

# What's in a name



The Government of Assam adopted a resolution on February 27, 2006 to change the official name of the state from Assam to Asom. The reason given for the change of name was that the name Assam is not an indigenous one and was coined by the British. No evidence was given by the government in support of their contention. This raised my curiosity to find out the origin of the name of Assam. I searched the Dutch archives and discovered something else too.

Historically the Dutch have been famous for good record keeping. A search for the word 'Assam' in the Dutch archives threw considerable light on the use of the name in different contexts. Based on my findings in the Dutch archives and backed up by historical documents from the Mughal period, I published an article confirming that the name Assam existed long before, and was not given by the British. On this I got an invitation from the Friends of Assam and Seven Sisters (FASS) to present my findings in Assam.

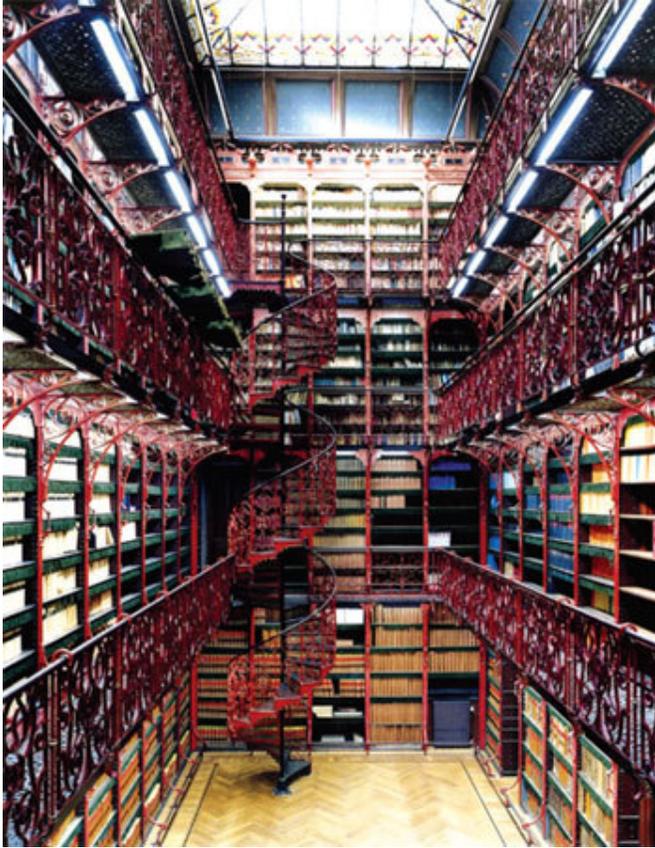
## **Travel Account of Glanius**

Before I left for Assam in November 2006, I was requested to bring a copy of a book written by one Glanius about his 17th century travel account of his visit to the region in 1662. My research resulted in a book published by Glanius with the title *A Relation of an Unfortunate Voyage to the Kingdom of Bengala*, published in 1682 from London. This English publication was not available in a Dutch library. I got a copy of Frans van der Heiden's book in Dutch, published in 1944. Several times the name of Assam is mentioned in this publication. I was able to find a copy of the original Dutch publication, published in 1675 in the library of the Maritime Museum, Rotterdam and compared the two publications. The 1944 version has extra preface added by the publisher including a map of Bengale drawn around 1661 where the name of Assam is mentioned.

On January 23, 2007 in a meeting at Guwahati, organized by Raushanara Education Foundation, Dr JN Das, the Director of the Department of Historical & Antiquarian Studies, Assam in a speech mentioned the importance of Glanius in the history of Assam. He further mentioned how Glanius got shipwrecked off the coast of Bengal, joined the army of Mir Jumla and fought in Assam.

I presented at the meeting the Dutch publication of the diary of Frans van der Heiden where he mentioned how he got shipwrecked, how he joined the army of Mir Jumla and most important of all, his experience in Assam in 1662. I also informed them that there is no need to translate the book into English as Glanius already did it in 1682. It was a big surprise for Dr Das and the experts in the audience for whom Glanius was an important figure in the history of Assam. After some discussion Dr Das and his friends requested me to locate a copy of the English translation of the diary of Frans van der Heiden published by Glanius.

The great historian, researcher and writer of Assam, Dr Surya Kanta Bhyuan in his book *Anglo-Assamese Relations 1771-1826* wrote: "Glanius, a Dutch sailor of Mir Jumla, has left an account of his experience in Assam; and as he was among the first Europeans to proceed as far as the capital or its neighbourhood, his account has significance of its own." This might be one of the reasons why Glanius is interconnected with the history of Assam.



Through the internet I was able to consult different libraries of the world and located copies of *Glanius'* publication — *A Relation of an Unfortunate Voyage to the Kingdom of Bengala*. But they were all on microfilms. Due to the copyright restrictions it was not possible to get the documents printed. My research led me to the Goethals Library and Research Centre, Kolkata. My correspondence with Father Felix Raj of St Xavier's College, Kolkata opened the doors to get a copy of the book published by *Glanius* in 1682.

#### **Did *Glanius* at all visit Assam?**

I went through the book. It is not a complete translation of the diary of Frans van der Heiden. In the book I got an answer to another puzzling question. Why many researchers and historians mentioned that *Glanius* accompanied Mir Jumla in his expedition to Assam? Why the name of Frans van der Heiden is not mentioned? In the English translation of the publication by *Glanius*, he used first person to describe his

experience and gave the impression that he served in the army of Mir Jumla. In this publication I could not find a reference to the name of Frans van der Heiden. In the past, most probably some of the researchers in the English-speaking world did not have access to the original diary published in Dutch by Frans van der Heiden. They used the English translation by *Glanius*. Hence, they took it for granted that *Glanius* was the Dutch sailor who went to Assam with Mir Jumla's army. One mystery is now solved.

As for Frans van der Heiden, after serving Mir Jumla for 15 months, he left Dhaka and sailed down for 15 days to 'Hougli'. By 1663-end they sailed to Amsterdam. On their way back their ships were attacked by the British. He was taken prisoner and was imprisoned in St Helena. At the end of 1673 Van der Heiden returned home via England. The first edition of his diary under the name *Vervarelyke Schipbreuk van't Oost-Indisch Jacht Ter Schelling* was published in the summer of 1675 by Johannes van Sommeren and Jacob van Meurs of Amsterdam. It was a big success. Frans van der Heiden did not live long to enjoy the earnings from his book as he died six years later at the age of 43 and said to be buried at the Heiligeweg cemetery.

#### **Who is *Glanius*?**

Who is *Glanius* who translated the original book from Dutch into English? Was he a Dutch? Was he an Englishman or a Frenchman? *Glanius* not only translated the book of Frans van der Heiden from Dutch to English but, so far known, also translated two other Dutch publications to English, and yet another one to French. All the three publications are related to ships and sailors. But still they did not give the answer if *Glanius* was of Dutch, English or of French origin?

In my search for *Glanius* I came in contact with academicians and writers who mentioned *Glanius* in their publications. Almost all of them mentioned or referred that *Glanius* accompanied Mir Jumla to Assam. I came across a book by *Glanius* with the following introduction (title): "A new voyage to the East-Indies, containing an account of several of those rich countries, and more particularly of the kingdom of Bantam". This edition was printed for H Rodes, Next door to the Bear Tavern near Bride Lane in Fleet Street, 1682. I am not yet able to locate the original Dutch publication.

Further research on Glanius led me to the publication of the book of Jan Janszoon Struys. His third and last voyage started in 1647 and he returned home in 1673. Struys was a sail-maker and worked amongst other for the Tsar. This gave him ample opportunity to sail to different destinations. This book, first published in 1681, was also translated by Glanius into English.

### **Glanius was not Frans van der Heiden**

Dr Willem van Schendel of University of Amsterdam confirmed that Glanius is definitely not the author of the book. In the bibliography of books of University of Sorbonne, Paris, category Centre de Recherche sur la Littérature des Voyages, Glanius is mentioned as a 'Copiste'. That Glanius was not Van der Heiden is also mentioned in *Asia in the Making of Europe* by Donald F Lach and Edwin J van Kley — published by the University of Chicago Press.

"In 1682, for example, a translation of Jan Janszoon Struys' first voyage appeared under the name of Glanius, which must have been the pseudonym of the translator or translator pirate... It is not a very reliable translation, and it is augmented by long descriptions apparently pilfered from other works. In the same year, also under Glanius' name, a translation appeared of Franz Janszoon van de Heiden's relation of his shipwreck off the coast of Bengal."

In the book *A Voyage to East Indies* 8 — also written in first person — Glanius mentioned that they set sail on December 26, 1667. On this date Frans van der Heiden was a prisoner in Malta. The third publication, the voyage of Jan Janszoon Struys by Glanius mentions that the voyage started in 1647 and ended in 1673.

From the different publications mentioned in this article and from the diary of Frans van der Heiden, it can be safely confirmed that it was Frans van der Heiden who went to Assam and fought with the army of Mir Jumla and not Glanius. From the diary of Van der Heiden we know that he left India at the end of 1663 and arrived in Amsterdam in the summer of 1673.

### **WHO WAS THEN THIS GLANIUS?**

Glanius must have been a person interested in or active in the maritime field. He knew about the ships, sailings and far off ports they visited and the commerce and trade they carried out. He had an intimate knowledge of these subjects. Besides Dutch, he knew English and French. All three books translated by him relate to voyages and commerce. As Glanius used words like East Indies, kingdom of Bantam, etc my feeling is that he was Dutch and not an English or Frenchman.

In those days it was customary to use Latinized names. For example, Gerrit Gerritszoon, the famous Dutch humanist was known as Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus. Hugo de Groot, philosopher, poet, playwright and Christian apologist who laid the foundation for international law, was known as Hugo Grotius. Christopher Columbus (Cristoforo Colombo), Nicolaus Copernicus (Mikolaj Kopernik, Nikolaus Koppernigk), Nostradamus (Michel de Nostredame), are some of the other famous Latinized names. So Glanius might be also a Latinized Dutch name.

It seems that after more than 400 years it is difficult to obtain information about the background of Glanius. What was his nationality? Where did he live? What was his profession? Why was he so much interested in translating Dutch publications on voyages? Why did he publish the books in first person? The search for Glanius still continues.

The diary of Frans van der Heiden and the map of Bengale cartographed in 1661 have also proved that the name Assam was not coined by the British. The government of Assam seems to have

taken the decision more on political rather than strong historical evidence.

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