence. Nevertheless, Ketelaar was to investigate this matter carefully to determine whether the accusations were true. If concrete cases of misconduct by VOC staff could be established Ketelaar, of course must take disciplinary action.

With regard to the accusation against Backer Jacobz, that he had been in contact with the Musqat Arabs, the enemies of the Shah, Ketelaar would have to demand more information and above all proof. He was also to assure the Shah that such contacts had been and were still forbidden to VOC servants.

The E'temad al-Douleh also asked for an official invoice of all goods which the VOC imported into Persia in order to prevent any kind of fraud. (The E'temad al-Douleh for his part promised to hand over a sealed document stating what the court and the Persian merchants exported to Batavia). The Governor-General had no problem in granting this request, especially since in 1647 the VOC had offered such invoices to Shah Abbas II. He also understood the reason for the E'temad al-Douleh's asking for such an invoice, while for his part he believed that it might put a check on the obnoxious private trading. He also realised that such information might be misused

Table 4: Summary of the Shah's claim

Transported from Esfahan 98,906 lb of silk at 10,666 tomans purchased from the Shah during four different years, as well as some other goods during the 11 year period at 16,250 tomans or total:	1,709,245 ducats 108,333 ducats
Tax exemption on 20,000 tomans per year during 11 years	1,466,666 ducats
Exported from Esfahan exceeding tax exemption	350,911 ducats

Table 5: VOC's Annual sales in Bandar 'Abbas (1701-11)

year	tomans	mahmudis	guilders
1701/02	22,236	90	945,068
1702/03	23,332	32	991,623
1703/04	31,331	92	1,331,606
1704/05	1,214	62	51,621
1705/06	57,516	79	2,444,463
1706/07	32,011	24	1,360,477
1707/08	35,502	24	1,508,845
1708/09	30,530	75	1,297,556
1709/10	34,717	23	1,475,482
1710/11	23,020	9	978,853
Total	291,414	10	12,385,099

by the Persian authorities, by forcing merchants to bid jointly at lower prices, or not to buy certain goods at all, or by buying the best goods themselves.

The Governor-General did not have high hopes of restoring the VOC's rights by instructing Ketelaar to show that the E'temad al-Douleh was wrong and the VOC was right. Oets had already reported on the vexations he had experienced. It was therefore decided that Ketelaar would be allowed, if need be, to give a large present to the Shah in order to get the confirmation of the old privileges. Another option was to draw out the negotiations to such lengths that the Shah and the E'temad al-Douleh would become more amenable just to finish the whole business.

In any case Ketelaar must refuse on all counts to pay export duties on ducats and he was to try and make merchants pay in ducats in Bandar 'Abbas, although they claimed that they were unable to do so in a special letter to the Governor-General. It seemed that the only way would be to pay the impost.

Notes

1. KA 865, f. 846-47 (31/8/15); VOC 1862, f. 2479-80
2. VOC 1812, Report by the commission chaired by Director-General Frans Castelijn (27/9/16), ff. 1079-1253
3. For biographical data on Ketelaar see Vogel, 1937; Ketelaar had not been the Governor-General's first choice as envoy. He had first appointed Six, the Governor of Malacca on July 9, 1715. When the latter refused ten days later, the Governor-General appointed Ketelaar in his place the same day. KA 732, Realia resolution Governor-General, f. 113
4. KA 865 (31/8/15), f. 876-77
5. *Ibid.*, f. 880; VOC 1886 (25/2/16), f. 406; *Ibid.*, (15/2/16) f. 65-67
6. VOC 1886, (n.d.), f. 408-411
7. VOC 1886 (2/2/16), f. 428
8. VOC 1897 (30/11/16), f. 33-35; KA 869 (20/7/17), f. 680
9. The remainder of this chapter is based on the Castelijn commission's report, VOC 1812, in particular folios 1079-1113
10. Vazir, or deputy-governor
11. Kalantar, or mayor. See Floor, 1971b
12. Darugheh, or chief of the market police. See Floor, 1971a

5. WOOL TRADE PROBLEMS IN KERMAN (1716-1717)

The VOC had begun buying wool in Kerman in 1658, but discontinued these activities in 1667, because the wool trade yielded no profit. In 1672 they returned to Kerman and were able to make a profit until 1678. Thereafter the Dutch experienced a lot of trouble owing to British competition. In 1694 the English East India Company (EIC) even managed to convince the Persian authorities to forbid the Dutch to trade in Kerman. However, the Dutch were able to get their rights restored by royal decree later the same year.

It was customary for the VOC and EIC representatives in Kerman to advance money to the wool traders either at the beginning or the end of the season. The wool traders in their turn distributed the money amongst the herd owners to guarantee the delivery of wool during the next wool season. After having made their pre-sales trip through the wool-producing areas, the wool traders returned to Kerman where they stayed until March. In that month they again asked for an advance from the representatives of the European Companies in exchange for which they gave an IOU. After having received the money, the wool traders returned to the wool-producing areas to collect the current year's clip. Thus the wool trade was based on the wool sellers having a current account with the purchasers. If a wool trader was not able to settle his account with one of the Companies, the latter would not force him to pay his debt, but extended his credit to the following wool season.

After the wool had been delivered to the Dutch, they would check its quality and origin; then it would be cleaned and packed in bales. The wool carders earned seven to twelve paisas per day. In order to see that they worked well they were checked at least every day. In cleaning the wool about 25 per cent of their weight was lost. After cleaning, the wool was packed in sacks soaked in brine holding fifteen mans (each man of 90 lb), while salt was added as a preservative against moths.¹

Because the wool trade conflicted with the interests of several guilds of weavers (shawl, cloth) the European Companies could only purchase goats' wool in accordance with a special decree from the Shah. This was an effective deterrent against the protests raised by these guilds.

To enhance the probability of a trouble-free trading season the European Companies gave the beglerbegi (governor-general) of Kerman an annual present with the request that he support their local office in carrying on its trading activities. The Dutch (like the English) had a trading office in Kerman which was managed by two Armenian Persians. These "wool factors" were directly responsible to the VOC director in Bandar 'Abbas, to whom they regularly reported on trade and other events; their correspondence was carried on in Armenian. In Bandar 'Abbas it was translated into Persian and from Persian into Dutch. During the conflict which arose between Ebrahim Khan, Beglerbegi of Kerman, and the VOC, Hovannes and Gajatur, two Armenian VOC servants, were in charge of the Kerman trading station. They received a salary of 25 tomans (Dfl. 1,062) per year; in addition they received Dfl. 0.51 to pay for the rent of the house they lived in.²

Despite the annual present, the relationship between the beglerbegis of Kerman and the VOC was not always a smooth one. In fact the conflict of 1716 and the resulting problems were not unique. Both before and after that date, for example in 1712 and in 1720, the beglerbegi of Kerman extorted money from the VOC servants as well.

On September 19, 1716 Hovannes and Gajatur reported to Bandar 'Abbas that a few days earlier, Ebrahim Khan, the Beglerbegi had sallied forth from Kerman to attack a force of marauding Baluchis. Ebrahim Khan was defeated, however, at a village eight miles from Kerman and fled with his remaining troops to Kerman where he entrenched himself in a fortified house, leaving his baggage train and military equipment in the hands of the Baluchis, who pursued Ebrahim Khan and laid siege to Kerman plundering and burning a few villages situated around the city. They were soon able to take and sack the city and a great number of people were killed, while a great many more of the survivors were taken away into slavery and many houses were destroyed. Because of his weak military position Ebrahim Khan feared for his life.

He therefore made an agreement with the Baluchis in return for the payment of 2,000 tomans or Dfl. 85,000, that they would cease their destructive activities and leave Kerman.

Because Ebrahim Khan did not have that much money, he imposed a tax on the population of Kerman. Apart from the Persian citizens, the Banyans (Indian traders) as well as the VOC and the EIC representatives also had to pay. Ebrahim Khan demanded 210 tomans (Dfl. 8,925) from the VOC servants and 250 tomans from the EIC servants. Hovannes and Gajatur refused to pay, however, since the imposition of contributions on VOC servants had been prohibited by a royal decree of 1703. Ebrahim Khan was more worried about the Baluchis, and what they might do to him, than about the royal decree and imprisoned the VOC servants to make them see sense. To reinforce the strength of his arguments he had them given the bastinado twice a day, and subjected to this forceful treatment, the VOC servants gave in and paid. When the money was collected, Ebrahim Khan's servants also helped themselves to a few pistols, seven tomans and a silver dagger which belonged to the VOC servants.³

The news of the pillaging Baluchis had also reached the court in Esfahan. Shah Soltan Hosein appointed Mohammad 'Ali Khan as *sardar* (general) over the troops to deal with the Baluchis. The newly appointed sardar left Esfahan with about 1,000 soldiers only on October 1, 1716 and therefore, as the chief of the VOC trading station in Esfahan remarked, probably would have come too late to be effective.⁴

Bandar 'Abbas immediately ordered the Esfahan office to protest to the E'temad al-Douleh about Ebrahim Khan's behaviour and to demand repayment of the sum of money which had been extorted. Hovannes and Gajatur meanwhile had sent a statement to the Esfahan office, witnessed by all the important merchants of Kerman about the whole affair. Hovannes himself had taken the statement to Esfahan, for he feared further forceful actions by Ebrahim Khan, and from Esfahan he sent on to Bandar 'Abbas. Communications between Esfahan and Kerman had become insecure owing to increased activities by robbers, so the Esfahan office sent a messenger dressed in the clothes of a pilgrim in the hope that he would be left alone.⁵

Jan Oets, the VOC chief in Esfahan, decided not to lodge a protest with the E'temad al-Douleh, for he would immediately show the protest to Ebrahim Agha. The latter, chief of the white eunuchs, was a friend of the VOC and an uncle of Ebrahim Khan, and a man too important to antagonize. Oets therefore addressed himself directly to Ebrahim Agha who said that he appreciated it very much that Oets had taken the matter to him. He assured Oets that he would see to it personally that the matter would be set right. Owing to the insecurity of the roads he had sent one letter to his nephew to Kerman directly and another one via Bandar 'Abbas. In this letter Ebrahim Agha ordered his nephew to repay the money to the VOC servants to assist them in the execution of their work.⁶

On January 15, 1717 another letter from Kerman finally arrived in Bandar 'Abbas after two months of silence. Gajatur, the remaining VOC servant in Kerman, described the total upheaval that had resulted in the destruction of the city by the Baluchis. He had handed over Ketelaar's letter to Ebrahim Khan, who had not bothered to reply and had immediately left the city for the village of Baghin, seven miles out of town, where he had remained till the end of Ramadan. On his return to Kerman, the VOC servants had tried without success to get access to him, and they finally received a letter from Ebrahim Khan addressed to Ketelaar.⁷

Because of his behaviour during and after the sack of Kerman, Ebrahim Khan had lost all his authority and the respect of the population. Everybody acted as if he was not there and Ebrahim Khan was unable to maintain law and order.

The community does not any longer want to acknowledge him as Governor-General and therefore the city is in a turmoil. If His Excellency, however, does give an order the whole population turns out in a mob with the intention of taking his life. This causes him to sit quietly at home and refrain from interfering with anything. Those who go only one step out of the city are attacked by His Excellency's troops, so that the daily news is only about murders and killings on one side or the other. Nobody has the courage even to

go to the mills to fetch flour, unless they are accompanied by five or six soldiers in order to face the violence committed by the Governor-General's troops. During the night doors of houses are smashed open. Those who oppose them are killed and their property is stolen, nobody is certain of his life anymore. One of the Beglerbegi's captains named Schrafeddin beccq, who could not stand any more, has left and gone to Esfahan. En route he was overtaken by some robbers; these scoundrels infest the roads of Yazd, Esfahan, Shiraz and other places. No caravan can pass without being plundered and those accompanying it being killed.

Towards the end of December 1716 Ebrahim Agha's letter to his nephew had arrived in Kerman. The VOC servants again pressed several times for the repayment of the money extorted from them, but Ebrahim Khan only replied that he would think about it, so they had little confidence about the repayment. Around January 20, 1717 Ebrahim Khan sent some of his men to the villages of Shirjan and Khabid in order to "borrow" 200 tomans from the Banyans who were living there. The Indians refused to lend any money to Ebrahim Khan, and two of them were beaten to death and the 200 tomans taken by force from the other Banyans. The VOC servants commented that extorting money from the Banyans and the Zoroastrians was the only thing Ebrahim Khan still had the power to do.

For there is a man in the city named, 'Abd al-Khaleq, who has 400 soldiers in his service with whom he protects the city against the Governor-General's violence and obstructs anything he undertakes. They have been several times on top of a high caravansaray which is close to the Governor-General's house, from where they have fired continuously with match-locks loaded with balls at the said Governor-General's house. He therefore does not dare to come outside and it is believed that most of his servants and ushers have left him. Because of this state of affairs the Company's business cannot possibly be furthered.

This last remark expresses their fear that the VOC would not be able to get its money back from Ebrahim Khan. These fears increased because towards the end of December 1716 Pir Mohammad, the attorney and the spy of the chief of the Baluchis, Mir Khalil, had been murdered in Kerman. His servants had fled to Mir Khalil who was rumoured to be marching towards Kerman at the head of 6,000 men to teach Kerman a lesson. Although these rumours faded away after some time, the population was uncertain about the future and therefore started to construct a wall around the city. Apart from the confused political and social situation, Kerman was also suffering from food shortages as a result of a drought in 1716.

The VOC servants reported on January 17, 1717 that according to their sources of information, Ebrahim Khan had been very much upset by his uncle's letter. Ketelaar had sent them the same letter (which had come via Bandar 'Abbas) but they preferred to wait for Ebrahim Khan's return to Kerman before they handed it to him. At that time Ebrahim Khan had gone to the village of Firiz to amuse himself and to exercise his troops. The VOC servants also reported that it was rumoured in Kerman that Ebrahim Khan would be dismissed by the Shah and that someone called 'Ali Qoli Khan or Rostam Mirza would be appointed in his place.

Meanwhile a new kalantar or burgomaster, Mirza Baqer, had arrived in Kerman. It was said that the Shah had ordered him to demand from the population of Kerman, 1,700 tomans so that Ebrahim Khan could repay his debts, which he had incurred to pay off the Baluchis. Hovannes and Gajatur considered this unlikely because of the continuing violence and upheaval in the city to which Ebrahim Khan was unable to put a stop.⁶

On January 22, 1717 the VOC servants handed his uncle's letter to Ebrahim Khan. After reading the letter he asked them: "who has given the orders to beat and insult you?". Hovannes replied that Ebrahim himself had ordered his majordomo (*nazer*) Aqa Reza to do so. Ebrahim Khan then asked who had stolen the pistols, the

money and the dagger. Hovannes said that Aqa Reza had done so. Ebrahim Khan then ordered his majordomo to appear before him, who he vilified and scolded, for he had only ordered him to ask for, not extort, a loan of 200 tomans. He then ordered that Aqa Reza be manacled and locked in his stable.

Ebrahim Khan apologized to Hovannes for what his men had done to him and promised that he would repay the money personally. Although Aqa Reza was kept imprisoned for ten days and received a bastinado daily, Hovannes knew the man with whom he was dealing and therefore asked for the repayment of the money every day, but to no avail. When the VOC servants heard that Ebrahim Khan had ordered his soldiers to force Aqa Reza to pay 300 tomans in order to buy his freedom, Hovannes and Gajatur immediately presented themselves to Ebrahim Khan and asked for their money. Ebrahim Khan repeated his promise to pay, but he added that he needed those 300 tomans to pay for a military expedition which he was about to undertake; but as soon as he was back he would not fail to pay. The VOC servants, however, did not trust Ebrahim Khan and therefore requested repayment of their money in writing on February 3, 1717.

To make it clear to Ebrahim Khan that the VOC meant business, Hovannes and Gajatur informed the wool traders that the VOC would discontinue its trading activities in Kerman until Ebrahim Khan repaid their money and stopped his violent actions. They also told the wool traders, who all worked with money advanced to them, that they would have to repay these advances in cash. This news caused consternation among the local trading community, which immediately organized a meeting. The traders drew up a request to the Kalantar asking him for assistance in this matter. They further informed Hovannes and Gajatur that they did not have any money, for they in turn had advanced money to the owners of the herds. It was therefore impossible for them to pay their advances in cash. Moreover, if the VOC stopped trading in Kerman, they would not be able to earn a living and the traders therefore asked them to reconsider their decision.

The Kalantar sent for Hovannes and asked him whether it was really necessary to cause so much anxiety. Why did the VOC want to stop its trade and to have its advances back? Would not it be possible for the wool traders to repay them in wool instead of in cash? Hovannes replied that the VOC would gladly stay in Kerman if the old situation was reinstated, so that the Company could carry on its trade without any problems. However, in view of the current state of affairs he had received orders to close the trading station. The Kalantar asked the reason for that decision, whereupon Hovannes explained that Ebrahim Khan's refusal to repay the money extorted from the VOC was the cause of it all. The Kalantar said that that had happened before his arrival, and that, so long as he was Kalantar of Kerman, such events would not be repeated. He promised Hovannes that he would go to Ebrahim Khan and induce him to repay the money to the VOC. He also would write to the Director in Bandar 'Abbas to request him to allow Hovannes and Gajatur to carry on their trade as usual.

The Kalantar kept his word and went to see Ebrahim Khan. He drew his attention to the consequences for Kerman of a VOC withdrawal: it would impoverish the city, which depended for its wealth on the trade with the VOC and EIC; more than 400 people depended for their livelihood directly on the VOC. Ebrahim Khan then asked him why the VOC wanted to leave and the Kalantar replied that it was because the VOC was paid no respect in Kerman and the Governor-General there extorted money from it. Ebrahim Khan promised that he would repay the VOC.

The day after the Kalantar's visit, Hovannes went to see Ebrahim Khan who received him in a very friendly manner and ordered his mace-bearer to give Hovannes a place to sit. After having ascertained that the VOC indeed intended to leave Kerman, he solemnly promised to repay him the money.

On February 17, 1717 a tabin (subordinate official) of the E'temad al-Douleh arrived with a royal decree demanding 1,700 tomans from the population. This amount would be given to Ebrahim Khan to repay the money he had 'borrowed' during the Baluchi raid. The tabin, Tahmasp Beg, seeing the upheaval in Kerman and the fact that Ebrahim Khan no longer had any authority whatsoever, did not have the

courage to show the royal decree and collect the money. The VOC servants continued to press Ebrahim Khan to repay the money which he invariably promised to do.

This situation continued until March 18, 1717 when a messenger arrived from Esfahan and immediately went to see Ebrahim Khan. That very night Ebrahim Khan sent his baggage to Esfahan and, pretending to go off on a hunting trip himself, followed some time later. Hovannes and Gajatur as well as other creditors heard about his departure the next day; they immediately rode hard after him and overtook him in the village of Baghin where he had stopped, eight miles from Kerman. Hovannes drew Ebrahim Khan's attention to the fact that he had left without settling his debt. Ebrahim Khan replied that Tahmasp Beg would settle all his debts. Hovannes replied that he had no business with Tahmasp Beg, for it was His Excellency who had extorted the money and not Tahmasp Beg. Ebrahim Khan said that if Tahmasp Beg would not pay, then he would pay the VOC representative in Esfahan, for he had no cash with him. Hovannes was willing to agree to this arrangement, if Ebrahim Khan would sign a statement to that effect, which he would prepare on the spot. Ebrahim Khan refused to do so and mounted his horse; Hovannes followed him on foot for another half mile. In the meantime, Ebrahim Khan had become so irritated that he bitingly told Hovannes that he had better leave before he had his head taken off. He finally ordered his servants to beat Hovannes and chase him away, calling after him that if he dared to continue pestering him he would have his bones broken. Hovannes decided to return to Kerman.

Despite Ebrahim Khan's angry mood and his behaviour towards Hovannes, other creditors nevertheless dared to approach him. These, all Banyans, who had a claim of 1,200 tomans on Ebrahim Khan, asked him to pay or to sign an IOU. To show his appreciation for their trouble in following him, Ebrahim Khan extorted another 25 tomans from them and had them beaten up by his servants. Because the Banyans had no money with them they gave him a draft on Esfahan for the amount.

On March 15, 1717 a messenger from Esfahan arrived in Kerman with the news that Ebrahim Khan had been relieved of all his functions and that the Shah had appointed in his place Rostam Mirza, the Qollar aghasi bashi. However, he would stay at court and send his brother, Mohammad Qoli Khan as his deputy or na'eb.

After Ebrahim Khan's departure, peace and quiet returned to Kerman and life returned to normal. The fact that the worst rains in living memory had poured down on Kerman from March 3 to 11 undoubtedly helped to cool heated tempers. The rains also raised hope of a good harvest, which was really necessary in view of the high prices of basic necessities. In March bread cost one and three-tenths Mahmudis per man (weighing four and a half lb), which was twice the normal price.

On March 18, 1717 another messenger arrived from Esfahan confirming the news about Ebrahim Khan's dismissal and the appointment of Rostam Mirza as Governor-General. He also brought the news that, at Rostam Mirza's request, the Shah had repealed the order to demand 1,700 tomans from the population of Kerman. Moreover, it was also intimated that the population might get a tax exemption for one year, which caused much rejoicing in the city. Hovannes immediately went to see Tahmasp Beg and ask for his money, but was told by this official that his orders had been withdrawn and that he had no money, having been unable to collect anything. The VOC servants therefore immediately informed the Esfahan office of Ebrahim Khan's expected arrival in Esfahan and requested them to demand repayment by him of the debt to the VOC.⁹

On April 1, 1717 the Deputy Governor, Mohammad Qoli Khan arrived in Kerman. He was a boy of fourteen years old, and was accompanied by his chief adviser, Mohammad Ja'far Beg, who was de facto Governor-General. The latter immediately restored law and order in the city as well as the authority of the Governor-General by behaving impartially towards both poor and rich; for example four important persons were given the bastinado and died as a result. The effect of the new administration was to restore peace and quiet in the city, although basic necessities remained expensive and scarce.

Around April 5, 1717 a messenger from Esfahan, Gorgin Beg, arrived with six robes of honour for the chiefs of the Baluchis. He also carried six royal decrees, made

out in their names, offering them restoration of their previous revenues if they would acknowledge the Shah's authority again. On May 18, 1717 Gorgin Beg returned from Baluchistan with five Baluchi chiefs, who were received with much pomp in Kerman. The Governor-General gave them all robes of honour, a golden dagger and a golden hookah, and declared that during their stay in the city the state would defray their expenses.¹⁰

Meanwhile the wool season had begun again. The VOC servants in Kerman urged the head office in Bandar 'Abbas to send cash soon, for the English had been very busy giving advances to their wool traders, while the Dutch had already lost two months. In Esfahan, Ebrahim Khan had not paid his debt to the VOC, but he had not been given a new post so he could not escape from the VOC's attentions by moving on.¹¹

Life in Kerman in May 1717 was still very unpleasant, despite the re-establishment of law and order. Necessities were still very expensive. A man (weighing four and a half lb) of barley bread cost one and four-fifths Mahmudis, the same man of butter, eleven Mahmudis and both were hard to find. The result was that the majority of the poor had gone into the countryside to collect herbs, roots, seeds, vegetables etc. but could not survive on such a diet, dying like the cats and dogs everywhere in the city. Fortunately the wheat crop looked promising and high hopes were held out for the June harvest.¹²

The wool trade did not flourish and Bandar 'Abbas delayed sending the customary annual present for the Governor-General. In September 1717 Hovannes and Gajatur asked Bandar 'Abbas to send cash for the coming year's clip, because of the high rate of mortality among the herds and the forcing up of wool prices by the English. The wool factors feared that if the VOC did not make advances at that time, it would have great difficulty in acquiring a fair share of the wool clip which would be considerably less than in the current year.¹³

Life in Kerman had returned to normal again, and foodstuffs were available in sufficient quantities. The Baluchi chiefs were still in Kerman and were paid much respect by the authorities. The external threat had been contained, for the time being at least. Through the death of 'Abd al-Khaleq, the internal threat had been robbed of its leader, for 'Abd al-Khaleq had not only opposed Ebrahim Khan, but also the new Governor-General in August 1717. The new administration, however, was of a different nature from that of Ebrahim Khan. Under the pretext of wishing to bring about a reconciliation, the Deputy Governor had invited 'Abd al-Khaleq to his house. 'Abd al-Khaleq agreed to come and when he entered the Deputy Governor's house he was immediately beaten to death, taken outside and hung by his feet from morning till afternoon as an example to other potential rebels. In the evening he was buried.¹⁴

Notes

1. VOC 1999, f. 347-49 (28/6/22)
2. VOC 1999, unfoliated (15/11/22)
3. VOC 1897, f. 311 (19/9/16); *Ibid.*, f. 311 (30/11/16)
4. VOC 1897, f. 293 (4/10/16)
5. VOC 1897, f. 27-30 (30/11/16)
6. VOC 1897, f. 234-35 (14/11/16)
7. VOC 1897, f. 55 (21/1/17); *Ibid.*, f. 123 (8/3/17); *Ibid.*, f. 359-64 (2/1/17)
8. VOC 1897, f. 365-67 (17/1/17)
9. VOC 1913, f. 164-80 (25/3/17); *Ibid.*, f. 207-08 (5/4/17); *Ibid.*, f. 156-58 (14/4/17)
10. VOC 1913, f. 181-83 (8/4/17)
11. VOC 1913, f. 184-86 (17/5/17)
12. VOC 1913, f. 160 (25/3/17)
13. VOC 1913, f. 191-94 (25/9/17)
14. VOC 1913, f. 190-91 (25/8/17)

6. KETELAAR'S NEGOTIATIONS IN ESFAHAN

On July 24, 1716 Ketelaar left Batavia on board *de Beverweert* accompanied by a staff of six VOC administrative employees and a guard of twelve soldiers. On October 2, 1716 he arrived in Bandar 'Abbas. Notwithstanding his illness, which would cause him trouble throughout his mission, he participated in visits, return visits and other required diplomatic activities.¹

On January 26, 1717 the elephants arrived for the Shah on *de Leijtsman* from Ceylon as well as the letters from the Governor-General on *de Naters*. The elephants were landed with a lot of trouble after which they were officially transferred to the Deputy Governor (*janeshin*), Khosrou Beg. The E'temad al-Douleh had already given orders to Mirza Nur Allah, Governor of Lar, to see to it that the elephants were properly fed and transported to Esfahan in October 1716.²

The E'temad al-Douleh had also offered to pay the expenses of Ketelaar and his suite, which he declined. Ketelaar had orders to that effect, and Batavia was not pleased that Ketelaar eventually accepted payment of these expenses for his trips to Esfahan when the Persians insisted. It would have been better Batavia argued, not to have accepted any payment at all, for the Persians might conclude that his mission was of greater importance and status than Batavia had given it, and would consequently act upon such a belief during the negotiations.³

On March 27, 1717 Ketelaar finally left Bandar 'Abbas accompanied by two junior merchants, who had orders to keep themselves informed of all matters pertaining to the mission in order to take over from Ketelaar if anything were to happen to him; there were also two assistants charged with keeping the diary and financial accounts of the mission, and twelve soldiers who performed various functions such as barber, tailor, musician, and wig-maker. On the orders of the Governor-General they only bore arms during the voyage.⁴

During his stay in Shiraz, Ketelaar talked with the principal merchants, who had complained about the behaviour of the VOC staff in letters to the Governor-General as well as to Ketelaar himself soon after his arrival. In particular those merchants who called themselves (improperly) the Royal Company, had complained. They wanted to do business with Ketelaar, who told them that they had to go to Bandar 'Abbas as usual. They replied that in that case they feared that they could not do business with the VOC that year, but when Ketelaar asked the reason for this attitude, he did not get a clear answer. He also asked them to tell him in what way the VOC staff had misbehaved towards them, but the merchants asserted that they had never written anything of the kind. Ketelaar was flabbergasted and referred to their letters, and the merchants replied that this misunderstanding was probably due to a bad translation. Ketelaar then showed them their letters and for a long time the merchants looked reproachfully at one another. Finally the most important merchant, Hajji 'Abd al-Reza said that he had nothing to do with those letters. Ketelaar once again invited the others to speak freely to him about the behaviour of the VOC staff, but the merchants unanimously stated that they had no complaints whatsoever, and the letters must be regarded as well-intended communications. Ketelaar admonished them to write more carefully in the future and to continue to do business with the VOC. The only complaint raised during the meeting was that the VOC broker, Darmidas, was said to prefer some merchants to others. Ketelaar promised that this would not happen again.⁵

Although Ketelaar had refused to take the elephants for the Shah with him, these followed more slowly behind his company. Some courtiers had advised François Sahid, the VOC interpreter in Esfahan that it would be more prestigious for Ketelaar to make his entry into the city with the elephants, so he had to wait for them. The Persian officials had not covered the elephants with cloth covers as they had been ordered, and the VOC had to pay for these expenses. Thus, preceded by the six elephants, Ketelaar finally made his colourful entry with much pomp on May 31, 1717.⁶

Meanwhile the negotiations with the merchants had started in Bandar 'Abbas. From the difficult start of the discussions, it was clear that Ketelaar had not

succeeded in smoothing over relations between the parties, for the merchants had asked for a detailed statement of goods which had recently been landed by the VOC, information which had never been supplied hitherto. The customary procedure was that the merchants paid a visit to the VOC warehouses. In the case of bulk goods, trade was conducted on the basis of rough estimates rather than precise weights. Piece goods were treated differently; in this case merchants were assured that no goods would be sent to Esfahan and were given detailed information. Van Biesum, the Acting Director, told the merchants that any change in the customary procedure could be reported to him. The merchants however, followed the old procedure and visited the warehouses for two days. After the inspection, they declared that there were too many goods and suggested that they would only buy bulk goods, especially sugar. Van Biesum finally gave them a list of all goods available after much discussion.

On May 12, 1717 the merchants (or rather their agents) met with van Biesum again and submitted their prices, which he considered much too low. They allowed him three days to decide for they would not wait any longer, nor were they willing to pay for the goods with cash instead of with drafts. They asked van Biesum for a letter stating that no business had been possible on the basis of their bids, which they wanted to show to Ketelaar.

On May 17, 1717 van Biesum made a counter-bid for cash payments. The agents replied that business would only be possible if the principal merchants could pay with drafts at eight months' sight and the other merchants with drafts at five months' sight. Van Biesum could not agree to this, for Batavia had given orders that only sales against cash payments were allowed.⁷

The shahbandar, Mirza Nur Allah, tried to mediate between the two parties. He told the VOC interpreter, Bufkens, that the VOC brokers were to blame for the delay in concluding business, but that they were willing to deal directly with a Dutchman. Bufkens told him that in that case they should contact van Biesum directly, but he intimated that the merchants were to blame. Ketelaar had delayed his departure to Esfahan in order to deal with the merchants himself, but they had not appeared, and apparently did not want to be reasonable. Mirza Nur Allah informed Bufkens that the merchants would leave in six days' time and the business must be concluded before then. The merchants were willing to pay in cash on condition that the prices were lowered. Van Biesum refused to agree to this proposal, particularly in view of the fact that he knew that the agents did not have any cash with them.⁸

On July 10, 1717 the agents of the principal merchants, in particular Hajji Hosein and Hajji Yuscf, and the other merchants left Bandar 'Abbas. Van Biesum was quite taken aback, for he feared that he would be stuck with the goods. However, the brokers reported on July 18 that some merchants had stayed and were willing to do business. They visited the Dutch factory on July 19 and concluded a sale with payments by drafts at 3 months' sight, which had been made possible by new instructions from Batavia allowing sale against payment by drafts on condition that large volumes of goods were sold.⁹

Van Biesum was very happy with the result, which was better than he had hoped for if the agents of the principal merchants had remained in Bandar 'Abbas. If Hajji Hosein had stayed, no merchant would have dared to conclude the deal. Hajji Hosein wrote an angry letter to the merchants from Lar, accusing them of having broken the agreement not to buy any goods from the VOC that year. He threatened to take up this matter with their principals in Esfahan and to make them pay for it.¹⁰

Ketelaar commented upon these events as follows: it was clear that the principal merchants had tried to stage a coup and define the terms of commercial transactions to their own benefit. He had also discussed the matter of the accusations against the VOC staff with the merchants in Esfahan and had met the same reaction as in Shiraz. Nevertheless, some of the principal merchants had tried to influence the E'temad al-Doulch so that he would issue orders disadvantageous to the VOC. They spent as much as 1,000 tomans on him, his secretary, the Mostoufi-ye khasseh and other officials. It was to no avail, however, for Ketelaar reported on October 4, 1717 that the principal merchants had met with the E'temad al-Doulch and had been turned down. The merchants reacted by publicly demanding the restitution of their bribes, but they

harvested only shame and derision. According to Ketelaar the cause of the sale in Bandar 'Abbas had been the improved atmosphere in the negotiations with the E'temad al-Douleh after July 1717.¹¹

Only four days after his arrival, Ketelaar was received by the E'temad al-Douleh in audience. Ketelaar presented the letters from the Governor-General and had the elephants perform a show. Although little was said, the reception was reasonably friendly. The E'temad al-Douleh did not forget to inquire whether Ketelaar had other presents than elephants. On June 12, 1717 the Shah received Ketelaar in audience.¹²

The first business meeting with the E'temad al-Douleh took place on July 11, 1717.

Here the mask of feigned politeness was dropped, and the prime minister showed a brusque and totally disagreeable manner, while putting his moustaches in order by running through them many times with his greedy hands, possibly to inspire more respect and fright, for truly if one can defeat an enemy with big and long moustaches the Persians will always win.

The discussion was in fact a repetition of those carried on between the E'temad al-Douleh and Oets for many months in 1715. The E'temad al-Douleh told Ketelaar that the VOC must purchase 300 cargoes of silk per year from the Shah in exchange for exemption from customs to an amount of 20,000 tomans of imports and exports, or the VOC would have to pay customs and imposts just like ordinary merchants.

Ketelaar replied that he had come expressly to settle amicably the difficulties which had arisen about the privileges granted to Hoogkamer in 1701 and to effect the revocation of the disadvantageous decrees issued recently in an amicable fashion. The E'temad al-Douleh submitted that this was impossible, because the old privileges were detrimental to the Shah. If the VOC was not willing to carry on its trade on the basis of the arrangement he had proposed, it could leave Persia, especially since the Company only imported goods such as rags, wool, fruits, and treebark into this kingdom, which others could easily import just as well or could be dispensed with altogether, whilst (the Company) for the greater part exported most of the country's money.¹³

Ketelaar tried at length to convince the E'temad al-Douleh of the validity of his points of view, and then he informed him that if it was impossible to reach a reasonable settlement he would have to write to Batavia for further instructions. The E'temad al-Douleh became very angry and said that Mohammad Ja'far Beg had made it quite clear that the VOC must send a plenipotentiary. In a brusque manner he asked Ketelaar why, if he was not a plenipotentiary he had bothered to come, because otherwise he would have concluded the whole matter with Oets. Ketelaar replied that Mohammad Ja'far Beg had only asked that somebody of importance and authority be sent, and he had never asked for a plenipotentiary. The E'temad al-Douleh persisted in his position and wanted an agreement only on the basis of his proposal. Ketelaar saw that no progress could be made so he suggested that the E'temad al-Douleh appoint a negotiating committee. After more lengthy discussions, the E'temad al-Douleh agreed to this as a favour, stipulating that the committee would have to report to him after five days.¹⁴

Ketelaar also asked permission for Oets to leave for Bandar 'Abbas, but the E'temad al-Douleh wanted him to stay until the end of the negotiations. Ketelaar argued that Oets had no part to play in the negotiations, that the Dutch were a free nation and that the E'temad al-Douleh could not harm him if he left. The E'temad al-Douleh apparently did not wish to make an issue of this question, and replied that Oets would only have to stay for a few days in Esfahan.¹⁵ After this last round of talks, the Dutch tried to find out what their best line of policy might be. They asked their friends at court and were told that their differences could not be settled, unless they presented the E'temad al-Douleh and other important ministers with considerable amounts of money.¹⁶

The first meeting with the Persian negotiating team took place on July 14. The Persians were led by the Mostoufi-ye khasseh who received the Dutch reasonably well. The Persian claims were rejected by Ketelaar along the lines of his instructions. When no agreement could be reached on these various points, the Persian side suggested that Ketelaar give a written undertaking that the VOC would pay the Shah's claim amounting to 68,000 tomans. Ketelaar replied that it would be impossible to settle their differences if the Persians were not prepared to be reasonable. The Mostoufi-ye khasseh promised to discuss the matter with the E'temad al-Douleh and the first meeting came to an end. The Dutch sent their interpreters to their various friends to ask for advice, but nobody was prepared to offer any ideas for fear of the E'temad al-Douleh.¹⁷

The second meeting took place on July 17. The Mostoufi-ye khasseh announced that he wanted to examine the books of the VOC Banyans again. Ketelaar told him that he wanted to discuss this with his staff. He feared that the E'temad al-Douleh had already sent an order (ta'liqeh) to Mirza Nur Allah, the shahbandar of Bandar 'Abbas to arrest the VOC Banyans and to confiscate their property, and that they would have to come to Esfahan and that further trade with the VOC would be forbidden to all merchants. This would be a very negative development for the VOC, for no profits could be made if the Persians increased their demands, and finally enforced payment of what they considered to be a legitimate claim. Ketelaar, therefore, decided that the way to a settlement of the dispute had to be smoothed by an offer of money.¹⁸

On July 31 the E'temad al-Douleh replied that he was prepared to grant the VOC the same privileges which Hoogkamer had acquired in 1701 with the exception of the following:

- (i) Free export of ducats would not be allowed because this had not been granted in the firmans which Hoogkamer had obtained.
- (ii) All VOC caravans would have to be examined and their bales sealed before departure, as in former times.
- (iii) The VOC would have to waive the Shah's debt to the VOC.
- (iv) The 'recognitie goederen' or treaty goods would have to be twice the amount henceforth.

He also informed Ketelaar that the Shah's claim on the VOC amounted to 68,392 tomans at that time. This amount would be waived if Ketelaar would agree to his offer.

Ketelaar informed the E'temad al-Douleh on August 3 that he could not accept this offer, and he wanted to know by August 13 whether Ketelaar would accept his offer of July 31 or not. If not, he would prohibit all VOC activities in Persia and collect the Shah's claim immediately. Faced with this threat, Ketelaar accepted the E'temad al-Douleh's offer. Since the Persians had already started drawing up the new firmans the interpreter was sent to the Mostoufi-ye khasseh who was in charge of that activity to give him some money. On August 24 the firmans were ready, but before they could be handed over, Ketelaar had first to send 1,000 tomans to the E'temad al-Douleh. Ketelaar thus finally received the desired documents, and to seal the new agreement the 'presents' previously arranged were handed over to the E'temad al-Douleh, the Mostoufi-ye khasseh and other officials in the presence of witnesses on August 31.¹⁹

The economic situation in Persia had not improved during the year 1717. Worms, one of the soldiers accompanying Ketelaar, gives a vivid description of the situation in Esfahan at that time:

The expense and poverty in the Residence was so serious at that time and the scarcity of bread such, that all dead camels, mules and horses were eaten by the hungry beggars. If a horse died in our factory and was thrown in the street the poor had scraped away its meat within an hour. When we paid a visit to the Armenian suburb of Jolfa once, a beggar woman asked us for alms;

on our return we found her lying dead in the road and a dog was gnawing her head. The Persians were as unmerciful towards the poor, as the ambassador Ketelaar who had bread and wine distributed was compassionate.²⁰

The political situation had also deteriorated. The Musqat Arabs had mounted an expedition against Bahrain in July 1717. They were also active elsewhere in the Gulf, for on September 28 they seized an English ship, the *Elisabeth*, which was lying in the roadstead of Bandar 'Abbas. After firing some shots the crew fled ashore. The officials in Bandar 'Abbas panicked and took refuge in the hinterland with their property. Owners of pack animals did good business for the rich paid 30 to 40 Mahmudis per animal. The English Director sent a ship to Musqat the next day and got his ship back, while the Musqat Arabs apologized, saying they had believed the ship to be a Portuguese one.²¹

On September 17 the court received news that Bahrain had been attacked by the Musqat Arabs. The E'temad al-Douleh informed Ketelaar that he must order his staff in Bandar 'Abbas to keep Dutch ships ready to transport Persian troops to Bahrain. Ketelaar sent a reply that he was not used to getting orders from any but his masters and that there was no question of Dutch ships being used for this purpose.²²

On October 10 Ketelaar wrote to Bandar 'Abbas that the court is "finally arising from the dreams of pleasure" and was getting really alarmed by the news of the occupation of Bahrain by the Musqat Arabs, by the fact that Georgia had been overrun by rebels, that Herat had been taken by rebels and that the Uzbeks infested Khorasan and were threatening the provincial capital, Mashhad. At the insistence of Maryam Begum, the Shah's great-aunt, who put a substantial amount of money at his disposal to that end, the Shah decided to recruit an army.²³

Four days later the E'temad al-Douleh invited Ketelaar to his house. After half an hour he sent all his advisers away and asked Ketelaar to come and sit next to him. He wanted to borrow some Dutch ships to fight the Musqat Arabs and reconquer Bahrain. Ketelaar told him that he had no authority to lend, rent, or sell ships. The E'temad al-Douleh then told him that he would write to the Governor-General for naval assistance provided that his letter was sent to Batavia at the first opportunity. The Shah would write a similar letter, and the E'temad al-Douleh stressed that non-compliance with this request would be taken as disrespectful to the Shah. His letter to the Governor-General had already been prepared and Ketelaar accepted it with the required protocol. At the same time he presented the E'temad al-Douleh with a new petition containing four requests, viz:

- (i) Assistance in collecting Ebrahim Khan's debt.
- (ii) Assistance in collecting the debt of several merchants.
- (iii) Tax-exemption for the Banyans in VOC employ.
- (iv) The free export of ducats for the VOC.

The E'temad al-Douleh promised Ketelaar that he would try and do his very best to accommodate him.²⁴

After having taken his leave of the Shah on November 17, Ketelaar was received for a farewell audience by the E'temad al-Douleh. The latter told him that the Portuguese Agent, the Augustine padre Antonio de Sterro, had informed him that the viceroy of Goa would be ready to supply Persia with ships to fight the Musqat Arabs. He also said that the French had promised some ships, but de Sterro had told him that the Portuguese needed no help from others. However, the Portuguese are unreliable, the E'temad al-Douleh told Ketelaar, and it would be better for the Dutch to conquer Musqat. To that end he wanted to send an important official to Batavia to conclude a treaty with the VOC against Musqat. Ketelaar reacted that it was not necessary to send someone to Batavia, because his instructions were quite clear on this point: the VOC was not interested in military ventures. Seeing that neither veiled threats nor enticing promises made Ketelaar change his mind, the E'temad al-Douleh finally said that he was forced to send an ambassador to Goa and asked that he be transported by a Dutch ship. Ketelaar felt that he could not refuse this request and

agreed to do so, provided the ambassador was ready in time, i.e. before the end of the monsoon, in Bandar 'Abbas. The E'temad al-Douleh promised that he would be there on time and gave Ketelaar leave to return to Bandar 'Abbas.²⁵

Notes

1. KA 865, f. 711 (24/7/16)
2. VOC 1897, f. 21-22 (30/11/16); f. 112 (8/3/17)
3. KA 867, f. 690 (20/7/17); VOC 1897, f. 144 (8/3/17)
4. VOC 1913, f. 83-85 (4/3/17); VOC 1897, f. 146 (8/3/17)
5. VOC 1913, f. 483-85, 489 (31/3/18); VOC 1897, f. 347-49, 352-54; Worms, 1737
248
6. VOC 1913, f. 453 (31/3/18); Worms, 1737, 267-69
7. VOC 1913, f. 2-7 (31/12/17)
8. VOC 1913, f. 210-12 (4/6/17); f. 7 (31/12/17)
9. VOC 1913, f. 8, 9, 14 (31/12/17); VOC 969, f. 664-65 (20/7/17)
10. VOC 1913, f. 15-16 (31/12/17)
11. VOC 1913, f. 485-86, 470 (31/3/18)
12. *Ibid.*, f. 455, 457
13. *Ibid.*, f. 460
14. *Ibid.*, f. 460-63
15. *Ibid.*, f. 464
16. *Ibid.*, f. 465
17. *Ibid.*, f. 466-69
18. *Ibid.*, f. 469-73
19. *Ibid.*, f. 473-77
20. Worms, 1737, 293
21. VOC 1913, f. 28-29 (31/12/17)
22. VOC 1913, f. 487-88 (31/3/18)
23. *Ibid.*, f. 489-90; f. 49 (31/12/17)
24. VOC 1913, f. 481-501 (31/3/18)
25. *Ibid.*, f. 497-501

7. KETELAAR'S RETURN JOURNEY AND DEATH

Ketelaar and his suite finally left Esfahan on November 30, 1717. The pace of his journey was slow owing to his illness and to heavy rainfall. On December 15 he arrived in Shiraz where he was invited to stay by Lotf 'Ali Khan, who received him on December 23 and asked him for the loan of a few ships to fight the Musqat Arabs. Ketelaar refused and left Shiraz on December 28. He had sent his body-guard ahead at full speed, for a messenger had arrived with news about the attack of the Musqat Arabs on the island of Hormoz while he was in Shiraz. The same happened in Lar where the new Governor, Ya'qub Soltan, also asked for ships and received the same reply. Ketelaar finally arrived in Bandar 'Abbas on January 19, 1718. By then he was too ill to take over the management of the VOC affairs and the council of Bandar 'Abbas therefore appointed van Biesum as his successor.¹

Trade in Bandar 'Abbas had reached a very low ebb and the Dutch feared that when the Musqat Arabs took Hormoz, trade would come to a standstill. The European soldiers were kept in the factory, because of the uncertainty whether the Musqat Arabs would also attack Bandar 'Abbas. Another reason was the fact that marauding Baluchis were pillaging the countryside around Bandar 'Abbas, and anyway, it was more expensive to hire local matchlockmen. Prices of basic necessities had risen largely owing to the fact that Musqat Arabs had taken Qeshm, which was Bandar 'Abbas' source of supply. The Dutch therefore ordered 20 tons of rice from Batavia.²

The Persian envoy to the Portuguese viceroy of Goa, Tahmurath Beg, arrived on time as had been promised. The Dutch decided to keep as quiet as possible because of the proximity of the Musqat Arabs. Tahmurath Beg asked for accomodation for 35 persons and seven horses. In the night of February 17, 1718 Tahmurath Beg left by *de Limburg*.³

The action of the Musqat Arabs had started in early December, 1717. On December 9, 1717 a ship accompanied by 25 smaller vessels had been sighted near Qeshm and Larek. On December 11 it appeared that the crews of these vessels had occupied both islands, while the same day another nine Arab ships sailed past Bandar 'Abbas. It was suspected that they were heading for Hormoz. The Dutch therefore decided to keep the ship *de Hopvogel* in the roadstead for the time being.⁴

Later it was learnt that the Musqat Arabs had attacked Hormoz with 4,000 men and had laid siege to the citadel which was still in Persian hands. The citadel was shelled daily, while the Arabs also launched attacks on coastal settlements, which caused consternation in Bandar 'Abbas. The fact that one ship and 30 to 40 small vessels were lying in sight of the town added to the panic. The wealthiest merchants fled into the mountains in the hinterland. The news also caused consternation in Esfahan, and the most important courtiers sent their servants every day to the Dutch trading station to learn what the situation in the Gulf really was.⁵

On February 24, 1718 Ya'qub Soltan arrived in Bandar 'Abbas with about 200 men. After having received the Dutch (he refused to see the English) he paid a return visit to the Dutch factory on March 2. Ketelaar, though improving, was still ill. Ya'qub Soltan's request to be allowed to speak with Ketelaar in private was granted and, because Ketelaar was still in bed, Ya'qub Soltan had to whisper in his ear to ask him whether he could hire *de Haringtuyn* which had arrived on February 19, 1718. Ketelaar refused and pointed out that, since the Shah and E'temad al-Doulch had written about this matter to the Governor-General in Batavia, it would be better to wait for the replies to these letters. Seeing that he was getting nowhere with the Dutch, he asked Ketelaar to patch up his relationship with the English, for the refusal to see them had been given without his knowledge.⁶

On March 1, 1718, the Musqat Arabs were said to have amassed a great force at Jolfar to press the attack on Hormoz. On March 4 some of their vessels were seen leaving Hormoz, and it was said that these were going to Kong to prevent the Portuguese concentrating their ships in that area. Five days later, news arrived that the Persians had defeated the Musqat forces at Kong. Meanwhile the English had refused their ship *Anne* to Ya'qub Soltan who had become so angry that he was

reported to have said: "I want a ship for royal service now even if it will cost my head".

The hostilities continued on March 10 when the Arabs took some vessels which the Persians had brought together opposite Qeshm. This loss was made good, however, by the arrival of 30 vessels from Kong on March 14, but unfortunately they had very small crews. The Musqat Arabs also received new reinforcements with the arrival of another ship and in the following two nights there was very heavy bombardment of the citadel.

More news was received on March 16 when five people from the Hormoz citadel arrived in Bandar 'Abbas in a small boat. They related that the Musqat Arabs had attacked the citadel from all sides on March 14, but had been repelled with the loss of more than 700 dead and many wounded. The Persians had suffered only one dead and fourteen wounded. As proof of the victory they had brought with them six heads of Musqat soldiers who had been so bold as to scale the walls of the citadels. The Dutch did not believe this story, but Ya'qub Soltan had the heads carried through the town in triumph and his cannon fired to celebrate.

The Persians were irritated that the Europeans would not assist them against the Musqat Arabs. In Esfahan it was rumoured that the Dutch had refused the shahbandar's request to use their ships to transport troops to Hormoz, and concluded that the Dutch were collaborating with the Arabs. The E'temad al-Douleh too was angry about the neutral attitude of the European Companies and was reported to have said that if they did not help they need not remain in Persia. Ya'qub Soltan felt the same. On March 22 he asked Beavis, the EIC Director, for the loan of the English ship. Beavis refused, for he said it was a private ship over which his Company had no authority, so the next day Ya'qub Soltan prevented the loading of the English ship.⁷

The real problems began on March 25 1718, when an express messenger from Ya'qub Soltan arrived from Lotf 'Ali Khan with orders to relieve Hormoz at short notice or else he would have his head. The same day a Dutch boat sailed out to *de Haringtuyn*, was pursued by four Persian vessels and fired upon. Ketelaar ordered the boat to return to avoid bloodshed and sent a delegation to Ya'qub Soltan for an explanation. Although the Dutch were reasonably well received, Ya'qub Soltan told them that he wanted to have a ship; he knew that he would not get one by remaining polite, and so he changed his methods. He assured the Dutch that he would have a ship whatever the cost. He also warned them not to send *de Haringtuyn* away. He could not prevent it from sailing, but if it did he would not leave a single stone of the Dutch factory standing.

Ketelaar ordered the boat to be brought in to the shore since it had been confiscated *de facto*, and Persian soldiers helped the Dutch sailors to do it. Meanwhile Ya'qub Soltan had surrounded the English factory with troops. The English interpreter who had been sent to ask for an explanation had been threatened with having his belly slit open, but finally had been allowed to leave. The next day Ketelaar sent some representatives to the Deputy Governor, Khosrou Beg, to ask him to obtain the release of the Dutch boat. Khosrou Beg apologized for Ya'qub Soltan's behaviour and promised to comply with the request, provided that the shahbandar supported him in this matter which he agreed to do.

The Dutch interpreter had learnt that Ya'qub Soltan had designs on the ship *de Haringtuyn*. He was said to have told his soldiers to seize the ship and that if they returned empty-handed, he would kill them all. If the Dutch killed any of them, he would take revenge by killing the Dutch on shore. This news failed to lift Dutch spirits in the factory, especially since communications had been cut, for Ya'qub Soltan had posted guards on all the roads.

The English, taken aback by the drastic action against them, asked for two days' reprieve on March 26 in order to discuss the matter with the ship's captain. Ya'qub Soltan agreed to this request and raised the siege of the English factory. Beavis then sent his deputy aboard and he returned the next day with the news that the captain refused to put his ship at Ya'qub Soltan's disposal. After hearing this, Ya'qub Soltan immediately cut off the English factory from the outside world. He also took steps against the Dutch factory. A hundred soldiers forced all Moslem and

Banyan merchants to leave the Dutch factory, while 50 of them remained behind to blockade it.

The blockade was very strict, for the two *dehbashis*, who were in charge of the blockading force, would not allow the Dutch to fetch water and sent them back into the factory. It was also forbidden for people in town to speak with people in the factory: those who tried were chased away by the soldiers. Finally, on March 28, a Banyan merchant was allowed to enter the factory. He told Ketelaar that he had spoken to Ya'qub Soltan about their dispute, and he had been told that his own life was at risk if he did not soon get a ship. He was prepared to use much force to gain his objective. Ketelaar told the Banyan to tell Ya'qub Soltan that it was impossible for him to comply with his wishes, and that he would rather die defending the factory with honour than return to Batavia in disgrace.

On the afternoon of March 28 the English Director, Mr. Beavis, having received permission from Ya'qub Soltan, went aboard the English ship to discuss the lending of the ship to the Persians. At midnight the ship sailed away and could still be seen the next day being pursued by a Musqat ship. Ya'qub Soltan was furious and vowed vengeance, but the English deputy calmed him down by presenting him with a letter from Beavis. In this letter, Beavis stated that, after the captain had refused a second time he had decided to bring some ships from Bombay and he hoped to return in two months' time. Ya'qub Soltan told the English that, if he had been deceived, he would set fire to the English factory.

Fearing that *de Haringtuyn* would also depart, Ya'qub Soltan had three well-equipped Persian vessels surround the Dutch ship, though outside the range of its cannon. The VOC factory was also well guarded and neither water, food nor firewood was allowed in. Ketelaar therefore ordered a rationing of supplies, for their only well contained brackish water, but the Dutch had stored drinking-water when the Musqat attack began and everybody received one jug per day.

Nevertheless, some contacts with the world outside were possible. From friends in the city the Dutch learnt that a meeting had been convened by Ya'qub Soltan with the following: Mirza Nur Allah the shahbandar, Khosrou Beg the janeshin, Zakariya Khan the former shahbandar, Hajji Kamal one of the main trade partners of the VOC and attorney of some other important merchants. They all attacked Ya'qub Soltan. Mirza Nur Allah had asked him: "Who pays the customs and other imposts, for if this situation continues I certainly will not do so." Ya'qub Soltan had replied that he was beyond caring since he could be considered dead. The others said that if this were true, then why did he add to the country's woes by making the Dutch and the English into enemies? They advised him to explain his predicament at court, and they would do the same. Ya'qub Soltan then asked them what he should do. The merchants offered their mediation and asked him not to offend the VOC any longer and paralyze their trade. He asked them to request this in writing, but the merchants refused fearing that the blame for his failure would be laid at their door later on.

After a blockade lasting four days, Ya'qub Soltan ordered that two camels loaded with water and food be sent to the Dutch factory every day. He also told the merchants to speak to Ketelaar and to tell him that he must have a ship. In the afternoon, the merchants came to see Ketelaar to relay this message, but he refused again. The next day, April 1, the merchants paid another visit to Ketelaar to demand *de Haringtuyn*. One of them, a recent arrival from Shiraz, asked Ketelaar how he would account for himself to the Shah, if Hormoz were to fall. Ketelaar told him that he did not need to worry about that, for that was his affair. The VOC had no treaty obligation to come to the relief of Hormoz. He was willing to assist a friend in need as much as he was allowed, but the VOC needed *de Haringtuyn*, for its war in Malabar. The same merchant, on behalf of Ya'qub Soltan, then asked Ketelaar for a written statement that he would not send *de Haringtuyn* away without Ya'qub Soltan's permission. If he would agree to that then Ya'qub Soltan would release the two VOC vessels and leave the VOC factory alone. Ketelaar declined this offer.

Meanwhile it was rumoured that Hajji Baqer was returning from Kong with 900 men and orders from Lotf 'Ali Khan to seize all ships in the roadstead. Outside the town, gunners were practising on their cannon, while soldiers were being trained to

shoot from vessels at sea. Ya'qub Soltan had acquired a blood-thirsty reputation, for since his arrival on February 24, 1718 he had ordered the execution of more than 50 people. His own soldiers feared him greatly and disliked doing guard duty at his house. This was understandable since he had ordered seven soldiers who had asked for their pay, to have a hand and a foot cut off, a treatment which until then he had accorded only to deserters.

Hajji Baqer finally arrived on April 6, but with only 150 men and no vessels, which he said were to come later. He had letters for the Europeans with him, but Ketelaar was too ill to receive him. In the afternoon a few merchants visited the VOC factory and told the council members that Hajji Baqer had been very surprised at Ya'qub Soltan's behaviour. He had taken Ya'qub Soltan to task about it, because it was done without any authorization from Lotf 'Ali Khan. He also asked to be allowed to see Ketelaar to which the council members agreed, although they could not be sure that Ketelaar would be well enough to receive him. The next day Ketelaar was so weak that it was believed that he would die and he therefore took his leave from everybody "with many paternal and pious admonitions".

The interpreter was sent to Hajji Baqer to inform him of Ketelaar's state. He also received Lotf 'Ali Khan's letter for Ketelaar. The interpreter told Hajji Baqer about the offences which the VOC had suffered and asked him to speak to Ya'qub Soltan about it. That same night a discussion took place between the two Persian commanders. Hajji Baqer asked Ya'qub Soltan on whose orders he had taken such hostile measures against the Europeans, whether he had contemplated what the consequences of such actions might be, and what he had done against the Musqat Arabs. Nothing, Hajji Baqer added, for although he knew that the citadel was suffering from lack of water, he had done nothing about it. Taken aback by this approach, Ya'qub Soltan immediately ordered a vessel to be stocked with water and sent to Hormoz.⁶ He also promised to follow later himself with troops and food when the wind was stronger. Hajji Baqer had also ordered the soldiers to leave the VOC factory, but they feared Ya'qub Soltan so much they did not dare to go without a direct order from him. The next day, April 8, Hajji Baqer sent two of his men to drive the soldiers away.

The citadel of Hormoz gave the agreed signal to show that the water vessel had arrived. Its arrival was very timely, for according to a report by a vessel from the citadel on April 9, 20 people had died in the citadel since March 16. The water situation was critical, for if no relief came soon, the garrison would be forced to surrender.

On the afternoon of April 10, Ya'qub Soltan suddenly ordered the English to close their factory and all the Moslem servants to leave, although non-Moslems were allowed to continue visiting the factory. The cause of this sudden change of policy was unknown: the Dutch ascribed it to the vehement discussions that had taken place between Ya'qub Soltan and Hajji Baqer, the latter of whom paid a visit to the VOC factory the same evening. Ketelaar received him on his sick-bed and told him about the offence suffered by the VOC and that he was surprised that *de Haringtuyn* had as yet not fired at the Persian vessels. Hajji Baqer said that the vessels were only practising and had no hostile designs on the Dutch ship. He also explained that Ya'qub Soltan was a headstrong man, who would not listen to reason. It might therefore be better if Ketelaar wrote a letter to Lotf 'Ali Khan and he would see to it that the letter reached its destination.

Early in the morning of April 11, about 25 large and small Musqat vessels came from Hormoz and dropped anchor half a mile east of the VOC factory. Hajji Baqer immediately went to see Ya'qub Soltan and asked him whether he would prepare his vessels or just sit back and do nothing. Ya'qub Soltan replied that the Musqat Arabs had no hostile intentions, but Hajji Baqer disagreed and added that if Ya'qub Soltan was not going to do anything, would he at least put his vessels at Hajji Baqer's disposal to attack them. Ya'qub Soltan agreed to this, according to the Dutch, because he hoped that Hajji Baqer would be killed. As soon as Hajji Baqer set sail, the Musqat ships came towards him in full force and he therefore landed again under the walls of the citadel of Bandar 'Abbas. At 2 o'clock in the afternoon, the Musqat flotilla

arrived under full sail in the roadstead of Bandar 'Abbas. When they came into range of *de Haringtuyn* it fired a warning shot, and the Musqat ships lowered their sails.

The Persians were busy loading vessels with water and food. Ya'qub Soltan again refused to return the two VOC ships, but permitted a visit to *de Haringtuyn* aboard a Persian vessel. On their return, the VOC servants reported that there were ten cases of sickness aboard the ship, of which two were serious. That night Hajji Baqer was successful in sending four vessels carrying 56 men to Hormoz.

The Musqat flotilla returned to Hormoz, after having tried once again to entice the Persian vessels out from under the protection of the citadel, but when it failed they left in the afternoon of April 12. The Persians continued to load ships with water and food supplies and they also mounted two heavy cannon at Nakhle Khoda one mile east of Bandar 'Abbas to fire on Musqati ships, about which the Dutch commented that it would not have been a bad idea, if the Persians had been good gunners.

That night the VOC interpreter went to see Hajji Baqer, Mirza Nur Allah and Khosrou Beg to ask for the return of the two VOC vessels. They all said that they could not do anything then, because Ya'qub Soltan would not listen to reason. It would be better to wait another six days, by which time Lotf 'Ali Khan would have arrived. Hajji Baqer also told the interpreter that he had received information that an important Musqati general had arrived from Jolfa on Hormoz and that the Arabs were expecting another 60 vessels and 2,000 troops. He said that the Musqat Arabs were aware of the Dutch position and that was why they had not attacked Bandar 'Abbas.

On April 15 Hajji Baqer returned to Kong, apparently because he could no longer put up with Ya'qub Soltan. The Musqat Arabs sent 25 vessels to Kong in order to prevent ships being sent from there to Bandar 'Abbas. The next day heavy bombardment of the Hormoz citadel was renewed after a long period of inaction.

On April 17 a messenger from Lotf 'Ali Khan arrived in Bandar 'Abbas with news of his campaign against the Musqat Arabs. He had been able to put 9,000 men ashore on Bahrain and had written to the court for orders with regard to the Dutch and English refusal to lend him ships. The next day a Musqat flotilla sailed from Hormoz to Nakhle Khoda and shelled the newly-constructed artillery position without prompting any response from the Persians, but they could not prevent a vessel coming from the Hormoz citadel with some women and putting them safely ashore. They reported that water was still scarce in the citadel. Ya'qub Soltan rode to Nakhle Khoda the next day to inspect the damage caused by the Musqati shelling and witnessed the Musqat Arabs taking two vessels from the beach there without meeting any opposition.

Ketelaar had drawn up an official protest about Ya'qub Soltan's behaviour and sent the interpreter to Mirza Nur Allah on April 21 for a reply. The latter said that he had tried to convince Ya'qub Soltan to mend his ways. The result was that Ya'qub Soltan wanted a letter to be sent from the Governor-General in Batavia to the Shah promising naval assistance, and in this letter no mention would be made about any offence that had been given. If Ketelaar agreed to that, *de Haringtuyn* could depart and the old situation would be restored. Ketelaar thereupon sent a reply stating that he could not give these assurances and that not even the Shah and the E'temad al-Douleh had asked for them.

On April 24 messengers from Lotf 'Ali Khan arrived with letters for the officials in Bandar 'Abbas. It was rumoured that Ya'qub Soltan had been reprimanded for his behaviour. The next day Mirza Nur Allah asked Ketelaar to hoist the flag as a sign that trade could begin again, but Ketelaar replied that, as long as the two VOC ships had not been returned, he would not hoist the flag. It was preposterous that, when the Shah allowed the VOC to trade freely and unhindered all over Persia, one of his subjects should prevent it and then all of a sudden ask everybody to forget what had been happening. Therefore, the old situation with total freedom of movement must be restored, and if it was, Ketelaar would see what he could do, for at the time he considered himself a prisoner.

The next day Mirza Nur Allah asked Ketelaar to postpone the departure of *de Haringtuyn* for another twelve days by which time Lotf 'Ali Khan's reply was expected to have arrived. During this period some vessels were expected from Kong and he apparently believed that as long as a Dutch ship was in the roadstead the Musqat Arabs would not attack Bandar 'Abbas. Ketelaar replied that because of the seizure of the two VOC vessels and illness of its crew, *de Haringtuyn* would be forced to stay for some time. At the same time he repeated his demand for the release of the two ships. Later that day, merchants came to the factory to trade, but Ketelaar gave them the same reply that he had given Mirza Nur Allah on April 24.

Mirza Nur Allah had also asked the English to hoist their flag, but they had replied that those who had lowered it must be the ones to hoist it. Because of the European Companies' attitude, Mirza Nur Allah and his colleagues managed to induce Ya'qub Soltan to give in. The kotval (castellan) of Bandar 'Abbas was sent to the Dutch factory with the information that the Dutch might come and get their two vessels and that henceforth the Persian servants would be allowed to come to the factory. On April 26 all the Persian servants came to the factory, but Ketelaar did not hoist the flag. Ya'qub Soltan was angry about this and in the afternoon he sent the kotval with some men to ask him to hoist the flag, but Ketelaar replied that it did not suit him to do so today, but that he would do it the next morning and would make it seem as if that had been done by Ya'qub Soltan's servants. The next day at sun-rise the flag was hoisted as promised and normal trading operations started again.

On April 30 Ya'qub Soltan's special adviser, the darvish Shoel Reza, took to his heels. Their relationship had turned sour, especially after the failure of the Nakhle Khoda artillery position which had been constructed upon the darvish' advice. Ya'qub Soltan had had many trees cut down for the purpose despite the protests of the local population. The whole exercise had been proved futile when the high tide at the end of April had swept away the whole construction. Ya'qub Soltan ordered his adviser to be pursued and arrested and he was soon caught. He accused him of having put him up to his forceful actions against the Europeans and wanted to incarcerate him without food or water. After other officials interceded for him, he was kept under arrest in normal conditions.⁹

Although Ketelaar had been able to see a satisfactory ending to the dispute with Ya'qub Soltan, he did not live to reap the benefits of it. On May 12, 1718 he finally succumbed to the illness which had already been plaguing him on his arrival in Persia in 1716. The next day he was buried in the Dutch cemetery half a mile outside Bandar 'Abbas. The council appointed Adriaan van Biesum, who had already been acting for him, as his temporary successor.¹⁰

De Haringtuyn left Bandar 'Abbas on May 30. Two days earlier it had been rumoured that Ya'qub Soltan intended to prevent its departure and also wanted to seize the two VOC vessels again. Van Biesum therefore had them sent over to the ship which then left quietly. Mirza Nur Allah asked why *de Haringtuyn* had not waited for Lotf 'Ali Khan's reply, and van Biesum said that Ketelaar had only promised to wait twelve days which had long since passed.¹¹ On June 4 Lotf 'Ali Khan's reply finally arrived in a letter to Mirza Nur Allah, ordering him to assist the Dutch in general and with the departure of their ship in particular.¹² He also promised that Ya'qub Soltan would be punished, and he was arrested on June 24 when Mohammad Zahed Soltan arrived in Bandar 'Abbas. He also confiscated Ya'qub Soltan's property which was estimated to have a value of 40,000 tomans (Dfl. 1.7 million). On July 22 orders arrived to send him to Shiraz and on August 14 his goods were sold publicly.¹³

In the meantime Lotf 'Ali Khan had been able to expel the Musqat Arabs from Bahrain. This development caused them to raise the siege of the Hormoz citadel and to withdraw from the island on June 5. They continued to occupy the islands of Qeshm and Larek, however, as well as to control shipping in that part of the Gulf, so that local trade remained at a standstill.¹⁴

Notes

1. VOC 1913, f. 53 (31/12/17); f. 66 (17/2/18); f. 260 (30/5/18); f. 512 (31/3/18); Worms, 1737, 299-300
2. VOC 1913, f. 231 (30/5/18); f. 73-74 (17/2/18)
3. VOC 1913, f. 70-71 (17/2/18); for Tahmurath's mission see Mirza Mohammad Khalil Mar'ashi, 1328/1949, 41
4. VOC 1913, f. 50 (31/12/17)
5. VOC 1913, f. 72 (17/2/18); f. 265-70 (3/2/18); Worms, 1737, 300
6. The remainder of this chapter is mainly based on the Gamron Diary for the period 1 February to 30 April 1718, VOC 1913, f. 302-57 unless otherwise indicated
7. VOC 1913, f. 275-76 (7/3/18)
8. Because of this decision Ya'qub Soltan earned two lines in Mar'ashi's chronicle, see Mar'ashi Safavi, 1328/1949, 38
9. VOC 1913, f. 253-54 (30/5/18)
10. *Ibid.*, f. 260; Worms' version of Ketelaar's demise is erroneous, see Worms, 1737, 303. Vogel's description of the tomb (Vogel, 1937, 125-27) is erroneous, because it was destroyed by Seyyed Ahmad Khan's troops in 1728
11. VOC 1913, f. 2362 verso (7/11/18)
12. *Ibid.*, f. 2362 recto - 2362 verso
13. *Ibid.*, f. 2362 verso - 2363
14. *Ibid.*

In a first response to the information received on Keteleaar's mission the Governor-General wrote on July 19, 1718 that "as far as is clear from the correspondence received the mission to the court (of the Shah) has been justified by the objective for which it was sent". However, Batavia reserved its final judgment until Keteleaar's return or the arrival of his mission report.¹

Objectively viewed, Keteleaar had obtained good results, taking into account the difficult position which the E'temad al-Douleh had taken and the elbow-room his instructions had allowed him. Nevertheless, Keteleaar expected criticism from Batavia, and he therefore wrote in his mission report "It would take too long to describe all the difficulties, threats and bitter reproaches to which we have been continually exposed before we could conclude an agreement".² However, the Governor-General should not consider "the result of this activity as having been caused by intimidation or premature concessions, for his only real fear had been that continued negotiations would have led to a complete standstill of the Company's trade in this kingdom".³

Keteleaar drew Batavia's attention to the fact that he had obtained confirmation of most of the privileges which had been granted to Hoogkammer in 1701, the most important of these being the right to free trade on the condition that the VOC presented the Shah with the treaty goods (recognitie goederen) every year, whether he had delivered silk to the VOC or not. On two other points Keteleaar had been forced to concede the Persian point of view, viz. the payment of duties on the export of golden ducats and the examination of VOC caravans prior to their departure.

With regard to the treaty goods, Keteleaar observed that he had agreed to this condition, and had stated that the VOC would deliver these goods, only if the Governor-General agreed to it. He offered it as his personal opinion that this issue should not bother the VOC too much, since the cost-price of the treaty goods only amounted to Dfl. 8,000, and it was more important that delivery of the goods should guarantee that the VOC would no longer be bothered about silk deliveries as had been the case in the past.⁴

The right to the toll-free export of golden ducats had been categorically denied by the Persians, Keteleaar remarked. This practice had been condoned, but had never been a right of the VOC. The firmans which Hoogkammer had obtained did not contain such a privilege either, and Keteleaar had therefore agreed to a formulation similar to that in Hoogkammer's firman. The Government of Persia meanwhile, was permitting the free export of golden ducats in the expectation that the Governor-General would waive the Shah's debt to the VOC. Nevertheless, Keteleaar had refused to raise hopes on this issue. He had therefore ordered the Esfahan office to continue to export golden ducats, but to pay the normal legal impost.⁵

He felt that the obligation to have VOC goods examined and sealed before sending them from Esfahan to Bandar Abbas was not an important issue. He granted that this practice might cause some trouble, but on the other hand it set the tax farmers' minds at ease and would put an end to false accusations, and he therefore had agreed to this stipulation.⁶

Finally Keteleaar reported that the Persian merchants' accusations against the VOC servants had been unfounded, and he had not been able to find any proof of private trading by VOC personnel. Although the VOC interpreter, François Sahid, and the VOC broker, Kimshant Matturadas, were engaged in trading operations because their wages were too low, Keteleaar had not prohibited it. Their trade was carried out through an attorney and he felt that he could not forbid it, although he had advised them to be very careful and to pay the customs and other imposts just like any other merchant. The Persian accusation of illegal exporting of ducats by VOC personnel had been unfounded as well, for he had been unable to find a single shred of evidence. Keteleaar commented that this accusation had been fabricated by Mohamad Ja'far Beg, who had been put up to it by Esfahani merchants. He added that Mohamad Ja'far Beg was now in very bad repute and, according to reports which he had received, had even been forced to leave court.⁷

Ketelaar had gauged the mood in Batavia accurately, for the Governor-General was not very pleased with the outcome of his mission. Not only had Ketelaar departed from his instructions, but he had also spent a substantial amount of money, viz. Dfl. 278,408, and this expenditure had not served the interests of the VOC. For the free export of golden ducats had not been granted, treaty goods would have to be delivered whether silk was purchased or not, caravans would have to be examined and sealed, and the Shah expected the VOC to waive its debt.

Batavia commented that the formulation of Hoogkamer's firman surely implied the free export of ducats although it had not been stated explicitly. The firman had been granted in response to a request to that effect, and if this privilege had not been granted there would have been no need at all to issue the decree, for everybody was permitted to export ducats provided taxes were paid. Ketelaar should therefore have insisted on compliance with the VOC interpretation. The Governor-General for his part would not waive the Shah's debt and took the line that silk at least must be delivered in payment thereof.

Although Batavia agreed that the examination and sealing of VOC goods was not an important issue, provided that the Persian government paid all the costs arising from it, the Governor-General was disappointed about the agreement on the delivery of the treaty goods. Not only was the sales value of these goods Dfl. 26,000, but the fact that the goods had to be delivered whether silk was supplied or not was a disincentive to the Persian government to supply silk at all. The Governor-General wanted to settle the Shah's debt at least by payments in silk, which the Government might be induced to do by the prospect of the delivery of the treaty goods, and now this inducement had been negated.⁸

More criticism was to follow, when in February 1719, the shahbandar Mirza Nur Allah claimed poll-tax from the VOC Banyans. The Dutch protested, because the VOC had been exempted from this tax, a right confirmed in a firman granted to Ketelaar. When Lotf 'Ali Khan continued to insist on its payment the Dutch protested at court, for if this firman was not respected, what was the value of the other firmans which Ketelaar had obtained? The Governor-General was very displeased about the whole affair. He accused Ketelaar of having obtained the firman for the Banyans purely for his own glory and reputation and he certainly had not been instructed to do so. After all, the VOC had nothing to do with these people and could expect neither use nor profit from them. The Governor-General had not intended to renew this firman, but since Lotf 'Ali Khan wanted to violate it he was obliged to insist on its implementation. However, Batavia stipulated that if its other privileges were liable to be endangered by this action because of a conflict with the E'temad al-Douleh, Oets (who had returned to Persia to succeed Ketelaar) was ordered to give in. As far as Batavia was concerned, this particular firman should never have been requested, which also held for the earlier one requested and obtained by Hoogkamer.⁹

The criticism was very unfair, for Batavia had written to Amsterdam in 1702 about the firman granting the VOC Banyans exemption from poll-tax "that this was a great honour"¹⁰ for the Company. Ketelaar had been instructed to obtain the confirmation of all firmans granted to Hoogkamer, and Batavia had not made an exception for this particular one. He had therefore acted quite rightly in obtaining its confirmation.

In view of the circumstances, Ketelaar's mission, in my view, had been rather successful. Of the four main points which the VOC wanted, he was able to get agreement to two points favouring the Dutch view, viz. freedom of trade in Persia and exemption from customs and taxes for VOC imports and exports, while the third point, the examination of VOC goods, was arranged in a manner acceptable to Batavia. With regard to the export of ducats, he acted in accordance with his instructions. He could not get an explicit right to exemption from taxes, but obtained a firman containing the same phrasing as the one which Hoogkamer had obtained.

He had, moreover, obtained the waiving of the Shah's claim on the VOC, while he had refused to do the same for the VOC's claim on the Shah. In fact he had been given a commitment for its payment, although the Persian Government expected it to be waived in exchange for a *de facto* right to the tax-free export of ducats.

Batavia was right about the high costs of the embassy, but wrong in blaming Ketelaar for this. Long experience with the Persian court, and the attitude of the E'temad al-Douleh towards Oets in 1715 should have made it clear to Batavia that, without the payment of considerable amounts of money, no agreement could have been reached. Instead of criticizing Ketelaar they should have praised him for getting the most out of a very difficult situation. As was clear from Oets' efforts to get the Persians to agree to Batavia's still outstanding wishes, Ketelaar had obtained the best possible result. The VOC would not benefit for long from the newly obtained privileges. Oets' attempts to renegotiate some of the agreed points only led to trouble for the VOC in 1720, while the occupation of Esfahan and large parts of Persia by Mahmud Khan, son of Mir Weis, and his Afghan force in 1722 rendered them a dead letter.¹¹

Notes

1. KA 871, f. 584-5 (19/7/18)
2. VOC 1913, f. 477 (31/3/18)
3. *Ibid.*, f. 481
4. *Ibid.*, f. 480
5. *Ibid.*, f. 477-78
6. *Ibid.*, f. 479
7. *Ibid.*, f. 483-84, 486-87
8. VOC 1999, unfoliated (15/11/22); KA 871, f. 600 (19/7/18)
9. VOC 1904, f. 2432 vs - 2434 vs (20/3/19); KA 874, f. 1210-1211 (12/10/19)
10. Coolhaus, 1980, 215
11. On Oets' efforts see his memorandum, VOC 1999 (15/11/22), unfoliated; on the Afghan occupation of Persia see Lockhart, 1956

GLOSSARY

- Banyan - Indian trader
Beglerbegi - Governor-general
Carga - approx. 200 kgs
Darugheh - Chief of market police, Sheriff
Dehbashi - Officer commanding a platoon of 10 soldiers
Divan begi - Lord High Justice
Eshik aghasi bashi - Chief mace-bearer
E'temad al-Douleh - Chancellor & Prime-Minister
Farrash bashi - Chief of the servants
Janeshin - Deputy governor
Jeloudar - outriders
Kadkhoda - head of city quarter
Kalantar - Mayor
Kotval - castellan
Mehmandar bashi - Chief of protocol
Mohrdar - Keeper of the seal
Mostoufi al-mamalek - Treasurer of the state provinces
Mostoufi-ye khasseh - Treasurer of the royal demesnes
Na'eb - assistant (governor)
Nazer - majordomo
Qollar - royal slave
Qollar aghasi - Commander of the royal slaves
Qollar aghasi bashi - Commander of the royal slaves
Qorchi bashi - Commander of the mounted troops
Rahdar - road-guard
Rahdari - road-tolls
Raqam - royal decree
Saheb-e raqam - Private secretary
Sardar - General
Shahbandar - Customs master
Ta'liqeh - decree
Tabin - subordinate official
Tofangchi bashi - Commander of the matchlockmen
Tupchi bashi - Commander of the artillery
Vali - Viceroy
Vazir - Deputy governor

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