Port Cities and Intercultural Relations
15th–18th Centuries

EDITED BY
LUÍS FILIPE BARRETO
WU ZHILIANG

Lisbon, 2012
Title:
Port Cities and Intercultural Relations
15th–18th Centuries

Published by:
Centro Científico e Cultural
de Macau, I.P.
Rua da Junqueira, n.º 30,
1300-343 Lisboa – Portugal
Tel.: 21 361 75 70
E-mail: geral@cccm.pt

Fundação Macau
Av. de Almeida Ribeiro, n.º 39, 7º-9º andar,
Macau
Tel.: (853) 2896-6777
E-mail: info@fm.org.mo

Edited by:
Luís Filipe Barreto
Wu Zhiliang

Authors:
Luís Filipe Barreto
Wu Zhiliang
Ronnie Po-chia Hsia
Roderich Ptak
James K. Chin
Jorge Santos Alves
Willy Vande Walle
Elisabetta Corsi

Design by:
Nuno Teixeira

Printed by:
Grifos – Artes Gráficas, Lda.

Number of copies:
1000

Lisbon | 2012

ISBN: 978-972-8586-29-4

Dep. Legal: 342778/12
# Table of Contents

**Foreword**

**About the Authors**

**Ronnie Po-chia Hsia**

*A Tale of Two Ports: Macau and Guangzhou in the Ming and Qing Dynasties*

**Roderich Ptak**

*Comparing the Incomparable: Some Thoughts on Seventeenth-Century Macau and Fort Zeelandia*

**James K. Chin**

*Trade, Migration and Sojourning Community: Chinese Merchants in Melaka*

**Jorge Santos Alves**

*Malacca: A Centre for Islamic Debate and a “New Mecca” (1480–1511)*

**Willy Vande Walle**

*Malacca under Dutch Rule (1641–1795 and 1818–1825)*

**Elisabetta Corsi**

*Tra scrittura e legenda*  
*La Cina negli stampati romani della fine del Cinquecento*
Foreword

I. The annual international Symposium on Port Cities and Intercultural Relations (15 - 18th centuries) was held in Lisbon at the CCCM on the 12, 13 and 14 October 2009. The volume now being published contains the essence of this symposium and focuses on the port cities of Macau, Guangzhou and Malacca; it also encompasses the means of communication and circulation with Formosa (Taiwan) and the city of Rome in the Baroque period, as a center which received Chinese culture, material and intellectual.

In 2009, the symposium also addressed Manila and the Chinese presence in this port city. The presentation made by Juan Gil subsequently led to the CCCM’s publication of his book entitled *Los Chinos en Manila - Siglos XVI y XVII*, in 2011.

II. The Studies now published by Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, Roderich Ptak, James K. Chin, Jorge Santos Alves, W. F. Vande Walle and Elisabetta Corsi, together with the book on Manila by Juan Gil make a significant contribution to what is known about these cities and port networks from 1400 to 1800.

Chinese and Portuguese sources, together with Spanish, Dutch, Italian and Malaysian sources have unveiled a panoply of facts and factors that have generated more and better knowledge of the functions of the port cities as international and intercultural centers and networks.

III. The port cities are maritime borders. Border zones, be they maritime or land borders, allow exchange and enable populations with very diverse languages, religions and cultures to have a common life. The border allows each of these communities and their dynamic and triumphant elites to find an economic and social place and function in the framework of a global network. Borders join just as much or even more than they separate. Border zones foster articulations between the most diverse
interests and powers. Political and military interests and powers, frequently strategic to the official centers, but also commercial and financial interests and powers that are crucial to the local, regional and international elites. Interests and powers that are also shared between the border zones, and unofficial and informal networks or even illegal networks according to the national and international law in force.

As shown by these studies, the port cities are capitals of coastal and maritime zones, centers of international and intercultural networks and relations, urban hubs and border markets of land and sea that exchange, foster and multiply products and investments, people and services. The border - both maritime and on land – goes beyond the local limits and national polarities. It generates a hybrid social and cultural environment with countless interacting ties and complex relations that defy distance and time.

Each and every border zone is a mark not only of identity but also of difference. It is a limit just as much as an opening. The border zone is indeed the ambivalence of division and incorporation, of separation and union. On the Asian and Eurasian maritime borders, we find a linguistic and religious, an ethnic and social crossing and mix. The presence of central powers and officials is not so strong, there is not so much coherence and unity, and so they can gather and empower more differences and pluralities. The international and intercultural port cities and the maritime border zones are processes in time and space which experience significant fluctuations of power and impact. Fluctuations on the margins of the possibility dictated by the environment and technology, by the regional context and the international structure of trade, finance and political order.

Port cities are processes of metamorphosis that transform the distances of the seas and between the coast and the inland into the proximity of exchange, the opportunity for profit and communication. They allow the transformation of the unknown and the different into something we know and can compare. City ports, the networks and zones of coastal borders are the cradles of cosmopolitanism and globalization.

Luís Filipe Barreto and Wu Zhiliang,
in the port cities of Lisbon and Macau, March 2012.
About the Authors

Luís Filipe Barreto is a Full Professor at the University of Lisbon’s History Department. Since 2006, he is the President of the Macau Scientific and Cultural Centre, based in Lisbon, under the ministry of Education and Science. He was the coordinator of the CCCM’s Research Project on Tomás Pereira, that led to the publication of his works in two volumes, under the title Tomás Pereira. Obras (Lisbon: CCCM, 2011). His research interests are in the field of cultural history and cultural interactions between Europe and China from the 16th to the early 18th century. He has published extensively on the Portuguese Renaissance, as well as on the History of Macau. His books include Descobrimento e Renascimento – Formas de Ser e de Pensar nos sécs. XV e XVI (Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional, 1982), Lavrar o Mar – Os Portugueses e a Ásia: c. 1480–c. 1630/Ploughing the Sea: The Portuguese in Asia: c. 1480–c. 1630 (Lisbon: CNCDP, 2000), and Macau: Poder e Saber (Lisbon: Presença, 2006).

Wu Zhiliang was born in Lianping, Guangdong Province in 1964. Upon graduation in Portuguese at Beijing Foreign Studies University in 1985, he came to Macau. He then went to Portugal in 1986, studying at the Faculties of Arts and Law, respectively at the University of Lisbon and Portuguese Catholic University. He completed a two-year course on Public Administration at the University of East Asia in 1991, and was doctorated in history at the University of Nanjing in 1997. Wu joined the Macau Foundation in 1988 and had become a Director since March 1992. Since July 2010, he has become the President of the Board of Directors. He is also a Visiting Professor at the University of Macau, the Macau University of Science and Technology, Nanjing University and Beijing Foreign Studies University.

Ronnie Po-chia Hsia is the Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of History, Religious Studies, and Asian Studies at the Pennsylvania State University, USA. He is the author of
many books, among which is *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City: Matteo Ricci 1552-1610* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). He is also the co-author and editor of several books, such as *The Cultural History of Translation in Early Modern Europe* (Hsia & Peter Burke, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) and *Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 6: *Reform and Expansion 1500-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

**Roderich Ptak** received his MA degree in economics from the University of Guelph, Canada; he obtained a Dr. phil. and habil. degrees in Chinese Studies, Heidelberg, Germany. He has been Professor of Chinese Studies, first in Heidelberg, then in Mainz-Germersheim, since 1994 in Munich. In between: Heisenberg scholar, guest teacher in Paris, Lisbon and Macau. He has published several books and articles on maritime Chinese history, Macau, traditional Chinese literature, animals in Chinese texts. He is also the co-editor of several book series. Details under www.sinologie.uni-muenchen.de/index.html.

**James K. Chin** is Research Fellow at Centre of Asian Studies, the University of Hong Kong. Meanwhile, he is invited to be Distinguished Professor at Research School of Overseas Chinese at Jinan University, China, and Research Professor at Institute of Historical Research, China Academy of Social Sciences. Currently he is, among a number of other social and academic positions, Vice President of China’s Association for Maritime History Studies, and Board Member of Hong Kong Maritime Museum. His research interest includes maritime history of imperial China and Chinese international migration, and he has published more than 90 articles and 15 books in these fields.

**Jorge Santos Alves** received his Ph. D. in History from the Universidade Nova de Lisboa (Portugal) in 2004. He is Assistant Professor and Coordinator of the Asian Studies Consortium (Faculdade de Ciências Humanas, Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Lisbon). He is currently senior researcher at the Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Cultura (FCH-UCP) and coordinator of the research topic East and West – Memory Transfers, from the research line Culture and Conflict. He is Visiting Professor at the University of Macau. His main research areas are Pre-colonial Southeast Asia, the History of Macau and the Sino-Portuguese historical relations (16th to 19th centuries). Among his main publications, we can highlight *Fernão Mendes Pinto and*

Elisabetta Corsi is a Professor at the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, University ‘La Sapienza’ of Rome, where she teaches Sinology and Classical Chinese. She has developed her studies on Art History, Chinese Philology, Comparative Religions and Theology in Rome, Beijing, Hong Kong, Bombay and Mexico. Her research interests are related to the Society of Jesus’ intellectual apostolate in China and the diffusion of Catholic visual and scientific culture in China in the early modern period. She has published extensively on linear perspective, namely *La fábrica de las ilusiones. Los jesuitas y la difusión de la perspectiva lineal en China (1698–1766)* (Mexico: El Colegio de México, 2004) and recently she contributed, with Filippo Camerota,
to the section on linear perspective and mathematics of the exhibiton and catalogue
Mirabili disinganni. Andrea Pozzo (Trento 1642–Vienna 1709). Pittore e architetto gesuita
(Rome, 2010). She is currently working on a book project concerning the trasmission
of Aristotelian natural philosophy to China during the early modern period.
A Tale of Two Ports: Macau and Guangzhou in the Ming and Qing Dynasties

Macau was the outer port of Guangzhou: this is the succinct and precise formulation of Professor Luís Filipe Barreto in his important study on the early history of Macau. The intertwined fates of two ports represented a unique example in Chinese maritime history and is relatively rare in urban history (Seville and Cadiz in the early modern period being the best example); the two cities enjoyed a remarkably long period of close association that only declined toward the end of the 18th century and which was eventually supplanted by the opening of Treaty Ports after the Opium War (1839-42). But even as Guangzhou and Macau grew apart, the 1880 Gazetteer of Guangzhou Prefecture waxes nostalgic about the bond between the two ports:

The Prefecture of Guangzhou occupies the Cantonese region of the five ranges and lies at the confluence of three rivers (Pearl, West, and North), and is the most magnificent place in the southeast and the region of the Yue. In the middle of the prefecture, the cities of Nanghai and Pangyu form an axis of support to the right and left … [She is] surrounded by Shunde, Xiangshan, Xinan, and Dongguan, all close to the sea, their fertile fields, fishing grounds, and salt pans being indispensable for the poor … Protected by hills and accessible by Xinlin, Xinhui, Sanshui, and Qingyuan, all important sites allowing an endless traffic of boats. Huaxien, Longmen, and Conghua serve as screens for the provincial capital… whereas Zengcheng, situated downstream, serves as the eastern gateway to Guangzhou, while Sanshui and Qingyuan provide defenses in the northwest. As for Haojing (Macau), an isolated island, where the waves meet seamlessly with the infinite sky, foreign barbarians have settled here, and ships are moored side to side like a wall. As a foreign garrison for the provincial capital, no place is more important than this. (see illustration 1)

This was a remarkable statement, seen in the increasingly confrontational relations between Imperial China and western powers in the late 19th century. My paper aims to present a brief sketch of the Guangzhou-Macau axis à la longue durée. And although many of the topics this paper touches on are well researched – the policy debate in the late Ming toward Macau, the Portuguese enclave’s trade with Southeast Asia and Japan, etc. – I will use new documentation from the Jesuit Mission to elucidate the importance of the binary urban relations in the history of Sino-western encounter.

China’s primary port: Guangzhou

Until the Southern Song dynasty, Guangzhou was the most important seaport in China’s maritime trade with Southeast, South, and Southwest Asia. Between the high Tang and the Northern Song dynasties, ships from many countries called at the port on the Pearl River estuary. A large community of Arabic, Persian, and Southeast Asian merchants resided in Guangzhou; and the city was named in Arabic sources Khanfu (Guangfu, prefecture of Guang).

During the Southern Song dynasty, Quanzhou on the southern Fujian coast rose to new prominence and eclipsed Guangzhou’s role, thanks to its proximity to the imperial capital in Hangzhou, a leading role it continued to play during the Mongol Yuan dynasty. This period would see the emergence of southern Fujian (Minnan) merchants as the most significant group of Chinese seafarers, who would in the early 16th century provide a crucial link for the Portuguese in Melaka and in southeast China.

After the collapse of the Mongols, Guangzhou regained its preeminence under the Ming dynasty and served as the entrepôt for most southeast Asian tribute-bearing voyages, although one should add that the early 15th century voyages of the Eunuch-Admiral

---

3 There is a voluminous literature on Ming maritime policy, the role of Macau, and Sino-Portuguese relations. See inter alia, Qiu Xuanyu 邱炫煜, Ming di guo yu Nanhai zhu fan guo guanxi di yan bian 明帝國與南海諸蕃國關係的演變 (Taipei: Lan Tai chubanshe, 1995), pp. 291-329; Chen Shangsheng 陈尚胜, “Huai yi” yu “Yi Shang.” Ming dai haiyang li liang xing shuai yanjiu 「怀夷」与「抑商」: 明代海洋力量兴衰研究 (Jinan: Shandong Renmin chubanshe, 1997); Zhang Zengxin (Stephen Tseng-hsin Chang) 張增信, Ming ji dongnan Zhongguo de hai shang huo dong 明季東南中國的海上活動 (Taipei: China Committee for Publication Aid and Prize Awards, 1988); and the two essay collections by Roderich Ptak, China and the Asian Seas (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 1998) and China, the Portuguese, and the Nanyang (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 2004).

Zheng He were launched from Nanjing and Zhejiang, and had pretty much bypassed the Guangdong coast. Similarly, when the Portuguese first sailed to the Chinese coast in the 1510s and 1520s, their first base of operations was off the coast of Zhejiang, where the island of Shuangyu served as a major haven for the mixed Sino-Japanese-Portuguese community of merchant-smugglers. The subsequent state suppression of smuggling and the rise of large-scale privacy on the coast of Zhejiang and Fujian is a well-known story, and testify as much to the blindness of a short-sighted imperial anti-maritime policy as to the rapacity and violence of the Sino-Japanese Wako. The violence that erupted off the Zhejiang-Fujian coast drove the Portuguese to the south, and the progressive move of Portuguese shippers from Langboaao to Shangchuan and eventually Macau is a story that is well told in Portuguese historiography and need not be repeated here.

Emerging Symbiosis

The first contacts between the Portuguese and Ming provincial officials in Guangdong were of an informal nature. It was one of these mandarins, the haidao in Guangdong, Wang Bo, who struck a deal in 1552 with the Portuguese captain-major Leonel de Sousa. The xun shi hai dao fu shi, the full title of Wang Bo, translates literally as the Vice-Official for the Inspection of the Maritime Sector. Established during the pirate troubles of the Jiajing reign, the haidao in Guangdong province was the mandarin who had immediate jurisdiction in all matters dealing with the Portuguese. Charged with maritime security, the haidao occupied the second highest military post in the province, only after the zongbin, the regional commander. Charged also with the collection of maritime duties, the haidao, like many leading military commands, was usually entrusted to civilian mandarins, since professional military men enjoyed little trust and prestige in the imperial bureaucracy of the Ming dynasty. In Guangdong, the function of haidao was usually carried out by the anchasi fushi, the Provincial Surveillance Vice Commissioner. Their position presented

---

5 See James K. Chin, “The Portuguese on the Zhejiang and Fujian coast prior to 1550 as seen from contemporary Chinese Private Records,” in Macau during the Ming Dynasty. Luís Filipe Barreto, editor (Lisbon: Centro Científico e Cultural de Macau, 2009), pp. 119-37.

6 Barreto, Macau: Poder e Saber, chaps. 1 and 2 and Wan Ming 万明, Zhong Pu zao qi guanxi shi 中葡早期关系史 (Beijing: shehui ke xue wanxian chubanshe, 2001), chaps. 3 and 4.

the haidao with many opportunities of personal enrichment; hence, whatever their attitude toward the “barbarians in Macau”, they continued to advocate Portuguese interests within the provincial bureaucracy.

The agreement in 1552 between Wang Bo and de Sousa stipulated that the Portuguese were to be treated with the same protocol as the Siamese, a recognized friendly tribute-bearing country, that they could trade in Guangzhou once yearly (later extended to two semiannual fairs), that they could use Macau as a permanent land base, and that they pay a 20% duty on all imported goods.\(^8\) In 1557, the Portuguese received permission to construct durable houses in Macau. The Portuguese gained further credit with the Ming court by assisting in coastal pacification: in 1564, they furnished 300 men to General Yu Dayiu who crushed a mutiny; in 1568, they defeated the pirate Zheng Yiben, who was raiding the Pearl River delta; and in 1574-5 the Supreme Commanders of Guangdong and Fujian summoned Portuguese ships to help suppress the pirate Lin Daoqian. Recognizing their superior firepower and ships, Chinese mandarins came to see the usefulness of tolerating the Portuguese at their doorstep.

One more thing the mandarins appreciated about the Portuguese: these barbarians performed all official ceremonies and did not object to rituals of submission such as kneeling in front of mandarins and bowing their heads on the floor, the ritual of koutou (kowtow), expected of all Chinese subjects before the mandarins, and later vigorously objected to by Spanish and British emissaries. If the Portuguese seemed docile in the 1550s, their attitude was due less to awe with Ming might than with the love of profit. Thanks to Ming prohibition of direct Sino-Japanese trade, the Portuguese became the only middlemen, buying up silk brocades, raw silk, and fine porcelain in Guangzhou to ship to Nagasaki, Japan, carrying on their return voyages vast quantities of silver in the large bulk of their naus to feed the bullion hungry Chinese market. In addition, the Portuguese in Macau imported sandalwood, camphor, and spices from Southeast Asia, and exported silk, porcelain, and many handicraft wares, reaping profits of more than 100% in the triangular China-Japan-Melaka voyages.

Meanwhile, there was a growing symbiosis between Macau and Guangzhou: the annual trade fairs that became biannual events, which allowed Macau merchants to sail up the Whangpo, lodge on their ships, and trade outside the city walls on the river front; and the consequent rise of Chinese intermediaries—traders, workers, servants, interpreters, craftsmen and farmers who supplied necessities to the Portuguese and their

\(^8\) See the letter of Leonel de Sousa to the Infante D. Luís, 15 January, 1556, in Loureiro, ed., *Em Busca das Orígens de Macau*, pp. 91-99.
dependents. In addition to the two major groups of players in this symbiotic relations – the mandarins and the Portuguese traders – two other groups emerged as key players in the early history of Macau: Jesuit missionaries and Minnan seafarers. The latter group, as we have seen, first entered into contact with the Portuguese in Melaka and supported the Portuguese overthrow of the Melaka sultanate. Subsequently, they acted as business partners with the Portuguese in the lucrative illegal trade off the Zhejiang and Fujian coast. If not the majority of the Chinese population in 16th century Macau, the southern Fujianese continued to play a central role in China’s maritime history up to the end of the Ming dynasty in the mid-17th century. The career of Zheng Zhilong, known in Portuguese records as Iquan, the father of Zheng Chenggong, Koxinga, who made his fortunes as a young man on the Macau-Nagasaki trade as a Portuguese protégé, a convert to Christianity, and who employed a personal guard of Lusophone Africans, was a case in point. The Jesuits played an equally important role as peacemakers in the early history of Macau, defusing many potentially violent confrontations between haughty and mighty fidalgos. The fathers also accompanied every trade delegation to Guangzhou, saying mass, dispensing spiritual aid, and, on one occasion, converted a young Chinese Buddhist novice, which provoked the ire of the Guangdong mandarins.

This informal arrangement underwent a transformation in the early 1580s. In 1581 Chen Rui (b. 1513) was appointed zongdu of Guangdong and Guangxi. Prior to this appointment, he was the Grand Coordinator (xunfu) of Hubei, the home province of the Grand Secretary Zhang Juzheng, the most powerful man in the realm under the emperor, whose protégé he was. The Fujianese Chen Rui had obtained his jinsbi, the highest civil service examination degree in 1553, and had served in various provincial posts, before being nominated to the pinnacle of his career. The mightiest mandarin in Guangdong and Guangxi, Chen Rui promptly dispatched an emissary to Macau upon assuming office: he delivered a summons to Capitão-Mor João de Almeida and Bishop Leonardo de Sá to appear before his office in order to answer for the fact that the Portuguese were residing in Macau without formal imperial permission. Since the Portuguese had been paying a small rent annually after 1555 to the provincial government and far larger gifts to her officials, Chen Rui’s message, in addition to a summons, was received and understood by the Portuguese as a not too subtle demand for more bribes.

10 Barreto Macau: Poder e Saber, p. 115ff. and Loureiro, Em Busca das Origens de Macau, p. 122.
The Portuguese selected Mateus Panela, auditor, one of the highest ranking official in the Macau administration, and the Italian Jesuit Michele Ruggieri to represent the secular and ecclesiastical authorities in this delicate diplomacy.

As the only Jesuit in Macau with any command of Chinese, Ruggieri made a favorable impression on Chen Rui. He presented the Portuguese in Macau as loyal vassals of the Ming emperor, who desired nothing but trade and peace. The gifts presented by Panela also helped. While compensating the Portuguese auditor for his expensive gifts, Chen Rui also secretly asked Panela to use the money for the purchase of goods in Macau, according to Jesuit records.11

This first high-level recognition by Chen Rui of Macau represented the establishment of an official and formal status for the Portuguese enclave. It is of interest to note that Chen Rui came from Changlo in southern Fujian, where the Ming admiral Zheng He had raised a steele commemorating his voyages. It is quite likely that the mandarin Chen Rui had long been aware of the lore and legends of the sea, and the lucrative trade that the Portuguese and Chinese smugglers had plied off the coast of his native place.

Although Chen Rui was dismissed from office after only one year, after the death of his patron Zhang Juzheng and the charge of corruption, the Jesuit mission found another mandarin patron, the magistrate of Zhaoqing, Wang Pang. There is an interesting parallel here between Wang Pang and Chen Rui. Both men came from coastal towns in maritime provinces – Chen Rui from southern Fujian and Wang Pang from Shaoxing in Zhejiang, the latter a short distance from the island of Shuangyu, the hideout of Sino-Portuguese smugglers in the generation of Wang Pang’s father, and in the proximity of the best silk-growing region of the country. In fact, Wang Pang’s family was closely connected to commerce, similar to many gentry families in Zhejiang and Fujian, which combined trade and imperial service, money and power in their strategy for upward social mobility. In 1583 Wang Pang summoned Ruggieri back to Zhaoqing, from where he was banished after the dismissal of Chen Rui. Another young Jesuit, Matteo Ricci, accompanied Ruggieri to man this first Catholic mission in the Chinese interior.

In the winter of 1585 Ruggieri accompanied a brother of Wang Pang from Guangzhou to the family native place in Shaoxing. The journal kept by Ruggieri gives us a rare glimpse into the business operations of a Chinese merchant from the Jiangnan, economically the most prosperous region in Ming China, and its connection to the international

maritime trade through Guangzhou and Macau. In November 1585 the brother of Wang Pang, whose name is not recorded, arrived in Guangzhou. Ruggieri hastened to meet him there from Zhaoqing. Through the mediation of the Jesuit, Wang’s brother quickly disposed of his merchandise of silk and tea, gaining a handsome profit from his dealings with Portuguese traders from Macau. From Guangzhou, the Portuguese shipped the merchandise to Macau and onto Nagasaki and Southeast Asia; this part of the trade network, the international maritime sector, we are familiar with from the research of Charles Boxer and other historians. What was the interior trade network? How was China connected to the Macau trade? Again, Ruggieri’s journal provides an answer.

Although the Jesuit did not record the details, Wang’s brother presumably used his profits to purchase western goods and Guangdong products. The merchandise was loaded onto barges on the banks of Guangzhou, and the party sailed from a tributary of the Pearl River westward before turning north to continue its journey up the North River (Beijiang). After a week’s sailing, the barges reached Shaozhou, the confluence of three rivers, and the travelers continued in a northeasterly direction on the Zhen River until the town of Nanxiong, just on the border with Jiangxi province. There the party unloaded the merchandise on the backs of mules to trek over the 10th century stone-paved road, the Meiling Way, across the low ridge of the same name. At the reverse slope, they arrived in Jiangxi, where the merchandise was re-loaded on barges to sail on the Gan River all the way to Jingdezhen, the center of porcelain production and a veritable industrial center in Ming China, whose wares were marketed all over the world. During a brief sojourn, Wang’s brother made a further purchase of Jingdezhen porcelain before continuing onward to their final destination, Shaoxing in Zhejiang. The entire journey, almost entirely by waterways, lasted for about two months (see illustration 2). Avoiding the dangers of sea travel and official ban, Jiangnan merchants could use internal waterways to connect with the lucrative international maritime trade through the two ports of Guangzhou and Macau. The two port cities were linked not only by their geographical proximity, but also formed close transitional points in an extensive trading network, connecting the maritime and continental halves, the Portuguese Asian realm and Ming China.

The examples of Chen Rui and Wang Pang indicate the importance of examining native place and family strategies in understanding the policy debates in late Ming China regarding Macau and maritime trade. In the case of Chen Rui, it also points to the widespread practice of mandarin corruption and venality that lubricated early Sino-

12 See my *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, chap. 5.
Port Cities and Intercultural Relations
15th-18th Centuries

Portuguese relations, for which we have only fragmentary documentary evidence from the 1630s and 1640s.\textsuperscript{13}

**The Seventeenth Century Crisis**

The collapse of the Ming regime disrupted the symbiosis between Guangzhou and Macau. Between 1644, the conquest of Beijing by peasant rebels, and 1684, the final pacification of the country by the new Manchu Qing dynasty, after the defeat of the Zheng regime in Taiwan, China was in chaos. Guangzhou witnessed two sieges by Qing troops; and the Portuguese in Macau were torn between their loyalty to the old Ming regime and their realistic assessment of power in the struggle between southern Ming and Qing forces. While in December 1650 the Macau authorities still supported the mission of the Jesuit Michael Boym, who traveled to Europe on behalf of the last southern Ming emperor Yongli for diplomatic recognition and military aid, soon after they proffered submission to the Qing regime.

The face of the new Qing regime in Guangzhou was represented by Shang Kexi 尚可喜, one of the three Ming turncoat commanders, who ruled southern China for their Manchu master as the three feudatories. Virtually autonomous in Guangdong, Shang Kexi tried to develop his own connections to the lucrative international maritime trade. For this reason, he welcomed Spanish Franciscan friars from the Philippines, whom he hosted inside his palace in Guangzhou.\textsuperscript{14} In addition to potential Spanish competition, which Macau succeeded in fending off during the entire Ming dynasty, the Portuguese also faced their nemesis, the Dutch, who were quickly expanding into the South China

\textsuperscript{13} See the expenditures on gifts and small provisions recorded in the Senado of Macau in the 1630s and 1640s, published in the *Arquivos de Macau*, vol. II, No. 2 (February 1930), “Despeza que da o procurador e tizoureiro Domingos D’Almeida” for July 1644, pp. 75-82. Evidence also occasionally comes up in Chinese historical records, such as the memorial copied by the Imperial Censor for the Ministry of War, dated Chongzhen 16th year, 11 month 6th day (December 1643), from the Censor and Commissioner of Guangdong Liu Yindong, who reported on the corruption and indiscipline of 11 military commanders, ranging from the commander of a garrison, *weiso* to battalion commander, for stealing the pay of the troops, robbing civilians, forging receipts, indiscipline, disobedience, including the battalion commander Peng Qizhu of Guangzhou Left Garrison, who kept smuggled goods without turning them in. *Ming Qing Shi liao, ren bian*, 明清史料·壬編, vol. 6, p. 572b. Academia Sinica. Institute of History and Philology, ed., 中央研究院歷史語言研究所 (Beijing/Taipei, 1930-67), 90 volumes.

Sea. Like the Spaniards, the Dutch sought to establish their own entrepôt on the southern Chinese coast, preferably in Fujian. Repulsed in their 1622 attack on Macau, the Dutch had established a strong presence on the island of Taiwan before they were also defeated by the Ming loyalist forces under Zheng Chenggong (Koxinga) in 1662. Turning directly to Beijing, a delegation dispatched by the Dutch East India Company in Batavia sailed to Guangzhou in March 1656; Shang Kexi sent the Dutch envoys to Beijing, where, due to the intrigue of the Jesuits at court, they failed to gain a favorable hearing. These European threats aside, Portuguese Macau faced the gravest crisis its history during the ban of maritime traffic (1662-1684). Designed as a ‘scorched earth’ policy to deprive any means of provisioning for Zheng Chenggong’s fleets, this Qing policy devastated numerous coastal communities from Zhejiang to Guangdong; and the forced re-location of millions caused thousands of deaths and untold suffering. The Portuguese enclave became a veritable island, with an uninhabited buffer zone between itself and Guangzhou. Only the exceptional provisioning granted by Beijing saved the city from starvation.

By 1684, Macau’s ordeal was over. The Qing had crushed the rebellion of the three feudatories (1674-81), defeated the Zheng on Taiwan, and reunified the country under strong central rule. Guangzhou and Macau were about to enter into a new period in their long symbiosis. It was in these years that we have the first detailed Chinese description of the Portuguese enclave. This came from the pen of the Chinese Jesuit Lu Xiyuan (1631-1704). A native of Jiangsu province, Lu and a fellow Chinese convert, the famous painter Wu Li 吳歷 (1632-1718), accompanied the Belgian Jesuit Philippe Couplet to Macau, where they hoped to embark for Europe as Jesuit novices. Unable to sail abroad, Lu and Wu remained in Macau for their theological training: Lu was baptized Dominique and Wu, Simon-Xavier a Cunha. Unlike the European missionaries, Wu’s party entered Macau on the Chinese side via the land route (see illustration 3):

---


*Aomen Jilu* 澳門記略 by Yin Guang Ren and Zhang Ru Lin, annotated and edited by Zhao Chun Chen, Macau, 1992. An earlier edition of the Ou-Mun Chi-lu has been translated by Luis G. Gomes under the title, *Ou-mun kei-leok: Monografia de Macau*, Macau, 1950. The edition by Zhang includes also excerpts from other 18th and 19th century Chinese works touching on Macau, particularly excerpts from the gazetteers of Xiang Zhan county.
Before we get to the fortification of Qianshan, we can see Macau afar like a lotus leaf floating above water, with its stem the customs checkpoint to distinguish the inner and outer boundary. Upon approaching, we see stories of houses, the high ones built on slopes, and low ones on the sea’s edge, with winding buffs and cliffs, just like a beautiful landscape painting. But once inside the territory, I saw that the walls do not even reach a hundred feet and the population hardly exceeds five hundred; the households lack stored grains, and people are dressed poorly. Nonetheless, for security there are the literati (i.e. the clergy), dressed in floating cloaks, reciting verses, exiting from churches; they are the scholars who discourse on ethics, examine science, reflect on logic, and pursue metaphysics. There are also warriors, bareing their arms and carrying swords, testing one another their courage and strength in the various fortifications... These literati and warriors all obey the orders of the Emperor on High (Shangdi) and all their actions are entrusted to the Lord of Heaven (Tianzhu).

Lu went on to describe the various churches, dwelling especially on São Paulo, the Jesuit Church, “whose members such as Adam Schall and Ferdinand Verbiest have all served the emperor selflessly and received numerous honors.” He then described the foundling hospital, the leprosy, and a hospital for the poor and travelers. Commenting on the fortifications, Lu observed that their canons were far superior to the western canons cast during the Ming dynasty, and thus “frightening away the pirates, the Vietnamese and Japanese barbarians; in the defense of the Southeast and the demarcation of Guangdong, can one deny their merit?”

If this statement can be interpreted as a positive evaluation of the role of the Portuguese, Lu makes explicit his hopes for a true cultural exchange:

Thus we have received [them] as hosts and designated [this territory] as outside of the boundary of the Realm, since [they] have retained the customs of their own country and have kept their national dress and language. However, if we do not consider [them] as aliens, and try to integrate them with the books of Confucius and Mencius, and with our ancient rituals of the Book of Rites, then we can use their understanding of things to educate our own people. Then everyone will know to love and honor the Lord of Heaven and their neighbors, and no one will steal or cheat, and the entire country will be populated by the subjects of heaven. If we use their science of nature to inspire our youth and talent, then the rules of things will be known, predictions will be accurate, and measurements will be minute, and the lacunae in our own learning of things can be completed. If we use their bravery to subdue the disobedient, then there will be no thought of rebellion and the entire land will be populated by loyal servants. If we use their tax revenues to supplement our income, there will never be a shortage in tax quotas, and the county will never be short of funds.
And what do we do with such a place, with such people, with such a way of morality, with such learning, and with those who have performed service for our country? We treat them as alien barbarians and keep them outside of the realm! Is this not to be deeply regretted? Is this not to be questioned?"

In addition to this sympathetic portrait of Macau by a Chinese Jesuit, the famous collection of anecdotes on Guangdong compiled by Qu Dajun (1630-96), the Guangdong Xinyu, New Discourses on Guangdong, have two entries of great interest on Macau. The first entry, written after 1684, under “Aomen”, describes the topography, architecture, the churches, the technology, the white and black people, the women, and the commodities, a passage that is copied word for word in the well-known Chinese description of Macau, the Aomen Jilu, written by two Qing dynasty magistrates, Yin Guangren 印光任, and Zhang Rulin 張汝霖. On the last item, commodities, Qu writes:

The people of Macau are mostly wealthy. Every year the Country of Western Ocean sends an official to govern them. Many ships carry precious cargos here … each ship carries a treasure of silver. The Fujianese serve as their pilots and help them distribute their silver among all the handicrafts, for food, clothing, and various commodities. The trade prospers with each year. In the past, the maritime ban was strictly enforced, and the people were forbidden to communicate with Macau. Clandestinely, the feudatories traded with them and kept all the profits, with the common people getting none. It is the same now.17

The second entry that concerns Macau is under the long heading “silver”; Qu writes:

The silver in Fujian and Guangdong mostly come from foreign ships. They include the Luzon barbarians, to the south of Fujian, who produce silver … The Fujianese and Cantonese import Luzon silver to Guangzhou. The whole-sellers take it directly from the ships and distribute it among the hundred handicrafts, who sell clothing, vessels, and various implements. In [former] times of peace, the merchants used all their silver to purchase commodities. When they trekked over the Meiling [ridge], they did not carry silver with them. Therefore, only 30-40% of the silver in eastern Guangdong were exported. Today, there are many internal customs. When the merchandise has been transported to Jiangsu, Hunan, or the capital, they usually fetch only a low profit, if at all. The merchants now mostly export silver, leaving hardly any in eastern Guangdong.18

17 Qu Dajun 屈大均, Guangdong Xinyu 廣東新語, juan 2 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuchu, 1997), vol. 1, p. 38.
Qu Dajun observed not only the massive import of American silver into China through the Philippines, a trend that increased from the late 17th into the 18th century, but also the tightening central control of the Qing imperial state over regional and local affairs after the 1680s. The symbiosis between Guangzhou and Macau would enter into yet another new phase in the High Qing during the 18th century.

Centralization and Control under the Qing

As a North Asian people who conquered China on horseback, the Manchus turned their gaze to the steppes and horses, not to oceans and ships. For the first century of Qing rule, emperors directed their attention to pacifying the northern and western borders, against Zunghar Mongols, Russians, and Muslim rebels. Until the conquest of Taiwan in 1684, the sea (and South China) represented a threat to the rulers in Beijing; and even after pacification, the Qing was slower to recognize the potential wealth from maritime trade, compared to the Ming regime. Control, not income, was the key concern. For this reason, we see a series of measures in the reigns of Yongzhen and Qianlong that tightened central control over Macau; in the course of the 18th century, it resulted in putting Macau in a more subordinate position versus Guangzhou, the provincial capital that represented central imperial authority.

Ever since the settlement of Portuguese Macau, it was placed under the jurisdiction of the magistrate of Xiangshan County (today Zhongshan). In 1731, the Yongzhen emperor transferred the sub-magistrate of Xiangshan to the garrison at Qianshan, just across the barrier, the *guanzha* that chokes off the neck of land linking Macau to the mainland. In 1744, under the Qianlong emperor, a sub-prefecture was created within the prefecture of Guangzhou; the magistrate established his office also in Qianshan, while the sub-magistrate of Xiangshan moved within the Macau peninsula to the village of Mongha, just outside the Portuguese city walls (see illustrations 3 and 4).

In addition to tighter political control, the Qing regime also exercised a stricter supervision over Macau’s maritime trade through the requirement of ship registration. Established in 1725, this measure limited the number of ocean-going vessels in Macau to 25; the name, tonnage, and owner of each vessel was recorded under the jurisdiction

---

of the Xiangshan magistrate. No repairs or further construction were permitted without the approval of the Chinese magistrate. This policy was very much enforced. In the National Archive at Torre do Tombo, there are 126 Chinese official documents extant for the period 1740s to 1840s, which reflect the close supervision exercised by the Qing mandarins over Macau’s maritime trade.  

By the middle of the 18th century, the symbiosis between Macau and Guangzhou, first established in the late Ming dynasty, was evolving into a strict subordination of the Portuguese enclave to the provincial capital city. The rise of Guangzhou (again) as the entrepôt of international trade began with the arrival of French and English ships around the turn of the 18th century, and accelerated rapidly with the arrival of more western traders: the Ostende General India Company first traded there in 1717; the Dutch East India Company sent its first ship in 1729; in 1731, the first Danish vessel sailed up the Pearl River, followed in one year by the Swedish East India Company; and the Americans came in 1784. The internationalization of the Pearl River trade prompted the rise of pidgin English as a lingua franca of trade in the 1720s and 30s, and its gradual displacement of Portuguese as the dominant language of commerce in the Guangzhou trade. The establishment in 1757 of the thirteen hangs (factories) with a monopoly on all foreign trade in Guangzhou sealed the subordinate position of Macau. The Cohang (or Cohong, Canton system) privileged a small group of Chinese merchants resident in Guangzhou, whose trade (and hence the extent of western penetration as well) could be closely supervised by Qing officials. In the late 18th century, British, American, French, Swedish, Danish, and other European vessels bypassed Macau to dock at the Huangpu Roads; and foreign merchants would build factories directly on the embankment in front of the outer Ming city walls, where the Customs Office was located (see illustrations 5 and 6).

As the ‘outerport’ of Guangzhou, Macau nonetheless preserved a certain role in the Guangzhou system. For most of the 18th century, European and American merchants were forced to retire to the Portuguese enclave during the offseason, being permitted only in Guangzhou during the trade fairs. Most of the thirteen hong merchants established a branch of their houses in Macau; and many foreign traders took advantage of the lower custom duties and better exchange rate for silver there. And when the illegal opium trade

---

20 Qing dai Aomen Zhongmen dongan hui bian, documents 333-424, 438-473.
22 Paul A. Van Dyke, Canton Trade, pp. 80-1.
became entrenched in the 1760s, Macau also served as an important place of transaction. The symbiosis between Guangzhou and Macau is perhaps best illustrated by one incident in 1792, when provincial Qing officials tried unsuccessfully to incorporate all Macau-Guangzhou trade into the Cohong system.

In 1792, the Customs Officer visited Macau and received a petition from the merchants there for a grant of license, so that merchandise from the Portuguese port could be shipped without hindrance to Guangzhou. The Officer Sheng Jiawei had given a monopoly to one of the 13 hang merchants, Xu Yongqing (who specialized in merchandise from Europe and America), for importing all goods from Macau and collecting taxes on them, thus bringing order and uniformity to the collection of customs from the Macau imports. The Portuguese objected. The whole matter was finally dropped when Xu Yongqing petitioned to relinquish the monopoly because he had no time to deal with this additional charge, due to the large number of western vessels now sailing to Guangzhou.²³

After two-and-a-half centuries, Portuguese Macau still found herself as the twin port of Guangzhou, albeit in a much reduced role. With the rising domination of the English East India Company, Portuguese vessels accounted for less than 10% of the Guangzhou trade.²⁴ Yet the Portuguese still maintained their longstanding relations with the Chinese authorities, supplying two armed vessels to help patrol the south China coast against another rising tide of piracy, similar to the service they had performed in the second half of the 16th century.²⁵ Not until the clash of arms between Britain and China, and the collapse of the ‘Canton system’, did Macau find herself gradually eclipsed by the neighboring upstart of Hong Kong, which would take her place in the drama of Sino-western relations.

²³ Qing dai Aomen Zhongmen dongan hui bian, vol. 2, documents 1237-1241, pp. 631-34.
²⁴ Paul A. Van Dyke, Canton Trade, p. 147.
Illustration 1. Guangdong province
Illustration 2. China in the Ming dynasty, showing the major water and land lines of communications
Illustration 3. Map of Macau by Jacques Nicolas Bellin, 1764. Note the ‘village chinois’ outside the city walls is Mongha village and the Casa Branca was the Portuguese name for the Qianshan magistracy.
Illustration 4. Chinese map of coastal defense, 1790, details of Macau. Note, from south to north, the walled city of Macau, the gate at Guanzha, and the magistracy at Qianshan.

Illustration 5. Urban Plan of Guangzhou, Kiangxi era. Note the outer walls built to add defense to the river front. In the middle of the Outer Walls is the location of the Customs Office.
Comparing the Incomparable: Some Thoughts on Seventeenth-Century Macau and Fort Zeelandia

Introduction

During the last decades historians have developed various models to categorize Asian port cities involved in both pre-colonial and colonial trade. This has led to a number of comparative studies focusing on the internal administration of particular places, on their economic functions, the structure of their societies more generally, demographic factors, cultural features, and so on. One type of port is the so-called *emporium*, usually defined as a location freely accessible to all or most merchant groups, irrespective of their background, nationality, religion, etc. Typical *emporia* would be fifteenth century Melaka or medieval Quanzhou. These places were characterized not only by the presence of sizeable foreign communities, but also by predictable economic conditions regarding demand and supply, a stable institutional framework, and a strong orientation towards the sea. Of course, between these two examples certain differences can be identified as well. For instance, Melaka largely depended on supplies brought by ship, while Quanzhou, which was much larger and much more developed, received many products from the interior of China – in spite of its role as a port.

Here we may turn to another type of coastal settlement, the so-called *export-outlet*. Certain locations in the Persian Gulf belong to this category. They collect oil from the hinterland, the only product they offer for sale, which is then carried by ship to various destinations. There are virtually no imports; the flow of commodities is mostly in one direction. Other types of ports include *bridgeheads*, simple *entrepôts*, and so on. They can be defined in different ways and, of course, very often, one place can be associated with more than just one category, depending on the parameters used for analysis. Indeed, most ports could probably be classified as “hybrid” entities in one way or another.

Some years ago, Chinese historians have enriched this typology by introducing yet another category, the so-called *fanfang* 番坊 (plus variant names). A typical *fanfang* would
be a foreign urban compound with a certain degree of juridical and cultural autonomy. Medieval Guangzhou and Quanzhou are cases in point. The foreign quarters existing in these two *emporia*, it is believed, were once dominated by Muslim merchants, who operated their own mosques and were allowed to follow their own laws, at least under certain conditions. Furthermore, there was a community leader who represented the foreign residents vis-à-vis the Chinese authorities. Similar arrangements can once again be detected in pre-Portuguese Melaka and other Malay ports, the office of *shabandar* being a typical example.

The above suggests that the *fanfang* structure should perhaps be compared with common diaspora models. To some measure both entities represent variations of the same theme. What we do not know is, whether the earliest *fanfang* / diaspora compounds emerged in Southeast Asia, coastal India, or along the coasts of China.

Be this as it may, the diaspora category has also been brought into connection with Macau. It was argued by some scholars that early Macau would resemble a typical *fanfang* of the kind one can find, for example, in medieval Guangzhou, or other locations. Elsewhere I have tried to show that such a view depends on the criteria applied – and the period examined. My conclusion was that in certain regards, yes, early Macau would probably be similar to, while in others it would be quite different from the “classical” *fanfang* category.

Here, I do not wish to repeat these ideas, but rather want to draw attention to yet another “foreign settlement” in the Chinese world – Fort Zeelandia, the centre of Dutch activities on Taiwan during the seventeenth century. Furthermore, I would like to offer some comparisons between this place and Macau. There are three reasons for such an approach: (1) Macau was the first European outpost along the China coast, F. Zeelandia should be seen as the second major European settlement in this area (smaller places, like Shangchuan 上川, Pinhal / Piñal and others set aside). (2) Macau can be investigated in terms of various categories such as the *fanfang* model, as we saw. That should also apply to F. Zeelandia. (3) Yet, the history of both places was and still is perceived very differently, depending on certain factors and modes of writing, as we shall see.

**The Beginnings of Portuguese Macau and Dutch Fort Zeelandia**

To being with, the Portuguese settlement on the Macau peninsula and the Dutch trading post F. Zeelandia were born under different circumstances. We shall look at the Portuguese case first. Immediately prior to using Macau as a trading base, the Portuguese made regular stopovers on some nearby islands such as Shangchuan. The main reason for
Comparing the Incomparable: Some Thoughts on Seventeenth-Century Macau and Fort Zeelandia

Roderich Ptak

gradually giving up these places in favor of Macau during the 1550s probably had to do with the more advantageous location of the latter, especially its closer vicinity and easier access to Guangzhou, and certainly also with the convenient possibility of sheltering ships in the so-called Inner Harbor.

Whether Macau – more precisely, the southern part of the Macau peninsula – was given to the Portuguese in compensation for providing military aid against pirate gangs, as was traditionally argued by Portuguese historians, whether money was involved in one way or the other, for example in the form of bribes, or whether both aspects came together, is an old point of debate. Whichever way applies, Macau was not taken by force; no war was fought between Chinese and Portuguese soldiers over this small piece of land. On the contrary, it was the local authorities, which gave the place to the Portuguese, with or without Beijing’s explicit consent.

While the long history of Luso-Chinese relations is comparatively free of violent clashes – there are only three or four minor incidents and these amount to very little – the Dutch presence in Chinese waters, which only lasted for a few decades, provides a very different picture. The VOC (Dutch East India Company) undertook several blockades of Macau’s harbor in the early seventeenth century, which was followed by a major attack in 1622. When this attack had ended in failure, the Dutch turned to the Penghu Islands (澎湖), from where they were ousted shortly thereafter by Chinese troops. They then moved to Taiwan, taking advantage of unclear circumstances at the Chinese side, and set up a new base along the southwestern shore of that island, near a small settlement often referred to as Dayuan 大员. In the course of time, the new installation, called F. Zeelandia, became heavily fortified. But in spite of its military strength, Chinese forces led by the Zheng regime (郑), took F. Zeelandia in 1662, after a long siege, renaming it Anping 安平, and the Dutch were compelled to leave Taiwan once and for good. Thus, while the Portuguese stayed on in Macau for circa four and a half centuries, the Dutch presence on Taiwan lasted for less than forty years.

Like Macau and many other ports in the East, F. Zeelandia was used as a commercial base in trade to Japan. But while Macau’s principle raison d’être was peaceful exchange and giving logistic support to the Church in China and Japan, F. Zeelandia became a military stronghold, as was said, from which the Dutch would try to disturb trade between Manila and Fujian, or occasionally set out to kidnap Chinese junks sailing through the Taiwan Strait. In Dutch military strategy, Spain in particular had to be fought along a great arc stretching from Japan, via Taiwan and Manila down to Sulawesi and Maluku. This also explains why the Dutch took, again by force, the small posts operated by the Spanish along the northern shores of Taiwan. But violence was not only exerted against
Chinese ships and European competitors, Dutchmen also launched attacks against tribal groups inside Taiwan. If these were not willing to cooperate with the VOC, they were “punished” and badly treated. In the early 1640s this led to small wars and unnecessary killings. One episode even involved a small settlement along the eastern side of Taiwan.

At the commercial level, the Dutch on Taiwan cooperated with some local Chinese residents (but definitely not with all), who had migrated to the island before the 1620s (often against contemporary regulations in China). At first sight this sharply contrasts with the fact that VOC ships would chase Chinese vessels in the open ocean, as was already mentioned, or direct attacks against coastal sites in Fujian. This unusual situation can be explained by temporary economic needs and, above all, by political dissent inside the Chinese camp, which brought some Chinese into opposition to the Dutch, while others held more “liberal” views. Moreover, cooperation did not occur at all times. And finally, the VOC was unable to efficiently control larger areas beyond F. Zeelandia, although it moved into some nearby villages such as Sincan 新港, Saccam 赤嵌, or Poncan 北港. This suggests that many Chinese settlers and merchants had nothing to do with the VOC because they were outside the Dutch confines.

In the early 1650s relations between the local Chinese and the Dutch deteriorated rapidly, possibly because of tax problems. This led to heavy fighting, and left more than four thousand Chinese killed. Paradoxically, some sources refer to these events as an “insurrection”. But the Manju court, so it seems, had a clearer perception of the situation and was now convinced that the VOC could not be trusted, no matter how it would perform in the future.

Here we may briefly return to earlier stages. Already prior to the arrival of the Dutch, many Chinese had settled in the fertile plains of western Taiwan, as was said. Land cultivation, trade and hunting were the principal occupation of these settlers. This leads to an important consideration. Some historians believe that, in the early seventeenth century, Taiwan did not yet belong to anyone, not even to China. But the island’s ties with Fujian, it was suggested by others, were then much closer than we tend to think. Trading groups around Li Dan 李旦, Lin Feng 林凤 and others had already used Dayuan in pre-Dutch days. With the growth of the Zheng regime, these ties even strengthened. A brief review of textual evidence reveals that by then, and even earlier, Taiwan (still called “Xiao Liuqiu” 小琉球 or “Dongfan” 东番 at around 1600) was not only quite well-known on the mainland, but also hailed a growing population and therefore had already become part of China’s periphery. If this view is accepted, then the VOC’s activities on Penghu (which had played a special role in Chinese geo-strategic thinking), and later, on southwestern Taiwan, must be considered as intrusions into Chinese territory. Even the
Manju court, it appears, took that view. – The Portuguese, as was shown, had appeared on stage in a less dramatic manner and the authorities in Beijing usually proved quite tolerant towards Macau, even if certain officials did not like their Lusitanian guests.

Greater Political Frameworks

Some of the “general functions” of Macau and F. Zeelandia within the greater context of maritime East Asia were already addressed. There are many more aspects that should be mentioned as well. First, both places formed part of major “colonial empires”, or structures.¹ But Macau’s foundation was not an official act promoted by the government in Goa. It took several decades for the new settlement to become fully absorbed into the Estado da Índia and to develop the kind of administrative framework that one finds in other coastal ports then under Portuguese control. By contrast, the foundation of F. Zeelandia was an official project directed by the VOC – with fierce determination, much enthusiasm, and sizeable funds. In terms of internal setting, F. Zeelandia did resemble many other strongholds put up by the VOC. However, in the early seventeenth century, the VOC had just begun to move on stage. From that perspective, the Dutch involvement on Taiwan should be counted among the early experiments of the Company. Macau was different: Its birth was a slow process and came more than forty years after the foundation of Goa – at a stage, when the Estado da Índia had already begun to mature.

There was one other very general difference between the Portuguese and the Dutch. This concerns the macro-level of their respective systems: In contrast to the Estado da Índia, the VOC in its totality operated as a single company, and not as a state, or territorial dependency. However, it was endowed with the powers and rights comparable to those of a sovereign entity. Thus, while F. Zeelandia was run by a “firm” with a special status, Macau formed part of an “ordinary” government structure.

The latter leads to another observation: In the beginning of their overseas ventures, the Portuguese were not really interested in conquering large spaces. Consequently, the early Estado da Índia has often been described as a system of coastal mini-possessions, a network of fortified locations and /or simple feitorias, at best with a few acres of “hinterland”, and often heavily dependent on food imports. Usually, these places were not accessible to everyone, only the Portuguese and their partners were allowed to enter them. Therefore

¹ Here and elsewhere, the word “colonial” appears in quotation marks, because in my understanding “colonialism” is a term more applicable to the French, British and other overseas empires of later periods.
most Portuguese ports cannot really be classified as free *emporia*. Rather, they functioned as *entrepôts* in a general sense, i.e., as trading bases within a complex system of mini-posts, tied together by a net of official and less official trade routes, often called *carreiras*, and nearly always run by the Portuguese themselves, be they crown representatives, private individuals, or others.

Within the VOC structure one also finds a set of more a less fixed sea routes and some variations in the degree of control over individual locations. Fortifications were a common sight, but not all positions were heavily fortified. More generally, as in the case of Portuguese-Asia, the Dutch system also operated as a network of *entrepôts*, and not as an ensemble of free *emporia*.

The above suggests that Macau and F. Zeelandia should both belong to the *entrepôt* category. However, as commercial stopovers on an important sea route – the one leading to Japan – they were more deeply integrated into their respective macro-systems than many other locations, for example the European installations in Japan. Put differently, the degree of “colonial” influence was certainly strongest in Goa and Batavia, but negligible in cities such as Nagasaki. Macau and F. Zeelandia ranged somewhere between these two “extremes”.

Without doubt, the above remains somewhat “impressionistic”. The same applies to the following assumption: If we see in seventeenth Macau a location which, in terms of its internal setting and administration, partly depended on Chinese influence, and not only on its Portuguese and mestizo ruling elite, then F. Zeelandia was probably somewhat different – in the sense that it was always more “Dutch” than Macau was “Portuguese”. Pre-modern Macau went through several stages characterized by a strong growth in its Chinese population; F. Zeelandia, due to its short-lived history, had few chances to experience similar developments – if we disregard the fact that it had to take Chinese refugees (like Macau). Although in both cases, the temporary (or permanent) presence of large Chinese population groups did not automatically lead to qualitative changes within the government and other structures, there was some pressure for adjustment, and that pressure was certainly much more strongly felt inside Macau than in F. Zeelandia.

There is a second and very general argument for speaking of different degrees in “colonial-hood”: The western sections of the *Estado da Índia* were much more characterized by “formal” rule than those positions which the Portuguese held around the Bay of Bengal and to the east of Melaka. Furthermore, during the middle of the seventeenth century, after the conquest of that port by the Dutch (1641), Portugal’s presence in the Malay world was severely weakened, with Macau being virtually cut off from India. These geopolitical circumstances increased Macau’s dependency on its Chinese hinterland.
A comparable process, or division of “empire”, cannot be observed in the case of the VOC, at least not during the period considered here. F. Zeelandia was never a lonely outpost at the rim of a greater maritime “world”, it was always quite close to Batavia, and thereby of key importance to the entire Dutch system. Unlike Macau, it did not experience long cycles of economic decline, and it was never forgotten by some distant authority. – But it disappeared almost as abruptly as it had been born – against a violent background.

A further difference between F. Zeelandia and Macau concerns their respective hinterland. This point was already addressed above, but only at random, therefore a few more aspects must be considered: For about three hundred years, Portugal’s presence in Macau was restricted to the southern half of the Macau peninsula. The northern section was only added under the government of Ferreira do Amaral in the nineteenth century. Taipa and Coloane were also taken at some point, but not the island regions to the west of the peninsula.

By contrast, the Dutch on Taiwan, almost from the beginning, made efforts to expand their area of influence beyond the confines of F. Zeelandia. Although they never really acquired a sizeable share of the island’s western half, they nevertheless went beyond the point of being satisfied with merely a small port town. Moreover, militarily they were capable of moving deep inland, if this was required.

It is here that the earlier concept of a network tied together by a set of coastal “mini-colonies” seems to become invalid. This picture works in the early Portuguese case, but it does not really suit the Dutch. To understand the reasons, one may briefly look at the Spanish side. Manila harbored hopes of acquiring larger territories in Southeast Asia. Already in the late sixteenth century the first moves in that direction begin to surface. One project was the conquest of Fujian or, alternatively, of Hainan Island. The Portuguese did not like such ideas, they were more prudent and modest – and by far not as belligerent as their Iberian “colleagues”. Japan was among the expansionists, Hideyoshi, it is well known, overran Korea in the 1590s. The Dutch, after having concluded the initial phase of their “colonial” adventure – by setting up several key posts and some fortresses –, also proved to be of a tough nature – and, like the Spanish and Japanese, were ready to get involved in contest over major territories.

It is into this dark period that the rise of F. Zeelandia happens to fall. The acquisition of control over some land behind that post, therefore, is not purely accidental, but seems to be in line with contemporary politics.

By contrast, after circa 1640, Macau was caught in decline and economic isolation. No one in this city would then dream of enlarging Portugal’s “sphere of influence”. The
Estado da Índia was on retreat, and Lisbon’s general interests in Asia gradually shifted away from the Far East to the Indian scenario.

Cultural Bridges

But Macau had a different type of hinterland, this was the “spiritual empire” of the Jesuits. Although weak in numbers, the missionaries exerted significant influence over certain members of the intellectual elite inside China. Even during the difficult period of transition from Ming to Qing, Macau’s “cultural annex” continued to operate very efficiently – and did in fact grow. It may be recalled here, that the Jesuits served the Nan Ming and Shunzhi courts simultaneously – and that such bright minds as Johann Adam Schall von Bell warned the Manju government against the Dutch.

The case of Taiwan was different. There were some Protestant missionaries on the island, but these persons left very few imprints – and nothing comparable to what the Catholic Church was able to achieve on the mainland. The latter, it is well-known, also functioned as a cultural mediator between Europe and the Far East, intellectually, in certain technological fields, in medicine and science, arts, and other areas. By contrast the few missionaries active on Taiwan were mostly interested in turning certain local groups into loyal Protestants who would serve their “colonial” masters.

This leads to another point: In terms of classification systems, Macau was much more a cultural bridgehead than F. Zeelandia. The difference in degrees becomes particularly evident if one looks at the flow of intellectual expertise. China received as much from Europe as it gave to Europe in return, while the local non-Han population on Taiwan had little to offer. Few intellectual debates could be led with these groups, if at all, neither on philosophical issues, nor on scientific or other questions. To this should be added that religious exchange between the VOC and its few Chinese partners on Taiwan was minimal as well, and again in no way comparable to the transfer of knowledge taking place inside China or via Macau.

The above picture can be enriched in several ways. First, the Jesuits constituted an international society, almost a multicultural enterprise operating on a global level. Its primary interests did not lie in the maximization of material gains, but in spiritual achievements and, instrumental to this end, diplomatic and cultural exchange. From the viewpoint of the Church, Macau, as a bridgehead, served the Society, while Macau’s residents probably took the opposite view: If the missionaries would act diplomatically and respect Chinese traditions, they were a factor that could be instrumental in stabilizing...
Macau’s position vis-à-vis those radical officials, who proposed to throw out the Portuguese altogether.

From this follows yet another observation. Seventeenth-century Macau was not only embedded in one European structure, but it did in fact form part of two “empires” simultaneously – of the *Estado da Índia* as a worldly structure, and of the Catholic Church with its center in Rome. The multi-national character of the Church and the extraordinary educational level of its members were certainly held in high esteem by some leaders inside the Ming and Manju courts, especially under the Kangxi emperor.

It may be recalled here that, numerically, the Manju elite itself was a small group as compared to the millions of subjects under its guidance. Comparisons are often risky, but if we think of the Manju empire in terms of a multi-cultural enterprise, its character was not totally different from the multi-national structure of the Church. Both “organizations” had to keep a delicate balance of power inside their respective systems, and both had to adjust themselves to the needs of different ethnic groups and varying local traditions. Thus, along the sea board, the Manju government would often follow the earlier standards already installed by the Ming, while at the inner Asian frontier, it adopted a different set of policy tools, as exemplified, for instance, by the Treaty of Nerchinsk (1689), which was essentially negotiated through the Jesuits. Treaties of this kind were not made at the maritime periphery, at least not in the seventeenth century.

Put differently, to some extent both structures, the Qing ruling elite and the Society of Jesus, had to remain very flexible and even ambiguous on certain points, so as to please all sides. The wonderful phrase *jing tian* 敬天 (associated with the famous tablet, which the Jesuits received from the Kangxi emperor) is an excellent example for this “diplomatic ambiguity”. It can be translated in many ways and may be interpreted – at least implicitly – as a sign of mutual respect, silent understanding, and unusual harmony.

On Taiwan, no comparable double structure (Church / *Estado*) existed, and there were no mechanisms which would bring the Dutch into regular intellectual exchange with a Chinese or Manju ruling elite. The delicate question of who would be instrumental for whom, therefore, was irrelevant.

In the eyes of Beijing, Taiwan constituted a peripheral region, opposite of Fujian – and not much more than that. In terms of its functions, it was similar to certain remote regions on Hainan or in Yunnan. By comparison, Macau stood – at least intellectually – much closer to the center of Ming power, and later, the Manju elite. The difference became evident when the Dutch, threatened by the Zheng regime, undertook a diplomatic initiative in Beijing. They were turned down and achieved close to nothing. The Portuguese, used to Chinese ways of thinking, were less direct in formulating their concerns, demanded
very little, and usually received much more. Mutual understanding required self-control, modesty, and a sense for harmony – elements that a profit-maximizing firm like the VOC would rarely make use of.

Here we may briefly return to the issue of China’s medieval fanfang. Usually, a typical fanfang would emerge in an already existing urban area, as was noted above. This neither applies to the southern half of the Macau peninsula, nor to F. Zeelandia. Although the former was used by Fujianese and other sailors in pre-Portuguese days, a major town did not exist on this piece of land. The same is valid for the area around F. Zeelandia, which did not compare to a major Chinese center such as Zhangzhou or Xiamen. Therefore, in terms of environment and setting, both places, Macau and F. Zeelandia differed from a “conventional” fanfang.

Yet, they shared certain things in common as well. A fanfang, like most diaspora settlements, was nearly always embedded in a major foreign network, and probably exerted some kind of cultural influence over its immediate (Chinese) neighborhood. At the same time, those living inside the fanfang, would adopt certain Chinese ways of life. Acculturation may thus have gone in two directions. The latter certainly applies to the situation inside Macau, and perhaps to a lesser extent, also to the Dutch on Taiwan.

But conceptually we may run into difficulties here, especially if acculturation is conditioned on (or simply linked to) peaceful coexistence and harmony – ideally, between groups of a similar cultural level. By and large, this can be said of Macau, which was a multi-ethnic place, where all groups would live together without being caught in racial clashes, but it cannot be claimed for F. Zeelandia and the villages under its control. There was no long-lasting harmony and very little peace.

The diaspora or fanfang problem can also be approached in another way. Macau flourished at some distance from a major metropolis, Guangzhou. As seen through Chinese eyes, F. Zeelandia emerged in a peripheral region without any important city in its immediate vicinity. A place such as this had fewer opportunities to prosper intellectually, or to become involved in a long-lasting process of mutual acculturation. Profit was the only thing that mattered, mutual tolerance beyond the purely monetary level was at best a dream.

These ideas can now be linked back to the issue of greater cultural frameworks – and thereby to the concept of a “double empire”. Macau, as a multicultural place en miniature, characterized by internal acculturation, mirrored the global structure of a well-connected and – at times – equally open-minded institution, namely the Catholic Church; simultaneously, it formed part of a complex political system with its seat in Goa. Physically, Goa was far away, but Beijing – Macau’s “host” – was nearby, at least
spiritually. Perhaps it was this “cultural proximity” that gave Macau a good chance of survival, especially in situations, where, normally, Goa’s help would have been needed.

F. Zeelandia, although much more closely connected to its “suzerain” on Java, geographically and in other respects, could not count on an independent, circumglobal enterprise that would promote cultural research, provide “development aid” and offer spiritual exchange. There was no strong partner with whom to cooperate, whom to consult, or who would serve as a guide and mediator. The structure of which the Dutch possessions on the island formed part, rested on one pillar only – essentially a profit-maximizing firm which, at that time, expanded its operational radius by relying on guns and powder.

Trade and the Economic Dimension

Here we may continue with the more “profane” strata of the maritime world. Seventeenth-century Macau and F. Zeelandia both lived on trade. This implied the need of buying cheap and selling dear, and thus also the need of nurturing foreign relations. In later years, towards the third quarter of the eighteenth century, and again in more recent times, Macau did not only undertake efforts to maintain its exterior networks, it also underwent several structural “transformations”. The first qualitative transformation came with the growth of what one may call the “service sector”, when Macau began renting houses to its European competitors, who would need a few weeks of rest after doing business in Guangzhou. This was followed by the opium and coolie cycles (during these cycles trade revived under completely different conditions), and finally by the emergence of local production on a broader scale.

F. Zeelandia did not last long enough to experience major transformations of this kind (although, according to some, it did experience minor “alterations”). As was said, the seventeenth century was mainly characterized by the acquisition and simple exchange of commodities, and not much more than that. Even political turbulences and local wars did not matter very much in that regard.

In the case of seventeenth-century Macau, trade was first centered on shipping Chinese silk to Japan and other destinations, and bringing Japanese silver (plus some Manila silver) to Guangzhou. Gold, copper, mercury, tin, lead, spices, precious woods, coral, musk and medicinal substances were involved as well, but they were only of secondary importance. After 1640 the composition of Macau’s exports and imports altered and the overall volume of trade declined dramatically. The loss of Melaka to the Dutch, the closure of Japan, the
temporary interruption of the Macau-Manila route, and the tensions arising from political shifts and changes inside China were the principal reasons for this decline.

F. Zeelandia did not go through such a development. The impact of exogenous factors on the internal structure of this “colonial” settlement proved less dramatic – with the exception, certainly, of its final stages, when the Dutch were defeated by the Zheng regime.

During its prosperous years, above all, F. Zeelandia served as a stopover on the long route between Japan and Southeast Asia, as has been said. While the Portuguese suffered setbacks at both ends, in Southeast Asia and Japan, the Dutch expanded their influence over the Malay world and were allowed to continue their business in Nagasaki, even after the closure of Japan. This was certainly of great advantage to the VOC in F. Zeelandia. The merchants staying in or regularly visiting this place did not suffer the enormous pressure felt by the Portuguese, who were compelled to search for alternative markets.

In spite of different developments at the political and economic frontiers – conditions for Macau worsened, while F. Zeelandia enjoyed a somewhat better fate, both places did share certain functional features. These may again be described in terms of exogenous variables. There was, first of all, the dependence on food imports, and secondly, on regularly receiving major trade commodities. Macau could not live without Chinese silk, F. Zeelandia had to acquire deer skins for the Japanese market, to mention only two examples. Skins also came from Siam, just as silk could be obtained through many international ports other than Guangzhou. In that sense, there was strong competition at various levels – to an extent that neither Macau nor F. Zeelandia could lean back and relax.

But on the other side, certain differences between Macau and F. Zeelandia can be noted as well. From a macro-perspective, the exchange of silk for silver was the key stratum of Far Eastern trade in its totality, even after 1640; skins could only count as a minor commodity. In that sense the acquisition of Taiwanese deer skins for the Japanese market played a subordinated role. A decline or complete disruption of this trade – due to ecological or other reasons – would not have mattered very much. In theory, if left unchallenged by its enemies, F. Zeelandia would have been able to stay on, because it was needed as a stopover on the route between Japan and those regions in Southeast Asia, where silk could be purchased. Thus, it could always count on Batavia’s support.

Macau did not “run” a subordinated production zone comparable to the skin producing areas “behind” F. Zeelandia. Nor did Portuguese demand ever lead to a radical exploitation (or even depletion) of natural resources. In other words, Macau had nothing to give up, there was no “supplement” the loss of which might have been digested with ease; on the contrary, Macau had to keep up with its traditional commitments, by all means, and as best as it could.
Most merchants in Guangzhou and Xiangshan 香山, it would appear, had a strong interest in keeping Macau afloat, as long as some profits could be derived from trade with the Portuguese, and as long as no major conflicts would arise. Since no such conflicts had ever occurred, there was mutual confidence – not at all times, but at least over long periods. Neither the Zheng forces nor the aboriginal tribes on Taiwan could claim the same vis-à-vis the Dutch; in fact, each side could do without the other (especially since the skin trade, as was said, was of a secondary nature). It may be assumed, therefore, that Macau and Xiangshan / Guangzhou were in a much closer (commercial) alliance than the VOC and its partners could ever be.

This picture can be complicated by a few additional assumptions. Fujianese trading groups and the Guangdong merchants in and around Guangzhou should not be lumped together. The Portuguese were closer to the latter, their relations to the Fujianese being somewhat more “special”. The administrative levels were also different. Macau had to deal with the local officials in Xiangshan, with the provincial government, and at times (even if rarely, because this was in the hands of the clergy), with the court in Beijing. In theory, if tension between different administrative levels emerged inside China, subtle diplomacy could be made use of to counterbalance possible threats. Rhetoric was a tool which the Portuguese had learned to handle well, at all levels.

The Dutch cooperated with some local Chinese of Fujianese descent, but not with all merchant groups, as was mentioned; they had few chances of acquiring the kind of diplomatic routine, which Macau’s merchant class had mastered since early times. Above all, there was no need of balancing the interests of different administrative levels within one and the same regime, in order to find acceptance. The Zheng clan acted like an independent entity, the Manju side was a different factor. Moreover, when the Zheng group clashed with the VOC, it was like a clash between two reckless rivals, without there being a realistic diplomatic option, after all that occurred in the past, to solve the conflict.

The Mediterranean Concept

Several Asian seas have been brought into connection with the Mediterranean concept of Fernand Braudel. Although no two maritime spaces can claim an identical set of characteristics, it is nevertheless possible to state that both the South and the East China Seas – the latter with its “adjunct”, the Yellow Sea – shared certain constituents with the Mediterranean world. This concerns, for example, the fact that all these spaces were characterized by exchange and a certain degree of “built-in” homogeneity. However, in
the seventeenth century, the Northeast Asian scenario was probably more closed and more self-sufficient than the South China Sea, because the main thrust of trans-Pacific traffic and most European initiatives were targeted at the ports and shores around the latter. Both Macau and F. Zeelandia can be seen as locations which partook in the exchange of goods and ideas inside this second space, and between that area and maritime Northeast Asia.

When the Portuguese withdrew from Nagasaki, the Dutch were left as the only European group in Japan – and the only group, which had its power center outside the East China Sea, i.e., on Java. Regarding the Chinese who sailed to Nagasaki, they mostly came from “within” the system – from coastal Fujian and Zhejiang, or from Taiwan. Even the Chinese operating out of Ayuthaya, Patani and other ports around the Gulf of Siam, normally maintained close connections to China’s own ports and often cannot be disassociated from their mainland colleagues. Therefore, after 1640, F. Zeelandia was the last European outpost to remain involved in trade between two maritime zones with a (partially) “Mediterranean” character.

Macau did not only lose its former functions in the Northeast. Due to Qing blockades and the long conflict between Zheng–China and Beijing it was periodically cut off from the other (quasi)-“Mediterranean” as well, with the inevitable result that, functionally, it became even more dependent on its hinterland than before. This state of affairs only ended after the downfall of the Zheng regime, when trade prohibitions, under which coastal China – from the north down to the south – had so badly suffered, were lifted and trade resumed.

Thus, Macau went through a dramatic change – in the sense that it was reduced from a flourishing entrepôt between two “Mediterranean” spaces to a simple port with limited commercial functions, whereas F. Zeelandia retained much of its original character. Put differently, after 1640 Macau was no longer a “classical” entrepôt on a major Portuguese shipping line, rather it became an occasional port-of-call, almost a terminal point for Portuguese vessels coming in from Southeast Asia. At best it served as a small-scale entrepôt for local trade, and trade between China and Southeast Asia. The Dutch on Taiwan, needless to add, never had to experience anything even close to that – with the exception of F. Zeelandia’s final years.

Seen from the “Mediterranean” perspective, i.e., from the viewpoint of the maritime historian who is looking from the sea to the land, and not in the other direction, Macau was one of many places located at the western fringe of the Nanhai 南海. Prior to 1640, it served as a stable pillar for trade through the South China Sea. After that date, and even after the end of the Manju ban on trade in the 1680s, Macau – now with less funds to draw on and a much reduced population, as compared to the golden years of the
Japan trade cycle – became much more absorbed into the hinterland than before, both in relative and absolute terms. It thus changed into a place which, from a purely functional perspective, was less “Mediterranean” than before. None of this applies to F. Zeelandia, which pursued a less dramatic career.

Perceptions

In spite of the many ups and downs experienced by the Portuguese, Macau was never occupied by a major foreign fighting force (if we overlook the brief British incursion in the early nineteenth century, which was ended through Arriaga’s diplomatic skills). Furthermore, Macau lasted much longer than the old fanfang in medieval Guangzhou and Quanzhou, which had disappeared in the course of dynastic wars. Flexibility, mutual dependency, and silent understanding on all sides – as if the Portuguese were more Confucian than their Chinese partners – accounted for Macau’s outstanding success, at least in part. Consequently, the perception of Portugal’s presence in that city (and of the Church inside China) also floated up and down. In the end, however, these nuances in views had a common denominator, for, as a rule, roaring thunder was nearly always diverted away from the modest houses, in which the Portuguese used to live…

The presence of the Dutch on Taiwan was remembered in Europe and Japan, but almost forgotten in China, and generally of little concern to the Taiwanese themselves. It was only during the last three or four decades that Chinese historians in Taipei and elsewhere, more than three hundred years after the fall of F. Zeelandia, became more interested in this neglected topic. At the same time, Dutch historians began seriously investigating the enormous body of colonial documents related to F. Zeelandia’s gloomy past. This led to the emergence of new pictures – and a respectable apparatus of beautifully printed books and articles, not only designed for the academic world, but also to entertain a broader readership in both the Netherlands and on Taiwan.

One curious facet of this apparatus pertains to its current “application”. Taiwanese intellectuals – and that even includes some local romanciers, as the author of the present article experienced on several occasions – often assign a very special significance to the short-lived presence of the Dutch on “their” island. Not infrequently, this presence is unduly inflated – to the extent that the period in question is labeled the “Dutch era” in Taiwanese history. By presenting the past in such a light, the role of the Chinese immigrants is implicitly downgraded, and the brief presence of the Spanish almost forgotten.
There seem to be two important reasons for these distortions: First, for several decades Taiwanese historians were influenced by English and Dutch writers, who would of course present the role of the Iberian powers from their “northern” (and often very Protestant) viewpoints. Secondly, by intentionally upgrading the Dutch “heritage”, those Taiwanese, who were dreaming of political independence, began developing an extra tool, which would enable them to claim that Taiwan had gone through a past distinctly different from what the rest of China had experienced. In other words, if there would be something like a special Taiwanese identity, this identity would be partly conditioned on a “colonial” background – which of course does not apply to the mainland.

Probably there are few cases worldwide, where the colonial past is perceived in similar ways, the Dutch presence in southwestern Taiwan being one of these exceptions. Occasionally, this has even reached the point, where the image of the VOC has almost been whitewashed. Paradoxically, as was said, the Dutch “intermezzo” on the island was all but smooth and peaceful, in contrast to Portugal’s role in Macau. However, mainland historians dealing with Euro-Chinese relations, have not given very much attention to these differences. So far, they were mainly interested in the history of Hong Kong, Shanghai, Macau and other major cities, while the Dutch, who killed thousands of Chinese already two centuries before the first Opium War, were often treated at the margin… . Future research – on a comparative basis – will be needed to reveal the many intellectual asymmetries linked to this alarming situation.

Selected References

Andrade, Tonio: *How Taiwan became Chinese. Dutch, Spanish, and Han Colonization…* (e-book).
Comparing the Incomparable: Some Thoughts on Seventeenth-Century Macau and Fort Zeelandia

Roderich Ptak

Jin Guoping and Wu Zhiliang: Dong xi wang yang 东西洋望 [subtitle: Em busca de história(s) de Macau apagada(s) pelo tempo]. Macau: Aomen chengren jiaoyu xiehui, 2002.


Comparing the Incomparable: Some Thoughts on Seventeenth-Century Macau and Fort Zeelandia

Roderich Ptak


For many centuries, entrepôts and port-polities played important roles in facilitating the exchanges of commodities, technologies and culture in historical maritime Asia. An entrepôt such as Melaka, located on a direct international route, on which regional trade routes also converged, had the added advantage of commanding an entire sector of maritime commerce in the region. In other words, the so-called “Melaka trade” not only covered a network within the Malay-Indonesian archipelago but also formed part of the Indian Ocean trading world with vital linkages with South China. Chinese contacts with the Malay Peninsula could be traced back to about the beginning of the first century B.C., and Chinese merchants had already been active in bartering with indigenous peoples before the coming of the Europeans in the early 16th century. With the rise of Melaka as an international port-polity in the region, Chinese merchants, those from South Fujian and East Canton in particular, began to make their presence felt in local society. In the meantime, an increased number of Chinese migrants arrived in Melaka and they gradually incorporated the port-polity into their regional maritime trade network. Based on contemporary Chinese records, Malay legends and Western accounts, this article looks into the early commercial activities of Chinese merchants in Melaka while examining the growth of a Chinese sojourning community in the port-polity and its trade links with different parts of maritime Asia. It is hoped that such a revisit to the old and fascinating entrepôt from a different perspective could shed new light on the topic.

* This is part of the ongoing research project entitled “Maritime Trade between Hong Kong and Southeast Asia”. The author wishes to thank the generous support from RGC GRF of Hong Kong SAR Government (Project Code: HKU 742509H).
Rise of Melaka and the Early Contacts

The birth and growth of early Melaka had much to do with the Hindu Majapahit kingdom on Java, which by the late 14th century had suzerainty over Palembang, Siam on the Malay Peninsula, and Ming China in the north. Both the *Séjarah Melayu* (Malay Annuals) and the *Suma Oriental* of Tomé Pires state that sometime before 1403 a prince of Palembang on the west coast of Sumatra named Parameswara (the name Parameswara means “prince consort”) was married to a Majapahit princess, and he threw off Majapahit’s suzerainty and was driven out, first to Tumasik (Singapore) and thence to the Muar river, where he was invited by a group of sea-pirates who traded in goods taken from ships captured in the Straits of Melaka to become the ruler of a settlement they had founded on Bertam, inland from the Melaka River.\(^1\) These events occurred in the last decade of the 14th century, and by 1403 Melaka had sufficiently been well established as a trading port to attract the attention of the Chinese court.

There is no doubt that the rapid rise of Melaka in the early 15th century as an important port polity of Southeast Asia was closely related to the support and encouragement from the Chinese Ming Empire. Melaka’s official relations with China began with the arrival of a Chinese mission led by a eunuch named Yin Qing (尹慶) in the mid 1404, and it was Ming China which took the initiative in sending a diplomatic mission to Melaka. Yin Qing was sent by the Yongle emperor to visit Melaka with a sizable Chinese mission on 28 October 1403, and it took Yin Qing and his mission for more than seven months before finally reaching Melaka as they had to visit Java and Palembang first.

At this time both Majapahit and the Siamese (Thai) kingdom of Ayutthaya claimed suzerainty over the Malay Peninsula, and as a result the nascent port polity of Melaka paid tribute to Ayutthaya. The situation prior to the arrival of Chinese imperial mission is well depicted in Ma Huan’s *Yingya shenglan* (《瀛涯勝覽》) as follows:

> Formerly this place was not styled as a kingdom but was known as Wuyu (五嶼) or Five Isles because there were five islands off the coast. It had no king, but only a chieftain. The country was under

---

the rule of Xianluo (Siam), to which it paid an annual tribute of 40 tael of gold. Otherwise it would have provoked a military attack from Siam.²

Such a scenario, however, was gradually changed with the visit of Yin Qing’s mission in 1404. Parameswara immediately accepted Chinese suzerainty and sent tribute to the Yongle emperor. In return he received a commission, a seal, a set of robes, and a yellow umbrella, the symbols of kingship under the Chinese empire, and Chinese envoys arrived to erect a monument to commemorate the elevation of Melaka to the status of a kingdom. In other words, it was the Chinese Yongle Emperor who in 1405 appointed Parameswara King of Melaka in acknowledgement of his loyalty by offering annual tribute to the Chinese court. Four years later Melaka’s status in the Chinese empire sphere was officially raised by an imperial decree to have become a kingdom though it was nominal in nature.³ Parameswara and his two immediate successors came in person to the Chinese imperial court in 1411, 1414, 1419, 1424, and 1435 in addition to a dozen ordinary official missions dispatched to China between 1405 and 1435.⁴ Understandably a major object of these diplomatic efforts was to seek the Ming court’s protection and to secure Chinese support against the Siamese.

In the meantime, Parameswara sent missions to Majapahit and to Pasai, a coastal sultanate in north Sumatra in the hope to establish trading relations. The sultan of Pasai agreed what Melaka asked but requesting Parameswara to become a Muslim, which he did about 1414, taking the name of Megat Iskandar Shah and at the same time marring one of the sultan’s daughters. With the efforts of Iskandar Shah and his two successors Sri Maharaja (r. 1424-1444) and Muzaffar Shah (r. 1445-1458), Melaka gradually became a major commercial power in the Straits, controlling all the shipping passing through the Straits in both directions and providing the principal market in Southeast Asia for the valuable commodities produced in the region, including Sumatran pepper, cloves from Maluku and nutmeg and mace from the Banda Islands, Timorese sandalwood, Chinese silks and porcelain, and Indian cloth. According to Sějarah Mělayu, Tomé Pires’ The Suma Oriental and Afonso D’Albuquerque’s The Commentaries of the Great Afonso D’Albuquerque, Muzaffar Shah won two notable victories over the Siamese of Ayutthaya, and extended Melaka’s suzerainty northward in the Malay Peninsula to Kedah and Patani, southward

---

² Ma Huan, Yingya shenglan (1416), Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1955 reprint, p.22.
³ Ming Shi, juan 325; Ma Huan, Yingya shenglan (1416), “Man-la-ka guo” (Melaka Kingdom).
⁴ Ming Yongle shilu (Veritable Records of Ming Dynasty: The Yongle Reign), juan 38, p.4b; juan 47; Ming Shi, juan 325, pp.8416–8419.
to Singapore and Riau-Lingga, and across the Strait to Indragiti, Kampar, and other port polities on the west coast of Sumatra. He also maintained close relations with Ming China, and in 1456 the Chinese emperor conferred the title of Sultan on him. Muzaffar Shah’s son, Mansur Shah (r. 1458-1477), married a Chinese princess, conquered Pahang, and placed a Melakan prince on the throne. Through more than six decades’ development, Melaka was elevated to imperial status with political and commercial hegemony over the greater part of the Malay Archipelago.\(^5\)

As recorded in classical Chinese documents, Chinese commercial contacts with the Malay Peninsula could be dated back to the beginning of the first B.C. Habitually Chinese junks sailing from the south China coast would set sail to markets in the Malay Archipelago during the northern monsoon season in January or February and return home when the wind was from the south in June, July or August. Prior to the rise of Melaka as a commercial port city at the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula, Chinese maritime activities on the Peninsula mainly concentrated in port polities such as Geluo (哥羅 Kal āh of the Arab topographers and could be located in the neighbourhood of Mergui), Luoyue (羅越 in southern part of the Malay Peninsula), Danmaling (單馬令 T āmbralinga in early Sanskrit inscription which refers to a state in the Ligor district), Langyaxiu (狼牙修 Langkasuka, in the vicinity of modern Patani), Foluoan (佛羅安 possibly refers to Kuala Bèrang close to the Trèngganu River), Dengyanong (登牙農 Trèngganu), 吉蘭丹 today’s Kēlantan), Pengfeng (彭豐 in modern Pahang), Longyamen (龍牙門 Dragon-teeth Strait, referring to the present-day Keppel Harbour passage between the south coast of Singapore Island and Blakang Mati), and Banzu (班卒 modern Fort Canning Hill in Singapore).

With the rapid growth of Chinese maritime trade in the 13\(^{th}\) and 14\(^{th}\) centuries, a number of small Chinese sojourning commercial communities came into existence on the Malay Peninsula. According to the extant Chinese contemporary account of ancient maritime Southeast Asia Daoyi zhilue (島夷志略) compiled by Wang Dayuan (汪大淵) in 1349, regularly Quanzhou (泉州) traders from south Fujian would barter with indigenous people in Longyamen or modern Singapore, and “the natives and the Chinese dwell side by side” (男女兼中國人居之). This is the first written record in Chinese referring to a Chinese community sojourned in a port polity close to the future settlement of Melaka. Given that Wang Dayuan’s two voyages to overseas in 1330-1334 and 1337-1339 respectively were arranged by Hokkien merchants of Quanzhou, and his travel account

\(^{5}\text{For an excellent summary on Melaka’s rise in the Malay Archipelago, see Paul Wheatley, The Golden Khersonese, Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1961, pp.308-309.}\)
originally was prepared for the local gazetteer of Quanzhou *Qingyuan xuzhi* (《清源續志》), very likely the early Chinese migrants mentioned in his travel accounts could be a group of Hokkien people or people from coastal south Fujian.

**Migration and the Sojourning Community**

*Chinese Migrant Community before 1511*

It is difficult to identify when Chinese actually started to live in early Melaka. It seems a small number of Chinese traders had already settled down in Melaka by the early 15th century as Fei Xin clearly mentions in his *Xingcha shenglan* (《星槎勝覽》) as saying: “The climate is hot during the day but cool at night. Both sexes coil their hair into a knot. Their skin resembles black lacquer, but there are some white-complexioned folk among them who are of Chinese descent” (氣候朝熱暮寒，男女椎髻，膚色黑漆，間有白者，唐人種也). Fei Xin visited Melaka in the suite of Zheng He, and what he recorded should be reliable. As a result, Fei Xin's travel account was late incorporated into the official history of the Ming Dynasty *Ming Shi*. What is a bit strange is that Ma Huan, a Muslim interpreter who also accompanied Zheng He on some of his voyages to maritime Asia, makes no mention of a Chinese sojourning community there in Melaka though he records that Chinese merchants frequented this port polity.

Another Chinese private record entitled *Hai Yu* (海語) or Accounts on the Ocean tells us that the cost of living in Melaka was high which was about five times the cost of living in China, and that fowls, dogs, geese, and ducks were imported, and that pork which was a forbidden article of food to the native Muslims, was occasionally eaten by the sojourning Chinese there, which in turn invited indignant criticism, saying that it was a filthy custom. *Hai Yu* was authored by Huang Zhong (黃衷) and published in 1537, but like many other contemporary Chinese books it may refer to an earlier period because the account was usually based on records of earlier period.

On the other hand, a contemporary indigenous Malay writing tells people a tale of Sultan Mansur Shah of Melaka and his marriage with Princess Hang Liu, daughter of the Emperor of China, after her conversion to Islam, while the five hundred Chinese

---

“youths of noble birth” who accompanied the royal bride supposedly built their houses on the hill known today as Bukit Cina or China hill in Melaka.\(^7\)

Similar narratives on early Chinese commercial sojourners could also be found in the Portuguese sources. Writing retrospectively, Brás D’Albuquerque, the son of Afonso D’Albuquerque, mentions that during the Melaka Sultanate period, four Xabandar (Shabbandars), or port officials, were appointed to help the administration of foreign trade. Of them, one was a Chinese, another a Javanese, a third a Cambayan, and a fourth a Bengali.\(^8\) In addition, Brás D’Albuquerque tells people that the second Sultan of Melaka, Sri Maharaja, married a daughter of the Kapitan Cina. The presence of a Chinese Kapitan, who was normally appointed by local authorities as headman of his ethnic community, and a Chinese Xabandar clearly suggests that there was a sizable Chinese sojourning community in Melaka by 1440s. It was a reasonable result given the rapid development of bilateral official relations between Ming China and Melaka facilitated by Zheng He’s voyages in the early 15\(^{th}\) century.

**Chinese Migrant Community in Portuguese Melaka**

The Portuguese cosmographer Godinho de Erédia was born in Melaka in 1563 and had lived there for some years in the early 17\(^{th}\) century. In Erédia’s account of the territory, we know that the Portuguese Melaka at that time was consisted of two parts – the fortress on the shore to the southeast of the river, and the suburbs outside of it on both sides of the river. The first of the suburbs was called the suburb of Upeh, on the other side of the river; the second was called the suburb of Hilir, or of Tanjong Pasar, on the same side of the river as the fortress; and the third was called the suburb of Sabak, extending along the southeastern bank of the river behind the fortress. Of the three suburbs, the most important was Upeh, also known as Tranqueira, the present-day Tengkera, as it contained the Chinese migrant village called Campon China. Campon or Kampong is the Malay word for “village”. According to Erédia, Campon China formed part of the Upeh, and extended “from the Bazar of the Jaos (Javanese) on the beach and from the mouth of the river (of Melaka), in a north-easterly direction for a distance of 400 fathoms along the bank of the same river to the gate (of the Chincheos) and the earth wall which forms part of the rampant; and beyond the marsh-land again, as far as the “Nypeiras” or Wild Palms

beside the stream of Paret China. In this quarter of Campon China live the Chincheos, descendants of the Tochâros of Pliny, and stranger merchants and native fishermen”.

Two important points are revealed in Erédia’s account. First, a Chinese migrant community was well established in the harbour-city in the early days of Portuguese Melaka as evidenced by the name Campon China or Chinese Village. Second, majority of these commercial migrants were Hokkiens from south Fujian as one of the city gates of Melaka was named after “Chincheo”, a name which was frequently employed in the Western documents of 16th and 18th centuries to refer to the Hokkien people or south Fujian, in addition to the Chincheo merchants lived in Campon China. Both evidences point to a clear fact, indicating the influence of Hokkien merchants in early Portuguese

---

Port Cities and Intercultural Relations
15th-18th Centuries

Melaka. While no exact figures are available for the Chinese migrants in Portuguese Melaka, Erédia's description shows that the Chinese sojourning there must have been present in substantial numbers by at least the first decade of the 17th century.

There is reason to believe that the size of Chinese sojourning community sometime prior to the mid 17th century had been quite large. According to the local Chinese cemetery tablet sources, the Chinese cemetery in Bukit Cina was founded by the then Chinese Kapitan Li Jun-chang (李君常) in the mid 17th century to cater for the increasing demand of the Chinese community as more and more Chinese migrants who fled from the declining Ming China needed to be buried in Melaka and could not be shipped back to their home villages in south China. Li Jun-chang was a Hokkien merchant from Amoy or Xiamen in south Fujian, who left home during the Ming dynasty and settled in Melaka. Emigrated with Kapitan Li were his fellow villagers from Xiamen or San-du-ao in Longxi (present-day Zhangzhou). In order to pay homage to the early Chinese community leader, a special tablet was erected in 1685 at Bukit Cina to commemorate his contributions made towards the development of Chinese migrant community in Melaka. 10 Bukit Cina is the largest and earliest extant Chinese migrant cemetery in Southeast Asia. Again, what depicted above shows the dominant position enjoyed by the Hokkien merchants in early Melaka.

Chinese Migrant Community in Dutch Melaka

Relationship between the Portuguese and the Chinese merchants in the early stages was cordial. Consequently, a large number of Chinese political refugees and business migrants moved into Melaka from coastal south China. Of them, Hokkien people were the most significant in numbers. However, the monopolistic trade policy imposed by the Portuguese obliged many merchants, including Chinese, to leave Melaka during the latter stage of Portuguese rule, leading constant conflicts with neighbouring Southeast Asian states and the Dutch. By the time of the Dutch captured Melaka in 1641, this port city was a ruined one with only 2,706 inhabitants left, including 300 to 400 Chinese, as compared with an estimated figure of 20,000 in the pre-Dutch period. 11 The drastic decline of Chinese population forced the Dutch authorities to import 33 Chinese from


Dutch Batavia in 1641 to work in the fields and gardens as the local trade in Melaka at that time appears to have been controlled by Indian merchants if what Valentijn depicts is reliable.  

The number of Chinese migrants increased steadily in the Dutch period. The Dutch Governor of Melaka Balthasar Bort mentions in his report of 1678 that there were 426 Chinese among the total population of 4,884. According to this report, the Chinese community comprised 127 men, 140 women, and 159 children. What is interesting to note is that all of the females among the Chinese were Batak and Balinese, whom the Chinese male migrants married because Chinese females were not allowed to go overseas until about the middle of 19th century. Moreover, majority of the Chinese migrants lived around Bukit Cina, and the rest dwelled in the northern suburb which was recorded as Upeh by the Portuguese. Being principally merchants, artisans, and carpenters, these Chinese migrants were relatively wealthy. Of a total of 185 brick and 583 atap (Malay: thatch) houses in Melaka, the Chinese owned 81 brick and 51 atap. In addition, the Chinese owned 290 slaves. By 1750, Chinese population in the territory increased to 2,161, a fivefold increase over the 1641 estimates.

The growth of Chinese migrant community in Melaka, however, was soon curbed by the monopolistic trade policy imposed by the Dutch authorities. The Dutch colonial government of Melaka forbade Chinese from moving freely while imposing a monthly poll tax of a quarter guilder per person on the Chinese migrants, which in turn discouraged the inflow of new migrants. When Penang was established by the British as a new trading station in 1786, and the British laissez-faire trade policy was greatly favoured by the Chinese merchants, numerous Chinese migrants were attracted and moved from Melaka to Penang, which in turn led to a gradual decline of Melaka’s maritime trade in the late 18th century. The Chinese population in Melaka had dwindled to 1,006 by 1817. The founding of Singapore in 1819 gave a final blow to Melaka and sealed its fate as a major trading centre in the Straits as a huge number of Chinese businessmen quickly transferred from Melaka and Penang to the new maritime trade emporium.

---

12 M. Hacobian, Ibid., pp.116-132.
15 T. Braddell, Statistics of the British Possessions in the Straits of Malacca, with Explanatory Notes, Pinang: Penang Gazette, 1861, Table 1.
17 T. Braddell, Statistics of the British Possessions in the Straits of Malacca, Ibid., Table 1.
Maritime Trade and Regional Commercial Network

Similar to the Chinese emigration to Melaka, China’s maritime trade with this port polity could also be dated back to early Ming when the Melaka Kingdom was established with the support and protection of the Ming court. Nevertheless, as evidenced by both the Chinese sources and the Portuguese records, Chinese merchants for a long period only sojourned in Melaka while bartering with indigenous Javanese, Malay, and different merchant groups coming from India and Arabian Peninsula. It seems foreign merchants would have to keep some distance from the indigenous people in the evening and habitually they would return to their ships for their safety. As depicted by Ludovico di Varthema in a book published n 1510 in Rome, a year before the Portuguese conquest, “It is not possible to go about the place here when it is dark, because people are killed like dogs, and all the merchants who arrive here go to sleep in their ships”. As a result, when the first Portuguese fleet led by Sequeira visited Melaka in 1509, they met four Chinese junks in the port. Two years later, when Afonso d’Albuquerque led another Portuguese fleet to conquer Melaka, again they met five Chinese junks in the port detained by the King of Melaka some days ago, aiming at to use them against the king of Daru with whom he was at war. If that was the normal case, then the regular number of Chinese junks trading with Melaka in the early 16th century probably ranged from four to five. It is interesting to note that some of the Chinese merchants met with Afonso d’Albuquerque in 1511 were the same group of people who had made friends with Sequeira two years before, a fact suggesting that understandably a same group of Chinese maritime merchants would prefer to do business in Melaka as they already had the local commercial connections established there.

While a Chinese Shahbandar had been appointed and functioned well in Melaka’s foreign trade prior to the arrival of the Portuguese, the major change from sojourning merchants to migrant merchants came into existence in the Portuguese period. The Portuguese followed a policy of exclusive monopoly and as far as possible the Portuguese authorities compelled all passing ships to call at Melaka. In 1546, Chinese goods were imposed 10 percent of duty while 8 percent on the Bengal goods, not to mention other miscellaneous exactions collected by the Portuguese officials. Consequently, the volume of Chinese maritime trade in Melaka did not grow significantly.

---

Unlike the early junk trade between south China and Melaka which saw four or five Chinese junks conducting long-distance trade annually and directly sailing from south Fujian to the port city in most part of the 16th and 17th centuries, the trade pattern clearly changed from the late 17th century onwards with Chinese migrant merchants based in different major port polities of Malay Archipelago played a leading role in the regional maritime trade. The Dutch Melaka harbourmaster records on the Melaka commercial shipping of the late 18th century has provided an excellent database in this regard for a detailed analysis. Dianne Lewis, Lee Kam Hing, Anthony Reid, Radin Fernando and Nordin Hussin have respectively used these records to study the coastal trade and shipping in the Malay Peninsula during the 17th and 18th centuries.\(^{19}\) What depicted below is based on the pioneering studies conducted by them.

As showed by the Dutch Melaka shipping list, Melaka’s maritime trade was characterized by the short-distance trade within the Malay Archipelago. While the Southeast Asian maritime trade continued to rise rapidly in the late 18th century, the most part, nevertheless, was carried by Malay and local Chinese merchants, between Melaka and such flourishing ports as Siak, Riau, Selangor, and Asahan. While largest ships were Europeans, with the British East Indiamen plying between India and Canton in the four hundred to eight hundred ton range and most of the other English, Danish and French vessels between one hundred and fifty and five hundred tons, but in numbers the small locally-based Javanese and Chinese junks, probably averaging about twenty tons, were overwhelmingly dominant, and together they represented a much larger share of Melaka’s maritime commerce.

Table 1: Number of Ship Arrivals in Melaka by Captain’s Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>1761</th>
<th>1765</th>
<th>1770</th>
<th>1775</th>
<th>1780</th>
<th>1785</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aceh</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bugis</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Javanese &amp; Madurese</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burghers</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danish</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other European</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabs</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moor</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td>188</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>434</td>
<td>484</td>
<td>539</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

20 Anthony Reid and Radin Fernando, “Shipping on Melaka and Singapore as An Index of Growth, 1760-1840”, Ibid., p.66.
### Table 2: Ships Calling at Melaka from Various Ports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arriving from:</th>
<th>1761</th>
<th>1765</th>
<th>1770</th>
<th>1775</th>
<th>1780</th>
<th>1785</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Selangor</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perak</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kedah</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trengganu</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riau</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Parts of Malay Peninsula</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aceh</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pidie</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasai</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asahan</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batubara</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panai</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rokan</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siak</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bukit Batu</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inderagiri</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palembang</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Parts of Sumatra</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batavia</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cirebon</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semarang</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surabaya/Gresik</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Parts of Indonesian Archipelago</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manila</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siam</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia/Kangkao</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cochinchina</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macau</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Chinese Ports</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian Ports</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mergui</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangoon &amp; Pegu</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified &amp; Other</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>188</strong></td>
<td><strong>393</strong></td>
<td><strong>445</strong></td>
<td><strong>434</strong></td>
<td><strong>484</strong></td>
<td><strong>539</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Table 3: Ship Captains Based in Melaka by Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>1761</th>
<th>1765</th>
<th>1770</th>
<th>1775</th>
<th>1780</th>
<th>1785</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burghers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nat. Christ.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aceh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bugis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gujarati</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jentief</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td>67</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As is evident from the three Tables presented above, the most remarkable growth in this period was concerned with the junks under local Chinese and Malay *nakhodas* or captains based in Melaka or other major trading ports in Southeast Asia. Table 3 shows *nakhodas* based in Melaka by ethnicity, which clearly demonstrates that Melaka had progressively become a less European and more Asian port city.

Gradually the Chinese merchants based in Southeast Asia formed their own business networks which connected trading ports of different sizes together. Chinese merchants under the Dutch rule actually frequently changed their residential places in order to cater for their business requirements and development, which in turn produced a most volatile profile of Chinese mercantile community in Melaka. As shown in Table 3, the Chinese *nakhodas* based in Melaka were very vibrant and active, rising to 94 in 1770, falling to 13 in 1775, and then rising eight-fold to 106 and all of Chinese captains listed Melaka as their home in 1785. What is more significant is that these Chinese captains represented more than half the total number of *nakhodas* in the town.

What needs to be noted is that the great majority of Chinese *nakhodas* based in Melaka were small junk owners, and their average crew size was only about 10. The largest

---

22 Anthony Reid and Radin Fernando, “Shipping on Melaka and Singapore as An Index of Growth, 1760-1840”, Ibid., p.70.
Chinese junks visiting Melaka were based in the Dutch ports of Java, and to a lesser extent in Amoy, Kedah, Siam or Cambodia. The prominent merchant families were the Tan (Chen 陳) and Oein (Huang 黃) families of Semarang and Cirebon, which regularly sent large junks to Melaka with rice and other supplies. Such a scenario probably suggests that Chinese merchants based in Dutch Java were the most powerful and influential economically as compared with their fellow countrymen in Amoy (Xiamen), Melaka and other parts of Southeast Asia.

In terms of Chinese maritime trade network within the Malay Archipelago, Kedah needs to be particularly noted as it was the only one in all the Malay ports that was dominated by Chinese merchants, with 18 of the 25 Kedah-based nakhodas listed over the years being Chinese. The Tja (Cheah or Xie 謝) clan of Kedah played a leading role in local society, and they had commercial interests over a wide area. For instance, Tja Kiong Sing was Kapitan China of Kedah in 1761, and he sent a junk with 18 men to Melaka in December under the name of Tja Nya Ko. Another large junk was the property of Tja Kian Ko, described in the Dutch records as a “prominent Chinese” of Kedah. In 1761, this junk was trading between Kedah and Cambodia by way of Melaka, under the command of Tja Sia Ko. Four years later this Chinese nakhoda appeared in the shipping list as based in Melaka, but running a smaller ship across the Melaka Straits. The close collaborations between Chinese communities in Dutch Melaka and Dutch Batavia could also be seen from family letters written in traditional Chinese style, which are being kept at London’s British Library. Normally the family correspondence was carried by the Chinese trade junks plying between ports in Java, Sumatra, Siam, Vietnam and Malay Peninsula, and Chinese merchants based in different port polities would in the letters report to their family members or relatives their commercial activities and family business. Thanks for Dr. Annabel Gallp’s kind assistance, photos of some Chinese letters are presented below for readers’ interest.
Port Cities and Intercultural Relations
15th–18th Centuries
Conclusion

Melaka’s rise in the early 15th century as an important maritime trading centre and port polity was closely related to the support and encouragement from the Chinese Ming Empire. With the development of official relations between Ming China and Melaka, Chinese merchants started to trade in Melaka and a small size of Chinese migrant community had been established by the mid 17th century.

Chinese emigration to Melaka was facilitated by different factors, such as the commercial opportunities, the political push factor in the mid-17th century which saw a large number Ming loyalists fled from south China to Melaka, and the encourage policy imposed by the Dutch authorities to induce more Chinese merchants and artisans to work in the territory. Similar to other trade ports of Southeast Asia, Chinese mercantile community in early Melaka was dominated by the Hokkien merchants from south Fujian, as evidenced by the fact that a large number of Kapitan China in early Melaka were Hokkiens and majority of the Chinese tombs kept in Bukit Cina belong to the Hokkien migrants, not to mention that even today the lingua
franca of Chinese community in Melaka is Hokkien. It is in this sense that the Chinese migrant community of early Melaka could be termed as a Hokkien community.

Chinese merchants were active in Melaka’s maritime trade. With the growth of Chinese migrant communities in different port cities of Southeast Asia, those based in Dutch Java in particular, the trade pattern of Melaka quietly changed with local Chinese merchants rather than those from south China played a leading role in the regional maritime trade. It is in this sense we could see how Melaka gradually played a leading role in the regional maritime trade network.
Malacca: A Centre for Islamic Debate and a “New Mecca” (1480-1511)

1. Literature and the contextual framework

One of the classic ideas about the study of Southeast Asia during the pre-colonial period is that Malacca was a perfect example of an international and cosmopolitan port. The creation of this veritable historiographic standard dates back to the pioneering work by Meilink-Roelofsz (1962), continued to a certain extent by the numerous studies by L.F. Thomaz (per tot 1965; 1990). Following in the footsteps of these two authors there have been a multitude of studies over recent decades analysing and describing the sultanate of Malacca as the socio-economic and political prototype of the Malay sultanate. This prototype was summarised by some authors, of whom Denys Lombard is perhaps the best example (1990).

More recently, in the 21st century, new lines of analysis and interpretation regarding the sultanate of Malacca have emerged, which have sought to revise the more “traditional” view, so to speak, mainly pertaining to the period of its political and commercial-maritime decline, which culminated in the conquest by the Portuguese in 1511 (Alves 2003; Ptak 2004). A recurrent feature of these analyses is that they advocate rereading European sources dating from the early 16th century, especially Portuguese sources, more specifically the text by Tomé Pires (1515). Another core element common to all these studies is the proposal to reappraise the size of Malacca’s international mercantile port activities and its demographic structure. This reappraisal can and should also extend to the religious plane. In other words, when referring to Malacca, it is perhaps a small universe. A small but diverse and dynamic universe.

Another historiographic proposal, at least in one of these works (Alves 2003: 177-223), is the reconstruction and comprehension of the religious dimension in Malacca, in the transition from the 15th to the 16th century. This is an extremely important aspect while studying Asian port cities as intercultural centres, the theme of this international
conference and this volume of proceedings. This dimension has been particularly overlooked in the case of Malacca. Studies about the religious life of Malacca during the sultanate are few and far between. Even the monumental *Malacca, The Transformation of a Malay Capital, c. 1400-1980* (1983) included just one article partially dedicated to the theme (Wake 1983). Instances in which the process of Islamisation, men of religion and the main currents of religious thought have been examined in detail are rarer still. However, it is nonetheless important to note the works by Milner (1983 and 1985) and Walker (2004).

On my part (Alves 2004), I have sought to trace a comparative framework of the religious dimension in the lives of the sultanates of Malacca, Pasai and Aceh during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, portraying their constant features and dynamics. In the particular case of Malacca, the subject of this study, one period was of special interest: the reign of Sultan Mahmud Syah (1481?-1511). This was a moment of great stress in the sultanate’s political life, both due to external as well as internal reasons. Internally, it was a period that simultaneously witnessed the serious conflicts between Sultan Mahmud Syah and his all powerful *bendahara* Tun Mutahir as well as between the sultan and some of the richest and most powerful foreign magnates in the city (such as the Javanese Tuan Kelaskar and Utama Adiraja). At the same time, Sultan Mahmud Syah was embroiled in succession problems with his son, Ahmad (Chamber-Loir 2005). At an external level, Malacca had to contend with the ominous presence of Java and the threat of a Majapahit expedition aimed at conquering the city and, in a broader geo-strategic context, aimed at dominating the region of the straits (Malacca and Sunda). However, despite closer political and military ties between Sultan Mahmud Syah and the Zamorin of Calicut, coupled with reinforced commercial and military relations with Malik Gopi and Malik Ayaz, rival Gujarati magnates, Malacca’s commercial and maritime life declined with each passing day. This happened also due to the actions of the Portuguese fleets that sought to control navigation in the Indian Ocean. In the excellent summary by the Portuguese chronicler João de Barros, Malacca lost its trade, since “The Moors, Arabs, Persians and Gujaratis alike did not generally take this [Malacca] route for fear of our fleets; and if any of their carracks did indeed venture there, it was furtively, away from our gaze, which King Mahmud of Malacca immediately began to feel, owing to the loss of the customs duties generated by the commerce that used to take place there. Since the king was used to earning vast amounts because of the large number of carracks that used to go there, and seeing how much he was losing (…) it seems that he tried to recoup his losses from
the few merchants who were there and he robbed and tyrannised the merchants living in the city to such an extent that they began to leave”¹.

As the following pages attempt to demonstrate, these factors that wrought havoc on Malacca’s circumstances were further compounded by elements of its religious life, clearly aggravating the sultanate’s situation. The situation was aggravated in Malacca in much the same manner as, during more or less the same period (up to the 1520s), in other parts of the Malay-Indonesian coastal region such as Pasai (Sumatra), Demak and Kudus (Java).

2. Religious life in Malacca in the transition to the sixteenth century – Protagonists and ideas

Malacca’s religious and social life during the last quarter of the fifteenth century appears to have been rather tumultuous. It is clear that few details are known about the Islamic religious circles. It is not possible, using known sources, to identify all the agents of the city’s religious science and life. Neither the narrative sources nor epigraphy facilitate this task, as is the case, for example, with Pasai. The Islamic religious hierarchy in Malacca is equally unknown, apart from its highest dignitary, the kadi. Nor is it possible for the time being to assess the role of the debate about religious science in the court and in the city in general. One thing is certain: various currents intersected and appeared to clash in Malacca. However, in much the same manner as, for example, the sultanate of Pasai during the same period (Guillot & Kalus 2008), the image provided by sources is quite blurred; while it may be correct to write that Sunni Islam, of the Shafi’ite rite, dominated, it is nonetheless overly generic and limiting.

The final years of the fifteenth century and the first decade of the sixteenth century coincided, as recorded by local chronicles, with the arrival in Malacca of new winds of the mystic Islam that blew in from the Near East. Even during the government of Sultan Mansur Syah (1459-1477), the Sejarah Melayu speaks of the arrival of an Arab religious man, called Maulana Abu Bakar, who took up residence in the city. This Sufi brought with him the mystic book Durr Manzum (“Necklace of Pearls”) authored by one of his mentors, Sheikh Abu Isahak². The presence of Maulana Abu Bakar and that book in Malacca could have stirred up the religious status quo in the city and perhaps provoked a strong

¹ Barros, 2: 2, 26-27.
² SM, 100.
reaction from the highest religious dignitary, the kadi, Maulana Yusuf. At the height of the dispute, Sultan Mansur Syah even consulted Pasai and the sultanate’s jurisprudence experts about one of the most controversial points of the Durr Manzum. Veritable duels for spiritual authority followed between Maulana Abu Bakar and the kadi, which resulted in the affirmation of the maulana as the spiritual leader of the Muslim community. Abu Bakar having emerged victorious, Kadi Yusuf recognised Bakar’s authenticity and the value of his authority and even became his disciple. Sultan Mansur Syah himself followed in the kadi’s footsteps.

In the aftermath of these events Kadi Yusuf, whose prestige had been seriously jolted in the eyes of the community of the faithful, withdrew to the hinterland of Malacca, where he dedicated his life to mystic contemplation, handing over his office to his son Menawar. This means that, for a while, Maulana Abu Bakar’s prestige and the public influence that he wielded among the community and at the sultan’s court must have been immense. This influence must have been particularly strong with regard to Sultan Mansur Syah, fuelling his dream, which he never realised before his death in 1477, of making the pilgrimage to Mecca. In this aspect his son, Alauddin Riayat Syah, apparently followed in his footsteps. Alauddin Syah went down in history more as a mystic than a ruler, forever dreaming of making the pilgrimage to Mecca.

The brief interlude mentioned in the Sejarah Melayu was interrupted by the arrival of another holy man on the scene, probably an Arab or a Persian, Maulana Sadar Jahan, during the 1480s, if not as late as the 1490s, along with a small entourage of disciples. This could have heightened the tone of the debate and controversies in the city’s religious Islamic circles. Once again, it is the Sejarah Melayu that transmits this information.

As early as the reign of Sultan Mahmud Syah a more “local” atmosphere appeared to prevail in Malacca, in which learning Arabic and studying the Koran were viewed with apparent disinterest by vast segments of the Malay nobility. This aloofness gave rise to disputes between two visions and versions of Islam: one local and more Malay while the other was foreign and tending towards a certain doctrinal integrity. The Sejarah Melayu refers to Maulana Sadar Jahan as a pandita (“hermit” or “sage”), very probably of Persian origin. His reputation as a master of religious science earned him the title of makhdum. Other Malay texts indicate that special responsibilities were attributed to him, at the

---

1 SM, 100-103.
2 SM, 103.
3 Pires, 169v.
4 Idem.
request of Sultan Mahmud Syah, during the compilation of Malacca’s legislative code, the *Undang-Undang Melaka*, conferring the title of kadi upon him. Sultan Mahmud, his son Ahmad and some of the most prominent courtiers became disciples of the *maulana*. However, Sadar Jahan proved to be quite uncomfortable with the customs and traditions of the Malays, which prevailed over Islamic law in many aspects of everyday life. Sadar Jahan was particularly intolerant about the consumption of alcohol, a widespread habit amongst the city’s population, and laxity with regard to the religion’s precepts and even – something which caused a great deal of discontentment amongst the Malays – the use of the Malay language to the detriment of Arabic, which few Malays wished to learn and even fewer mastered. This was in fact a criticism repeated by other visitors from the Near East who visited Malacca during this period, such as Ahmad Ibn Majid.

The greatest resistance to Maulana Sadar Jahan appeared to have emanated from some sections of the court in Malacca, who criticised him harshly because his own lifestyle contradicted the ideals he taught and preached. His critics accused him of being no more than an opportunist who had come from poverty in his own country in search of material wealth. This reaction from many sections of the court against Maulana Sadar Jahan appears to have touched a chord with Sultan Mahmud Syah, even if he continued to receive his teachings. However, it had little impact on his son, Ahmad, who was utterly devoted to the *maulana*.

The debate and, sometimes, the clash between the various schools of thought should not detract from the fact that in some cases issues concerning the personal affirmation of a man of religion as compared to the other residents of the city could also have been a factor. A man of religion claiming primacy for himself in terms of spiritual authority, knowledge, the sanctity of life, number of disciples and influence in society and in the political life of the surrounding community. This must have been the case with Maulana Sadar Jahan.

---

7 *UnM*, 11.
8 *UnM*, 24.
9 *SM*, 153.
13 *SM*, 167.
3. Sultan Mahmud Syah and the quest for the perfect synthesis?

A sentence that seems to be isolated and out of context, penned by the Portuguese author Tomé Pires in his *Suma Oriental*, regarding Sultan Mahmud Syah of Malacca (c. 1481-1510), served to inspire this article. This sentence has already given rise to diverse comments (*inter alia* Wake 1983; Milner 1985; Walker 2004). The majority of these comments indicate either a religious or a political interpretation, keeping in mind the construction of an image of Sultan Mahmud Syah only as a ruler. The sentence reads thus: “[The sultan] said that he alone had the power to destroy the world, and that the world needed his port since it was the fulcrum of the monsoons, and that he would transform Malacca into Mecca”

What I propose is to revise these interpretations. A revision that simultaneously encompasses the two dimensions, i.e. the religious and political aspects. This association has never been made from the point of view of historiography, perhaps because the image of Mahmud Syah mostly oscillated between that of a despot and a bloodthirsty opium addict and a weak and impotent ruler, incapable of defending the sultanate from foreign aggression. Curiously, a negative image that circulated in Europe as early as 1514, a few years after Malacca was conquered by the Portuguese, averred that he was hated by neighbouring monarchs and by his subjects.

In Malacca, in the late fifteenth century and early sixteenth century, the sources speak, as is known, of the presence of a set of foreign men of religion living in the city at the time. Only the Portuguese accounts mention the presence of a man of religion from Gujarat, a renowned spiritual master and swordsman, known as Nakoda Begawan (Alves 2003: 253-254; Alves 2005). According to the same sources the majority of these foreign men of religion had a certain Islamic integrity in common; so much so that during the crises caused by the Portuguese in 1509 and 1511, they defended armed resistance against the Europeans in the name of Islam. They were perhaps the same individuals who accused Sultan Mahmud Syah of committing a “sin”, if he authorised the installation

---

14 *Pires*, fl. 170. This same idea is repeated in the *Comentarios de Afonso de Albuquerque*, perhaps even explained better: “[The sultan] used to say that Malacca was Mecca itself” (*Comentarios*, II: 92). The underlining is mine.


16 See above all *Pires*, fl. 176v.
of the Portuguese in Malacca. They did so at odds with the all-powerful Maulana Sadar Jahan.

They were also the ones who propagated the idea, engraved in Malacca's historic memory, that the “fall” of the sultanate was a just divine punishment for the “sins” of Sultan Mahmud Syah. But what were these “sins”? The “sins” of arrogance and the “heresy” of wishing to transform Malacca into a “new Mecca”. Of transforming Malacca into a new holy city of Islam. Even though it had a magnificent mosque, admired by everyone who visited the city, and a thriving economic prosperity. The very fact that Sultan Mahmud Syah criticised his predecessors for having been obsessed with the pilgrimage to Mecca is yet another symptom of his aspirations with regard to promoting his city to the category of a sacred city. It could also be a reflection of his subscribing to the mystic currents that affirmed that the “physical” journey to Mecca was dispensable, since the objective could be achieved by means of a Gnostic journey; not by means of moving in space and time but thanks to a change in one's state of awareness, one's ecstatic nature. One can recall that Portuguese observers in Malacca, around 1509-1510, described Sultan Mahmud Syah as “a recluse who is always indoors”. Others, around 1511, guaranteed that he spent much of his time in the city’s main mosque, seeking refuge in its minaret.

According to the code of maritime laws for Malacca prepared during his reign, Sultan Mahmud Syah provocatively styled himself the “Caliph of the faithful”. Was this a skilful means of synthesising temporal power and spiritual power? Or was it something more?

In this context, what was the role played by the extremely influential Maulana Sadar Jahan in the construction of this ploy by Sultan Mahmud Syah? He assumed this influence so overtly that he only received the sultan if the latter presented himself at the door as Fakih Mahmud Syah. He was the one who accompanied the young Sultan Ahmad during the defence against the Portuguese attack on the city in 1511, discussing the doctrine of the Unity of God. He was perhaps the holy man who lived and taught in

---

17 Comentarios, II: 82.
18 Idem.
19 Pires, fl. 170.
20 Letter from Portuguese prisoners in Malacca to Afonso de Albuquerque, Malacca, 6/2/1510, CAA, III: 5-12 [7].
21 Barbosa/Apêndice, II: 462, 464.
23 SM, 172.
Malacca, preserved in Javanese historical memory for having advised two of his disciples who had come from Java against going on the pilgrimage to Mecca\textsuperscript{24}.

Could this indicate that, in much the same manner as in the Islamic centres in Northern Sumatra, in the early decades of the sixteenth century, there were followers of Wujudiyya in Malacca, involved in debates and in intense struggles with the supporters of other mystic doctrines? Perhaps this can shed some light on why the \textit{Sejarah Melayu} criticises the followers of Wujudiyya, citing the example of Sayyid al-Hak, leading to the Sufi al-Hallaj\textsuperscript{25}, who proclaimed the possibility of a mystic union between God and the person who loved God to the point of ecstasy, calling him “the liar”\textsuperscript{26}. Since during these very years the highly acclaimed Persian Sufi Shamsu al-Tabrizi, a Gnostic, was present in Malacca, this could indicate that the city was a small but dynamic point of confluence for currents of mystic thought, which could have been further bolstered by other currents that are not mentioned in the sources. It is not difficult to believe, merely as a hypothesis to be explored, that the influence of mystic thought, in any one of its variants, was quite effective on Sultan Mahmud Syah and his son Ahmad. Could they have had an unbridled desire to implement a project to transform the Malay sultanate of Malacca into a theocracy, combining spiritual and temporal power? And if to this end it proved imperative to transform Malacca into a “new Mecca”, into a new sacred city for Islam? Examples of combinations of the religious and political spheres, promoted by Sufi masters, can be found throughout Asia and even in regions that have strong ties with Southeast Asia during this very same period\textsuperscript{27}. Similar adventures and projects – if this project was indeed ever formulated – can be found in the vicinity of Malacca. In this regard one only has to consider what happened in Java, during the early decades of the sixteenth century, in the cases of the small and ephemeral theocracies of Gresik, Cirebon and above all Kudus, where a spiritual and temporal leader known as Sunan Kudus dubbed his city Jerusalem and simultaneously adopted the title of the heir to David and Solomon (Kalus & Guillot 2002: 34-35).

On a more speculative plane it is important to ascertain if something similar, in essence, could have happened in Pasai, roughly between 1515 and 1523. What is known

\textsuperscript{24} As described in the Javanese chronicle \textit{Babad Tanah Jawi} (cf. the Portuguese translation in an excerpt in Thomaz (2002: 587-602 [592]).

\textsuperscript{25} For further information about this Sufi and his fame in the Muslim world and Malay world, see Massignon (1975).

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{SM}, 180.

\textsuperscript{27} This was the case with the sultanate of Gujarat in the last quarter of the 15\textsuperscript{th} century (see Pearson 1976: 134 onwards).
is the following: after the electrifying political life of this Malay sultanate during the early sixteenth century (Alves 1999: 82-91), a foreign or mixed-blood sultan rose to power in 1516, with family ties to the Persian Gulf (Khurfakkân). This sultan reigned until 1519. Upon his death one of his sons, who was very young, ascended the throne, who took the title of Kamis. Due to his tender age, Kamis was politically mentored by a religious figure, a *maulana*, whose name is not known but to whom Portuguese sources unanimously attributed a great deal of influence in the governance of the sultanate.28 The return of Prince Zainal 'Abidin to Pasai, in 1519, who then seized the throne, caused Sultan Kamis and the *maulana* to flee towards the Red Sea.29 Thanks to the military assistance of the Portuguese, whom they had asked for help in the meanwhile, Kamis and the *maulana* returned to Pasai in 1521 and the young sultan was reinstated into power (Alves 1999: 97-111). He continued on the throne up to 1523, always under the political (and religious?) tutelage of the *maulana*, who decided all matters including the sultanate’s foreign policy, which encompassed relations with the Portuguese in Malacca. He went to Malacca on at least one occasion, undoubtedly to negotiate with the Portuguese authorities.30

Given that this was the political situation in Pasai, the Portuguese chronicler João de Barros could have hit the nail squarely on the head when he affirmed that the celebrated Nuruhlah left the city unhappy with the Portuguese protectorate over the sultanate and the unfavourable environment for Islamic religious life. Perhaps Barros, while reading the documentation that he consulted while writing his chronicles, understood that the causes for Nuruhlah’s departure – and perhaps the departure of other men of religion – were linked to a theological conflict between currents of Islamic thought. Especially since it is known that Nuruhlah defended very “integral” positions from the theological point of view. Furthermore, Barros could have concluded from his sources – if this information could be found there –, that a hypothetical religious quarrel could have connections with the political plane and the question of access by “foreigners” to the government of Pasai. Given the current state of knowledge in this regard one can only speculate about these issues. Likewise because some of the protagonists of the politico-religious adventures and projects in Malacca, in Kudus and perhaps even in Pasai were the same individuals, as was the case with Shamsu al-Tabrizi.

---

29 *Barros*, 3, 5, 1; *Castanheda*, II: 53 and 54.
30 Order by Jorge de Albuquerque, Malacca, 1/4/1522, IAN/TT, CC II-100-20.
This was a region and a period of great upheaval and rapid changes. Everything or almost everything was conceivable. Even the notion of transforming Malacca into a “new Mecca”.

Abbreviations

IAN/TT – Instituto dos Arquivos Nacionais Torre do Tombo (Lisbon).


CAA – Cartas de Affonso de Albuquerque seguidas de documentos que as elucidam. Raymundo A. de Bulhão Pato & Henrique Lopes de Mendonça (eds), 7 vols. Lisbon: Academias das Ciências, 1884-1935.

CC – Corpo Cronológico (IAN/TT, Lisbon).


Malacca: A Centre for Islamic Debate and a “New Mecca”
(1480-1511)

Jorge Santos Alves

Bibliography


Malacca under Dutch Rule (1641-1795 and 1818-1825)

Introduction

Between roughly 1500 and 1800 East and Southeast Asia witnessed the emergence of a number of European-controlled cities, which in political, economic, commercial and cultural terms made a deep and lasting impact on the regions they were located in, an impact far greater than their sheer size would normally have warranted: Malacca, Macau, Batavia, Manila and Nagasaki, to name but a few. Since the conference focuses on the Portuguese imprint on the history of East and South East Asia, Malacca features prominently in it, followed by Macau, Nagasaki, and Manila. While this implies that Dutch Batavia is by definition not included in the scope of the conference, we will have ample occasion to make references to it, albeit obliquely, in this study on Dutch Malacca. All the port-cities I have just mentioned embodied in the eyes of the Asian populations the advent of new people, new practices and new cultures: newcomers not only of European origin but also of foreign Asian background came to their shores and settled there. Whether the contemporary local Asian populations were aware of the historic significance of these newcomers is a moot point, but with the wisdom of hindsight, we now know they were there to turn a new page in their history. These cities shared a number of features, but there were equally important mutual differences, so much so that some scholars have voiced doubts as to whether we are warranted to posit a typology of the colonial port-town.¹ At any rate, there are marked differences in the roles these ports and cities played in their specific local and regional settings, differences which were due to the specific environment they found themselves in, but also to the characteristics of the empire they were part of. Whereas for instance Dutch Batavia acted as a trade entrepôt and administrative headquarters for the commercial empire of the Dutch East

¹ See e.g. Nagtegaal 1993.
India Company (henceforth VOC), Malacca was both a vital node in the Portuguese commercial network and a stronghold for the deployment of the cultural-religious policy of the Portuguese Crown, commonly known as the Padroado Real. What the precise balance was between the cultural-religious drive and the profits of the spice trade in shaping the policies of the Portuguese Crown is an arguable point, but it is certain that the relative weight of the two motives shifted with the passage of time.

Affonso de Albuquerque is commonly hailed as the chief architect of the Portuguese Empire in Asia. “Empire” is perhaps too strong a term. What he set out to do was establishing a string of port-cities which would control the spice route. In rapid succession he conquered a number of strategic posts. Goa was taken in 1510 and subsequently became the administrative headquarters of the Estado da Índia, Portugal’s Asian empire from Mozambique to Macau. Malacca, the main port for collecting cloves, nutmeg, mace, and Southeast Asian pepper, fell in Portuguese hands the following year, while Hormuz, which controlled the gateway to the Persian Gulf, became the seat of a Portuguese toll house in 1515. These three ports were the main strongholds that allowed the Portuguese to establish and increase their control over a long stretch of the seas. Further eastward they secured a foothold in Macau in 1557, and one in Nagasaki in 1570, although the first contacts with Japan go back to 1543. In order to complete the long string of nodes necessary to control the entire spice route, Portugal only needed to take Aden, which controlled the entrance to the Red Sea. This city managed to withstand an attack by Albuquerque in 1513 and, although Heitor da Silveira did occupy it for a short time in 1528, it was to remain outside the perimeter of direct Portuguese control.

The old port of Malacca, situated on the west coast of the Malaysian peninsula, was founded around the year 1425. By the time Vasco da Gama reached Calicut on the west coast of India in 1498, Malacca was well established as a thriving international emporium.

The VOC

On 20 March 1602 the States-General of the Republic of the United Netherlands at The Hague awarded a monopoly of navigation and trade to all countries between Cape

---

1 Incorporated in 1602 under the name “Generaele Nederlandsche Geoctroyeerde Oostindische Compagnie,” commonly referred to as Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC).
of Good Hope and the Strait of Magellan, to the United East Indies Company, which was an aggregate of a number of so-called companies for trade with far-off lands. This incorporation came about after protracted negotiations and under heavy political pressure. The charter protected the VOC against Dutch competition and laid out the principles of her organisation and structure in the Netherlands. In addition, she was awarded a number of sovereign rights in the areas covered by the charter. Here she was allowed to administer justice in the name of the States-General, build fortresses, appoint governors, station troops, wage war and conclude peace. The incorporation of the Company has to be seen against the backdrop of the continuing war of the insurgent Netherlands against their suzerain, the King of Spain. During the preceding decades, traders from Zeeland and Holland had explored the sea routes outside Europe, the ports and trade conditions there, and in the process collected information which hitherto had been the monopoly of the Portuguese and the Spaniards. The Company was established in order to continue the war overseas against these enemies and to upset their trade. The VOC was not just a commercial company; she was also a political creation and was supposed to represent the Republic overseas.\(^5\)

To the outside world the VOC presented herself as a unity, but internally she remained true to her historical background as the incorporation of a number of local trading companies. There were six chambers, representing each of the former local companies: the chambers of Amsterdam, Middelburg, Rotterdam, Delft, Enkhuizen and Hoorn. Each of these chambers was governed by a number of local governors and shareholders, who fitted out their own ships and owned their own warehouses and shipyards. Each chamber was responsible for the recruitment and dispatch of its own personnel. The general management of the concern rested with the *Heeren Zeventien* (‘Gentlemen Seventeen’), a college of representatives from among the local governors, which convened several times a year, alternately four years in Amsterdam and two years in Middelburg.\(^6\) The Gentlemen Seventeen were assisted by specific commissions such as The *Haagse Besogne* (advisory committee), and by the *Eerste Advocaat* (Permanent Secretary) and his staff.

At the outset the VOC just sent out fleets, but very soon it also founded trading stations and factories in various places in Asia. In addition, the Company endeavoured to and succeeded in ousting the Portuguese and Spanish enemies from several of their strongholds and settlements. As their legal heir, the Company thus inherited a colonial empire that gradually took shape: *Neerlands India* (the Dutch Indies). To administer this

\(^5\) Schutte 2002b, p. 43.
\(^6\) Schutte 2002b, p. 43.
Port Cities and Intercultural Relations
15th-18th Centuries

growing empire, the VOC needed a coordination centre and general meeting point in the East. In 1619 Batavia on Java was chosen to serve as its headquarters, where the Governor-General and the councils of India resided and where, as time went on, a growing number of staff members and Company servants were posted. Batavia thus became the nerve centre of the Asian activities of the VOC, including its commodity trade.7

The first permanent possession of the VOC in the East was Fort Victoria in Ambon, wrested from the Portuguese in 1605. From this vantage point the Company attempted to dominate the Moluccas and to monopolize the cultivation of cloves and mace. The Company had sovereign authority over Ambon, where it found a partially christened population. It equally had sovereignty over the Banda islands after their conquest in 1621. The strategic port city of Makassar on South Celebes surrendered to the Company in 1667. The Sultan of Ternate submitted to the VOC in 1677. On Java the Company had only direct rule over Batavia and the Ommelanden (surrounding areas), and a few factories in port cities such as Surabaya and Grissee. Outside these limited areas her rule was indirect, even after recognition of her suzerainty over all of Java in 1677. Elsewhere in the Archipelago, notably in Sumatra and Borneo, the VOC maintained only forts along the coast and factories.8

The trade network of the VOC spanned the whole of South, Southeast and East Asia. Malacca constituted an important node, after its conquest from the Portuguese in 1641. After various failed attempts to secure a foothold on the Chinese continent, the VOC lodged itself in a number of islets off the Chinese coast, and on Taiwan, which she ruled for four decades until 1662. In Japan the Company occupied a unique position. She was the only western power having a factory on the island of Dejima in the Bay of Nagasaki between 1639 and 1854. In Further India, i.e. Burma, Cambodia, Quinam and Siam, the VOC had a number of trading lodges of varying size and importance. The Indian subcontinent was of great importance to the VOC, both in terms of her inter-Asian trade and as a producer of commodities destined for the European market, notably textiles, sugar, pepper, and cinnamon. The company owned tens of lodges in Bengal, along the Coromandel and Malabar coasts, in Gujarat, and further west, in Persia and Arabia.9 On Ceylon and the opposing shore (Cochin and Madurai), the Company expelled the Portuguese between 1637 and 1663. Apart from the domain of Kany in the interior, the

7 Schutte 2002b, p. 44.
8 Schutte 2002b, p. 44.
9 Schutte 2002b, p. 44.
whole of Ceylon became a Company dominion, after Van Goens annexed Colombo and Jaffna in 1656.\textsuperscript{10}

The trade empire of the VOC stretched from the Cape to Dejima and from Mocha to New Guinea. Her flag flew atop hundreds of forts, factories and lodges, where a varying number of Company servants were posted, in some cases with their wives and children. Many lodges were very modest settlements, manned by just a handful of people. The European personnel on Amoy in 1688, for instance, only counted four men, in Tonkin seven, and in Dejima 27. At the time there were allegedly 2,700 men employed by the Company on the island of Ceylon, which is a huge number, but one must bear in mind that they were spread over tens of locations on the island and the opposite Indian shore. Only in a limited number of major locations such as Colombo, Galle, and Jaffna did their numbers run in the hundreds. In these cities the European segment of the population, including the wives of the Company servants — very often of Asian stock — and children, as well as the small group of free burghers\textsuperscript{11} and their slaves, came close to the size of a city community in the mother country.\textsuperscript{12}

Apart from the Cape of Good Hope, the colonial VOC settlements were typically urban phenomena: this was the case in the port cities in Ceylon, Malacca, Ambon and Batavia. Besides, the VOC also had sovereign rights over a number of territories, and here her jurisdiction also covered the Asian and Indo-European subjects. They were administered indirectly, even when the native population was partly christened, as was the case in Ceylon and in the Moluccas.\textsuperscript{13}

The Capture of Malacca

The first Dutch attack on Malacca was launched by Admiral Cornelis Matelieff de Jonge in 1606. Initially he had hoped to take the town by surprise, but the stratagem failed. Then, securing the assistance of Johore,\textsuperscript{14} he opted for a combined naval blockade

\textsuperscript{10} Schutte 2002b, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{11} The people employed by the VOC (soldiers, bureaucrats, Calvinist ministers) were called \textit{dienaaren} (‘servants’) and the others (settlers, merchants, artisans, and tavern keepers) were called \textit{vrijburghers} or \textit{vrijluiden} (‘free burghers’).
\textsuperscript{12} Schutte 2002b, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{13} Schutte 2002b, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{14} He concluded a contract with the sultan of Johore, reproduced in Bort’s report: see Blagden and Bremner 1927, pp. 10-12. No copy of the original document is extant.
and military siege. After four long months of inconclusive hostilities, a powerful armada from Goa, commanded by Don Martin d’Alphonsno de Castro and consisting of 16 great galleons, nine galleys, one caravel and 13 barges,\textsuperscript{15} made its appearance. Although Matelieff managed to defeat the armada at Cape Racardo (Cabo Rachado), he was eventually forced to abandon the siege of Malacca and leave Malayan waters in January 1607.\textsuperscript{16} There followed another blockade in 1608 by Dutch admiral, Pieter Willemsz. Verhoeff, and yet another standoff between a Dutch and a Portuguese fleet in December 1615,\textsuperscript{17} but none of these clashes delivered the port into Dutch hands. In the meantime the Dutch had their hands tied elsewhere, notably in Java, where they had become embroiled in a conflict with Mataram, and in the Spice Islands, where they were facing the English. For the time being a full-scale assault on Malacca was no longer an option. From the 1620s onwards they limited their actions to blockading the harbour and cruising against the carracks that plied the seas between Goa and Macao through the Malacca Straits. This lull could not last forever, as the Portuguese were fully aware of. They set about reinforcing Malacca’s defences.

The guns carried by the VOC vessels were state of the art. During the sixteenth century, the destructive power of guns at a range of more than one hundred paces had been quite limited, but by the 1620s and 1630s their effective range had grown considerably, the propelling charge heavier and the firing rate faster. For the Portuguese at Malacca it was vital to devise a defensive plan that could keep the enemy’s artillery at bay. They came up with the idea of transforming the offshore islands fringing the harbour into their first line of defence at sea, and to build a series of works on land between the sea and the walls of the main fortress.\textsuperscript{18} Cornerstone in this plan was the building of a fort on the small island of Ilha das Naus,\textsuperscript{19} but implementation was slow. The walls were not even completed yet when the Dutch invasion fleet made its appearance before Malacca harbour in 1640. The Portuguese hastily abandoned their partly finished fort without so much as firing a shot.

The decision to send the expedition and take the port once and for all had been taken by Antonio van Diemen (1593-1645), the dynamic governor-general of the VOC in Batavia. The expeditionary force of the Dutch, counting twelve ships, six cutters and about 1,500 men (Dutchmen and Germans), was supported by a flotilla of forty vessels

\textsuperscript{15} Blagden and Bremner 1927, p. 12; De Witt 2007, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{16} Stapel 1939, pp. 54-5.
\textsuperscript{17} Macleod 1927, pp. 75 and 146-7.
\textsuperscript{18} Irwin 1962, p. 28.
\textsuperscript{19} Coolhaas 1952, p. 65.
and about 1,500 troops provided by their ally the sultan of Johore, the former ruler of Malacca, who was still hoping to win his former capital back. On 2 August of that year the troops went on land in an outlying district north of the town, from which position they shelled the walls of the fortress. The assault soon ground to a halt, and the assailants found themselves bogged down in a war of attrition that lasted five months and caused heavy losses on both sides. At long last, on 14 January 1641 the assailants were able to penetrate the fort by way of the bastion of São Domingo. This was the decisive action that sealed the fort’s fate. Having been promised honourable terms, the Portuguese capitão Dom Manuel de Sousa Coutinho surrendered the town to the Dutch commander Minne Willemsen Caertekoe. Of the 20,000 inhabitants living in and around the town before the siege, 7,000 had died, and an even higher number had fled. Less than 3,000 people are said to have survived. The Dutch had heavily underestimated the Portuguese resistance, and paid a high price in casualties for their misreading, but the capture was at last a fact. Even more had fallen victim to the pest that ravaged both warring parties than to enemy arms.

Two days after the surrender Dom Manuel de Sousa Coutinho passed away. The Dutch gave him a funeral with military honours in the Church of São Domingo “after their [i.e. Portuguese] fashion.” Portuguese clergymen went to the Dutch commander to request safe passage to the Coromandel Coast in India. The Dutch offered them the possibility to stay, and guaranteed them freedom of conscience, as long as they would be loyal to the new administration, but they declined the offer. A few days later the Ouvidor-General (called Fiscaal by the Dutch, i.e. the prosecutor) of the Portuguese Indies, along with the Jesuits, and other clerics, as well as the prominent citizens with their wives and children, were allowed to borrow a yacht from the Dutch and sailed to Negapatnam. This

---

20 The sultanate was initially located on the island of Bintan (Bintang, Bintam), but later relocated to the tip of the Malayan Peninsula.
22 Valentyn remarks that Caertecoe did not have the authority to offer safe-conduct to the enemy. Valentyn 1724-26, vol. V/A, p. 342 b.
23 Bort gives 19 January as the actual date of the surrender: see Blagden and Bremner 1927, p. 14.
26 Wickeren 2010, pp. 26-31. According to Valentyn 1724-26, vol. V/A, p. 343b, more than 1,500 Dutchmen had lost their life, although the majority had succumbed to pestilence. Bort too mentions 3,000 Dutchmen brought into action, about half of whom perished: Blagden and Bremner 1927, p. 14.
28 De Witt 2007, p. 64.
lenient measure allegedly allowed the *Ouvidor-General* to get away with a few hundred thousands of rix-dollars.\(^{29}\) The officers and soldiers, along with a few clerics and less prominent citizens were shipped as prisoners to Batavia and Macassar. This deportation further reduced the already depleted population, so that “only a few married Portuguese, but many *mestizos* and blacks with their families remained.” During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Malacca, along with Ayutthaya, ranked among the biggest cities in Southeast Asia. Contemporary travellers give various figures, some even the number of 200,000, but in reality it more likely will have been around 20,000.\(^{30}\) Be that as it may, under Dutch rule the town seems never to have recovered its former vigour and bustle. The Portuguese lost Malacca to the Dutch after a five-month siege and heavy loss of life on both sides. It was to remain under Dutch rule for a century and a half, but would never regain the vibrancy and prosperity it had once enjoyed during the heydays of Portuguese rule.

### The Fortress of Malacca

After seizing Malacca from its Malay Sultan Mahmud Shah (r. 1488-1511)\(^{31}\) in 1511, Albuquerque made arrangements for the construction of a stone fortress, at the foot of the hill, on the seaside, to the southeast of the river mouth, on the foundations of the palace of the expelled sultan.\(^{32}\) The initial construction, erected in 1512, consisted of a four-walled keep, rising about 40 *rods* above sea level, supplemented by a palisade along the sea-, river- and land-sides. Later on, the palisade was replaced by a wall and bastions of solid, hard, well-mortared stone, built on a geometrical ground plan “after the European fashion” with the hill at its centre.\(^{33}\) The fort stood on the left bank of the Malacca River, opposite the town, which was located on its right bank, which was the South bank. The fort was thus located on the shore, and commanded the entrance to the river.

There appears to be a lot of confusion among authors as to the shape, size and surface of the fortress, mainly because the fortifications went through a long process of improvement and enlargement by the Portuguese throughout the thirteen decades of

---


\(^{30}\) Bosma and Raben 2008, p. 5; Dunn 1984, p. 185.

\(^{31}\) His successor Aludin II fled to the island and city of Bintang or Bintam (Johore), whence he undertook several attempts to recapture his lost capital, but without success.

\(^{32}\) Janssen 1882, p. 2.

\(^{33}\) According to governor Balthasar Bort: see Blagden and Bremner 1927, p. 10.
their rule. The confusion is probably compounded by the rather loose word choice that is often encountered with regard to fortification architecture. The Portuguese explorer and geographer Manuel Godinho de Erédia’s *Declaraçam de Malaca* contains several drawings of the fortifications of Malacca. One is entitled ‘Planta da Fortaleza de Malaca’ and shows a simple layout of two squares, a big one and a small one adjoining one another in an L-shape. The caption reads: ‘Afonso de Albuquerque fundou esta Fortaleza nesta forma Anno 1511’. A second drawing bears the caption ‘Planta de Fortificaçam da Cidade de Malaca’ and shows a pentagonal enceinte; in one of its corners we discern the L-shaped structure of the previous drawing. Yet another drawing bears the caption ‘Fabrica da Cidade de Malaca intra muros Anno 1604’. This is the most detailed of the three drawings, because it does not simply represent the ground plan, but gives a bird’s-eye view of the major buildings within the intramuros. Here in one corner we can clearly identify the silhouette of the fortaleza attributed to Albuquerque in the first drawing mentioned above. This structure included a square-shaped two-storied tower, which, judging from the number of windows, contained four floors. A simple elevation of this tower is represented next to the effigy of Albuquerque in another drawing in Erédia’s *Declaraçam de Malaca*. The square fort (Fortaleza) overlooked a town of mainly wooden houses thatched with nipa palm. This was the view that would have greeted the visitor in the first half of the sixteenth century. By the early seventeenth century however the townscape offered a much grander view.

The fortifications underwent numerous alterations and improvements in the course of the sixteenth century. In the early seventeenth century the intramuros presented a ground plan in the shape of an irregular pentagon, with its apex pointing to the sea, and fortified by five bulwarks (clockwise starting from the south side: San Pedro, also known as Couraça, São Domingo, Madre de Deos, As Virgens, Santiago). The walls averaged about 20 feet in height high and five feet in thickness forming an Intramuros. Graham Irwin contends that Manuel Godinho de Erédia’s plan is generally unreliable, for, in his assessment, the plan is in many details at variance with Erédia’s own text as well as with later Dutch maps. Irwin therefore has drawn his own reconstruction of the layout of the fortress as it was at the time of João Batista’s visit to Malacca in 1588. Even so, Irwin’s reconstruction equally shows a pentagonal layout. It differs however from Manuel Godinho de Erédia’s plan in that Irwin believes that the enceinte was not entirely

---

34 Van Wickeren 2009, p. 14, when describing the fort as square, evidently refers to the initial phase.
of stone but consisted of wooden stockades on two of the five sides, and that the *Hospital Real* was located elsewhere than shown on Manuel Godinho de Erédia’s plan, namely on the opposite side, close to the Dominican monastery. I must add that, although Manuel Godinho de Erédia’s drawing seems to suggest that the *enceinte* is entirely made of stone, in his text he is quite clear that between the bulwarks Santiago and São Domingo the *enceinte* was a wooden palisade.\(^{37}\) It would therefore seem that Irwin overstates Manuel Godinho de Erédia’s unreliability. As I see it, the major material error of Erédia probably lies in the fact that he puts the two hospitals next to one another, in the south-eastern tip of the *enceinte*. It seems likely that the hospital of the poor and the hospital of the elite are located far apart from one another.

The ground plan given by Manuel Godinho de Erédia is similar to the one found in a Dutch map dated 1656, and discovered by Pieter Arend Leupe in the archives of the VOC in Batavia.\(^{38}\) Within its walls it housed, besides the fort proper (the L-shaped construction), the palace of the governor, the bishop’s palace, the Senate (Câmara da Cidade, Senado da Câmara, established in 1552), a charitable brotherhood (Confraria da Misericórdia, founded in 1532), five churches including the Jesuit church Nossa Senhora da Annunciada (built in 1521) on top of the hill of São Paulo, the Nossa Senhora da Assumpção, consecrated as a cathedral on 4 February 1558, as well as residences of several religious orders, and two hospitals, i.e. the *Hospital dos Povres* and the *Hospital Real*.\(^{39}\) On the ground plan one cannot discern five churches, but only four: the Igreja Marias, the Annunciada, i.e. the church connected to the Jesuit College, the San Antonio, adjoining the Augustinian monastery, and the chapel of the Dominican monastery.

Albuquerque’s *fortaleza* was none other than the keep, located not on top of the hill but at its foot, close to the river, but it allegedly reached as high as the top of the hill. The reason for its location at the foot of the hill was its vicinity to the sea, from where it could easily be supplied in times of war.\(^{40}\) After the enlargements in the course of the Portuguese period, Albuquerque’s *fortaleza* was referred to as *Fortaleza velha*. The Dutch capture of the town in 1641 came with major destructions to the fortifications. The Dutch batteries had made huge breaches in the bulwarks Couraça and São Domingo, caused heavy damage to the Hospital dos Povres, levelled the tower of the *Fortaleza Velha*, as

---

37 See Janssen 1882 (French translation of Manuel Godinho de Erédia’s *Declaraçam de Malaca*), p. 4.
38 Leupe 1936.
39 Janssen 1882, p. 4.
40 Janssen 1882, p. 3.
well as a church and many tall houses. After the capture the Dutch sent a commissary by the name of Justus Schouten to the town to take stock of the spoils and report on the damages. He wrote that the fortress lay in ruins, most of the churches, monasteries, hospitals and other public buildings and virtually all houses were damaged. What had not been destroyed had often become so structurally unstable that it had to be torn down during reconstruction works. The Dutch introduced their own restrained architectural style, and erected a number of landmark buildings, most prominent of which was and still is the Stadthuys (town hall), built in the 1650s on the ruins of the Portuguese governor’s house, close to where the fortaleza velha used to stand, and serving as the seat of the Dutch governor and the administrative centre of the settlement. This multifunctional building included the Secretary’s office, a records room, a prayer room, a dining room, a guest house, servants’ quarters, the home of the Chief Merchant, a prison, the trade office, warehouses, courtyards and a detached bakery. It is said to be a replica of the old town hall of the Frisian town of Hoorn, which existed from 1420 till 1796. The Malacca-born scholar Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir mentioned in his autobiography the existence of tunnels running through St. Paul’s hill into the Stadthuys, but no evidence of these has so far been found. Another Dutch landmark building is Christ Church, built between 1741 and 1753 to commemorate the centenary of the capture of the town. All in all Dutch Malacca presented an outlook quite distinct from the former Portuguese townscape.

During the sixteenth century the Portuguese enlarged the fortress, so as to encompass St. Paul’s Hill. We have already mentioned the pentagonal ground plan drawn up by Godinho de Erédia. He estimated the distance round the perimeter in 1605 at about 1,100 yards. In 1678, after the Dutch had strengthened the defences, Governor Bort (governor of Malacca from 1665 till 1679) estimated them at about 1,400 yards. According to another seventeenth-century testimony included in J.J. Sheehnan’s article, the fort “was about a mile in compass. There are six small towers furnished with sufficient cannon, and a ditch towards the sea and channel. The two gates are one towards the river, and the other towards the south cape. The governor of the city commands in it, and has under him a garrison of one hundred and eighty soldiers.” The six small towers referred to in

---

41 Valentyn 1724-26, vol. V/A, p. 341a. Bort seems to suggest that all churches were destroyed: see Blagden and Bremner 1927, p. 14.  
42 De Witt 2007, p. 54.  
43 De Witt 2007, pp. 118-119.  
44 De Witt 2007, pp. 120-121.  
Shehnan’s article must be the bulwarks. On Godinho de Erédia’s plan of 1604, we see only five of them, but the Dutch added one, as well as three half-angles.

Munshi Abdullah noted that there were four gates to the fort and three bridges connecting it to the town and to other parts of the suburbs.\(^{46}\) There were three “Wall streets” that were prefixed ‘first bridge’, ‘second bridge’ and ‘third bridge’, a fact which seems to confirm the observation made by Munshi Abdullah. The main bridge, spanning the Malacca River, was a drawbridge. A ship entering the town through this bridge had to pay a levy tax.\(^{47}\)

A map dating from 1744\(^ {48}\) shows the layout of the town, the names of the streets, the markets, the orphanage home, the mosques, the bridges and the kampongs. This clear picture of the town in many respects confirms the features just mentioned, but there are variant points as well. For instance, the 1744 map shows only one bridge, and does not have three streets prefixed with “bridge.” The map also conveniently lists the Dutch names of the bastions: Victoria, Amelia, Hendrietta Louisa, Wilhelms, Mauritius, Friedric Hendrik, Middelburg, Ernestus, Amsterdam.\(^ {49}\) That is nine in all, while Godinho de Erédia’s plan only marks five. Five of those nine can easily be identified with their Portuguese predecessors on the same locations as the five marked by Erédia. The other four were either added or were enlargements of existing locations made by the Dutch. The additions are Mauritius, Middelburg, Ernestus and Amsterdam. Strictly speaking, Ernestus and Amsterdam are not to be counted as bastions. They are actually so-called half-angles, i.e. raised positions from which guns could give flanking fire in one direction only, in this case towards the south-west, i.e. the direction of the mouth of the river.\(^ {50}\) Bort describes Ernestus as a half bastion and Amsterdam as an angle or breastwork. On the 1744 map Middelburg has the appearance of a bastion, but was, at least in

\(^{46}\) Nordin 2007, p. 138.

\(^{47}\) Nordin 2007, pp. 138-139.


\(^{49}\) Spellings of the Dutch names vary. I reproduce the names as I find them in the various sources. No variant poses any problem as to identification.

\(^{50}\) Irwin 1962, p. 29.
Bort’s days, what he calls a ‘half bastion’, i.e. a half-angle. It was added in 1660 by Joan Thijssen on the corner closest to the mouth of the River Malacca next to Fredrick Hendrick. According to Irwin ‘Victoria’ corresponds to the former ‘São Domingo’, ‘Amelia’ to the former ‘Madre de Deos’, ‘Henrietta Louisa’ to the former ‘As Virgens’, Santiago became Wilhelmus, the Hospital dos Povres became Mauritius (or Mauritits), while ‘S. Pedro’ (or the ‘Couraça’) was renamed ‘Prins Hendrik’ (or ‘Friedric Hendrik’). These identifications can easily be confirmed, when we compare Erédia’s plan with the 1744 plan and with Bort’s description. Still according to Irwin, the name ‘Ernestus’ (or ‘Ernst Casimir’) was given to what was once called ‘Mora’, and the name ‘Amsterdam’ to what was the ‘Hospital Real’ of the Portuguese. The plan of Godinho de Erédia does not mention ‘Mora’, while it puts the ‘Hospital Real’ in the same corner as the ‘Hospital dos Povres’, whereas Irwin puts ‘Hospital Real’ on the opposite side, close to ‘São Domingo’. According to Balthasar Bort, ‘St. Domingo’ was renamed ‘Victoria’, ‘Madre Deos’ was renamed ‘Emelia’, ‘As Virgines’ (which he spells ‘Ongie Mille Virgines’ i.e. ’11,000 Virgins’) was re-named ‘Henriette Louise’, ‘St. Iago’ (Santiago) was re-named ‘Wilhelmus’, the ‘Hospital del Rey’ was re-named ‘Mauritius’, ‘Courassa’ was renamed ‘Fredrick Hendrick’, the ‘Hospital del Povre’ was re-named ‘Ernestus Casimir’, and ‘St. Domingo’ was renamed ‘Amsterdam’. Surprisingly, Bort mentions ‘St. Domingo’ twice, but if we look at the 1744 map, both ‘Victoria’ and ‘Amsterdam’ are located in the corner where once ‘São Domingo’ and, adjacent to it, the Dominican monastery stood. The main topographical difference between Bort and Irwin is again connected with the location of the two hospitals.

Bort describes ‘Middelburgh’ and ‘Ernestus’ as half bastions, ‘Amsterdam’ as an angle or breastwork, ‘Victoria’ as a full bastion, ‘Emelia’ as a great, for the most part, round bastion, ‘Henriette Louise’ as a full point, ‘Wilhelmus’ as a small round bastion, ‘Mauritius’ as an obtuse angle, and ‘Fredrick Hendrick’ as a spacious, excellent bastion. ‘Fredrick Hendrick’, ‘Mauritius’ and ‘Wilhelmus’ are facing the seaside to the south east. ‘Ernestus’, ‘Amsterdam’ and ‘Victoria’ lie along the river on the northwest. Proceeding from there along the south of the fort, are the land bastions ‘Emelia’ and ‘Henriette Louise’. Mauritius is located on the corner, the point where Erédia’s plan shows the two hospitals. It was probably considered sufficiently fortified by the combination of it

51 Blagden and Bremner 1927, p. 16.  
52 Irwin 1962, p. 33.  
53 Irwin 1962, p. 20.  
54 Blagden and Bremner 1927, p. 16.  
55 Blagden and Bremner 1927, p. 16.
being an obtuse angle and its location near cliffs and the sea. About ‘Fredrick Hendrick’, ‘Ernestus’ and ‘Emelia’, Bort informs us that they have spacious, convenient, vaulted cellars for gunpowder, that ammunition may be stored and kept dry under ‘Victoria’ and ‘Wilhelmus’, and that ‘Emilia’ and ‘Henriette Louise’ are the only bastions provided with casemates.

When we compare Godinho de Erédia’s plan with the 1744 German map, we see the extent to which the townscape has changed in the course of a century of Dutch rule. We notice that quite a number of buildings of the Portuguese period have disappeared — many were destroyed during the siege — but that some have nevertheless remained: the Hospital (formerly the Hospital dos Povres, if we follow Graham Irwin), the Jesuit church on the hill (called Sankt Pauli Kirch on the German map), the San Antonio church (called Sankt Antoni Kirch on the German map), and the San Antonio cemetery (not marked on Godinho de Erédia’s plan). We know that the Saint Paul’s church was used by the Dutch Reformed Church congregation, but it is not clear how the San Antonio church was used. No traces of the Bishop’s palace and the Camara da Cidade are found on the 1744 map.

The qualifier *A Famosa* is often used in connection with the fortress of Malacca, but the name actually does not refer to the fortress, but just to the tower or keep, named *Fortaleza* by Manuel Godinho de Erédia, and *Fortaleza Velha* by Graham Irwin. *A Famosa* was located near the site where the Dutch built their *Stadthuys*. Manuel Godinho de Erédia clearly distinguishes between the *Fortaleza* and what he calls the entire *Intramuros Fortificação*. *A Famosa* is often erroneously identified with the still extant gate, which is now a heritage landmark in Malacca and is identified as the Porta de Santiago. If this is a correct identification, it must be located close to where the bulwark of Santiago once stood. This assumption seems to be confirmed by a plan of 1924, where we see a “Fort Gate” close to the location of what was once the bulwark of Santiago. Since the gate bears the inscription “Anno 1670” it follows that it was repaired and renovated by the Dutch. The coat of arms above the arch is described on various internet sites as the coat of arms of the VOC, but it can be identified more accurately as that of Dutch Malacca. Indeed, Balthasar Bort reports that, in commemoration of the fact that Malacca was won by the sword, an armed man with a sword in his fist, as well as the VOC’s general mark, were added to the Portuguese arms of the town, viz. a Chinese junk, the latter image having been chosen by the Portuguese because they first conquered the port disguised.

---

56 See *Town and Fort of Malacca* 1924, appended map.
as Chinese traders.\textsuperscript{57} The bas-relief above the arch features indeed two human figures. One is that of a man, wielding a sword. He must be the man with the sword mentioned by Bort. He sports long hair and a huge walrus moustache and does not look unlike a seventeenth-century Dutchman on paintings from that period. The other figure appears to be that of a woman, holding a palm branch in her hand, presumably the palm of victory. In between them is a shield emblazoned with the VOC monogram. In addition, surrounding these two human figures in the centre is a rim decorated with martial emblems, including crossed muskets and swords, which would confirm the martial overtones attached to the commemoration of the capture of Malacca. Moreover, it is doubtful whether the name of Porta de Santiago is appropriate for the gate as it now stands. Bort reports that he undertook “some new works”, including two strong stone gates, one between the bastions ‘Middelburgh’ and ‘Ernestus’ on the river side and the other between the bastions ‘Wilhelmus’ and ‘Henriette Louise’ on the land side. He states that the new gates were built in 1669, a date which ties in very well with the date of 1670 above the arch of the Porta de Santiago, which would have been the date of completion. He further explains that he found the gate on the land side close to the bastion ‘Wilhelmus’ blocked and the one on the river side much reduced. It is indeed possible to see these two gates on the plan of Erédia. Bort further writes: “At the new gates there are stone stairs by which to mount to and come down from the upper wall and they have on both sides convenient stone guardhouses and cookhouses.”\textsuperscript{58} This indicates that he considers his constructions as new ones, and not as renovations or enlargements of existing Portuguese ones, although they are ostensibly on the same locations. The Porta de Santiago should therefore be referred to correctly as Bort’s land gate. The wrong attribution of the Portuguese name seems to go back to Munshi Abdullah, who in his autobiography identified the two figures above the arch as Portuguese.\textsuperscript{59}

There is debate as to the extent of the territory under the jurisdiction of Dutch Malacca. In 1660 a VOC employee claimed that the town’s territorial jurisdiction extended 64 leagues, from the island of Sembilan to the Cape of Singapore, but governor Bort placed its northern boundary on the Pannagie (Penajis) River and the southern at Muar, a far more restricted area.\textsuperscript{60} Valentyn (1666–1727), writing in the early eighteenth century, says that it was 30 miles long and 8 to 10 miles wide,\textsuperscript{61} which is impressive. According

\textsuperscript{57} Blagden and Bremner 1927, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{58} Blagden and Bremner 1927, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{59} De Witt 2007, p. 105.
\textsuperscript{60} Andaya 1983, p. 198.
to Pieter van Dam, the Company lawyer, the town’s government never really controlled more than four miles south, five miles north and six miles inland from the town centre.\textsuperscript{62} Sheehan writes that the area the Dutch controlled did not exceed three miles round the town.\textsuperscript{63} During the period of English rule, the boundaries were more clearly marked: they ran along the coast from the Linggi River to the north of the town to the Kersang River on its south. The territory was 40 miles long at its greatest extent, and its breadth varied from 10 miles to 28 miles inland. The hinterland was not intensely cultivated. It was given out to landowners, who lived in town, and left the actual management of the land to local headmen. Tax collection seems to have been their main concern, and little effort was made to fully develop the area into a crop and fruit producing area.\textsuperscript{64} Most supplies were shipped in from Bengal and Sumatra.

In 1795 the town was occupied by the British as part of a larger strategy, agreed to by Stadtholder William V, Prince of Orange, to prevent the French from taking the port and using it as a base to wage war against the British in Asia, although the possibility of this actually happening was a remote one. It is perhaps useful to briefly sketch the European background to this move. On 19 January 1795, Dutch revolutionaries proclaimed the Batavian Republic, which in actual fact became a client state of the French Revolutionary Republic and its successor the Napoleonic Empire. Stadtholder William V, Prince of Orange, fled the Netherlands when the country was invaded by the French Revolutionary Army, and found refuge in the “Dutch House” at Kew Palace, England. From here he sent out the so-called Kew Letters. In his capacity of Captain-General of the Dutch Republic he ordered the civil and military authorities in the provinces of Zeeland and Friesland, Dutch naval officers in British harbours, and Dutch colonial governors, to cooperate with Great Britain in its resistance against France. The letters to the colonial governors ordered them to surrender the colony they administered to the British “for safekeeping.” On 5 June 1806, Napoleon Bonaparte put his brother Louis Bonaparte on the throne of the Kingdom of Holland, ostensibly with the intention of treating Holland as a province of the French Empire. When Louis proved to be less amenable to his brother’s scheme than anticipated, Napoleon annexed his kingdom in 1810. The Napoleonic wars did not end until the downfall of Napoleon in Waterloo (June 1815) and the conclusion of the peace in the Vienna Conference of 1815. At the conference Holland regained its independence, and was no longer an enemy of Britain. It took the

\textsuperscript{62} Andaya 1983, p. 198.
\textsuperscript{63} Sheehan 1934, p. 103.
\textsuperscript{64} Nordin 2007, p. 135.
English East India Company until 1818 before it lifted its occupation of Malacca and returned the settlement to Holland. Since the VOC had gone bankrupt in 1795 and had been nationalised by the new Batavian Republic on 1 March 1796, all its assets and liabilities had been ceded to the Republic. When sovereignty was restored to the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the kingdom inherited all rights and claims of the VOC. Though the British had earlier coveted the place for commercial and strategic reasons, by the time they occupied Malacca, they had no real use for it as an entrepôt anymore, since they had taken permanent possession of Penang in 1786, as an alternative to Malacca. Assuming that their possession would be temporary anyway, they did not make any plans for the newly acquired place, and contented themselves with reducing its strategic value to a minimum. At the proposal of Colonel Robert Farquhar, Lieutenant-Governor of Penang, the British tore the old fortress A Famosa down and neglected the town. The British had apparently hoped that these actions would stimulate the population to relocate to Penang, but the majority refused to leave.

In destroying the fort the British virtually erased a history of three centuries. The edifice was a venerable construction that had been built up over three centuries by the Portuguese and Dutch. During the sixteenth century it had withstood many sieges, notably by the sultanate of Aceh and other Malayan states. Only twice in its existence had it changed hands. To the Malay Peninsula the fort was of little relevance, for it never served as a base for establishing territorial possessions in the interior. Its value was strategic and commercial: it controlled the main maritime link between India and China, and was a centre of international trade.

The Strategic Significance of Malacca

In his *Suma Oriental* Tomé Pires lavishes praise on Malacca as a linchpin in the Portuguese overseas empire: “There is no doubt that Malacca is of such importance and profit that it seems to me it has no equal in the world.” It was a town “that was made for merchandise, fitter than any other in the world.” Epitomizing its global significance he stated: “Whoever is lord of Malacca had his hand on the throat of Venice.”

---

65 Harrison 1979, pp. 11-12.
67 Cortesão 1944b, p. 285.
68 Cortesão 1944b, p. 286.
69 Cortesão 1944b, p. 287.
perception is confirmed by the seventeenth-century traveller Sheehan, who states: “The harbour of Malacca is one of the finest in all the Indies, being navigable at all the seasons of the year, a conveniency belonging scarce to any other in the Indies.”

For the Dutch Malacca’s main value lay in its strategic position and its fort, rather than in its trade, for by the time they seized it, Batavia had been developed as its commercial headquarters. Most of the port-cities controlled by the VOC were strategically located along the trading route between the Indian Ocean and the East China Sea. Some of these ports had a pre-colonial history as “native” centres of trade. A few, like Malacca and Colombo had first been under Portuguese rule before coming under Dutch administration. Batavia had no such previous history. Rather than possessing Malacca, it was more important for the Dutch to deny it to the Portuguese, simply because it enabled them to control the main sea-corridor linking India to the Far East (Spices Islands, China and Japan). This change in vocation for the town under its new rulers almost naturally destined it to a slow and gradual decline.

At the time the capture was greeted by the Dutch as “the most important conquest ever made in the Indies”, but was it? In terms of trade, Malacca had already lost much of its importance to Batavia, while its control over the Straits of Malacca was mitigated at best, because it was continually besieged by the sultanates of Aceh and Johore. Arguably, the loss for the Portuguese was bigger than the gain for the Dutch. In the *Estado da Índia* the town had been second only to Goa. It was a main trading centre and naval base, indispensable to control the trade in spices and pepper, which had to be supplied from the Moluccas, the Banda Islands and Sumatra. Since the Dutch had established direct control over these producing centres, Batavia was and remained their main base in the East Indies, which meant that in strategic terms there was little gain to be had by developing Malacca’s trade to the detriment of that of Batavia. This policy left the opportunity for the Sultanate of Johore (the former ruler of Malacca) and ally of the Dutch to develop the emporium of Riau (an island near Singapore). What the VOC sought was not free trade, but a spice monopoly and a pepper oligopoly in the Malayan and Indonesian waters. It therefore had to deny Malacca to its competitors, whether they were the Portuguese or the English. In the words of Governor Balthasar Bort, the VOC’s fundamental policy was to continue and maintain “the tolls and licenses and the cruising here in the Straits, instituted

---

70 Sheehan 1934, p. 76.
71 Irwin 1962, p. 19.
by the Portuguese for the maintenance of the rights of Malacca and now devolved on us by right of conquest.”

After the conquest, the VOC concluded treaties with Aceh, Djambi and Palembang, by which these sultanates pledged to sell all pepper they produced to the Dutch. With a number of sultanates on the Malay Peninsula, including Kedah (1642), Ujung Salang (1643), Bangkeri (1645), the Dutch concluded trading agreements in order to secure a steady supply of tin from the tin-producing centres. Apart from the trade in this commodity, their new conquest turned out to be a drain on the VOC’s resources. Profits were low, and in many years they actually registered losses. Moreover, most of these sultanates proved to be unreliable allies and suppliers. In 1651 the Dutch garrison in Perak was killed, and in 1660 the Dutch abandoned their factory at Ujung Salang.

The town, although restored by the Dutch from the devastation caused by the siege, never quite regained its former lustre and glory. During the seventeenth century it was eclipsed by Batavia, during the eighteenth century by the trade at Riau.

**Peace with Portugal**

When receiving word of the fall of Malacca in 1641, the then Viceroy of Goa João da Silva Telo e Meneses, conde de Aveiras, aware of the truce that was being negotiated between Portugal and the Dutch Republic, had suggested to broach the return of the port-town of Malacca in the peace negotiations that were to be held with the Dutch Republic. As history teaches, nothing ever came of this idea. The Dutch had captured Malacca in the nick of time. Since 1569, when the Dutch had seceded from the Habsburg Empire, they had been involved in a protracted war with the Spaniards. When in 1580 Portugal became part of that same empire through the Iberian Union, Spain closed the Portuguese ports to the Dutch and proclaimed a ban on trade between the colonies of the Iberian Union and the Dutch Republic. In response, the Dutch occupied the northeast of Brazil and Angola, an act which only deepened the hostilities between the two sides. All Portuguese overseas possessions were now legitimate targets of Dutch attacks. From that point of view, the seizure of Malacca was entirely justified in terms of European power relations. However, at the very moment that the end-game in the siege of Malacca was unfolding, Portugal was breaking loose from the Iberian Union. In December 1640 an insurrection ousted the Spaniards, and the eighth duke of Braganza (Bragança) ascended

---

74 Blagden and Bremner 1927, p. 14.
75 Wickeren 2010, p. 32.
the Portuguese throne as Dom João IV. This marked the beginning of the Portuguese Restoration War. The Portuguese king sent ambassadors to France, England, and the Dutch Republic, in a bid to seek alliances with these countries against Spain. Since Spain was the archenemy of the Dutch Republic, the States-General of the Republic were keen enough to conclude an agreement with the Portuguese. On 12 June 1641 the two sides signed what is known as the Treaty of The Hague. It included a ten-year truce between the Dutch Republic and the Kingdom of Portugal, as well as a Treaty of Offensive and Defensive Alliance between the two countries, directed against Spain.

On 18 November 1641, the treaty was ratified by the king of Portugal and on 20 February 1642 by the States-General. Now, it became apparent that the imperatives of European policy did not necessarily coincide with the interests and the agenda of the VOC in the East Indies. The truce was supposed to become effective in the East Indies one year after the conclusion of the treaty. Informed about the prospect of a truce, the viceroy of Goa sent a legation to Governor-General Van Diemen on 27 September 1641, with a view to negotiating a truce. While the legates were staying in Batavia, Van Diemen received the message in February 1642 that the truce would become effective in the East Indies one year after receiving Dom João IV’s ratified copy in The Hague. Van Diemen thereupon coldly informed his Portuguese guests that hostilities would continue until that date. Although the truce was originally meant to cover all territories and dependencies of the two concluding parties, Van Diemen was clearly reluctant to comply with this stipulation. Riding the crest the VOC’s ascending power; he was all too keen to protract the hostilities in a bid to secure possession of as many territories as possible before an anticipated status-quo would set in. The truce between the Estado da Índia and the VOC finally became effective on 25 January 1645, but already in September 1652 the VOC declared an end to it, as she was keen to further strengthen her position in Ceylon. Although the formal administration of the Estado da Índia gradually lost ground, and the Portuguese lost many settlements to the Dutch, this did not mean an end to the Portuguese presence in those areas. Portuguese cultural and even economic presence continued for a very long time, in many cases even into the twentieth century. This Portuguese Diaspora in the Indian Ocean has been aptly called by George Winius and Markus Vink the Portuguese Shadow Empire.

76 Wickeren 2010, p. 34.  
77 Wickeren 2010, p. 53.
The Administrative Set-up

Theoretically the high government in Batavia was accountable to the board of directors of the VOC in Amsterdam, but in actual practice the governor-general had a very large measure of autonomy and discretionary authority, if only because of the distance that separated the Indies and the Republic. Communications were extremely slow, so the High Government took its decisions on a day-to-day basis. Batavia in essence functioned as the headquarters of the East Indies Empire and its reach and impact on places like Malacca was far more incisive and direct than any decision taken in Amsterdam. There was also a fair measure of comings and goings between Batavia and the various settlements, so that the latter functioned as the periphery for Batavia that functioned as the centre of the empire. What obtained in Batavia could also be observed in Malacca, if on a more modest scale and less articulated.

Most Dutch settlements shared some typical features. They were often located at the mouth of a river, or inlet or island. They had a fort or citadel, which were home to the administrative, military and to some extent the economic functions of the town. Beyond Malacca town proper lay its suburbs. The Tengkera district was located on the northern side of town, while Bandarhilir was located to the south of the fort, both along the coast. Bunga Raya and Bukit China lay further inland. The aforementioned map of 1744 shows an orderly grid of roads and alleys connecting the various areas. A little further upstream along the river lay Kampong Java and Kampong Malay. To all intents and purposes the scale of the town was small. In 1729 William Dampier wrote: “Malacca is a pretty large town, of about 2 or 300 families of Dutch and Portuguese, many of which are a mixt breed between those nations. There are also many of the native Malayans inhabiting small cottages on the skirts of the town. The Dutch houses are built with stones, and the streets are wide and straight, but not paved. At the north west of the town there is a wall and gate to pass in and out: and a small fort always guarded with soldiers. The town stands on a level low ground, close by the sea. The land on the back-side of the town seems to be morassy, and on the west-side, without the wall, there are gardens of fruits and herbs, and some fair Dutch houses: but that quarter is chiefly the habitation of the Malayans. On the east-side of the town, there is a small river which at a spring-tide will admit barks to enter. About 100 paces from the sea there is a draw-bridge, which leads from the midst of the town to a strong fort, built on the east-side of the river.”

---

78 Dampier 1931, p. 110.
VOC jurisdiction of the town did not cover more than four or five miles in radius. The major ethnic communities were the Dutch Burghers, the Malays, the Peranakan-Chinese, the Kelings and the Portuguese Eurasians. There were also large numbers of slaves. Gradually, the presence of the Dutch Burgher population diminished towards the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This tendency went hand in hand with the decline of the VOC and the contraction of the Dutch East Indies Empire into the Indonesian archipelago.

A main street or canal often ran across the town and there was a special area designated for the civilian residents. In Malacca this was the grid of streets already mentioned. The officers and administrators usually lived in the town's fort, which also served as the main defence area. Markets, bazaars, places of worship and residential areas were in the town. During the Dutch period the town could be subdivided into three main sections: the Fort, where only Company servants and Dutch free burghers were allowed to live; the town was intersected by streets with names such as Heerenstraat (Gentlemen’s street), Jonkerstraat (Squire street), Goudsmidstraat (Goldsmith street), Eerstbrugwalstraat (First Bridge Wall street), Secondebrugwalstraat (Second Bridge Wall street), Derdebrugwalstraat (Third Bridge Wall street) and Vischerstraat (Fisherman's street); these streets led into the outer suburbs, Tengkera, Bandarhilir, Bunga Raya and Bukit China.

80 The officials employed by the VOC (soldiers, bureaucrats, Calvinist ministers or predikanten) were called dienaaren (servants), while others European residents (settlers, merchants, artisans, and tavern keepers) were called vrijburghers or vrijluiden ('free burghers').

In the VOC settlements administrative power was shared by a number of officials. There was an elaborate rotation among Company servants, who were promoted, demoted or reassigned from one factory to another or one settlement to another. In this sense Malacca was part of a loosely integrated system in which Company servants moved about. All settlements were nodes in a huge network, and together formed a loose unity. Often the governor also held the concurrent post of Raad van India (‘Councillor of the Indies’). This Dutch term raad both denotes a college and each of the individual members of the college that assisted the governor-general in Batavia. There were two kinds of councillor: council in ordinary of India and councillor extra-ordinary of India. The first one took part in the decisions, while the second had only an advisory capacity. Both positions represented however stations of considerable prestige. François Valentyn

79 Raben 1996, pp. 33-34.
80 Nordin 2007, p. 137.
(1666–1727), the well-known predikant, naturalist and author of the monumental Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën (“East-Indies Then and Now”), gives a list of Company servants stationed in Malacca: 1. landvoogden van Malakka; 2. opper-kooplieden en tweede persoons van Malakka; 3. capiteins van Malakka; 4. sjahbandaars van Malakka; 5. fiscaals van Malakka; 6. fiscaals independent; 7. soldy-boekhouders van Malakka; 8. geheimschryvers van Malakka; 9. winkeliers van Malakka; 10. opperhoofden van Peirab; 11. opperhoofden van Ligoor; 12. cassiers van Malakka; 13. dispensiers van Malakka etc.\(^{81}\) The most important was the landvoogd (‘governor’). He was responsible for political, military, criminal and civil matters. He was accountable to the governor-general in Batavia. Next in the hierarchy came the opperoopman (‘chief merchant’), also called tweede persoon (‘second person’) or secunde. His position was tantamount to that of vice-governor. Next came the position of capitein (‘captain’), a position that in the case of Malacca was only irregularly filled. The same is true for the syahbandar (‘harbour master’), the prime customs officer, controlling the commercial activities in the port, including the fight against smuggling and contraband, supervising weights and measures, and keeping a register of incoming and outgoing vessels. Fiskaal was the name of the head of police or prosecutor. The last date Valentyn mentions is 1725, which is the year his book saw publication. As we approach that year of closure of redaction, we see increasingly big gaps in the succession of the incumbents. That many of these positions were filled irregularly most probably is suggestive of the waning importance of Malacca. The governor and the chief merchants seem to have been the two positions that somehow sufficed to run the place. Even for the syahbandar there are considerable gaps in between two successive incumbents. The list of governors contains only a few well-known Company servants. One of them is Johan Anthoniszoon “Jan” van Riebeeck (1619–1677), the founder of Cape Town, who served as governor of Malacca from 1662 to 1665. The Company servant who left the strongest mark on the seventeenth century history of Malacca was Balthasar Bort, a man best known for his missions to China in 1662, 1663 and 1664. It is possible to follow his career in Malacca in the list given by Valentyn. We find him as geheimschryver (‘secretary’) between 1646 and 1649, as fiscaal (‘prosecutor’) in 1649 and briefly again in 1656, as opperhoofd in Ligoor (a trading post in the Kingdom of Ayutthaya) in 1656, and opperoopman (‘chief merchant’) and tweede persoon (‘second person’) in Malacca from 1656 to 1657. In 1665 Bort was promoted as bevelhebber (‘commander’) and voorzitter (president of the Council of Justice). In 1668 he was awarded the title of landvoogd (‘governor’). In 1670 he was promoted buiten-gemeen raad van India (councillor extra-ordinary of the Indies) and in

1678 made it to *gemeen raad van India* (‘councillor in ordinary of the Indies’). Bort left a report on Malacca, which constitutes a real treasure trove of information on the settlement in the second half of the seventeenth century.

The community of Christians was administered by the *predikant* (‘minister’). Other typical Dutch civilian institutions were the *schutterij* (‘civilian militia’), the *wijkmeester* (‘district head’), the *brandspuitmeester* (‘chief fireman’) and the lamplighter. The civilian and religious spheres touch one another in the charitable bodies, such as the *diakonij*, *diakonie* or *diaconie* (‘diaconate’), which supervised the relief of the poor and the needy, and the *weeskamer* (‘Orphan Chamber’ or ‘orphanage’). It must be noted that the orphanage had considerable funds at its disposal, and that as a result it served as a lending institution, providing financial resources for the residents.\(^8^2\) The Dutch Reformed Church enjoyed a privileged status, but Catholicism was condoned.

**Malacca Society**

The Portuguese-Eurasian community was large enough to resist absorption into the larger Asian population. For the offspring of unions between migrant Asians and local women the situation was slightly different. Offspring of migrant Chinese with local women tended to identify with the ethnic identity of the father, and formed the Chinese Peranakan or Baba community.\(^8^3\) Offspring of Indian Muslims and native women, identified as the Jawi-Pekan, tended to be more easily integrated into the Malay community. As a result the administration classified the Baba and Jawi Pekan with the ethnic group they identified with. Official classification of the various communities did not neatly reflect the complexity of the ethnic, religious and cultural mosaic of Malacca’s population. It was easy enough to lump the Dutch officials of the VOC and the Dutch burgher community together, but the Asians were a very diverse population. Each community tended to segregate itself from the rest.\(^8^4\)

Segregation was not a feature introduced by the Dutch but originated in the days of the sultanate, when each foreign group lived in a separate quarter. Since the fifteenth century, Malacca had developed into a thriving centre of interregional trade and attracted many foreigners of diverse background and dealing in various commodities. Since they

---

\(^8^2\) Nordin 2007, p. 130.
\(^8^3\) See Clammer 1983, pp. 156-173.
\(^8^4\) Nordin 2007, pp. 271-272.
usually did not represent any polity or community, but simply themselves or a private ship-owner, they could not be easily fitted into the prevailing system of tributary relations, nor could they, due to their different backgrounds and the temporary character of their stay, be treated as subjects of the sultanate. Nevertheless, some system had to be devised to regulate the relations of the various foreign communities with the ruler as well as among themselves. Thus, as was the case in many other port cities, the sultanate of Malacca had instituted a system of segregation and extraterritoriality. On the basis of ethnic, cultural, linguistic and/or religious background, or the kind of commodities they traded in, the foreigners were housed in separate quarters and were allowed to enforce their own laws. The major foreign groups were put under the direct management of a headman, who was responsible for maintaining law and order within the group and represented the group vis-à-vis the local potentate. This made it easier for the ruler to exert control over these foreign residents, since he had only to deal with a few representatives. Maintaining law and order was left to the headmen, who were expert in the legal customs of the community they managed. This was a convenient arrangement, especially in matters of family and inheritance law. This kind of legal pluralism was typical of most cities and states in South and South East Asia. One could either see it as a measure of the fragmented power relations in these cities and states, or a microcosmic replica of the tribute relations between states, in the sense that the headman somehow acted as a vassal vis-à-vis his suzerain. The segregation naturally was reflected in the spatial layout of the city. In the sultanate Malacca, there were four headmen. They were known as syahbandar (harbour masters). They maintained contact with the ruler, administered justice and acted as commanders in times of conflict. There was a syahbandar for the Gujaratis of north-western India, one for the merchants from Coromandel, Bengal, Pegu and Pasai (in northern Sumatra), one for the residents from Java, Moluccas, Banda, Palembang, Borneo and Luzon, and one for the Chinese, people from the kingdom of the Ryūkyūs, and Champa. Smaller communities were subsumed under one of these big four no doubt on the basis of (presumed) cultural, ethnic or religious affinity. Since polities and identities were appear to have been rather fluid in maritime Southeast Asia, there was generally no strong feeling of “nation”, let alone a sense of being a citizen of one particular nation. Allegiances went in the first place to rulers and religion, although there were also exceptions. Chinese, Japanese and Persians, for instance, had a strong sense of identity, based on the long history of the polities they belonged to, their long cultural tradition, their distinct writing systems etc.

85 Bosma and Raben 2008, p. 4.
What we get is a kaleidoscopic picture with institutionalised segregation through the appointment of *syahbandar*, and the settlement of residents in separate districts or enclosed *kampons*, and day-to-day life where the borderlines between the various groups were allegedly porous.\(^86\) Mixing and integration were inevitable, even when not desirable for ideological, religious or ethnic reasons. It is undeniable that the groups harboured many prejudices vis-à-vis one another. The Islamic Malay inhabitants of Malacca were outraged at the Chinese practice of eating pork.\(^87\) Religious identity was arguably stronger than ethnic, as is testified by the fact that in Malacca marriage between Muslims of different geographical backgrounds were quite common.\(^88\)

When the Portuguese took possession of Malacca, they inherited this structure of segregation in *kampons* and extraterritoriality. It continued to exist until the end of Portuguese rule, and was subsequently inherited by the Dutch. This system relieved the colonial administration of the need to interfere in the internal affairs of the various communities, although the segregation gradually took on more bureaucratic and legal characteristics under the European colonial administrations.\(^89\) As a result certain areas in town could be identified with a particular ethnic community, although there was a large measure of fluidity. Dutch officials lived in the reserved area of the fort, while the burghers and other Europeans mostly resided in the Kampong Belanda (Herenstraat and Jonkerstraat), the prime area in the town. The Portuguese Eurasians tended to be clustered in the areas of Tenquera and Bandarhilir. The foreigners generally lived within the town, while the majority of Malays lived in the outskirts. There was also a Kampong Java (outside the town), a Kampong China (Goudsmidstraat and Eerstebrugwalstraat), a Kampong Serani (further north of the town), a Kampong Pali (between the Seconde and Derdebrugwalstraat) and a Kampong Kling (Colijstraat). By the end of the eighteenth century however, segregation had largely blurred. Areas formerly exclusively populated by the Dutch Burghers (Herenstraat and Jonkerstraat) became the homes of affluent Chinese. Wealth instead of ethnic background had become the decisive criterion for the choice of district. Herenstraat and Jonkerstraat remained the exclusive streets, and were lined with houses built from bricks and roofed with tiles.\(^90\)

\(^86\) Bosma and Raben 2003, p. 19.
\(^87\) Bosma and Raben 2003, p. 20.
\(^88\) Bosma and Raben 2008, p. 7.
\(^89\) Bosma and Raben 2003, p. 27; Bosma and Raben 2008, p. 15.
\(^90\) Nordin 2007, p. 141.
The European Community in Malacca

The European community consisted of VOC officials, Dutch Burghers, and other Europeans engaged in commercial activities. Over time the town became the permanent home of a sizeable number of Europeans, who had decided to settle in Asia rather than return to Europe. Many owned land and houses and enjoyed a higher status in Malacca society than they normally would have in their own homeland. Many were married with Eurasians or locals and settled permanently in the colony.\(^91\)

The Dutch living in the various settlements gradually developed an overseas Dutch community, knit together by ties of interest, friendship or family relationships. This was made possible by the practice of moving officials from one colony to the other, and making appointments on the ground of family connections. There were burgher communities in Batavia, Colombo and other Dutch towns in the East, where some of the burgher men could find a bride in lieu of waiting in vain for one from Europe.\(^92\) The scarcity of European women was somewhat mitigated by their mobility within Asia. European brides, if found, were often found in other settlements than the one the bridegroom was residing in. This was made possible by the frequent connections between the various settlements. In the early days it was common for widows to remarry. Over time, as living conditions improved, more European women would come out to the East, a fact that eased the problem of gender imbalance, but as rule European men always outnumbered that of women.\(^93\) The VOC officials relied largely on the co-operation and goodwill of the burgher community for the day-to-day administration of the town. This was especially true in the declining years of Dutch Malacca, when there was a dearth of regular officials. Burghers were notably involved in social welfare and the administration of orphans and children. They also assisted in security tasks and the maintenance of roads and bridges.\(^94\)

Many members of the Dutch community owned property in land. Newbold wrote: “After the British had taken possession of Malacca, in 1825, it was found that scarcely a foot of land with the exception of a few spots near the town, belonged to Government; that the propriety rights in the soil of the whole territory of Malacca had been given away to various individuals, by the Dutch, reserving the right of imposing a land-tax on the whole.”\(^95\) Although we do not have a full picture of the property distribution among the

\(^{91}\) Nordin 2007, p. 273.
\(^{92}\) There were many such marriages. See e.g. Christiaans 1986, pp. 257-287.
\(^{93}\) Nordin 2007, p. 274.
\(^{94}\) Nordin 2007, p. 275.
\(^{95}\) Newbold 1839, p. 162.
various communities, lists of mortgage documents in the Orphan Chamber reveal that the majority of borrowers were the Burghers, followed by the Chinese, Malays, Kelings and the Portuguese-Eurasians. They also show that many of these Burghers owned houses and land. However, by the nineteenth century, most of the property in the elite areas had moved into the hands of the Chinese. Many Burghers had migrated to Batavia after the English takeover, ceding their property in the Heren [i.e. Heeren] and Jonker streets to rich Chinese. The displacement of the Burghers by the ethnic Chinese is a telling testimony of the transformation Malacca underwent in the nineteenth century: from an Asian town with a strong European minority to a town dominated by Asian migrants.\(^96\)

The linguistic situation in Malacca and similar port towns was one of co-existence of several languages, of diglossia or heteroglossia, of several languages, all with specifically defined uses and range of application. These languages were not used in a proficient way, but were usually vernaculars of reduced scope, but they had their own sphere of use and co-existed. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, both during the period of colonisation and after, there was an increasing drive towards the installation of a singular, unitary standard language, to be used in all circumstances, in all spheres of life and for all purposes. This trend towards a single language is typical of the nation state, whose most fundamental value is unity and overriding goal is unification. A residue of the former, multilingual situation is the continued existence of a Portuguese creole called Kristang, which is still spoken by some in present-day Malacca.

### A World Apart

We tend to conceive of the colonial realities in terms of the nineteenth and twentieth century, when colonial governments tried to replicate the social and institutional structures of the metropolis, but before the 1800s the colonial world was quite different from what the colonizers would have wished it to be.

The world of the port-cities and the colonies in general during the seventeenth and eighteenth century practically constituted a parallel universe. Very few people in the metropolitan areas or metropolis, whether they were elite or common populace, had any specific and concrete notion of what was going on in the colonies. It was something that was going on as if behind a curtain. They had to rely on reports sent from the nodes of empire or on stories of returnees. Basically the people who were populating the colonies

---

were very much left to their own devices and had to fend for themselves. They largely organised their own lives and this meant a good deal of accommodation with local ways. Ideally, a man was not supposed to marry coloured women but in the colonies he did if only because of the dearth of European women. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century demographic dearth was the reality. In the early days of European presence in Asia, there were usually a few tens of Europeans, at best a few hundreds residing in any settlement. Even in the major settlements, there were seldom more than a few thousand Europeans, and most of these were born in Asia. Reliable statistics for Portuguese migration to Asia and demographic figures for Portuguese settlements are hard to come by, but according to some estimates, during the sixteenth century yearly migration of Portuguese to Asia did not exceed 2,000. The majority did not even stay in Asia. During the seventeenth century Portuguese migration further declined. In 1635 the Portuguese António Bocarro estimated the total number of Portuguese colonists in Asia: 6,700 white colonists (casados brancos) and at least 7,500 black colonists (casados pretos). Of the white colonists almost a quarter were members of religious orders. Goa, the capital of the Estado da Índia, did not count more than 800 white and 2,200 black colonists. Although it is not clear whether these figures include military and civil servants, it is at any rate, a very low number for a city that was the capital of a seaborne empire. In 1800 there were no more than 1,800 Europeans and their descendants in Goa. We have some more figures for the Dutch settlements in Asia, but initially the number of migrants from the Republic was more or less equal to that from Portugal. Each year a few thousand made the voyage to Asia, and most eventually returned to the motherland. In the course of the seventeenth century, what with the increase of the fleet, the movements of goods, and the increase of employment provided by the VOC, the numbers steadily increased.

The personnel of the VOC grew as time went on. In 1625 the Company had about 2,200 people on board its ships en route and about 4,500 people in its service overseas. Almost half of its personnel were sailing personnel. In 1688 the total number had grown to 22,000 people; the European segment of this body amounted to about 16,000 men. Around 1750 the VOC had 23,000 European servants on a total of 35,000, while in 1780 Europeans accounted for 18,550 on a total of 27,000 persons. In the course of time an increasing proportion of her European servants came from outside the Republic. Around 1660 sixty five percent of the soldiers and 35 percent of the sailing personnel of the VOC were foreigners. A century later, in 1770, the percentages had risen to 80% and 50%

---

97 Bosma and Raben 2008, p. 15; Bosma and Raben 2003, p. 27.
98 Bosma and Raben 2008, p. 15; Bosma and Raben 2003, p. 28.
respectively. Among the higher echelons of the Company servants these percentages were much lower, but even there one could find quite a few non-Dutch people. There were especially many Germans in the employ of the VOC, either as soldier or as company employee. The absolute number of Dutchmen in the Indies was always quite limited. No creole language on the basis of Dutch evolved. Afrikaans, a language derived from Dutch, does not qualify as a creole language.

In 1632 Batavia already counted at least 8,000 residents. 2,368 of them were employees of the VOC and Europeans. They reached their peak around 1700, when around 3,400 Europeans and mestizos were living in and around Batavia, not counting the more than 3,000 soldiers stationed in the fortresses and guardrooms. In 1813, after the British had occupied the city, Batavia and its environs counted 2,299 Europeans and their descendants. This figure gradually picked up, to reach the number of 6,386 (of whom 4,043 were born in the Indies) in 1870. Batavia was indisputably the most European city of the Dutch maritime empire. Colombo (in Ceylon), the second city of the Dutch East India Company, counted about 2,200 Europeans and mestizos, of whom more than 1,600 were company employees. In 1678 Malacca counted no more than 145 vrijburgers (Free Burghers, free European citizens), 666 company employees and their families, and 1,489 mestizos and “Portuguese.” During most of the eighteenth century the VOC employed about 20,000 European employees, mostly on a temporary contract, throughout Asia. The majority of the newcomers only stayed for a limited time. The long-term settled population numbered several thousands. These numbers seem surprisingly low, but we must take into account that neither Batavia nor the other colonial cities in Asia were settlement colonies, such as they developed in North America. In the colonial settlements of the other powers, there were even less Europeans. In 1756 there were only 671 European men and 80 European women in British Calcutta (today’s Kolkara). Around 1810 there were only 250 European women and 4,000 European men in Bengal, the centre of British India. These are telling figures that illustrate how severe the gender imbalance was in the colonies. Until the late nineteenth century most colonial migrants were soldiers and the military accounted for the majority of the male European newcomers. Although stationed in barracks they left a deep imprint on colonial society, in as much as they were one of the most active sections in concubinage and prostitution. But they were by no means the only ones. The majority of

99 Schutte 2002b, p. 45.
100 Described in Gelder 1997.
102 Bosma and Raben 2003, p. 28.
103 Bosma and Raben 2003, p. 29.
the men had to engage in a relationship of some sort with an indigenous woman. Several things that would not have been tolerated in Europe were therefore being openly practised or at least winked at in the settlements. Many men had female slaves or common-law wives. Powerful or rich Europeans practised de facto a kind of polygamy in the colonies, and this was condoned and tolerated, if not allowed. The VOC authorities would have wished it otherwise, and regularly issued orders against mixed marriages, but in vain. Their efforts to neatly formalise social distinctions and control public and private life with laws and regulations were doomed from the start. Imposition of metropolitan standards of conduct and ethics was simply not an option. Practices openly or surreptitiously flouting these rules went largely uncontested because the colonies had their own rules. It was only in the nineteenth century that colonial empires were gradually taking shape and that integration of the colony and the motherland into an identical or at least similar frame or set of values became possible, was pursued, imposed and enforced consistently and efficiently. As a result tolerance for these practices grew less and less.

**The Indische Wereld**

When we try to picture the social fabric of the Dutch settlements in Asia, we come across a cultural identity that has been called in Dutch *de Indische wereld* (meaning: the world of the Dutch East Indies).\(^\text{104}\) This is a rather fluid concept, but in essence it denotes the world of Eurasians. “Eurasian” denotes a person of mixed European and Asian ancestry. In the case of Malaya ‘European’ refers to Portuguese, Dutch or English. The Malayan Eurasian Union’s\(^\text{105}\) definition of ‘Eurasian’ is said to be “A person of mixed European and Asian descent whose progenitor in the male line is of European descent.”\(^\text{106}\) In our case, we therefore are dealing with Portuguese-Eurasians and Dutch-Eurasians. Dutch-Eurasians are even more ‘hybrid’ than their Portuguese equivalents, because their male progenitor is himself the result of a mixed union. Eurasians, although racially or ethnically having a fair measure of Asian blood, and whose lives were inextricably interwoven with the *Indische* world, thought of themselves as people of European descent,

\(^\text{104}\) The term has been adopted as such in Bosma and Raben 2008 and may well gain general coinage in English language studies as well. The Dutch word *Indië* is the equivalent of the Portuguese *Índia* in the word *Estado da Índia*. *Indisch* is the adjective derived from *Indië*.

\(^\text{105}\) A citizen’s interest group uniting Eurasians from the six Malayan states and settlements, formed in 1947, in the run-up to Malayan independence.

\(^\text{106}\) De Witt 2007, p. 207.
as fundamentally different from the other ethnic groups, most of all the indigenous people.\textsuperscript{107} They were born and raised in the Indies, and this world constituted the prime horizon of their experience and world view. Thus, after one or two generations of colonists arriving from Europe, a new community gradually emerged, neither wholly European nor entirely Asian, a world of its own, a local \textit{Indische} community. The \textit{Indische wereld} was essentially the unintended product of the demographic imbalance between the elite of newcomers and the indigenous majority, and above all by the gender imbalance. The \textit{Indische wereld} had in point of fact a maternal lineage. The European world was typically male. It was maintained as a legal fiction through the family name, the Christian name (in proof of baptism) and European-style clothing. In case one was not born in Europe, a European name could be a substitute for birth in Europe. Therefore to have a European name became a decisive criterion for belonging to the European community. To have a Dutch or German name somehow elevated one to the status of European, next came the Portuguese name, and only then an Asian name. The differences in ancestry were also translated in clothing: all European and \textit{mestizo} men were given European-style clothes, European women received skirts, whereas \textit{mestizo} women were given \textit{kebaya} (Dutch: \textit{kabaja}), the native style of clothing for Asian women.\textsuperscript{108} Conversely, when at the end of the nineteenth century European women migrated to the colonies in far greater numbers than had hitherto been the case, European society, especially the administrative and economic elite, asserted more vigorously its cultural and social bonds with the motherland.\textsuperscript{109} The British were even more outspoken and vigorous in promoting the European culture and style of living.

The most typical — and by this very same token the least typical — colonial city in the Dutch Indies was no doubt Batavia. The morphology of the city was quite exceptional, in that the pre-existing conditions of the former settlements had little imprint on the subsequent shaping of the colonial town. It therefore displayed the typical planning, layout and architecture of a Dutch town, reflecting a master plan that had been modelled on those of Dutch architects and planners.\textsuperscript{110} Since Batavia looms so large in the scheme of the Dutch colonial empire, it is hard to resist the temptation to attune the sociological description of Malacca explicitly or implicitly to Batavia. Batavia functions as the yardstick, with which to contrast the other settlements. Malacca naturally shared a number of

\textsuperscript{107} Bosma and Raben 2008, p. xiii.
\textsuperscript{108} Bosma and Raben 2003, p. 59.
\textsuperscript{109} Bosma and Raben 2003, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{110} Nordin 2007, p. 129.
characteristics encountered in Batavia, but at the same time it also displayed distinctive features. Moreover, there is no doubt that in the initial phase of Dutch administration Malacca still bore heavily the Portuguese imprint. Thus, every settlement had a number of particularistic aspects that set it apart from Batavia. The *Indische wereld* was not a uniform monolithic world, but rather comparable to a string of loosely threaded beads, a chain of nodes. Each of these had its own identity, own culture, family networks, and typical ethnic and social make-up. So too, Malacca, even perhaps more than other places, due to its Portuguese history. A city of administrators, such as Batavia, was quite different from a garrison town, a port or a plantation community. In Batavia the proportion of newcomers was higher, because there were numerous positions to be filled in the VOC or the colonial government. Moreover, many local “European” men also found a position in the VOC or the colonial government, so that the expatriate culture could strike deeper root than in other settlements, where the administrative hierarchy was small by comparison. In places such as Colombo and Malacca the influx of newcomers was quite limited, so that creolisation proceeded more rapidly and deeply than in Batavia. The less dependent the local community was on the Company or the government, the stronger it deviated from the typical colonial social pattern. In settlements which boasted a sizable community of indigenous Christians, men could more easily find eligible brides, as a result of which they were less inclined to abide by the “colonial” rules and prejudices that underlay the social stratification.\(^{111}\)

Yet at the same time, all these beads or nodes were connected with one another through the VOC or later, the colonial government. The VOC and later the colonial government was the major employer, thus providing an institutional framework for the colonial society. This community was the product of a continual flow of migrants from Europe, mostly males, who produced offspring who in varying degrees identified themselves with the motherland or the Indies *milieu*.

The identity of this group of people was fluid and dynamic. They saw themselves as European in distinction to the natives, but the “real” Europeans and the newcomers saw them as *Indisch*. The colonial authorities, whether the VOC or the colonial government, set up their own rules in order to define who qualified as “European” and who was indigenous. The criteria which drew the dividing line between “European” and “native” had to be and indeed were watered-down, as an expedient to retain enough members in

\(^{111}\) Bosma and Raben 2003, p. 12.
the group of the ruling minority. Thus the status of mestizos could vary considerably over time, depending on whether there were many newcomers, or on the contrary, the stream of migrants had dwindled to a trickle. Mestizos were not marginal as is often contended, but functioned as intermediaries between European and Asian members of the colonial community. The dividing line between mestizo and European was quite arbitrary, certainly when defined in racial terms. Most Europeans in the Indies were born in the Indies, from Indische parents. The majority of them had a family history that spanned several generations in the East Indies. This “historical” element was more than the mere racial distinction implied in the word mestizo. Much more useful is the term “Indies-born Europeans,” which refers to “creolised Europeans” who might or might not have had mixed parentage. Moreover, we must not forget the role slaves played in the process of hybridisation and integration, because they were often involved in relationships with male immigrants. The offspring of these slaves contributed considerably to the growth of the population in the colonial cities of Maritime Southeast Asia.

Many of the Europeans, notably the Dutch had a bevy of slaves. The majority of them were Indonesians from the archipelago. They worked in the homes of the burghers, helped in their enterprises, were engaged in trade, manufacturing or agriculture. The Dutch owned the highest number of slaves in most of their settlements. In Colombo Europeans owned 70 percent of the slaves in 1694. This amounted to an average of almost 11 slaves per household. In Ambon they owned 59 percent with an average of almost five per household. There are apparently no figures available for Batavia, or Malacca, but these figures are probably indicative for Batavia and Malacca as well. In Batavia there was a community of so-called Mardijkers, the name commonly used for inland Christians. Their numbers appear to fluctuate up and down with the number of European residents in the city, which points to a close correlation between the number of Europeans and the

---

112 Bosma and Raben 2003, pp. 9-10.
113 Since mestizo is a term with a complex connotation, implying meanings that vary according to the region it is used in, we have to be careful. Nordin 2007, p. 128 seems to distinguish between Eurasian and mestizo. Eurasian denotes the offspring of a European and an Asian, while mestizo refers to descendants of Asian immigrants and natives. This distinction is certainly not used by all authors.
115 Bosma and Raben 2008, p. xvi.
118 From the Sanskrit mabarddbika (=free), i.e. manumitted slaves who had been shipped from Portuguese settlements in India, who were christened and bore Portuguese names.
manumission of Christian slaves. Slaves were the linchpin of Batavia’s colonial economy. They were put to work on Company dockyards, were employed as household personnel, performers in orchestras, labourers in agriculture etc. Female slaves also commonly served as the sexual partners of their masters.\(^{119}\)

Batavia was atypical in the string, in that it was the only node that had real city-like features, although it was not the best of places to live in. During the eighteenth century it often fell victim to outbreaks of malaria, exacting a heavy death-toll.\(^{120}\) Other places had less company employees, less government employees, and were much more \textit{Indisch}: the influence of European culture was much weaker, the indigenization of the Europeans went much deeper, \textit{mestizos} and hybrids were the rule, not the exception. There was a huge gap between the European elite in Batavia and the “Europeans” in those other nodes, who were located around Batavia like a string of satellites. Malacca evidently was such a satellite. Its distinctiveness lay in the fact that it had a previous history of 130 years of Portuguese rule, where a process similar to the one I have described above and which is commonly called mestisation, hybridisation, creolisation, had already taken place, with the Portuguese playing the role of “Europeans”. The upshot was that there was a wide range of distinctive groups that ran the gamut between “European” and “native.” \textit{Mestizo} Dutch would refer to dark-skinned Eurasians as Portuguese, whereas white Dutch newcomers would refer to settled Dutchmen as \textit{Indisch}. The child of a Dutch father and a native mother could easily join the ranks of the Europeans if registered as such by the authorities. The practice of the colonial authorities acknowledging these children as European, if they were recognized or adopted by the European father, was vital to maintain the stock of Europeans. The legal status as European made them eligible for a European education. There was no racially homogeneous European population. If one carried a European name one was supposed to be ‘European.’ They thus created a legal fiction about the ethnic background of persons in an attempt to increase the European minority. Adoption often went hand in hand with baptism. During the seventeenth century the Church required that a child first be adopted by notary deed before it could be baptised.\(^{121}\) Adoption was thus a kind of compensation for the breach of good Christian morals. In actual practice there was little unity among these people: elite, soldiers and poor city dwellers.\(^{122}\) Perceived ethnicity was not so much based on biological affinity as

\(^{119}\) Bosma and Raben 2003, p. 55.
\(^{120}\) Bosma and Raben 2003, p. 73.
\(^{121}\) Bosma and Raben 2008, p. 43.
\(^{122}\) Bosma and Raben 2003, p. 67.
on name, adoption, christening and clothing. Natural male children, once baptised, bore a Christian name and wore Western clothes, whereas girls would often be baptised and be given a Christian name, but in matters of dress and habit stick to the *Indische* style. Skin colour was not the primary criterion, but baptism and naming.

Not only Europeans practised concubinage, it was also widespread among Asian Christians. Among slaves, as well as between a European and a slave, no formal marriage was in principle possible. One first had to be christened. Moreover it was impossible for two partners to marry if they were practitioners of different religions. This was forbidden by *Plakkaat*. Among the higher echelons of the Company servants, the general tendency was to marry. The authorities officially encouraged formal marital bonds, but there was also social pressure to formally marry, since family relationship was usually an excellent means to secure a better professional position or maintain it. With the passage of time, the number of Europeans born in the Indies gradually increased, and they naturally had an interest in a regulated marital regime too. Nevertheless, some Company servants still seem to have preferred concubinage over marriage. By definition concubinage was a practice that was not officially accepted, but simply condoned. The most widespread variant of concubinage was no doubt the relationship with a slave or a so-called housekeeper. This could easily be practised at home behind walls, and was impossible to control.

Describing the policy of the Company in the early seventeenth century Bosma and Raben note that the Company also promoted regular marriage because it was seen as a way to promote colonisation of their settlements. Attempts to ship large numbers of men and women from the motherland to the colonies had proven abortive. Starting in 1622 a great number of so-called ‘Company daughters’ arrived in Batavia. These were unmarried women from the orphanages in the Republic, who were shipped by the Company as possible brides of Company servants. The effects of the marriage policy soon manifested itself. Shortly after the establishment of a Church council and the promulgation of a ban on concubinage in Batavia, the number of marriages showed a marked increase. Between October 1621 and January 1623 no less than 175 couples were married by the *predikanten*. 63 bridegrooms were Company servants, 17 were free burghers and 95 were Asians. In the ten years between 1622 and 1631 no less than 379 European women were married in Batavia. This figure represented 41 percent of all Christian marriages in that period. European women tended to marry Company servants of the higher echelons, while Asian women usually became the brides of Free Burghers and Company servants of the lower

---

123 Bosma and Raben 2003, p. 42.
124 Bosma and Raben 2003, p. 43.
ranks. After ten years the experiment with the ‘Company daughters’ was abandoned. It proved too expensive and many of the women longed to return to the motherland. In the 1630s the High Government reversed its policy and discouraged the marriage of Company servants, decreeing that they could only marry after getting permission of the governor-general. This boded the end of the colonisation policy of the VOC. As a result the number of marriages dropped dramatically, from 70 per year before 1634 to less than half that number afterwards. However, regardless of Company policy, European women continued to make the crossing, although in limited numbers, thus keeping the gender imbalance among Europeans acute. European women continued to make the crossing and became the bride of Company servants in higher positions, while servants of the lower echelons took Asian women as their wives. The gender imbalance thus had strong repercussions on social class.\textsuperscript{125} Although the data given by Bosma and Raben relate in the first place to Batavia, they are indicative of similar trends and attitudes prevailing in the other settlements including Malacca. If anything, these trends were even more outspoken in the peripheral settlements, since the likelihood of any European women, travelling there was even smaller. As an alternative to shipping Dutch brides to the colonies, the governors of the VOC encouraged local marriages between Company servants and indigenous women, which in time gave rise to an \textit{Indische} community of European men and their \textit{mestizo} children, who bore their name and were adopted within the European community.

By its incorporation into the framework of Dutch administration, Malacca gradually took on many features common to all areas under Dutch rule in the East Indies. Many of these features were common to most Asian colonial towns, including phenomena such as segregation along ethnic lines, a pluralistic population of immigrants and natives; and an Asian majority ruled by a European minority.\textsuperscript{126} In Malacca the Dutch thus constituted a small minority ruling over a population made up of a small group of “Europeans” and a larger group of Asians. Just as in many other towns, the Asian population consisted of Malays, Chinese, Kelings, Moors and slaves,\textsuperscript{127} while the Europeans comprised VOC employees and soldiers, burghers, as well as the descendants of unions between Portuguese men and local women. The latter constituted a fairly sizeable and stable community, who are usually referred to as Portuguese Eurasians. This phenomenon could also be observed in Batavia. Originally most of the slaves in Batavia came from India and Bali. Gradually

\textsuperscript{125} Bosma and Raben 2003, pp. 44-45.
\textsuperscript{126} See, Nordin 2007, Chapter Five: ‘Urban Traditions, Geography and Morphology.’
\textsuperscript{127} For a detailed description see Nordin 2007, Chapter Six: ‘Population Growth in Melaka and Penang.’
however, the supply of slaves from India was supplanted by slaves from the Indonesian archipelago. As a result, slaves from Indian origin gradually became a minority. The slaves from India usually spoke Portuguese, and Portuguese seems to have been the vehicular language in most of the slave-owning households. After manumission the slaves from India and Indonesia tended to join the Portuguese-speaking church community. Between October 1688 and February 1718 the Portuguese-speaking church admitted 4,426 persons as member, whereas the Malay-speaking church only accepted 306. During the eighteenth century the membership of the Portuguese church quietly dwindled, and the Mardijkers community eventually disappeared as a distinctive group.

The Mardijkers constituted a separate group within the Christian community in Batavia. They were identified as ‘Portuguese’, which meant that they had slave ancestry. This distinguished them from the European and mestizo members of the Christian community, although Mardijkers were a mixed bag, and in point of fact, many mestizos joined their ranks, or were undistinguishable from them. Generally speaking however, they had a dark brown skin. When someone was called ‘Portuguese’, it meant slave ancestry, even though he had earned his freedom many generations ago. They were accordingly looked down upon by the European and mestizo groups. And indeed, they had usually a dark brown skin, were often poor, and had little opportunity for careers.

The British looked askance at the tolerance of the Dutch vis-à-vis the Indische practices of their women folk, at least in areas where they constituted a tiny minority like in Malacca. Catharina Johanna Koek, who had a very Dutch name, but was a mestizo born in Malacca, married Abraham Couperus (1752 - 1813) in 1785. Couperus later became governor of Malacca and had the rather dubious honour of surrendering the port to the British in December 1795. When the English fleet called again at the port in January 1796, Couperus invited the British admiral and his retinue to a dinner. Of this occasion Captain and Secretary Walter Caulfield Lennon noted down his impressions in

---

128 Bosma and Raben 2003, p. 56.  
129 Bosma and Raben 2003, p. 57.  
130 Couperus was not really to blame. He surrendered the colony when the British handed him a copy of the so-called Kew Letters, written by Stadtholder William V, Prince of Orange, who had fled the Netherlands when the country was invaded by the French Revolutionary Army, and found refuge in the “Dutch House” at Kew Palace, England. In these letters he ordered in his capacity of Captain-general of the Dutch Republic the civil and military authorities in the provinces of Zeeland and Friesland, Dutch naval officers in British harbours, and Dutch colonial governors, to cooperate with Great Britain in its resistance against France. The letters to the colonial governors ordered them to surrender the colony they administered to the British “for safekeeping.” Couperus simply acted in response to this order. Incidentally, Abraham Couperus was the great-grandfather of the celebrated Dutch writer Louis Couperus (1863-1923).
his memoirs. About Mrs. Couperus, he writes: “Madam Couperus was dressed in the most unbecoming manner possible, a mixture between the Malay and the Portuguese, her outward garment being made exactly like a shift (hemdjurk), she looked as if she reversed the order of her dress altogether. Her hair was drawn so tight to the crown of her head, and the skin of her forehead so stretched, that she could scarce wink her eyelids; she seemed however very affable and well bred for a person never out of Malacca.” From this it is clear that even the wife of the Dutch governor stuck to her Indische lifestyle, which she had absorbed during her childhood, and that her husband apparently did not look askance at the habits of his wife. To the British however it looked as if she wore her undergarment on the outside. This must have been a long kebaya (Dutch: kabaja), perhaps trimmed with lace. The sarong and kebaya were not typical of Malacca, but a feature commonly found in most VOC settlements.

The weight of the maternal line is also apparent in the use of the language. When Dutchmen married Asian or Portuguese-Eurasian women, the language and the culture of the household were those of the mother: Malay or Creole Portuguese. In this way the offspring was brought up in a family environment where Dutch language and culture were hardly used. This trend was reinforced by the fact that Malay and Creole Portuguese were languages with a wide circulation among traders in the East Indies. The father often had a good command of one or both of these languages, whereas the mother usually had only a poor command of Dutch. In the administrative sphere Dutch was obviously the official language, but in the informal sphere, and in many homes, Creole Portuguese was the most widely used. Asian domestic helpers and slaves also would be conversant in Creole Portuguese. Portuguese-Eurasians were allegedly never fewer than four fifths of the total Eurasian population of Malacca. This goes a long way to explain the survival to this day of a Portuguese Creole language known as Christao or Kristang. Thus over time the Indische community assimilated all sorts of local customs and cuisine, often introduced into the domestic life of the Dutch burghers through the slaves. This influence manifested itself in the construction of the houses, and the food, including the habit of chewing sirih with betel nut, common among the Malays, and adopted by the Portuguese-Eurasian women. Lennon says about Madam Couperus that, “she chewed betel incessantly, as did

---

133 De Witt 2007, p. 196.
the other ladies in company, and every chair in the room was furnished with a cuspidor
to spit in...”

Although some Portuguese-Eurasian women were thus able to join the European
segment of society through marriage with Dutch officials or burghers, as seen in the
case of Madam Couperus, the men usually did not have the opportunity to climb the
social ladder. They remained mostly poor, many living in Bandarhilir. In principle the
Portuguese-Eurasians were treated as a separate category by the Dutch and were not
regarded as Europeans. In fact the term ‘Eurasian’ was an English category and allegedly
only gained coinage during British rule, notably through in a text written in 1874 by Lord
Lytton on the education of poor Europeans and Eurasians. The Portuguese-Eurasians
saw themselves as a separate group too and resisted integration into the local Asian society.

Religious Life in Malacca

The Dutch conquest of Malacca drastically altered a number of conditions for its
inhabitants, but, as we shall see, there was more continuity than one would have expected,
if not by intent, at least by default. Unsurprisingly the arrival and installation of Dutch rule
greatly affected the religious constellation in the settlement. The Dutch were fairly tolerant
towards individual religious conviction, but were wary of organised Catholicism. The
Iberian Catholic orders lost a jewel in their crown. Before the handover Catholicism had
been thriving in Malacca. In the beginning of the seventeenth century there were eight
parishes in the jurisdiction of Malacca with 7,400 Catholics. Since 1557 the town had
been an episcopal see, which commanded considerable wealth thanks to its involvement
in trade. The town boasted a cathedral, six parish churches, a number of smaller chapels,
as well as residences of Dominicans, Recollect Franciscans (Capuchos), Augustinians,
and Jesuits. The latter ran a college, while the Dominicans’ residence served as the base
from which they directed their missionary ventures into the Indonesian archipelago.

When the Dutch took over, Roman Catholicism was banned from public life, and its
sanctuaries were confiscated and transferred to the Dutch Reformed Church. Though not
a state religion, the Dutch Reformed Church (Nederduytse Gereformeerde Kerk) enjoyed

---

134 Lennon 1881, p. 59.
135 De Witt 2007, p. 207.
136 Brockey 2008, p. 3. This figure is actually based on Manuel Godinho de Erédia’s Declaraçam de
Malaca, (French translation) p. 6.
the status of “public” or “privileged” church, both in the Republic and the territories administered by the VOC. The charter awarded the Company by the States-General, the highest authority in the Republic, included sovereign rights, not just the monopoly on navigation and trade between Cape of Good Hope and the Strait of Magellan. In the territories covered by the charter, the Company had the right to administer justice, build forts, appoint governors, station troops, wage war and conclude treaties, all in the name of the States-General. The charter was issued against the background of the ongoing war with Spain. During the preceding decades, traders from Holland and Zeeland had explored the ocean routes, overseas ports and trade conditions, thus gathering precious information which was jealously guarded as a virtual monopoly of Spain and Portugal. The Company may have been the first multinational company in history, but in regard of the political ramifications of its creation by the States-General, it was also a proxy of the Dutch state, and in that respect not that much different from the Portuguese Estado da Índia, which was a royal enterprise by virtue of the claim that the Portuguese king was ‘Lord of the conquest, navigation and commerce of Ethiopia, Arabia, Persia and India.’ The differences lie more in their modus operandi than in their respective political patrons.

Religious Life in the Dutch Republic

Since religious life in the colonies was of necessity a reflection of the religious situation in the Republic, it is necessary to have some understanding of the quite unique position of religion in that recently established state. The Reformed Church was the dominant religion of the state, privileged and protected. Important segments of society belonged to its congregation, Church and authorities collaborated in many areas of public life and, in particular also in the area of social order. Yet the Reformed Church did not have a monopoly. The Dutch Republic was pluralistic and compartmentalized, and maintained a modus vivendi which accommodated to a considerable degree other tolerated denominations. The house churches and barn churches of the dissenters and the Catholics were not hidden places, but were known to everyone as centres of religious life. The large measure of actual freedom of religion, even for sectarians, attracted all sorts of immigrants and refugees. French-speaking Calvinists, English Presbyterians, Lutherans, the German-speaking and Portuguese- speaking nations of the Jews all found a safe haven in the Republic.

The reach of the reformed religion went beyond the congregation of the confirmed members. The reformed denominations also included the children of reformed families.
and adults who had been baptised but had not been confirmed yet, a step adults not
tseldom put off until a marriage was to be contracted, or when one’s own children were to
be baptised, or when one was about to take up public office, or a position of consequence
in society. Besides the confirmed members, the Reformed Church also included many
auditors (toehoorders): a large group of adults, interested people, who had not made the
final step to fully confirmed membership. Formally speaking, the Reformed Church in
its definitive form was based in the acceptance of the Canones and the Church Order of
Dort (Dordrecht) of 1618-1619.

The distance between the prescribed piety and the actual practice was big. There were
many undecided and indifferent people, who seldom went to church except for baptism,
maintenance and funerals. Popular life was anything but a paragon of piety. Reformed
membership rose only slowly during the second half of the seventeenth century, a rise
perhaps due to the combined effect of a pastoral offensive and relaxation of the severe
church discipline. But even then, the Reformed Church never attained the status of an
all-inclusive popular church, embracing each and every one in town and village to the
pulpit and the Supper Table. Many stuck with their remonstrant conviction, heeded the
stern appeal of the Baptists or preferred the pageant of Roman Catholic ceremony.

In order to instate someone as a minister to a congregation, the church council
had to deliberate with the civil authorities, since the latter paid the expenses involved.
It first had to apply for permission to start up the calling procedure, and subsequently,
it had to receive permission to accept a candidate. The reformed diaconate (diaconie or
diakonie)\textsuperscript{138} was usually accountable to the secular authorities. The diaconate depended
for part of its revenue on the authorities. In some cases it took care only of the members
of the congregation, in other places of all poor people, while in yet other places there
was a form of collaboration with the civilian institutions of poor relief. In many cases
the church councils had among their members a commissaris politiek (commissioner of
policy), someone who was both an ouderling (elder) and a regent, and served as an official
intermediary between the church council and the city council. Church council members
usually belonged to the social upper crust of the congregation. Filling functions in
ecclesiastical and secular bodies, either simultaneously or alternately, was part and parcel
of a regent’s career. Reformed churches were locally autonomous entities, geographically
defined and managed by a church council, but this autonomy was limited and subject to
control by various gatherings, such as the gathering of the classis, provincial and national
synods. In practice it was especially the classis which had an important say. This was a

\textsuperscript{138} The Church body in charge of social welfare.
regional gathering composed of representatives from all congregations within the region (each congregation delegating a minister and an elder). It gathered a few times a year in the most important city of the region concerned. It controlled all congregations and served as arbiter in local conflicts or differences.

Since the Dutch Reformed Church was the public church in the Republic, it automatically became the public church in the settlements in the Indies. Although it was never formally adopted as the state religion, the law required every public official to be a communicant member of the Reformed Church. Consequently, the Church had close relations with the civil authorities. The authorities provided the churches and the salaries of the ministers. The Public Church fulfilled a number of public services for public society: baptism, marriage and funeral. She supervised education, public prayer and thanksgiving days, gave assistance to prisoners and convicts, and administered spiritual care to army and navy. She also provided assistance to the poor and needy church members and their children, but sometimes even to persons of another affiliation or with no affiliation at all.139

Catholic Lament

Alexandre de Rhodes, a prominent figure of the Jesuit mission of Vietnam, made a call at Malacca in 1646. In a letter to Europe he lamented about the dire straits the Catholics had fallen into since the Dutch conquest. ‘All of the signs of the True Religion had been entirely abolished,’ he wrote. It rent his heart to hear the bells of the former Jesuit college toll ‘for the detestable uses of the heretics,’ inviting the members of the Reformed Church community to come and hear the ministers ‘spew forth a thousand blasphemies against the Virgin and the Saints.’140 This was a depressing situation, but the Catholics were not persecuted. Admittedly, when they captured the town, the Dutch had either expelled the Catholic priests or sent them as prisoner to Batavia. But, demography got the better of ideology. Seeing the level to which the population had been depleted — the original number of around 20,000 had dwindled to less than 3,000141 — the Dutch had encouraged the return of the Portuguese and mestizos (topazes). To make that return easier they had even encouraged some Catholic priests to remain in the town.142 Moreover,

139 Schutte 2002, pp. 15-16.
141 Dunn 1984, p. 185 gives the specific number of 2,150, without mentioning his source however.
the Dutch Republic was built on freedom of conscience as one of its basic values, so they made little deliberate effort to impose the Reformed Religion on all inhabitants. Things could change however in light of the vagaries of the global power relationship between Portugal and the Dutch Republic.

On 16 January 1651, Pêro de Mesquita and Manuel Henriques, two undercover Jesuit priests, disembarked at Malacca. Their brief was to survey the current situation at the former Portuguese settlement and in particular to administer the Sacraments to the Catholics living in the town. They had to carry out their mission clandestinely, for if detected, they were sure to be arrested and shipped off to Goa or Macau. The churches and chapels, in fact all Church property, had become property of the VOC, who had handed some of the sanctuaries over to the Reformed Church community, and re-affected the other buildings for secular use. In the process, the Catholic shrines had been stripped of their ornamentation and imagery. Mesquita reported in vivid detail how large icons were smashed before the door of the fortress, while small devotional statues were distributed among the children as toys. The local chapter of the principal religious brotherhood, the Misericórdia, had been disbanded, but the Catholics continued practising their religion in a Confraternity of the Rosary, which gathered in a chapel outside the town walls.\textsuperscript{143}

Bad as things were for the Catholic clergy, Pêro de Mesquita and Manuel Henriques calculated that the flock still counted around three thousand members in 1651. They included Europeans, \textit{mestizos}, and a variety of Asians from various regions along the Indian Ocean’s shores. Needless to say, Catholicism had never been the only religion in the town. Malacca was also home to communities of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Jews. Surprisingly, or perhaps not, Asian converts of Catholicism and European Catholics did not always live in blessed harmony. Under the Portuguese, there were often clashes of interest between the bishop and the captain. As long as it enjoyed the protection of Portuguese rule the town could arguably afford this luxury of internal strife, but even after the Dutch takeover, tensions between the various Catholic institutions and in the community at large seem to have persisted.\textsuperscript{144}

According to Mesquita and Henriques, the Dominican overseer of the diocese of Malacca warned them against outstaying their welcome in Malacca, because the bishop in exile, Dom Paulo da Costa, who had formerly been expelled from the Society of Jesus, held a grudge against Jesuits, and did not brook their presence in his see. There was also a limit to solidarity among Catholics, for Mesquita notes that the rich Portuguese did not

\textsuperscript{143} Brockey 2008, p. 7.

\textsuperscript{144} Brockey 2008, p. 5.
open their spacious homes to religious services for the Catholic community, ‘either out of fear of the Dutch, or because of their own private disputes.’ It remains to be seen whether this lack of solidarity among the Catholics was incidental, or obeyed a certain consistent pattern. The rich and variegated social fabric the Dutch found in Malacca in 1641 had been built up over thirteen decades. In the course of that time a considerable fraction of the town’s population had become allied to church institutions, such as the cathedral chapter and the religious orders. Catholicism was indeed as much a social as a religious phenomenon. In addition, other civic and political institutions were firmly entrenched.145

Manuel Godinho de Erédia, in his *Lyvro de Plantaforma das Fortalezas da Índia*, an illustrated survey of the settlements found between East Africa and East Asia (circa 1620) makes reference to the various institutions of the town: the captain who commanded the garrison and artillery, the bishop who headed the clergy, the vicar general, who oversaw the mendicant orders, judges and royal treasury officials. In addition, the town also had a branch of the charitable brotherhood, called the *Misericórdia*, and a royal hospital. Malacca had the status of a town. The married Portuguese householders (the *casados*) and the common people (the *povo*) were therefore given the same political, economic, and judicial privileges as those enjoyed by the cities of the metropolis, and they had the right to constitute a municipal council, or *Senado da Câmara*. By virtue of the privileges it enjoyed and the civic institutions it harboured Malacca was a city on a par with other Portuguese colonial settlements such as Macau, Colombo, Baçaim, Hormuz, and Mozambique, higher in rank than a mere fortress (*praça*), but lower than Goa, the seat of the viceroy of the *Estado da Índia*.146

When Pêro de Mesquita and Manuel Henriques visited Malacca in 1651, most of the institutional fabric of the Portuguese colony had been stripped, while much of the material infrastructure which embodied those institutions had been destroyed during the long siege. It must be noted however that the VOC had permitted Portuguese judges to continue in their posts (and receive their salaries) for the first few years after the takeover. Even so, many of the town’s *casados* stayed on, continuing to amass fortunes from long-distance trade. Mesquita and Henriques, like many after them, were forced to leave, taking many devotional books and sacred art with them. In September 1652, they were forced aboard a ship bound for India. Altogether, they spent two years in captivity, including

145 Brockey 2008, p. 5.
fifteen months in a Ceylonese prison at the former Portuguese town of Negombo. They were taken to Goa, where they were to be part of an exchange of prisoners.\textsuperscript{147}

One indication of the resilience of Catholicism in Malacca is that Dutch governors repeatedly issued \textit{plakkaten}, i.e. prohibitions of Catholic worship, as we shall see further on. Local Catholics nevertheless continued to flout the \textit{plakkaten} and invited priests in transit across Maritime Asia, such as the Dominican Frey Domingo Fernández de Navarrete. He was travelling from Macau to Madrid in 1669, and made a stop at Malacca, to hear confession and say clandestine masses in the town. The Dominican was received by the brotherhood of the Rosary, the backbone of Catholic life under Dutch rule. He writes:

“That afternoon the stewards of the brotherhood of the Rosary invited me to go up the river at eight of the clock at night, where most of the Christians live, there to sing the salve and litany of our Lady. I could not avoid it, but went; their church was adorn’d: after the rosary, the slave and litany were sung very well, I being in a cope, brought out the image of our blessed Lady, which was a very beautiful one. Then I heard some confessions, and having taken my leave of the people, went away to rest at the house of an honest Portuguese, who was married to a Malaye woman. I was twelve days ashore; the evening and morning was spent in hearing confessions. I said mass every day but one, and administer’d the blessed sacrament: the rest of the day I visited the sick, and that they might all be pleased, said mass one day in one house, and the next in another...\textsuperscript{148}

Ever the militant Dominican, Navarrete related: “The Dutch gave good alms even to the Catholick poor, but almost oblig’d them to be present at their service. A poor lame man said to me, Father, I cheat them very handsomely, for being lame, as I go up that hill I feign myself lamer, and sit down to rest every step, so that I never get to the top, nor never will.” The Dominican lamented that “in spirituals [Malacca] was once a great colony and the church has many children there still, but they are among bloody wolves.”\textsuperscript{149}

Navarrete praises the women for being extraordinarily good Christians and notes that they wished they could get away from Malacca, but could not because they were too poor. He also relates a case of a woman who had converted to the Reformed Religion, upon marrying a Dutchman: “Among the rest there was a woman an extraordinary good Christian, she furnished bread and wine for the masses. She had a daughter whom she

\textsuperscript{147} Brockey 2008, pp. 7-8.
\textsuperscript{148} Sheehan 1934, p. 91.
\textsuperscript{149} Sheehan 1934, p. 92.
had educated with all possible care; yet when grown up, she married a heretic, who soon perverted her, and she prov’d a mortal enemy to catholicks.”

Conditional Tolerance

However, freedom of conscience being one of its basic tenets, the Republic was, in seventeenth-century terms, a pluralist society. In spite of the privileged status the Reformed Church enjoyed, around 1650 its membership is estimated at only 37 percent of the total population. By the end of the eighteenth century it had risen to about 55 percent. Other denominations outside the Public Church were called dissenters, but their adherents were not prohibited from practising their religion. They were simply banned from public office. There were many Roman Catholics, including Joost van den Vondel (1587-1679), “Prince of Dutch Poets”, the most prominent writer of his time, who had converted to Catholicism, besides Remonstrants, Mennonites, Lutherans, and a host of foreign church communities, as already mentioned above. As time went on, tolerance for dissenting denominations grew stronger and stronger and religious pluralism became firmly embedded in Dutch society.

The attitude of passive tolerance also applied by and large to the overseas settlements, although in the initial phase it was an uneasy and painful balancing act, clearly not without its contradictions. Freedom of conscience was recognized as a sacred principle, but it is questionable that this amounted to religious tolerance, for the Dutch forbade gatherings and the presence of priests, both preconditions for the sacrament of the Eucharist and the full practice of Catholic religion. Since in Catholicism some fundamental rites can only be performed by a member of the clergy, prohibiting the presence of priests is tantamount to preventing the practice of one’s religion. But even so, there was a degree of connivance, which grew with time, and in the end amounted to religious freedom. Tolerance steadily grew from the second half of the seventeenth century onwards. Nevertheless, politics directly impinged on religious tolerance. When rivalry or hostilities between the VOC and the Portuguese Crown flared up again, the enmity was often translated into the attitude of the Dutch authorities towards Catholicism.

Thus during the very first years, the Dutch took on a lenient attitude, but they changed their tack around the year 1645-46. In his report presented on 7 September 1641

---

150 Sheehan 1934, p. 91.
151 Schutte 2002, p. 16.
to the High Government in Batavia Commissary Justus Schouten recommended that the exercise of the Roman Catholic religion be allowed for political considerations in one of the churches of Malacca, and he even suggested that the church of St. Laurens be rebuilt for use by the Malacca Roman Catholic community. The Catholics were even allowed to hold processions ‘for which the heretics loaned them structures and musical instruments, along with everything else necessary for increasing the feasts’ pageantry’. This is confirmed in Balthasar Bort’s report, where we learn that the “The Romish community” was indeed allowed for a brief spell the freedom of public worship and assembly “by connivance”, but that this privilege was repealed/retracted by the High Government in Batavia in two instructions (dated 6 December 1645 and 22 May 1646), sent to governor Arnout de Vlamingh van Oudtshoorn (governor from 6 November 1645 to 26 November 1646). The reason given was the “treachery committed by them [the Portuguese] in Brazil”, by which is meant the increased hostilities between the Dutch West India Company and Portugal over Brazil in the 1640s. Thus, far away political and military developments could easily impinge on everyday life in Malacca. The aforementioned two instructions from Batavia actually confirmed repressive measures that had already been taken by Arnout de Vlamingh van Oudtshoorn’s predecessor Jeremias van Vliet (governor from 15 December 1642 to 6 November 1645). The High Government now officially adopted a policy based on a strict reading of the treaty between the Portuguese King João IV and the States-General. Article 26 of that treaty guaranteed Portuguese subjects on land freedom of conscience, in their private houses, but without the presence of ministers and the right of assembly. It was only on their ships that they were allowed the free exercise of their religion in the care of priests, but the priests could not remain in loco longer than until the departure of the trading vessel by which they had come. Therefore no public preaching in the town to the subjects of Malacca was permitted.

If the VOC administration was prepared to accept a certain degree of connivance towards the segment of the Malacca population that identified with the Portuguese, i.e. Portuguese Eurasians and Asians who had converted to Catholicism, it was in the hope of stemming their exodus from the town to other Portuguese-controlled settlements. Malacca’s population had been depleted and they were unwilling to let go a valuable segment of the population, which would be sorely needed for the reconstruction and

---

152 Leupe 1936, p. 113.
154 Blagden and Bremner 1927, p. 79.
155 Blagden and Bremner 1927, pp. 79-80.
revival of the settlement. The Dutch no doubt felt the demographic pinch and were eager
to replete the Malacca population. They realised that keeping the Portuguese community
in Malacca was crucial for the rebuilding and economic recovery of the town. It was also
from this perspective that they encouraged the immigration of Chinese traders.

Catholic services were forbidden and certainly in the early stages the Company would
now and then clamp down on any Roman Catholic priest who would try to sneak into
town. On several occasions the governor promulgated plakkaten against Catholicism. In
1665 the Dutch administration found out that, while a Portuguese vessel was lying in
the roadstead, a multitude of about 1,500 people were secretly gathering in a garden
near the town to hear mass. The Dutch fiscal, acting on the orders of Jan van Riebeeck,
commander of Malacca between 1662 to in 1665, went to the garden with a number
of soldiers, to interrupt the mass and disperse the worshipers. They took the religious
images to the fort and destroyed them. The priest, who had apparently come aboard the
vessel now anchored in the roadstead, escaped to Bengkalis on a native ship. Allegedly
this soured the already tense relationship between the authorities and the Portuguese
Catholic community, to the point that the Malacca Portuguese were no longer employed
as night watchmen at the fort. 156

The priest in question is probably the same as the one identified in Bort's report as
Don Fernandus Manuel. Manuel sailed from Macau and arrived in Malacca in March
1665. He had the audacity to erect atap houses, as places of worship, “one in the northern
suburb [probably in Tranquerah] beside the road to the bank shall, and another at Bongerij
[Bunga Raya] tricked out with pictures and other superstitious ornaments in form of a
popish church, and in these the said Portuguese priests have during the holy days just
past not only preached but celebrated the idolatrous mass and their Romish worship
publicly and without scruple before a great concourse of people.” 157 When Dutch officers
appeared on the scene to break up the gathering, the priest allegedly “offered active
resistance” and used “seditious language” against the Dutch. Newbold, writing in the
1830s noted that the Portuguese–Eurasians gathered in a Roman Catholic church near
the river side of Bungaraya and that priests from Goa and Macao regularly visited the
Catholic community of Malacca. 158

156 De Witt 2007, p. 65.
157 Blagden and Bremner 1927, pp. 82-83; De Witt 2007, p. 66.
158 Letter from, W.T Lewis Acting Assistant Resident of Malacca 30 June 1827, G/34/172.
Governor Balthasar Bort

One of the most prominent figures in the history of Dutch Malacca was Governor Balthasar Bort (governor of Malacca from 15 October 1665 to 10 October 1679). He left us a report, which contains a wealth of information about the early decades of Dutch rule. Not only had he learned about the public masses held in a make-shift church in the suburb, but also about the fact that the priests talked their followers into bequeathing their property or part of it, by testament or other disposition, to the churches and monasteries in Goa or other Portuguese settlements. He therefore issued another and even more stringent proclamation on 29 January 1666. It forbade Roman Catholic priests to come ashore and enjoined all priests who were already ashore to leave within one month, unless they were willing to disrobe their cassock and refrain from preaching or holding public masses.

However, the Catholic inhabitants as well as the Portuguese priests kept coming from Goa, Macao or other places, and sneaking into town, where they continued challenging Bort’s prohibition and said mass in secret.\textsuperscript{159} Bort was only too aware of the difficulty he met in enforcing his ban, for he admits “Some improvement followed on this further proclamation, not however to the extent of our being able wholly to purge the territory of Malacca of Romish priests; they did not show themselves here openly, but remained in hiding; some even, in civilian garb, serving their religion and their ecclesiastical ceremonial, especially mass, in remote places both in the jungle and elsewhere. This they still persist in, whenever they can discover a convenient time and occasion therefor [sic]. More particularly these Romish subjects of ours contrive always to maintain here in secret a priestling to minister to them in sickness and death, for they imagine that, if they are obliged to do without a priest at such times, they are lost and will not go to heaven.”\textsuperscript{160}

But Bort was fighting a losing battle, as he noted that Malacca Catholics went on transgressing the proclamation.\textsuperscript{161} The VOC administration could not enforce its own prohibitions too severely, for such policy would only spur the further exodus of many ‘Portuguese’ families and their dependents to other places. Bort admits this himself in his report, stating that “the prohibition of the exercise of the Romish religion has notably reduced the population of this town, by reason of the departure of many Portuguese families and their dependents to other places.” Moreover, they took with them many Asian converts, or to quote Bort: “They have taken with them a good number of black

\textsuperscript{159} Blagden and Bremner 1927, pp. 82-85.
\textsuperscript{160} Blagden and Bremner 1927, pp. 85-86.
\textsuperscript{161} De Witt 2007, p. 65.
fishermen and would have carried off the rest, if they had not been prevented.” 162 From the outset it was clear to the Dutch that the likelihood of converting the Catholics to the Reformed Church was dim. Commissary Schouten, who was sent out to take stock of the spoils just after the capture, admitted so much in his report. He states that even preaching in Portuguese will do little to win them over. He therefore suggests to remove the “superstitious” relics from the churches, but to retain “some picture of real miracles” as a way of accommodation. 163 The Dutch did indeed need the ‘Portuguese’ population, which in the Malacca context consisted mainly of Asians converted to Catholicism. As a matter of fact, Schouten regarded them as indispensable for Malacca. 164

Navarrete, who stayed a few months in Malacca in 1669, i.e. when Bort was governor, although never passing up an occasion to lash out at the Dutch heretics, indirectly admits that it was not all that bad. He relates a meeting with a Dutchman, which suggests that he could move freely through town, even while being recognized as a Catholic friar. He writes: “As I was going home with some friends, we found a jolly Dutch man with his table and bottles in the cool air; he invited us, and I accidentally asked, Are you married, Sir, in this country? He answered me very pleasantly, Yes, father, I married a black; since I cannot eat white bread I take up with brown.” 165 The friar also relates an incident between a Dutchman and what appeared to be two black female slaves: “Some of us from a Catholick’s house, saw a Dutchman lash two blackmoor women most cruelly, they seem’d to be catholicks; he had ty’d them to cocotrees, and beat them unmercifully; one of them call’d upon Jesus and Mary, and we saw him for that reason lash her again in a most outrageous manner.” 166

Bort writes in his report that there were two churches: St. Paul’s, a church with a tower on the top of the hill, “which the town possessed in the time of the Portuguese and has retained,” and another, at the foot of the hill in the southern part of the fort. Of this church he writes that “it was formerly a dwelling house and was turned into a church in my time and called the New Church.” The St. Paul’s is evidently the former church of the Jesuits, while the New Church must be the one identified on Heydt’s map of 1744 as the St. Anthony Church. In this church at the foot of the hill a sermon was preached only once during the week, while in St. Paul’s a sermon was read twice every Sunday. These sermons were presumably preached in Dutch by predikanten. However, on

---

162 Blagden and Bremner 1927, p. 86.
163 Leupe 1936, p. 120.
164 De Witt 2007, p. 66.
165 Sheehan 1934, p. 92.
166 Sheehan 1934, p. 92.
Sundays a visitor of the sick (called Steven Ferdinandus van Tavilien) also held a service in Portuguese in the lower church, while a sermon was read and the psalms of David sung, “some of which have been translated into said language.” This presumably means that the sermon was also read in Portuguese, and some of the psalms as well. The translation of the psalms into Portuguese was evidently not so easy, and that probably explains why he mentions explicitly that some of them had been translated. About this service, Bort states: “this service was attended by the natives of our religion, mostly half castes and black women married to Dutchmen. Formerly it was the custom for our clergy to preach there also in Portuguese, in order to attract our Romish community the more to our religion, but they saw that they accomplished little or nothing by this means and the custom fell into disuse.” From this we may conclude that predikanten offered full-flung services in Dutch both in the St. Paul’s and the New Church, while in the New Church a visitor of the sick administered a service in Portuguese to the ‘Portuguese’ section of the population. Attendance here was limited to persons who had a special relationship with the Dutch, usually women who were married or otherwise connected to Dutchmen. A visitor of the sick is a lower position in the clerical hierarchy of the Reformed Church. He is not entitled to celebrate the Lord’ Supper. From the above it is clear that the Dutch made efforts to convert the Catholics to the Reformed religion, but that this attempt ended in failure. When the failure became apparent, they seem to have embarked on a silent path of accommodation, which ultimately led to full-flung tolerance towards Catholicism. Catholics continued to practise their religion in the aforementioned Confraternity of the Rosary and used to gather in a chapel outside the city walls. The members of this confraternity are believed to have been the ‘Irmãos da Igreja,’ a brotherhood of laymen that survived under Dutch and British rule. Masses continued to be celebrated in secret on remote locations. A French Jesuit bound for China visited Malacca in 1698 and noted: “Catholics are obliged to go far into the interior of the forest to celebrate the secret mysteries”. One such secret location may have been a hill in Malim, where allegedly a miraculous wooden cross was found, and where, to commemorate this event, a chapel was built. Until this day Catholics celebrate the feast of Santa Cruz in this chapel.

From the second half of the seventeenth century onwards, however, as the antagonism between the Republic and Portugal in the East Indies gradually abated, and as tolerance struck deeper root in the Republic itself, control and enforcement gradually relaxed,

---

167 Blagden and Bremner 1927, p. 87.
168 Smith 1961, pp. 98-100.
including in Malacca. In the early eighteenth century, tolerance towards the Catholic religion was unquestioned, for we see the appearance in Malacca of a recognizably Catholic church, Saint-Peter Church. The policy of tolerance had also a political aspect, for it was connected with the alliance between the Netherlands and Portugal in the Spanish Succession War. Anti-Catholic laws were repealed or no longer enforced. But already earlier than that, connivance had grown to a remarkable extent. Valentyn writes about a conflict between the predikant Leydekker and the then Dutch governor of Malacca, called van Quaelberg, who was allegedly too lenient for Catholics. The governor was married to a Portuguese Eurasian and apparently allowed a Catholic priest to do mass in public and administer to the Catholic flock. The priest in question was known as Antonio Rodrigo de Brit, probably a Portuguese Eurasian too. He allegedly celebrated in public the Feast of the Rosary of the Lady Virgin and the Novenas from the 1st to the 8th October, beginning his prayers with the words “Viva, viva el Rey de Portugal...” The Feast of the Rosary of the Lady Virgin was no doubt organised by the already mentioned Confraternity of the Rosary. As Valentyn, himself a predikant, remarked, the governor was supposed to forbid this kind of Catholic service in public, and by allowing it, failed in the execution of his duties, but the civic authorities seemed to care little. When Leydekker turned to the civic authorities in Batavia asking for action against the governor, he found no listening ear.

In the first decade of the eighteenth century the St. Peter’s Church was built on a plot of land, that had been donated by a man whose name is given as Maryber Franz Amboer. The fact that the title to the land could be transferred to a Catholic congregation is in itself sufficient proof that the authorities had become quite tolerant. Not much is known about the background of the donor. Maybe he was a Malay who had converted to Catholicism. He does not figure on the list of VOC employees, but since he is mentioned as having attended a meeting of Malacca’s Council of Policy in 1703, it is surmised that he was a Vrijburgher (Free Burgher). The records bear out that Franz Amboer was married to a woman named Thomasia Fernandus, probably a Portuguese-Eurasian. He had a daughter named Magdalena Amboer who was christened on 22 September 1694 in Malacca’s Dutch Reformed Church. Magdalena Amboer married in Malacca with Nicolaas Carstensz, a (Dutch Reformed) Church sexton and schoolmaster.

170 Cornelis van Quaelberg, governor from 23 December 1680 to 1 December 1684.
On 5 September 1708, D. Frei Manuel de Danto Antonio C.P., who subsequently served as the bishop of Malacca from 1710 to 1734, requested the Archbishop of Goa to send a priest to Malacca. Fr. Domingos Monteiro was appointed and became the first parish priest of St. Peter’s Church. The Catholic parish of Malacca took a start in 1710. It should be pointed out that St. Peter’s Church as we can see it today in Malacca, is not the original structure dating from 1710, but was rebuilt sometime in 1818-1819.

**The Reformed Church under the VOC**

Catholicism appears to have been resilient in the face of adversity, and no doubt helped by the penchant for tolerance inherent in the foundation of the Dutch Republic, managed to survive one century and a half of Dutch rule over Malacca. But, what about the religion of the newcomers? How did the Reformed Church fare in the Dutch colonies in general and in Malacca in particular?

The traditional assessment of the role of the Reformed Church under VOC rule has been that she was a trade church, and entirely subservient to the aims and interests of the Company. She fulfilled a pastoral role among Company servants, but did not engage in evangelizing work among the Asian populations, nor was she expected to do so by the Company. For the Company, spreading the Gospel was not a priority. Commerce always came before mission. Systematic evangelization had to wait for the demise of the VOC, when missionary congregations started sending out their members in earnest to the colonies. Obviously, the surge in missionary activity in the Dutch Indies was not only related to the demise of the VOC, or not even per se, but rather to the new trend in Europe, which gave rise to an explosion of missionary ventures by missionary congregations after the end of the Napoleonic wars.

Just as Malacca was inextricably linked with the other nodes of the Dutch commercial empire, so it is impossible to describe its religious life without referring to the wider context of the Reformed Church in the East Indies, which was like a web with Batavia at the centre. In regard to the Reformed Church, Malacca was to all intents and purposes, a dependency of Batavia. The Dutch Reformed Church counted half a million members and 240 congregations, spread over the Moluccas, the Cape of Good Hope, Formosa and

---

173 De Witt 2007, p. 150.
174 De Witt 2007, p. 151.
Ceylon, Malacca and Batavia. Between 1602 and 1799 the VOC had 650 predikanten, 2,000 krankbezoekers (‘consolers of the sick’) and many more schoolmeesters (‘teachers’) and catechists. At least half of them were Asian, and the majority of the churchgoers were also Asian. This Church is so idiosyncratic and so different that it has rightly been called Indisch Sion (‘Sion in the East Indies’), a term coined by G.J. Schutte.  

The 1602 charter of the VOC did not contain any articles about pastoral care for the personnel, the founding of churches or the establishment of missions. Several historians have seen in this reticence on religious matters confirmation of the fact that the VOC was essentially a business venture, for who religion was of secondary importance. However, G.J. Schutte is perhaps right when he contends that the absence of any reference to religious affairs is not surprising, since in those days religion was so self-evident that the matter did not need to be explicitly mentioned in the charter. The charter accorded a number of sovereign rights to the Company in regard to its own personnel and the waging of war against the Republic’s archenemy Spain. For people as Johan van Oldenbarnevelt (1547-1619), one of the founding fathers of the Republic, and a man who was instrumental in the founding of the Company, interference in matters of religion and Church affairs was an inherent part of the responsibilities of the authorities. The VOC was a political creation, the overseas arm of the Republic, whose identity was in essence Calvinist. The Indian High Government had to report on three matters in their Generale Missiven: business, war and the spread of the Gospel. Pieter Both, the first Governor-general of the Indies (1610-1614) was thus entrusted with the supervision over the ministers and school teachers, whose task was not limited to administering to the Europeans, but also included the conversion of the heathen, “so that the name of Christ may be spread, and the advantage of the Company furthered.” The authorities, the VOC governors and the Church have from the beginning taken various initiatives to provide pastoral care to the VOC personnel and to promote the Gospel among the people of the East Indies: ‘by sending out able people to spread the word of God among the people of the Indies, and to admonish them [with words] from the Holy Scripture against all kinds of superstition and temptations by Moors and atheists.’

The growth of the Company and the establishment of an Asian network of trade posts and settlements naturally led to the foundation of churches and the pursuit of missionary activities. 

---

176 Schutte 2002.  
177 Schutte 2002b, p. 46.  
178 Nordin 2007, p. 277.  
179 Schutte 2002b, p. 47.
activities. The second VOC charter of 1622-23 explicitly mentioned the ‘conservation of the public Reformed Faith’ as one of the reasons for continuing the monopoly of the Company. This stipulation presumably simply confirmed an existing situation, already well established in the field. It had become necessary to mention this aim explicitly because of the increased interest among the public opinion in the overseas mission, because the topic had in the meantime evolved into a major issue in the public debate about the continuation of the war against Spain.\(^{180}\)

The VOC translated the stipulation in its charter about the conservation of the reformed religion into several specific measures. The *Artikelbrief* (duties and rights of Company servants in the East Indies) included the duty to behave in a Christian manner. Swearing, drunkenness and brawling were forbidden, church attendance was mandatory. Aboard all vessels a morning and an evening prayer had to be said publicly every day and on Sundays a sermon had to be read out. The governors also made sure that from 1602 onwards *ziekentroosters* (‘comforters of the sick’) travelled on the ships, equipped with the necessary literature: Bibles, collections of sermons, catechisms, and edifying literature. The dispatch of *predikanten*, in close co-operation with the church, followed very soon afterwards. Churches were soon founded. The growing number of local congregations boosted the need for *ziekentroosters*, *onderwijzers* (‘teachers’) and *predikanten*.\(^{181}\)

The assessment by historians of the VOC’s overseas activities in the area of ‘conserving the Reformed Religion’ is usually rather demure. The conservation and promotion of religion, so they claim, was a subordinate aim, and most authors also do not find that surprising given the nature of the Company. They do not necessarily subscribe to the assertion that ‘no colonising people has been as tolerant as [the Dutch]’, as the Dutch historian Colenbrander contended three-quarters of a century ago in his *Koloniale Geschiedenis*. They simply believe that this aim was in essence not reconcilable with the pursuit of profit of the Company. This assessment has been contested by G.J. Schutte. He argues that religion and the pursuit of profit were not considered mutually exclusive in the days of the VOC. The *ambtsgebed* (‘official prayer’), prescribed before or at the end of council meetings overseas, invoked God’s blessing in the undertakings of the Company. Moreover, everyone was familiar with the collaboration between Church and State in line with the Dutch Reformed theocratic concept. We must perhaps reassess the efforts the Company made for the promotion of religion and public worship. In order to gauge her commitment to the cause, we must answer the question how many *predikanten*,

---

\(^{180}\) Schutte 2002b, p. 47.

\(^{181}\) Schutte 2002b, p. 47.
krankbezoekers (‘consolers of the sick’, ‘visitors of the sick’) or also called ziekentroosters and other servants of the Church she employed?  

**Batavia: the Centre of *Indisch Sion***

From 1601 onwards *predikanten* in the port cities of Holland and Zeeland began to manifest interest in the ventures overseas. They felt the need to provide pastoral care to the seafaring personnel of the Company, and were eager to respond to an urge to spread the Gospel overseas. This led to the establishment of a system of liaison officers, who would confer with the directors of the VOC about Church matters and the sending of Church personnel. Gradually this evolved into a situation where the two *classes* of Amsterdam and Walcheren, and by extension the provincial synods under whose jurisdiction they fell, (North Holland, South Holland and Zeeland), virtually monopolized the Church affairs of the East Indies. When at one point the other provincial synods protested against their exclusion, the fledgling church council of Batavia retorted that the existing setup should be maintained, adding that churches in the motherland had no right to exercise authority over the churches in the East Indies anyway. This disclaimer confirmed in practice the virtual monopoly of the synods of North Holland, South Holland and Zeeland over the affairs of the Church in the Indies on the one hand, but at the same time sent a strong signal about the Batavian church council’s assertion of its own autonomy. The question of the autonomy of the overseas Church became a major issue. The *classes* of Amsterdam and Walcheren succeeded in monopolizing the mission affairs in the East Indies. The other provincial synods were simply informed about the gist and decisions taken at the meetings on Indian church affairs. The aforementioned three synods tried to maintain their monopoly on Indian Church affairs, and were not willing to give much autonomy to the overseas Church.

In the quadrilateral relationship between the churches and the political and commercial authorities in *patria* on the one hand and the Indian authorities and overseas churches on the other, the Batavia church council gradually asserted its autonomy. It did not have any interest in the creation of a *classis* in the Indies, granted that this would have been at all possible in the vast empire of VOC settlements ranging from Banda to Persia, and from the Cape to Dejima in Japan. This council, in collaboration with the Indian High Council, organised the dispatch of ministers to the outlying areas. Amsterdam and

---

182 Schutte 2002b, p. 48.
Walcheren were not in favour of the establishment of classes overseas either, because such measure would inevitably entail erosion of their own influence. From the viewpoint of the Company, the selection, examination, dispatch and posting of church personnel was undertaken in the first place with a view to providing spiritual care to Company servants and Company settlements. Thus ministers, ziekentroosters (‘consolers of the sick’) and schoolmeesters (‘teachers’) were sent out to the Indies in the framework of mutual consultation between the Church and the directors of the Company. During the 17th and 18th centuries more than 600 predikanten and at least twice or thrice as many consolers of the sick were sent out and an even much greater number of schoolmeesters. Recruitment and instruction was the responsibility of the civilian authorities and the Church. Examination, assessment and dispatch was the charge of the Church. Differences of opinion sometimes arose between the VOC and the Church, but more often there was friction about the posting of dispatched personnel between the metropolis and Batavia (the Batavia church council and the High Government). Batavia was much more concerned about continuity and the size of the christened population, and the influence of the Company as collator was often decisive.

Organisation and management of the Church overseas was by and large based on the ‘Church Order’ (equivalent of canon law in Catholicism) of Dort (Dordrecht). However, there was a good deal of accommodation to local circumstances and adaptation due to constraints imposed by local conditions, such as size and distance. The Church in the metropolis hardly intervened in the articulation of the ‘Church Order’ for Batavia. No classes were created, confirmation of ministers before the Church congregation and the relationship between the Church and the authorities worked differently than in the mother country.

In confessional terms as well the Indian Church was intended to be a reflection of the Church in the mother country: the strict boundary between citizens and the congregation, between Christians (Indo-Europeans and Asians) and fully confirmed members, prevailed here too. This created a high threshold for admission into the Reformed Church. A side-effect of this policy was that the Church had less leverage to influence on colonial society. But here too there was a good deal of accommodation and adaptation. Confirmed membership was reserved to those who had fully accepted the doctrine of the Church, which was enshrined in the reformed professions of faith. On

---

185 Joosse 2002, p. 32.
186 Joosse 2002, p. 32.
3 January 1621 the *reformed* congregation in Batavia held its first official Lord’s Supper (equivalent of Holy Communion in Catholicism) celebration. At the celebration minister Hulsebos submitted six articles of faith to which each participant had to subscribe. No objections were raised against these six articles by the Church in the mother country. Cultural adaptation also gave rise to the debate about the separation of the sacraments: baptism and the Lord’s Supper, the only two sacraments in Protestantism. Later on, a simplified version of the *Heidelberg Catechism* became the touchstone for admitting someone into the Reformed Church community. Catechisms were simplified, edited and adapted to the levels of linguistic proficiency, knowledge and understanding of the local population they were intended for.\(^{188}\)

Although the Church in the metropolis set great store by the maintenance of orthodoxy, she invested little in the translation of the Bible and of doctrinal literature. She did send Dutch-language Bibles, catechisms and edifying literature to the Indies. For the translation of their sermons, of (parts of) the Bible and of manuals the ministers did not ask for control from the mother country. Initially there was little linguistic expertise in Amsterdam, certainly in regard to the Malay language.

In regard to Portuguese, however Amsterdam had more expertise. A catechism translated in 1649 from Spanish into Portuguese by the Portuguese minister Johannes Ferreira d’Almeida was submitted for approval to the Amsterdam *classis* and formally approved. The authorities used Dutch as a vehicular language, but it soon turned out that knowledge and use of Malay and Portuguese were indispensable. These two languages were important trade languages, and the simplified Portuguese of the Indian middlemen was the *lingua franca* in ports from the Red Sea to Canton. Nevertheless some ministers made great efforts to study local languages and dialects as well. They were following the example of many Company servants who spoke Urdu, the most widespread language in northern India or sometimes Persian, the court language.\(^{189}\)

Ministers returning in *patria* were not systematically encouraged to put their linguistic expertise to good use in translations. Translations were by and large left to the overseas ministers and church councils. In the metropolis there was no systematic policy to give aspirant missionaries linguistic training, or to use the linguistic abilities of returnees in drafting and editing certified translations. Some haphazard efforts were made to train ministers before dispatching them to East Indies.\(^{190}\)

---

\(^{188}\) Joosse 2002, p. 35.

\(^{189}\) Joosse 2002, p. 36.

The first time the Dutch Church intervened actively in the edition of translations was in 1677. The Amsterdam classis notified Batavia of its wish to verify the Portuguese translation of the New Testament by minister d’Almeida. The Batavia church council responded that it considered this control one of its own tasks, but nevertheless sent the manuscript over to Amsterdam. The Amsterdam classis noted that the translator had not made reference to the Statenbijbel, i.e. the Dutch authorized version of the Bible. She therefore ordered two former East Indies ministers to rework the Portuguese translation. The reworked manuscript was then sent back to Batavia, where the local people had to conclude that this reworked version was no longer understandable, much to the chagrin of the VOC authorities, who had provided the necessary outlay for the venture. Batavia started all over again and completed the new translation of the New Testament in 1691. The manuscript was sent to the metropolis once again, but this time simply to be published. The Amsterdam classis did not act on the request for publication, so that in the end the Batavia church council decided to publish it itself. It was published in 1693, to become a bestseller of sorts. More than a century later this same version was even introduced in Brazil by the Roman Catholics. The Portuguese edition of the Old Testament was an even greater ordeal. The Dutch Church had little or no interest, so that the project had to be taken in hand by Batavia. Amsterdam did not respond to the request to publish the finished translation either. Finally in 1725 the provincial synod of South Holland decided to take care of the publication and asked Batavia to send the manuscript. The Batavia church council procrastinated and in the end it took until 1745 before the Portuguese version was published.\(^{191}\)

The Malay translation of the Bible was an equally arduous process. There already circulated Malay translations of parts of the Bible. Independently of each other two ministers embarked upon an integral translation into Malay. Melchior Leydekker started work in 1678, but died before he could complete it. His work was completed posthumously in 1701. François Valentyn started his translation on Amboina in 1688 and completed it when he was back in the Republic, before returning once more to Batavia in 1706. While in Holland, he had convinced the classis of Walcheren and the North and South Holland synods of the legitimacy of his translation method. At issue were the questions what language and what letter types to use: pedestrian trade Malay or lofty literary Malay, and Arabic letters or Latin letters?\(^{192}\) Much to Valentyn’s chagrin Batavia opted for Leydekker’s version. The Church in the Republic was more in favour of Valentyn’s


version, without however having consulted returnee ministers. The VOC in Holland did not want to put up the outlay for printing the Valentyn version, in spite of a request to that effect by the South Holland synod in 1740. Within the Batavian Church opinions were divided on the question, although the majority seemed to lean towards Leydekker’s translation. This in the end was the version that was published in Arabic letters with the financial support of the High Government.\textsuperscript{193} This halting policy of publishing the necessary materials can only be taken to indicate a lack of enthusiasm and commitment to the promotion of religion in the colonies.

**Extent of the Church in the Indies**

In the Republic the Public Reformed Church boasted about 1,500 positions for predikanten (ministers). At the end of the seventeenth century the Republic counted close to 2 million inhabitants, about half of whom were reformed. How big was the extent of the Church in the East Indies?

The recruitment and composition of the VOC personnel naturally had a great impact on the position of the Reformed Church within the Company. It is safe to say that the reformed members were a minority among the Company servants. The majority of the European employees came from regions or countries where the Reformed Church was absent or negligible. Many were Lutheran, but Roman Catholics were by no means exceptional either. They were all Christian, but devout churchgoers and committed confirmed members were rather scarce among the sailors, soldiers and the junior staff employees of the VOC. They all had a variety of reasons to go to the East, but these motives were seldom virtuous, wrote Nicolaas de Graaff in his *Reisen\textsuperscript{194}* and *Oost-Indise Spiegel* (1701)\textsuperscript{195}. Apart from their duties in the offices, warehouses, forts and ships of

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{193 Joosse 2002, p. 38-39.}
\footnote{194 Full title: *Reisen van Nicolaus de Graaff na de vier gedeeltens des werelds, als Asia, Africa, America, en Europa. Behelsende een Beschryving van zijn 48 jarige Reise en aanmerkelykste voorvallen, die hy heeft gesteen en die hem zyn ontmoet. Van de levenswyse der Volkeren, Godsdiens, Regeringe, Landschappen en Steden. Alsook Een nette, dog korte Beschryving van China, desselfs over groote Landschappen, menigvuldige Steden, Gebouwen, gegraven Kanalen, Scheepvaard, oudbheid der Chinesen: Mitsgaders derselfs Oorlogen tegen de Tartaren: en op wat wyse de Tartar sig meester van China heeft gemaakt. Hier agter is by gevoegd d’Oost-Indise Spiegel Zynde een Beschryving van deselve Schryver van geheel Oost-Indien, de Levenswyse so der Hollanders in Indien, als op de Schepen, en een net verhaal van de Uit en t’hui Reise. Met curieuse koperen Platen verçiert.*}
\footnote{195 Full title: *Oost-Indise spiegel door Nicolaus de Graaff, behelssende Een beschrijving van de stad Batavia, en wijse van leven der Hollandse Vrouwen in Oost-Indie, een net verhaal der bijzondere bandelaars; Almede de
the Company, much of their day-to-day life in the East was spent in port cities and a foreign, non-Christian world. For many the alehouse was a favourite haunt, while quite a few lived with slaves or concubines. Only in the bigger settlements was there a regular church life, but even there regular spiritual care by qualified personnel was lacking. The mortality among the VOC personnel was notoriously high and, sick comforters, teachers and predikanten were just as mortal as the other Company servants.

The people within the reach of the Reformed Church under the Company were of various backgrounds. The field of activity of the Church was by no means limited to the confirmed members only. It included in principle all Christians, the entire Corpus Christi. This included in the first place all ten to twenty thousand Company servants with a European Christian background, their families, wives or concubines, children, servants and retinue of slaves, but also, obviously, the christened inhabitants of the Moluccas, Ceylon and elsewhere, more than half a million people in all. They all had to be instructed in the Reformed Teaching and needed pastoral care. Besides, we must not forget that there were great numbers of Moslims and so-called pagans, who were “trapped in the heresy of Islam” or the darkness of paganism, and who ideally ought to be converted.

The general muster-roll of the VOC personnel in the East Indies in 1688 lists 14,800 names. Of them 108 were appointed to positions in the service of the Church or related to Church duties: 34 predikanten, 40 consolers of the sick, 23 laymen readers and teachers (schoolmeesters), and 11 sextons. In the following years this category of personnel grew markedly, also in terms of percentage. During the eighteenth century the average number of persons in Church service was 240 persons, the actual number varying between 315 and 120. These numbers indicate the limited level of engagement of the Church and the Company. The highest figure of 315 represents one and a half percent of the total personnel volume. These numbers explain the recurring complaints about lack of Church personnel. When 315 servants can easily be put to work in Church work, it is only natural that discontent is aired over an average understaffing of 240 people. How often did the workforce fall short of the minimal 120? It is interesting to compare the numbers of Church servants with those active in healthcare or ‘in surgery’. Here too there were important fluctuations from year to year around an average of almost 280. But these were all European. The 108 Church servants of 1688 were all European, but the Reformed

---

196 Schutte 2002b, p. 48.
197 Schutte 2002b, p. 49.
198 Schutte 2002b, p. 50.
Church had also many Asian personnel, just as she had many Asian members. During the eighteenth century there were about as many European Church servants as there were Asian. The Asians were usually employed in the positions of teacher (schoolmeester) and catechists. The Church under the Company has had only fifteen ministers of Asian origin in its ranks.\(^{199}\)

As borne out by the figures of 1688, the Church-related personnel category included a wide range of differing functions. We must pay special attention to the positions of predikant, consoler of the sick and teacher. The number of predikant positions was determined by the Gentlemen Seventeen in 1647 at 28, in 1661 at 32; in 1679 at 42 and in 1740 at 44. Their number actually seems never to have exceeded this figure. Sometimes new positions were created and others were abolished. From a table drawn up by G.J. Schutte listing the number of predikant positions in the years 1648, 1679 and 1740, we can infer that there were only a few towns with more than one predikant: Ambon, Banda, Batavia, Malacca, Colombo, Galle and Jaffna. Batavia far outnumbered the others: it had three predikanten in 1648, eight in 1669, and twelve in 1740. Batavia had five predikanten administering in Dutch, but also two to four speaking Portuguese and one or two speaking Malay. Malacca had two predikanten in 1648, two in 1679, and one in 1740.\(^{200}\)

A mere 40 predikanten is a pitiful number in comparison to the number of Christians and congregations in the Dutch East Indies. For the roughly 100,000 Christians living in Batavia around 1730 there were twelve predikanten. For the roughly 200,000 inhabitants of Amsterdam, who were far from all reformed, there were 29 predikanten. Thirteen predikanten for 200,000 Christians on Ceylon is little, certainly if one considers the vast area they had to cover. The difference with the Republic becomes manifest when one compares the distances, numbers of parishioners and predikanten in the country in Amboina: six predikant positions in 1727 for 52 congregations and 35,000 Christians, living in 52 kampongs spread over five or six islands. These numbers and proportions about the Church under the Company were certainly inadequate. But is this comparison with the metropolis entirely fair? There were indeed few predikanten working in Indisch Sion. However, in addition to those 44 predikanten around 1740, there were for the 240 congregations in the Dutch East Indies — half a million Christians in total — another 35 Dutch consolers of the sick, and 300 indigenous consolers of the sick or teachers. We

\(^{199}\) Schutte 2002b, p. 50.

\(^{200}\) Schutte 2002b, p. 51. Valentyn 1724-26, vol. V/A, p. 358 mentions only one predikant at a time stationed in Malacca.
have to add to that figure a number of sextons, organists, and marinjos (village messengers who announced church services).²⁰¹

The low number of predikanten and the thin spread of the postings had at least two causes. First, there was the structural lack of predikanten in the East. The company never succeeded in finding enough candidates to fill the available positions, not even the 28 or 44 we mentioned. For all the Indische congregations the Company has employed about 650 predikanten. Incidentally, over 800 ministers and several thousand laymen readers were sent out to all Dutch colonies before 1799.²⁰² On average during two centuries she sent out three or four predikanten per year. Yet there were always vacancies, because almost half of all predikanten died before even completing their first contract of five years. The VOC was unable to enlist many more candidates in spite of the high salary (the initial salary per month was 90 guilders for a proponent (ordinand) and 100 for a predikant, easily twice the amount a minister in the Dutch Republic would earn). Even the Republic was faced with a shortage of predikanten until the 1650s, and again in the eighteenth century.²⁰³

In the Reformed Church a predikant was indispensable for the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and his presence was also very desirable for the consecration of marriage. He was the minister of the Gospel and only a predikant or a proponent (‘ordinand’) was allowed to preach (hold a sermon). But the Reformed Church service could easily take place without the presence of a predikant, just as a church council meeting could take place without one attending. Consolers of the sick, ouderlingen (‘elders’), and even common confirmed members could read out a passage from the Bible, a sermon of a predikant, or a formulaic prayer. In the Republic too many pastoral tasks were devolved to consolers of the sick. The catechetical instruction was part of the regular educational curriculum or was given by special the catechists. Consequently, only a limited number of predikanten was needed.²⁰⁴

From the above angle it is understandable that the Church in the Indies often used personnel from the lower echelons: proponenten (‘ordinands’) and especially consolers of the sick. During the two centuries of its existence the Company employed about 2,000 consolers of the sick, at least three times as many as predikanten.²⁰⁵ Consolers of the sick were not only cheaper, they were also easier to find. Many persons who had aspirations for an ecclesiastical or pastoral career were unable to meet the requirements the Reformed

²⁰¹ Schutte 2002b, p. 52.
²⁰² Survey 1983, p. 87.
²⁰³ Schutte 2002b, p. 52.
²⁰⁴ Schutte 2002b, p. 54.
²⁰⁵ Schutte 2002b, p. 54.
Church imposed on its *predikanten*, especially the long and expensive academic study. The requirements for a consoler of the sick were markedly lower. Candidates had to be able to read and write, and have some knowledge of the Bible and of the Reformed Doctrine. In addition, they had to be confirmed members, but in the East somebody who had not been accepted as a confirmed member yet, but led an ostensibly virtuous life would sometimes be considered to fill the requirements.\textsuperscript{206}

From 1625 onwards it was rule for all VOC ships to have a spiritual guardian aboard. They were usually consolers of the sick. They were equipped with a small library of edifying books, collections of prayers and sermons, and some exemplary forms, because the consoler of the sick was usually the one who wrote parting letters and testaments for dying crew members. But in many of the Company settlements too the consoler of the sick acted as the *voorganger* (the ‘pastor’, the person who takes the pulpit in a *reformed* service). And in larger settlements which also had a *predikant*, the consoler of the sick usually filled the function of the day-to-day pastor or pastoral assistant, in institutions such as the hospital, the leprosy, poorhouse or the house of correction. In many places even the teacher was the *voorganger*. In the Republic too they often acted as *voorlezer* (layman ‘lector’) and *voorzanger* (‘precentor’) in churches, and the catechists of the youth. In the *kampongs* and villages on the Moluccas and Ceylon they played a crucial role in Church life and in village life in general. They were usually Asians, who had received training while staying with a *predikant* in his parsonage. They received a salary from the Company, and were enlisted on a three-year contract.\textsuperscript{207}

The Church thus used a relatively limited number of highly trained European collaborators and a much larger number of less trained collaborators, the latter category including many indigenous people. In the process she was able to mitigate the impact of the differences in language and culture. In essence the Indies Church did not function differently from the one in the metropolis.\textsuperscript{208} In the Republic too the authorities and the Church worked hand in hand in the promotion of religion. In the motherland too the authorities took on the expenses of the Church and had to give their approval for every new Church appointment.

However, the authorities involved were usually local authorities, while it was also the local Church Council which was responsible for calling someone as *predikant* and enlisting the other church personnel. In the East however all the *predikanten*, consolers

\textsuperscript{206} Schutte 2002b, p. 55.
\textsuperscript{207} Schutte 2002b, p. 55.
\textsuperscript{208} Schutte 2002, p. 56.
of the sick, teachers and catechists were servants of the Company and subject to the authority of the High Government of India, who paid them and could also decide on their posting or transfer. When they did not function satisfactorily they could be dismissed by the Company and sent back to the mother country. Here lay the major differences with the situation in the Republic. Traditional historiography of Church history has always pointed the finger to this subservient status of the Church as one of the reasons why the mission’s success was so limited.\textsuperscript{209}

It became custom among Europeans in the Dutch East Indies to have their slaves baptised. This practice became widespread after 1648, when christened slaves were admitted to the celebrations of the Lord’s Supper in the Dutch Reformed Church. Admission to the Lord’s Supper was and is the defining point for full membership of the Church community. Many burghers set their christened slaves free by will. Once set free, they usually joined the ranks of the \textit{Mardijkers}.

Although different from the European community, the freed christened slaves were entitled to appealing to the Church for charity. Many submitted requests for alimony to the \textit{diakonie} (‘Church welfare board’). These requests teach us that the \textit{Mardijkers} far outnumbered the other groups in society. A European or a \textit{mestizo} could re-enlist with the Company, if necessary, but this avenue was denied to the \textit{Mardijkers}. The number of Burghers, former Company servants and \textit{mestizos} applying for support to the \textit{diakonie} remained quite limited. For instance in December 1728 136 \textit{Mardijkers} found shelter in Batavia’s poorhouse, in contrast to only six \textit{mestizos} and 25 Europeans found there.\textsuperscript{210} As the number of freed slaves increased and joined the ranks of the \textit{Mardijkers}, the applications for relief soared, forcing the Company to take measures to make manumission more difficult.

Although the \textit{diakonie} was supposed to support all Christians, the poorhouse made a clear distinction in the level of succour it gave according to the ethnic background: the monthly sum of money given to Europeans was higher than that given to \textit{mestizos}, and the latter in turn received more than the Asians.

\section*{The Church in Malacca}

\textsuperscript{209} Schutte 2002b, p. 57.
\textsuperscript{210} Bosma and Raben 2003, p. 57.
Malacca was one of the congregations of *Indisch Sion*. In the early sixteenth century the port of Malacca received up to 500 ships a year. The town and its direct environs were home to about 20,000 inhabitants. In 1606 the VOC attempted to capture the city, but failed. It then put up a maritime blockade during many years which reduced Malacca’s trade to a trickle. Nevertheless it still took more than five months to force the Portuguese into surrender. At that time only 2,150 inhabitants remained. The town slowly recovered under the rule of the VOC, but never quite regained its former size or dynamism. For the company it was an important maritime station, and served as the centre of her regional activities. The VOC factories on the Malay Peninsula, in Sumatra and the Riau Archipelago fell under the jurisdiction of the governor and council of Malacca. It served as *entrepôt* for pepper and tin.\(^{211}\)

The Company employees in Malacca initially numbered around 375, but later on in the course of the seventeenth century their number rose to between 400 and 500. After 1710 the figure fluctuated around 600, and after 1740 it stabilised at an average of about 540. The overall number of inhabitants slowly recovered. In 1665 the town counted 3,817 inhabitants, and about 7,500 in the surrounding areas. In the beginning of the eighteenth century the figure stood at about 16,000, including the 10,000 Malay, Chinese, Minangkabau, Buginese, and Indians in the *kampongs* outside the town. In 1796 the figure stood at 14,000. The jurisdiction of the company was limited to the city and its direct surroundings, which were isolated from the rest of the Malayan Peninsula by natural obstacles.

Malacca was an important node in the VOC commercial empire. Malacca was a colonial town, home to a variety of ethnicities and cultures. Even under the rule of the Company and the presence of its European servants, she maintained largely her Portuguese colonial outlook. Her *mestizo* culture remained dominant in the midst of the numerical majority of Asians.

**Protestant Places of Worship**

The old Jesuit church (originally called Nossa Senhora da Anunciada, but commonly called St. Paul’s Church) at the top of St. Paul’s Hill was renamed the *Bovenkerk* (‘church on top’, ‘upper church’) and used as the main church of the Dutch Reformed community. The other churches and chapels apparently fell into disrepair. The well-informed Valentyn,

\(^{211}\) Schutte 2002c, p. 219.
writing in the early eighteenth century, states that “from the beginning there always was only one appointed church, and as a result (there were) in general only one or two ministers, and no efforts were made to further spread the Gospel, and no dependent church, under the jurisdiction of this one, was ever acquired.”\textsuperscript{212} The many churches and chapels Portuguese Malacca had boasted, had been destroyed, or what remained of them seems to have been secularized and no further reference is found to them. However, in 1741, to commemorate the centenary of the capture of Malacca, the Dutch burgher community decided to erect a new church. Since in contrast to the Bovenkerk the newly built church was located at the foot of the hill opposite the Stadhuys, it was commonly called the Benedenkerk (‘church at the foot of the hill’, ‘lower church’). The first stone of the church was ceremonially laid on 18 February 1754 and the construction work was completed in 1755. The church still exists today, and is presently known as the Christ Church. The church was originally white, as was the Stadhuys, but both landmarks were unfortunately repainted in a distinctive coral red in 1911 and have remained like that until this day. It is common belief that the new Benedenkerk was built in replacement of the old Bovenkerk, but this is not the case. De Witt, basing himself on a Malayan author, claims that Christ Church was built as a replacement for another church, St. Anthony’s Church, which was equally called Benedenkerk. In other words, the new Benedenkerk had to replace the former Benedenkerk, not the Bovenkerk. There is however also a claim by Martijn Maarleveld that St. Anthony’s Church was torn down in 1659, in which case the former Benedenkerk must have referred to another sanctuary, but it is unclear which one. At any rate, Erédia’s plan has a spot called ‘San Antonio, convento Augustino’, and the 1744 map of Heydt has a Sankt Antoni Church, near the Wilhelmus bastion, a point which corresponds roughly with the location of ‘San Antonio, convento Augustino’ on Erédia’s map. This is clear evidence that there was such a church in the first half of the eighteenth century, and Maarleveld’s claim is unfounded. At any rate, this church seems to have been torn down around the time that the new Benedenkerk was built.\textsuperscript{213}

Within the enceinte surrounding the hill was the residence of the governor and the buildings related to the administration and trade. On the top was the main church of the Reformed congregation, the Pauluskerk, the former chapel of the Jesuit Society. In the shadow of the fort lay downtown, where in 1650 a Dutch-style town hall was built, now the oldest remaining VOC building in Asia. Here was the Portuguese benedenkerk and the houses and warehouses of the Company, of her servants and all the free burghers in

\textsuperscript{212} Valentyn 1724-26, vol. V/A, p. 354b.
\textsuperscript{213} De Witt 2007, p. 124.
the area of the Heerenstraat and the Jonkerstraat. Beyond this area one could find the districts of less well off Indo-Europeans, and beyond them the kampongs of the Asians. The membership of the Reformed congregation was about as big or as small as the number of people with VOC connections. One would be tempted to conclude that the members were by and large recruited from among the VOC section of the residents, and that she failed to appeal to the other sections of the town populace. This has been accepted by quite a few researchers. However, more careful research about the recruitment base of the Reformed congregation shows this not to have been the case. In other words, contrary to received wisdom, the Reformed church in Malacca was not a typical handelskerk (‘traders’ church’).

The Portuguese had pursued a vigorous policy of conversion. A considerable portion of the population was Christian, albeit not reformed. Immediately after the conquest in 1641 the Company introduced the Reformation. The Jesuits and other Roman Catholic priests were expelled from the town and the churches and monastic establishments were secularised and turned into an arsenal, poorhouse, hospital etc. A few days after the capture, Minister Loosveld, who was put in charge of cataloguing the library of the Jesuit College, presided over a day of thanksgiving and fasting. The Pauluskerk and the benedenkerk now became the place where on Sundays and Thursdays reformed services were held. In the middle of the eighteenth century the benedenkerk was replaced by a new building called Christ Church. Malacca thus had two predikanten positions; one of them had to speak Portuguese. Until 1700 there were usually two predikanten, but later quite often only one. During these vacancies the schoolmasters would read a sermon to the congregation.

The Malacca congregation was headed by two predikanten and two ouderlingen (‘elders’). After 1710 the number of elders was increased to four. Care for the poor was the charge of four diakenen (‘deacons’). They were selected by the members of the Church council, but their appointment had to be approved by the council of policy. They served two year terms. Church council members had to be full members of the congregation and of high moral standing. Members of the church council were chosen from among the higher levels of society or higher echelons of the Company. Sailors, soldiers and craftsmen did not qualify for membership of the church council, but every now and then we come across an assistant, a junior surgeon, or a master carpenter among its membership. The number of eligible persons was apparently quite limited. The ouderlingen were usually appointed from among the free burghers (Europeans and mestizos), but never from among the Mardijkers (see above). The latter were sometimes found among the diakenen.
An important part of the pastoral tasks was taken care of by the ziekentroosters. In Malacca there was a Dutch-speaking, Portuguese-speaking and Malay-speaking consoler. They visited the sick at home, in the infirmary or in the leprosy. There were even two hospitals in the town. Education too reflected the linguistic balance. There was a Dutch and a Portuguese public school. After 1700 both schools counted about 80 pupils each. There was also an itinerant schoolmaster, who called at the houses to provide teaching in the catechism to adults who desired to be baptised and be confirmed as member. A portion of their catechumens were actually slaves.

The Reformed Church in Malacca started out very modestly. In 1655 it had sixty confirmed members, in 1660 eighty. In the early eighteenth century the figure had risen to about 200 and about 230 on average in the years 1714-1724. After that peak, it gradually declined to about 200, and in the second half of the eighteenth century to a level between 75 and 100. At the beginning of the eighteenth century less than half of the confirmed members were born in Europe. Mardijkers, Indo-Europeans and Asians made up the majority. Moreover, the congregation also counted more women than men. In total between 450 and 600 people were counted as belonging to the public church. This is a number far exceeding the confirmed membership. Many more people were indeed included in the congregation than the confirmed members. The congregation was a ‘mixed bag’, including as it did a racially and culturally varied group: Company servants, free burghers, freemen and slaves, rich and poor.214

The very modest size of the Reformed Congregation in Malacca suggests that it never really took on. Neither in religious nor in cultural terms did the Catholic community feel any attraction to Protestantism. As late as 1710 the number of Catholic Christians was estimated to be six times the number of reformed ones. These Catholics were described as consisting “of a few Europeans, more Mestizos, but the majority blacks, mostly living outside the city.”215

Once the rule of the Company had been firmly established and the Republic was at peace with Portugal, the VOC usually condoned the presence of Catholic priests and their religious services. Only when the Republic was embroiled in a war with some Catholic state, did the Company raise its vigilance. The Catholic portion of the population was simply too important to keep antagonising it. Obviously the Church council could not

---

214 Schutte 2002c, p. 222.
condone any sympathy towards Catholicism among its own membership. Censure and disciplinary action was usually directed against expressions of what it called ‘papism.’ By the end of the eighteenth century Catholic priests could carry on their activities undisturbed. This ran parallel with a similar evolution in the mother country. After 1780 Malacca even had a Catholic harbour master (syahbandar), a fact known to everyone but about which no one made any objections.

Traditionally the Reformed Church in Malacca has been described as a traders’ Church, consisting of soldiers, company servants and a small number of free burghers. This characterisation has been challenged by G.J. Schutte. While he admits that the European element, Company servants and free burghers, formed an important part of the membership of the Reformed Church, he insists that the membership was more varied than that. First of all, only a small portion of the Company servants were confirmed member, or even churchgoer. Secondly, many members were of Indo-European or Asian origin, which is borne out by the fact that services were being held in Portuguese and that there were instructors, tutors and consolers of the sick using Portuguese and Malay.

The Reformed Church in Malacca remained very modest, in spite of the efforts made by the Company and the Church to make public religion accessible in Portuguese and in Malay. Every year new members were confirmed, and these also included mestizos, natives and slaves. In light of the size of the congregation, the mobility of its members, and the high mortality rate, Schutte estimates that every year the Church must have confirmed between ten and twenty converts. The first to join the Church must have been the “Portuguese” widows who in 1641 were summarily wedded to newly arrived Company servants. In all settlements the majority of persons joining the Church were women. The Malacca register of membership of the years 1717 to 1719 lists 163 women against only 82 men. At least 115 women and 18 men had Indo-European or Asian names. It may be concluded that the Reformed Church of Malacca was too well integrated in local society for it to be simply labelled a “traders’ Church.”

Malacca Falls into British Hands

On 26 August 1795 Malacca fell into British hands after a symbolic resistance by its governor Abraham Couperus. The Convention of London, drawn up in 1814, stipulated that after the final defeat of Napoleon, the settlement would be returned to

---

216 Schutte 2002c, p. 223.
the Netherlands. On 21 September 1818 Jan Samuel Timmerman Thijssen took over the administration from the British as “commissaris” for the Dutch government. However, in the Treaty of London (17 March 1824) Britain and the Netherlands swapped Malacca and Benkoeelen (also known as Bengkoeelen, Benkoeelen or Benkulen, present-day Bengkulu) on Sumatra. The British retook formal possession of Malacca on 5 April 1825. The last seven years of Dutch rule over Malacca were overshadowed by frictions over the purchase of Singapore by Sir Stamford Raffles (6 February 1819) on behalf of the British East India Company. Timmerman Thijssen lodged a protest with Bannerman, governor of Penang, but the latter referred the matter to Lord Hastings. The British procrastinated and created a *fait accompli*. In June 1819 Singapore’s population already counted 5,000 people, one year later the number had doubled. The import and export by Asian vessels recorded four million pounds in the first year. In the last year of Dutch rule over Malacca, sales turnover was 318,426 pounds, while in that same year Singapore already registered a return of 1,610,440 pounds. Malacca had already lost much of its trade to Penang, but when the British acquired Singapore, it rapidly became the commercial centre of the region. This spelled the demise of the Malacca as a centre of international trade. A considerable proportion of the “Dutch” population remained in the port, as did the indigenous groups, and were ready to be assimilated into the British population. One part of the “Dutch” population moved to Sumatra or Java to join the *Indische* population in the Dutch East Indies. On the basis of archives in the India Office, genealogical records, baptismal books, marriage records, and burial records in the Public Record Office in London, as well as the published *Almanak van Nederlands Indië*, and the name lists of the European inhabitants of the Dutch East Indies in 1823-26 in the Algemeen Rijksarchief of The Hague, P.A. Christiaans has drawn up an inventory of the “European” population of Malacca during the latter days of Dutch rule (1818-1825). What emerges from this list are the high proportion of people actually born in the East Indies, in particular in Malacca, the many children born from “common-law” wives, and the considerable number of German names, attesting to the great number of Germans who had come to the colonies. We come across names such as Baumgarten, Baumhauer, Blankenheim, Dieterich, Endorff, Frankfort, Grosse, Hartman (born in Hannover), Kilian, Neubronner, Stecher, Wiederhold, etc. Most of these men and women were born, baptised, married and buried in Malacca. In the list we also come across quite a few English names, no

---

218 Christiaans 1986, pp. 259.
doubt persons who had come to Malacca and settled there during the two preceding decades of British rule.

Prominent Dutch families were the families Angelbeek, Dieterich, Koek, Kraal, Neubronner, Rappa, Velge, Westerhout en Wiederhold. We also note that these families had a strong tendency to intermarry. The European community was a close-knit society. In view of the period reviewed (1818-1825) it is not surprising to find quite a few Europeans of English and Scottish origin as well. These were generally people who had travelled to Malacca during the period of British occupation, i.e. between 1795 and 1818.

Gustaaf Dieterich harked from Wolfenbüttel in Germany, and had joined the VOC. He had apparently assimilated completely with the Dutch, since he also used a Dutchified version of his name, i.e. Dirksen. Gustaaf was accountant of the VOC, senior sworn clerk of policy and secretary of Justice of Malacca, diaken (head of the Church poor relief council), from 5 January 1755 to 31 January 1760. He died in Malacca on 5 February 1779. He married in Malacca ca. 1752 with Johanna Maria de Roth (ex matre Famula van Mandaro), who had been baptised in Malacca on 22 July 1735, and died in childbirth in Malacca shortly before 17 August 1760. She was the natural and baptised daughter of Johan de Roth. The name of the mother of Johanna Maria is given as “Famula, van Mandaro” (Famula from Mandaro), which means that she only had a first name, followed by a toponym, indicating the place she came from. A name thus composed is indication of the fact that she was a former slave, a member of the group identified as ‘Portuguese’ (hence the Portuguese Christian name) in the Dutch East Indies, i.e. a descendant from Indian slaves. After her death, Gustaaf remarried with his former freed slave Kittjil in Malacca on 22 September 1776. Kittjil was a slave from Makassar, born ca. December 1741, and had been christened in Malacca as Catharina Wilhelmina. As in the case of Famula, she would be referred to as Catharina Wilhelmina from Makassar, the toponym again indicating that she was a former slave. She was admitted as a member of the Church on 11 September 1774. Since the date of her burial in Malacca is given as 2 January 1837, she outlived her husband by half a century.

Gustaaf had also a son with another freed slave, whom he apparently did not marry, and who had equally a “Portuguese” name: Christina Rebello. This son, Jan Diederich Dieterich, was baptized on 18 March 1765, and judging from his family name evidently adopted into his father’s family. On 10 August 1785 he was admitted as member into the Church. On that same date Christina Elisabeth Baumgarten, unmarried daughter who possibly came from Batavia, was also admitted into the Church. Their admission preceded their marriage, for they were wedded on 13 November 1785. With his second spouse Kittjil, alias Catharina Wilhelmina, Gustaaf had two daughters, both of them born
however before the marriage, at a time when their mother still had the status of slave. The eldest daughter Bastiana Catharina Elisabeth Dieterich, was baptised at Malacca on 20 June 1767, and admitted as member of the Church on 28 July 1779, i.e. on date when her father had already died. She died in Cheribon on 4 February 1806. She first married at Malacca on 12 December 1779 with Adam Manger, born at Oeffingen (Baden) in Germany. He was chief surgeon of the hospital at Malacca, and died in Malacca in 1784. She remarried in Malacca on 15 September 1785 with Reinier Bernardus Hoynck van Papendrecht, baptised at Yperen on 19 May 1753, assistant merchant of the VOC, tax collector in Malacca, member of the Council of Policy, president of the Council of Justice and headmaster of the orphanage in Malacca. He died in Malacca in early 1788. He was the son of Johan and Theresia Maria van Lintelo and the widower of two former marriages. After the death of Reinier Bernardus Hoynck van Papendrecht, Bastiana Catharina Elisabeth Dieterich married for the third time with Johanna (Johannes?) Bellemont, baptised at Yperen on 19 May 1753, assistant of the VOC, and acted as diaken from 25 June 1787 to 2 May 1789, and from 25 February 1790 until his departure to Cheribon in 1803. Johannes and Bastiana died in Cheribon.

Gustaaaf’s second daughter with Kittjil was Maria Dionicia Wilhelmina Dieterich. She was baptised by a Roman Catholic priest, shortly before 20 September 1769. The minutes of the Church council meeting of 20 September 1769, contain the following interesting passage (in translation): “Gustaph Dirksen, former secretary of Justice, has again debauched in his old sins of lewdness and fornication, and has even been so devious as to have the Romish priest baptise his illegitimate child.” Nevertheless Maria Dionicia Wilhelmina was admitted as member of the Reformed Church on 18 February 1785, and ten days later she married Adriaan Koek, (1759-1825), son of Joost and Catharina de Roth. The couple had nine children. The Koeks had roots in Malacca that went back to the middle of the seventeenth century. Adriaan was a prominent member of society in the declining years of Dutch Malacca. His maternal grandmother was a freed slave of Singhalese origin. He was born in Malacca on 24 December 1759, and baptised there on 15 March 1760. He was kapitein-luitenent van de burgerij (‘deputy captain of the militia’), and Secunde (‘Deputy Governor’) from 1819 to 1824. He was waarnemend gouverneur (‘Acting Governor’) of Malacca from 1822 until 1823, president of the council.
of Justice from 1812 to 1824, and *eerste klerkmeester* ('first clerk master'). He died in Malacca and was buried there on 19 May 1825. That he was appointed governor *ad interim* in Malacca, must be viewed in connection with the transitional period he was living in. The VOC had gone bankrupt and had been liquidated. The Netherlands had been invaded by French troops and had been cut off from the colonies by the British Navy. Malacca had only been returned by the British to the Dutch in 1818, and the new kingdom of the Netherlands was just recovering from the long years of turmoil and decline. The country evidently did not have the strength to send officials to all the former settlements of the VOC, and was too happy to appoint one of the scarce residents that could be found on the spot. He had excellent connections with several of the local Malay rulers. In 1818, when the British returned Malacca, Batavia intended to reassert its traditional suzerainty over the dominions of Johor. When armed Dutch ships and 300 marines appeared in Riau's bay, tensions rose high at the Royal court of Riau. At that point the Dutch sent Adriaan Koek ahead to Riau to talk the Riau Royal Court into accepting Dutch instead of British suzerainty. He succeeded in swaying the decision of the sultan in Dutch favour thanks to his friendship and relationship of trust with the sultan. Adriaan Koek also served on the committee charged by the colonial government at Batavia with the compilation of the first Malay-Dutch dictionary. Thanks to his friendly relations with the local rulers, he was instrumental in collecting writings in the Malay language from various places.

Gustaaf Dieterich was a representative case. He chose his bride from among the *mestizo* community, typically of a Dutch father, who had adopted her. His second wife was apparently a concubine of Malay stock, who was set free and baptised, and thus joined the fictitious European community. His case also shows the common practice of creating a marriage market that encompassed not only Malacca, but the entire East Indies. Indeed, the high degree of mobility of the European community, especially its male members, made it possible to find bride in one of the many other settlements. The marriage market of Malacca alone was obviously very restricted. Remarriage was very common, and the pool one could choose one's partner from, was very restricted.

These burghers played a vital role in the management of the colony. In 1824, Gerrit Leendert Baumgarten worked as *pakhuismeester* ('warehouse master'), in the *weeskamer* ('orphan chamber'), the *diakonie* ('Church welfare board') and as a *predikant*. One of his brothers, Johan Willem Baumgarten, became a member of the Council of Justice in 1820-

---

222 Christiaans 1986, p. 266.
223 De Witt 2007, p. 213.
1824. Adriaan Koek became the captain-lieutenant of the burghers, Deputy Governor of Malacca, President of the Council of Justice, and a Church minister.\textsuperscript{224}

When Malacca was definitively given up to the British in 1824, many Dutch burghers stayed on. Newbold, writing in the 1830s, explains this choice as follows:

“The Dutch formed a highly respectable and wealthy class of the community. They are mostly the descendants of the officers of the old Dutch governments; who preferred, on the place being given up to the English, to remain without employment, rather than quit Malacca for Batavia, (the capital of the possessions of Holland in the East Indies) and are much attached to the soil. Some of them find employment in the government offices, others are engaged in commerce and agriculture, while a few live on the annual sum paid by government for the transfer of their landed rights.”\textsuperscript{225}

\section*{Conclusion}

Malacca fell too late into Dutch hands. It could not become their centre of empire, because they already had founded Batavia. They should have taken it around 1606, when Matelieff attempted to do so. When they finally took hold of it, it was rather to deny it to any other power than to use it to their own profit. I wonder whether they never regretted not having used Malacca as their headquarters. It was indisputably a healthier place, more pleasant to live than Batavia. Batavia was closer to the areas that produced the spices, i.e. the Moluccas, the Banda Islands and Ternate. This constituted a tremendous strategic advantage over Malacca. Moreover, Batavia was newly founded over the ruins of Jacatra, and this condition of “tabula rasa” no doubt presented less constraints than Malacca, which had a varied and rich cultural tradition and a history of a sultanate and Portuguese rule. Here they were much more constrained by the firmly entrenched social relations they inherited, and had to work from there, whereas in Batavia they could build a polity and society virtually from scratch. Malacca thus was doomed to live in the shadow of Batavia. In the end it functioned as a guard post, provided with a small garrison, rather than as a trading centre in its own right. In 1698, governor-general Willem van Outhoorn (1635-1720; governor-general from 1691 to 1704) wrote from Batavia to the headquarters in Amsterdam: “It has been known for a long time that Malacca has been more a place of necessary residence and garrison than of trade.” In his report of 1741 Gustaaf Willem

\textsuperscript{224} Nordin 2007, p. 275.

\textsuperscript{225} Newbold 1839, p. 138.
van Imhoff (1705-1750), council of India, and later governor-general of the Company (1743-1750), described Malacca as a deficit post of the Company, producing little trade and playing no role in relations with indigenous states. “It could be reduced in size but not completely abandoned because of its strategic position.”

Was Malacca one of those nodes of empire? If we look at the states or state entities of the seventeenth and the early eighteenth century, in particular the Dutch Republic, it is fair to say that the level of technology, in other words the technological resources, the material resources and the human resources or demographic resources, the level of political and integration, its power to organise and mobilise huge numbers of people, the level of education and know-how, in short, the means to project its power beyond its borders, were simply insufficient to construct a colony that would come anywhere near replicating the society in the motherland. It was simply a matter of limitation. It was simply impossible for the small group of colonisers in those days, whether they be the Dutch, the English, or the Portuguese to realize anything similar to the kind of construction the colonial powers in the nineteenth century would do. The nineteenth-century colonizing powers were vastly superior to their seventeenth and eighteenth-century predecessors. They had a much higher level of technological prowess, they could mobilize many more people, the level of their material culture was much higher, their political institutions were much more sophisticated, encompassing a much larger population. The power that the coloniser could bring to bear on the colonized in the course of the nineteenth century was infinitely more sophisticated than what the VOC could muster in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is not a question of choice but simply a question of necessity.

The VOC never tried to establish or build a nation in the East Indies, their policy was rather one of avoidance. In Malacca, as in most other settlements, the political institutions and regulations were designed to keep things in order, to safeguard their position and their material privileges. The Company did not endeavour to construct, to knead a community out of the conglomerate of ethnic communities living in Malacca. This is probably what distinguishes the VOC most from the subsequent coloniser, the British during the nineteenth century. They were representing a nation-state. Their goal clearly was to integrate a particular area or domain, dominion or city into the larger whole of an empire. In the case of the Dutch, Malacca and many other port-towns they established, were not truly part of a unified and integrated empire.

References

Al-Monaes 1991

Andaya 1971

Andaya 1983

Arasaratnam 1979

Barend-Van Haeften 1992

Barendse 2000

Baxter 1983

Beaujard and Fee 2005
Blagden and Bremner 1927

Blussé 1996

Bosma and Raben 2003

Bosma and Raben 2008

Boxer 1965

Boxer 1967

Boxer 1969

Brockey 2008

Bruijn 1980
Cardon 1934

Christiaans 1986

Clammer 1983

Clark 1993

Coolhaas 1952

Cortesão 1944a

Cortesão 1944b

Dampier 1931

Das Gupta 1985
De Josselin De Jong and Van Wijk 1960

De Witt 2007

Dunn 1984

Ferrand 1918

Flecker 2001

Gelder 1997

Gelderblom and Jonker 2004

Hancock 1969

Hancock 1975
Harley and Woodward 1995

Harrison 1979

Harrison 1985

Hayes Hoyt 1997

Hoffman 1972

Hooykaas 1939

Irwin 1962

Irwin 1970

Irwin 1983
Janssen 1882

Joosse 2002

Ketelaars *s.a.*

Knaap 1999

Knowlton 1964

Koloniaal Archief-Ontvangene en Ingezonden Papieren van Malacca

Lennon 1881

Leupe 1859

Leupe 1936

Lewis 1995

Locher-Scholten 1994

Lutz 1994

Macgregor 1955

Macleod 1927

Maier 1993

Marsden 1812

Marsden 1824
Malacca under Dutch Rule (1641-1795 and 1818-1825)

Willy Vande Walle

Maxwell 1911a
W.G. Maxwell. “Barretto de Resende’s account of Malacca.” JRASSB 60 (Dec 1911), p. 3.

Maxwell 1911b

Meyer 1991

Morillo 1995

Nagtegaal 1993

Newbold 1839

Newitt 2007

Nordin 2002

Nordin 2007

Novaresio 1996
Numata 1964

Oostindie and Paasman 1998

Ophuysen 1910

O’Rourke and Williamson 2002

Overvoorde 1923

Polo 2001

Raben 1996

Rêgo 1942

Roeper and Wildeman 1993

Russell-Wood 1978
Salmon 1981

Sandhu and Wheatley 1983

Schuchardt 1890

Schutte 2002

Schutte 2002a

Schutte 2002b

Schutte 2002c

Sheehan 1934

Sotozono 2004

Smith 1961
Sta Maria 1994

Stapel 1938-40

Subrahmanyam 1995

Sulentiny 2005

Survey 1983

Tarling 1992

Tibbits 2002

Tolmacheva 1994

*Town and Fort of Malacca* 1924
Valentyn 1724-26

Valkhoff 1972

Verhoeven 1964

Verhoeven 1967

Vertzberger 1984

Watson Andaya 1983

Wickeren 1999
Wickeren 2009

Wickeren 2010

Wink 2002

Winstedt 1935

Winstedt 1949
Malacca under Dutch Rule (1641-1795 and 1818-1825)
Willy Vande Walle

Archives

Algemeen Rijksarchief, ‘s-Gravenhage
Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren (VOC)
I) Copie gemene resolutien genomen in rade van Politie der stad en fortresse Malacca;
II) Copie secrete resolutien genomen in rade van Politie der stad en fortresse Malacca;
III) Copie lijsten van aangekomen en vertrokken en particuliere vaertuijgen in genoemd tijdperk;
III) Lijste van alle inwoonders tot Malacca.

Private Collectie and Collectie Familiearchief in Algemeen Rijksarchief, ‘s-Gravenhage
I) G.J.C. Schneither;
II) Couperus
III) Flack
IV) Verhuell
V) Maps Collectie

Oriental and India Office Library, London
I) Straits Settlements Factory Records
II) Board’s Collections
III) Dutch Records relating to Malacca
V) India Office Records Reference Map Collections.
VI) Prints and Drawings: Print Collection in Oriental and India Office.

British Library, London
I) Map Collections in the Map Reading Room

National Archives of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur
I) Microfilm of Straits Settlements Factory Records
II) Microfilm on Inventories and accounts of deceased estates
III) Dutch Church Records
IV) Microfilm of VOC records relating to Malacca
V) Map Collections
School of Oriental and African Studies Library, London
Missionary archives: Council of World Missionary Archive of the London Missionary Society
Ultra Ganges

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Library, Bangi
Microfilm copies of Dutch records from India Office Library, London

University of Malaya Library, Kuala Lumpur
Microfilm copies of VOC records relating to Malacca
Plan of the Portuguese Fortress of Malacca
British Museum – Sloane M.S. 197.
Dutch Map of Malacca Town
Reduced to Scale of Four Chains to an Inch
Date doubtful- probably drawn before A.D. 1800. Printed by the Federated Malay States (1895-1946) Surveys No. 87-1924.
Panoramic view of the harbour and town of Malacca.
The gate known as Porta de Santiago, but in actual fact the gate (re)built by Balthasar Bort (1669-1670). Old photograph, reproduced in *Town and Fort of Malacca* 1924, opposite p. 1.

Christ Church. Old photograph showing outlook before 1911, reproduced in *Town and Fort of Malacca* 1924, opposite p. 41.
Tra scrittura e *legenda*
La Cina negli stampati romani della fine del Cinquecento

**Roma: centro o periferia?**

Per la storiografia tradizionale Roma moderna è al centro della periferia. La periferia è rappresentata dall’Europa meridionale cattolica: la Spagna, il Portogallo e l’Italia; mentre il centro è costituito dall’Europa settentrionale, protestante e pragmatica, ove ha luogo la rivoluzione scientifica e successivamente la rivoluzione industriale. Al centro della periferia è appunto Roma con la sua Corte papale, vetusta e decadente, con i suoi palazzi e le sue academie.

Questa prospettiva convenzionale è stata messa in dubbio dagli studiosi già da almeno un trentennio\(^1\), pur non senza generare una qualche resistenza. Nella storiografia italiana, per esempio, è stato alquanto problematico e doloroso disfarsi di quella interpretazione negativa che del barocco aveva dato Benedetto Croce. Nel discorso crociano non solo Roma ma tutta l’Italia, perdurarono ai margini di quel processo di trasformazione che coinvolse l’Europa settentrionale e condusse alla rivoluzione scientifica e alla modernità. Avvolta nelle maglie del controllo controriformista della vita sociale e religiosa, Roma, in

---

quanto sede della corte papale, non poteva, nella visione di Croce, dare spazio all’innovazione ed alla libera circolazione delle idee. La mentalità barocca, ridondante e artificiosa, della quale i gesuiti erano i principali artefici, è, per Croce, il principale ostacolo alla modernità. Non intendo qui ripercorrere le tappe di un dibattito certo noto ai lettori e mi limito a rimandare in nota a pochi essenziali studi sull’argomento. Nei rimandi noterete che faccio riferimento in particolare alla storiografia italiana ma non per spirito di parte, quanto piuttosto per rendere note ai lettori opere che ritengo significative e che possono non avere sempre avuto l’ampia circolazione che meritavano.

Scopo di questo articolo è quello di raccogliere, attraverso riferimenti dispersi in una serie di fonti disparate e di studi dedicati ad argomenti affatto eterogenei, indizi di una presenza della Cina, e più in generale dell’Oriente, nel fiorente mondo editoriale della Roma tra la fine del Cinquecento e gli inizi del Seicento; riconoscendo dunque alla scrittura il ruolo di “forma fondamentale secondo cui l’Occidente organizza il proprio rapporto con l’altro e con la parola dell’altro”. Ancorché non sia propriamente una città portuale, essa può tuttavia essere considerata, soprattutto in virtù degli stretti vincoli con il mondo editoriale veneziano, un punto di incontro di diverse culture nonché centro di irradiazione di una conoscenza della civiltà cinese che precede ed in qualche modo plasma la sinofilia, caratteristica dell’enciclopedismo barocco.

Non mi addentrerò quindi negli aspetti che maggiormente la caratterizzano, come per esempio la così detta “controversia dei riti”, le cui premesse certo si ritrovano già nel Seicento, ma che esplode in tutta la sua magnitudine durante il secolo successivo. L’articolo prende piuttosto in esame frammenti delle origini di una lunga storia culturale nella quale, sia sul piano intellettuale che materiale, la Cina è protagonista, insieme al Nuovo Mondo, di quella dilatazione del mondo che porta l’Europa a ripensare se stessa e la propria storia – un processo culturale e socio-politico che non si è ancora concluso, e che anzi è quanto mai attuale. In questo processo, come sottolineava Garin, ancor prima che la famosa opera di Edward Said vedesse la luce, la conoscenza dell’altro si traduce in riflessione speculare:

---


3 Sull’enciclopedismo nel Seicento si veda Cesare Vasoli, L’ enciclopedismo del Seicento, Napoli, Biblio-polis, 1978.
Tra scrittura e legenda
La Cina negli stampati romani della fine del Cinquecento

Elisabetta Corsi

Quasi in uno specchio, è l’anima stessa dell’Europa che si riflette nelle immagini che gli Europei si fanno degli altri popoli – e in quelle immagini si esprime così la buona come la cattiva coscienza degli Europei.4

Se dapprima, la concezione umanistica della pari dignità di tutti gli uomini sembra prevalere, man mano che la penetrazione coloniale si fa più aggressiva, essa cede gradualmente il passo alla convinzione di una superiorità dell’Europa rispetto alle popolazioni “pagane”.5 Cristianesimo e superiorità intellettuale si ritrovano così commisti in una infernale mistura dagli effetti devastanti, la cui magnitudo continua ancora a minare gli equilibri del mondo.

Come è noto, nel periodo storico preso in esame da questo breve articolo, la pubblicazione del libro di Molina, Concordia libri arbitri cum gratiae donis, determina una delle maggiori controversie teologiche tra Gesuiti e Domenicani in merito alla differenza “in actu primo” o “in actu secundo” fra Grazia sufficiente e Grazia efficace. Scaturita dalla necessità di trovare una mediazione tra i due estremi del pelagianismo e del calvinismo in merito al problema della giustificazione attraverso i meriti o per sola fede, la Concordia propone il concetto di scientia media, ovvero una prescienza divina delle cause contingenti che indurranno un individuo a cooperare o non cooperare con la Grazia efficace. Il domenicano Bañez critica tale tesi ritenendo che essa limiti l’onnipotenza di Dio facendo dipendere la prescienza divina dalla libera determinazione umana. Pur senza voler entrare nel merito della complessa questione che dovette essere affidata da Clemente VII all’opera della Congregazione De Auxiliis (1598-1607) affinché vi ponesse fine, è opportuno alludervi poiché essa ha importanti risultanze rispetto all’atteggiamento adottato nei confronti delle popolazioni dell’Asia e del Nuovo Mondo, le religioni da esse praticate, la possibilità della salvezza di queste genti pur senza che fosse loro giunto l’annuncio della parola di Cristo. In tale contesto teologico, animato da aspre e insanabili controversie dottrinali, devono dunque essere comprese le prime committenze editoriali relative alla

---

4 Garin, Rinascite e rivoluzioni, cit., p. 330.
Port Cities and Intercultural Relations
15th-18th Centuries

Cina. I teologi gesuiti insisterranno sull’universalità della conoscenza di Dio, che è la sola condizione mediante la quale tutti gli uomini possono ambire alla pari dignità, limitando così fortemente la portata del discorso campanelliano. Ecco come José de Acosta, SI (1539-1600) descrive tale condizione:

Che fra gli Indiani è qualche cognizione di Dio.

Primieramente quantunque le tenebre dell’infidelitadi tengano oscurato l’intelletto di quelle nationi: in molte cose nondimeno la luce della veritade, & la ragione di operare qualche cosa in quelle: & così comunemente tengono, & confessano, un supremo Signore, & Fattore del tutto...Il che è molto simile à quello che riferisce il libro degli atti delli Apostoli, che predicò Santo Paolo in Atene, ove vide un altare intitolato (Ignoto Deo) al Dio non conosciuto. [Atti, 17]

Tale precognizione è tuttavia assai labile, dato che, a detta di Acosta, gli indiani non hanno neppure un termine col quale nominare Dio nelle loro lingue e dunque “non lo sapendo ancora nominare, se non col nostro vocabulo.” (p. 99 verso)

È necessario situare il libro di Acosta nel contesto degli studi sulle origini della sinologa, ove esso è sempre assente. Per Acosta, infatti, Indias, secondo una nozione invalsa nel tempo, rappresenta l’insieme dei paesi non ancora evangelizzati, compresa dunque la Cina. Ancorché il Nuovo Mondo vi abbia prevalenza, non mancano riferimenti assai significativi all’Impero di Mezzo. Mediane la nozione di Indias, autori come Acosta, tendono a riassumere tutte le popolazioni gentili, secondo un modello desunto dagli Atti

6 Su tali controversie esiste una copiosa bibliografia. Per una sintesi efficace si veda Paola Urbani, “Controversie teologiche al tempo di Sisto V”, in Maria Luisa Madonna (a cura di), Roma di Sisto V. Le arti e la cultura, Roma, De Luca, 1993, pp. 494-495.


degli Apostoli ed in particolare dal discorso di Paolo all’Aeropago, una delle principali fonti ispiratrici del discorso missionario post-tridentino.

A José de Acosta fa riferimento più volte Giovanni Botero nella sua


ancorché l’opera di De Acosta sia stata pubblicata nel 1596. Le pagine dalla 16 alla 18 sono dedicate alla descrizione dell’**Isola della China**, ove prevale, come del resto è caratteristico di questa edizione dell’opera, l’interesse per i prodotti commerciati. Come è noto, la **Relatione Universale** fu oggetto di numerose revisioni ed aggiunte da parte del suo autore; il subitaneo successo dell’opera ne determinò le numerosissime edizioni che, come avvenne per altre opere delle quali si parlerà in seguito, suppliranno all’aniconismo delle prime edizioni cinquecentesche, con un adeguato corredo di immagini esemplificative delle “curiosità” narrate dal testo. Se nell’edizione del 1595, i cinesi sono “di costumi rozi, portano braghe alla tedesca: e in testa due corne, fatte di un velo sottile, e un paio di forbici in fronte” (p. 18), nell’edizione del 1622, “non è natione, che con studio maggiore attenda al gouerno; né che habbia meglio ordinata distribuzione delle pene, e de premij.”

Come vedremo a proposito dell’opera di Juan Gonzales de Mendoza, la concezione teologica di una prescienza della rivelazione che accomunerebbe le popolazioni gentili, alla quale si è precedentemente alluso e che non è estranea neppure all’opera di Botero, non è affatto esclusiva della produzione testuale gesuitica ma è condivisa anche da altri ordini religiosi. Mendoza, per esempio, fa spesso riferimento al fatto che l’Apostolo Tommaso avrebbe predicato sino in Cina (cap. V, p. 43 e cap. VI, p. 46).

Questo inserimento della Cina all’interno del mondo pagano delle Indie e la loro conseguente assimilazione, di volta in volta, alla remota antichità egizia o alla classicità
pagana, deve essere ricondotto all’irrisolto problema avvertito dal mondo cristiano nei confronti dell’antico; un problema che si ripropone varie volte nel corso dei secoli e viene affrontato con mutati atteggiamenti ma è sempre generatore di tensioni. Si potrebbe dire che, per il Cinquecento, esso venga affrontato nei termini di una dottrina delle similitudini, secondo l’insuperata analisi che ne fa Foucault ne Les mots et les choses.\(^{11}\)

**La Cina nella Roma di Sisto V**

Mentre imperversano le controversie teologiche che animano il breve ma intenso pontificato di Sisto V (1585-1590), viene pubblicata a Roma la prima opera dedicata sistematicamente alla conoscenza della Cina. Si tratta di un’opera che normalmente non viene citata negli studi sulle origini della proto-sinologia italiana, forse ingenuamente perché composta in castigliano da un non italiano. Al contrario, la

_Historia de las cosas mas notables, ritos y costumbres, Del gran Reyno dela China, sabidas assi por los libros delos mesmos Chinas, como por relación de Religiosos y otras personas que en estado en el dicho Reyno. Hecha y ordenada por el muy R.P. Maestro Fr. Ioan Gonzalez de Mendoça de la Orden de S. Agustin, y penitenciarrio Apostolico a quien la Magestad Catholica enbio con su real carta y otras cosas para el Rey de aquel Reyno el año 1580. Al illvstrissimo S. Fernando de Vega y Fonseca del Consejo de su Magestad y su presidente en el Real de las Indias. Con un Itinerario del nuevo Mundo [por Fr. Mart. Ignatio]. Con privilegio y Licencia de su Sanctitad. En Roma, a costa de Bartholome Grassi .1585. en la Stampa de Vincentio Accolti,

dedicata a Sisto V, viene commissionata a Juan Gonzalez de Mendoza (1550-1620) da Gregorio XIII e stampata sotto il pontificato di Sisto V.\(^{12}\)

---


\(^{12}\) Mendoza aveva lasciato la Spagna alla volta del Messico all’età di diciassette anni e nel 1564 era entrato nell’Ordine degli Agostiniani. Questa particolare condizione gli aveva probabilmente permesso di avere accesso alle informazioni relative alla missione di Legazpi nelle Filippine e successivamente alle imprese dei confratelli Martin de Rada e Jeronimo Marin, i quali, dal giugno all’ottobre del 1575, cercarono, senza successo, di fondare una missione nel Fujian. Sulle fonti dell’_Historia_ si veda Donald F. Lach, _Asia in the Making of Europe, cit._, vol. I, Book two, pp. 742-794.
Composta da Mendoza dopo il suo arrivo a Roma nel 1583, la *Historia* non deve solo considerarsi un’impresa editoriale romana ma una vera e propria impresa globale. Concepita sin dalla prima edizione in 8°, ovvero nel formato di un *libro da bisaccia o da mano*\(^\text{13}\), composta in lingua volgare, si presenta subito come un’opera destinata ad un’ampia cerchia di lettori, non appartenenti ai ristretti circoli ecclesiastici.

Quanto tali scelte editoriali siano state condizionate dall’interesse del Pontefice per i libri non ci è dato di sapere. Tale interesse deve essere ricondotto ad un ampio progetto ideato dal Pontefice e che si articolava su tre fronti: in primo luogo era necessario proteggere e conservare il patrimonio librario e dunque provvedere a mettere in atto un piano di rinnovamento della Biblioteca Vaticana; occorreva poi promuovere grandi imprese editoriali al fine di combattere l’attivismo riformista che nella stampa aveva uno dei suoi più efficaci strumenti di propaganda, istituendo, a tal fine, la Tipografia Vaticana. In ultimo, egli comprese presto che i libri potevano costituire uno strumento straordinariamente efficace nell’evangelizzazione dei popoli.

L’opera di Mendoza può essere in qualche modo assimilata a quel corpo di testi che potremmo definire come un vero e proprio genere letterario, quello dei *Nuovi Avvisi*\(^\text{14}\), operette che consistono di una o più lettere indirizzate dai gesuiti del Giappone e della Cina ai loro superiori o talvolta a corrispondenti privati e che, in virtù della loro eccezionalità, varcano i confini della ricezione privata essendo date alle stampe nelle lingue volgari, dopo aver subito un sapiente lavoro di riedizione. Tale processo di riscrittura ha lo scopo di mettere in evidenza quegli argomenti considerati maggiormente in grado di stimolare la “curiosità” dei lettori in merito a queste remote civiltà, e nello stesso tempo consente di omettere dati e considerazioni relative al funzionamento interno della missione e dunque meno rispondenti alle finalità di tali pubblicazioni.

A cavallo tra la narrazione storica e l’agiografia, i *Nuovi Avvisi* sono anche una efficace fonte di propaganda per le missioni. A Venezia sono soprattutto gli stampatori Giolitti e Tramezzino ad occuparsi della stampa di diversi *Nuovi Avvisi*. Essi contribui-


Ancorché stampata a Venezia, deve a buon diritto essere considerata nell’ambito della cultura editoriale romana del Cinquecento, a causa dei forti legami dei Tramezzino con Roma. I fratelli Michele e Francesco si erano infatti trasferiti a Roma verso i primi anni venti del ‘500 e risiedevano nel rione di Parione. Il Sacco di Roma aveva tuttavia determinato un prematuro sconvolgimento delle attività imprenditoriali dei due tipografi, inducendo così Michele il Vecchio a fare ritorno a Venezia. Michele il Giovane aveva invece ereditato, nel 1579, i beni dello zio ma con essi anche una causa civile intentata dai Tramezzino romani. Non ci soffermeremo sulle complesse vicende che conducono al progressivo antagonismo tra le case veneziana e romana dei Tramezzino, rimandando alla letteratura specializzata sull’argomento.\footnote{Tinto, \textit{Annali, cit.}, p. XXVII e ss.}

Ciò che interessa qui mettere in evidenza è il contributo diretto di queste figure di editori-tipografi i quali, con le loro scelte editoriali, seppero interpretare in modo significativo e incoraggiare, grazie al loro intuito commerciale, i gusti della crescente comunità borghese di lettori interessati a quelle civiltà antiche, che le relazioni dei missionari svelavano con sempre maggiore precisione e dovizia di dettagli. Dai torchi dei Tramezzino videro la luce opere di medicina e arte militare, teologia e giurisprudenza, classici latini e greci, sino alla veterinaria, alla gastronomia, e ai romanzi cavallereschi, soprattutto tradotti dallo spagnolo, incluse le opere storiche, anch’esse in gran voga.\footnote{P. Grendler, \textit{The Roman Inquisition, cit.}, p. 6, 14-15; Alberto Tinto, \textit{Annali tipografici dei Tramezzino}, Venezia, Roma, Istituto per la collaborazione culturale, rist. Leo S. Olschki, 1968, pp. XX-XXI e passim.}

E questo il caso dell’ opera

\textit{Delle historie del mondo di M. Gio. Tarchagnota,} Lequali contengono quanto dal principio del Mondo fino à tempi nostri è successo. \textit{Cauate da piu degni, e piu graui auttori, che habbiano...}
di Giovanni Tarcagnota (m. 1566), le cui complesse vicende editoriali, che coinvolsero gli eredi Tramezzino, Michele il Giovane di Venezia e Venturino di Roma, a cavallo tra il 1580 e il 1581, sono state narrate da Paul Grendler come esempio della vitalità del mercato dei libri nei due centri di Venezia e Roma, nonché della complessità delle transazioni economiche ad esso sottese.\textsuperscript{19}

Le narrazioni contenute nei \textit{Nuovi Avvisi}, e più in generale nella corrispondenza missionaria del tempo, confluiscono nel quinto volume dell’opera di Tarcagnota


ove si dedica ampio spazio alla conversione del Giappone, traendo spunto, in particolare, dai resoconti di Luis Frois.\textsuperscript{20}

Quando la vena letteraria prende il sopravvento sulla documentazione storica, si può addirittura sfociare nel romanzo cavalleresco, come è il caso de: \textit{Il magni vitei} (In Verona, appresso Girolamo Discepolo, 1597), opera del Vicario Generale del Vescovo di Mantova e al contempo poeta e letterato della corte gonzaghesca, Ludovico Arrivabene (?1530–?1597).\textsuperscript{21}

Opere di questo genere sono solo indirettamente connesse alle controversie teologiche alle quali si è alluso assai brevemente all’inizio di questo articolo. Infatti esse, nelle caratteristiche editoriali, per esempio nell’uso del corsivo e nel formato, nonché nell’uso delle lingue volgari piuttosto che del latino, indicano chiaramente a quali destinatari esse si rivolgano. Si tratta in sostanza di veri e propri “libri moderni”, diretti al nascente pubblico di lettori eruditi e “curiosi”, ma accessibili nei costi anche ad un artigiano che fosse sufficientemente versato nella lettura.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Supplemento e quinto volume dell’Historie}, Venetia, Tramezzino, pp. 74-77.
\textsuperscript{22} P. Grendler, \textit{The Roman Inquisition}, cit., p. 14.
Per Ludovico Arrivabene, secondo quanto riferisce l’ampio colophon dell’opera:

oltre al piacere che porge la narrazione delle altre cavallerie del glorioso Vitei, primo Re della China, et del valoroso Golao, si ha nella persona di Ezonlom, uno ritratto di ottimo Prencipe et di Capitano perfetto. Appresso si acquista notizia di molti paesi, di vari costumi di popoli, di animali, si da terra et si da acqua, di alberi, di frutti et si somiglianti cose, moltissime. Vi si trattano ancora innumerevoli questioni quasi di tutte le scienze più notabili. Fatti di arme navali, da terra, assedi et assalti et loro maneggi. Funerali, trionfi, ragionamenti di soggetti diversi, avvenimenti meravigliosi; et altre cose non punto discare a’ Lettori intendenti.\(^\text{23}\)

Il magno vitei è dunque non soltanto un romanzo proto-etnografico, ma anche un precoce esempio di divulgazione scientifica, poiché nell’opera l’autore cerca di dar conto delle eclissi, dei terremoti e delle maren. L’editore Discepolo aveva pubblicato, lo stesso anno, una


pubblicata dapprima a Roma per i tipi di Luigi Zannetti.\(^\text{24}\)

In che senso è da intendersi la modernità di questi libri? A questo proposito, potrà rivelarsi utile considerare il successo dell’impresa editoriale della _Historia_ di Mendoza: il susseguirsi di edizioni nelle principali lingue nell’arco di pochi anni, è sintomo del suo immediato successo, tanto più significativo se tiene conto del carattere pionieristico dell’opera. Lo studio più approfondito delle diverse edizioni è stato condotto da Carlos Sanz in appendice alle _Primitivas relaciones de Espania con Asia y Oceania_. Tuttavia il contributo sinora più significativo, soprattutto per il rigore filologico, ad una lettura comparativa di esse, è costituito dal saggio bibliografico di Adrianus Dudink, composto in risposta alle sollecitazioni offerte dalla pubblicazione dell’edizione annotata della versione in tedesco del libro di Mendoza.\(^\text{25}\)


\(^\text{25}\) Madrid, Libreria General Victoriano Suarez, Apendice F, Bibliografia Sinòptica de la “Historia d las cosas mas notables, ritos y costumbres del Gran Reino de la China, por Fray Juan Gonzalez de Mendoza”,
La prima edizione dell’Historia risale al 1585, a costa di Bartolomeo Grassi, en la Stampa de Vincentio Accolti e si compone di 440 pagine rilegate in 8°. Lo stampatore Vincenzo Accolti apparteneva alla famiglia Bolani Accolti, il cui padre Giulio, detto “il Bresciano”, era giunto a Roma intorno al febbraio 1557, dopo un apprendistato nell’officina di Antonio Manuzio a Venezia. Egli aveva aperto una stamperia in Borgo Alessandrino (“Bartolomeo qm Antonio Grassi libraio al Pellegrino”), trasmettendo dunque al mondo editoriale romano la perizia nell’arte che aveva appreso nella stamperia aldina.26

Quando all’edizione del 1585 segue, l’anno successivo, una seconda edizione romana appresso Giovanni Martinelli, in 4°, di 379 pagine, si sono già succedute altre sei edizioni a Valencia, Venezia, Barcellona, Madrid e Lisbona.

Giovanni Martinelli,27 “cospicuo libraio-editore romano con bottega al Pellegrino”, è altresì responsabile dell’edizione in lingua italiana dell’ editio princeps:


in-8° (ne esiste anche un’altra edizione stampata da Bartolomeo Grassi, secondo Cordier “du même tirage” per via del fatto che la p. 378 è indicata in entrambe le ed. come 578). Il titolo dell’edizione veneziana del 1586 è leggermente diverso:


La prima edizione in castigliano impressa a Madrid, en casa de Querino Gerardo Flamenco. A costa de Blas de Robles. Librero, viene così descritta da Sanz:

“El “Itinerario” que se atribuye en esta edición a J. Gonzalez de Mendoza, tiene 27 capítulos, y ocupa los folios 268-368. …Los capítulos 7-8-9 y 10 se refieren al descubrimiento del Nuevo Méjico por Antonio de Espejo, que no figuran en la edición de Roma, 1585, ni en las subsiguientes y traduc. que la toman por base.”29

Anche nel caso dell’opera di Mendoza dunque, come avevamo visto per quella di Botero, ci troviamo di fronte ad una complessa vicenda testuale che è sintomo della necessità di arricchire progressivamente l’opera di nuovi contenuti, in risposta alle sollecitazioni offerte dal mercato editoriale del tempo. La singolarità dell’Historia è dettata, peraltro, dal fatto che in essa sono, per la prima volta in uno stampato europeo, riprodotti dei caratteri cinesi, questione che verrà trattata nel paragrafo seguente.

**Caratteri cinesi e caratteri “orientali” negli stampati romani**

Il 6 marzo 1581 Montaigne visita la Biblioteca Vaticana e in quell’occasione gli viene mostrato un libro cinese:

“Poi un libro cinese in caratteri strani, su fogli d’una certa materia assai più delicata e trasparente della nostra carte, che non tollera la tinta dell’inchiostro: sicché sono scritti da

---

un solo lato del foglio, e i fogli sono tutti doppi e ripiegati sul lato esterno dove si tengono insieme. Si suppone sia la membrana di qualche albero. Vidi pure un frammento dell’antico papiro, recante caratteri sconosciuti: è una scorza d’albero.”

Non ci è dato purtroppo di sapere di quale libro si trattasse ma è certo che fosse un libro stampato in Cina e non di quelli che cominciavano a stamparsi a Roma grazie allo sviluppo dei caratteri tipografici degli alfabeti orientali. La riproduzione dei caratteri cinesi nell’ambiente tipografico romano, ma anche europeo, fu sempre assai problematica a causa soprattutto della natura non alfabetica della lingua cinese. La necessità di contenere i costi di stampa e di tirare pochi esemplari alla volta pur potendo conservare le matrici da utilizzare in ristampe successive, indusse i tipografi cinesi a preferire la stampa xilografica a quella, pur nota, a caratteri mobili. Una situazione del tutto diversa occorse invece in Corea, ove al contrario si preferì tradizionalmente tirare numerosi esemplari di un opera servendosi dei caratteri mobili per comporre le pagine, senza dover dunque conservare le matrici per future ristampe.

I caratteri cinesi che appaiono nell’opera di Mendoza sono alquanto imprecisi, anche se vi si nota l’impegno del punzonista nel cercare di riprodurre lo spessore e la plasticità dei tratti. È chiaro che sarebbe stato impossibile per un tipografo romano, poco avvezzo alla scrittura cinese, riprodurre la complessità dei caratteri su una matrice lignea secondo il metodo utilizzato in Cina. Egli avrebbe potuto tuttavia ricorrere alla forgiatura dei punzoni necessari se solo avesse avuto informazioni sufficienti in merito agli otto tratti costitutivi di tutti i caratteri cinesi (yongzi bafa 永字八法); purtroppo però i resoconti missionari del tempo sono abbastanza lacunosi al riguardo.

Il problema della riproduzione dei caratteri cinesi rimane pressoché irrisolto anche a distanza di quasi un secolo, come si evince da un’opera di soggetto assimilabile a quella di Mendoza, sia per i contenuti che per il successo editoriale. Si tratta della Relazione della grande monarchia della Cina del P. Alvaro Semedo Portovghese di Giesv’. Con Privilegio, Roma, Sumntibus Hermann Scheus, 1643, tradotta in italiano a soli tre anni dalla pubblicazione dell’originale portoghese. I caratteri in essa presenti non superano, come nel caso dell’Historia di Mendoza, il numero di tre, e si limitano a pochi tratti costitutivi: vi sono raffigurati, senza l’indica-

---

zione della pronuncia ma con il loro solo significato, i caratteri tu 土, wang 王 e yu 玉; questi ultimi due peraltro sbagliati nelle proporzioni tra il primo ed il secondo tratto. Essi appaiono tuttavia meno fantasiosi e dunque più facilmente decifrabili, rispetto a quelli presenti nell’Historia di Mendoza.\footnote{Ibid., p. 46.}

I caratteri cinesi non verranno successivamente più inseriti nei testi a stampa, eccezion fatta per la China illustrata di Athanasius Kircher, la Histoire generale de la Chine di Jean Baptiste Du Halde, e poche altre opere, parimenti dispendiose sia nell’apparato iconografico che nel formato, allorché l’asse del mondo editoriale si sarà inesorabilmente spostato verso l’Europa settentrionale.

La pubblicazione a Roma dell’Historia di Mendoza impone dunque, come dicevamo, di occuparci del problema della stampa dei caratteri cinesi in Europa, problema che deve essere visto in primo luogo in rapporto alla necessità di stampare libri liturgici nei diversi alfabeti detti “orientali”.

L’opera Indice dei caratteri con l’inventori, & nomi di essi esistenti nella stampa Vaticana & Camerale, dedicata al Card. Francesco Barberini, bibliotecario di Urbano VIII, e stampata a Roma nel 1628, contiene ad esempio un Alphabetum indorum, così come caratteri arabi, fenici, caldei, pur essendovi del tutto assenti i caratteri cinesi.

D’altra parte la stampa di prodotti contenenti alfabeti orientali vantava già a Roma una tradizione più che decennale, avviata sotto il pontificato di Gregorio XIII, allorché nel 1578 veniva fondata la tipografia universale. In ossequio ai dettati tridentini in merito alla revisione dei libri liturgici, essa aveva la finalità di garantire la diffusione, “tramite i gesuiti, di testi liturgici in lingue orientali presso i cristiani non romani.”\footnote{Alberto Tinto, La Tipografia medicea orientale, Lucca, Maria Pacini Fazzi Editore, 1987, p. 8.}

Nata piuttosto come una vera e propria società commerciale, è invece la Tipografia Medicea Orientale, fondata nel 1584, dal cardinale Ferdinando de Medici, poi Ferdinando I Granduca di Toscana, su sollecitazione dell’orientalista Giovanni Battista Raimondi. La Tipografia, che aveva sede in Piazza di Montedoro, si dota ben presto di una ricca biblioteca di manoscritti orientali e, secondo quanto riferisce Tinti, il cardinale si rivela assai munifico nella acquisizione delle serie di caratteri orientali, al punto che molti dei tipi in dotazione alla Tipografia non vennero addirittura mai utilizzati.  

È dunque probabile che il volume cinese veduto da Montaigne alla Biblioteca Vaticana facesse parte di una serie di testi precocemente acquisiti proprio per studiarne la tipologia di scrittura e la eventuale riproduzione tipografica. Un passaggio nell’Historia sembrerebbe corroborare questa ipotesi, poiché, nel descrivere le caratteristiche della scrittura cinese, Mendoza afferma che attraverso esemplari presenti nella Biblioteca Vaticana è invero possibile accertare che:

“La loro lingua s’intende meglio in scrittura, ch’in voce, come l’Hebrea, distinguendosi i caratteri per punti, che non servono così facilmente parlando: Scrivono diversamente da quello, ch’usiamo noi, facendo le righe da altro à basso, molto eguali, & dritte, & cominciando al contrario, cioè dalla man destra verso la sinistra. Il medesimo stile tengono nella stampa, come si dirà, & si può vedere hoggi in Roma nella libraria Vaticana, & in quella, che la Maestà del Rè Filippo ha fatto nel monasterio di S. Lorenzo il reale, dove, come anco in ogni altro luoco, si troverà esser vero, quant’io dico, del modo di scrivere, & de i caratteri.” (pp. 93-94)

Che stampati cinesi circolassero già in Europa è del resto alquanto probabile, se si deve tenere fede a quanto riferito da Mendoza a proposito dei libri da lui visti e posseduti. È possibile altresì che dei libri che Martin de Rada aveva portato con sé nelle Filippine, e dei quali Mendoza fornisce un elenco alquanto dettagliato al capitolo XVII della sua Historia, qualcuno avesse preso la via dell’Europa o della Nuova Spagna, frammisto al cargo di spezie ed altre delizie esotiche del Galeone di Manila.

Dalla narrazione di Mendoza si evince che l’interesse manifestato verso i libri cinesi fosse legato non solo alla curiosità nei confronti dei contenuti in essi esposti, quanto alla loro stessa materialità, al fatto cioè che essi fossero testimonianza di un’antica e sofisticata tecnica di stampa. Mendoza dedica il cap. XVI alla dimostrazione dell’influenza esercitata dai libri cinesi su Gutenberg, poiché essi “gli dessero il lume, ch’egli comunicò poi à gl’altri.” (p. 102). “Che questa invenzione passasse da loro à noi”, lo dimostra il fatto che in Cina esistano libri stampati “più di cinquecento anni inanzi, che l’inventione d’Ale-
magna avesse principio...”. (p. 103) Lo stesso Mendoza dichiara di possedere un libro cinese altrettanto antico e molti altri dichiara di averne visti: “Un de i quali ho io in po-
ter mio, oltra molt’altri, c’ho veduto, così nell’Indie, come in Spagna, & in Italia”. Oltre
naturalmente ai libri acquistati dal “Provinciale Herrada, in Auchieo, & portati all’Isole
Filippine, & erano introno à cento corpi composti sopra diverse materie, & stampati in
diversi luochi del Regno, ma la maggior parte nella Provincia d’Ochiam, dove la stampa
fiorisce più”. (p. 103) Essi costituirebbero il corpo delle fonti delle quali egli si sarebbe
servito per la redazione della Historia.

Benché agli alfabeti orientali siano dedicati alcuni paragrafi Della Libraria Vaticana,
Ragionamenti, Roma, 1590, di Muzio Pansa; opera nella quale è evidente l’influenza
della Historia per quanto concerne la sezione relativa alla stampa, della quale parleremo
in seguito, vi è del tutto assente ogni riferimento alla scrittura cinese.

Muzio Pansa (1565-1628), originario di Penne, presso Pescara, si era laureato a Roma
in medicina. Egli può essere considerato il primo importante storigrafo della Biblioteca
Vaticana. La sua opera, Della Libraria Vaticana, concepita come celebrazione del rinnova-
mento della Biblioteca Vaticana voluta da Sisto V, venne impressa dallo stesso Giovanni
Martinelli, che aveva prodotto l’edizione in italiano della Historia di Mendoza. L’opera è
composta di quattro parti, articolate in Discorsi, dei quali solo i primi hanno attinenza
con la biblioteca vera e propria, mentre gli altri ne raccordano il contenuto ai cicli pittorici
che la decorano. Numerosi sono i riferimenti ai fasti del papato di Sisto V ed ai suoi molti

La prima parte del volume è dedicata all’origine delle biblioteche; ad essa Pansa fa
seguire una descrizione della carta, le cui origini vengono ricondotte al papiro egizio ed
alla pergamena, ma non vi si fa alcun riferimento alla sua invenzione in Cina. La scrittura
cinese non è presente neppure nel Discorso III, dedicato ai “Caratteri delle lettere dei
linguaggi del Mondo e quali siano i principali”. Finalmente nel Discorso III: Dell’In-
vvenzione della Stampa, e quando fosse la prima volta in Italia, si ammette che:

“...(p. 14) Non dimeno, per quel che si legge nelle Historie della China troviamo essere
stata l’invention della Stampa più antica; & i Chinesi affermano essa haver havuto principio
nel lor (p. 15) Regno, & esser stata trovata da un’ huomo, che essi onorarono come Santo
e che tenendo i loro Progenitori molti anni da poi commercio nell’Alemagna dalla parte
della Russia, e della Moscovia, che sono più commode per fare il camino per terra, vi fosse
La Cina negli stampati romani della fine del Cinquecento

Elisabetta Corsi

portata quella invenzione, e che anco i Mercanti Alemani, che venivano alla China per il Mar Rosso, & per L’Arabia Felice, portassero alcuni libri stampati, nel lor paese, i quali venendo alle mani di Cutemberto predetto tenuto Author della Stampa nelle Historie, gli dessero il lume, ch’egli comunicò poi à gli altri. Il che essendo vero, come essi tengono per scritture autentiche, e necessario; che questa invenzione passasse da loro à noi, e tanto maggiormente questo è da credere, quanto si trovano oggi nella China molti libri stampati più di cinquecento anni innanzi, che l’invention di Alemagna havesse principio secondo il nostro computo, si come si legge ne’ libri d’Historie di quel Regno. [sino a questo punto il testo è ripreso integralmente dall’edizione in italiano dell’ *Historia* di Mendoza. N.d.A.] Ne è da meravigliarsi di ciò, perché l’Artiglieria reina della gloria militare fu conosciuta, e usata molti anni prima nella China, che in Europa, nella quale fu ritrovata secondo la commune opinione l’anno della salute MCCCXXX da un Tedesco, & questa era già molti anni prima ritrovata da Vitei primo Rè della China che grande incantatore, insegnatali, come dicono i Chinesi, da uno spirito, che usci di terra, e veramente l’inventione di essa fu cosa Diabolica, poiché ha di già mandato in ruina il Mondo. Ma comunque si sia basta, che l’invenzione della Stampa è stata mirabile, e fruttuosa assai: poiché per lei tanta moltitudine de libri che erano smarriti, e nascosti, sono venuti in luce in grande utilità de gl’huomini, col’aiuto de quali riescono tali letterati, quanti hoggi sono in tutte le parti della Christianità, che per innanzi per divenir tali si penava molto”.

Quanto l’esattezza delle informazioni messe in circolazione attraverso questi libri dipendesse dall’accuratezza delle informazioni fornite dai missionari, si può desumere da una comparazione con le considerazioni sulla stampa contenute in un’opera che, nonostante fosse stata impressa a Venezia, deve essere nuovamente citata in questo contesto poiché le considerazioni sulla Cina in essa contenute sono basate sui resoconti di missionari incontrati a Roma. Si tratta della

*Historia Naturale e morale delle Indie; scritta dal R. P. Giosseffò di Acosta Della Compagnia del Giesù; Nella quale si trattano le cose notabili del Cielo, & de gli Elementi, Metalli, Piante, & Animali di quelle: i suoi riti, & cerimonie: Leggi, & governi, & guerre degli Indiani. Nouamente*

---


giona. Di tutte l’opere di N.S. Papa Sisto V. Dell’historie de concilij generali sino al Tridentino. Delle librarie famose,

e celebri del mondo. Di tutti buomini illustri per l’inventione delle lettere. Con l’agiuanta degli alfabeti delle lingue

straniere, e con alcun discorsi in fine de libri, e della Stampa Vaticana, & di molte altre librerie si pubbliche, come

privatè in Roma, con tre tavole, Vna degli autorì citati, l’altra de’ discorsi, e la terza delle cose notabili, nuovamente

posti in luce. All’illvstrissimo Signor Scipione Gonzaga cardinal de’ de’ S. Chiesa, Roma, Appresso G. Martinelli,

Ancorché nel *Procuranda Indorum Salute*, Acosta avesse proposto una gerarchia delle popolazioni pagane sulla base del diverso grado di erudizione, stabilendo dunque l’identità tra evangelizzazione e civilizzazione, ed avesse collocato la Cina al primo posto proprio sulla base dell’elevato sviluppo delle istituzioni culturali in quel paese grazie alla diffusione della cultura scritta, nella *Historia natural* la scrittura cinese è inferiore a quella dei messicani perché “con una medesima figura non si può significare la diversitade, che intorno la cosa si concepisc” (pp. 128r–v). Anche la stampa non è poi così sviluppata perché:

“Calcando una tavola delle figure, che vogliono stampare, & stampando tanto forte, quanto vogliono, et nel medesimo modo, che qua noi stampiamo imagini, calcando il rame, ò legno”. (p. 128r) “Tutto questo non di meno è di poca sostanza, perché in fatti tutta la scienza de i Chinesi consiste nel sapere scrivere, et leggere. Perché non hanno saputo scienze più alte, et il medesimo leggere, e scrivere non è vero scrivere, ò leggere, perché non sono lettere le sue, che servino per parole, ma figurette d’innumerabili cose, che con infinita fatica, et lungo tempo s’imparano: et in somma di tutta la sua scienza sa più un’Indiano del Perù, ò del Messico, c’ha imparato à leggere, et scrivere, che il più saputo Mandarinino, che sia fra quelli: perciòche l’Indiano con uintiquattro lettere, che sà scrivere, et unire insieme, scriuerà, et leggerà tutti i vocaboli, che sono nel mondo: et il Mandarinino con le sue cento millia lettere sta molto dubbioso nello scriuere qualunque nome proprio di Martino, ò di Alfoso, et molto meno potrà scriuere li nomi di cose, che non conosce: perché in somma lo scriuere della China è una specie di dipingere, ò di cifrare”. (p. 129r)

In sostanza la condanna di Acosta si basa sul fatto che la lingua cinese, non essendo di natura alfabetica, non consentirebbe di tradurre nomi propri della tradizione europea, un argomento alquanto debole, probabilmente desunto da, a quanto Acosta rivela, Alonso Sanchez (p. 128v), forse in occasione del loro incontro a Roma con Antonio Possevino. Ben altre considerazioni formula Alvaro Semedo nella *Relatione*:

“...par che la Cina tenga il primo luogo perché conforme alli loro libri, si servono di quella da 1600 anni. Non è però, come accennammo sopra, simile alla nostra: sono le lor

---

lettere intagliate in tavola. Segna l’Autor del libro la forma che vuole, ò grande ò piccola, ò mezzana; ò per dir meglio, dà l’opera sua manoscritta all’Intagliatore, il quale fa le tavole della grandezza delli fogli, che se gli danno; & incollando sopra le tavole li fogli datigli al rovescio, vâ intagliando le lettere che li ritrova, con molta facilità & esattezza, senza incontrarsi in alcun’ inciampo, essendo le lor scritture, non dall’una a l’altra parte, come s’usa fra Noi, mà da una sola: & il parerci che lor libri siano scritti da ambedue le parti, proviene perché il bianco di quello sta di dentro la piegatura”.

Semedo ci dà anche una rara testimonianza della tecnica della litografia:

“Fanno parimente l’istesso in tavole di pietra, con questa differenza, che nello stampare resta il campo della carta nero, e le lettere bianche; perche qui si dà la tinta alla superficie della pietra, e nelle tavole al solo vacuo dell’intaglio. Quest’ultimo modo di stampare serve solamente per Epitaffi, Piture, Alveri, Montagne, e cose simili, delle quali pretendono lasciar memoria stabile, e ne hanno molti”. (p. 48)

Le fonti missionarie sono in genere assai parche rispetto alla predilezione cinese per la calligrafia, che pure viene attestata nel resoconto di Semedo:

“Hanno in maggior prezzo la buona lettera, che la buona pittura: e per Quadri di lettere antiche bel formate, passano ad essere riverite, perché non sopportano di vedere per terra una carta scritta: subito la levano: e nelle scule de’ Putti vi ha luogo assegnato per conservarle, & à suo tempo le bruciano, non per religione, come fanno li Turchi, mà solamente per riverenza delle lettere”. (p. 46).

A queste considerazioni Semedo fa seguire una breve descrizione delle caratteristiche del pennello, della pietra (“calamari”) e delle barrette di inchiostro, rilevando persino che “gli Artefici che la fanno [“la tinta”], no sono tenuti per mecanici, tanto nobile giudicano quest’arte”. (p. 47) Egli non manca di concludere il suo discorso con un accenno alla libertà di stampare “quel che gli pare e piace, senza che vi ha bisogno di vista ò censura, ò licenza alcuna”. (p. 48)

Come si evince dai pochi esempi sinora presentati, non vi è uniformità nella qualità delle informazioni relative alla cultura scritta e alla stampa in Cina; è dunque sempre necessario tornare ad esaminare accuratamente ogni singola fonte, evitando comode quanto pericolose generalizzazioni.

38 Semedo, p. 47.
Ampie sezioni dedicate agli alfabeti orientali e alla storia delle lingue ebraica, egizia e caldea, sono contenute nell’altra opera celebrativa dell’impresa sistina commissionata ad Angelo Rocca (1545-1620), ovvero la


In essa tuttavia non si fa cenno, così come era stato per l’opera di Pansa, Della Libraria Vaticana, alla scrittura cinese.

Abbiamo precedentemente trattato il problema della riproduzione di caratteri cinesi in stampati europei ed abbiamo visto come esso non sia mai stato risolto se non attraverso il ricorso ad espedienti inefficaci. Manca un studio che fornisca un quadro d’insieme dei tentativi di stampare testi in cinese presso i diversi centri editoriali europei, e che sia in grado di tracciare le diverse articolazioni, tenendo conto cioè dei mutamenti eventualmente prodotti da un incremento in Europa della circolazione di stampati cinesi, successivo per esempio alla fondazione della Sacra Congregazione di Propaganda Fide. Come vedremo da un ampio resoconto concernente la biblioteca della Congregazione, le collezioni di codici e stampati cinesi erano estremamente ricche, ma non è chiaro sino a che punto possano aver avuto un qualche impatto sui circoli accademici secenteschi e sul mondo editoriale.

Ancorché in numero minore, libri cinesi circolavano già da tempo in Europa, stando a quanto affermato da Montaigne e Mendoza, al punto da indurre quest’ultimo a ritenere che essi avessero avuto una influenza determinante su Gutemberg. Nonostante fosse molto difficile per i tipografi europei riprodurre la scrittura cinese, mi piace pensare che la diffusione di conoscenze in merito alle tecniche tipografiche adottate in Cina abbia continuato ad esercitare una certa influenza in Europa. Nel 1592, per far fronte ai problemi posti dalla necessità di ristampare i libri di canto fermo che Gregorio XIII aveva incaricato Palestrina e Zoilo di emendare, secondo le disposizioni tridentine, Raimondi ideò ciò che egli stesso aveva chiamato “prima invenzione”. Si trattava, non già della stampa tipografica, ma di quella silografica dei libri di canto fermo, dato che le dimensioni dei volumi avrebbero altrimenti obbligato alla forgiatura di punzoni di misura tale da risultare di difficile e dispendioso uso. Mi piace immaginare dunque che l’idea sia balenata a Raimondi grazie alla lettura di questi importanti resoconti sulla tecnica della stampa in


In quanto compendio dei “librorum multitudine meliores Auctores” (p. 2), la \textit{Bibliotheca Selecta} può essere studiata come un guida che orientò le scelte dei missionari rispetto ai saperi europei che dovevano essere trasmessi attraverso la lingua cinese, la cui diffusione avrebbe dovuto appunto recare la “salute spirituale dei gentili”. In tal guisa, la traduzione di un’opera tanto significativa per la tradizione culturale cinese deve essere interpretata nello specifico contesto nel quale Antonio Possevino la collocò, ovvero nel libro dedicato ai popoli di fede giudaica, islamica e ai gentili, ai quali fa seguire, nei Libri X e XI, una discussione sulla \textit{Ratione Procurandae Salutis Iaponiorum, & aliarum Orientalium gentium}. Lungi dall’essere

“il primo esempio giuntoci, dove si trova un sistema di trascrizione in lettere latine, completo di indicazione delle aspirate e dei toni, precedente di oltre dieci anni a quello che sarebbe stato elaborato da Ricci nell’opera \textit{Xizi Qiji} del 1604”\footnote{In quanto compendio dei “librorum multitudine meliores Auctores” (p. 2), la \textit{Bibliotheca Selecta} può essere studiata come un guida che orientò le scelte dei missionari rispetto ai saperi europei che dovevano essere trasmessi attraverso la lingua cinese, la cui diffusione avrebbe dovuto appunto recare la “salute spirituale dei gentili”. In tal guisa, la traduzione di un’opera tanto significativa per la tradizione culturale cinese deve essere interpretata nello specifico contesto nel quale Antonio Possevino la collocò, ovvero nel libro dedicato ai popoli di fede giudaica, islamica e ai gentili, ai quali fa seguire, nei Libri X e XI, una discussione sulla \textit{Ratione Procurandae Salutis Iaponiorum, & aliarum Orientalium gentium}. Lungi dall’essere}
Port Cities and Intercultural Relations
15th-18th Centuries

la traduzione, lungi dall’essere un esercizio filologico, è piuttosto il risultato di un “addomesticamento” del testo originale, volto a porre in evidenza le virtù di quel “lume naturale”, artefice, mediante la grazia infusa da Dio, di quel complesso di “istituti e leggi” che avrebbe permesso ai missionari gesuiti di impiantare i semi dell’annuncio.

Il primo esempio di uno stampato che presenti i caratteri cinesi associati ad una traslitterazione è costituito invece dalla laudatio fatta pervenire da Matteo Ricci a Cheng Dayue (1541-c. 1616) e da questi riportata nell’opera Cheng shi mo yuan (Il giardino d’inchiestro del Maestro Cheng), stampata nel 1606, non in Europa ma a Nanchino. 41

In precedenza ho alluso all’incremento nella circolazione di libri cinesi a seguito della fondazione della Sacra Congregazione di Propaganda Fide nel 1622. Della biblioteca di Propaganda esiste un ampio resoconto nell’ Eusevologio romano di Carlo Bartolomeo Piazza:

“Rendono altresì segnalata questa insigne Libreria i Volumi di tutte le lingue Orientali; al Cui fine con magnanimo pensiero, e Zelo providissimo della Sac. Congregazione suddetta vi si esercita d’Artefici, & Operatij condotti da tutte le Nazioni, la stampa con


caratteri di ventidue Idiomi; col mantenimento d’Interpreti, Traduttori, Lettori, e Maestri delle medesime Lingue, perché in ogni Nazione, e Idiomi con la continua Providenza del Romano Pontefice si lodi, e benedica il Signore; essendosi Stampati li Catechismi di tutte le lingue, sparsi per tutte le parti bisognose d’esser istruite ne’ Dogmi Cattolici, da i molti Missionarij, che continuamente si mandano e si mantengono con immenso dispendio della medesima Congregazione. Arriva il numero di entrambe queste Librerie, privata, publica sopra dieci mila Libri”.

La descrizione prosegue segnalando la presenza di strumenti adeguati di riferimento e consultazione, quali gli Indici “copiosi”, ordinati per autori e per soggetti. La biblioteca costituisce, come si evince dal resto della descrizione che ne fa Piazza, un punto di riferimento per quegli “Studiosi Forestieri d’ogni Nazione”, i quali avrebbero potuto soddisfare la loro “virtuosa e erudita curiosità” accedendo a certi “riservati armarij”, nei quali si conservavano ogni genere di documenti nelle più diverse lingue, compresi preziosi libri cinesi, redatti sui più disparati supporti scrittori:

“Per diversità di lingue; varietà de’ costumi, strane usanze di Religioni, e d’Abiti; e Peregrino modo di Caratteri, d’Emblemi, di Zifre, di Gieroglifici, disegni, di colori, di linee misteriose scritte in pelli di diversi Animali; in Cotiche e membrane di Pesci; di Draghi, di Corio d’Elefanti, d’Idiomi affatto strani, e selvatici alle nostre Europee polizie e civiltà, di lingue, e di costumanze; quivi in riservati armarij per soddisfare alla virtuosa, & erudita curiosità de’ Studiosi Forestieri d’ogni Nazione; non v’ha per avventura altra Libreria, o Archivio, che questa avanzi, per la necessaria corrispondenza, che tiene questa famosa Congregazione, e Collegio, con tutte le più remote, e barbare Nazioni del Mondo; per essere quivi addomesticate con le dottrine, e Discipline Cristiane alla salutare ubbidienza dell’Evangelio”. (p. CXXXVJ)


---

Port Cities and Intercultural Relations
15th-18th Centuries

Teatri di libri

Roma è ancora, nel Seicento, un importante centro editoriale della cultura europea, non solo perché a Roma risiedono rinomati tipografi e librai, ma anche perché, come abbiamo visto, vi sono importanti librarie. Una delle più rinomate è quella di Palazzo Barberini, che è infatti “sopratutto nobilitato dalla Biblioteca di 40 mila volumi e più delle migliori impressioni, con i quali si vede superare ad ogn’altra libraria d’Europa”. 43

Le biblioteche romane tra la fine del Cinquecento e gli inizi del Seicento vengono sistematicamente inserite nelle guide e negli itinerari della città destinati ai pellegrini e visitatori. 44 Questo atto pone in relazione, non solo sul piano estetico-figurativo, il gusto per l’arte con quello per i libri, contribuendo ad inserire, in modo significativo, gli eclettici gusti culturali romani in un circuito di più ampia fruizione intellettuale ed estetica. Così Carlo Bartolomeo Piazza, ricorrendo alla fortunata metafora figurativa, ne esalterà le virtù: “Che i Libri siano vive, e vere Immagini degl’Ingegni, e monumenti gloriosi dell’Eternità, ne furono di parere tutti d’accordo gli Huomini più sensati”. 45

A proposito dell’inserimento dei libri nel circuito della fruizione artistica, Valentino Romani, nell’importante studio sulle biblioteche romane tra Sei e Settecento, rileva che:

“Dal mondo delle forme linguistiche ci arriva un primo, ancorché generico suggerimento in ordine alle circostanze di questo nuovo interesse per le biblioteche, nel coevo scorrimento di senso della parola ‘frontespizio’ che, propria della pratica architettonica tardo medievale, migra a partire dai primi decenni del Seicento verso gli usi della descrizione e del collezionismo librario: il libro sta facendo il suo trionfale ingresso nella complessiva esperienza prospettica dell’uomo del Rinascimento, diventando una coordinata ineludibile della sua percezione”.

Egli evidenzia tre tipi prevalenti di biblioteca: la libreria legata alla tradizione monastica di socievolezza e di servizio, associata alla spezieria, ovvero medicina del corpo e

---

di Roma. Nello Stato presente, edizione a cura di Valentino Romani, Biblioteche romane del Sei e Settecento, Manziana (Roma), Vecchiarelli, 1996, pp. CXXXVI-CXXXVII.

43 Roma sacra antica e moderna figurata e divisa in tre parti...In Roma, per Giovanni Battista Molo, 1687. A spese di Vincenzo de Romanis libraro a Pasquino, all’insegna di S. Francesco, e del Giglio d’oro, p. 64, cit. in Valentino Romani, Biblioteche romane del Sei e Settecento, p. 9.


45 Carlo Bartolomeo Piazza, Eusevologio Romano, cit., p. CXXXIV.
dello spirito; la grande libreria con annessa la quadreria e la collezione di stampe, ovvero la biblioteca del principe cristiano teorizzato da Diego de Saavedra Fajardo; infine lo “Studio di libri”, ovvero la biblioteca borghese, privata, “espressione di una forte pratica di scrittura”.

Queste considerazioni mi pare possano permetterci di situare la circolazione di stampati sulla Cina nel contesto della cultura libraria a cavallo tra il Cinquecento ed il Seicento: se i resoconti missionari hanno come scopo primario quello di promuovere l’evangelizzazione dell’Impero, stimolare le vocazioni nonché la carità di monarchi e principi, nello stesso tempo le informazioni in essi contenute vengono rielaborate per produrre opere che hanno lo scopo di stimolare il “piacere della lettura”.

Se la lingua e la cultura libraria avevano, più di qualsiasi altro aspetto della civiltà cinese, stimolato l’interesse degli eruditi della fine del Cinquecento, il quadro di riferimento si fa più complesso nel Seicento, man mano che si moltiplica la diffusione dei resoconti di viaggio e degli scritti missionari. Roma ha gradualmente perso la propria importanza come centro editoriale, cedendo il campo ad altri centri del nord d’Italia e d’Europa. Destinate ad un pubblico di lettori laici, eruditi o semplicemente curiosi, le pubblicazioni seicentesche continuano a preferire l’italiano al latino e le rilegature in 4° e in 8°, più maneggevoli ed economiche. Ne citerò solo una, dati i limiti di spazio di questo contributo, rimandando ad una bibliografia alla quale mancano tuttavia studi recenti.46

Di particolare interesse, nel contesto che ci occupa, è sicuramente l’opera,

Delle immagini de gli dei delli antichi di Vicenzo Cartari Reggiano. Ridotte da capo a piedi alle loro reali, & non più per l’adietro ofseruate simiglianze. Cavate da’ Marmi, Bronzi, medaglie, Gioie & altre memorie antiche; con e'quifito studio, & particolare diligenza da Lorenzo Pignoria Padovano. Aggiunte i le Annotationi del medefimo sopra tutta l’opera, & un Discorso intorno le Deità dell’Indie Orientali, & Occidentali, con le loro Figure tratte da gl’originali, che si conservano nelle Gallerie de’ Principi, & ne’ Musei delle persone private. Con le Allegorie sopra le Imagini di Cesare Malgatti Padouano, migliorate, & accresciute totalmente. Et vn Catalogo di centro più famosi Dei della gentilità. Con l’aggiunta d’un altro Catalogo de gl’Autori Antichi, & Moderni, che hanno trattato questa materia, ordinato & raccolto dal medesimo Pignoria, che ha accresciuto le Annotationi, & aggiunte molte imagini, in Padova, Nella Stamperia di Pietro Paolo Tozzi, 1626.

Come si evince dall’articolato titolo, al trattato di iconografia mitologica di Vincenzo Cartari (1531–dopo il 1569), Le imagini con la spositione de i dei de gli antichi raccolte per

---

46 Cfr. soprattutto D. Lach, Asia in the Making of Europe, cit.
Vincenzo Cartari (Venetia, F. Marcolini, 1551), Lorenzo Pignoria, nei primi anni del Seicento, vi aggiunge un Discorso sulle divinità delle Indie orientali e occidentali. Non si tratta tuttavia di una semplice integrazione ma di una operazione editoriale di natura assai più complessa, in ossequio a quella “proliferazione iconografica” propria del Barocco. Cartari si era infatti servito di fonti letterarie principalmente tardo-antiche e medievali, compresa la Genealogia deorum gentilium di Boccaccio, per descrivere le divinità classiche, inneggiando all’aniconismo della più antica religione degli Egizi, dei Greci, come pure dei «Persi, Sciti, e quelli della Libia», poiché essi adoravano «col lume della mente» e non già «con gli occhi del corpo» (p. 10). Significativamente la editio princeps del trattato: Le imagini con la spositione de i dei de gli antichi raccolte per Vincenzo Cartari, stampata a Venezia da F. Marcolini nel 1551 in un agile libro da bisaccia in 8°, non conteneva immagini “visive” ma solo descrizioni delle divinità antiche che erano state solo successivamente tradotte in linguaggio figurativo da Bolognino Zaltieri per l’edizione veneziana del 1571. Dato il successo immediato dell’opera si erano succedute negli anni diverse edizioni nelle principali lingue europee, facendo sì che essa soppiantasse gli altri trattati iconografici, eccezion fatta per la Iconologia, ovvero Descrittione dell’immagini universali cavate dall’antichità ed da altri lvoghi; opera non meno utile che necessaria à poeti, pittori, & scultori per rappresentare le virtù, uijtij, affetti & passioni humane di Cesare Ripa, la cui prima edizione (Appresso Eredi Gigliotti, Roma, 1593), era anch’essa priva di immagini calcografiche. Il manuale di Cartari veniva dunque a costituire la principale fonte di ispirazione per tutte le raffigurazioni mitologiche realizzate non solo da artisti italiani ma anche europei. Sull’onda del successo dell’opera, Pignoria si calava nell’ambiente della curia romana ove avevano ampia circolazione i resoconti dei missionari in Oriente, e ad essi attingeva copiosamente. A Roma si favoleggiava ancora della missione diplomatica dei principi giapponesi e delle immagini e statuette religiose da questi recate in dono a Papa Paolo V.


48 La bibliografia relativa alla missione giapponese è cospicua, anche se manca ancora uno studio che ne esami la presenza negli stampati del periodo. Il viaggio dei principi venne infatti ben presto inserito nell’ambito di una narrazione che aveva lo scopo di diffondere in Europa una conoscenza del Giappone, come è il caso di Historia del regno di Voxo del Giapone, dell’antichita, nobilta e valore del suo re Idate Masamune, deli favori, c’ha fatti alla Christianità, e desiderio che tiene d’esser Christiano, e dell’aumento di nostra santa Fede in quelle parti. E dell’Ambasciata che hà iniata alla S.ta di N.S. Papa Paolo V. e della suoi successi, con altre varoe cose diedificatione, e susto spirituale de i Letteri. Dedicata alla S.ta di N.S. Papa Paolo V. Fatta per il Dottor Scipione
Nel trattatello di Pignoria è da individuare l’origine delle affinità tra religione degli Egizi e religioni dell’“Oriente”, che assumerà tutta la sua pregnanza epistemologica con Athanasius Kircher, SI. E che ci riconduce a quella dottrina della *somiglianza* discussa da Foucault ed alla quale avevamo fatto riferimento al principio di questo saggio. Afferma infatti Pignoria:

“Et insomma per tutto questo, che chiamano novo mondo, tanto nell’Occidente quanto nell’Oriente, io ho avertito tanta la conformità fra le superstizioni Egittiane, & quelle del Paese, che ho havuto a meravigliarmi alcune volte. Scrive un Padre del Giesù fin del 1553, di Goa, d’haver osservato un Pagode di quei paesi, nel si vedeva una statua con tre capi, tre gambe, tre mani, & che si chiamava il Pagode dell’Elefante...Et queste composizioni d’huomo, & di bestia non sono d’altra religione, che di quella d’Egitto, come si può vedere nelle anticaglie di quel Paese. Nel Giapone (o pure vogliamo Giapan), non erano difformità minori”.49

Le similitudini tra le raffigurazioni delle divinità hindu di Ganesha, le divinità messe- sicane e quelle buddiste, sono, a detta di Pignoria, talmente evidenti che “non è necessario il provarlo”. (p. 566) Infatti,


Il Demonio, “Simia di Dio”, come lo chiama Pignoria (p. 553), il vero artefice della seduzione della somiglianza, alla quale si è fatto riferimento al principio di questo articolo:

“Et perché ancora di là il Demonio haveva introdotto Academie, & Studenti, in un Tempio fabricato ad effetto di approvare & graduare quelli che lo meritavano, si vedeva la figura del Dio delle lettere, & della Eruditione, ch’era la Lucerta o Ramarro. Di questo non

---

si vedeva ne statua, ne Altari, ma la figura sola nel soffitto del Tempio, fatta in giro & in forma rotonda, come gl’Egittij rappresentavano per il Serpente l’anno”. (p. 568)

**Conclusioni**

Nel corso di questo saggio ho voluto porre l’accento sul ruolo delle stamperie romane, in stretto rapporto con quelle veneziane, nella prima diffusione di conoscenze sulla Cina ed in particolare sottolineare l’importanza di Sisto V, il papa architetto, interessato non solo alla costruzione di edifici ma soprattutto all’edificazione di un’impresa missionaria che, per i suoi caratteri transnazionali, contribuirà a modellare, nei secoli successivi, il rapporto dell’Europa con il resto del mondo. Le diverse tipologie di scritti riguardanti la Cina, dai resoconti missionari ai *Nuovi avvisi*, alle *Historie*, sino ai romanzi cavallereschi ed ai cataloghi di *librarie*, contribuiscono a forgiare, là dove l’arte tipografica di un Granjon aveva fallito nel riprodurre gli ostici caratteri della grafia cinese, la “curiosità” secentesca per quella civiltà, coniugandola indissolubilmente alla cultura antiquaria e alla nascente cultura scientifica, che riconosceva nelle preziose “erbe del gran Imperio”\(^50\) proprietà taumaturgiche insuperate.

---

\(^50\) Francesco Redi, *Esperienze intorno a diverse cose naturali e particolarmente intorno a quelle che ci son portate dall’Indie*, in *Opuscoli di storia naturali di Francesco Redi*, a cura di C. Livi, Firenze, Le Monnier, 1858, p. 287.