

## Lambert Biesman (1573–1601) of the Company of Trader-Adventurers, the Dutch Route to the East Indies, and Olivier van Noort's Circumnavigation of the Globe

by Fred Swart

### Introduction and acknowledgements

I first learned of Lambert Biesman while researching another early adventurer with whom Biesman made his final voyage, and from that moment I was determined that his tragic story be more widely told. But, as was the case with my earlier subject, very little information was available. That is not to say that Biesman had gone completely unrecognised, but his story had survived only as a footnote to both the first Dutch voyage to the East Indies and the later circumnavigation of the globe by Olivier van Noort. His survival of the first and his death in the latter are the stuff of which great stories are told.

The children's author Klaas Norel wrote *Jonker op de Vloot van Houtman*,<sup>1</sup> loosely based on Biesman's experiences during and prior to the voyage to the East Indies. In it, Biesman is portrayed as a youth of about fourteen. Biesman was, in fact, about twenty-two when he embarked on that voyage as an *adelborst*.<sup>2</sup> Norel's book is not entirely fiction; rather it strings together events which might have happened between known historical events in order to maintain a narrative line. I thank Mr Marius Bloemzaad, moderator of the Klaas Norel message board,<sup>3</sup> for providing me with a copy of it from his prized collection of Norel's books. *Jonker op de Vloot* is extremely rare outside the Netherlands, and pretty rare there as well. Mr Norel is to be commended for bringing Lambert Biesman's name to a generation of Dutch youth.

My particular thanks go to Mevr. C. C. van der Woude, archivist of the Regionaal Archief Nijmegen, for furnishing me with the relevant contents of the Biesman Family Archive, which included seven letters from Biesman to family members, written in his own hand,<sup>4</sup> and Dr J. M. A. Maenen for his diligence in retrieving them. My letter of inquiry, addressed to Mr M. J. J. de Wit, secretary of the

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<sup>1</sup> K. Norel, *Jonker op de Vloot van Houtman*, G. F. Callenbach, Nijkerk, 1940.

<sup>2</sup> *Adelborst* is nowadays regarded as the equivalent of midshipman but in earlier periods corresponded to what was commonly known in English service as 'gentleman volunteer'.

<sup>3</sup> At <http://www.xs4all.nl/~zarco/start.htm>

<sup>4</sup> A. Delahaije, *Inventaris van het Archief der Familie Biesman*, Nijmegen, 1944 (*Collectie Biesman*, 10: *Brieven van Lambert Biesman*.)

Local History Foundation of Nijmegen, was a shot in the dark. Fortunately, Mr De Wit forwarded it to Mevr. Van de Woude who assigned my request a high priority. This article would have had few sources of information but for their diligence.

Michiel van Ooijen, whom I met on-line by chance as he was researching his ancestor Hans van Uffele, another late sixteenth-century explorer, rendered the entire body of Biesman's letters from the archaic Dutch of the sixteenth century into modern English. This task was far beyond my capacity, and his contribution is invaluable. Finally, I am indebted to my daughter, Sarah Jane Swart, for her assistance in proofreading and correcting my flagrant errors in grammar, logic and organization. Without her contribution this over-long paper would have been unintelligible.

### **Biesman's early life and lineage**

Lambert Biesman was born in 1573<sup>5</sup> into a family of wealth and position.<sup>6</sup> The name Biesman appears in Nijmegen at least as early as 1429, when a Theodoricus Biesman was an *onderrichter*, or teacher.<sup>7</sup> One authority asserts that to be a Biesman in fifteenth-century Nijmegen implied a relationship to the counts and, later, dukes of Gelderland. Gerrit Biesman married Gertjen Kanis, of a powerful patrician family, around 1500. Gerrit and Gertjen's grandson Jacob, born 1544, was by 1579 alderman of the city. Jacob married Geertruid Geurtsdochter van Beuningen, daughter of a prosperous Amsterdam merchant family – early patriots and supporters of the revolt against Spain. Among Geertruid's grandfather Geurt Jansz. van Beuningen's children was Machteld Geurtsdr., who married Jacob Andriesz. Bal. Machteld's son, Jan Jacobsz. Bal, alias Huydecoper, was, thus, Geertruid's cousin, and their children, Lambert Biesman and Jacob Jansz. Huydecoper were second cousins, as was also Gerrit van Beuningen. These relationships are clearer when displayed graphically<sup>8</sup> (see below).

There is little direct knowledge of Biesman's early life, but much is known about the times in which he lived. The army of the founder of the republic, William I (the silent) of Orange, was defeated near Nijmegen in 1574, with the loss of his brothers Louis and Henry. In 1584 William was assassinated. The unsuccessful attempt of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, to be made sovereign of the Netherlands ended with Dudley's withdrawal in 1587. Nijmegen was then firmly in Spanish hands, having been recovered for Spain in 1584 by the Gelderland Knight, Sir Martin Schenk. Loyal to Philip, Nijmegen, one of Charlemagne's capital cities,<sup>9</sup> still claimed

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<sup>5</sup> Actually the year of Biesman's baptism.

<sup>6</sup> P. J. A. N. Rietbergen, 'Lambert Biesman: de eerste Nijmeegse Indiëvaarder (1595–1597) en wereldreiziger (1598–1601)', in *Numaga, Tijdschrift gewijd aan Helden en Verleden van Nijmegen en Omgeving*, 30 (1983), nr. 1, Nijmegen, 1983, pp. 18–22. (hereafter, Rietbergen: 'Lambert Biesman')

<sup>7</sup> Meertens Instituut, Biesmans.

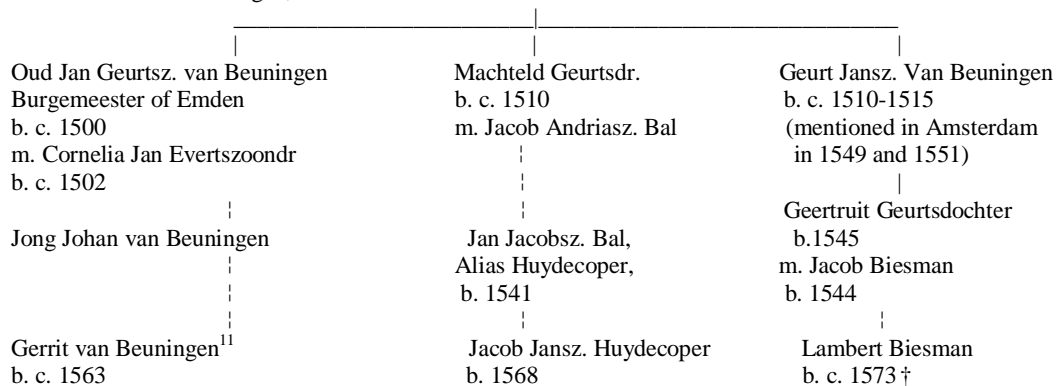
<sup>8</sup> O. Van Noort, *De Reis om de Wereld, 1598–1601*, ed. by J. W. IJzerman, Linschoten-Vereeniging, 's-Gravenhage, Martinus Nijhoff, 1926, vol. 2, pp. 181–182. (hereafter, IJzerman, *De reis om de wereld*.)

<sup>9</sup> An assertion challenged by Albert Delahaije, 1915–87, the former archivist (1946–87) at Nijmegen and the compiler of the Biesman family archive.

the ancient rights and privileges of the Empire, and faithfully sent its annual rent of a glove full of pepper to the Holy Roman Emperor.<sup>10</sup>

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Geurt Jansz. Van Beuningen, b. c. 1470



On 10 August 1589 Sir Martin, having (for a price) changed allegiances and joined the rebellion against Spain, headed a flotilla of men on barges to the wharves of Nijmegen in an attempt to recapture the city, this time for the Dutch republic. He dashed headlong into the city without waiting for his barges to be safely docked, and attacked a wedding party in the residence he hoped to establish as his headquarters. Most of his party was struggling in the awkward barges to gain the wharves, and his attack was a wretched failure. Schenk drowned during his retreat. His body was fished out of the river, beheaded, drawn and quartered, and put on public display in Nijmegen,<sup>12</sup> a daily sight for young Lambert.

After the death of William and until 1590 the so-called United Provinces were anything but united, with many important cities still in Spanish hands. Were it not for the heroic efforts of Johann Oldenbarneveldt, who single-handedly held together the independently minded states, the fragile union would not have survived until the emergence of Prince Maurice of Nassau, stadholder of five of the provinces, as the military commander of the Dutch revolution.<sup>13</sup>

In 1591 Maurice, with his small but disciplined army of 20,000 foot and 2000 horse, conducted a brilliant campaign in which he turned the Spanish out of eight cities along the German border. One by one, the cities fell to his outstanding generalship: Deventer, Groningen, Deftzyl, Opslag, Yementil, Steenwyck, Hulst, and

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<sup>10</sup> John Lathrop Motley, *History of the Netherlands from the death of William the Silent to the Twelve Years' Truce, 1584–1609*: Project Gutenberg, <http://www.Gutenberg.org/etext/4885> (hereafter, Motley, *History*).

<sup>11</sup> J. C. Mollema, *De eerste Schipvaart der Hollanders naar Oost-Indië 1597–1597*, Martinus Nijhoff, 3-Gravenhage, 1936, p. 56 (hereafter, Mollema, *De eerste Schipvaart*).

<sup>12</sup> Motley, *History*.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

finally, on 21 October, Nijmegen fell, never again to be Spanish. Prince Maurice collected the bones of the unfortunate Schenk and arranged for a Christian burial.<sup>14</sup> Living through this eventful period in Nijmegen's history should have provided Biesman enough excitement to last a lifetime, but new opportunities were available to him with Netherlands' independence, and Lambert sought new lands and untravelled routes. In his own words, 'Wij nieuwe landen gaen soecken de noyt bevaren sijn geweest'.<sup>15</sup>

### The first voyage

Biesman's cousin Gerrit Van Beuningen had earlier removed himself over religious differences from his family in Emden, where his grandfather had established the family. He rejoined the family in Amsterdam, where Gerrit's knowledge of the Spanish trade, gained through his brother Eilart in Emden, was valuable to the merchants of Amsterdam. In 1594 cousin Gerrit learned of the Compagnie van Verre, a venture that followed closely upon Linschoten's revelations<sup>16</sup> about the Portuguese trading empire and how to get there. Gerrit not only signed on in the service of the company but became an investor as well.<sup>17</sup> Biesman was enthralled by the notion of journeying to distant lands, and he petitioned his cousin ceaselessly to be included on the voyage. His entreaties were heeded by his older cousin, and he and fellow cousin Jacob Jansz were given berths on the voyage as cadets. Biesman's excitement can easily be detected in the following letter, one of seven that are preserved in the Biesman Archief in Nijmegen.

Lambert Biesman. Letter No. 1<sup>18</sup>

*Laus Deo*, 6 November *anno* 94, in Amsterdam

Gracious and well loved father. This is just to advise you that I came here to Amsterdam from Rotterdam with these ships, should you hear of it, to sail, with God's help, to the Indies. A favourable opportunity to do so arose by recommendation of Jan Jacobsz.<sup>19</sup> and my cousin, Gerrit van Bueningen, who shall be vice-admiral. There will be four *adelborsten* on each ship, who, beside the Captain, shall have command over the *volk*. Of the former I shall be one, my wages have not been determined, though doubtlessly I shall receive

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Other references establish a different order of Maurice's battles.

<sup>15</sup> 'We go to seek new lands, which have never before been seen.'

<sup>16</sup> Jan Huygen van Linschoten, *Travel Document of the Navigation of the Portuguese to the Orient*, 1595.

<sup>17</sup> Mollema, *De eerste Schipvaart*, p. 56.

<sup>18</sup> Het Archief de Familie Biesman.

<sup>19</sup> His mother's cousin Jan Jacobsz. Bal, alias Huydecoper.

no less than twenty florins per month,<sup>20</sup> and I shall mess at the Captain's table with my cousin Jan (sic).

I leave tomorrow for England to acquire some armaments of which we are lacking.<sup>21</sup> My cousin Gerrit van Bueningen sent me, with the recommendation of the Heeren Staten.<sup>22</sup> May the Lord God grant us a good voyage, may our lives be protected as we sail to hitherto unknown lands. My cousin and I have measured on the world globe the voyage we plan to accomplish: we found it will be little short of sailing the whole world round, and hope to accomplish what the Portuguese require three years to do in only two, and go four or five hundred miles beyond their trading posts.

These ships of ours are fit for a king, well provisioned, as we prepare to sail, with God's help. I pray to inform you, father, I left without the money with which you wanted to reimburse me for a half-dozen coarse shirts, with simple cuffs and collars on them, to be made up while I am in England, along with an undecorated sleeping cap for our Gert.<sup>23</sup> Since I shall have so much to do, with the long trip, you want to have them delivered to my cousin Jan. I shall, if I have time enough, come over and tell you all the details upon my return from England.

I am sending you, with the bearer of this letter, a bag full of good bulbs.<sup>24</sup> Send it to my cousin Jan with great haste, pray do not forget: I promised I would send them and I should be embarrassed were I to fail to do so. They wanted to send money for them which I did not want to accept, for both he and cousin Gerrit have shown me great friendship. If possible, also send a bag of them to Gerrit.

You may think that I expect you to pay all my expenses, so I warrant that, should I return alive, you will not suffer any injury. I am here praising God and dancing with joy, delivered of nearly all the great toil.

Herewith I want to greet my father now, together with all great friends, who are, father dear, recommended to the Holy protection of Almighty God.

Your dutiful son,

(signed) LAMBERT BIESMAN

(on the cover) To the honourable and wise Jacob Biesman, my dear father dwelling in Nymeghen. P. amy<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Good pay for an *adelborst*. Fifty years later both the East and West India Companies paid ten florins for the same rank. See C. R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire 1600-1800*, Penguin Books, 1990, pp. 337-340 (hereafter, Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire 1600-1800*).

<sup>21</sup> Mollema, *De eerste Schipvaart*, p. 57. Lambert may have exaggerated his role a little to his father, for Gerrit van Bueningen headed up the cannon buying expedition, a major operation.

<sup>22</sup> Literally, Lords of the Council; either the States of Holland or the States General of the United Provinces.

<sup>23</sup> Sister Geertruid.

<sup>24</sup> Probably tulips. The word here is *knollen*, which could mean almost any tuber or root, but turnips do not seem worthy of mention.

<sup>25</sup> p. a., or par ami, through or with a friend, on addresses of letters (*Calisch Engelsch Woerdenboek*, Arnhem & Nijmegen, 10<sup>th</sup> edn, ca. 1880-1900).

The nation was captivated by the audacity of the venture, and the provinces and the Stadholder each donated two artillery pieces. The municipalities together donated twenty-three, but still more were needed, so Gerrit van Beuningen was sent to England entrusted with the task of buying an additional thirty.<sup>26</sup> The Company for Far Lands was supplied with four ships. Head trader Cornelis de Houtman had as his flagship the *Mauritius* (skipper Jan Jansz. Muelenaer) of 460 tons. Van Beuningen, next in rank, flew his flag from the *Hollandia*, or *Hollandsche Leeuw* (Lion of Holland, skipper Jan Dignumsz.), also 460 tons. The *Amsterdam*, of 260 tons (skipper Jan Jacobsz. Schellinger, trader Reynier van Hell), was the third ship. Lastly, the *Duyfken* (Little Dove), a pinnace of fifty tons (skipper Simon Lambertsz. Mau), completed the flotilla.

Cornelis de Houtman, the head trader, was nominally in charge of the expedition, but the sponsors cautiously did not appoint him admiral, afraid of vesting too much authority in one man. De Houtman, born in Gouda in 1565,<sup>27</sup> was the son of a brewer who was a member of the city council. Gerrit van Beuningen was De Houtman's immediate subordinate. Van Beuningen did not like being in an inferior position to De Houtman, whose family had been retainers of the Van Beuningen family since the prior century. In turn, De Houtman cannot be faulted for protecting his primacy. The officers and traders of the ships made up a *College*,<sup>28</sup> or *Schipsraad*, a council which was required to be convened and to vote on any significant decision. As might be expected, this organization was handicapped by the tensions generated as each member of the council sought to increase his authority and influence. Democracy was a seed not yet planted. The professional seafarers were particularly displeased with sharing authority with the traders and regarded them as little more than passengers.

With Van Beuningen aboard the *Hollandia*, with the rank of trader, was De Houtman's brother Frederick. Frederick was a scholarly man, who assisted the principal navigator Pieter Dircksz. Keyser in the performance of astronomical observations of the southern constellations. Keyser was an associate of the famous astronomer Petrus Plancius and contracted with Plancius to map the southern constellations. Frederick applied himself assiduously to the task, climbing regularly up the mainmast, drawing and making notations with Keyser, and continuing the task after Keyser's untimely death. Keyser's observations contributed greatly to astronomical knowledge, and are valid to this day.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Mollema, *De eerste Schipvaart*, p. 35.

<sup>27</sup> According to Mollema. Other sources place his birth variously at 1540 and 1570. Rietbergen places his baptismal date in 1571. If this is correct, the earliest date may be safely ignored.

<sup>28</sup> Mollema, *De eerste Schipvaart*, p. 39.

<sup>29</sup> Ian Ridpath, *Star Tales*: [www.ianridpath.com/startales/startales1c/htm](http://www.ianridpath.com/startales/startales1c/htm) (also pub. by Universe Books, New York, 1988). Together Keyser and De Houtman charted 135 new stars divided into twelve new constellations, by which names they are still known.

The fleet sailed from Texel on 2 April 1595, with high spirits, flags gaily flying and musicians playing. No Dutch ship had ever attempted to venture so far. To be sure, the Dutch had logged millions of sea miles in the preceding centuries, but rarely farther than the Mediterranean Sea and the Baltic. While competent mariners, they were not long-distance sailors yet, though it would take them scarcely five years for their influence to be felt all over the Indian Ocean and beyond. The voyage started well. On 28 April Biesman saw his first flying fish. On 4 May they encountered two heavily armed Portuguese men-of-war of 500 or 600 lasts burden,<sup>30</sup> who, mercifully, were not inclined to attack the Dutchmen. In fact, the encounter was very friendly. Visits and small gifts were exchanged. The Portuguese admiral spoke wistfully of Dom Pedro<sup>31</sup> and seemed unhappy to be a part of the Spanish Empire. Then the Portuguese continued on their way to Goa, to which city they were carrying the new archbishop.<sup>32</sup>

On 11 May they met up with a Dutch squadron, whose admiral, Joris van Medemblick, told them that their failure to attack the Portuguese was unwarranted but excusable, as the result of misplaced trust. In fact, the traders had been enjoined by the backers of the voyage to avoid strife with the Portuguese. The admiral visited the *Mauritius*, and gifts were again exchanged. On 4 June the fleet crossed the equatorial line, then, facing southerly winds and gales over the next thirty-eight days, made good only thirty degrees of latitude, less than fifty miles a day. Men began to show the signs of scurvy as early as 12 June. Food was spoiling, and much of the supplies had to be cast overboard, too foul to consume. On 2 July the ships' council cut the wine ration. By 27 July fifty men (55% of the roll) of the *Hollandia* were sick, and on 1 July scurvy claimed its first victim.

At last signs that the African coast was near began to appear. Pollen was seen on the water by 31 July, and the sounds of trumpeting elephants were heard. The next day birds flew overhead. On 2 August the cape was only twenty miles distant, and on 4 August the *Duyfken* sailed into the Bay of San Bras, from whence she reported good anchorage to the fleet. On the *Hollandia* now there were eleven dead, and fifty men of the remaining fifty-three were sick. The *Mauritius* fared hardly better, with an even longer sick list but only two dead. Three small parties in ships' boats, led by Van Beuningen, were sent out to find food and, it was hoped, to trade with the native peoples, and soon six sheep were purchased from the local people for thirty pounds of rough iron rod. On 8 August a party sent ashore for water went oystering, and found these mussels in quantity, some with pearls. Thereafter, the Dutch called the Bay of San Bras by the name Mosselbaai.<sup>33</sup> On the same day, two more men died.

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<sup>30</sup> A last is approximately two tons.

<sup>31</sup> The pretender to the throne of Portugal, whose ambitions were finally quashed by Philip II in 1584.

<sup>32</sup> W. Lodewycksz, *Om de Zuid*, ed. by V. Roeper & D. Wildeman, SUN, Nijmegen, 1997. The timeline in greater detail may be found in this source, which is to be understood as the basis of the following account of the first voyage, except where otherwise noted. (hereafter, Lodewycksz, *Om de Zuid*.)

<sup>33</sup> Credit for the naming of Mosselbai is frequently awarded to Paulus van Caerden, who, as Admiraal van Caerden revisited the cape in 1601. He certainly remembered the experience of the De Houtman fleet there, of which he was a member, and knew the location as Mussel Bay. Credit, however, should be given to De Houtman, or perhaps Lodewycksz. for originating the name.

Although the shores of the bay did not provide abundant food, the immediate problem of starvation was alleviated. The food that was available there did not include, however, fruits and edible green plants to address the scurvy. The local people, whom the Dutch called Hottentots, were the Khoikhoin, a gentle people who spoke a click language. The Khoikoin had to be sought out in order to conduct trade with them. After a while, they came around no more, likely reluctant to deplete their own meagre stores and flocks. They were neither numerous enough nor wealthy enough to manage the provisioning for nearly two hundred men. It was clear that the fleet could not afford to stop here much longer. The ships' council determined that it was time to push on. Departing from Linschoten's sailing directions, which directed them to Mozambique, the fleet set sail on 11 August to Madagascar, where the Bay of Antogonil, on the northeast coast, was reported to be lush and fruitful. They arrived at the south-eastern tip of the island on 3 September after a difficult passage hindered by severe storms, typical of the southern winter. Nearly every day found more men dead.

The prevailing winds could provide no further progress to the north along the eastern coast, so they were obliged to follow the southern shore to the west. The fleet found a secure anchorage on 13 September at the island of Nosy Manitsa, off the Gaga peninsula. Thirty-one men died between 2 September and 21 September. Jan Dignumsz. van Quadyk, captain of the *Hollandia*, died on 29 September. The fleet remained at the island until 7 October, able only to minister to the sick and dying. The dead they removed to the island, where seventy men still lie, and the island ever after has been known as the 'Hollandsche Kerkhof', or Dutch Graveyard.

The area nearby yielded little sweet water and almost nothing else to satisfy their needs, but they were powerless to move on. Fish were abundant, and some trade was conducted with the inhabitants, but never enough to relieve their suffering. Dissension wracked the Ships' Council, with the traders and the sailors each blaming the other party for the sorry state of affairs. The sailor faction wanted to return home. A serious disagreement arose between Van Beuningen and the Ships' Council between 1 October and 7 October over the successor to the deceased Dignumsz. Principal Navigator (*Opperpilot*) Pieter Dircksz. Keyser seemed the obvious choice, especially since he had sailed these waters under a Portuguese flag, but some members of the Council wanted to consider other names. Van Beuningen, breaking his oath, appointed Keyser on his own initiative and swore him to the office. Van Beuningen deliberately undermined the Council's authority and, whomever they might ultimately have chosen, they would not soon forget this challenge. The *Duyfken* was sent out to search for water and food. It explored to the south and west as far as St. Augustine Bay in her search for fresh water, which was found in abundance there. The native peoples nearby were eager to trade fat oxen and sheep in exchange for European trade goods, such as tin spoons. Meanwhile green vegetables and fruit were still in short supply and men continued to die.

At last the fleet moved on. A working party was assembled comprising the most able-bodied from all four ships to weigh the anchors, for no single ship had men strong enough for the task. From Nosy Manitsa they sailed west along the southern coast to St Augustine Bay, where the fleet lay from 9 October to 13 December. On 12 October the sick were brought ashore to strengthen them, and the native people engaged in peaceable trade with the Dutch. That day Van Beuningen and De Houtman



engaged in a ferocious quarrel over the promotion of Keyser. The adelborsts later circulated a petition on Van Beuningen's behalf, written on 20 November, with seven signatures upon it, which they delivered on 5 December. Biesman's signature is prominent on the lower right hand side of the page.<sup>34</sup> A petition of this sort suggests Van Beuningen was courting the younger officers to support him over De Houtman.

On land, the men recuperated nicely. Death became increasingly rare, and by 14 December the ships again weighed anchor to begin the voyage to Java. A few days out the fleet was ravaged by severe storms and forced to turn back. This time, landfall was near the original objective, the Bay of Antigonil. While underway, Van Beuningen attempted to execute a plan he may have conceived after his argument with De Houtman. It probably was his intention to separate from the fleet and sail onward alone, admiral of his fleet of one.<sup>35</sup> It is hard to ascertain his plan,<sup>36</sup> but Van Beuningen's scheme was discovered, and he was arrested and placed in shackles on 28 December.

After its arrival at the Bay of Antigonil on 5 January 1596, the fleet anchored by Santa Maria Island, immediately to the south of the bay. More food was obtained from the local population, very cheaply: rice, poultry, goats, and the fruit that had previously been so hard to find. At first trade went on smoothly, but soon the Dutch began to wear out their welcome. As the relationship faded, trade suffered and finally ended altogether. On 12 February the fleet once again set sail, in better shape than it had been since its departure from home. On 28 February Van Beuningen was released from his shackles, still under arrest, to spend the next year in his cabin. Another hard passage lay ahead, for the fleet faced south-easterly winds during the entire voyage. On 5 June the fleet anchored by the island on Engano, near the Strait of Sunda, after three months and twenty-two days at sea. An agreeable arrangement was made with a local pilot to lead them to Bantam, where they arrived on 22 June. Of the 249 men who had embarked a year ago, fewer than half were still alive.

The local sultan, Abd 1 Kadir, was a child, his father only recently dead, so De Houtman met with the regent, Ki-Patih Djajanagara, about trading for pepper. Djajanagara arranged for the Dutch to meet with Sultan Keling Padjang, the high sultan of Java. After a month-long negotiation, the sultan entered into a treaty with Prince Maurice, whereby the Dutch received favoured-trading status over the Portuguese, in exchange for protection of the sultan in time of war. A rate of exchange was established between the silver *real*, brought by the Dutch for trading, and the copper *caixas*,<sup>37</sup> which was tendered for nearly all goods in Asia. The

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<sup>34</sup> Rietbergen, Lambert Biesman. A facsimile of part of the document may be examined in this article.

<sup>35</sup> Mollema, *De eerste Schipvaart*, p. 57.

<sup>36</sup> Lodewycksz, *Om de Zuid*. This journal, the principal first-person account of the voyage, is like a naturalist's notebook, and maintains a daily account of progress made, lands visited, flora, fauna, inhabitants encountered, and is profusely illustrated. It contains very little about the dissensions that wracked the voyage.

<sup>37</sup> Mollema, *De eerste Schipvaart*, p. 226 footnote. The exchange rate was set at 100,000 caixas = 8 reals, or 18 guilders. Caixa is the origin of the English word *cash* (Dutch, *cassa*).

Portuguese had had no European rival for trade in Java for the last seventy-five years, and they looked for ways to sabotage the treaty.

During negotiations the cadets from the *Hollandia* (Biesman surely among them) were pressed into service after the completion of a series of talks, and in their best bib and tucker, presented the sultan a gift of fine crystal, a gilded mirror, and several scarlet cloths. A reception for the sultan aboard the *Mauritius* was proposed, and the cadets were offered as hostages to ensure his safety. The sultan declined the offer, saying he did not doubt the good faith and honesty of the negotiators; besides, he wanted to think it over. After the audience was concluded, he invited the cadets to his residence, where he treated them with confections. That evening they rowed back to the ship.<sup>38</sup>

In Bantam all of Biesman's desires to see and experience new things were fulfilled. The market was full of strange sights, sounds, and smells. Strange people were there dressed in unfamiliar clothing. The goods offered there went far beyond pepper, cloves, cinnamon and nutmeg. A description of the principal market follows:<sup>39</sup>

Operating every day in Bantam are three markets where goods are exchanged. The largest of these is in a great square on the east side of the city. At daybreak traders of all nationalities: Portuguese, Arabians, Turks, Chinese, Klingalese, Pegunese, Malays, Bengalese, Gujaratti, Malabarese, Abyssinians, and others from all the domains of the Indies come to conduct trade. After nine hours, everyone packs up and goes away. I shall speak of the wares that are sold in the market.

We begin clockwise at the front along the houses and then along the waterside. Before entering the palisade, there is a mosque, where women sit with bags and measures, who sell small lots of pepper, by the *ganta*, or three-pound bag, purchased from the farmers nearby who bring it to the market. They are very experienced in this. They pay the farmers 800 or 900 caixas per *ganta*. There one finds also Chinese who are equally shrewd: they go out to the farms and make an offer for the whole crop. They carry a rod with a weight on one end and a bag on the other. They dump the pepper in the bag until it balances in order to obtain true weight, so as not to be deceived by the farmers.

On both sides of the entrance to the palisade stand a group of women who sell betel-nuts, areca (papaya), bananas, and watermelons. Just beyond them are more women who cook and sell hot baked goods. Still farther and to the right is the pitch of the men who sell weapons. They have short rifles, poniards (a dagger they call a *kris*), iron skewers and knives and other weapons, but also white and yellow sandalwood. Left of the weapon sellers are the confiseurs, who sell sugar, honey and assorted confections. Next are the bean stalls where one may buy white, black, red, yellow, green, and grey beans for 300 caixas per *ganta*. In an adjacent cul-de-sac is the onion and garlic market. In front of them are merchants with all sorts of linen goods and other wares. Following along brings one to the brokers who insure cargoes for

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<sup>38</sup> Mollema, *De eerste Schipvaart*, pp. 232-3.

<sup>39</sup> Lodewycksz., *Om de Zuid*, pp. 139-45.

ship owners, and next, on the right, the poultry market. There one may purchase chickens, ducks, doves, small animals, parrots and other birds.

From there are three paths. The first leads to the stalls of the Chinese, the second to the vegetable and kitchen herb market, and the third to the meat market. Following first the path to the Chinese stalls, on the right are the jewellers, Persian and Arabian, who sell small rubies [*robijntjes*], jacinths [*jacinten*], spinels, *balassen*, garnets, and [larger] rubies and all sorts of precious stones. On the left side of the path are Bengalese and other merchants who sell their wares with sharp practices. At the end of this path are, finally, the Chinese stalls. They offer fabrics of all sorts and colours, silks and damasks, velvet, satin, gold thread, cloth-of-gold, porcelain ware and beautiful baskets filled with lacquer ware, large and small brass plates, cast and beaten copper vessels, quicksilver, beautiful small crystals, writing paper in many colours, bound almanacs, gold leaf in books, mirrors, combs, spectacles, sulphur, Chinese sabres with lacquered sheaths, medicinal roots, fans, and parasols that men use to shade their heads from the sun. These stalls fill two streets on both sides.

On the right of the second path are the stalls of the Bengalese, on the left is the men's cloth market. Next to that is the cloth market for married women. Men may not enter there under penalty of a severe fine. Farther along, on both sides of the path, is the fruit and vegetable market. All sorts of spices and fruits are sold there, entirely different from the fruits that we know. The only recognizable fruits are oranges, lemons, limes, and pomegranates. These markets meander onwards throughout and reach the boundary of the square.

On the third path comes first the fish market where all sorts of fish are sold, then on the left is the meat market with good oxen, deer, and buffalo meat. Beyond that is the spice market. Women sit there and sell spices in small lots: white and black pepper, cloves, nutmeg, mace, cinnamon, cumin, dried ginger, *kwijl wortel* [literally, slobber-root], wild ginger, Spanish pepper, green pepper, poppy seed, gum from the rubber-tree, aloe wood, sandalwood, *costus indicus* [used in perfumery], aromatic nardus from the Himalayas, *kalmoes*, Chinese root [ginseng?], rhubarb, medicinal galingale root, *kwijlzaad* [literally, slobber-seed], fennel, aniseed, coriander, hashish, thorn-apple, cannabis, cantior [a kind of ginger], turmeric, *katjoe* [used by betel chewers], black mustard, *cypergras*, saffron, bay leaf, medicinal *podii* seed, *sari* powder, garlic, tormentil, *tagari* root, red cedar, *jalawe* fruit, dried *paravas* leaves, white and black rosin, coral, and many other things that we have forgotten.

We have omitted, in all of this, the rice market on our right. Bags of rice are sold there, ready for loading onto the small vessels along the shore. After the rice market we find the pottery market, the mat market, and finally the salt market. Great mounds of coarse salt from Jaratan and other places are there. On the left, then, are the oil market and the coconut market, which brings us back to the place where our circuit began. Captains and merchants from all over the Indies sail here and trade.

Trading had scarcely begun when, on 28 August, a dispute arose over the price of the pepper and the uniformity of the bags, and De Houtman protested that the Portuguese were also loading pepper onto two of their junks, which he threatened to strip of their cargo. The Portuguese had no headquarters in Bantam, only a storehouse

with a few men, but their influence greatly exceeded the size of their contingent, and they were familiar with the power brokers of the port. The Portuguese retaliated by circulating a rumour that the Dutchmen were not sincere and that the treaty was a sham, and the Dutch meant to seize the next crop of pepper and then destroy the town. De Houtman's tactlessness was ill-timed, for his Dutch ships were not yet laden. The Portuguese appealed to the sultan to arrest the blustering Dutchman because of his threat, and the sultan obliged them. On 5 September De Houtman and all the Hollanders ashore were arrested and imprisoned. The Dutch fleet, after hearing the news, fired on the town and confiscated the two Portuguese junks. On 7 September about twenty Javanese proas surrounded the Dutch ships, and again the Dutch fired their cannons on them, wreaking great destruction.

The Dutch in the ships, now critically short of water, sailed along the coast in search of a fresh stream, leaving their companions behind. This took them two weeks to accomplish. During this excursion Skipper Keyser, the object of the dissension between De Houtman and Van Beuningen, died. Meanwhile, in the sultan's lock-up, De Houtman must have felt that the fleet had abandoned him to his fate. Upon the fleet's return he agreed to pay the ransom demanded by the sultan and he was released, along with his men. He somehow managed to reopen the trading contract, and the trading resumed spiritedly. On 24 October Sultan Padjang suddenly placed an embargo on trading in Spanish reals, cleverly not forbidding the Dutch to trade, had they but the right currency, and this embargo effectively put the toilsome Dutchmen out of business.

With the ships still not profitably laden, De Houtman on 6 November turned his face east and continued on his way along the north coast of Java in the direction of the Moluccas, passing by Japara and Tuban. Here and there he was able to trade for small lots of pepper. On 5 December, at Sidajoe, the local sovereign welcomed the fleet to his anchorage, then, pretending to honour the *Amsterdam*, attacked the ship instead. Of the twenty-seven men on board, twelve were killed outright and four were badly wounded. Sailing on, the bewildered men three days later lay at anchor at Madura. An ambassador from the monarch there arranged for the king to visit the fleet where he would bid them welcome beside the *Mauritius*. The monarch's retinue mistakenly approached the *Amsterdam* and were fired upon by the apprehensive crew, sinking the king's proa, killing him and nine others.

The mood of the fleet was now at its lowest ebb. The whole voyage had been one long quarrel, and since his release from captivity in Bantam De Houtman had hardly wielded any authority whatever. Next a dispute developed between the traders and the ships' captains. The traders wanted to sail on to the Moluccas and conduct more trading there. The captains and mates had no further confidence in the mission and refused to sail farther. With the inadequate manning of the ships likely to worsen, the captains thought it too risky to continue. Some of the men who wished to continue had brought money with them with which to trade privately, and had never the opportunity to do so.

Ninety-four men had survived, although some had been mortally wounded, so at Council it was decided to abandon the *Amsterdam*, stripping and burning her, while dividing her remaining crew among the three other ships. In the conflict between the traders and the captains a compromise was reached on Christmas day: the *Hollandia*

(Biesman's ship) would go on to the Moluccas and continue to trade while the other two would return home. Jan Meulenaer, the captain of the *Mauritius* and spokesman of the seafarers, agreed under protest to go along with the plan. That very evening, while at table, Meulenaer complained of feeling unwell, took a sip of water, and suddenly fell dead. This event signalled the end of whatever authority De Houtman still possessed. The council arrested him on suspicion of poisoning the captain and placed him in confinement, under guard. The council deliberated what to do next. They determined the best course was to return immediately to the Netherlands. They decided to deliver De Houtman to a civil magistrate at home, just as they were to do with Van Beuningen.

The fleet, now crewed by eighty-nine men, stopped at Bali to refresh themselves. They stayed there for four weeks. Van Beuningen was given the freedom of the deck. Two men jumped ship at Bali, fearing more privation and unable to resist the allure of a tropical paradise. The run home was uneventful, save for a stand-off with the Portuguese at Saint Helena, where the fleet would have taken on water. The fleet arrived at the coast of the Netherlands after five and a half months. The men on the *Hollandia* were too feeble to bring her to her anchorage, but on 14 August all the ships were safely led through the seagate.

The voyage was not a financial success, and barely recovered its expenses. The nearly empty holds held only 245 bags of pepper, 45 tons of nutmeg, 30 bales of mace, and a selection of Chinese porcelain.<sup>40</sup> The backers were aghast at the terrible loss of life. But the voyage was, in another sense, a resounding success in that it showed to the Dutch that they might successfully reach the Indies. In the following year no fewer than twenty-two ships distributed over six expeditions ventured out, and the rush to the East had begun.

Lambert Biesman. Letter No. 2<sup>41</sup>

Laus Deo den 9en September Anno 97 in Amsterdam

Gracious beloved father. This will advise you that, praise the Lord, I am again healthy and in good spirits; furthermore, I am surprised not to have heard from you, even as there are many here who are well informed every day, and I long for word from home. Should you not have time to write yourself, you could have my brothers Chrystoffel or Wynant write in your stead.

I have heard on several occasions that my sister Geertruidt is espoused to the stepson of Willem van Eyck, whom, I think, if he is brave and sound, would be a good marriage for her. Really, you must write to me about it, as well as where my brother Gerrit now lives and what he is doing now.

I hope to visit you soon, but our wages are overdue and we have not yet been discharged from our oaths. Furthermore I am concerned on behalf of my cousin Gerrit van Beuningen, held prisoner, and I may be called upon to testify to his innocence. As a blood relative, I feel guilty not to be of more

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<sup>40</sup> R. Silverberg, *The Longest Voyage*, Ohio University Press, Athens, 1997, p. 393.

<sup>41</sup> Archief de Familie Biesman.

assistance, for no-one is better informed than I of the affair; up to now, neither he nor we have had the opportunity to testify, so no-one knows any but the most despicable lies.

As soon as the schout<sup>42</sup> returns from Den Haag the case will be heard, and I have no doubt that the truth will out, through our steadfastness, and their villainy and Godlessness, which has spoilt our wonderful voyage to this extent, will be punished accordingly. The supporters of Van Beuningen, both from his father's and his mother's side, are among the most powerful and respected in Amsterdam. Earnest in his support, they are willing to post sureties for him, even a large sum, be it even 200,000 guilders,<sup>43</sup> and after they have been informed about everything that happened on the voyage we have no doubt that we shall soon see him and the others freed from prison. When we, with the help of God, have made this progress I shall be the first to greet him, God willing.

Greetings to my dear mother, brothers and sisters, and a heartfelt greeting to all my friends, and may you be commended to Almighty God, praying that he will take you into His almighty protection.

In haste, your dutiful son,

(signed) LAMBERT BIESMAN

(On the cover): To the honourable and wise Jacob Biesman, my father at Niemeghen. P. amy.

Van Beuningen recovered his freedom and his reputation but, it appears, not among his former companions in the Compagnie van Verre (absorbed, with the New Company for Voyages, into the Old Company of Amsterdam) and was not invited to participate in their further ventures. It may be significant that none of the three cousins shipped aboard the second voyage to the East Indies. In 1598, Van Beuningen was captain of the *Geloof* (Faith) in the attempt by Jacques Mahu at circumnavigation, and was named vice-admiral, after the death of Mahu off the coast of Guinea and the succession of Simon de Cordes to Admiral. This was accompanied by the transfer of Van Beuningen's command to the *Liefde* (Charity). He was killed on 7 November 1599 with twenty-two of his men, after surviving a strenuous passage through the Strait of Magellan, by Aurucanian Indians at Punta di Lavapié in Chile. The Indians likely mistook the Dutchmen for the Spaniards they had been fighting for well onto sixty years.

De Houtman, with his brother Frederick, was also not invited to participate in new ventures by The Old Company of Amsterdam, and organized a company of his own. He chartered the *Veersche Compagnie* in March 1598, and sailed to the northern coast of Sumatra, where he was captured and fatally poisoned by the Sultan of Atjeh

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<sup>42</sup> Willem van der Does, uncle of *adelborst* Franck van der Does, shipmate of Lambert and friend of the family. The precise meaning of *schout*, which signifies a legal officer such as a sheriff or bailiff, is unclear.

<sup>43</sup> According to Rietbergen, Van Beuningen's family did, indeed, post a surety of f200,000, a princely sum. The whole foregoing expedition had been financed by only f290,000.

(modern Aceh, Indonesia). Frederick was held prisoner there for twenty-three months, until finally released through the exertions of Paulus van Caerden, a companion on the first voyage, now Admiral in his own right. The Sultan had offered Frederick his freedom in exchange for conversion to Islam, but he was unshakable in his faith.

True to his scholarly nature, Frederick compiled a Dutch-Malay dictionary and phrase book to occupy his time, and it was used to great advantage by the Dutch East India Company, in which he was later to serve with distinction. He also continued the celestial observations begun with Keyser, increasing the number of measured star positions to 303. His dictionary was published upon his return to Gouda, with an appendix listing his observed star positions. Regrettably he failed to credit or even to mention Keyser in his book, a manifest case of scientific plagiarism.<sup>44</sup> Later he served as governor of Amboina (1605-11) and Molucca (1621-23). In 1619 he discovered the dangerous shoals off the west coast of Australia which are named Houtman's Abrolhos.<sup>45</sup>

One might imagine that Biesman's appetite for adventure had been sated, but, in spite of the privations he had suffered, he was eager to have another run. Meanwhile, ashore, he waited patiently for the pay-off of the crew from the *Hollandia*. We are left uninformed about that disposition, but there was little profit made from the voyage, and Biesman may have waited in vain for his wages.

Lambert Biesman. Letter No. 3<sup>46</sup>

Laus Deo, den 13en September, in Amsterdam anno 97.

Gracious and well loved father. I am sending you my chest with Cornelis Glaemaker, the bearer of this letter. Please compensate him for his trouble, that he will handle it carefully when it is delivered, for it is partially broken. I have written two days ago with Arnt Stevens, you will want to reply to that. Today I received a letter from my brother Christoffel through the wife of Willem van Mullichem, which contents has saddened me not just a little. I am also rather surprised, that in such long time nothing has changed, as my only hope was, that cousin Jan would have been paid by now, but as that is not the case yet, one needs patience. Furthermore I want to recommend you, apart from greetings to all friends, to the mercy of the Almighty God.

With haste

Your dutiful son  
(signed) LAMBERT BIESMAN

(On the cover): To the honourable and pious Jacob Biesman, my dear father in Nymeghen.

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<sup>44</sup> Ian Ridpath, *Star Tales*.

<sup>45</sup> Rijkmuseum Volkenkunde Leiden, at [www.rmv.nl/publicaties/3Enggano/e/tekst/houtman.html](http://www.rmv.nl/publicaties/3Enggano/e/tekst/houtman.html). Abrolhos means, in Portuguese, literally, 'Eyes open!'

<sup>46</sup> Archief de Familie Biesman.

The significance of this letter corresponds to information in letter number four, following, which verifies that the first voyage was having difficulty paying off its participants. As to the reference that nothing has changed, Biesman's meaning is obscure to us today, unless it is a reference to the failure of the Company to meet its obligations. The contents of the chest are a mystery. Dr Rietbergen, in his *Numaga* article, speculates that it may have contained the results of Biesman's private trading, possibly holding some of the first Chinese porcelain to reach the Netherlands.

### **The circumnavigation of the globe. Biesman's second voyage**

While Biesman and his cousin Jacob may have been shunned by the successors of the Compagnie Van Verre, a Rotterdam brewer, tavern keeper, and adventurer named Olivier van Noort, organizer of the Magellansche Compagnie, was searching from among a very slim list of Dutch mariners experienced in the East. Lambert and Jacob had exactly the credentials he sought. Van Noort's plan was to circumnavigate the globe by sailing west through the Strait of Magellan, following the track of Drake and Cavendish to the Indies, there to trade for spices. To that end, he also recruited the English navigator Thomas Melis<sup>47</sup> (or Mellish), who had safely led both Drake and Cavendish on their remarkable – and profitable – ventures. Melis, now a full captain, would accept a reduction in rank in order to sail as *opperpilot* for Van Noort.

Van Noort obtained the necessary permission from the States-General and his request for *letters-of-marque* from Prince Maurice was honoured:

'We, Maurice, Prince of Orange, have fitted out these vessels which we are sending to the coasts of Asia, Africa, America and the East Indies to negotiate treaties and to trade with the inhabitants of these regions. But as we have been informed that the Spanish and the Portuguese are hostile to the subjects of our provinces, and are interfering with their navigation and trade in these waters, contrary to all natural rights of cities and nations, we hereby give explicit orders to go to these islands, to resist, to make war, and to strike as many blows as possible against said Spanish and Portuguese.'

The Prince signed the warrant on 28 June 1598. Investors in Rotterdam furnished two ships, The *Mauritius*<sup>48</sup>, named for Prince Maurice, and a 50-ton yacht, the *Eendracht* (Harmony or Unity). The other investors, in Amsterdam, bought and equipped two additional ships, the 350-ton *Hendrik Frederik* (named for the Stadtholder's brother) and the 50-ton yacht *Hoop* (Hope). The company elected van Noort the General or *Admiraal* of the enterprise, with the *Mauritius* his flagship (Huigen Jansz. van Troyen, master). Vice-Admiraal Jakob Claesz. van Ilpendam was aboard the *Hendrik Frederik* (Arend Klaesz. Kalkbuis or Callebuys, master). Jakob

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<sup>47</sup> Melis's first name is obscure, but he is listed as Thomas Melis by the historian Richard Hildreth in *Japan as it is and was*, Phillips, Sampson & Co., Boston, 1855, p.133. Hildreth does not reveal a source for this information, but Thomas will serve as well as any.

<sup>48</sup> Capt. J.Burney, *A Chronological History of Voyages of Discovery*, London, 1804, p. xx, asserts that the *Mauritius* was Van Noort's personal ship.



Jansz. Huidekoper was captain of the *Hoop* and Pieter Esaiasz. de Lint was captain of the *Eendracht*.

Lambert Biesman. Letter No. 4 <sup>49</sup>

Laus Deo den 6en July Anno 98 in Amsterdam

Dear Brother, you must do me the favour of calling on the wife of master Dirck van den Bonen, who resides, I am informed, in Nijmegen, who offered me four or five embroidered hat rims trimmed with pearls for fifty daalders<sup>50</sup>, not to be paid until my return, but I dared not to risk it, as I did not know if they would be good for trading in the West Indies, but as I now gather from an acquaintance who has just returned from there, they are more in demand there than anything else I could carry, so I want you to contract with her for them under any conditions you find agreeable; my masters want to accept them from me against a reasonable value as if they were cash currency. Don't trouble to haggle, for as our voyage looks to us now, you will have no cause for regret.

I spent some five or six days in Rotterdam, where at dinner we were introduced to a pilot, just arrived from England, which our Heeren were not just a little pleased about, as they had been expecting him for some time. This pilot has made our voyage twice already, once with Drake and once with Cavendish. He assures us there is no peril in it, and that the voyage ahead of us will be the most beautiful and profitable ever done; that it has enticed him from the service of his King to sail with us, as he is himself a full Captain on the water, and he has insisted to join with us on the condition that he shall receive no wages, the better for us to profit. His further revelations I dare not entrust to my writing pen, as it must remain secret.

I pray thee to perform the service of friendship to see me off, for which you will have to be here in the early part of next week: it would mean a great deal to me. I would have sent you what I have received of the starting wages, but I live in hope that my previous master will do the right thing. I have now nine hundred guilders from my masters, excepting my two months' wages, but when you come here you can take away all that I have in hand.

I stay at the Venlo Inn, as the house of cousin Jan (Jan Jacobsz. Bal, father of shipmate Jacob Jansz. Huydecoper, ed.) is not available, for his wife is lying-in<sup>51</sup>.

My masters hold me in high esteem, and I have been given greater authority than I had anticipated; I have been made *oppercommis* of all the *comenschap* of the fleet and the lieutenant of the Vice-admiral, who is a weak

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<sup>49</sup> Archief de Familie Biesman.

<sup>50</sup> A *daalder* of that period, not to be confused with the more modern *rijksdaalder*, was equivalent to thirty stuivers, or one and one-half guilders.

<sup>51</sup> Jan Jacobsz. Huydecoper, widower, married on 2 May 1590 Lijsbeth Gerritsdr. van Gemen; the youngest born to them was Joan Huydecoper, Knight, Lord of Tamen and Blokland, later Lord of Maarseveen en Neerdijk, who died 27 Sept 1652 in Amsterdam (personal correspondence from Michiel van Ooijen).

but godly man, so that the governing of the ship is mostly granted to me. The general (Van Noort, ed.) also has a lieutenant<sup>52</sup> but he has no authority at sea, and the Admiral's *oppercommis* is lower in rank than me. Cousin Jacob is captain of (one of) the yacht(s), and we now have an entourage of four ships.

Kindly order the aforementioned hat rims as soon as possible. Tell father that I will write him with all particulars ere I leave, but I cannot now, as I have much to do and have no time; and also enquire how he is faring and please greet all friends and commend them to Almighty God.

With haste, your dutiful brother,

(signed) LAMBERT BIESMAN

(on the cover): To my honourable and wise Christoffel Biesman, my dear brother in Nymeghen, p. amy.

The sailing, scheduled for early July, was delayed, for the ships provided by the investors in Amsterdam were very slow making preparations for departure. Van Noort went to sea accompanied by the *Eendracht* to await their arrival at Plymouth, where he would pick up Captain Melis. He encountered adverse winds and returned to Holland, where he seethed with impatience. At last the fleet assembled and, all together, departed from Texel on 14 August 1598.

Biesman's next letters tell the story of the first few weeks of the voyage and of Lambert's personal concerns:

Lambert Biesman. Letter no. 5<sup>53</sup>

1598. Laus Deo Ad. 14 August, old style, on board ship whilst sailing from Texel.

Dear and well beloved, this will serve to advise you that we, by God's mercy, put out to sea today, Monday, with a good wind and a firm faith that merciful God will favour our estimable voyage with honour and success. The reason that we lay by so long was that our ship had been provisioned in such haste that goods were strewn everywhere, we would have been ill-advised to put out to sea with her in such a state and for that reason we were obliged to stow our holds in better order, which has now been remedied with God's help, and we still have time enough.

My affairs go well and I am so well esteemed by my masters that I have been given more authority than I think I was due; the crew respects me as well, and I am the ship's manager. I hope I am able to discharge these obligations creditably; I pray that merciful God, in whom my faith is firm, will continue to bestow His great mercy unto me, so that I may return home with honour and find you in good health.

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<sup>52</sup> Renier Poppes (IJzerman p. 185).

<sup>53</sup> Archief de Familie Biesman.

I have a thousand guilders in the company,<sup>54</sup> apart from two months' wages, that being a hundred and twenty guilders. Of the aforementioned thousand guilders I have made my brother Chrystoffel heir. The signatures of the witnesses Dirck van Haeften and Zeger van Apeltern are on the will. You must request a copy of it, for it is customary among sailors that they are vested with a stake in the company equal to two months' pay, and you must demand it should I die underway without having received it. I have taken all my clothing save for my best mantle, which is at the house of my cousin Jan Jacobs. If it is God's will that I die, I wish for the mantle to be bestowed unto my brother Chrystoffel.

Willem Aertsen improves steadily. Hens still needs some polish, but I hope in time that he will learn. I have no doubt that Willem Aertsen will advance. He is full of energy, and I will do my outmost for him.

Please remind our *predikants* to include me in their prayers from time to time, and tell them I greet them heartily. Greetings also to my brother Chrystoffel and his wife, my dear mother, my brother-in-law, sisters and brothers, Jan de Graeff, Jacob van Herwarden and his wife, all the friends in the council, particularly Wytien van Haeften, Gysbertien Segers and all good friends, and do not forget my brother Gerrit. Will you encourage my brother Wijnandt to apply himself to his studies, so that he may become accomplished in some foreign languages, ciphers and philosophy, because doubtless I shall be able to recommend him to an important position if this voyage is successful and he is at all capable.

Herewith it is my wish to recommend you to the protection of the Almighty, who will keep you and all your friends in good health and prosperity and who shall give to us that which we cherish, so that we may be joyfully reunited.

With haste, your dutiful son,

(signed) LAMBERT BIESMAN

Underneath, written in a different hand

Min inleggen (my stake) . . . . .	225 g.
D. van Haften . . . . .	200 g.
Abraham . . . . .	100
S. van Apelt . . . . .	<u>104</u>
	629

(on the cover): To my honourable and distinguished Jacob Biesman, my loving father, dwelling at Legemerckt in Nijmegen. Reward the messenger.

The fleet was still not yet ready to sail, consequently its final departure was delayed until 4 September (old style) from Goeree, in South Holland. Biesman does not explain this last delay, from 14 August until 4 September. The fleet arrived at Plymouth on 9 September as Biesman relates, below.

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<sup>54</sup> IJzerman, vol.2, p.62, suggests that Lambert had received some money, either from his old masters or from the sale of the decorated headbands.

Lambert Biesman. Letter no. 6 <sup>55</sup>

Praise be to God. The 10en September old style, in Plymouth

Kind and well beloved father, we have made good progress and came here into port yesterday, Saturday: I believe we will sail again today at mid-day, and with these good winds we hope to make good seaway as we embark upon our voyage. May God almighty grant us (as aforesaid) good speed and guide our decision when best to leave. I don't know what else to write, other than that all is well and that we are four ships, all told. I have learned with great distress through my brother Wynandt in Zeeland of the great number of deaths there<sup>56</sup>, yet God's will be done. I pray that He will see you and all good friends through and protect you from this pestilence. I wish also my brother Chrystoffel, his wife, my dear mother, my brother-in-law Jan, my sister Geertruyd, Hilleken, Willemken<sup>57</sup>, Grietjien, and all good friends greetings in great measure, and may they be delivered into the merciful protection of the Lord; and then, with an adieu for two or three years, sincere greetings.

In haste,  
your obedient son,

(signed) LAMBERT BIESMAN

I have taken the opportunity to write everything of significance from Texel.

(On the cover): To the honourable and wise Jacob Biesman, my loving father, dwelling by the Meypoort at Nyemeghen. Reward the messenger.

Six men stole the long boat from the *Hendrik Frederik* and deserted in Plymouth, but as the season was so advanced and a good wind blew from the east, Van Noort decided not to pursue them and sailed on, leaving the *Hendrik Frederik* short-handed.

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<sup>55</sup> Archief de Familie Biesman. In this letter Lambert, aboard the *Hendrik Frederik*, of the Amsterdam contingent, explains the delay that so vexed Van Noort.

<sup>56</sup> Bubonic plague struck western Europe in 1598 with great loss of life.

<sup>57</sup> Probably Willemken Wanray, the prominent Arminian remonstrant, widow of Johan van Kempen, who married Lambert's brother Gerrit in 1604 and is named as Christoffel Biesman's sister-in-law in documents of the period. Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis:  
<http://www.inghist.nl/Onderzoek/Projecten/DVN/lemmata/data/WA>.

Lambert Biesman Letter No. 7<sup>58</sup>

*Laus Deo*, 25 September old style,  
aboard ship under sail at sea near the Canary Islands

Dear Father, as we have met up with some Dutch ships today, returning from Barbaria,<sup>59</sup> I cannot ignore this opportunity to write to you and inform you of our state. We have, with God's mercy, with prosperity and a healthy crew come this far, trusting that God will continue to bestow his mercy upon us and help us to make progress. I have also written you from Plymouth. It is today now three weeks since we departed Zeeland, as you will learn from our Wynant. We are all in good health. Willem and Hans greet you most heartily, and all good friends. All are in high spirits. We have all been very saddened, understanding the high death toll in Nijmegen,<sup>60</sup> but what God wants must happen.

I would write at greater length and more perfectly if not for the great haste. I must finish, with greetings to my brother Stoffel, his wife, my dear mother, Jan van Santvort, and all our sisters and brothers and all good friends. Do not forget my mother's mother, and let herewith almighty God in his merciful protection be praised and heartily received.

With haste,  
Your dutiful son,

(signed) LAMBERT BIESMAN

(On the cover: To the honourable and distinguished Jacob Biesman, *burgemeester*, dwelling at Maypoort in Nijmegen. Reward the messenger.)

These last three letters constitute the last communication received directly from Biesman. The happy state of affairs related by him was to be short-lived.<sup>61</sup>

While passing through the Canary Islands, a ship's boat under tow from the *Hendrik Frederik*, with a man aboard, was lost. The fleet hove to and searched for him until daybreak, but he could not be found. They sailed on, closely following the African coast. The first of the catastrophic disasters to strike the expedition was on 11 December, at Principe, a Portuguese island off the coast of modern Equatorial Guinea. During an attempt to trade there for water and supplies the shore party was ambushed and all were killed save one. Van Noort lost his brother Cornelis in the attack, but more devastating was the loss of Captain Melis.<sup>62</sup> Van Noort retaliated by attacking

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<sup>58</sup> Archief de Familie Biesman.

<sup>59</sup> Morocco or other Barbary states.

<sup>60</sup> See note 54.

<sup>61</sup> From this point forward, the text is based on IJzerman's account, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>62</sup> IJzerman II, ch. VI, p. 65. Of the men in the advance party sent to negotiate with the Portuguese on Principe Island on 11 December 1598, only De Lint survived. Their names (extracted from their individual entries) were Daniel Gerretsz. van der Buys, *commis* (trader), on board the *Mauritius*.

the fort, but it was strongly defended and he was obliged to withdraw. He then sent a contingent to fire the cane fields, but in that effort two more men were killed and sixteen wounded. Water was successfully obtained there, a Pyrrhic victory.

On 25 December a court was assembled and a navigator was set ashore for 'mutinous practices' at Cape Lopez Gonsalvo, on the tip of a peninsula extending into the Gulf of Guinea from modern Gabon. Of all specialties, Van Noort needed navigators more than any, but this was not to be the first instance of poor judgment and arbitrary punishments. Here the fleet met up with some Dutch vessels and from them learned of the death of Admiral Jacques Mahu and several of his men from a disease which was raging among the population ashore. Mahu had been in charge of another, better financed fleet from Rotterdam attempting the route. Fearful of the same contagion, Van Noort directed his course westward for Brazil.

On 9 February they anchored at the entrance of Rio de Janeiro, and subsequently at other places along the coast, but the Portuguese were diligent in preventing them from obtaining food or water, and several more men were lost while attempting to secure provisions. On 10 March it was decided that, with the southern winter approaching, the fleet should winter over at the island of Saint Helena. Now sailing eastward, they were still without fresh provisions and water was running low. On 30 March they recorded the first death from scurvy. On 8 May, in tropical latitudes, they mistakenly calculated that they were east of Saint Helena. They wandered around the South Atlantic, off the coast of west Africa, for three weeks searching for the island. At the end of May they found themselves once more off the coast of Brazil. The Portuguese as before opposed their landing, but on 2 June they found a small island named Santa Clara, about three miles from the coast. Here they anchored and rested the men. They found herbs that were efficient to treat scurvy, and plenty of fish, but water was available only to meet immediate needs. Five men were too ill to recover and died there. On Santa Clara Van Noort dispensed more justice, and sentenced two men to abandonment at some future convenient place for mutinous practices. Another man was sentenced to have his hand fastened to the mast by his knife driven through it for having attacked the pilot with the same knife.<sup>63</sup> He could only release himself by drawing his hand through the blade.

At Santa Clara the *Eendracht* was surveyed and found unfit for further use, and she was dismantled and burned. Sailing on, the three ships arrived on 30 June at the island of San Sebastian where they were able to replace their stores of water. They stayed at San Sebastian until 9 July 1599, when they sailed south for Port Desire in Patagonia. The weather was stormy and they did not arrive at Port Desire until 20 September. Seals and penguins were plentiful there, and the ships were careened and the bottoms scraped. They had now been away from Holland for one full year and had crossed the Atlantic Ocean three times.

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Captain Melis, English navigator who sailed with Cavendish (and Drake, by one account), on the *Mauritius*, Cornelis van Noort, brother of the Admiral, on board the *Mauritius*, Captain De Lint, *Eendracht*, and Hans van Bremen, Stuurman (first mate) of the *Hendrick Frederick*.

<sup>63</sup> Burney, *A Chronological History of Voyages of Discovery*, p. 210. This mode of punishment at sea is mentioned as customary judicial sentence by Olaus Magnus, in the chapter 'De punitione Rebellionis Nautorum'. See *Olaus Magnus: A Description of the Northern Peoples 1555*, ed. by P. G. Foote, Hakluyt Society, London, 1996-98, 3 vols.

On 5 October Biesman's cousin, Jacob Jansz. Huydecoper, died of scurvy and was buried ashore. Pieter de Lint, formerly captain of the *Eendracht*, was named to succeed him, and the *Hoop* was re-christened the *Eendracht*. Biesman was still aboard the *Hendrik Frederik*. On 20 October some native people were seen on the opposite shore. Van Noort with two boats went to the place where they were seen, but found no-one. He landed and marched off into the interior with twenty men. In his absence, the five men tending the boats were attacked: three were killed and one badly wounded by an arrow through his leg. The attackers numbered about thirty, all tall, fierce, and painted. Van Noort examined some grave goods at funerary sites, where the natives exposed their dead to the sky, and found evidence of Spanish contact.

After salting down a plentiful supply of penguins and seals, they sailed away for the Strait of Magellan. On 4 November they anchored off the Cape of Ten Thousand Virgins, at the mouth of the strait. Van Noort lost three of his anchors in stormy weather and requested Van Ilpendam to supply him with one from the *Hendrik Frederik*. Van Ilpendam refused, and offended Van Noort in his refusal by declaring that he was as much a master as the Admiral. Van Noort took notice, but deferred any action. The fleet encountered head winds, and attempted the entrance to the strait three times before gaining entry on the fourth attempt, on 22 November. In passing through the first of the narrows they sighted a man wearing a cloak, running toward them. Their first impression was that he was a European, but when closer he was seen to be a native. There were more people farther away, but none would approach the ships. The Hollanders fired on them five or six times, but the people were unafraid, not understanding the danger.

The second narrows were traversed on 25 November and the fleet arrived at the Penguin Islands. On the smaller of the two, they saw some natives, and two boats were sent to them. The islanders, about forty in number, collected themselves on a high cliff and motioned the sailors not to advance further. They threw penguins down to them, assuming that collecting penguins was the strangers' intent. When the Dutchmen continued on, the natives shot arrows at them. They responded with musket fire, driving the natives from the cliff. After landing, the Dutchmen found the natives had sought refuge in a large cave where they had also placed the women and children of the tribe. The native weapons were no match for the Dutch arms, and a wholesale massacre ensued. Van Noort later recounted this episode with equanimity, regarding it as a measured retaliation for the attack he had suffered at Port Desire, hundreds of miles away. Four boys and two girls escaped the massacre and were taken aboard the ships.

Van Noort next attempted to locate Port Famine, a Spanish settlement placed in the strait after Francis Drake's passage through. Due to the difficulty of provisioning the outpost the settlers there had starved to death, the few survivors seen by Cavendish on his passage in 1587. Van Noort's quest for Port Famine failed, and he next made for Cape Forward. The boats landed there in early December, and found some green herbs which seemed to help those who were suffering from diarrhoea. From there the fleet moved on into a great bay, which Van Noort named for himself. There the ships' carpenters set about making a longboat.

On 15 December to the west was sighted a strange ship, which proved to be the *Geloof*, a ship of the Mahu expedition formerly captained by Gerrit van

Beuningen, last heard of while off the coast of Africa. The ship, commanded now by Sebald de Weert, had entered the South Sea but had been blown back into the strait by furious gales. The other four ships of the Mahu fleet (now the De Cordes fleet) were, as far as De Weert knew, successfully through. De Weert decided to join up with Van Noort. On 19 December a south-southeasterly wind sprung up, and Van Ilpendam, without awaiting orders, fired off a cannon (the signal for the fleet to get underway) and sailed away, continuing to fire his signal gun. Van Noort did not follow. The following day, with a fair breeze, Van Noort fired a signal and set sail, followed by De Weert and the *Eendracht*. The wind failed that evening and anchorage was found near the north shore of the strait. On 22 December, with wind and tide favourable, they again set sail, but De Weert, undermanned and fatigued from a year in the strait, fell behind and abandoned the venture. On 25 December Van Noort rejoined Van Ilpendam, his wayward vice-admiral.

Van Noort called for the ships' council to assemble, in which proceeding it was determined that Van Ilpendam's conduct had a tendency to excite mutiny in the fleet. He was arrested and removed to Van Noort's ship, with notice that he had three weeks to prepare a defence for himself at trial. On 31 December the fleet returned to the great bay in which they had built the longboat. At this time the number of men still alive was 151, 97 having been lost by misfortune, attack and sickness. Only four men were on the sick list. On 8 January two men were killed from ambush while gathering mussels. The same day a boat arrived from Sebald de Weert in the *Geloof*, requesting a two-month supply of bread. Van Noort's answer did little for his reputation at home, for De Weert was able to return to the Netherlands and tell everyone of Van Noort's response. Infamously, Van Noort replied that he had a long voyage ahead himself, and was himself not provided with an excess of bread; and if he should be reduced to want, this was not a part of the world where bread could be easily obtained. No progress was possible for the next few weeks, though several attempts were made.

On 24 January the promised court was assembled to try Van Ilpendam. His defence was considered inadequate, and he was sentenced to abandonment on shore. The punishment was carried out on 26 January 1600. The unfortunate man was put on shore with a small supply of bread and wine. Nothing further is known of his fate.

Van Noort now had vacancies to fill. Pieter de Lint was named vice-admiral and moved to the *Hendrik Frederik*. Biesman was moved off the *Hendrik Frederik* and was appointed captain of the *Eendracht*, his first command at sea. On 6 February Van Noort called a council, and announced that he did not want to spend a winter in the strait as De Cordes had done. He announced that he would continue to attempt the passage for only two months longer. If unsuccessful in clearing the strait at the end of that time he would go the other way round to the East Indies, by way of the Cape of Good Hope. Near the end of February the winds became favourable, and on 29 February the fleet found itself at last in the South Sea.

On 8 March there were 147 persons mustered in the fleet. Four days later, in dense fog, the *Hendrik Frederik*, with 61 men, became separated from the main body of the fleet, never to be seen by them again. An arrangement had been agreed upon that on separation at the strait (for that was a recognized hazard), the fleet would regroup at the island of *Santa Maria*, off the Chilean Coast. On 21 March Van Noort



and Biesman anchored at the island of Mocha. Unknown to Biesman, his cousin Gerrit van Beuningen, then vice-admiral of the Mahu-De Cordes expedition, had late in the previous year been ambushed and slain on the mainland nearby. Biesman was now the sole survivor of the three cousins who had shipped aboard the first expedition to the East Indies. Van Noort sent one of the two men ashore that he had sentenced to abandonment while at Santa Clara to parlay with the natives, in exchange for remittance of his sentence. The man convinced the natives that he was not Spanish, and he opened trading with them. The following day a great exchange of goods was accomplished, and the Hollanders were hospitably entertained. They were treated to the local beer, made of masticated maize.

The Viceroy of Peru had received news from Spain about Dutch intentions in June 1599. On 8 November the Viceroy had been informed by the Governor of the Province of the River Plate of Van Noort's dilatory progress along the Atlantic Coast in August and at Rio de Janeiro the previous February.<sup>64</sup> On 2 December he was informed of the Chilean intrusion of the Dutch Mahu-De Cordes fleet, and on 8 December, the *Blijde Boodschaap* (Glad Tidings), of the Mahu expedition, was taken from Valparaíso (where she had surrendered) to Callao, with her captain Dirck Gherritz. Pomp a prisoner. On 1 January 1600, with eight ships at his disposal, the Viceroy sent, under the command of Pedro Ozores de Ulloa, two galleons and the *Buen Jesus* to stand off Santa Maria until 20 March. Then the galleons were to break away to accompany the silver ship from Arica (carrying the annual production of the mines of San Luis Potosi) to Callao, while the *Buen Jesus* continued the patrol. The five remaining ships he sent for sentry duty off Pisco, about two degrees south of Callao, until they should be required, in turn, to escort the silver shipment, just transferred from Arica, from Callao to Panama.<sup>65</sup>

On 24 March Van Noort and Biesman made for the Island of Santa Maria, hoping to make the rendezvous that the fleet had arranged before broaching the strait. Arriving there on 25 March, he sighted a sail which he expected was the *Hendrik Frederik*. Approaching more closely he observed that the ship was a *patache*,<sup>66</sup> making furious preparation for flight. Van Noort saw an opportunity to gain a prize and immediately gave chase. The *patache* should logically have been able to outrun the heavier, less manoeuvrable square-rigger, but somehow Van Noort was able to capture her, although the chase continued into the following day and carried him two or three hundred miles beyond the rendezvous. It could be that Biesman, in the faster yacht, actually made the catch. In any case, the little ship was captured and her crew made prisoner. From the captain of the *Buen Jesus* Van Noort learned that the prevailing winds were from the south, and that he could not return to Santa Maria. It seems that Van Noort did not inquire how the Spanish were able to sail there, for had he asked, he may have learned that northerly winds could be found away from the coast. Van Noort made no effort to return to the rendezvous. He must now have decided he would rather have specie than spice.

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<sup>64</sup> J. Burney, *A Chronological History of Voyages of Discovery*, vol.2, p.233.

<sup>65</sup> P. Gerhard, *Pirates of the Pacific 1575-1742*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1990 (orig., Arthur H. Clark, 1960), p.27; from Bradley, *Maritime Defence of the Viceroyalty of Peru (1600-1700)*, *The Americas*, vol. 36, no. 2 (1979), pp. 156-7 (hitherto, Gerhard, *Pirates of the Pacific*).

<sup>66</sup> A small ship usually employed to deliver dispatches, not a fast sailer.

The fleet now sailed north along the coast, making no effort at concealment. He was observed, and the Spanish, having little intelligence, assumed he was a part of a larger contingent, which included the four ships of the Mahu-De Cordes fleet which had preceded them. One of those ships still lay at the island of Chiloe, in the south of Chile. A slave named Emanuel from the crew of the *Buen Jesus* told Van Noort that she had been carrying three boatloads of gold that the captain had dumped overboard during the chase rather than let it fall into pirate hands. Van Noort tortured a second slave and the pilot, Juan de San Aval, until he verified that the story was true. He failed to ask why a picket ship should have gold on board.

The same 25 April, in Lima, the Viceroy of Peru, Luis de Velasco, Marqués de Salinas, first learned of the presence of the intruders. On 28 April Van Noort's flotilla reached Valparaíso. There he released the prisoners from the *Buen Jesus*, excepting only Emanuel, another slave and the pilot, Juan de San Aval, who would be useful for coastal navigation. Van Noort seized the *Los Picos* while at Valparaiso, another victualling ship<sup>67</sup> carrying leather, wine, olives and fruit. From her he intercepted letters bound for Panama in which he learned more about Dirck Gherritsz. Pomp's imprisonment in Lima and of the death of Simon de Cordes, leader of the failed expedition preceding him. The captured prize ships *Buen Jesus* and *Los Picos* now accompanied them. On 1 May Van Noort put in at Huasco where he obtained fresh meat and fruit<sup>68</sup> and burned the *Los Picos*. Having some apprehension of the Viceroy's strategy, Van Noort gave the Spanish naval base at Callao<sup>69</sup>, and the five ships patrolling off Pisco, a wide berth as he continued his northward sail.

In Lima, the Viceroy was not slow to respond to this threat. The five-ship squadron under the command of the Viceroy's nephew Juan de Velasco, now patrolling off Pisco, well armed and carrying 400 men, was already assembled to accompany the annual silver shipment to Panama for transshipment overland to the Atlantic.<sup>70</sup> The viceroy gave his nephew Velasco the additional task of searching for the pirates as soon as the silver was safely transferred to a Spain-bound ship in the Atlantic. One of the prisoners released from the *Buen Jesus* told the Viceroy that the pirates wanted to capture the Manila galleon at Cabo San Lucas, as Thomas Cavendish had done in 1587.

Velasco's first assignment was not completed until months after Van Noort had turned his fleet west to commence his passage over the Pacific Ocean. After leaving Panama on August 13, Velasco's squadron reached Acapulco, the galleon's traditional landfall, on August 26. Velasco reported that they had 'counted the rocks along the shore' from Panama north, and found no trace of the enemy, whom he believed had already turned west. The search for Van Noort had the happy result of placing five Spanish ships nicely out of De Lint's way.

Van Noort turned into the Pacific on 10 May, well before his former vice-admiral De Lint had left his vigil at Santa Maria. Charts provided for the Van Noort

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<sup>67</sup> K. Lane, *Pillaging the Empire, Piracy in the Americas 1500-1750*, M. E. Sharpe, Armonk New York, 1998, p.76. (hitherto, Lane, *Pillaging the Empire*.)

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. Lane says 1 April but must mean 1 May.

<sup>69</sup> Callao lies in 12°S.

<sup>70</sup> Gerhard, *Pirates of the Pacific*, pp. 104-5.

fleet must have shown Isla del Coco, an infrequently visited island. Van Noort steered for Coco, but with his accustomed skill failed to find it after an extensive search, so he gave it up and proceeded for the Ladrones,<sup>71</sup> which would be his first landfall in the East. Along the way, he abandoned the *Buen Jesus* which had broken her rudder on 15 August<sup>72</sup>, and on 28 August an unidentified prize for which he had no further use. Shortly after that, he threw the coastal pilot, Juan de San Aval, captured from the *Buen Jesus*, over the side, a punishment usually reserved for pirates.<sup>73</sup> The unfortunate man had accused Van Noort of trying to poison him to death, so Van Noort accommodated him, even though De San Aval had heretofore been treated with courtesy and took his meals with the officers.<sup>74</sup>

In mid-June Van Noort found the easterly trade winds. He had a relatively easy passage to Guam, where he was greeted by 200 canoes, and was able to trade bits of iron for food. At Luzon, on 15 October, he pretended to be a French ship with permission to trade in the Indies, and was able to purchase rice, hogs and poultry. After three days his ruse was discovered by a Spanish official and he sailed on, more pirate than trader, looting every ship he found. On 21 October he captured a small bark loaded with rice and fowls and sank it. On 24 October he went ashore to a village in the Strait of San Bernardino, and found the inhabitants had concealed themselves on their approach. John Caleway, the ship's musician, was captured there and was never seen again. On 28 October Van Noort burned the village in retaliation. On 29 October, Bastien, one of the slaves captured from the *Buen Jesus*, deserted. His fellow slave, Emmanuel, was interrogated and Van Noort, not satisfied with Emmanuel's answers, ordered the man shot. On 30 October a shore party landed and found more hidden rice and hogs, which they slaughtered. Four more villages, each of fifty to sixty houses were put to the torch. On 6 November Van Noort took a Spanish bark and sank it, and on 7 November took a Chinese sampan which he kept to use as a tender. He put aboard a prize crew of six men, leaving the five captured Chinese aboard. On the night of 21 November the sampan vanished, with no trace of his crewmen. When he got to Manila on 24 November he lurked outside the harbour, continuing his piracy.<sup>75</sup>

Manila Bay is enormously large, able to contain all the navies of the world. The north channel to the bay is guarded by two islands; one, very close to the mainland, named La Monja, the other somewhat larger and on the right of the north channel, named Corregidor. There is another island, somewhat outside the bay and to the south, named Fortuna. Upon his arrival Van Noort placed his ships on the mainland side of the islands north of the channel where he concealed himself from view, both from the city and shipping entering the main channel. He called a meeting of the ships' council where he announced his plan to lie at the mouth of the bay until the beginning of February, intercepting all Manila-bound shipping and hoping for the arrival of the annual treasure ship from Panama, laden with silver to buy oriental trade goods. If Biesman's counsel advised against this course of action it would have availed little. There Van Noort lay in wait with Biesman, we hope, his unwilling accomplice, using the islands to conceal themselves from view.

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<sup>71</sup> Modern Mariana Islands.

<sup>72</sup> J. Burney, *A Chronological History of Voyages of Discovery*, vol. 2, p. 225.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* p. 225.

<sup>74</sup> R. Silverberg, *The Longest Voyage*, Ohio University Press, 1997 (orig. Bobbs-Merrill, 1972), p. 414.

<sup>75</sup> The foregoing account of Van Noort's piratical activities from Burney, pp. 225-9.

The progress of Van Noort and Biesman had been so leisurely that word of their presence had preceded them. The governor, Don Francisco de Tello, had already ordered the conversion of two ships for the defence of the port: one, an embargoed cargo ship still laden with its consignment named *San Antonio de Zebu* (Cebu), the other a small galleon<sup>76</sup> still under construction, the *San Bartolomé*. The work on the conversion had already begun when the Dutchmen arrived at Manila.

Dr Antonio de Morga, a judge of the Audiencia, begged Governor de Tello to appoint him over the officer who was currently engaged in the project to complete the conversion of the ships. De Morga was hard to refuse, and the governor awarded him the post. To his credit, De Morga expedited the work on the two ships, but in the haste necessitated by the presence of the two corsairs at their door, the *San Antonio* was not offloaded of its heavy cargo. As a consequence, mounting the necessary guns on her upper decks caused dangerous instability. The ship lay so low due to her excess weight that the lower, lee-side gun ports could not be opened without water flooding into the ship. The smaller ship did not present this problem, but her keel had only recently been laid and much work was necessary to ready her for the sea.

De Morga cajoled the governor to name him the General of the armada, with the *San Antonio* his *Capitano*, or flagship, even though he had little or no fighting experience, a fact he concealed from the governor. The governor had doubts, but De Morga prevailed. Second in command was a proper fighting man, Juan de Alcega, vice admiral, with the *San Bartolomé* his *Almirante*, or vice-admiral's ship. Van Noort and Biesman continued their depredations, unaware that the sound of hammering and sawing coming from behind the Cavite peninsula had any relevance to them. On 3 December Van Noort stopped a Japanese vessel bound for Manila, laden with flour, iron, fish, and hams. Van Noort uncharacteristically purchased provisions from her, as well as a well-made wooden anchor, and let her go on her way. On 9 December he took a Spanish vessel with a cargo of coconut wine and a Chinese sampan with a cargo of rice. Both he sank.

Van Noort dallied too long and had not set a diligent watch. On 14 December Van Noort espied two sail in the passage, standing out of the bay. He sent a boat to the *Eendracht* with orders to intercept them and speak to them, but it soon became apparent that these were vessels of war. He ordered the boat back and began to ready himself for combat. The vessels were very near and Van Noort was left with no time to draw up his anchor. He severed the line and abandoned it. He met the *San Antonio* outside the bay and to the south, not far from Fortuna Island. Van Noort could muster fifty-three men on board the *Mauritius*; Biesman, in the *Eendracht*, twenty-four or five. By Van Noort's account, each of the Spanish vessels was manned with 400 to 500 men. Such a claim is preposterous, but there may well have been near half that number. In turn, De Morga's account inflates the strength of the Dutch ships' manning and size. Van Noort ordered Biesman to stand off and avoid the battle.

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<sup>76</sup> Antonio de Morga, *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*, trans. & ed. by J. S. Cummins, Hakluyt Society, Cambridge, 1971. Actually, according to De Morga, it was a *galizabra*, a three-masted ship generally of less than 100 tons, related to the *fragata*, but equipped with openings for seven oars on each side, which provided the ship great manoeuvrability in port. (hereafter, De Morga, *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*).

Van Noort fired on the approaching *Capitano*, but she could not reply as her lower ports were awash and Van Noort was in her lee. The Dutch cannon wrought great destruction in her bows, so De Morga, unable to respond, ordered the helmsman to steer for the Mauritius and ram her at full speed, further weakening her already damaged bow. When this was done, the Spanish soldiers clambered aboard the *Mauritius* and drove the Dutchmen into the fore- and stern-castles. Now in control of the decks, the Spanish struck the Dutch colours and lowered the main and mizzen sails and removed their rigging. Biesman, seeing his commander's colours struck, attempted to flee. Alcega, also noting the struck colours, assumed the *Mauritius* had surrendered, so rather than engaging the *Mauritius* from her other side as written in his detailed instructions, he pursued the *Eendracht* instead.

Van Noort attempted to negotiate terms of surrender. No one in authority responded, and so the Dutch waited. As the hours dragged by, Van Noort realised that something was amiss. In his account of the battle he claims that the Dutch were fighting the whole time. The Spanish attack seemed now to be without direction. Six hours into the encounter Van Noort set a fire below decks which he knew that he could, with luck, extinguish and ordered his men out of the shelter of the castles, threatening to let the ship blow if they did not resume the fray. The Spanish soldiers fled in panic back to the *San Antonio* upon seeing the smoke. When De Morga was informed that the Dutch ship was on fire he ordered immediate withdrawal and release of the grapples from the sides of the *Mauritius*. This done, the *San Antonio* sank after sailing only a few hundred yards. She had gradually been filling by her bows with water, unknown or ignored by De Morga, and may even have been temporarily stabilised by the grappling lines, which were now severed.

Alcega pursued the *Eendracht* and overtook her after a chase of several hours. Five or six of the *Eendracht*'s men were killed in the ensuing battle for the ship. At the end, Biesman stood in front of the magazine with a burning brand, ready to die rather than surrender. Alcega assured him that he and the crew would be treated with compassion and their lives spared if they would submit, and so achieved their surrender. Alcega returned to Manila in company with the captured *Eendracht* and her crew, where they were turned over to the governor. It seems fair to say that Van Noort, having suffered many casualties himself and his ship badly damaged, could offer little help to Biesman had he tried. The Spanish force on the *San Bartolomé* was much superior in numbers and well armed, even though the ship was hardly larger than the *Eendracht*. De Morga censured Alcega severely for not attacking Van Noort and blamed him for the loss of the *San Antonio*. Had Alcega attacked it seems likely that he would also have taken the *Mauritius*, but it is not likely he could have saved the *San Antonio*.

Van Noort quickly extinguished the fire and set about setting his ship to rights. In a short time he had his ship under control, rigged a foremast sail and set about sailing through the horde of Spanish swimmers, his men shooting and stabbing with pikes all they could reach.<sup>77</sup> Many of the Spaniards were wearing heavy armour

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<sup>77</sup> Burney, *A Chronological History of Voyages of Discovery*, footnote, p. 232. In Theodor de Bry, *Collectiones Peregrinationum*, Frankfurt, 1590-1934, we find the following passage: 'They steered through the midst of the Spaniards swimming all together in the sea, stabbing and killing many of them with pikes in passing, and firing great guns among them.'

which impeded swimming. De Morga later wrote that he swam with the captured colours in his armour for four hours before reaching Fortuna Island. He reported that fifty of the Spaniards drowned. Van Noort claimed that 150 of them drowned or were killed. Van Noort sailed slowly away after clearing the swimmers, making his way to Brunei, where he narrowly escaped an attempt by the ruler there to capture his ship. From Brunei he endeavoured to reach Bantam and failed, then sailed southeast through the Java Sea, stopping near Bali for a few bags of pepper. From there he sailed home with his forty-eight survivors.

According to De Morga the battle for control of the deck of the *Mauritius* waged fiercely for six hours. Other authorities dispute this assertion, which De Morga disseminated throughout the Spanish speaking world in an apologia<sup>78</sup> for his conduct of the battle.<sup>79</sup> An examination was held by a court of inquiry after the battle, and testimony obtained from sailors who were aboard the *San Antonio* (rechristened the *San Diego* after her refit, by which name her wreck is identified) reveals that De Morga cowered behind the capstan in a roll of kapok, trembling with fear and unable to communicate other than to ask his subordinates, 'But what can I do?'. When he at last comprehended that the *Mauritius* was on fire, he, barely lucid, ordered the *San Antonio* to withdraw immediately, by which time she was no longer buoyant.

At the very least De Morga exaggerated his military experience to the governor, and he it is clear that he sought the command only in order to add lustre to his reputation.

Nineteen men, including Biesman, were imprisoned at Manila. The Spanish authorities quickly secured all of the documents, commissions, and orders pertaining to the ship. It did not help Biesman's case that the *commisie-brief* for the commander of the ship was made out in favour of Pieter de Lint, who now commanded the *Hendrik Frederik*. Van Noort had not written a new commission or endorsed the old one, so Biesman had no written authority to be commanding the *Eendracht*. The Spanish, who documented everything, translated the commission papers into Spanish, and the translation is the only copy that survives. In it, the *Eendracht* is named *Concordia* and De Lint, Isayas de Lende.

According to De Morga's account, Biesman and his crew were executed by order of the governor, Don Francisco de Tello, without trial, customary for pirates. Alcega's assurances that their lives would be spared, if they were communicated to the governor at all, were ignored. The prisoners were examined, and six of the youngest were spared upon their acceptance of the Roman faith: most of the Netherlands had until recently been Catholic, and the majority of them had not abandoned that faith, as many have not to this day. Some of the young prisoners were likely not guilty of apostasy at all, but loyal to the Holy Church from the start.<sup>80</sup> The rest, thirteen in all, were given the choice to foreswear the reformed religion so that they might die in a state of grace and be awarded a less painful death. Biesman alone

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<sup>78</sup> Antonio de Morga, *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*.

<sup>79</sup> [http://www.vocshipwrecks.nl/out\\_voyages/hendrik\\_frederik/html](http://www.vocshipwrecks.nl/out_voyages/hendrik_frederik/html)

<sup>80</sup> IJzerman, vol. 2, p. 75. Of the six, two were known to have served in Spanish galleys.

refused, unshakable in his conviction. The means of death meted out to the twelve is unrecorded. Biesman was taken to the garrotting post and there he died. The priests who witnessed the execution called him 'the most hardened heretic that they had in their lives yet encountered'.

Lambert Biesman might be seen by many to be a minor character on the world stage. He can not be said to have discovered anything of note, nor has he left a legacy of his observations or descriptions of his travels to inform future generations. Only his seven letters survive, and they reveal an engaging young man, eager to embrace the adventure of life. However, his bravery, his sacrifice, and his participation in the Netherlands' two most significant voyages of discovery, whereupon was laid the foundations both of the most powerful commercial empire in history, and of an acquisition of wealth never before seen in the world, surely merit him a place in the hall of heroes of the Netherlands, to be honoured there forever.