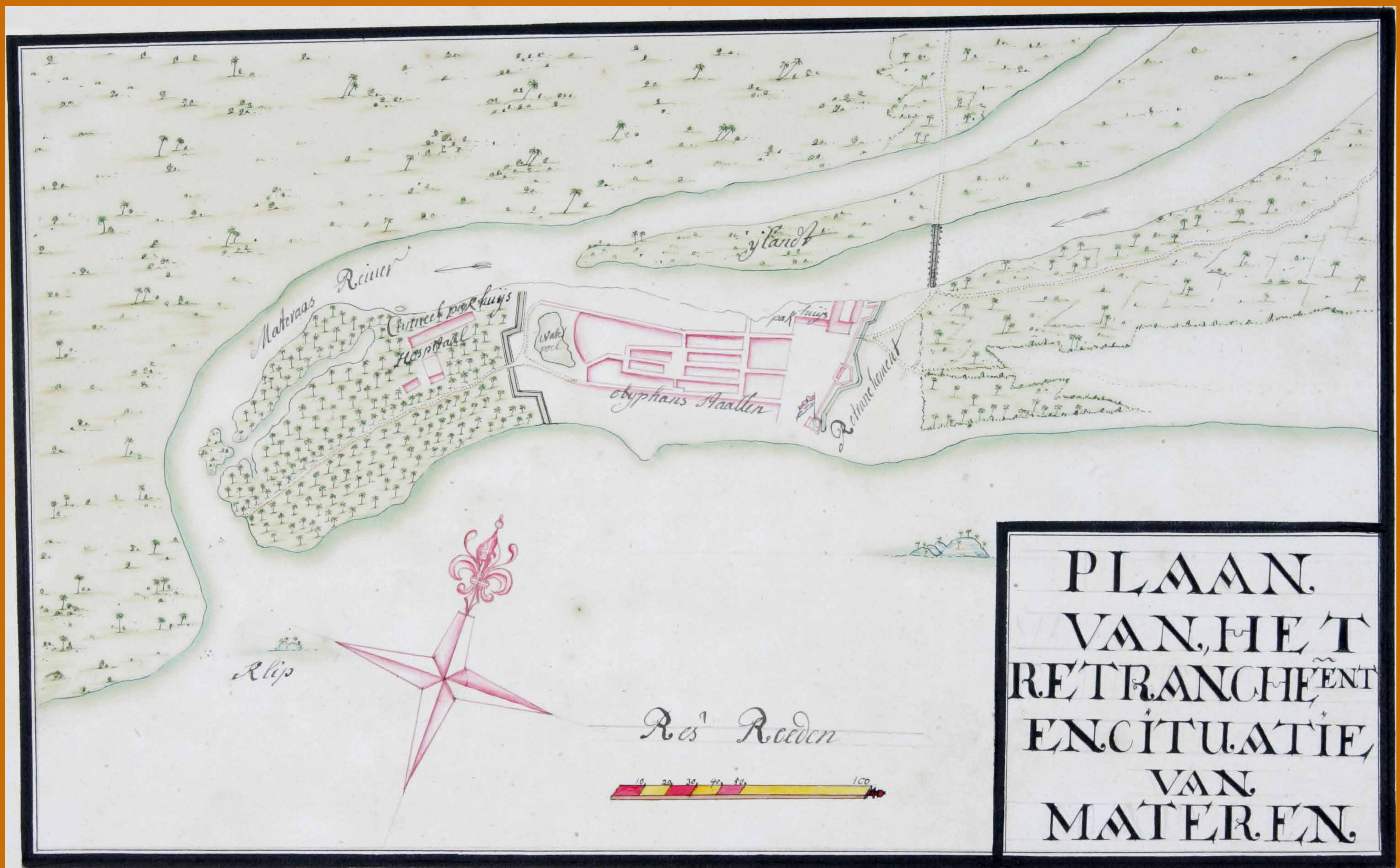


Matara...



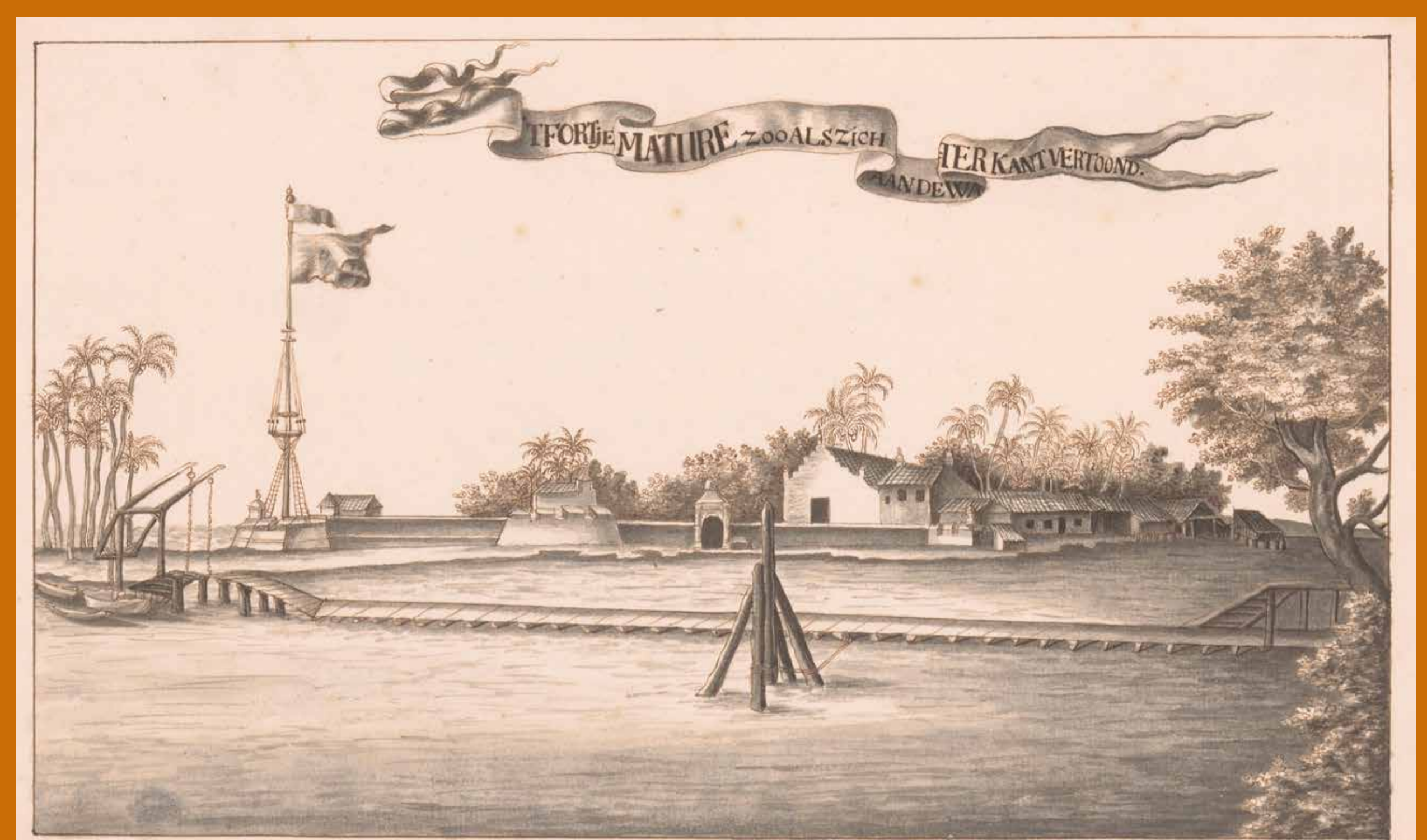
Map of Fort Matara and surroundings, c. 1770

Matara was at the end of a headland, at the mouth of the Nilwana Ganga. It was only accessible via a ferry and a floating bridge. Expensive defenses were not necessary, a simple wall from sea to river was sufficient. Behind the wall stood a warehouse (*pakhuijs*), a church and a view houses for the VOC servants – the largest of them was the residence of the Dessave of Matara. A great part of the territory was occupied by the four elephant stables (*olyphans staallen*) that could lodge eighty elephants at a time. More to the left one sees indicated the hospital (*hospitaal*) and the cinnamon warehouse (*Canneel pakhuijs*).

Maker not known. University Library Leiden, Special Collections, Collection Bodel Nijenhuis, inv.nr. COLLBN 002-11-59 (edited)

A simple bastioned wall from the sea to the Nilwala Ganga protected the Matara peninsula. Early March 1761, with the help of soldiers of the King of Kandy, local freedom fighters against the Dutch occupation besieged this small fort. Unable to defend the place any more, on March 24 the Dutch garrison retreated and fled by sea. What was left of the place was set on fire.

After it was recaptured in 1762, the VOC started rebuilding, which is evident from the date '1767' on the memorial sign of the Reformed Church. For more security a star-shaped redoubt (*redoute*) was built outside Matara. Business was soon resumed. Cinnamon was peeled again and transported to Galle. Elephants caught in the jungle were stabled in Matara before they made the long march to Jaffna, where merchants from South India gathered each year for the auction.



[above]
The fortress of Matara, seen from the River, c. 1750-1800

Artist not known. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv.nr. RP-T-00-3226.

[below]
The fortress of Matara with clock tower (1883), 2011

Photo Johannes Odé



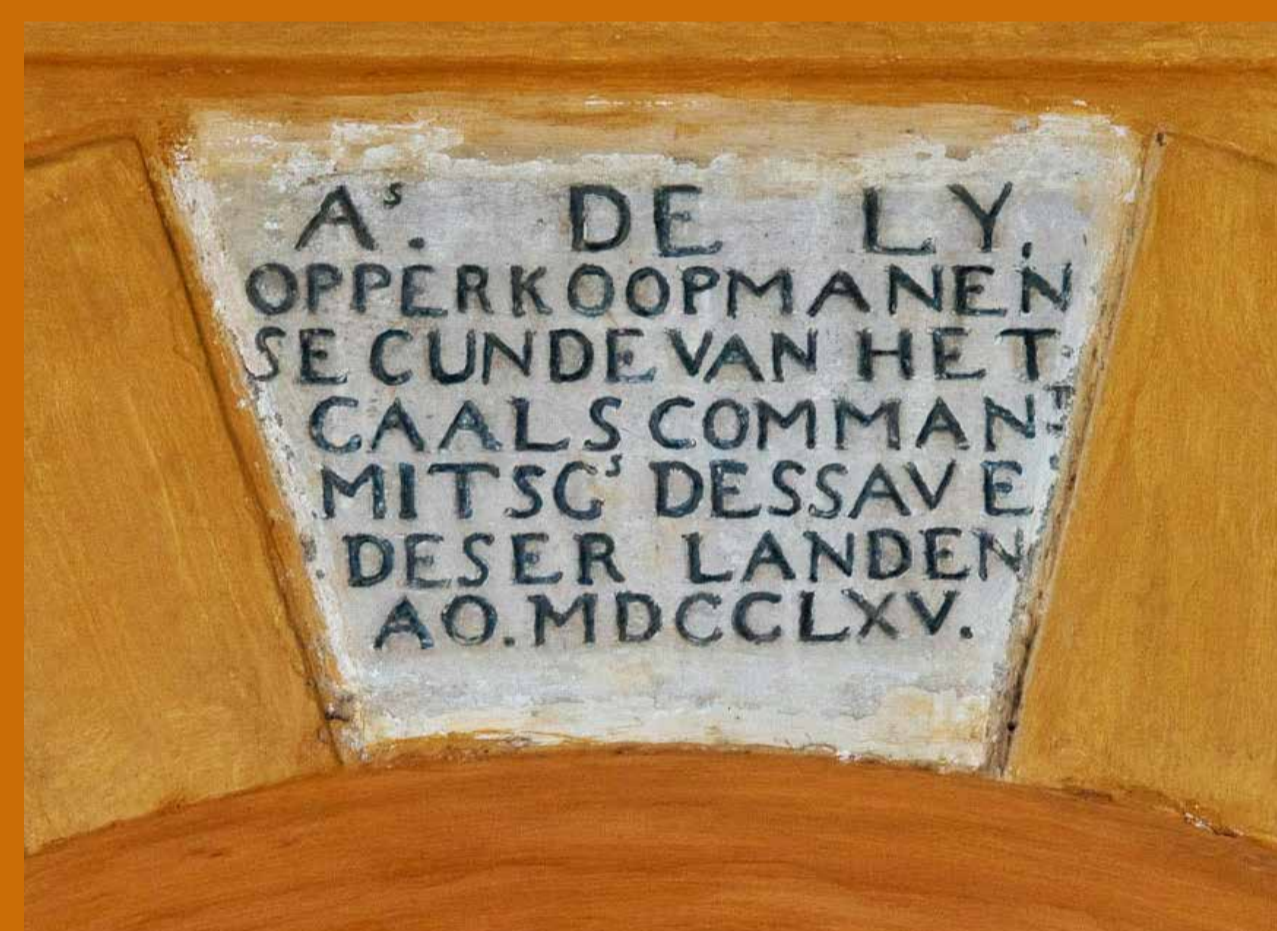
...cinnamon and elephants



The Christian Reformed Church of Matara and [right] detail, 2011

The text of the stone memorating the completion of the Christian Reformed Church in 1767 reads: DANIEL BURNAT/ OPPERKOOPMAN EN/ DESSAVE/ ANNO 1767. Daniel Burnat (1723-1801) was Dessave in the rank of senior merchant from 1767 to 1784.

Photos Johannes Odé



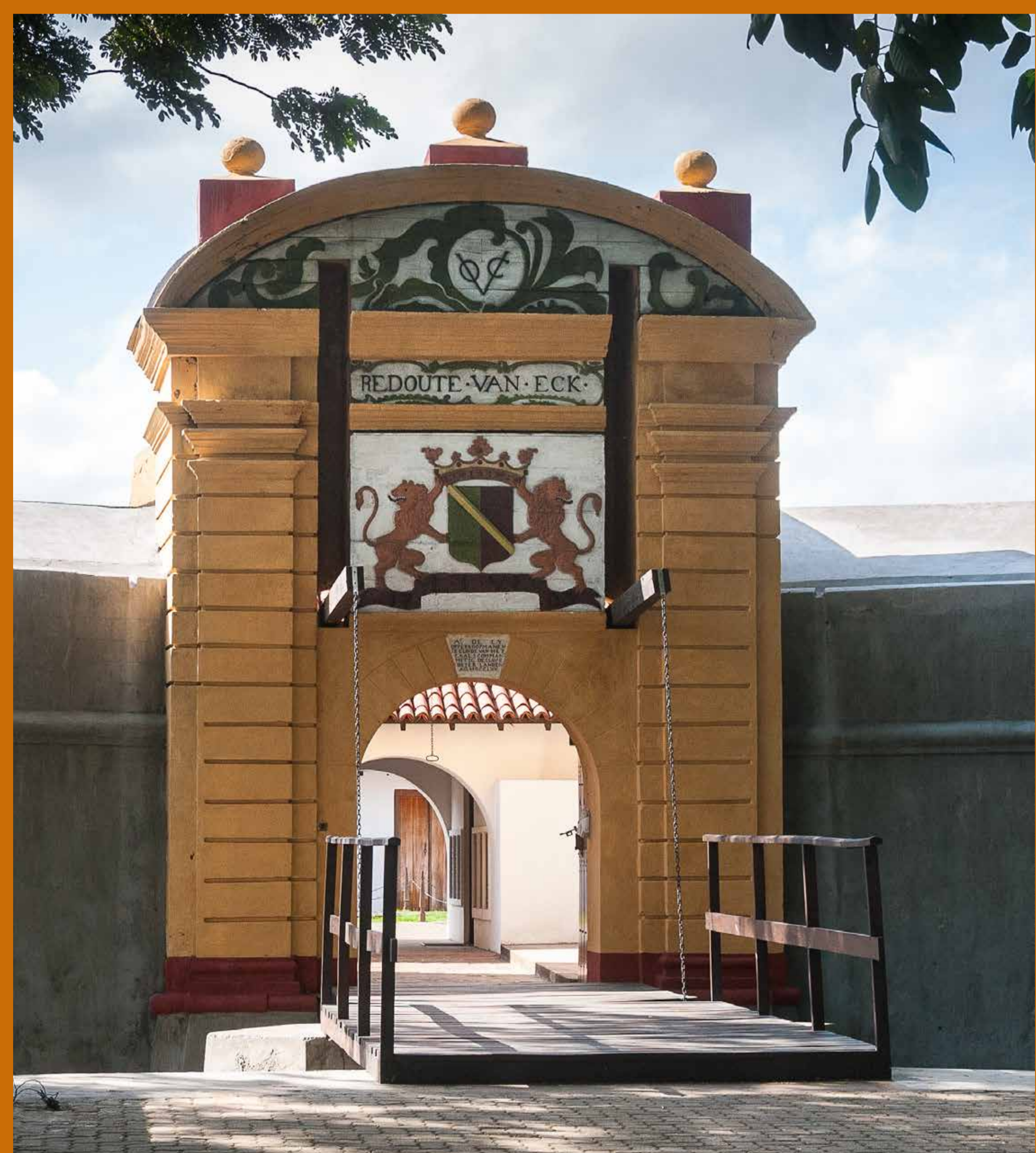
[right] Entrance of the Star Fort or *Redoute van Eck* and [left] detail.

The text above the gate reads:

AS. DE LY/ OPPERKOOPMAN EN/ SECUNDE VAN HET/ GAALS COMMANT/ MITSGS DESSAVE/ DESER LANDEN/ A° MDCCLXV.

(translation) 'A[rnoldus] de Lij, senior merchant and second in rank of the Galle Commandment, and also Dessave of these lands, Anno 1765'. Arnoldus de Lij (c.1725-1784), already appointed Chief of Matara and Dessave of the lands of Matara in 1761, was promoted to the rank of senior merchant after Matara was retaken. Only in the course of 1763 all of the dessavony of Matara had been brought back under Company's rule.

Photos Johannes Odé



[left] The Star Fort or *Redoute van Eck*, 2018

At the end of the war in 1765 the VOC built the star-shaped fort or *redoubt* at the point where the road along the Nilwana Ganga ended on the coastal road. From this strategic point, the artillery efficiently covered the access to Matara. The fort was named after the Dutch Governor Lubbert Jan van Eck (gov. 1762-1765), who died shortly after the capture and destruction of Kandy in April 1765.

Photo Yeb George Hiemstra

