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A relook into the life of Hendrick Hamel and various editions of “Hamel’s Journal”

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Abstract: It is undisputed that Hamel is known in Korea’s history as a historical character who first introduced Joseon to the West in the 17th century. Prior to the release of *Hamel’s Journal*, the West had never heard of a country named Joseon. Furthermore, *Hamel’s Journal* also was significant as one of the only sources of information the West had of Joseon up till the 19th century. However, there are still misunderstandings surrounding the historical significance of Hamel in Korea’s history, and additionally, the impact of *Hamel’s Journal* in the West is not as well-studied despite having played such an important role. Therefore, this paper aims to first look into the historical significance of Hamel within Korea’s history and resolve the misunderstandings surrounding it. Also, the impact of *Hamel’s Journal* in the West will be discussed and what its role was in shaping the West’s perspective of Joseon from the 17th century.

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Keywords: Hendrick Hamel; *Hamel's Journal*; Dutch East India Company (VOC); Joseon; Korea; Saagman; Hoetink; perspective discourse.

헨드릭 하멜 생애와 『하멜표류기』 판본에 대한 재검토

초록: 헨드릭 하멜은 한국에서 조선을 서양에 처음 소개한 17 세기의 역사적 인물로 알려져 있다. 『하멜표류기』가 출판되기 전까지 서양은 조선이라는 나라에 대해 들어본 적이 없었다. 또한 『하멜표류기』는 19 세기까지 서양이 조선에 대해 갖고 있던 유일한 정보원 중 하나로서 중요한 의미가 있었다. 그러나 한국사에서 하멜의 역사적 의미를 둘러싼 오해가 여전히 존재하고 있으며, 또한 조선을 서양에 소개하는 데 그렇게 중요한 역할을 했음에도 불구하고 서양에서의 『하멜표류기』의 영향은 제대로 연구되지 않고 있다. 따라서 본 논문은 우선 한국 역사 내에서 하멜의 역사적 의의를 살펴보고 이를 둘러싼 오해를 해소하는 데 목적이 있다. 그리고 서양에서 『하멜표류기』의 영향과 17 세기부터 서양의 조선 인식을 형성하는데 있어서 『하멜표류기』의 역할이 무엇이었는데에 대해서도 분석할 것이다.

핵심어: 헨드릭 하멜; 하멜표류기; 네덜란드 동인도회사; 조선; 한국; 사그만; 후틴크; 표류민 송환 체제.

Nowa odsłona biografii Hendricka Hamela oraz poszczególnych wydań „Dziennika Hamela”

Abstrakt: Nie ulega wątpliwości, że Hamel zapisał się na kartach koreańskiej historii jako osoba, która po raz pierwszy odkryła państwo Joseon siedemnastowiecznemu Zachodowi. Państwa zachodnie nie słyszały wcześniej o takim kraju – sytuacja ta zmieniła się wraz z momentem ukazania się *Dziennika Hamela*. Zapisy te były zatem aż do wieku XIX znaczącym źródłem informacji o Joseon. Jednakże pomimo ważnej roli *Dziennika* wciąż nie doczekał się on na Zachodzie dogłębnej analizy, występują także nadal pewne nieporozumienia dotyczące jego historycznego znaczenia. Niniejszy artykuł ukazuje zatem nie tylko rolę, jaką Hamel odegrał w koreańskiej historii, ale i stara się wyjaśnić związane z nim nieporozumienia. Przeanalizowany zostanie także wpływ *Dziennika Hamela* na Zachód, jak również i to, jaką rolę odegrał w kształtowaniu zachodniej percepcji Joseon od siedemnastego wieku.

Słowa kluczowe: Hendrick Hamel; *Dziennik Hamela*; Holenderska Kompania Wschodnioindyjska (VOC); Joseon; Korea; Saagman; Hoetink; dyskurs perspektywiczny.

1. Introduction

Hendrick Hamel is known as a historical character in Korea's 17th century history who first introduced Joseon to the West through the narrative he wrote. Hamel and his crew worked for the Dutch East India Company (hereafter known as VOC) and due to a shipwreck, their ship crashed on Jeju Island in 1653 while enroute from Taiwan to Japan. Prior to that, Hamel worked as a bookkeeper for the VOC and sailed from Europe to Africa and Asia along the VOC trading routes. After crashing on Jeju Island, Hamel spent 13 years in various regions of Joseon and in 1668, various accounts detailing Hamel's experience in Joseon were published. It is most commonly known as *Hamel's Journal* currently and has been translated into various languages throughout the years. *Hamel's Journal* is significant as it is the first document published that contains information about Joseon to be released in the Western world, and therefore represents an important milestone in Korea's history with respect to the West's awareness of Joseon and Korea.

Currently, Hamel is mentioned in Korean history textbooks as a character who first introduced Korea to the West. If mentioned to the general public, most would know that there is an exhibit of a model of Hamel's ship, *De Sperwer*, in Jeju Island. Some might have even heard of a museum that is dedicated to Hamel in Yeosu, the last place that Hamel had lived in before escaping Joseon. However, in comparison to Hamel's apparent historical importance as being the first person who had introduced Joseon to the majority of the West, his impact is not as well-researched as it should be. Therefore, this paper aims to take a relook into the life of Hendrick Hamel, the impact of his narrative in the West and how it has shaped the West's perception of Korea.

With regards to the direction of research in Korea up till now, it has mostly been focused on Hamel's time spent detained in Joseon for 13 years and the analysis of related materials. The basis of such research is closely related to the academic inclination in Korea since the early 1900s, where the main focus of much research often attempted at making meaningful connections between Korea and the West. This is also largely in conjunction with the country's modernization efforts and still persists up till now. There has also been increasing opinions that Hamel had possibly contributed to the development of weapons during his time in Joseon. However, such claims need to be addressed as it has the potential

to completely alter Hamel's historical significance in Korea. Hence, the validity of such claims will also be covered in this paper as well.

Within Korea, Hamel was only brought into the spotlight in the early 1900s. Prior to that, it appears that there were no Korean translations of Hamel's narrative and therefore, research on Hamel could not be carried out. The first known Korean translation of Hamel's narrative was published by 최남선 (Choi Nam Seon), who chanced upon the article in a Japanese magazine titled *Pacific Ocean*. He translated the Japanese article into Korean and then published it in a Korean magazine titled *청춘* (*Cheongchun; Youth*) in 1918 (Choi Nam Seon 최남선 1918). However, it should be noted that this article had been translated from Japanese – not directly from the original work's language – and thus, the accuracy of it may be compromised to a certain extent.

Following that, the first full translation of *Hamel's Journal* officially published in a book was by 이병도 (Lee Byung Do) in 1934. It is considered to be a well-researched translation that is highly regarded in the academic field (Lee, Byung Do 이병도 1934). In fact, the image of Hamel created at that time has been reflected in the Korean academia and textbooks till the late 1900s. That is, implying that the Western culture had already been introduced by Hamel into Joseon from as early as the 17th century and along with it, knowledge of weapons as well.

It was only until the 1990s that research regarding Hamel began to break away from the initial perspective and branch into other aspects. Through research on Hamel, other aspects such as 17th century East Asian relations (Kwon, In-hyuk 권인혁 1999: 9–22; Han, Myung-ki 한명기 2003: 8–25), trading system and culture (Ji Myung-suk 지명숙 2003: 53–95), laws regarding repatriation of drifters (Shin, Dong-gyu 신동규 2007) etc. could also be studied. Hence, the historical significance of Hamel should not be limited to his purported contributions to the Joseon military and instead, be approached from other perspectives.

As such, this paper aims to first address the issues regarding the possibility of Hamel having contributed to the development of weapons during his time in Joseon. Firstly, Hamel's childhood and the experience he obtained while working under the VOC, their trading routes and the products they come in contact with will also be analysed. Through such an analysis, whether Hamel actually had the skills and knowledge required to contribute to the development of weapons can be inferred and it will also resolve the related misunderstandings. The overall East Asian situation during Hamel's time spent in Joseon and what he did while being dispatched to various regions will also be covered as well.

Next, to approach the historical significance of Hamel from another perspective, this paper aims to cover the impact of Hamel's narrative in shaping the West's perspective of Joseon. In fact, *Hamel's Journal* was known as the only source of direct information that the West had of Joseon for over two centuries. Hence, it can be said that it was instrumental in the formation of the West's initial impression of Joseon.

In order to examine the impact of Hamel's work, the first step would be to understand the authoring process and Hamel's intentions for writing his narrative. As Hamel's narrative was the West's only direct source of information on Joseon for over two centuries, it inevitably became the source that many researchers relied on regarding Joseon and was treated as a comprehensive guide to understanding Joseon instead. However, Hamel's intention has to be taken into account, which aspects of Joseon he focused on, and what he possibly omitted.

The three initial editions of *Hamel's Journal* that was published in 1668 upon Hamel's crew's return to the Netherlands will also be analysed. At that point of time, it is known that Hamel was still in Japan and only returned to the Netherlands after his narrative had been published. Therefore, it can be said that Hamel's writings were not published with his consent. Additionally, the content of all three editions differ from each other and therefore, the general public's first impression of Joseon would vary accordingly as well. Hereby, issues with the content and inaccuracies that persisted due to it since the publishers had to cater to the general public's preferences will be highlighted.

Lastly, the translations of *Hamel's Journal* from the 18th to 20th century will be examined as well, with a focus on a few notable English translations. References made to it by writers and researchers with regards to research about Joseon will also be taken into account. Together with the above analysis of Hamel's intention, we will take a deeper look into how Hamel's description of Joseon was perceived by other researchers and the context in which it was used.

With the analysis of all the above points, this paper aims to take a relook into the historical significance and importance of Hamel in Korea's history, and also to reanalyse the impact his writing had in shaping the West's perspective of Korea since the 17th century.

2. Hamel's Life and Shipwreck in Joseon

Since the 1930s, Hamel has been depicted as a character who had contributed to the development of weapons during his time in Joseon and also spread the Western culture to the people of Joseon from as early as the 17th century. Therefore, he is also painted as one of those who could have brought about the modernisation of Korea earlier. While it is possible that Hamel might have had knowledge pertaining to weapons that were typically more common in the West, there remains a need to clarify if Hamel actually had skills and knowledge in the development of weapons to the extent of leaving a lasting societal impact in 17th century Joseon. This could lead to defining changes regarding Hamel's historical significance and therefore, this research will begin with an analysis of Hamel's childhood, as well as information related to his background and experience.

Thereafter, it was known that Hamel joined the VOC at a relatively young age of twenty. Hence, this research will also cover Hamel's work experience throughout the duration of his employment with the VOC and the possible trading routes and products exchanged during the 17th century. By analysing the above factors, it will provide a better understanding of Hamel's background and experience, and thereby providing a firm basis in order to draw a conclusion regarding the possibility of Hamel's involvement in the development of weapons.

Hamel's time in Joseon and what his actual role was is also important in this analysis. Additionally, the overall situation of Joseon and its relations with other East Asian countries have to be taken into account as well.

Upon his escape to Japan in 1666, it was also known that Hamel wrote his narrative about Joseon while in Japan and it was published shortly after in 1668, in the Netherlands. His description went on to become the first document that introduced Joseon to the Western world, and also remained largely relevant for the next two centuries. It could also be considered the only direct source of information the West had of Joseon up till the late 19th century.

Before taking a deeper look into the impact of Hamel's narrative in the West and its role in shaping the West's perspective of Joseon, this portion of the paper will first analyse Hamel's authorship process and his initial intentions of writing such a description. This will provide a better

understanding as to whether Hamel's writings were later used within his original intended boundaries or used for other contexts throughout the time from its first published edition up till the late 19th century.

2.1. Childhood and Employment with the VOC

Since the 1930s, Hamel has been depicted as a character who had contributed to the development of weapons during his time in Joseon. In order to determine if Hamel had the skills and knowledge to contribute towards the development of weapons, archives on his childhood and background will be analysed chronologically. Whether Hamel had any exposure to weapons or formal military education can be analysed by looking into the environment that he grew up in. To further complement this portion of the research, the overall societal and economic circumstance of 17th century Netherlands will also be briefly covered.

Hendrick Hamel was born in Gorinchem in 1630, which is also otherwise known as the Golden Age of the Netherlands. The Dutch economy developed rapidly from the late 16th century, especially in regions situated by the trading ports. According to Dutch researcher Valentine Wikaart, Hamel had lived near the port areas during his childhood and therefore, it is more probable that he had been exposed to the likes of merchants, traders and sailors (Wikaart 2021, "Hendrick Dirckszn Hamel"). The following is an excerpt from the Gorinchem archives that contains information about Hamel's father's occupation and possible influence on Hamel.

"Dirck Frederiks Hamel, fortification builder, contractor, workmaster of fortifications and fortification master, lived in Gorinchem and was born there around 1594. Died between Saturday, 23 March and Wednesday 9 October 1641 in Kortendijk. Dirck was almost 47 years old." (Regionaal Archief Gorinchem, RA 434 f 76)¹

¹ Translated by Valentine Wikaart (2021): "Dirck Frederiks Hamel, (...) fortificatiebouwer, aannemer, werkmeester der fortificaties en fortificatiemeester, wonende te Gorinchem en aldaar, is geboren rond 1594, wonende Kortendijk aldaar, is overleden tussen zaterdag 23 maart en woensdag 9 oktober 1641 aldaar. Dirck werd hoogstens 47 jaar".

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Through the records, it is known that Hamel's father was a contractor that was involved in building city fortresses and often travelled around the country for work. He also passed away when Hamel was eleven years old. Hence, it did not seem likely that Hamel's father had considerable influence on him during his formative years. Furthermore, Hamel had also joined the VOC at a relatively young age of twenty years old (Ledyard 1971) and hence, the possibility of Hamel having been skilled in weaponry and yet going on to join the VOC as a sailor does not seem plausible.

With regards to the 17th century Dutch society and its possible influence on Hamel's background, the background that led to it being considered the Golden Age of the Netherlands will be looked into first. According to a description regarding Dutch society in the 17th century, a new society that had high levels of urbanisation had arisen, specifically in the areas that were involved in maritime trade and in Holland.

The Dutch Republic had thrived in the areas of trade, science and art during the 17th century and was known as a maritime and economic power as well. It was only at the end of the 17th century that certain conflicts led to the decline of the Dutch economy and simultaneously, the end of the Golden Age as well (Price 1999: 3–21).

Therefore, considering the structure of 17th century Dutch society and the social and economic situation then, it is not likely that the average citizen will have any need for knowledge regarding weapon development. While it is true that European regions were often at war over territorial conflicts, 17th century Netherlands was more focused on expanding its maritime trade. Hamel also lived near the ports where traders and merchants were more commonplace, as opposed to people who lived near the borders where territorial conflicts took place. Furthermore, being trained to develop weapons is considered a very specific occupation and would require years of education and training as well. Reiterating the fact that Hamel joined the VOC when he was only twenty years old, it can be concluded that the possibility of Hamel being an expert in developing weapons is very miniscule.

As mentioned above, it is known that Hamel joined the VOC in 1650 when he was twenty years old and therefore, generally wouldn't be considered to be someone with a wealth of experience. Next, Hamel's experience and trading items he often came in contact with while employed with the VOC will be looked into.

There is currently still a significant amount of accounting records of the VOC from the 17th to the 18th century that can be accessed and in

this report, it will be analysed to gain more insight into the occupation and skills required of the sailors then. According to the archives, Hamel joined the VOC with the role of ‘Bosschieter’. The role is explained as that of someone who is a competent sailor that was also tasked with firing cannons. From the time Hamel joined the VOC until 1653 – a short two-year period – Hamel was promoted to assistant and later served as a bookkeeper². Hence, it is worth noting that while Hamel had started off with the role of ‘Bosschieter’ and had learned how to fire cannons, it seems to be a standard role for all newcomers and it is mainly related to defense aspects of the job (Nationaal Archief, “1.04.02”). As the VOC ships carried significant amounts of valuable items to be traded and sold, it would seem that defense mechanisms were necessary to protect themselves from possible encounters with pirates or other forms of danger.

Furthermore, knowing how to fire cannons does not necessarily equate to having the skills and knowledge on how to develop cannons or any type of weapons. Taking into account that Hamel’s shipwreck in Joseon happened a mere two years after he joined the VOC, it is unlikely that he became an expert in the development of weapons during that short period of time while still performing his duties as a bookkeeper and their trading activities.

To have a more comprehensive understanding of Hamel’s experience during his employment with the VOC, this paper will also be taking into account the possible trading routes taken by the VOC in the 17th century and the products that they traded.

When the VOC was established in 1602, its initial purpose was to engage in the East Asian spice trade industry. Since then, the VOC quickly established a strong presence in the international trading community and transported a variety of goods, in addition to spices, between Europe and Asia for nearly 200 years. Hence, when Hamel joined the VOC in 1650, it was already an established business that traded a significant number of products.

The VOC fleet generally sailed from the Netherlands, through the Cape of Good Hope and towards Batavia. However, some ships also docked in Galle, Sri Lanka to obtain cinnamon (Jacobs 2000: 39). According to the records of where Hamel’s ship had sailed to and the different ports they docked at (Nationaal Archief, “1.04.02”), it would seem that Hamel had not yet made a return to the Netherlands before he

² Through the VOC’s records, it seems that Hamel had been promoted rather quickly and did not spend much time in the newcomer position.

drifted to Joseon. Comparing this with a typical voyage and route of a VOC ship (Brujin 1980: 251–265) also confirms the fact that Hamel wouldn't have been able to make a return trip to the Netherlands in such a short time. In other words, he did not experience a complete voyage during his time working with the VOC.

According to the VOC trading records, firstly it is known that they generally carry a significant amount of silver on their fleets for trading purposes. Items that they trade include spices such as nutmeg, cloves, cinnamon and pepper. Fabric from India was also an important item along the trade routes as it was necessary in exchange for the spices. Other valuable items that the VOC traded included Chinese porcelain and tea; copper bars; silk and silk threads; luxurious products such as rubies and pearls; coffee and tea; and even exotic plants, fruits and animals. Additional items that they traded along the way included commodities that they brought along to the various Dutch settlements in Africa as those items could not be obtained locally. They included limestone, marble and European oak, and also food items such as salted butter and cheese. In general, most fleets would return to the Netherlands with the above-mentioned items by fall and then the goods will be auctioned for profit (Hartkamp-Jonxis 1987: 12–20).

In conclusion, it can be inferred that the VOC trading routes mostly dealt with spices and various other commodities, and they did not do trading of weapons in general. Thus, it was not likely that the sailors aboard the VOC fleets needed any further education in terms of their understanding of weapons development aside from the basic knowledge mentioned above.

Hence, after taking into consideration all the above factors, including Hamel's childhood, the age he joined the VOC and the short period of time he was employed, as well as the products traded by the VOC, it is unlikely that Hamel would have been familiar with military systems or the development of weapons. It is therefore hard to justify the opinion that Hamel might have been able to contribute significantly to the development of weaponry during his time in Joseon.

2.2. Escape to Japan and Authorship of *Hamel's Journal*

During Hamel's time in Joseon, he was sent to various regions such as 서울 (Seoul), 강진 (Gangjin), 순천 (Suncheon) and 여수 (Yeosu). The longest time he remained in a region was in Gangjin, where he spent over 7 years. Due to a precedent with another Dutch sailor named Jan Janse de Weltevree who had drifted to Joseon in 1627, 26 years before Hamel did, Hamel and crew were also assigned to a military training institute called the 훈련도감 (訓練都監; *Hullyeon dogam*) and officially designated as military personnel. It is also the reason why Hamel had often been associated with having contributed to the development of weapons, because there were official records of the aforementioned Weltevree assisting in the development of cannons.

However, through various records by the officials in the regions, it is known that Hamel and crew did not have roles that required them to be actively participating in the military. In fact, they could be more accurately described as performing miscellaneous jobs such as cleaning, removing weeds and so on (Jeju National Museum 2003: 208–210). Furthermore, the issue was exacerbated by poor harvests and a nationwide famine that affected not only Joseon, but the surrounding East Asian countries as well. The famine was also described as one of the worst Joseon had ever encountered up till then. It was also due to the severity of the prolonged famine that Hamel and crew were split up and sent to different regions to lessen the burden of each region. Hence, considering the situation of Joseon, historical data on Hamel's activities, and also the lack of any mention about weapons development in *Hamel's Journal*, it further confirms that there is only a very low possibility that Hamel had made any significant contributions to the military of Joseon.

Then in 1666, Hamel escaped to Japan with a few remaining members of his crew. It is known that Hamel had written his narrative on Joseon while he was in Japan and it is also this very particular narrative that went on to become the first document that introduced Joseon to the Western world. Prior to that, aside from select industries such as the Portuguese who started sailing and trading in Asia before the VOC, the majority of the general public in the West had never heard of a country named Joseon. Therefore, to take a relook into the impact and importance of Hamel's narrative in Korea's history, the authorship process of Hamel's narrative will be covered as follows.

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Firstly, it is important to differentiate if Hamel's narrative was meant to be written as a travelogue that contained stories about his time spent in Joseon, or if it was meant for other purposes. After the Portuguese started trading routes between Europe and Asia in the 16th century and the establishment of the VOC in the 17th century, stories that consisted of unfortunate events such as shipwrecks and experiences in foreign, exotic lands were considerably popular. Furthermore, with the spread of the Gutenberg printing technology in Europe that allowed for an easier way to distribute information and books since the 16th century, it became more commonplace for stories to be created and published to the general public too.

However, one of the reasons that Hamel wrote a chronological record about his time spent in Joseon is known to be for the purpose of claiming compensation from the VOC for his wages. Since he had been on a voyage that was within the boundaries of the VOC's stipulated work when the ship crashed on Jeju Island, it seemed plausible that Hamel would want to obtain compensation for the time that he had been detained in Joseon:

"Hamel, the supercargo of the ship, wrote a book on his return, recounting his adventures in a simple and straightforward style." (Griffis 1882: 176).

Additionally, according to the above excerpt from William Elliot Griffis's book about Korea – more will be mentioned in the later portion of this paper – Hamel's writing was being described as "simple and straightforward" by Griffis as well. Taking into consideration the purpose of Hamel's description of Joseon, which is a formal report to his employees and not a travel journal of his adventures, it would be befitting to adopt a simple and formal method of writing.

Furthermore, it was also later revealed that Hamel's narrative about Joseon—a detailed description about Joseon that included specific information pertaining to subjects such as Joseon's trading relations with its neighbouring areas, its geographical characteristics and so on—closely followed a format that was provided by the VOC to its employees.

In fact, the format contained the following general headings: geographical characteristics, state organisation, commerce, agricultural products, the position of the VOC specified region, etc. Looking at Hamel's description of Joseon, it does indeed follow the format very closely and therefore, was in fact meant to be a report to be submitted to the VOC. This format is provided by the VOC to all its employees in the

event that they come in contact with a region that does not have trading relationships with the VOC, and by taking down the necessary information according to the format provided, the VOC would be able to take the information and assess if it was worthwhile to establish trading relations with the said region (Walraven 2007: 19–32). Thus, it is sufficient to conclude an important fact that Hamel's narrative about Joseon was not meant to be a travelogue describing his adventures or about his unfortunate shipwreck that led him to be stuck in a foreign, exotic land for 13 years, it was in fact, an official report that was meant to be submitted to his employers for them to assess the trading merits of Joseon. With this in mind, it is crucial to note that the initial editions of *Hamel's Journal* were published without Hamel's knowledge, and since it was an official work report, it is also inevitable that it wouldn't be an interesting and comprehensive recount of his experience, but instead, would be tailored to suit the needs of the VOC.

It is also due to such reasons that Hamel's narrative, although more widely known as "Hamel's Journal", is also referred to as "Hamel's Report". As established above, the original intention of Hamel was not to write a diary or "journal" about his time in Joseon. But it was for all intents and purposes, an official report to be submitted to the company that he was working for. Hence, it might be more accurate to refer to Hamel's original submission to the VOC as "Hamel's Report", while the versions published later that were based on the contents written in Hamel's report, can be referred to as "Hamel's Journal".

With regards to whether Hamel's report had fulfilled its original purpose, there are records that the VOC's board of directors, which consists of a panel of 17 members, known as HEEREN XVII, had in fact received Hamel's report and deemed Joseon to be worthy of establishing trade relations with.

According to a record detailing the Heeren XVII's plans regarding Joseon, they had decided that it was a lucrative venture to establish trading relations with Joseon for items such as sandalwood, pepper and cloves. They had even named the fleet *Corea* that was set to depart in the spring of 1669. The crewmen that had escaped Joseon along with Hamel and returned to the Netherlands, also offered to take the voyage as they had experience living in Joseon and would be suitable for the mission. The records also indicated the wages allocated to the sailors that would be on the voyage to Joseon, otherwise known as Corea (Nationaal Archief, "Record No. 4934"). Hence, it can be said that Hamel's report had in fact, fulfilled its original purpose of being a report

that detailed the trading aspects of Joseon and the VOC had taken the information positively as well.

An important note hereby, would be the fact that the VOC did not manage to establish trading relations with Joseon in the 17th century. However, this was not due to any form of outright rejection from Joseon, as often misunderstood by many. In fact, while the VOC had contacted their counterparts in Batavia (modern day Jakarta) about their plans to establish trading relations with Joseon, they were discouraged to do so due to their knowledge of the East Asian trading culture. More often than not, Joseon has been labelled as ‘closed off’ and ‘conservative’ up till the 19th century, and this incident regarding the failure to establish trading relations between Joseon and the VOC contributed towards such views as well.

Such misunderstandings mainly stem from the vast differences in the trading system and culture of Europe and East Asia in the 17th century. However, as the topic is a vast and complicated issue in and of itself, it will not be covered in this research paper. It is sufficient to note that with regards to this particular issue, trading happened vibrantly in the 17th century within the East Asian countries and Joseon did not outrightly reject the VOC in terms of establishing trading relations because the VOC never managed to attempt it at all.

3. Various Editions and Characteristics of *Hamel’s Journal*

The next half of the paper will delve deeper into the crux of this research, which is the impact of Hamel’s narrative in the West and its significance in relation to Joseon. While it is undeniable that Hamel’s description of Joseon had raised the West’s awareness of what was once considered an unknown country, how Hamel’s work was perceived in the West still remains a topic that needs to be looked further into.

As mentioned above, it would seem that Hamel’s work was not meant to be published to the general public, but instead, was an official report meant to assess the trading merits of Joseon. Be that as it may, it was ultimately still published by three different publishers in 1668 and quickly became popular among the readers of the general public. However, since Hamel’s report was documented according to a format

given by the VOC for work and trading purposes, it is unlikely that it would have been able to garner interest among the general public. Thus, it was inevitable that the publishers would have altered the content to cater to the interests of the target audience.

Hence, the initial three Dutch publications will be examined and issues regarding the altered, exaggerated or false content and illustrations that were included in the publications will be highlighted as well. This is especially important as it completely changes our understanding of how the West would have perceived Joseon initially in the 17th century, and therefore the significance of Hamel's narrative historically will be different as well.

Following the Dutch publications, translations into various languages such as French, German and English were made intermittently throughout the 1700s to the 1900s. In this research, various English translations and how they have been referenced by researchers and scholars who studied Joseon will be the main focus.

Some issues such as inaccuracies due to the texts being translated across a number of languages, and also the limitations of the information with regards to the culture and traditions of Joseon will be looked into as well. As Hamel's narrative remained the only direct source of information the West had of Joseon for over 200 years, it is likely that the West had to consider it as a comprehensive description of Joseon. Due to that, it has inadvertently led to certain misrepresentations of Joseon and Korea, and this paper aims to address such issues as well.

3.1. Three Different Dutch Publications from the 1600s

When Hamel's description was published in 1668 in the Netherlands, it was known that he was not physically back in the Netherlands yet. He had stayed back in Japan to claim compensation for his wages and only returned to the Netherlands after his story was already published. Since it was meant to be submitted to the VOC, it can be considered to have been leaked to the public.

There were three publishers that released Hamel's story in 1668: Van Velsen, Stichter and Saagman.

The first publisher, Van Velsen, was the first to know about Hamel's story and published two editions immediately after. His edition

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did not contain any illustrations, and also did not include the excerpt at the back about the specific descriptions of Joseon. It only included Hamel's diary log of events that happened during the time he was detained in Joseon. Therefore, it can be said to be a hasty piece of work.

The second publisher, Stichter, was a famous publisher of almanacs in Rotterdam, Netherlands. He also published Hamel's story in 1668, shortly after Van Velsen. His edition included seven illustrations and also the specific descriptions of Joseon. Up till now, a woodblock of his illustration is being preserved in the Netherlands.

The third publisher, Saagman, is where issues regarding the credibility and reliability of Hamel's story stemmed from. The following translations from traditional Dutch to modern language was done with the help of Dutch researcher and former curator of the museum dedicated to Hamel in the Netherlands, Valentine Wikaart.

Firstly, Saagman's edition of Hamel's story was intended to cater to the average, less-wealthy audience, which also made up for a larger market. During the late 17th century, stories related to events such as shipwrecks, battles, captivity, exotic foreign places and so on, were immensely popular. Additionally, illustrations also increased the appeal of books significantly.

However, as Saagman's intention was to produce stories for a wider but less wealthy audience, he had to reduce the production costs as well. Hence, Saagman obtained old copper plates of various illustrations and inserted them into the stories to enhance their marketability. But these illustrations were not accurate descriptions of the content at all.

According to an excerpt from Saagman's publishings, it can be translated as follows:

"If you would like to read something new and strange, then you can, at home and at ease. Experience what happened to these people: their ship, shipwrecked; their men, imprisoned, in a rough and non-christian country, which has been described; as well as the daily life of its inhabitants, and the trade that they practice" (Saagman 1668)³.

Hence, it can be seen from the excerpt that the nature of Saagman's publishings tended to favour strange happenings that were

³ Translated by Valentine Wikaart. "Ghy die begeerigh zijt yets Nieuws en vreemts te lefen, Kond' hier op u gemack, en in u Huys wel wefen, En fien wat perijckelen dees Maets zijn over g'komen, Haer Schip dat blijft door Storm, gevangen zijnf' genomen, In een woefit Heydens Landt; in 't kort men u Befchrijft Den handel van het Volck, d' Negotie die men drijft."

previously unheard of, specifically shipwrecks that took place in exotic countries. Since Hamel's story fitted the bill, it wouldn't be unusual for Saagman to have included it.

Furthermore, illustrations in Saagman's edition of Hamel's narrative often do not accurately depict Joseon's culture, dressing and customs. Instead, it merely illustrates a scene that would have been considered foreign and exotic by the average reader in the West. The illustrations also fail to accurately portray Joseon's environment and people.

Additionally, Saagman even included pictures of animals that could not be found in Joseon in the 17th century. Animals like crocodiles, camels and elephants are not native to Joseon or Korea, even up till today. Exaggerated stories such as how Hamel had described the people of Joseon capturing a crocodile because it had eaten three young children were also included. However, there are no native crocodiles in Korea and such stories were also not found in other editions of Hamel's description of Joseon. It is highly possible that Saagman added this content to increase the popularity of the stories and his publishings.

While it is unfortunate that Saagman's edition had caused Hamel's description of Joseon to be deemed incredible due to the inaccurate descriptions and false content, it is also to be noted that Saagman's stories were never meant to be biographies or historical records. In current terms, it would simply be classified under 'historical fiction', where stories inspired by actual events are reinterpreted with a creative take on it. With that being said, Saagman's edition shouldn't be taken into consideration when evaluating the accuracy of Hamel's description of Joseon. However, it can be said to have contributed to have increased the West's interest in Joseon.

The West would therefore have a varied first impression of Joseon according to which edition they had access to first. Additionally, even if they had first come to know about Joseon through Hamel's original description, it wasn't a comprehensive description of Joseon but instead, it was a narrative that was majorly focused on aspects such as the trading relations, manufactured products and geographical characteristics. It still wouldn't have been an accurate representation of the culture, traditions and life of people in Joseon.

In other words, *Hamel's Journal* is strictly speaking, a formal report meant to be submitted to the VOC for them to assess the pros and cons of trading with Joseon. It is not a manual for trading with Joseon,

nor is it a comprehensive informational guide to understanding the customs and culture of Joseon.

3.2. English Translations and Misrepresentations from the 1700s to the 1900s

Even though European countries were known to share similar values in terms of trading and have similarities in their culture and tradition due to proximity, language barriers still existed as they do not all speak the same language. Hence, in order to evaluate the impact of Hamel's story in the other Western countries, the frequency and accuracy of translated editions have to be taken into account as well.

As mentioned above, this paper will be focusing on the various English translations and writings of researchers that referenced Hamel's description of Joseon in English. The first known English translation of Hamel's story was published in 1704 by John Churchill. He had published Hamel's story together with a series of other similar happenings in a collection titled *A Collection of Voyages and Travels* (Churchill 1704).

"Hendrik Hamel's account of his unexpected and involuntary visit to Korea from 1653 to 1666 has long been known as the earliest report in a western language on the land, people and customs of Korea, yet for over 300 years the only version available in English has been the very flawed Churchill translation of an embroidered French version of the text. Gary Ledyard in his work *The Dutch Come to Korea*, shows up the errors in the Churchill translation (...)" (Buys 1994: ix).

However, as seen in the excerpt above, John Churchill's edition of Hamel's narrative was not directly translated from Dutch to English, but instead, taken from what seems to be a loosely translated French edition of Hamel's story. Hence, it was pointed out by Jean Paul Buys (1994: ix) of the Royal Asiatic Society that John Churchill's edition contained mistakes and did not contain the entirety of the contents as well.

This is important as in 1884, a well-known researcher and author named William Elliot Griffis had published a series of books on East Asian countries and his books on Corea, or Joseon, made reference to Hamel's description of Joseon. As mentioned above, Hamel's description of Joseon was only meant to be a report on the trading merits of the

country, but in this case, it was taken to be a comprehensive information guide to Joseon:

“Three Dutch editions of Hamel’s Narrative of an Unlucky Voyage and Shipwreck on the Coast of Korea are known, of which translations appeared in French, English and German. Of the two in English dress, we have selected that found in Churchill’s Collection of Voyages, London 1732.” (Griffis 1884: 37).

Additionally, as seen in the excerpt from Griffis’ book, he also stated that he had specifically referred to Churchill’s English translation, that is an incomplete version that was said to contain mistranslations as well, for his research. While it is inevitable as there were no other sources of information on Joseon at that time, it is to be noted that Griffis had referenced a source that only contained information limited to certain aspects of Joseon, and additionally, it was a source that was from two centuries ago. A lot would have changed in Joseon within the two centuries, but Griffis and other researchers in the West did not have access to such information.

It was not until later on in the early 20th century that another Dutch scholar named Hoetink published another transcription of *Hamel’s Journal* that is recognised by scholars to be accurate and is currently still highly regarded in the academic field (Hoetink 1920). Hoetink’s edition is considered to be a well-researched work that incorporated many original records from the VOC’s archives and Hamel’s notes, and also appropriately translated traditional Dutch to modern Dutch. Since then, many translations into other languages, such as English and Korean versions that are relevant to this research, have referred to Hoetink’s edition. In fact, it would seem that up till 1994, before Jean Paul Buys released an English translation of Hamel’s narrative by referencing Hoetink’s transcriptions, the most widely referred-to English translation was John Churchill’s version that was published in 1704. Other publishings of Hamel’s narrative up till the 19th century were reprints of Churchill’s edition as well (Royal Asiatic Society 1918).

Pertaining to the aforementioned Saagman edition of Hamel’s narrative that caused it to be unreliable as a credible historical source, it was only also only until Hoetink published the transcriptions of Hamel’s original notes that his reputation was cleared. However, there are some researchers and scholars that still do not regard Hamel’s narrative to be a credible source of information up till this day. Therefore, it would seem

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that this issue is worth looking into again to determine the impact and significance of Hamel's work historically.

With regards to the issues brought about by the English translations and references made, they can be largely summarised as follows: Hamel's description of Joseon was more often than not used to label Joseon as (a) a country that did not accept Christianity and therefore, considered to be uncivilised, and (b) a country that refused to establish trading relations with the West and therefore, considered to be conservative and closed-off.

“Until the introduction of Christianity into the peninsula, the hermit nation was uninfluenced by any ideas which the best modern life claims as its own. As with the whole world, so with its tiny fraction Corea, the door of ancient history shut, and the gate of modern history opened, when the religion of Jesus moved the hearts and minds of men.” (Griffis 1882: 176).

First of all, as mentioned above, Griffis' observation and research on Joseon regarding its perspectives towards Christianity was based on Hamel's narrative—which was already two centuries old at the time of Griffis' writing. Additionally, the ideology that countries that did not accept Christianity were uncivilised comes from a Western-centric point of view. It does not take other factors into account, such as the original culture and history of the subject of research. In fact, Hamel's narrative about Joseon was largely used in such a context in the West and also in other books released by Griffis as well. While such academic trends could be attributed to the inaccessibility of information on Asia prior to the 19th century, the situation now is very different. Therefore, there is a need to reexamine history from other perspectives and take into account the culture and original systems of the research subject. In other words, if Joseon is the subject of research, factors such as the trading system already present within East Asia, its relations with other countries in the region and ideologies that influence their actions should be considered as well.

Next, it has also been explained above that Joseon had not rejected the establishment of trading relations with the VOC directly, but that the attempt was not made at all. Therefore, it seems to be that Hamel's description of Joseon was used out of context in relation to Joseon. While that was inevitable as it was the only direct source of information the West had of Joseon from the 17th to early 20th century, it is sufficient to call for a relook into Hamel's narrative and his actual impact in the West.

4. Conclusion

Thus, referring back to the main focus of this paper, various factors that would provide a better understanding of Hamel's narrative in order to reevaluate the historical significance and importance of Hamel and his description of Joseon in Korea and the West have been analysed. The sequence of events that led to the West having certain perceptions about Hamel and Joseon in general, as well as certain misunderstandings that still persist to-date were also covered.

Firstly, an important factor that has often been overlooked would be Hamel's intention with regards to his authorship of *Hamel's Journal*. It was never intended to be a comprehensive travel guide, nor a collection of stories to recount his experience in an exotic, foreign country. It was only meant to be a formal report meant to be submitted to the VOC for them to decide if they want to establish trading relations with Joseon. Therefore, Hamel's narrative had been largely focused on the trading aspects, manufactured products and geographical characteristics of Joseon. Despite that, it has been regarded as a largely comprehensive description of Joseon and therefore, resulted in certain misunderstandings with regards to the traditions and culture of Joseon. Furthermore, the failure to establish trading relations between the VOC and Joseon, despite the VOC's positive evaluation of Joseon, also added on to further misunderstandings regarding the trading culture of Joseon and of East Asian in general.

Secondly, since Hamel's report was not written with the general public's interests in mind, publishers had taken the liberty to exaggerate the content and that has also led to Hamel's narrative being doubted for its credibility. In fact, there are even opinions that Hamel had never actually been to Joseon. However, as mentioned above, there has been a lot of research done in Korea on the 13 years Hamel spent detained in Joseon and according to a significant amount of Korean historical records, the events mentioned in *Hamel's Journal* match those of the records and hence, it is undeniable that Hamel and his crew had been in Joseon during the same period specified in Hamel's Journal.

However, the exaggerated and false content, especially that of Saagman's edition, did result in the West having an inaccurate perception of Joseon. Furthermore, Saagman's edition was meant to be more affordable and therefore, catered to a wider audience. It would also imply

that a large proportion of the Western general public might have had an inaccurate perception of Joseon in the 17th century. Since there are researchers that still do not regard Hamel's narrative as a credible source of information up till now, it would imply that Saagman's edition of Hamel's story was also considerably impactful in the Western society.

Lastly, how Hamel's description of Joseon was referenced by researchers up till the late 19th century was also examined. Even though Hamel's narrative was already two centuries old at that point of time, it still proved to be relevant and remained an important source of information about Joseon in the West. However, it also became a major source that was used to label Joseon as uncivilised due to its purported religious inclinations, and conservative due to the trading culture. In fact, such misunderstandings have persisted till today and while there have been attempts to differentiate the different trading systems and cultures of East Asia and the West, it is a vast and complicated topic that needs to be researched further and therefore, remains as a limitation of this paper.

In conclusion, despite the issues with its credibility and the content being limited to being as assessment of the trading merits of Joseon, it is undeniable that Hamel's narrative had been a piece of work that put a spotlight on Joseon and increased the Western world's awareness of the country, and it had also been relatively successful in maintaining the world's interest in Joseon for over two centuries. That, in and of itself, is a feat that remains hard to achieve by many other similar works. Therefore, with regards to the historical impact and significance of Hamel's narrative, it can be concluded that it is an important piece of work with a considerably long-lasting impact in both Korea and in the West for it has changed the trajectory of events leading to the West having increased awareness of what was otherwise, an unknown country in the regions of East Asia, Joseon. However, as mentioned above, Hamel's historical significance is in fact much wider and is not limited to interpretations of his narrative in Western literature. Other aspects such as the trading system of East Asia, diplomatic relations of Joseon with other countries etc. can also be studied through Hamel's narrative as well.

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