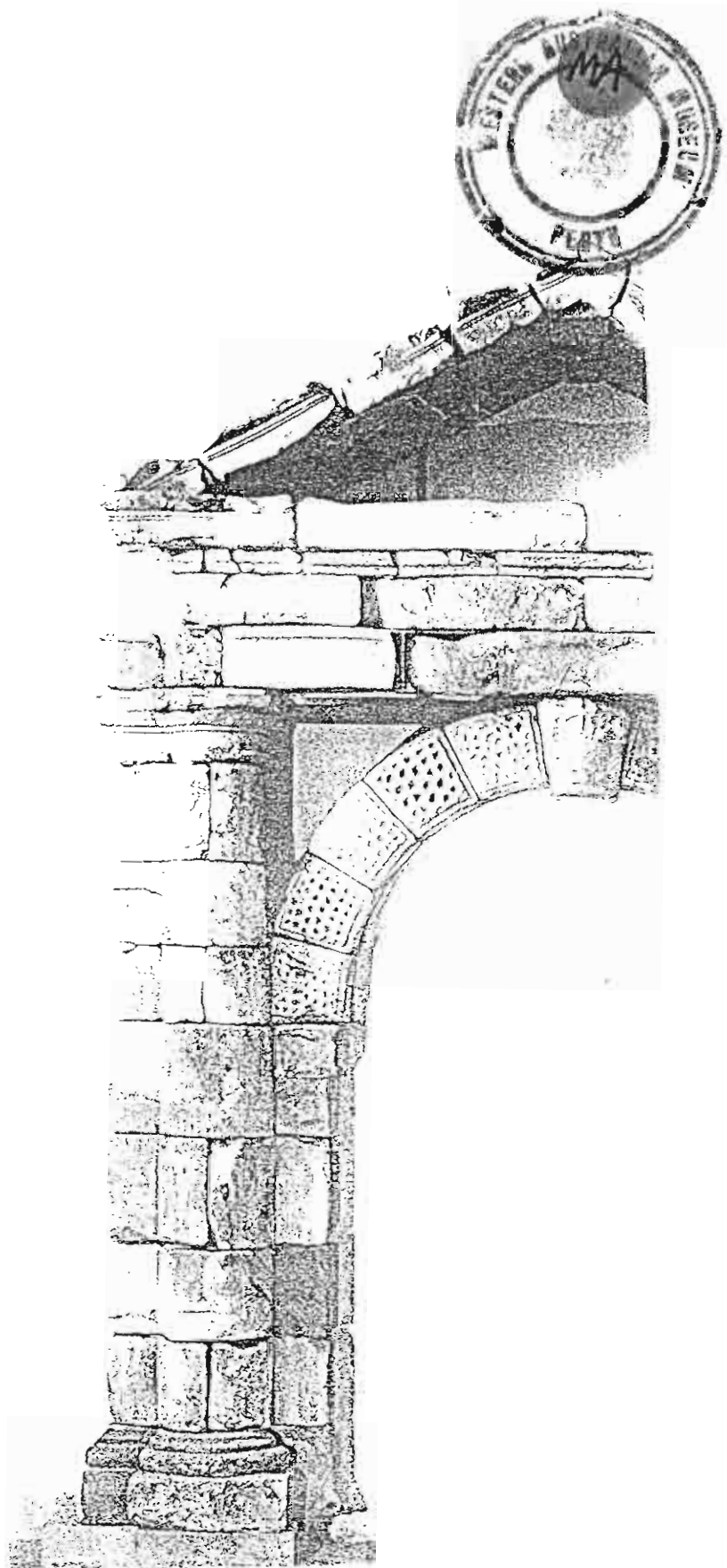


*THE
LOST
GATEWAY
OF
JAKARTA*



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THE LOST GATEWAY OF JAKARTA

On the Portico of the VOC Castle of Batavia in 17th century
Dutch East India

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Introduction

In October 29 of 1628 the flagship of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) *Batavia* in command of Fransisco Pelsaert left Holland and set sail for the capital of the Dutch East Indies Batavia. It never reached its destination but was wrecked on the *Houtman Abrolhos* June 4 of 1629 on the coast of Western Australia. The massacre that took place there became one of the most atrocious stories in Maritime History.

When the *Batavia* site was discovered in 1963, one of the first things observed was a large amount of shaped sandstone building blocks. During the excavation between 1972 and 1976, 137 blocks were recovered from the site, in all 37 tonnes (Green, 1975)

Mason's marks on the drums indicated the sequence for what appeared to be columns, the drums were marked from B2 till B8. The blocks for the pediment, the top of the facade, were unmarked and they had to be fitted by trial and error. Because the individual blocks were so heavy initial attempts to match the blocks were disappointing.

A 1:10 scale model was made and now it became much easier to try and play around. Soon it became apparent that they formed part of a portico facade of a classic Tuscan order.

In the Maritime Museum in Fremantle an iron construction was made to support the rather soft building blocks. Thus, no block was weight-bearing, the load of the block above being taken by steel plates.

There are a number of blocks that do not fit into the reconstruction of the portico. There are for example eight small blocks that could form two small windows.

Archival research had to be carried out to determine what the facade was intended for in the Dutch East Indies. The facade is rather big and therefore it was thought most likely to be meant for an important building.

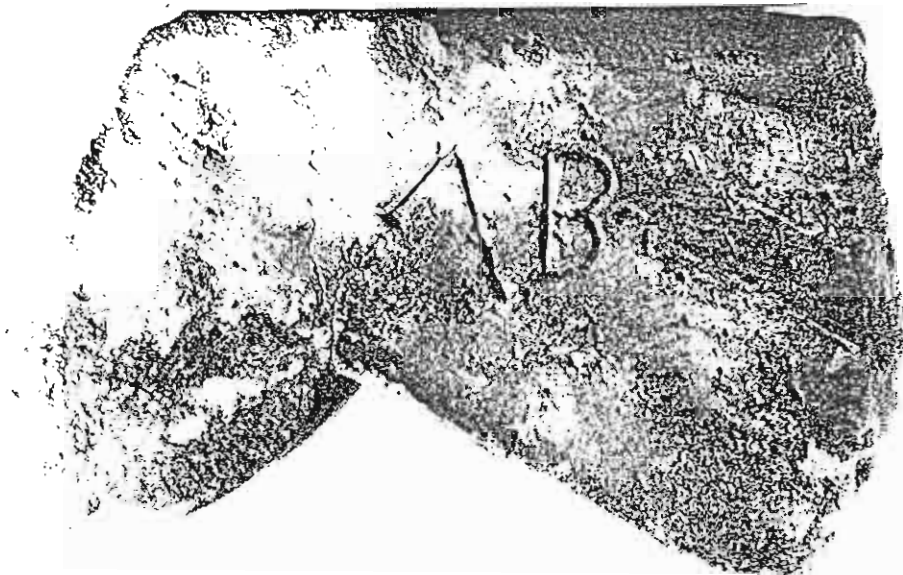


Figure 1: Sandstone block

The VOC (United Dutch East India Company) 1602-1797

The Dutch East India Company was created in 1602.

The Spanish King Philip II closed the port of Lisbon to Dutch shipping, thereby excluding Dutch merchants from the trade in spices and other produce which the Portuguese brought from the east. The Portuguese traded with countries in the far east from the end of the 15th century. By this embargo Philip hoped to deal a heavy blow to the commercial interest of the United Provinces. The Netherlands were a Republic at this time, the so called United Republic of the Seven Provinces (Gelderland, Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht, Friesland, Overijssel and Groningen). King Philip did not succeed in his intention, because the Dutch now took the trade with the east into their own hands.

The VOC was from its beginning a very successful trading company. It forced back the Portuguese, who had established their commercial empire in Asia a century earlier, and pretty well eliminating them as competitors in the trade between Europe and Asia. England was in the beginning of the 17th century not a real rival, because of their lack on financial capacity, organisational ability and governmental support (The EIC was founded in 1600)

A number of factors for the remarkable success of the VOC can be indicated:

- There was capital in the Republic partly from trade in the East-sea.
- Military operations had to be financed, and because there was enough capital to do so, their ships were better equipped than those of the enemy. Thus they were able to win the world monopoly on fine spices.
- The VOC managed to build up a trade network between the various establishments in Asia. This intra-Asian trade provided a rich source of income for the Company during the 17th and 18th century.
- After 1639 the VOC was the only European trader with access to Japan, where they operated from the Island *Deshima* (Gaastra, 1991).

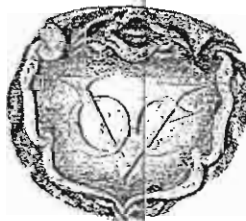


Figure 2: VOC mark

The organisational structure of the Company was and stayed rather complicated, due to the founding premises, in relation with the kept archives this is however not without importance. The Company was divided into 6 chambers (Amsterdam, Zeeland, Delft, Rotterdam, Hoorn and Enkhuizen). Each chamber originally had been a company. The government decided that each of them was too small to be a real force in Asia, and that they were competing each other instead of the enemy, therefore they were forced by the government to unite.

The control of policy lay with the powerful *Heren XVII*, Gentlemen or Lords XVII. Each chamber had depending its importance one or more representatives in the general board of directors. Amsterdam was by far the greatest chamber and 8 of the 17 Gentlemen were from this city. Zeeland was with 4 representatives the second largest chamber.

When walking through the city of Amsterdam one still can find on almost every corner a reminder of the VOC: Warehouses along the canals are now often luxury apartments, but were built for the VOC. A lot of the larger older buildings in the city are originally VOC buildings, as

can be seen at tablestones at the façades or just by their names, for instance the *Oostindiehuis*. In street names, like Pepper Street, Mace Street, etc. A whole neighbourhood in east Amsterdam is called the Indian quarter and all the streets are named after Islands or towns in Indonesia. The Dutch themselves call the 17th century their Golden Century ¹.

The first trade factory was founded in Bantam (1603). In 1609 a Governor General was placed at the head of the Company in India (the whole far east was called India), assisted by the Council of India in which all important matters were decided by majority vote.

There were problems with the Matramese and the English and there were fights, but in August 1619 Governor General Coen writes to the Gentlemen XVII in the Netherlands:

"Now we have defeated those from Bantam out of Jacarta, and have foot and domini in the land of Java. Her [these are the English] wickedness has been punished within reason. Certainly this victory and the flight of the haughty English will create much terror throughout the Indies. The Honour and reputation of the Dutch will improve enormously by it. Everyone will search to be our friend. The foundation of the so long wished for rendez vous has been laid. A large part of the most fertile land and seas of the Indies can be called yours" (Coen I, pp 472).

In 1618 they had decided to relocate their headquarters from Bantam to Jakarta, and in 1621 the Dutch decided to name the town Batavia, for it was then thought that the Dutch were the descendants of the old German tribe, the Batavians. For more than 300 years Batavia will be the name for the town. The Dutch trading interest extended from the Moluccas in the east, to China and Japan in the north and to the Coromandel Coast and Surat in the west.

In the 18th century the Company still made profits, but the other European trade companies did as well, gradually the VOC ceded its unique position. The profits from the sale of Asian wares at home in the Patria were still sufficient to cover the pay for the extensive outfitting of ships for Asia, but the financial reserves were shrinking.

The invasion of the French in the Netherlands and the collapse of the old Republic sealed the fate of the VOC. At the beginning of 1796, after almost 200 years, the board of directors had to resign and the VOC was nationalised. The total figures for two centuries of the Company are impressive:

For instance the VOC fitted out 4700 ships and sailed 972.000 people from Europe on these ships to India; The expenditure on equipage (shipbuilding and outfitting) from 1640 reached the sum of 1978.000 Dutch guilders (Archieven, 1992).

The VOC-archives

As can be expected when seeing these figures the VOC kept their books meticulously. The archives of the VOC in the General State Archives in The Hague are among the most important archives preserved in the Netherlands. This importance is not only measured by their extent, which covers about 1277 metres. Their contents are of incalculable value for historiography. The impressive quantity of documents not only provides information about the commercial, financial and diplomatic activities of the Company, but is also very significant for the history of the Netherlands and for those countries and regions in Asia and Africa where the VOC was established. For this reason a large number of users of the archive comes from outside the Netherlands.

¹ More about Dutch culture in the 17th century can be read in the book *The Embarrassment of Richness* by Simon Schama.

Because of the organisation of the VOC, the VOC archives are complicated. In two hundred year.the activities of the VOC led to a large quantity of paperwork. The administration was carried out independently by the six chambers, there never had been a central archives depository. Each chamber took care of its own papers. And each year a growing stream of paperwork from the *Octrooigebied* came in. So the archive can be divided roughly in two parts:

1. paperwork from the Netherlands
2. paperwork from Asia, which contained: journals, letters, proceedings, Daily-registers, muster-rolls and other documents from the Governor-General and Council in Batavia. These are called in the archive: *overgekomen brieven en papieren* [LETTERS AND PAPERS RECEIVED FROM ASIA]

Everything had to be copied in sixfold, for each chamber one copy, however this did not happen in reality. Still, one who is looking for information in documents of the VOC, has to check all 6 archives of the different chambers. All the archives are brought together now in the previous mentioned State Archives in The Hague. Of coarse a lot is lost or destroyed in the past 400 years.

For instance in connection with the ship *Batavia* unfortunately a part of the Daily Register of the Castle of Batavia: the part kept between 1629 until 1631 is missing. So we won't find a remark about the portico facade like: today Commander Pelsaert came with the terrible tiding of the loss of our ship *Batavia* and its precious cargo, with it the facade meant for the Watergate of the Castle of Batavia.

The Castle of Batavia

The Castle of Batavia was seat of the Governor General and his Council of the VOC in East India. It was built strategically in front of the town at the sea side, East of the river. The headquarters of the VOC were first located at Bantam, West of Jakarta.

As stated before, in 1618 Governor General Pietersz Coen decided to relocate the Company's headquarters to where there were already Dutch fortifications. His plan dated 1619 and gives the proposed new extensions .

The VOC started to build the Castle in 1620 on the same spot as the old fortifications, and it took a long period to finish it, due among other reasons to the lack of proper building-materials. Again and again building materials were asked for by the Governor General and Council on the so called 'lists of demands' (the *Eijs*) which were sent to the Netherlands.

It is clear from several sources that the so called Landgate at the land side was supposed to be the maingate. The fortifications on the land side of the castle was built earlier, than the one at the seaside.

A map from 1623 shows that at that time the North seaward walls of the Castle were unfinished. It appears that the Castle was initially designed for defence from a land attack.

At the end of 1627 the Governor General and Council agreed to build a permanent two story building between the bastions *Parel* [PEARL] and *Saphier* [SAPPHIRE];⁴ which were the bastions at the seaside, the other two bastions were called *Diamand* [DIAMOND] and *Robijn*. [RUBY]. In his diary Coen states November 9, 1627:

"The Castle of Batavia is closed in its four points with solid earthen walls except at the seaside where it has a strong wooden palisade, and where we are planning to build before long a solid brick house from one point to the other, two stories with a flat roof" (Coen V, p. 57).

It remained a plan because when the Castle was attacked by the Javanese in August 1628 the Governor general and Council realised that the Castle's fortifications were not strong enough

and again a resolution was taken to consolidate the Castle without delay on September 9 of the same year. In February 1629 Coen writes that the two sea-bastions were made and closed, two walls were finished: the first curtain on the West-side 16 *voet* [FEET] high and the second at the South-side [this is the land side], and he expressed the hope that they would finish the other two walls soon (Coen II, pp 424) ².

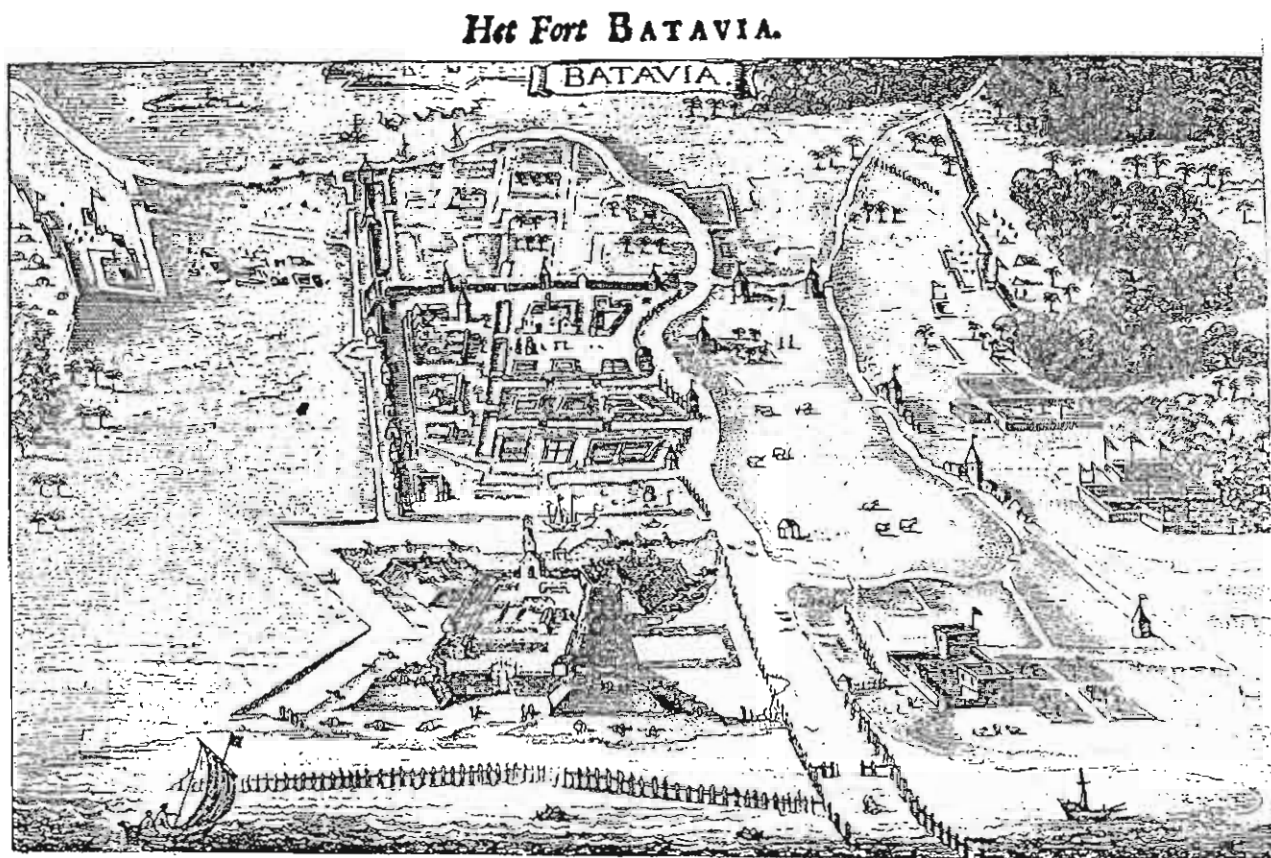


Figure 3: Castle of Batavia, *Pieter van den Broecke in Azië*

² This information shows clearly the uncertain situation at the time and the way building-plans and decisions in this matter were made. On several spots in the Daily Register of the Castle of Batavia complaints were expressed concerning building-materials in general. The building process appears to have been more of a 'make shift' than a carefully planned process.

The situation during the 2nd attack of the Matramese is shown in a number of maps, but especially enlightening is a drawing from Pieter van den Broecke, who was visiting Batavia at that time, namely from June till the end of December 1629.

Following his return to the Netherlands Van den Broecke published in 1634 a journal of his voyage with illustrations. The mentioned picture shows a bird's-view of the Castle and the town of Batavia in late 1629, showing the wall at the sea-side with an opening in the centre of it and on both sides of it a scaffolding, as if waiting for the portico (Van den Broecke, 1963).

As said before at that particular time the city of Batavia was being besieged by the Matramese so a wall without a gate was an unusual and dangerous situation for the VOC.

The loss of the Daily Register of the Castle of the period 1629 – 1632 is most unfortunate, as well as the death of Governor General Jan Pietersz Coen is in September 1629, Coen kept his own diary and papers carefully. This stopped after his death. Therefore information about this period is a bit spare.

A later etching of the Castle in the mid 1630s shows the gateway, or in Dutch *Waterpoort*, completed with a portico similar to that found on the ship the *Batavia*, and which gate is now in the Maritime Museum in Fremantle. Up to now, it has been assumed that the portico in the Maritime Museum was destined for the Watergate of the Castle of Batavia.

Other evidence for this assumption is a gold pendant which was made to commemorate the Chinese contribution to the defeat of the army of Matram. It clearly shows the completed Watergate. The pendant is dated 25 November 1632.

It was questioned how it was possible for the VOC to replace the missing gateway so quickly, as can be seen in the following time-table:

1628	October 29	Departure of the <i>Batavia</i> fleet from Texel
	April 14 till 22	Call at the Cape Good Hope
1629	June 4	The <i>Batavia</i> wrecks on the Houtman Abrolhos
	July 7	Arrival of Pelsaert at the city of Batavia
	July 15	Departure of the <i>Sardam</i> from Batavia to rescue
	September 17	<i>Sardam</i> arrives at the wreck-site on the Abrolhos
	November 15	Departure <i>Sardam</i> for Batavia
	December 5	<i>Sardam</i> arrives at Batavia

The authorities in Batavia could have heard at the very earliest in July 1629 of loss of the *Batavia* and the subsequent loss of the portico. It is possible but again most unlikely that a new order was sent with the next fleet to Holland. In Holland a new facade had to be ordered in Germany, it had to be made and transported to Amsterdam, than the new building blocks had to be sent again to Batavia with the next fleet. Is it possible that all this was done within a year time, and that this second facade was fitted already in 1630? The two journeys from Holland to the East Indies, and back again took at least 6 month each. The first fleet to the Indies departed on 27 December from the island Texel.

Information found in Valentijn's book *Oud en Nieuw Oost Indien* (*Old and New East India*) (Valentijn, 1726: 239) describes the city and the Castle of Batavia:

The Watergate is inscribed both on the inside and the outside anno 1630. And with it several large warehouses for the cloth of the Hon. Company and a large warehouse for the garrison, which is located on that side of the Castle.

The façade on the outside of the gate was inscribed anno 1631, above this the coat of arms of the city of Batavia, above this the coat of arms of the cities Delft, Rotterdam, Amsterdam, Middelburg, Hoorn and Enkhuizen. Above these coats of arms is placed a heavy

iron picket fence, and above this a painted clock. The gate is rather long and runs a bit crooked.

The façade on the inside was inscribed with the coat of arm of the Prince of Orange, and below it anno 1637, as an evidence that this inside façade is built much later. (p. 239)

This information indicates that the Watergate was completed within a year of the loss of the *Batavia*, and the outside façade of the Landgate only a short time later in 1631.

It is obvious that a new portico could not have been ordered in Batavia and delivered within 13 month.

It is very likely that four façades were sent to the Castle of Batavia in the fleet of the *Batavia* of 1628. Only three arrived and were fitted: two to the Watergate (on the inside and outside) and one to the Landgate. A new façade was ordered and placed at the Landgate only in 1637. An other gate in the Castle was inscribed 1637 as well, namely the gate of the so called Palais of the *Opperlandvoogd*, which was the Governor-General. Possibly a new load with façades was sent with the 1636 fleet, and fitted in 1637. This may also explain the mysterious numbers and letters found on the sandstone blocks. The column blocks were numbered 1 to 9 but with the prefix 'B'. Originally this was thought to be 'Batavia' but it is more likely that the other portals sent in other ships of the fleet were lettered 'A', 'C' and 'D'.

At the end of the term of office of Antonio van Diemen (one of the most important Governor Generals) the fort had its form and arrangements that it kept till the end. Inside the walls things were changing constantly. The Landgate and the wall at the landside were demolished in 1751 and the Watergate was rebuild in 1756. The total demolishing of the castle started in 1809, and factories and warehouses were built.

Figure 4: The Castle of Batavia 1650

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