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The age of Aceh and the evolution of kingship 1599-1641

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**THE AGE OF ACEH
AND
THE EVOLUTION OF KINGSHIP**

1599 - 1641



**by
Ingrid Saroda Mitrasing**

Cover page: Watermark of a decree Sultan Iskandar Muda (Source: KITLV nr. 36D 650)

THE AGE OF ACEH
AND THE EVOLUTION OF KINGSHIP
1599 – 1641

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Ingrid Saroda Mitrasing

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Adjajéb! Sobeunhanalah! Leungo lon kisah aneu'radjah

Wonderful! Listen! I am going to tell about princes
(Hikayat Pocut Muhammad)

CONTENTS

PREFACE	I
INTRODUCTION	1
Part One: HISTORICITY AND MYTH	
CHAPTER I : The Geo-Historical Setting	13
1.1.1 Malacca: marketplace and powerhouse	13
1.1.2 Sumatra: a clouded history	16
1.1.3 The Scenes of Aceh's history	18
1.1.4 Aceh: a good place in Sumatra	22
1.1.5 A cosmopolitan society	26
CHAPTER II : Representations of Kingship in Myth and Narrative	28
1.2.1 The Texts	28
1.2.2 The <i>hikayat</i> and the origin and meaning of kingship	30
1.2.3 The chronicles and Acehnese 'Thought'	34
1.2.4 The obstacles to conceptualising kingship	41
1.2.5 Influences on Acehnese 'Thought'	43
1.2.6 Succession	49
1.2.7 The appointment of the Prince of Pahang as Sultan	51
1.2.8 Significance of divine ordinance	56
1.2.9 Metaphor symbols and ceremonies	58
1.2.10 The council and the administration	63
1.2.11 Conclusion	68
Part Two : A TASTE FOR SPICE	
CHAPTER I: The Genesis of Aceh-European relations (1599-1607)	69
2.1.1 Towards understanding international relations	69
2.1.2 The first Dutch expedition to Aceh	71
2.1.3 Negotiations between De Houtman and the sultan	75
2.1.4 The sultan's inclination to the English	76
2.1.5 A turn of events: violence at the docks	78
2.1.6 Relentless Dutch efforts for trade monopolies	83
2.1.7 The dawn in Aceh-Dutch relations	86
2.1.8 Acehnese envoys visit the United Republic	87
2.1.9 The English obtain the Privilege in 1602	89
2.1.10 The visit of the French in 1602	95
2.1.11 Accord between Aceh and the VOC in 1607	97
2.1.12 Conclusion	100
CHAPTER II: Challenges and Choices: a Litmus Test	102
2.2.1 Centralization of the trade	102

2.2.2	Annulment of the Privilege of 1602 and the Accord of 1607	103
2.2.3	An English <i>Orangkaya</i> : Thomas Best in Aceh	109
2.2.4	Continuing English efforts for trading rights	113
2.2.5	Humiliation and retaliation of the Dutch	115
2.2.6	The nerve-system of the trade	118
2.2.7	Conclusion	119

CHAPTER III: Triangular Affairs and Inter-European Competition		121
2.3.1	English efforts for trade contracts	121
2.3.2	The English in the lead of the pepper trade	122
2.3.3	Coen's 'discourse'	128
2.3.4	Cornelis Comans appointed special ambassador to the sultan of Aceh (1616-1619)	131
2.3.5	The promise of a contract	133
2.3.6	Threats against the Dutch	136
2.3.7	A Dutch charm offensive	139
2.3.8	Coman's plan to seize the trade of the west coast	139
2.3.9	Bad performance of the Dutch merchants in Aceh	142
2.3.10	Conclusion	144

CHAPTER IV: An Ineffective Anglo-Dutch Alliance		146
2.4.1	The Treaty of Defence	146
2.4.2	The king and the beggars	148
2.4.3	A botched strategy	150
2.4.4	European retreat from Aceh and Iskander Muda's retaliation	155
2.4.5	Conclusion	160

Part Three: WAR AND SUBJUGATION

CHAPTER I: Prelude to the war expeditions		162
3.1.1	Entangled interests: the real and the ideal	162
3.1.2	Aceh's Forces	164

CHAPTER II: BELLIGERENCE BETWEEN ACEH AND JOHOR		169
3.2.1	The early conflicts	169
3.2.2	Aceh's invasion of Johor in 1613	171
3.2.3	The fate of Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah	173
3.2.4	Raja Bongsu installed as vassal ruler of Johor	176
3.2.5	Dutch-Johor relations	177
3.2.6	Johor's capitulation to Malacca in 1610	179
3.2.7	Aceh's motif to invade Johor	182
3.2.8	Portuguese reactions to the events	183
3.2.9	The come-back of the Dutch in Johor	184
3.2.10	A time of flux: fusion and fission	187
3.2.11	Aceh's revenge	190
3.2.12	Conclusion	195

CHAPTER III: EXPEDITIONS TO MALAY AND SUMATRAN PORTS	197
3.3.1 The castigation of Pahang in 1617 and 1618	197
3.3.2 The fate of a captured prince	199
3.3.3 The ravage of Kedah in 1619	200
3.3.4 The subjugation of Perak in 1620 and the threat to Patani	203
3.3.5 The intimidation of Jambi	206
3.3.6 Conclusion	208
CHAPTER IV: THE ATTACKS ON MALACCA IN 1629 an in 1641	211
3.4.1 The besieger besieged	211
3.4.2 The momentum lost	213
3.4.3 Incitements by the Dutch	217
3.4.4 The end of an era and the end of a false start	219
3.4.5 Dutch-Aceh negotiations for the siege of Malacca (1637-1640)	221
3.4.6 The fall of Malacca	229
3.4.7 Conclusion	229
CHAPTER V: SUBJUGATION AND SLAVERY	232
3.5.1 Introduction	232
3.5.2 Demographic need for the invasions	232
3.5.3 Dominant relations in Islam	234
3.5.4 The institution of slavery in Aceh	238
3.5.5 European perceptions of slavery in Aceh	240
3.5.6 Treatment of royal captives and foreign <i>orangkaya</i> in Aceh	243
3.5.7 The plight of the European captives	246
3.5.8 The human commodity	248
3.5.9 The impact of subjugation and slavery on Acehnese Society	252
3.5.10 Conclusion	256
CONCLUSION	258
BIBLIOGRAPHY	268
GLOSSARY	278
SAMENVATTING	281
RINGKASAN	285
ANNEX	
- Copy of a letter of the King of Acheen to the Queen of England	
- ‘Translaet’ of a letter of Paduqua Sri Sultan to Prince Maurice of Nassau	
- Original letter of Sultan Iskandar Thani to Prince Frederick Hendrik of Nassau	
- Successive Rulers of Aceh	
CURRICULUM VITAE	

PREFACE

I shall tell about the kings of Aceh and the way they interacted with the outer world. By way of overture I like to start at the very beginning of my research enterprise. When I lived in Banda Aceh between 1988 and 1992, I regularly visited the Documentation Centre where I met with three dignified elderly gentlemen, the ‘guardians’ of the Centre who still spoke ‘*de moedertaal*’ (mother tongue), as they laughingly referred to the Dutch language. They were particularly proud to talk to me about the epoch when four females in succession were on the throne. The period lasted from 1641 until 1699 and was marked by peace and prosperity. According to the norms in orthodox Islam, female rule is an aberration. I was eager to learn and understand why female rule came about and how it sustained for such an extended period. The gentlemen were sure that in the archives in the Netherlands, the extant documents of this period of the Sultanate were collecting dust and they suggested that I uncover them and write about this historical precedent.

Some time later in one of Indonesia’s other cities of great historical significance, Palembang (the centre of the Buddhist Sriwijaya Empire), my husband laid hands on an exclusive book published for a special occasion, which describes prominent women in the course of Indonesia’s history. He presented this to me with the words ‘I hope this will inspire you to take up a study on the reign of the female sultans of Aceh.’

When we settled down to retire in our hometown of Leiden, I was ready to embark on a study of the rule of females in Aceh. To my delight I could join the TANAP project (*Towards A New Age in Partnership*), a Dutch-Asian-South African Mutual Heritage project, at the Leiden University, as an associate researcher. TANAP invited and facilitated researchers from countries in Asia and from South-Africa to study their own pre-independence history from the VOC archives. To pursue my objective I followed a course in palaeography which was organised at the National Archives in The Hague, indispensable for reading and understanding the old Dutch documents. I also followed a colloquium on the history of Southeast Asia and attended several guest lectures and seminars.

When several months later our project leader broke the news to me that somebody else had already embarked on a study of female rule in Aceh and would soon arrive from abroad to join the TANAP programme in Leiden, I was devastated. ‘Was I interested to examine the preceding period when Sultan Iskandar Muda ruled Aceh? His proposition was not at all

consoling. I had to give up a subject I had long cherished. Very reluctantly I set out to make an inventory of the extant material of the preceding period and slowly a mental picture of this historically important era appeared. It marked the genesis of the East-West encounters and relations and it was of great significance in terms of the geo-politics of the Malacca Straits region and even beyond. With my background in international relations and development, this seemed to be more my subject. I accepted the new challenge and immersed myself in the study. In 2004 I submitted a thesis on the trade relations between Aceh and the foreign traders. It was the precursor of this PhD dissertation. From there on I proceeded to study the evolution of kingship against the background of Aceh's relations with the outside world during the same period and thus broadened the scope of my research. The sultans of Aceh played a dominant role in the political and economical development of the Malacca Straits region. Aceh became the most powerful state in this region and it was the nemesis of Portuguese Malacca.

The sovereign Sultanate Aceh Dar as-Salam (*Aceh Darusalam*) does no longer exist. From being an expanding power since it assumed the leadership role in fighting the Portuguese who conquered the famous Islamic emporium Malacca in 1511, up to the time when the Dutch - its old ally - took Malacca from the Portuguese in 1641, its political power gradually diminished. It was invaded and occupied by the Dutch from 1873 to 1942 and by the Japanese during the rest of the Second World War. We note a crumbling of empire, a redrawing of its domain, until its dissolution by way of integration into the independent Republic of Indonesia in 1950. Civil unrest and rebellion were part of the political transition. In 1959 Aceh acquired the status of Special Territory (*Daerah Istimewa*) within the Unitary State of Indonesia, with autonomy in the fields of religion, education and cultural affairs. When I set foot in Aceh in 1988, it had gone through several political transitions and social upheavals and there seemed no end to it. Secessionist wars were still fought against the central government in Jakarta. In 2005 an accord was reached between the central government and the dissident groups. Aceh is now known as *Nangeroë Aceh Darusalam* and has more say in the exploitation of its natural resources. It is Indonesia's largest provider of natural gas. Its natural resources have always been its greatest assets; pepper and gold, benzoin and silk brought it wealth and power in the period which marked its apogee, the period of this study.

With the dissertation written, words of thanks are in place.

I feel privileged that I was allowed by the coordinating staff of the TANAP project under the leadership of professor Leonard Blussé van Oud Alblas to participate in the PhD programme as an associate researcher. I wrote my thesis under his supervision.

I proceeded to write this dissertation under the keen and sympathetic authority of professor Femme Gaastra.

It is not amiss to name a few persons who encouraged me in my endeavours. Professor Barbara Watson-Andaya of the University of Hawaii lent me a listening ear and welcomed my idea of researching the evolution of kingship.

Professor Teuku Iskandar, authority on the classical Malay works and a native of Aceh was always prepared to enlighten me on relevant issues. I grew up in Leiden during the fifties, when both he and my father, two eager young men from the ‘East’ and the ‘West’ studied at the university and our families became acquainted.

The late professor A. Hasjmi, chairman of the committee of *ulama* and ex-governor of the province of Aceh, kindly provided me with copies of his writings on Sultan Iskandar Muda and on female authority in Aceh.

Without the marvelous Marijke van Wissen of IGEER my search and surge would have been less joyful.

I thank Sri Margono, Muridan Widjojo, Chris Nierstrasz, Menghong Chen, Hsin Hui Chu, Alicia Schrikker, Harry Knipschild and Anjana Singh for sharing with me joy and distress. Janet van de Mark-Mc Kinzie, a native English speaker and teacher, read a chapter to screen my English and after taking out some ‘Americanisms’ merely gave me the green light to continue writing.

I compliment Agus Suwignyo, a PhD candidate in the Encompass Programme at the Leiden University, for helping me with the translation of my summary in a finer Bahasa Indonesia than my own ability allowed me to do.

I thank the staff of the Library of the Royal Institute of Linguistics (KITLV) in Leiden for giving me shelter all these years.

The Reid Library of the University of Western Australia generously provided me with computer facilities during my stay in Perth from November 2004 to January 2005.

My brother in law Onno Cosijn’s artistic hand helped to shape the front page of this dissertation.

My mother, a qualified educator, always believed in my abilities and from childhood onwards encouraged me in all my endeavours. With her special talents for both the *alpha* and *beta*

disciplines she commanded an overseeing role during my years in high school. I am grateful that she may witness the result of this endeavour.

I am much indebted to my late father, whose overwhelming academic and public merits remain a source of lasting inspiration to me.

My husband Gustaaf stood by me during all these years. This dissertation could not have been written without his critical engagement and constant encouragement in every respect. His intellectual curiosity, practical mind and his indestructible positivism were indispensable in this enterprise. He and I could not have guessed that the famous forefather of his counterpart in Aceh, Raja Arifin Panglima Polem, would once be the subject of our many conversations: Sultan Iskandar Muda.

The dissertation was in the making when the tsunami struck Aceh in 2004 with an unprecedented rage. Hundred thousands of lives were taken. A number of friends disappeared by the unleashed forces which also destroyed the written pages of Aceh's history so jealously guarded by the three dignified gentlemen of the Documentation Centre.

The past was often unfair to the people of Aceh. Yet life in Aceh goes on and the resilience of the people is once again demonstrated and makes me feel humble.

I dedicate this book to the silenced witnesses of turmoil and devastation.

INTRODUCTION

The Theme

I like to start this study by quoting Charles Dicken's often quoted words: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." This is how Aceh appears in the western historiography: an environment where harsh conditions were coupled with fabulous wealth at the court of the sultan.

The mighty and sprawling Sultanate Aceh Dar as-Salam, located in the northern part of the island of Sumatra, conjures up awe, admiration and condemnation, chiefly through the pen of visitors, foreign company officials and historians. There is even an agreed stereotype for the ruler who came to dominate the first part of the seventeenth century, Sultan Iskandar Muda. According to this he was a callous warrior who expanded and populated his realm by conquests, a cruel tyrant and a potentate who monopolised the region's trade.

In this study I try to distance myself from the clutter of assumptions and opinions on Aceh and its rulers, which have somehow become facts. This entails an assessment of the dynamics of change at work. By trying to capture the dynamism of Aceh's relations with the outside world, I hope to arrive at a conclusion about Acehnese kingship and the role Aceh played in these relations in the period between 1599-1641.

The most notable events of Aceh's history occurred in one or other of the two spheres of actions: trade and war. The sultanate was essentially the product of trade and war.

I have established two historical parameters within which this study is set: the arrival of the first European expedition under the Dutch in Aceh in 1599 and the take-over of Portuguese Malacca by the Dutch in 1641. Before 1599 the Portuguese were the only Europeans in the Straits. Aceh was the fiercest and strongest opponent of the Portuguese 'infidels'. War against them was one of the consuming activities of the Acehnese rulers of the sixteenth century; they incessantly challenged the power of the Portuguese, officially assisted in the second half of the century by Ottoman Turkey which sent manpower, artillery and ships to help strike the Portuguese in Malacca. A substantial number of Muslim traders from Malacca sought refuge

under the umbrella of the Acehne Sultan, relocating their trade networks which linked Aceh to the Red Sea Ports in the ports at the other side of the Straits of Malacca.

These Muslim merchants contributed significantly to the economical and political rise of Aceh.

The early Muslim visitors who came from the Middle East, Persia and India came solely for purposes of commerce and not to conquer, but the transmission of Islam was nonetheless a major feature of their presence in the area.

The coming of the northern Europeans in 1599 was another defining moment in the region's history. Much of what happened politically, economically and socially, owed this to their presence and unequivocal quest for trade contracts and monopolies.

The primary foreign sources give us a sense of Aceh's powerful position in the Straits region and its role in trade, conflicts, wars and peace. In these relations the role of the sultan was paramount. The dynamics and mechanisms of trade with the outside world in which the Acehne sultans started to command a prominent role and the consequences of their contacts with the encroaching Europeans put a heavy stamp on the way they asserted authority. Their interactions with the northern Europeans, people from outside the traditional lines of communication and dependency, their differing and mutual interests, render the view which attributes a greater place to Hindu and Buddhist notions of kingship in Southeast Asia, in this case in Aceh, superfluous. In this view the *mandala* state theory is proposed to characterize kingship.¹ *Mandala* is the Sanskrit word for circle: 'A *mandala* – in whichever capacity, personal or communal – is a centring device. It lays out the order of one's universe and the flow of energies relevant to one's existence. It unifies disparate elements into a coherent complexity, organised around a central self or divinity.'² The Portuguese conquest of Malacca in 1511 merely revolutionized the region's history by setting in motion a chain of events impacting even beyond the Malay world. The occurring developments such as the rise of Aceh, its concurrent political articulation and its aspirations, require from the historian to take a fresh look at Acehne kingship, the way its rulers communicated with the past and the present. By exploring the interaction between the practical consequences of trade and

¹ The historian O.W. Wolters used the term *mandala* as a model to describe patterns of diffuse political power in early Southeast Asian history. His work is listed in the Bibliography.

² Rosita Delios "Mandala-building in International Relations as a Paradigm for Peace". Paper for the 16th conference of the International Peace Research Association. (Brisbane: Bond University, 1996).

expansion and Acehnese perceptions and uses of the past, I shall try to give a perspective of Acehnese kingship as it may have been.

From the Acehnese annals such as the epics and chronicles, the representations of kingship which are furnished with myth and legend, are gleaned.

During this period in Aceh's history we see four rulers at work. These were Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah (Sayyid al Mukamil) who ruled from about 1589 to about 1604; his son Ali Ri'ayat Shah al Mughayat ruled from 1604 to 1607, his grandson Sri Perkasa Paduka Shah Alam, posthumously known as Iskandar Muda (the young Alexander) ruled from 1607 until 1636. As the longest sitting monarch his rule receives most attention in this study. He was succeeded by his son in law, a prince of Pahang, known as Iskandar Thani ('Alexander the Second') Alau'd-din Mughayat Shah who was on the throne from 1636 until 1641.

Within this period Aceh experienced its political hey-day under the audacious Iskandar Muda. By intervening in the affairs of several Malay and Sumatran ports which he tried to bring under his control, he ultimately became the kingpin of the region's trade. This period of wealth and power is usually perceived as Aceh's 'golden age'.

When examining Aceh's rise to prominence, it is not only important to look at its material achievements, but to discern its ideals, and goals.

The sultan was the central figure of the state, but despite the growth of royal pretensions, his claims did not always go unchallenged, which makes it necessary to identify the limitations of his power.

From the expanding and contracting relations with outsiders during this roughly forty-year period, we obtain a picture of the complexity of the geo-political realities, the reasons of conflicts and motifs for war. It is important to find out if there was a connection with the situation of the sixteenth century. One of the features of Sultan Iskandar Muda's rule was his relentless efforts to break Portuguese hegemony and to dispel them from Malacca and the whole Straits region. The epithet *Dar as-Salam* ('abode of peace'), was above all a distinction between the rule and law of Islam versus that of the 'infidel' or 'unbeliever' in the *Dar al-Harb* ('abode of war'). The reality however was, that Aceh was open to trade and alliances with traders and representatives of non-Islamic states who accepted the sultan's sovereignty.

Justification of the study

Aceh's role as a key player in international trade and politics has so far inspired little scholarly interest, not in the least because of the variety of sources one has to make use of and particularly because of the lack of local sources which describe these relations. Aceh's history must be pieced together from the records of foreign travellers and traders, from passing references in indigenous texts, both religious and secular, from panegyrics and works of fiction purporting to describe historical events.

Notwithstanding the fact that much has been accomplished by researchers and prominent scholars who enlighten us on phenomena characteristic of the period they describe, other periods and fields have hardly been uncovered, charted and studied. The result is that we look at several *lembar sejarah*, pages of history.

With this study I aim to fill a lacuna in understanding Aceh's objectives, goals and ideals in its relations with the outside world, a world stretching beyond the traditionally perceived boundaries. Because the role of the sultan was paramount in these relations, it shows how kingship during this period of intense interactions evolved. At the same time the efforts of the northern European states and their representatives in shaping their own foreign relations with Aceh and other Asian polities are exposed and explored. It is too pretentious to draw a final conclusion on the implementation of their strategies, because Aceh was only one out of several polities with which they interacted.

Trade was the central issue in the relations between Aceh and the northern Europeans. The European merchants were chiefly interested in pepper (*piper nigrum*), but silk, gold, benzoin, camphor and tin were also much appreciated. In this study I focus on the pepper trade because this was the most important source of income of Aceh and the most sought after product.

The relations between Aceh and the northern Europeans were not limited to trade alone, geo-political ambitions implied different ways of conducting these relations.

The colliding and common interests of all the actors and their rivalry are explored as far as the sources permit, to gain a sense of the playing field and the power equilibrium.

This study is definitely not about trade volumes or trade numbers. The task I have set myself is to confront such questions as: how were Aceh's relations conducted, on what lines? What were the motives or perhaps incentives for the sultans to grant special privileges, trade contracts and even jurisdiction to the northern European traders? What caused the conflicts

with the neighbouring ports and how were they solved? Was there a connection between European encroachment and the increased regional flux?

Historiography and sources

Three major studies emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century, which shed some light on the issues which are the concern of this study. These are the pioneering, mosaic-like work of Denys Lombard, *Le Sultanat d'Atjéh au temps d'Iskandar Muda 1607-1636* (1967) from which researchers on Aceh's history have frequently drawn. Many issues are brought to light in this work, like Iskandar Muda's war expeditions to several Malay and Sumatran ports. I miss a broader analysis of the regional developments and of Iskandar Muda's motives for the war expeditions.

Ito Takeshi has inimitably described Aceh's internal structure in his extensive study *The World of the Adat Aceh* (1984). He prefers to use the indigenous sources and very apprehensively uses the foreign sources.

Arun Das Gupta described in some detail Aceh's trade in his study *Aceh in Indonesian Trade and Politics 1600-1641* (1962), by also frequently drawing from then available documents of the VOC and the EIC.

The historian and prolific author Anthony Reid has contributed inspiring and probing articles on different subjects of Aceh's history of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, while a host of authors have written on a range of subjects. Their works are listed in the Bibliography.

Several Acehnese historians have devoted their attention to this important era of their country's history. From the pen of the historian and *ulama* A. Hasjmy appeared among others, a biography titled *Iskandar Muda Meukuta Alam* (1975). Rusdi Sufi has published *Pahlawan Nasional Sultan Iskandar Muda* describing the role of the 'national hero' Iskandar Muda (2003). Amirul Hadi published a major work titled *Islam and State in Sumatra, a study of seventeenth century Aceh* (2004).

In the nineteenth century Dutch colonial interest inspired the writing of two major ethnological studies. The underlying goal was to deliver comprehensive knowledge to the colonial administration. C. Snouck Hurgronje wrote *The Acehnese* (1906), an extensive ethnographical study in two volumes of Acehnese society. J. Jacobs wrote *Het Familie- en Kampongleven op Groot-Atjeh* (1894). Both these works are of significant value for the

researcher of seventeenth century Aceh, because they provide hindsight information which is otherwise lacking. Different colonial scholars devoted their attention to important subjects.³

Samuel Johnson may have remarked that ‘travellers are more defective than any other writers’⁴, it is a plain fact that we depend chiefly on their accounts concerning their experiences and their perceptions of the country and the local men and women with whom they interacted. They provide the bulk of the material on which a historical study can be based. The archives of the Dutch and English trade companies are the most important sources to embark on a study of the trade relations. In addition the accounts of Dutchman Frederick de Houtman, the Englishman John Davis and the Frenchman Francois Martin of their visits to Aceh between 1599 and 1602 present the first impressions of the sultanate and of the encounters between Sultan Alau’-din Ri’ayat Shah (Sayyid al-Mukamil), his officials and the Europeans.⁵ The extensive account of the French admiral Augustin de Beaulieu provides valuable and detailed information on Aceh under the rule of Sultan Iskandar Muda and offers some hindsight information regarding the rule of his grandfather Alau’-din Ri’ayat Shah.⁶ Islamic scholars, (anonymous) text writers and court scribes - writing from different ideological angles - have contributed to the institution of kingship and its acceptance and to the historical experience of the Acehnese.

The *Taj as-Salatin* (the Crown of Kings), composed around 1603 by Bukhari al Johari, stands out as an important guide book for Islamic rulers. Notwithstanding the fact that it has no historical value, it certainly merits attention as one of the great classical Malay works written in Aceh.

The *Bustan as-Salatin* (Garden of Kings) which consists of 7 volumes, is composed by Sheikh Nuru’-din al Raniri, the leading religious adviser of Sultan Iskandar Thani. Although Al Raniri came from Ranir in Gujerat, India, he acquainted himself with the existing Malay works before he began his task in Aceh. This highly significant work, describes ‘world

³ K. F. H. van Langen has written on the structures of the Acehnese state; P. J. Veth wrote on Aceh’s relations with the Netherlands. Both studies are listed in the Bibliography.

⁴ Quoted by C. R. Boxer in: *Dutch merchants and mariners in Asia: 1602-1795*, (London: Varium Reprints, 1988), 11.

⁵ There works are listed in the Bibliography.

⁶ See : Denys Lombard (ed.), *Mémoires d’un voyage au Indes Orientales 1619-1622; Augustin de Beaulieu un marchand normand a Sumatra*. (Paris: Maison Neuve et Larose, 1996).

history' and the history of Islamic kings. Volume II, book 13 describes the genealogy of the Acehese rulers from the conception of the sultanate which is placed around 1500 AD.

The *Adat Aceh* is a code of law compiled of royal edicts, harbour regulations and rules for conduct at religious festivals. It is written by a host of court-scribes who were ordered by Sultan Iskandar Muda in 1607 to make certified copies of his edicts; his successors added their own regulations.⁷ An explanation of the genealogy of the *Adat Aceh* is given by the Acehese historian A. Hasjmy.⁸

The *hikayat* is an epic story or a panegyric⁹ and as such not always reliable as a historical source. Contrary to what the title suggests, the *Hikayat Aceh* is a panegyric on the life of Sultan Iskandar Muda as a young man. The identity of its author is not known, but there is well founded speculation that the work is written by Sheikh Shamsu'd-din Pasai, the most influential religious scholar at the court of Sultan Iskandar Muda until 1629.¹⁰

The epic stories the *Hikayat Malèm Dagang* and the *Hikayat Pocut Muhamad* which supposedly appeared at the end of the seventeenth century and beginning of the eighteenth century, carry special value for acquiring insight in Acehese kingship as it was brought to bear on society. The composers of these works are not named.

Together these local sources provide for the representations of kingship which we cannot find elsewhere.

⁷ I base my examination on the edition by G.W.J. Drewes and P. Voorhoeve, *Adat Atjèh* ('s Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1958). This is reproduced in facsimile from a manuscript in the India Office Library in London.

⁸ A. Hasjmy, *Iskandar Muda Meukuta Alam*, (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1975), 70: 'Sultan Alauddin Ali Mughaiyat Syah dicatat dalam sejarah sebagai Pembangun Kerajaan Aceh Darussalam, dan Sultan Alauddin Riayat syah II Abdul Qahhar Pembina Organisasi Kerajaan dengan menyusun undang-undang dasar negara yang diberi nama Kanun Al Asyi, yang kemudian oleh Sultan Iskandar Muda, Kanun Al Asyi ini disempurnakannya. Dalam perjalanan sejarah kemudian, Kanun Al Asyi ini adakalanya disebut Adat Aceh dan juga seringkali disebut juga Adat Meukuta Alam atau Kanun Meukuta'.

'Sultan Alau'd-din Ali Mughayat Shah was the founder of the Sultanate, Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Syah II Abdul Qahar started to codify regulations which became known as the *Kanun Al Asyi*. Sultan Iskandar enhanced these regulations by adding several additions. It is known to us as the *Adat Aceh*, also the *Adat Meukuta Alam* or the *Kanun Meukuta Alam*.'

Meukuta Alam (Mahkota Alam) was the area north of the Aceh river, which gave its name to the first dynasty that ruled Greater Aceh.

⁹ Shelly Errington defines *hikayat* as 'a written text to be recited in Court'. Her study is based on the use of language; Wilkinson defines *hikayat* as a tale, a history, a narrative; in: O. W. Wolters, *History, Culture and region Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1982), 110-11.

¹⁰ Teuku Iskandar, *Hikayat Atjèh* (Leiden: Brill, 1958), 2 and 18. In this dissertation I refer to the edition of Teuku Iskandar.

L. Andaya names Shamsu'd-din Passai as the author of the *Hikayat Aceh* in: "Aceh's contribution to standards of Malayness", *Archipel* (Paris: CNRS, 2001 no. 61), 29-68.

The archives of the *Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC) and of the (English) East India Company (EIC) provide most of the information on the historical events and the interactions between the merchants and functionaries and the local rulers and between Aceh and the ports in the neighbourhood. Both contain correspondence, (secret) instructions and treaties, while they also include scanty notes of travellers, narratives and accounts. Some of these sources have been published.¹¹

Portuguese published archival material serves to glean the relations between Aceh, Johor and Malacca, especially during the sixteenth century. Tome Pires' enlightening work *Suma Oriental* provides some very useful insight in the political developments in the Malacca Straits during the first years of Portuguese authority in Malacca. The author was an advisor of the governor of Malacca.

Put together, this eclectic collection written in Malay, Dutch, English, Portuguese and French provides very important, hence fragmented knowledge of the history of the Sultanate.

Methodology and constraints

By utilizing the primary sources, the foreign as well as the local ones as much as possible, and by also drawing from secondary material, I aim to write a history of Aceh of the period 1599 until 1641. I must however stress here that the evidence used in historical discourse is intrinsically uncertain, because it is less susceptible to exact measurement and inference. The result is that our analyses of the historical, social and political realities is seldom watertight or conclusive and may give rise to contestable theories. Even if this research is chiefly based on primary sources, there are missing links. To make sense of dispersed, ambiguous and lacunose sources, one is not always successful and right.

I shall look at the extent to which the Acehnese rulers communicated with the past in order to form or to inform their own contemporary concerns, which contributed in shaping their political ambitions and goals. To gain some fundamental insight in how kingship, its legitimacy and its anguish continued since the foundation of the sultanate, elements of the sultanate's history such as myths, chronicles, epics, regulations and letters are examined and combined to create a coherent underpinning of the sultanate's past and its development.

¹¹ The relevant publications are included in the Bibliography.

Unfortunately no local sources survived which describe the historical encounters between East and West and the relations that ensued between the rulers and the northern Europeans. Much knowledge is therefore lost. Apparently the court of the sultan kept records of important events in the *Balai Besar*, (Public Hall), while the *Balai Furdah* kept a register of the harbour regulations. A razing fire which destroyed much of the palace buildings during the reign of the second female ruler (1675- 1678), has most probably caused this break in the record. Adding to this impediment in writing a history, is the fact that the extant local sources, such as the various *hikayat* are not wholly historically reliable while the guide book for kings known as the *Taj as-Salatin* and the code of law known as the *Adat Aceh* promulgate rules on how society should be ruled but do not say how society strictly was.

Central to using the material of the European companies are the relations between the merchants and the sultans and the impact of these relations on developments in Aceh and the Straits region. In these relations the common and colliding interests of all the actors involved in trade and politics come to the fore. The shaping of their own foreign relations with several Asian rulers can hopefully be drawn from this study. At the very start of their engagement in Asia, the European states relegated diplomacy to their merchants and admirals who acted as envoys of their sovereigns.

In both Europe and in Asia social differentiation and the division of functions was a growing tendency during the seventeenth century. There rose greater need for coordinated institutions and the monarchs operated in this situation, filling these integrating positions. In turn it gave them ample opportunities to exercise more power.

It can certainly be confusing and in a way misleading to explain an Asian society by chiefly relying on European material which sketch the historical encounters and relations.

Aceh's history is not the overseas history of Holland, England, Portugal or France, but an authentic history shaped by circumstances and developments across the boundaries of European hegemony and interest. To base an opinion on the impressions of travellers who came from Europe is precarious because their writings are coloured by their cultural backgrounds and individual perceptions.

The fundamental question which passes when looking at relations between states and nations, is why people from different parts of the world are willing to interact with each other?

Bringing different expectations and experiences into their contacts may give rise to misunderstanding and disagreements between them; consequentially the tendency to assume that other people share or should share one's own views and expectations, can lead to the

breakdown of the contacts, especially if a mutual or shared aim is lacking. Conflicts and wars can arise and may or may not be solved. Even if the parties usually respect the rules of law, the concept of law and order does not apply as much to them acting in the international arena, as to domestic relations, because there is usually less consensus among them than among individuals belonging to the same society about important values.¹² The international arena in which states or their representatives interact, is not necessarily a place of peace; it is often the scene of conflicting interests and aggressive encounters. The contending actors often take arbitrary actions against each other.

In this study Islam functions as a point of orientation to the extent to which it can encompass both the relevant questions and the evidence available. Although Islamization was a long, complex process and Islam and Muslim identity were not fixed or stable categories¹³, there are at least several solid reasons to look at Islam as a point of orientation: firstly because the Acehnese genealogies refer to the Muslim kings since the foundation of the sultanate around 1500; their courts were visited by many Islamic scholars who set up centres for learning. An Islamic court with Islamic judges presided over religious cases. There was an upsurge of Islamic literature written in Aceh during the period described here, of which the sultans were the patrons. The sultan led the Friday prayer in the main mosque.

Another indicator of Islam's importance is that pilgrims bound for Mecca and Medina gathered in the port of Aceh to wait for the favourable winds which enabled them to continue their voyage while they gained extra knowledge on Islam. Aceh became known as the *serambi Mekah*, the verandah of Mecca.

I declare however, that it is not my aim or intention to examine Islamic governance, because I am not trained to do so.

In the chapters where I examine the trade relations and interactions between the rulers and the representatives of Dutch authority, I have taken the liberty to extensively quote Dutch

¹² Steve Chan, *International Relations in Perspective: The Pursuit of Security, Welfare, and Justice* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company; London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1984), 308, 309.

I have to clarify here that the term consensus can probably be seen only in societies with democratic systems.

¹³ Although not a scholar in the real sense of the word, V. S. Naipaul examined how Islam is practiced among converted peoples in Asia: 'the overthrow of the old religions – religions linked to the earth and animals and the deities of a particular place or tribe – by the revealed religions is one of the haunting themes of history. Even when they are texts, as with the ancient Roman-Christian world, the changeover is hard to follow.' In: *Beyond Belief* (London: Abacus, 1999), 71.

texts, because one cannot convey in translations the true meaning of what was said, meant or written.

By examining the corpus of material, a picture of the sultanate emerged. I have extracted from this corpus the material which presents the most telling and relevant information of the East-West encounters, of the conduct of the relations established between the rulers and the foreigners as well as the relations of the rulers with the neighbouring port states.

I fully agree with the late Dutch historian M. A. P. Meilink Roelofs who did not believe in a theoretical model but in an idea, put it in her own words ‘in the flexibility of an idea, *of all things transitoriness* of history.’¹⁴

I have based my examination chiefly on the available primary sources to arrive at an autonomous conclusion. The study of primary sources enables us to some extent to form our own opinion of the past by not only accumulating facts, but also attempting to determine their true meaning.

I believe that one should not rely too much on secondary sources which are already permeated by the opinions of others and are two or more removes from the sources themselves. It is a truism that ‘the oftener a theory or assumption passes from researcher to researcher or from pen to pen, the less accurate or even less trustworthy it becomes.’ Sometimes insignificant details are magnified with the result that fundamental considerations are easily forgotten. It is true that I also benefited from past scholarship and research for which I am grateful. That I disagree at times on interpretation and perception, does not diminish my admiration for all the work of my predecessors. They opened the window on Aceh’s history.

The study is divided over three parts.

Part One ‘Historicity and Myth’ includes a chapter on Aceh’s historical setting while the second chapter is concerned with the representation of kingship in the indigenous sources. I try to shed light on the way kingship was conceived by looking at mythology and ‘thought’.

Part Two is about the East-West interactions, especially the trade relations and the forming of alliances.

Part Three focuses on armed conflicts and wars, their causes and solutions.

The influx in Aceh of war captives from mostly Malay (Muslim) ports is examined and discussed in relation to their position in the new environment.

¹⁴ in: Leonard Blussé, Frans-Paul van der Putten, Hans Vogel, (eds.), *Pilgrims to the Past*, (Leiden: CNWS publications, 1996), 30.

The saying 'Some books are written to answer questions, others are written to question answers already given' does not pertain to the task I've taken on. In this study I try to encompass both questions and answers. Yet inconclusive evidence and even imperfect theories are part of writing history.



Bird's eye view of Atsjien ca 1650 – 1750 (François Valentyn)



Map of Sumatra and Malacca 1598 (anonymous)
From "Journael vande reyse van Hollandtsche schepen ghedaen in Oost Indien"

PART ONE

HISTORICITY AND MYTH

Part One

CHAPTER I

THE GEO-HISTORICAL SETTING

1. 1. 1 Malacca: marketplace and powerhouse

The Malacca Straits was for centuries the gateway on which the Asian trade from India to China was linked. Along with trade, religions and various cultural elements travelled to the ports of Asia. Conveniently located, the port of Malacca was the great *rendezvous* for traders and shipping in Southeast Asia; Tomé Pires, an assistant of Alfonso d'Albuquerque, the conqueror of Malacca, saw the bustling port as a big fair where all sorts of goods were traded by many different nations. He said that the scale of the trade was of such magnitude that there were four *shahbandar* in charge of its handling, assisted by lesser functionaries.¹ Gujarati and Bengali traders from the Indian sub-continent bartered various kinds of Indian textiles and goods which Muslim traders from the Middle East had brought to their ports, for spices, gold, tin, benzoin, porcelain and other piece goods.

Malacca was founded by a Buddhist (Sailendra) prince by the name of Paramesvara who had come from the great city of Palembang in southern Sumatra, which was the centre of the Buddhist Empire of Srivijaya and had married a Majapahit princess from the island of Java. He arrived in the unassuming village of Malacca at the end of the fourteenth century, embraced Islam when he was already of old age and took the name of Megat Iskandar Shah. After his death in 1424 he was succeeded by one of his sons who was named Raja Ibrahim, but who immediately adopted the title of Sri Paramesvara Deva Shah. According to D.G.E. Hall, an authority on Southeast Asia this indicated a reaction against the new faith.²

¹ Armando Cortesao (ed.), Tomé Pires, *Suma Oriental*, (London: Hakluyt Society, 1944).

² D.G.E. Hall, *A History of South-East Asia*, (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 4th edition, 1981), 226. It is my view that both names Raja Ibrahim and Sri Paramesvara Shah combine Hindu/Buddhist and Islamic titles. Hall asserts that Malacca became the commercial successor of Srivijaya (225).

As a consequence thereof this man was murdered during a rebellion of Tamil Muslims led by his elder brother who established himself as the new ruler, taking the name Muzaffar Shah. Islam then became the leading religion in Malacca.

This was evidently later than in Samudra Pasai and Perlak, at that time two well-known ports on Sumatra's east coast visited by Marco Polo and Ibn Batutta in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, who took note of the coming of Islam in these ports.

Malacca's connections with the north Javanese ports of Tuban and Gresik, from where rice and spices arrived, became a passageway for the spread of Islam on the island of Java; Javanese traders settled in Malacca where they formed an important constituency of the cosmopolitan society.

For the Chinese Malacca was the key to the Indian Ocean where they brought porcelain and various piece goods which they bartered for pepper, spices and textiles, tin and gold. Chinese protection of Malacca when it shook off the yoke of Siam in the fifteenth century, contributed significantly to Malacca's political and economical rise. In 1409 the visiting Chinese admiral Cheng Ho of the mighty imperial Chinese fleet declared the Sailendra Prince Paramesvara 'king' and presented him the insignias of sovereignty.³ From then on Parameswara sent tribute in the form of pepper to the Chinese emperor.

A century later, when Malacca had become the powerful overlord of various territories on both sides of the Straits of Malacca, such as Pahang, Patani, Trengganu, Kedah, Perak, Kampar, Siak, Andragiri, Bengkalis, the islands of Bintang and Carimon, places rich in pepper, sulphur, silk, gold and benzoin, it still paid tribute to a greater power; the ruling Sultan Mahmud told his Italian visitor Ludovico di Varthema in 1505, six years before the Portuguese conquered his city, that his overlord was 'the king of Cini (China), who caused this place to be built about eighty years ago.' This was *grosso modo* the geo-political condition in the Straits region when the Portuguese armada led by Alfonso d'Albuquerque conquered the famous port in 1511.

Sultan Mahmud fled to the island of Bintang and later to Kampar on the east coast of Sumatra. His sons set up court in Johor, Perak and Pahang.

³ John Winter Jones (tr.) *The Itinerary of Ludovico di Varthema of Bologna from 1502-1508* (The Argonaut Press: 1928).

Too far East is West (English saying).

The maritime capabilities that brought the Portuguese around the Cape and into the East, ultimately made them the first Western imperial power there.

The Papal resolution laid down in the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) confirmed Portuguese claims of this Eastern route to India, safeguarded their interests in Brazil, and ratified Columbus' discoveries. The resolution was the outcome of a conflict between the two Iberian contenders of world discovery, that reached its breaking point after Bartolomeus Diaz accidentally discovered the sea route around the Cape of Good Hope in 1488. This discovery was crucial for opening up the sea lanes for global traffic and trade.

The Portuguese achievement was taken onto a new level by Vasco da Gama who succeeded in what Cristobal Colon (Columbus) had failed to accomplish: reach the shores of India. He arrived in Calicut in 1498 and sought to break the trade monopolies in Asia of the Muslim traders of the Levant and Egypt and those of the merchants of Genoa and Venice. The Indian ocean steadily replaced the Red Sea in significance.

Don Alfonso d'Albuquerque who is credited for Portuguese expansion in the East, succeeded in conquering Ormuz which gave access to the Persian Gulf; in 1510 he established Goa on the west coast of India as the capital of the Portuguese possessions, conquered Malacca in 1511 and opened the trade with the Spice islands, China and Siam. The Portuguese occupied the main strategic points and became the masters of the Indian ocean. The monopoly of the spice trade and the huge revenues were the great attractions for establishing Portuguese settlements. Hall contends that by cutting off the shipping line between Cambay in north-west India, the important *rendez-vous* for Muslim traders from Egypt, Arabia and the Persian Gulf and Malacca, the Portuguese hoped to take over the Muslim trade.⁴

They introduced the *cartaz* system to establish full monopoly over all trade that passed through their 'sphere of interest,' obliging foreign vessels to obtain a written permit (*cartaz*); they put a sharp curb on the operations of the Muslim traders and that of their trading partners in the East and attacked and destroyed Muslim vessels *en route* in the Straits.

Muslim merchants in Malacca felt forced to move their businesses over to other ports in the region; many crossed the Straits to the ports of Pedir, Samudra Pasai and Bandar Aceh where they based their trade with the rest of the archipelago and the Muslim ports of the Red Sea. Hall asserts that the Portuguese considered it an obligation to Pope Alexander VI to conquer Malacca, which was a main diffusion centre of Islam in the Malay Peninsula and the

⁴ *A history of Southeast Asia*, 229.

Indonesian archipelago.⁵ Scholars disagree on Malacca's great contribution as an important diffusion centre of Islam to the Indonesian archipelago and credit Christianity with the rise of Islam in the region. The Malaysian historian Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Atas argues that the 'magnification' by Dutch scholar Bertram Schrieke of the role of Christianity in bringing about the rise of Islam in the archipelago, relegates Malacca's importance as the centre from where Islamic propaganda and missionary activity radiated to the extremities of the Archipelago to the background.⁶ The evidence is that before the Portuguese made their entrance, Malacca traded with the north Javanese ports of Tuban and Gresik and one may assume that from there Islam spread to the rest of the island. Islam on the island of Sumatra arrived even earlier. Marco Polo and Ibn Batutta recorded the gradual process of Islamization in the ports of Perlak and Pasai when they arrived there in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

1. 1. 2 Sumatra: a clouded history

Ancient Sumatra is known in the Ramayana epic as Svarnadvipa (island of gold), while it was also the scene of the great Buddhist empire of Srivijaya, with its centre in the vicinity of the city of Palembang in the south of the island.

The huge island is blessed with an abundant nature: mountains, forests, rivers, swamps, and the rich surrounding waters. The *Barisan* mountain divides the island over the whole length in two parts.

Marco Polo and his brother were the first Europeans who made landfall in 1293 at Perlak ('Ferlec') a port lying on the north east coast, where they arrived on their way back to Europe from the court of Kublai Khan in China. The visit of the Polo brothers merely coincided with the gradual Islamization of the Sumatran east coast. Marco credits the arrival of Saracen

⁵ *ibid*, 264 'Moreover, since Malacca under a Muslim ruler was the chief diffusion-centre of Islam in Indonesia, by capturing it they would be carrying out the obligation laid on the Portuguese by the bull of Alexander VI. Thus the conquest of Malacca in 1511 was one of the most important features of an over-all strategic plan, and not an act of revenge for the treachery of the sultan in his dealings with Diogo Lopez de Sequiera when he attempted to establish a factory there in 1509.'

⁶ Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Atas, *Raniri and the Wujudiyya of 17th century Aceh*, (MBRAS, monograph III, 1966), 3.

merchants with the fact that the inhabitants of Perlak, who used to be idolaters, were introduced to Islam and he observes at the same time that the people of the surrounding mountains were living like beasts, ate human flesh and worshipped many different things. From Perlak the Polos moved to the bustling neighbouring port Samudra Pasai, where they spent five months, waiting for the favourable winds to set sail. Unlike Perlak, Samudra Pasai was not yet converted to Islam. The inhabitants were savages and idolaters, whose ruler was wealthy and powerful and professed allegiance to the Great Khan of China.⁷

Barely fifty years afterwards in 1345, Ibn Battuta ‘the traveller of Islam’ visited Samudra Pasai. He paints a different picture of the prevailing conditions, telling us that he was met at his arrival by several Islamic officials from the Court of the sultan and the *kadi*, the Islamic upper judge, who informed him that the sultan professed the *Shafi’i* form of Islam. This ruler loved to surround himself with theologians, followed the Islamic injunction to establish the Friday prayer, and walked barefoot to the mosque to pray. He mobilized his people for his expeditions against the ‘unbelievers’ in the neighbouring Batak territories on whom he declared a *jihad*.⁸ These people paid him the poll-tax to be relieved from the expeditions against them. Islam had become the leading faith in Pasai at that time. In the town of Lhokseumaweh in the province of Aceh (the location of Pasai), archaeologists unearthed a tombstone dating back to the year 1380 which belongs to a female Islamic ruler known as Nur Ilah.⁹ It is hardly disputable that Islam had firmly established itself in the north eastern ports of Sumatra when the Portuguese conquered Malacca.

Was Sumatra the site of the legendary Ophir - as some sources speculate -, fabulously rich in gold, to where king Solomon sent his ships?¹⁰ The Portuguese were not only interested in the Spice islands, but they were also eager to find the island of gold.¹¹ John Davis, pilot of the first Dutch and English fleets visiting Aceh in 1599 and 1602 respectively, mentions the existence of plenty gold and copper mines in Sumatra. It is tantalizing to imagine this when

⁷ Ronald Latham (tr.), *The Travels of Marco Polo* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1958), 224-228.

⁸ H.A.R. Gibb (tr.), Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa 1325-1354* (London: Routledge and Sons, 1929), 273-276.

⁹ Ibrahim Alfian (ed.), *Wanita Utama Nusantara Dalam Lintasan Sejarah*, (Jakarta, 1994), 3,4 .Here is mentioned that the scripture on the tombstone is transliterated by W.F. Stutterheim and published in the *Acta Orientalia*, vol. XVI (Leiden, 1936).

¹⁰ William Foster (ed.), *The voyages of Sir James Lancaster Kt to the East Indies*, (London: Hakluyt Society, 1940), 259.

¹¹ Jorge Manuel dos Santos Alves “Samatra” in: A.H. de Oliveira Marques, *Historia Dos Portugueses No Extremo Oriente*, 2 vols. Tomo II *De Macao á Periferia, Seculos XVI-XVII*, (Fundacao Oriente, 2000), 93- 94.

one travels today around the Ophir mountain in West Sumatra, the location of several gold mines.

1. 1. 3 The scenes of Aceh's history

According to the *Bustan as-Salatin*, Part II, book 13, by Nuru'd-din al Raniri, the Sultanate Aceh Dar al-Salam), occupying the northern tip of Sumatra, was founded around 1500 when Alau'd-din Mughayat Shah of the Mahkota Alam region north of the Aceh river, subjugated the Dar al-Kamal region south of the Aceh river. In 1520 he annexed the port of Daya on Sumatra's west coast, the port of Pedir (Pidië) on the east coast in 1522 and liberated Samudra Pasai in 1524 from the Portuguese who had built a fort there.

The vernacular on the east coast was Malay, but in Aceh the local language was Acehnese; Malay gradually acquired importance in Aceh as the *lingua franca* of commerce, literature and religion.

When the Portuguese captured Malacca, Aceh came out strongly to defend the Islamic trade and Sumatra's territorial integrity. It is warranted to look at the lucid and unconcealed account of the Florentine merchant Giovanni Da Empoli, who took part in the 1509 reconnaissance expedition to the Straits of Alfonso d'Albuquerque, for it provides an intimate look at the Portuguese operations and at Da Empoli's own involvement in these and may explain Aceh's response and articulation to Portuguese intrusions in the Straits region.¹²

After setting out from the Bay of Bengal, the mighty Portuguese fleet captured seven large ships owned by Muslim merchants from the great port of Cambay in western India, which were on their way to Malacca, and seized their rich and abundant cargo. In the vicinity of the port of Pedir on Sumatra's east coast the Portuguese seized another ship owned by Turkish merchants.

Da Empoli went on an inspection trip of Pedir to find out what commodities were available, and to see which nations traded there. The ruler received him cordially, but strongly demanded the returning of the booty from the Turkish vessel, declaring that his port was a free port since long visited by traders from all nations and that he did not tolerate that ships

¹² I have drawn from Antony Reid (ed.), *Witnesses to Sumatra A Traveller's Anthology*, (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1995), 11-16. This is abstracted from A. Bausani (tr.), *Lettera di Giovanni da Empoli* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1970), 124-129.

coming to his port were harassed. The Portuguese did not return the booty. Instead they furtively sailed away to the neighbouring port of (Samudra) Pasai, where Da Empoli went to see the sultan, to whom he announced that they had come to make pacts and peace, even though the king of Pedir had given them two *bahar* of gold to make war on his behalf. Pasai was at that time one of the most important suppliers of pepper and also provided raw silk to Cambay.

The Portuguese unscrupulously set out to conquer the region's trade, conducting their political and economical objectives along military lines. From Zainu'l-Abidin, the ruler of Pasai, they wrested a concession of an annual tribute of pepper for the Lusitanian (Portuguese) crown and for the governor of Malacca. In 1519, after Zainu'l-Abidin's death they got permission from his successor to construct a wooden fort in Pasai where Giovanni Da Empoli was appointed the first factor with the task to take care of the trade lines Malacca-Pasai-China.¹³ For a time Malacca's prominent position as trade emporium in the Southeast Asian region remained unimpaired, but Portuguese hegemony on the Asian seas and over the trade was immediately challenged by the upcoming power of Aceh. Their intrusion in the region and its trade, the concomitant seizure of Muslim ships and cargoes and their ability to manipulate local rulers, was anxiously followed by Aceh. The Acehnese historian Amirul Hadi asserts 'Based as it was on religious intolerance and on trade monopolies, they (the Portuguese) threatened nearly all other inhabitants and visitors in the region'.¹⁴

The Portuguese regarded the petty rulers in their new neighbourhood merely as chiefs of pirate states, but Tomé Pires in his descriptions of Aceh, called the Acehnese ruler, Alau'd-din Mughayat Shah, a *homem cavaleiro*, a gentlemen, a man of authority.¹⁵ They gradually came to realize that their survival and their profits depended to a great extent on the good will of the neighbouring ports and began to change their conduct of the relations with these ports, basing their strategy on the developments in the region especially with an eye on the shifting coalitions and economic ties.¹⁶ They became regular visitors of the Sumatran ports.

¹³ Dos Santos Alves, "Samatra" in: de Oliveira Marques, (ed.), *Historia Dos Portugueses*, 90-91.

¹⁴ Amirul Hadi, *Aceh and the Portuguese: A study of the struggle of Islam in Southeast Asia, 1500- 1579* (Montreal: Institute of Islamic Studies Mc Gill University, 1992), 51.

¹⁵ Armando Cortesao: Tomé Pires, *Suma Oriental*, vol. I, 138.

¹⁶ Manuel Lobato, "Malaca" in : de Oliveira Marques (ed.), *Historia dos Portugueses*, 41.

Aceh's Alau'd-din Mughayat Shah, alarmed by Portuguese incursions in Sumatra, and the ambivalence of the port rulers, annexed Pedir around 1522 and Samudra Pasai around 1524, whose rulers fled and sought refuge in Malacca.¹⁷ Aceh took on the role of leader of the Muslim opposition against the Portuguese 'infidel'.

The third ruler of Aceh, Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah (al-Kahar), a son of the founder of Aceh, Alau'd-din Mughayat Shah, considerably expanded Aceh's borders. Ruling roughly from 1537 to 1571, Al-Kahar (the conqueror) subdued the ports of Barus, Tiku and Priaman on the west coast of Sumatra and Deli and Aru on the east coast, establishing Aceh as a political and economical force of the first rank. Johor, the assumed successor state of the sultanate of Malacca, claimed overlordship of the Malay ports on Sumatra's east coast and saw Aceh's rise as a threat to its own supremacy.

Sultan Al-Kahar vehemently battled the Portuguese in the Straits and besieged Malacca several times, but his vigorous efforts were ineffective to dispel them from there.

He sent his envoy Husein Efendi on an official mission to the Ottoman Emperor Suleyman to propose a *Pacta Islamica* against the Christian invaders. Effendi's arrival in Turkey coincided with Suleyman's death and the enthronement of Selim II, who welcomed the opportunity of having a committed ally against expanding Christendom in the Indian Ocean region.¹⁸

An armada of 17 warships and 2 escorts led by commander Kurtoglu Hizir Reis reached Malacca in 1567,¹⁹ but the Portuguese led by Matias d'Albuquerque gained victory over the combined large Muslim fleet and confiscated much of its artillery.

If the material assistance from the Ottoman emperor enabled Al-Kahar to continue his naval actions against the Portuguese, the moral value of the support of the emperor, who was at the same time the assumed caliph of the Islamic community, gave impetus to Aceh's leadership of the fragmented regional Islamic opposition against the 'infidels' in Malacca.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 26.

In the historiography it is frequently mentioned that the sultan of Aceh called himself the sultan of Sumatra. This should be understood as Samudra (Sumatra) Pasai. Although Aceh under Iskandar Muda subjugated and controlled a considerable part of the island, it did not control the southern part which now constitute the provinces of South Sumatra and the province of Lampung.

¹⁸ Selim II declared that he would fight on Aceh's side the enemies of Islam in the East who attacked Muslim countries. The official reply dated 20 September 1567 is discussed by Ismail Hakki Goksoy in "Ottoman-Aceh relations according to the Turkish Sources", a paper presented at the First International Conference of Aceh and Indian Ocean Studies in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, held from 24-27 February 2007.

¹⁹ Muhamad Hasan Basry and Ibrahim Alfian (eds), *Perang kolonial Belanda di Aceh*, (Banda Aceh: Documentation and Information Centre, 1990), 54.

The Turks assisted in establishing a military academy which was named *Askari Baitul Muqaddas* where the female admiral Keumalahayati was trained.

First the Portuguese regarded Aceh's actions against their ships in the Straits as *razzias*, but they became aware that the help of the Ottoman caliph gave these actions the intensity and sincerity of a *jihad*.²⁰ Amirul Hadi asserts 'Based on the idea that Islam was strongly institutionalised in society, it is safe to suggest that Islam was a strong symbol stimulating resistance against the Portuguese and, later, the Dutch.'²¹

When the Acehnese choose to put up an appearance, they inflicted serious losses on their declared enemy, but they were not successful to dispel the Portuguese from Malacca. The Portuguese tenaciously held on to Malacca sometimes aided by several Malay ports.

In 1536 the Portuguese forced neighbouring Johor to make peace. Hall asserts 'For a time Perak, Johor and Pahang were content to remain on friendly terms with the Portuguese'.²²

When the armada of Aceh was on its way to attack Malacca in 1547, the combined fleet of Johor, Pahang and Perak arrived to lend support to Malacca, but the Portuguese had beaten off the Acehnese. Aceh retaliated by burning down a number of villages upon the Johor river.²³

In 1565 Aceh constructed a fort at Perak, which is situated at the entrance of the Malacca Straits, to guard the trade of the merchants from the Malabar coast of India. Johor perceived Aceh's infiltration in Perak as an aggressive deed against the Malay world. Despite the fact that Malacca was inherently Johor's archenemy, Johor regarded Aceh's rise as a threat to its own ascendancy. Johor for long controlled the Straits and its shipping. The incessant hostilities between the sultanates marked the regional politics of the sixteenth century.²⁴

²⁰ Dos Santos Alves, "Samatra" in: de Oliveira Marques (ed.), *Historia dos Portugueses*, 97.

Islamic theorists generally have difficulties in accepting the term *jihad* if it is coined as a military action, requiring among other things a description of the funding of the operation. In the view of Aceh the Portuguese were the enemies of Islam who had to be dispelled from Islamic territory. Mobilization against the 'infidels' was a religious command.

I may refer to Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991) in which the author traces the development of Islamic political language from its beginnings to this age. Review: 'Lewis places words of politics, past and present in a historical context and argues that wars, conquests and revolutions augment some terms and devalue others, which means that no term has meaning above the historical context'.

According to the Islamist P. S. van Koningsveld, in Islam as in other religions, there is the notion that war (Holy War or *jihad*) is mandatory under special circumstances. Not only a defensive war but also as a means to expansion. *De Islam*, (Utrecht: Uitgeverij De Ploeg, 1981), 125-6.

²¹ *Aceh and the Portuguese*, 111.

²² *A history of Southeast Asia*, 367.

²³ *idem*.

²⁴ Lobato "Malacca" in: de Oliveira Marques (ed.), *Historia dos Portugueses no Extremo Orientes*, 34
The Portuguese regarded the 'imperialistic conflicts' between Johor and Aceh as based on political and economical rivalry. They saw Johor as the protector of the Malay dominions and Aceh as a centralizing power.

There were however brief intervals of peace between the two antagonists in which they cooperated against the Portuguese.²⁵

In 1593 Portuguese merchants from Malacca made overtures to the incumbent Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah (Sayyid al Mukamil), soliciting the opening of trade relations with Aceh. It resulted in establishing trade and diplomatic relations between Malacca and Aceh.²⁶

Enthused by Sultan Alau'd-din's receptiveness, a Portuguese delegation from Goa came to request a site for the construction of a fort on one of the islands within Aceh's domain, but the sultan responded that they first deliver him Johor. It illustrates that Aceh and Johor were irreconcilable and that they both sought the help of the Portuguese 'infidel' and invader to attack each other.

1. 1. 4 Aceh: a good place in Sumatra

It is perhaps from the Indians that Aceh got its name. Overwhelmed by the beautiful coastline shaded by abundant coconut palms and the distant green mountains, the early Indian visitors called out 'achai' which means good, fine.²⁷

'The name is properly Aceh. The Portuguese turned it into Achem, and the English call it Achin, The Dutch Atchijn.' Colonel Yule suggests that we got our form of the word from the Arabs, who have Achin. It is so written in the Ain Akbari and in the geographical tables of Sadik Isfahani'. (anonymous English traveller).

While it is beyond the scope of this study to focus on theories that explain the arrival of Indians centuries earlier and the transmission of Indian culture to the ports of Southeast Asia, I like to dwell for a moment at the proposition of L. F. Brakel, a Dutch sociologist, who typifies Aceh of the seventeenth century as a case *sui generis* in the Indies, because it was much influenced by Indian ideas.²⁸ A serious oversight is that the 'Indies' was not a culturally

²⁵ *A history of South-East Asia*, 368.

²⁶ Dos Santos Alves, "Samatra" in: de Oliveira Marques (ed.), *Historia dos Portugueses no Extremo Oriente*, 104.

²⁷ For more on the toponyms I refer to Denys Lombard, *Le Sultanat d' Atjéh au temps d' Iskandar Muda 1606-1636*, 9-11.

²⁸ L. F. Brakel, "State and Statecraft in 17th century Aceh" in: Reid and Castles (eds.), *Pre-colonial State Systems in Southeast Asia*, (JMBRAS, monograph no. 6, 1975), 56-66.

nor politically homogeneous mass, but constituted a range of polities and entities with different cultural and political traditions; even stone-age areas persisted and atavistic beliefs juxtaposed alongside Islam; while some of these converted to Islam at an earlier stage than the rest, the shadows of a Hindu or Buddhist past were nowhere completely erased. Islam in Aceh certainly wielded more influence after the Portuguese conquest of Malacca in 1511.

Tasawuf (Sufism) the mystical path of Islam which spread from Persia, was predominant in Malacca and Sumatra.²⁹ Hamza Fansuri, who originated from the port of Barus on Sumatra's west coast became one of the leading Sufi scholars in Aceh during the latter part of the sixteenth century. He acquainted himself with various Islamic doctrines during his time spent in Arabia. Through poetry Sufi mystics were able to summarize and share their mystical experience. Hamza Fansuri used the Malay form of *sha'ir* to write and recite his religious ideas.³⁰ His student and follower Shamsu'd-din Pasai became the leader of the mystic *Wugudiya* (also spelled *Wujudiya*) movement in Aceh. The term derives from the Arabic *wahdat-al wugud* ('absolute unity of being'). The focus of *Wugudiya* teaching was on the nature of the relationship between Creator and man, denying the duality between them. Shamsu'd-din Pasai was the most influential religious scholar, functioning for over thirty years as the 'Sheikh al-Islam' at the courts of Alau'd-din Riayat Shah (Sayyid al Mukamil), his son Ali Ri'ayat Shah and his grandson Iskandar Muda. With the arrival from India of the more orthodox Sufi scholar Nuru'd-din al Raniri at the Court of Sultan Iskandar Thani in 1637, a new religious order replaced *Wugudyah* mysticism. Both Nuru'd-din al Raniri and Shamsu'd-din Pasai stood at different points of the evolution of Islam.³¹ The outlawing of *Wugudiya* mysticism and the persecution of mystics which started when Nuru'd-din al Raniri arrived in Aceh, indicated the end of the heterodox tendency which had long prevailed. It was a turning point in the socio-religious climate, with significant political consequences as the sequel shows, for example, when after the death of Sultan Iskandar Thani in 1641, a successor had to be appointed. This successor was his widow Taj al-Alam Safiatu'd-din Shah.

Aceh was the location of several smaller units before its unification around 1500.

²⁹ Van Koningsveld asserts that by embedding mysticism in Islam, traditional faith was furnished with an acceptable vestment. *De Islam*, 113.

³⁰ J. Doorenbos, *De Geschriften van Hamzah Pansoeri*, (Leiden: Batteljee & Terpstra), 1933.

³¹ C. A. O. Van Nieuwenhuijze, "Nur Al-Din Al-Raniri als bestrijder der Wugudiya" (BKI, 1948 (104), 2 and 3), 342.

The sultanate's favourable location with its seaboard stretching on the Straits of Malacca and the Indian ocean, was a quality from which merely everything else flew. Ships travelling to and from Asia made landfall in its ports. The incorporated flourishing ports of Pasai and Pedir were long visited by traders from as far as the Middle East and China who came to barter their goods for pepper, silk and gold.

For the very first images of Aceh at the turn of the sixteenth into the seventeenth century we rely on the writings of the English navigator John Davis who visited Aceh twice, in 1599 with the *Zeeland* expedition from the United Republic and in 1602 with the English fleet under the command of James Lancaster, and the observations by Francois Martin of the French expedition which visited Aceh in 1602.

From John Davis' pen comes the following prosaic description:

'The Ile Sumatra is a pleasing and fertile soyle, abounding with many rare and excellent fruites; of graine they have only rice, which is their bread. They plowe the ground with Buffs (buffaloes), of which there are great plenty, but with small skill and lesse diligence.

The rice groweth in all respects as our Barley. Of Pepper they have exceedingly plenty, Gardens of a mile square, it groweth like Hops from a planted Root, and windeth about a stake set by it until it grow to a great bushie Tree. The pepper hangeth in small clusters, three inches long, and an inch about, each cluster having fortie pepper Cornes, it yeeldeth increase equall with Mustard Seed. They bee able to lade twentie ships yearly; and more might, if the people were industrious and laboursome. The whole Countrey seemeth to be a garden of pleasure. The Ayre is temperate and wholesome, having everie morning a fruitfull dew, or small raine'.

'The citie of Achien if it may be so called, is very spacious, built in a Wood, so that wee could not see a house till we were upon it. Neither could wee goe into any place, but wee found houses, and great concourse of people: so that I thinke the Towne spreadeth over the whole land. Their houses are built eight foote or better from the ground upon posts of wood, with free passage under, the walls and covering of mats, the poorest and weakest thing in the World. I saw three Market places, which are every day frequented as Faires with all kinds of marchandize to sell'.³² As a navigator Davis was apparently interested in the lay-out of the harbour which he describes as small, with a stone fort on one side: 'before this fort is a very pleasant Road for ships, the wind still coming from the shore, a shippe may ride a mile off in

³² Albert Hastings Markham (ed.), *The Voyages and Works of John Davis the Navigator* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1880), 142.

eighteene fathomes, close by in four and six fathomes.’ ‘Of Beasts, here are Elephants, Horses, Buffes, Oxen and Goates, with many wild Hogs.’

François Martin recorded that the local houses were built on poles because of frequent flooding and they were made from leaves and reed of the palm tree and very prone to fire.³³ The sultan’s palace was situated half a mile out of the city upon the river and was similar in style to the traditional houses, only much bigger; one had to pass three guards with green spaces in between them before arriving at the audience hall. He mentions that there were no forts to protect the city.

It is obvious that the visitors were much impressed by the display of wealth at the palace. For many of them it was their first visit to an Asian Court. The reception hall was covered with carpets and hangings of luxurious textiles with gold threads. Sultan Alau’-din Ri’ayat Shah reclined on a raised platform, where he was attended by his eunuchs and women servants. Dancing girls performed their acts, while cock fights and elephant fights were much appreciated by the sultan.

Evidently the sultan’s court was the centre of command, display and entertainment.

Even the religious processions leaving for the Friday prayers to the mosque were manifestations of royal pomp and pageantry with horses covered with beaten gold and their bridles set with precious stones; the saddle of the royal elephant was of pure gold, likewise were the royal insignias such as the fan and the betel-box which were carried by a royal slave. Sultan Alau’-din Ri’ayat Shah’s robes were astonishingly luxurious, so much so that John Davis found it difficult to even describe them. The sultan carried the typical Acehnese dagger (*rencong*) on both his front and back side and Davis mentions that he was bedecked with precious jewels. These (ceremonial) daggers were usually made from silver, but the Acehnese rulers also highly favoured tin which came from Perak on the Malay peninsula.

By profession the Acehnese were merchants, fishermen and craftsmen, which tells us that Aceh was not a typical agrarian society. Rice was not planted on a large scale, but mostly imported from India. Pepper was usually planted around Pedir and in the territories on the west coast.

François Martin relates how the people dressed. The common men only covered their private parts with a big belt, the *orangkaya* wore cloaks from cotton or silk and covered their heads

Also in W.S. Unger (ed.), *De oudste reizen van de Zeeuwen naar Oost-Indië 1598-1604*, (‘s Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1948), 53.

³³ François Martin, *Description du premier voyage fait aux Indes Orientales par les françois en l’an 1603*, (Paris : Laurens Sonnius, 1604). Quoted in Anthony Reid (ed.), *Witnesses to Sumatra*, 55-63.

with a turban, their wives wore two pieces of cloth covering them from the breast to the waist and from the waist to the knees. The common women left the upper part naked, except for a scarf wound over one shoulder covering only part of the breast. The gentlemen distinguished themselves from those who did manual work by letting the nails of their thumbs and little finger grow.

Justice was observed according to local custom and for minor crimes hands and sometimes also feet were cut off; murderers were punished to die in the same way or by being thrown to the elephants who would kick them to death or in some cases they would be thrown to a tiger. There was an Islamic court which Frederick de Houtman calls the 'judges of the King', who investigated him for several days under physical threat about his faith.

John Davis observes that 'the State is governed by five principal men, with their inferior officers, his (the sultan's) secretary and four called *shahbandars*, with these rest all authority.³⁴ His women are his chiefest councillors. A woman is his admiral, for he will trust no men.'³⁵

1. 1. 5 A cosmopolitan society

'Of all which nations there bee some dwelling in Achen in the Ile of Sumatra, trading in marchandize, where I have met with Arabians and a nation called Rumos, who have traded many hundred years to Achen. These Rumos come from the Red Sea'.³⁶

Francois Martin recorded that traders from Negapatam, Bengal, Gujerat, Calicut, Cape Comorin, Ceylon, Siam and China were selling their wares in small stalls in the streets: fine cotton and silk from Gujerat, porcelain and other goods such as stones and drugs from China, spices from the Moluccan islands, etcetera. These traders were the only ones who bought and sold pepper.

They usually stayed in Aceh for six months, usually bringing with them their wives and children; in some instances they bought a wife for the time they were in Aceh.³⁷

³⁴ When the French admiral Augustin de Beaulieu was in Aceh in 1621 there were also of four *penghulu kawal* who were the heads of the patrol. The function of *penghulu Aceh* is also mentioned by the English traders in Priaman in 1617.

³⁵ Mentioned by John Davis, *The voyage and works*, 141; *De oudste reizen*, 55-6. This female admiral was named Keumalahayati.

³⁶ People from the Byzantium/Roman empire; also included are the Turcs.

Muslim merchants from the Red Sea region, the Middle East and the Indian sub-continent were pivotal in the rise of Aceh and its trade during the sixteenth century and in transmitting Islamic ideas. Like Hinduism and Buddhism, Islam originated from elsewhere and in the process Aceh became a society of converts.

As one would expect the littoral consisted of layers of settlers. They came from as far as China, Pegu, India, Persia, the Red Sea area and Turkey, bringing with them their own beliefs and customs. They lived in racially segregated areas in the ports, while the inland territories were inhabited by the indigenous peoples who led a more or less autonomous existence.

Francois Martin gives an account of the customs practiced by what he calls the 'gentiles'.

They venerated animals of which they considered the cow and the ox sacred and offered to idols, refusing to eat or drink from cutlery that had been used by persons of other faiths.

When a Hindu (Brahmin) priest died, his wife was burnt beside her husband on the pyre.³⁸

Although Martin was in Aceh simultaneously with John Davis and slightly later than captain Frederick de Houtman who also documented his experiences during his captivity in Aceh, we find no descriptions of this rather sinister custom in their accounts. From Martin's description we infer that not only Muslims, but Hindus too found their way from India to Aceh and that widow-burning had its adherents in the new environment. The conditions of life of the merely 'unregarded' Hindu community are missing in the works of the Muslim scholars and chroniclers. The information of the racial and culturally plural society of that time is obtained wholly from the scanty notes made by observant foreigners like Martin and Davis.

These writers were confronted by wholly new experiences as two different worlds met and came into intimate contact for the first time. There are no precedents and no records of the period, thus we follow the writers on their sojourn experiencing oddities, prejudices and emotions as probably no one before them did.

³⁷ Reid (ed.), *Witnesses to Sumatra*, 63.

³⁸ *ibid* , 62.



Nine-fold seal or *Cap Sikureueng* of Taj al-Alam Safiatu'd-din Shah who ruled from 1641-1675. Clockwise from down under are the names of several of her predecessors



Nine-fold seal or *Cap Sikureueng* of Sultan Muhammad Daud Shah (1879). Clockwise from down under are the names of several of his predecessors

Part One

CHAPTER II

REPRESENTATION OF KINGSHIP IN MYTH AND NARRATIVE

1. 2. 1 The Texts

‘The first thing God created was the pen, which tells us that it was created before the Tables of the Faith on which He has for all eternity written the fate of all human beings.’¹

Acehnese kingship was written - allegorically- on a palimpsest, with myth occupying one side and reality the other. Traditionally, myths and legends are strong elements of the Malay and Indonesian culture and they make much more understandable of the approach to religion.

For the Acehnese mysticism was the undercurrent if not, the essence of their faith; several Western scholars, such as the ethnologist C. Snouck Hurgronje, who wrote his influential work *The Acehnese*, have often received this with mixed appreciation.

To disregard the notion and the local acceptance of the mythical origin of kingship in a historical study, would make it difficult to understand Acehnese society and why it moved in certain directions. The kernel of Acehnese kingship was myth. Yet kingship was as much a contractually based institution in the sense that if the king did not rule justly, rebellion often ended his rule and assassination his life. These two strands of the origin of kingship in Aceh, the mythical and the contractual were rather incongruously combined.

The sixteenth century provides many examples of cases in which the sultan’s rule was ended by rebellion and his life by assassination. The enumeration of successive sultans, their rivalry

¹ Quoted . P. P. Roorda van Eijsinga: Bocharie al Djohari, *De Kroon aller Koningen*, (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1827). This is the Dutch translation of the *Taj as-Salatin*. This quote refers to the original text page 144. Roorda van Eijsinga, a colonial official, was the first to translate and introduce this work to the western public. The original manuscript composed by Buchari al Johari (about 1603) is in the possession of the British Library: registered as Or. Ms. 13295.

According to Bernard Lewis the pen was a symbol of knowledge. In medieval Islam two often used classifications were ‘men of the pen’ (scribal and religious authorities) and ‘men of the sword’. *The Political Language of Islam*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 141.

and their fall is described in the genealogy of the Acehese rulers in the *Bustan as-Salatin*, by Nuru'd-din al Raniri, the religious scholar and prolific writer of treatises on Islam, who served at the court of Sultan Iskandar Thani and for several years also at the court of his successor, his widow Taj al-Alam Safiatu'd-din Shah.²

Because the Islamic community is generally considered to constitute a single political community which is subordinate to Islamic Law, kingship is fundamentally a contractual obligation for the enforcement of the Law. The existence of a kind of moral covenant was evident on the day of the sultan's installation, when the important men of the realm accepted his *daulat* or sovereignty.³ In the *Adat Aceh* which is perceived as a code of law of the sultanate, the procedures for the installation of the ruler are stipulated.⁴

There are broadly two categories of texts written in the Malay language from which we are able to examine mythology and 'thought' or ideology in a broad sense and narrate a story of kingship; these are the *hikayat* (epic stories) and the chronicles. They function as the basis for a discussion of kingship as it was conceived and performed.

Islamic scholars who were in most instances the writers and composers of the texts, were instrumental in disseminating the myths of kingship to a wider audience, a literate and also an aural one. Their seeming purpose was to defend the political system of the era, which was forced upon them by the prevailing circumstances and history. They evidently used meaningful juxtapositions to satisfy their audiences within a society that attached value to tradition and local belief systems and this may reveal their anxieties with the institution of Islamic ruler-ship.

² Teuku Iskandar (ed.), *Bustanu's-Salatin*, Bab II, Fasal 13, (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1966) 32-36.

Iskandar utilized the copy which is in the possession of the Leiden University Library, codified as Cod. Or. 5443. From now on I shall only refer to Teuku Iskandar's edition.

³ By formally accepting the *daulat* of a ruler, a contract or covenant was established.

See: A. H. Johns, "Political Authority in Islam" in: Anthony Reid (ed.), *The Making of an Islamic Political Discourse in Southeast Asia*, (Monash papers on Southeast Asia – no. 27, 1993), 21.

⁴ G.W.J. Drewes and Voorhoeve P. (eds.), *Adat Atjèh*, reproduced in facsimile from a manuscript in the India Office Library, (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1958).

The Leiden University Library possesses three copies : Cod. Or. 8213, 6501 and 7254.

The editors have limited themselves to the parts 3 and 4 which are : (3) 'The etiquette to be observed at the Court' and (4) 'Harbour regulations, duties and customs'.

Part I is a defective copy which concerns 'Rules of government for Kings'. Part 2 concerns the Genealogy of the Acehese Sultans which is included in the publication of a copy by T. J. Newbold in the *Madras Journal of Literature and Science*, Vol. III (Jan.-Apr. 1836) and Vol. IV (July-Oct. 1836).

The authority of the ruler and the obedience of the subject has been the cornerstone of Islamic politics, but Bernard Lewis, a historian of political Islam, asserts that ‘they are both neither absolute or unlimited, since they are subject to the law by which they are imposed and regulated.’ ‘The Muslim ruler may be and usually is an autocrat, but he is no despot. His office, and his tenure of that office, are established and regulated by the law, by which he is bound no less than is the humblest of his slaves. He may not change that law; in principle it is not even his function to interpret it.’⁵ We thus presume that the Islamic ruler is bound by the Law. Mythology on the other hand enshrines a king’s authority as almost sacrosanct. By juxtaposing Islam and mythology in this way, the Islamic scholars were performing a balancing act, which shows their occupational anxieties.

It is far from my ability to employ a close-reading method of the narrative structures of the texts; my aim is to try to extract traditional expectation and perception of kingship, observe and analyse how it transformed towards the early modern age.

1. 2. 2 The *hikayat* and the origin and meaning of kingship

The *hikayat* can be regarded as a literary genre, used in the Malay world to write epics and legends. As such it provides glimpses of the local belief system and myths of royal origin. The Dutch scholar G.W. J. Drewes asserts that the Acehnese *hikayat* is always composed in poetic form, contrary to the Malay *hikayat* which is a story in prose.⁶ As I set out in the Introduction, the *Hikayat Aceh* is essentially a prosaic story, a panegyric on the life of prince Darma Wangsa, also called Perkasa Alam and known to us as Iskandar Muda (the young Alexander), in which facts, myth and fiction are cleverly interwoven. The author of this panegyric, supposedly Sheikh Shamsu’d-din Pasai (*‘al Samatrani’*), the leading religious scholar at the courts of Sultan Alau’d-din Ri’ayat Shah (Sayyid al Mukamil) and Mahkota Alam (Iskandar Muda), uses traditional mythology to expound the birth of the prince and also alludes to Iskandar D’zul-karnain (Alexander the Great) as the illustrious forebear of the Acehnese sultans. It looks as if he braided these stories from both the *Hikayat Raja Raja Pasai* which is the oldest Malay text describing royal genealogy and the culture of Samudra

⁵ *The political language of Islam*, 91.

⁶ G.W.J. Drewes (ed.), *Hikajat Potjut Muhamat* (The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), 3.

Pasai, the first Islamic polity on the east coast of Sumatra, and the *Hikayat Seri Rama* which is based on Hindu mythology. To quote Teuku Iskandar, scholar of the classical Malay texts: 'It looks like the author derives from the story of *Serie Rama* the birth of Perkasa Alam (Iskandar Muda) from Maha Bisnu (lord Vishnu).'⁷ As such it may show a lasting appeal to old Hindu mythology at a time when Islam had established itself in Sumatra centuries earlier. The mystical path of Islam which was represented in northern Sumatra by the Sufi school of thought, smoothed the process of a gradual spread of the classical religious doctrine.⁸

An avid reader discovers that the writer of the *Hikayat Aceh* presents the birth of Iskandar Muda as marking the unity of Aceh; the theme is central to the panegyric. He apparently used hidden passageways to bring the Mahkota Alam dynasty into the limelight after it was exhausted by rivalry and bloodshed. In 1589 a member of the Daru'l-Kamal dynasty came on the throne. This ruler, Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah (Sayyid al Mukamil), was Iskandar Muda's grandfather from mother's side. Iskandar Muda's father, Mansur Shah was apparently a member of the outlawed Mahkota Alam dynasty.

According to the story, Mansur Shah received a dream in which the birth of his son was announced. He urinated from a fort into the river which fertilized the whole of Aceh.⁹

The deep significance of the appealing metaphor lies in its unifying undertone. A unified state was indispensable at a time when the country was in peril and needed stability; rivalry for the throne in 1604 between the two sons of Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah had broken the cohesion of the polity, tainting its image. Assuming that this biographical work was composed after the birth of the prince, the consideration should be that the announcement ('prophesy') of his birth was purposefully brought in by the writer to sanctify his accession through usurpation, after he liquidated his uncle, the throne pretender. It is however not appropriate to suggest that the writer was in favour of the Mahkota Alam dynasty, for he had been the leading religious scholar at the court of Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah, a progeny of the Dar al-Kamal dynasty and the grandfather of the prince.

The writer who was a witness of the struggle and rivalry between the two siblings, clearly ingrains in his audience the simple truth that Iskandar Muda was from both parental sides a prodigious child, in whom the two Acehnese dynasties came together. Thus Iskandar Muda's birth came to symbolise the ultimate unification of the sultanate - of which the foundation was

⁷ *Hikayat Atjéh*, 46.

⁸ On the subject of mystical Islam in converted areas I refer to P.S. van Koningsveld, *De Islam* (Utrecht: Uitgeverij De Ploeg, 1981), 111-14.

⁹ *Hikayat Atjéh*, 56.

the unification of the two separate regions Mahkota Alam and Dar al-Kamal -, preserving the continuity of dynastic kingship. The book certainly has its merits as a unique document of royal myths entwined with true historical facts.

Two well-known *hikayat* appeared during the latter part of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century, offering quite imaginative stories which allude to real historical occurrences and events. Even if I did not make a profound study of them, I was nonetheless able to extract the essence of these stories. The *Hikayat Malèm Dagang* is an epic, describing one of Sultan Iskandar Muda's war expeditions to the Malay peninsula, most probably to Johor.¹⁰ Iskandar Muda's expeditions to Johor are explored and analysed in Part Three. This epic's striking feature is the heroism of the admiral of the sultan, named *Malèm Dagang*. The sultan on the other hand is depicted merely as a coward and weakling. One wonders why a story which runs so contrary to audience expectation of the ruler's exclusive status, his bravery and authority, is used as the centre-piece in this *hikayat*. The writer, unnamed and unidentified, is a myth-buster who reveals his disdain for the sultan, safely writing long after the event which he claims to evoke, took place. I may safely conclude that this work was not written under royal patronage.

Another epic of major significance is the *Hikayat Pocut Muhamad* which is probably composed by a religious scholar whose name is not recorded.¹¹ The story describes the anarchical political situation prevailing in Aceh, a time when princes rivalled for rulership.¹² I clearly perceive of the writer's great concern with dual government. Dual government was a political system practiced in several Malay polities.¹³ The principal figure in the story, Prince Muhamad abhors dual government which he believes is detrimental to the unity of the state and eventually jeopardizes its strength. In a dream God grants him a special place and success. He consults his brother whom he asks:

10 H. K. J. Cowan, *Hikajat Malèm Dagang: Atjehsch heldendicht*, (KITLV, 1937).

11 According to C. Snouck Hurgronje who includes an analysis of the narrative based on genre and structure, the writer was a man of religious knowledge who resided in kampung Lam Rukam. (*The Acehnese*, vol. II, 88-100).

12 I consulted the edition by G.W.J. Drewes, *Hikayat Potjut Muhamad*.

13 In the *Hikayat Raja Raja Pasai* there is talk of two 'brother-kings' in Samudra Pasai. A. H. Hill (ed.), *Hikayat Raja Raja Pasai*, (JMBRAS, vol. 33, 1960), 14.

It is acknowledged that in several Malay kingdoms the system of dual government existed, like in Barus and Perak. I propose that in Johor between 1579 and 1614 a similar system existed under Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah and his brother Raja Seberang who was also known as Raja *Ilir*, the later Sultan Abdul Ma'ayat Shah. In Part Three chapter III I have explored and explained the political situation in Johor.

“What do you think? What is your advice? I cannot bear the sight of two kings. That is what I cannot stand. The country goes to ruin and is thrown into disorder. We see that the royal compound has become a wood, and the Square a jungle. The main mosque is in complete disrepair and the country is doomed because of the two kings. People do not give notice of marriage and divorce anymore, because they see that there are two kings”.¹⁴

“But people having the disposal of a ship all put out to sea; old and young, everyone is apprehensive. And for what reason? In Aceh pillage goes on unrestrained. Thieves are not kept in check, because there are two kings. When people see that disorder prevails, they say that Aceh is a most unholy country.”¹⁵

It is tempting to see in this story the rivalry for the throne between the two sons of Sultan Alau’-din Ri’ayat Shah (Sayyid al Mukamil) which occurred around 1604. Augustin de Beaulieu, admiral of a French fleet that visited Aceh in 1621 gives some hindsight information about this sibling rivalry. His informants whom he calls living witnesses of that period, told him that Sultan Alau’-din Ri’ayat Shah divided his state between his two sons: the kingdom of Pedir and the lands along the east coast went to the youngest son and the older one he declared king of Aceh and the lands on the west coast.¹⁶ These two princes rivalled for the throne, ending in rebellion and chaos. This is further explored in a following chapter. The composer of the *Hikayat Pocut Muhammad* may have taken the rivalry of the two princes, which occurred almost a century earlier, as the argument to warn against dual government, preserving earlier memories and knowledge. The unity of the sultanate as imagined and ‘prophesised’ in the *Hikayat Aceh* certainly had its resonance.

Sultan Iskandar Muda, the heralded unifier of the *Hikayat Aceh*, started with a policy of centralization, drawing the trade of the ports on the west coast to the port city of Aceh (Bandar Aceh) which was also the seat of power and authority. It is debatable whether this was an effort to unify Aceh. I shall explore the trade relations in Part Two.

¹⁴ Drewes, *Hikayat Potjut Muhammad*, 39- 41.

¹⁵ idem.

¹⁶ Melchisedech Thévenot (ed.), *Mémoires du voyage aux Indes Orientales du General Beaulieu, dressés par luy-mesme* in: *Relations de divers voyages curieux* (Paris : Cramoisy, 1666), vol 2, 114.

1. 2. 3 The chronicles and Acehese ‘Thought’

The story of the development of Acehese ‘thought’ as expressed in religion, philosophy, poetry and prose could only be written intelligibly if it was built on the foundation of dynastic history, which furnishes the indispensable chronological basis. Following Nuru’ d-din al Raniri’s *Bustan as-Salatin* (Bab II, fasal 13), which concerns Acehese royal genealogy, this dynastic history starts around 1500 when Ali Mughayat Syah founded the Sultanate Aceh Darusalam (Dar as-Salam) by unifying the Dar al- Kamal and the Mahkota Alam regions, located south and north of the Aceh river. By adopting the epithet ‘Dar as-Salam’ (abode of peace), it is clear that Aceh distinguished itself from the world of the ‘unbelievers’ in the ‘Dar al-Harb, thus marking the borders. According to this division, territories which were no longer under Muslim rule became part of the House of War, and were subject to invasion and subjugation.

Sheikh Nuru’ d-din al Raniri, the composer of the *Bustan as-Salatin* evidently drew facts and ideas from the *Hikayat Aceh* of Sheikh Shamsu’ d-din Pasai, the revered, influential Islamic scholar and mystic whose ideas and writings Nuru’ d-din al Raniri - who is perceived as orthodox, - heavily criticised, advocating the burning of these writings and the execution of the *Wugudyah* mystics whom he called *kafirs*.¹⁷ *Wugudyah* mysticism was a local off-shoot of the *Sufi* school of thought which had found a fertile ground in northern Sumatra.

In this work Nuru’ d-din al Raniri employs contradictions probably to satisfy different audiences. Interpolating meaningful texts even though they seem in flagrant opposition with his orthodox inclination, illustrates his concern with both concrete and transgressive meanings. Apart from describing historical events and furnishing royal authority with myth and with religious authority, Nuru’ d-din also extensively dwells on the construction of the splendid royal pleasure garden known as *Taman Ghaira* with its flowers, animals and water, fine buildings and other constructions. He introduced the Indian idea of a royal garden. He furthermore devotes exceptional attention to the funeral of Sultan Iskandar Thani in 1641, which was more than anything else a primeval affair in which animals with their legendary status were important participants. While it is inconceivable to see his hand in this manifestation of pre-islamic tradition, the attention given in his book to the funeral is quite significant and covers several pages. Was it perhaps his aim to distract the attention of a future literate audience from the anguish which gripped society when he advocated strict measures as a result of which people lost their freedom to follow their religious inclinations?

¹⁷ *Bustanu’s Salatin*, 8-9.

One is tempted to answer this question with a firm ‘yes’. He was very much a man of the pen; he knew the power of the written word.

A work of a different order is the *Taj as-Salatin* (‘Crown of Kings’) which is supposed to have appeared in Aceh in 1603. Although it is a guide book for kings and government functionaries, it also directs its admonitions to the true followers of Islam. It admonishes the rulers and officials to rule and act justly. The enigmatic writer known by his pen-name Bukhari al Johari which may either mean the ‘mendicant’ from Johor or the ‘mendicant jeweler’ (*johari* is the Arabic word for jeweller), who made the *Taj* or Crown, was a man of religion too, familiar with ancient Greek and other texts to which he refers. He uses Islamic allegory to highlight his origin or function.

P.P. Roorda van Eijsinga, a Dutch colonial administrator who translated this work in Dutch includes a poem which starts as follows: ‘He who writes this text, should be *dāl, ain, alif* and ask the Lord for *khāf, ba, wan, lam*’.¹⁸ Roorda van Eijsinga omits a translation and explanation of this text, but even if a literal translation is produced, the meaning behind the words may elude the translator, still it is worth including for those who feel that they have the key to interpret it. One wonders why the writer of this generally perceived *Furstenspiegel* choose to remain anonymous when the sultan sanctioned its publication. Was he an original from Johor, Aceh’s Malay enemy? Interestingly the clue to the origins of the *Taj* is provided by Bukhari al Johari himself when he declares that it was conceived during the reign of the 16th ruler of the Malay and the 10th of them who followed Islam, under whose rule the Hollanders first came to Johor. The first fleet from Holland under the command of admiral Van Heemskerck indeed arrived in Johor in 1603 when Sultan Alau’ d-din Ri’ayat Shah was on Johor’s throne and his namesake Alau’ d-din Ri’ayat Syah (Sayyid al Mukamil) was ruling Aceh under the latter’s patronage there existed a productive literary climate where prose and poetry were written. Bukhari al Johari explains that the Malay world devaluated and Malay literature degenerated when the Portuguese established themselves in Malacca in 1511. It is likely that he left Johor for Aceh where he could continue writing under the protective umbrella of the Acehnese sultan. At that time the *Taj as-Salatin* was not as influential in the Islamic ports as it supposedly became in later times, especially since it was written in Aceh which was at loggerheads with these ports.

¹⁸ P.P. Roorda van Eijsinga: Bochari van Djohor, *De Kroon aller Koningen*, (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1827), 1. This is a translation of the *Taj as-Salatin* by Buchari al Johari, composed around 1603 in Aceh.

Several scholars such as Richard Winstedt and Teuku Iskandar assume that it had been compiled from Persian works. The work is based on Islamic and moral precepts and refers to a book called ‘History of the Kings’ in which God blessed Alexander the Great with the highest human authority and magnanimity ‘because he spoke the truth, he was faithful and he shared his wealth’. The author’s fundamental concern was with these essential characteristics in a ruler. The Indonesian historian Taufik Abdullah establishes that one of the basic foundations of mystical Sufi teachings is cited in the first chapter of this work: ‘*Man arafa nafsahu arafa rubbahu*’, ‘those who know themselves know their God’.¹⁹ This undoubtedly hints at a link with Persian Sufi works.

The *Taj as-Salatin* consists of 24 chapters of which the last chapter concerns rules for ‘just and devout kings’. The value of this chapter is essentially its admonition to the rulers to be *adil* or righteous and to secure a state of well-being among their subjects. By using narrative as a tool and hagiographies as examples, it sets out to teach about just and unjust kings and God’s reward or punishment for them.²⁰

Islam requires from the ruler to respect and enforce religious law, to safeguard the worldly interests of the Islamic community, to defend or expand the frontiers, to wage war against unbelievers, to administer public property and the collection and expenditure of state revenues, to dispense justice and to maintain internal security and to build mosques.

According to Taufik Abdullah the main concern of the *Taj as-Salatin* is to establish and secure an *adil* situation: ‘the pre-requisites of a ruler seem to have been designed to secure that the newly chosen ruler would prove himself to be an *adil* king.’²¹

Can we say with certainty that the system advocated by the *Taj* was wholly put into effect? We can glean to a limited degree from the notes of the foreigners in Aceh whether the sultan employed the *adil* principle.²² Yet, we should take into account that these notes are coloured by the foreigners’ own perceptions and background, making it difficult to grasp the actual conditions.

19 Taufik Abdullah, “The Formation of a Political Tradition in the Malay World”, in: A.Reid (ed.), *The Making of an Islamic Political Discourse in Southeast Asia*, (Clayton, Vic.: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1993), 35-58, 42.

20 In his stimulating essay Taufik Abdullah claims that the *adil* requirement remains the yardstick to evaluate the performance of the ruler, but that it can never be used to question the legitimacy of his *daulat*.

21 *ibid*, 43.

22 The subject of Muslim authority is among others treated by A.H. Johns in his article, “Political Authority in Islam” in: Reid (ed.), *The Making of an Islamic Political Discours*, 17-22.

Hagiographies of prophets were sometimes included in the guide books as examples to the rulers. In Roorda van Eijsinga's translation of the *Taj as-Salatin* a short hagiography of 'Omar' (the caliph) is included. According to this, Omar murdered his father because he did not believe in Mohamed, and he had his son beaten to death, because he was immoral.

The fact that Sultan Iskandar Muda had his son beaten to death around 1636 because he was immoral and committed adultery with the wife of a warrior²³, may suggest that Iskandar Muda followed Omar's good example. The question is whether the sultan liquidated this son because he acknowledged that the moral authority of the ruler (admonished by the *Taj as-Salatin*) was extremely important in regard to the continuity of the state?

He obviously feared that if this son would seize the throne, Aceh would crumble by internal strife²⁴. Its strong position in the region would diminish, giving its enemies an advantage in the power struggle. That was his chief concern. He needed a successor who did not incense Acehnese society by his amoral behaviour. Even in 1621 admiral Augustin de Beaulieu mentioned from talks he had with the sultan that the relationship between Iskandar Muda and his son suffered because this son was extremely cruel.

The sultan had taken practical steps by nominating somebody else as his successor long before the execution date of his son. A captured prince of Pahang who was raised at the court, was appointed as his successor. The issue shall be treated further in this study.

A. Hasjmy, historian and *ulama* includes a 'hagiography' of his own making in a work dedicated to female authority in Aceh²⁵, which tells us that Iskandar Muda fell sick after the execution of his son, and when his closest servants asked him if he felt any compunction for having put him to death he replied in Acehnese: '*Mate aneuk na jirat, mate adat ho tamita*', meaning that when one's child is dead, one can go to his grave, but when the law is dead, where can one go?²⁶ Hasjmy exults: 'This is one example of Iskandar Muda's righteousness (*'Suatu contoh dari keadilan Iskandar Muda'*). Hasjmy's intention seems to have been to present Iskandar Muda's execution of his amoral son to avoid his accession of the throne, as a

²³ Mentioned by Augustin de Beaulieu. Lombard, *Mémoires d'un voyage aux Indes Orientales 1619-1622*, 205.

²⁴ This seemed also the concern of the Dutch residents in Aceh. *Daghregister 1637* (10-12 March), 86.

²⁵ A. Hasmy, *59 Tahun Aceh Merdeka di bawah Pemerintahan Ratu*, (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1977), 45. Hasjmy disseminated royal myths to a Acehnese audience struggling to come to terms with contemporary developments against the background of Aceh's historical importance as a fervent Islamic state.

²⁶ idem. Hasjmy quotes here M. Zainuddin, *Singa Aceh*, hlm. 181 (Medan: 1957).

manifestation of *adil*. Perhaps in Hasjmy's view Acehnese society - which had gone through difficult transitional stages - needed a positive impulse from exemplary deeds by the great men of bygone times.²⁷ Thus contemporary scholars and writers such as Hasjmy and M. Zainuddin, as well as the writers of the court texts, highlight the sultan's exploits and the possible limits of his power, and use him to serve particular political purposes.

In reality Iskandar Muda abused the rules of morality too and was ruthless if he did not get his way. We know of one case in particular reported by Dutch merchant Cornelis Comans who mentioned in a letter to Jan Pieterszoon Coen in Batavia in 1619, that one of the chiefs on Aceh's west coast begged the help of the Dutch to oust the king of Aceh from there, in exchange for a pepper transaction. He and his family had fled from Aceh, because the king had set eyes on his wife and demanded her as a concubine. Iskandar Muda relentlessly pursued him, threatening to kill him.²⁸

Buchari al Johari, the composer of the *Taj as-Salatin*, declares 'this book is composed from the precious words of many learned men from all over the world, whose names are well-known.'²⁹ By referring to the Greek political thinkers Aristotle, Hypocrates and Galenus, he informs us that he was familiar with many different ideas and concerned with diverse fields of life. However, to call the *Taj* therefore a book of 'world thought' would be a gross exaggeration, despite the fact that it adopted as paradigms several ideas of East and West. This is less strange than it seems to be, because Muslim philosophers in the Middle Ages endeavoured to reconcile the philosophic doctrines which they had inherited from ancient times with the religious teachings of Islam. They translated and adapted ancient Greek texts, notably the writings of Plato and Aristotle.³⁰

We don't know with certainty what appealed to Buchari al Johari in Aristotle's thinking to make it acceptable for an Islamic cadre. Was it in the teaching of the ethical and metaphysical that the Greek thinker's ideas were inspiring to him? Developing on the basis of these underpinnings I must conclude that the *Taj as -Salatin* is not entirely original, yet it is a unique Malay document for Islamic ruler-ship.

²⁷ Hasjmy also held the position of governor of the province of Aceh, known at that time as *Daerah Istimewa Aceh* (the Special Territory of Aceh).

²⁸ The issue is addressed in Part Two of this study.

²⁹ *De Kroon aller Koningen*, 12.

³⁰ See the contributions in Joel L. Kraemer and Ilai Alon, (eds.), *Religion and Government in the World of Islam*, (Tel-Aviv, 1983); Also: Van Koningsveld, *De Islam*, 34. Lewis, *The political language of Islam*, 26.

Another work of significance is the *Sejarah Melayu* or Malay Annals, appreciatively called the *Sulalatu'l-Salatin*, the genealogy of the Malaccan rulers, may have appeared around 1613 in Aceh, after Sultan Iskandar Muda had sacked Johor and taken members of the royal family and a significant number of Johorese as his captives to Aceh.³¹ The sultanate of Johor assumed the role of successor state of the sultanate of Malacca. The writing of this chronicle was commissioned by Raja Bongsu, younger brother of Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah of Johor, to Bendahara Tun Sri Lanang.³² It is based on an older one which preceded the arrival of the Portuguese in Malacca in 1511. Apart from being a royal genealogy it also describes Malaccan society and customs. There are clear similarities between the *Sejarah Melayu* and the oldest known Malay work which is the *Hikayat Raja Raja Pasai*, the chronicle of the kings of Pasai one of the very early Islamic kingdoms on the Malay speaking east coast of Sumatra, which became part of the Sultanate of Aceh around 1524. Before the Portuguese arrived in Malacca, Sultan Mahmud Shah is said to have send his *bendahara* Tun Muhammad to Pasai to find answers for pressing religious issues.³³

Following the *Hikayat Raja Raja Pasai*, Iskandar Dzu'l-Karnain (Alexander the Great) was the mythical forebear of the Pasai kings. When Aceh annexed (Samudra) Pasai, it also inherently annexed its history; the Acehnese court-writers of the seventeenth century appreciatively utilized the myth of Iskandar Dzu'l-Karnain to suffuse the sultans with a numinous aura; the *Hikayat Aceh*, the *Bustan as-Salatin* and the *Taj as-Salatin*, all mention this myth of the royal ancestry. The influential religious scholar in Aceh, Sheikh Shamsu'd-din originated from Pasai. He was instrumental in spreading the myth. For sage, sultan and commoner, myth seemed too irresistible to reject.

Like the Acehnese works mentioned above, the *Sejarah Melayu* too alludes to Iskandar Dzu'l Karnain (Alexander the Great) as the illustrious forbear of the Malay kings:

“Ada pun nama kami dan bangsa kami bukannya daripada bangsa jin dan peri Bahawa kami ini bangsa manusia asal kami daripada anak cucu Raja IskandarDzu'l-Karnain, nisab

31 The book itself gives the *Hijrah* year which is the year 1612 of the Christian calendar as the year of its genesis.

32 Tun Sri Lanang spoke to Sheikh Nuru'd-din al Raniri in Aceh (on Raniri's first visit to Aceh) about the genesis of the *Sejarah Melayu* and declared that it was based on an older work which preceded the arrival of the Portuguese in Malacca in 1511.

33 Hadi, *Aceh and the Portuguese*, 39.

kami daripada Raja Nushirwan adil Raja Masyrik dan Maghreb, dan pancar kami daripada raja Sulaiman Alahi 's-Salam” 34

(‘Our name and our origin do not come from *jinn* and are not made up of stories; we are the descendants of the grandson of Alexander the Great, the rightful king Nushirwan of the East and the West and our very origin is from king Solomon.’)

We thus identify Alexander the Great as the common mythical forebear of both the Acehnese and the Malay kings. Even if scholars put question marks at the correctness of the interpretation that Dzu’l-karnain who is cited in the Qur’an (verse 18:83), was the same as Alexander the Great, the outcome is irrelevant for our purpose. What is important is the fact that in the Malay world as well as in Aceh, Alexander the Great was revered as the herald of Islam and declared the forebear of the kings. The Ottoman rulers also alluded to Alexander the Great as the herald of Islam. Noteworthy is the fact that Aristotle to whom the writer of the *Taj* refers, was the teacher of Alexander the Great.³⁵

Although the Acehnese spoke their own language, Malay acquired the status of the language of literature, religion and trade. As I mentioned Sheikh Shamsu’ d-din Pasai, the influential religious scholar and mystic who served for well over 30 years until 1629, the year of his death, originated from Pasai, the former Islamic sultanate where Malay was the vernacular. There can be little doubt that he was instrumental in propagating elements of the Malay culture. It is however clear that he did not invent the illustrious title Iskandar Muda (‘young Alexander’). It was a posthumous title for Sultan Perkasa Mahkota Alam made up by Sheikh Nuru’ d-din al Raniri, appearing for the first time in the *Bustan as-Salatin* composed about a decade after the death in 1629 of Sheikh Shamsu’ d-din Pasai. Nuru’ d-din al Raniri’s patron and protagonist, the prince of Pahang who, as Iskandar Muda’s candidate for the throne, successively acquired the title Iskandar Thani (‘Iskandar the Second’). It is evident that Nuru’ d-din continued with the Alexander myth of Acehnese kingship, introduced by his predecessor.

34 W.G. Shellabaer (ed.), *Sejarah Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1967), 22.

35 Anton-Hermann Chroust makes the interesting inference that the ‘Aristotelian conception of the *polis* was obscured by the Alexandrian ideal of the *cosmopolis* following the Macedonian’s world conquest.’ ‘Philosophies of the East’ in: *Review of Methaphysics*, vol. XVIII, 3 (1965), 572-80.

A work of a different order is the *Adat Aceh*, a code of law, compiled by the copyists and scribes of the royal court, whose engagement was with statecraft rather than with ideology. They explicitly worked at the orders of the sultan.

According to the Dutch scholar K.F.H. van Langen, the *Adat Aceh* was fashioned on the *Adat Meukuta Alam* (Mahkota Alam) which originates from the second half of the sixteenth century and should be credited to Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah 'al Kahar' ('the conqueror') who started to develop ideas on state structures.³⁶ Iskandar Muda initiated the parts 3 and 4 which make up the edition of G.W.J. Drewes and P.Voorhoeve which we have at our disposal.³⁷ Successive rulers, starting with the first female ruler Taju'l Alam Safiatu'd-din Syah (1641-1675) added their own ordinances. In relevant cases the stipulations and regulations shall be discussed in this study.

Since most texts which I briefly discuss here, were composed during the seventeenth century, it means *inter alia* that they were written with the *locale*, a unique Asian Islamic milieu in mind and that myths of Acehnese kingship were transmitted by religious scholars *cum* court writers more than a century after the sultanate had come into existence. Because their basis is different, we are able to glean how kingship was acquired, proclaimed and conceived.

1. 2. 4 The obstacles to conceptualising kingship

In the older literature kingship in Southeast Asia is often discussed from the angle of Hindu and Buddhist concepts in which the parallelism between the macrocosm and the microcosm is central.³⁸ Such an approach describes the links between these worldly men with the universe and explains the power of the king as resulting from the idea of concentric circles within

³⁶ K.F.H. van Langen, *De Inrichting van het Atjehsche Staatsbestuur onder het Sultanaat* ('s-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1888).

³⁷ *Adat Atjèh*, 17. In the year of his accession to the throne (1015 H.) which is 1607 of the Christian calendar, Sultan Iskandar Muda ordered Orang Kaya Seri Maharadja Lela, Penghulu Kerkun Radja Setia Muda, Kerkun Katibul-Muluk Seri Indera Sura and Kerkun Seri Indera Muda, officials of the *Balai Besar*, to make a certified copy (*suruh tandakan surat seperti*) of the *tarakatas*, the royal edicts.

³⁸ R. Heine Geldren endeavoured to take the attention away from the long accepted one in which Hindu and Buddhist concepts were central. See: "Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia", (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, paper no. 18, 1956).

Several scholars after him also used a different line of thinking to describe political thought and kingship in Southeast Asia, to name a few: A.H. Johns, Peter Riddell, Mahmoud Ayoub.

which the interactions are predestined. But the idea that a *Mandala*, in this case a circle of kingdoms, contracted or expanded because of shifting allegiances, depending on a spiritually dominant centre, is flawed. Scholars were inclined to describe Southeast Asian history as a continuation of processes even after Islam entered the scene. By doing so, they did not give an adequate picture of the historical reality, because the contingencies were generally ignored and even obscured. Situations of the sixteenth and seventeenth century are not merely reflections of the past; the encroaching European world impacted on the developments and the allegiances.

Let us for a brief moment dwell at the intellectual debate. D.G. E. Hall, a leading Southeast Asian historian, criticizes the characterizations used by the French scholar G. Coedès : ‘the decline of the Hindu Kingdoms’ and ‘the end of the Hindu kingdoms’ of the two subsequent periods up to 1511 which started Portuguese presence, saying ‘it betrays a failure to observe the real nature of the political and cultural developments of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, namely, the fact that leading peoples, not only of the Indo-Chinese Peninsula, but in Indonesia also, were developing their own highly individual political systems and cultures.’³⁹ While these views intrinsically imply that Hindu notions were steadfastly outmoded, this does not mean that pre-Islamic notions totally collapsed in the face of the coming of Islam and pre-modern civilization. As the Dutch scholar R.A. Kern observed, the arrival of Islam did not necessarily impact with force on the existing cultures. Islam in the Malay and Indonesian world was accommodative and able to absorb local customs. Kern established that traces of a pre-Islamic past can still be found in some of the rituals and customs of Islam, for example the word *sembahyang*, prayer or to pray, in fact refers to offering homage or *sembah* to Hyang, the primal ancestor of pagan times.⁴⁰

Indeed, it cannot be denied that several matters survived the peaceful infiltration of Islam in the Sumatran ports, alluding to a remote past. The local intelligentsia adapted the new faith to their traditions in what can be regarded as a cross-insemination between local cultures and Islam. I may refer to the use of the Sanskrit title ‘Raja’, which is an accepted title in the Islamised areas of the region. The letter R points to the word *Rahmet* (mercy); the letter A from its upright form, to the erecting of the Caliphate on earth by Allah, and his establishment

³⁹ Hall, *A History of South-East Asia*, xxii, xxiv.

Hall refers to G. Coedès, *Les États Hindouisés d’Indochine et d’Indonésie*, (Paris: 1948, new and revised edition, 1964).

⁴⁰ Quoted. Farish A. Noor, “Rethinking the Islamization of the Malay World”, (Leiden: IAS Newsletter, 27, March 2002) The writer refers to the ideas of R.A. Kern as published in: Gordon, Alijah (ed.), *The Propagation of Islam in the Indonesian-Malay Archipelago*, (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute (MSRI), 2001), 472.

of the *Amir Allah* (commands of Allah), through the agency of kings; the letter J to the word *jemal* (beauty).⁴¹ It is obviously reconciled with Muslim appreciation.

A tradition which we may trace back to Hindu custom is that when the sultan died, the *orangkaya* shaved their hair as a sign of grief.⁴² Pre-Islamic and primeval elements were still part of the royal burial processions in which legendary animals took central stage. The *Bustan* describes *in extenso* the burial procession of Sultan Iskandar Thani, which may therefore be regarded as an important *rite of passage* for the sultans even if the main characteristic of the procession was pre-Islamic. It is quite remarkable that Nuru'd-din al Raniri enhances on Iskandar Thani's visit to the grave of his father in Pahang, where he held a *khanduri* (ritual meal or feast) to mark his father's death, explaining that this was an ancient royal custom.⁴³ Nuru'd-din al Raniri who is considered the most orthodox of the religious scholars at the Acehese Court, thus highlights Islam's accommodation to local customs. It may give the impression that there was hardly any 'tension' between Islam and *adat* or local custom. If the foundation of the Islamic sultanate inculcates the formation of Acehese kingship, is the corollary therefore that Acehese kingship was an Islamic institution? Even if the answer to this question is 'yes', one is still faced with the dilemma of several of the court traditions which do often express the inescapable concomitant of human societies. The brisk developments for example in trade and diplomatic relations with the Europeans, also evidently impacted on how kingship was traditionally perceived.

1. 2. 5 Influences on Acehese 'Thought'

The successive Acehese rulers were influenced by ideas on government and statecraft which spread to the littoral by way of the arrival of traders and religious men from diverse countries such as Turkey, Arabia, Persia, India and China.⁴⁴ It is a truism that trade and the transfer of religions and various ideas went hand in hand.

⁴¹ *Adat Atjèh*, 15.

⁴² Dutch merchants mentioned that the *orangkaya* shaved their heads as a sign of grief. *Dagh-Register Anno 1637*, 86, 87.

⁴³ *Bustanu's-Salatin*, 58: 'Dan di-dirikan *khanduri* Paduka Marhum Yang Mahamulia itu seperti yang tersebut kemuliaan segala raja2 yang telah lalu itu pada masa dahulu kala wallahu a'lamu.'

The acceptance of Islam evidently set in motion a new way of thinking about governance and the relations between ruler and ruled. Islam as a vehicle for statecraft also imbued the idea of concepts like ‘God’s deputy’ (*khalifat Allah*) and ‘God’s shadow on earth’ (*dzu’l Allah fi’l-alam*). Sultan Iskandar Thani made use of these sublime titles in his letters to the Dutch Governor-general Van Diemen and Prince Frederick Hendrik of Orange Nassau, which he wrote just after his installation in 1637.⁴⁵

It is instructive to note that *khalif* occurs in the Qur’an twice, once referring to Adam and once to David. After the death of prophet Muhammad the historic caliphate begins. Abu Bakr succeeded the prophet as the head of the Islamic community and was called *Khalifatu Rasul Allah*, deputy of the Prophet.⁴⁶ Sultan Iskandar Thani thought himself the deputy of Allah and not the deputy of the Prophet. In their letters to their European counterparts, Iskandar Muda and Alau’-din Ri’ayat Shah (Sayyid al Mukamil) stressed their political authority by describing the lands under their power, rather than their religious authority.⁴⁷

Royal authority evidently attained a greater religious undertone with the arrival of Sheikh Nuru’-din al Raniri at the court of Sultan Iskandar Thani.

The view among older scholars is that the Acehnese rulers borrowed ideas on statecraft and certain cultural elements from the Moghuls of India⁴⁸; it is warranted to look at several characteristics of both courts before we are able to corroborate this view.

44 A.W.’S. Sullivan (tr.): Snouck Hurgronje, *The Acehnese*, 2 vols, (Leyden: Brill, 1906), vol. II, 278 ‘Those who sowed in the Far East the first seeds of Islam were no zealots prepared to sacrifice life and property for the holy cause, nor were they missionaries supported by funds raised in their native land. On the contrary these men came hither to seek their own worldly advantage, and the work of conversion was merely a secondary task. Later on too, when millions had in this way been won over to Islam, it was the prospect of making money and naught else that attracted hitherward so many teachers from India, Egypt, Mecca and Hadramaut.’

45 A *translaet* (translation) of the letter to Van Diemen is registered in the National Archives as VOC 1.04.02: 11264. Also published in *Dagh-Register int Casteel Batavia anno 1640-1641*, 6-9. The Library of the University of Leiden is in the possession of the original letter written in Arabic from Sultan Alau’-din Mughayat Shah (Iskandar Thani) to Prince Frederik Hendrik of Orange written around 1637 (Cod. Or 4818a- 1-3). This letter is included in the Annex.

46 Lewis, *The political language of Islam*, 44- 45.

47 See the *Translaet* of Iskandar Muda’s letter of 1610 to Prince Maurice: NA: VOC 1.04.02: 11263. The translation is also published in: J.E. Banck, *Atchin’s Verheffing en Val*. Letter to King James I of England written in 1612 in: W.G. Shellabaer “Some Old Malay Manuscripts” (JSBRAS, 1898) 123-130. *ibid.*, 17. Sultan Alau’-din Ri’ayat Shah’s letter to the governors of the west coast to announce the English arrival and interest to buy pepper in their ports.

48 G. P. Rouffaer asserts that the Acehnese sultans styled their seals on those of the Moghuls. “De Hindostansche oorsprong van het Negenvoudig Sultans-Zegel van Atjeh” (BKI, vol. 3/4 part 59, 1906); Bertram Schrieke supports the view that the Acehnese sultans were much influenced by Moghul Court traditions:

Teuku Iskandar, who edited and discussed the *Hikayat Aceh*, the panegyric on the life of the young Iskandar Muda, is of the opinion that its author was influenced by the *Akbarnama*, a biography of Emperor Akbar, who ruled northern India from 1555 to 1605, written by Abu'l-Fazl, one of Akbar's closest advisors.⁴⁹ He sees similar trends in the lives of both men, in their interests and education and notes similar arrangements of the contents of the book. Yet, even if there are mirror images in their lives, and even if the *Akbarnama* functioned as a basis for the writing of the *Hikayat Aceh*, it is generally acknowledged in scholarly circles that Muslim text-writers and poets since the Middle Ages played prominent roles in describing history and the history of the rulers of their realm who frequently employed them for the task of polishing their image. This long established custom was copied simultaneously in different polities in the Islamic world.⁵⁰ There can be little doubt that both the Moghul emperors and the Acehese sultans were aware of this custom, simply because religious scholars at their courts were well travelled and visited the holy places of Islam. We should not leave out the possibility that certain ideas on government derived from the ancient Indian treatise *Arthashastra* written by Kautilya especially for the Mauryan Empire, because this treatise influenced many thinkers and writers on statecraft and governance all over the world.⁵¹ An attempt to establish the degree of Moghul influence on the rulers of Aceh needs a closer look at different aspects of Moghul court culture and compare these with the realities of Aceh. Taking expansion as one of the core elements of the Akbar era, it is indubitable that successive Acehese rulers were aware of Akbar's successes in this field. But the question is whether there was a connection between Akbar's expansion and that of Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah (al Kahar) who was his contemporary and who is credited for Aceh's territorial expansion, in other words can we establish that the Acehese ruler (s) were inspired by and followed the example of the Moghuls? In formulating an answer I advance the thesis that

Indonesian Sociological Studies, 2 vols. (Bandung/Gravenhage, 1959, 1960).

49 *Hikayat Atjéh*, 22.

50 Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam*, 10:

‘ In the days before the advent of the media, the poet had an important role in the field of propaganda and of what we nowadays call public relations, and poetry could often be an important weapon of political warfare. For the modern historian, it is often an invaluable source of information on the language of political discourse, and on the allusions to which the poet knew his listeners would respond. In addition to poetry, we have at our disposal a vast mass of literary and documentary evidence, the former including a wide range of historical and political writings, the latter reflecting many different aspects of both conduct of government and the waging of political warfare among Muslims from medieval to modern times.’

51 Narasingha P. Sil (ed.), *Kautilya's Arthashastra, a comparative study* (London: Sangam Books Limited, 1985). D. G. E. Hall also briefly points to this ancient Indian treatise in connection to governance in Southeast Asia, but he does not pursue an analogy: *A History of Southeast Asia*, 250-1.

Aceh was a maritime power, the Moghul Empire was land based, something which already sets them apart. The sultanate Aceh Darusalam rose as a reaction to Portuguese incursions in the Straits region and their attack on Muslim trade and shipping. Historians perceive of Emperor Akbar's expansion as pure aggression with the intention to become the unrivalled ruler of India.⁵²

If court architecture can be regarded as a parameter to establish similarities in expression, it is evident that the architecture in Aceh was different from that of the Moghuls. Akbar was known for building huge forts, like the one in Agra and he established an elegant court-city in Fatehpur Sikri where today the sophisticated style of architecture is still preserved. The mausoleum which Emperor Shah Jehan built for his wife Mumtaz Mahal is an outstanding example of Moghul intricate architecture which was missing in Aceh.

The foreigners in Aceh had an outspoken opinion of the architecture; although they spoke of a strong palace, they mention at the same time that it was built like the local houses which stood on poles and were covered with matting. ⁵³ The forts were not imposing, and if we accept the description by John Davis who was in Aceh in 1599 and in 1602 as correct, in fact quite unremarkable '.... over which stood a stone fort, which was without covering, battlements, or flankers, low walled like a Pown, a worse cannot be conceived.' Even the *Hikayat Aceh* points to the fact that the city needed no protection walls because its strength lay in its elephants. ⁵⁴

When the VOC fleet under admiral Verhoeven (Verhoeff) was anchored in Aceh in 1608, the disembarking made different observations. They spoke of a strong and beautiful castle with strong walls and fitted with palisades and metal pieces on all the sides to defend the fortress and the city. But it is doubtful that the castle to which they referred was styled on the exclusive Moghul architecture.

Sultan Iskandar Thani took the construction of the beautiful royal garden with its flowers and fruit trees, known as the *Taman Ghairah* to hand, probably at the suggestion of his religious advisor Sheikh Nuru'd-din al-Raniri. A description is found in the *Bustan as-Salatin*.⁵⁵

⁵² Percival Spear (ed.), *The Oxford History of India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press), Fourth Edition, 1958), 341.

⁵³ The French merchant Francois Martin who visited Aceh in 1602 among other things gave a description of the lay-out of the city of Aceh. In: Reid, A., *Witnesses to Sumatra*, 55-63.

⁵⁴ *Hikayat Atjéh*, 165.

⁵⁵ *Bustanu's Salatin*, 48- 49.

Originating from India the sheikh was familiar with the Moghul gardens and it looks like the *Taman Ghairah* was an adaptation of the Moghul gardens with its flowers such as the lotus and water lilly, its fruit trees and waterworks. Yet it is interesting to know that the Mauryan emperors of ancient India, Chandragupta and Asoka, constructed pleasure gardens full of flowers and fruit trees for the recreation of men and animals.⁵⁶ I infer that both the Moghul pleasure gardens and the *Taman Ghairah* had their roots in the Mauryan gardens.

I admit that this brief and limited comparison based on some basic aspects of the Moghul and Acehnese realities has its flaws. It implies however that a careful examination of the many dimensions of Moghul and Acehnese court traditions and politics is necessary to arrive at a compelling conclusion. One should realize that Aceh was already an established and powerful sultanate when Emperor Akbar, one of the greatest Moghul rulers came to the throne. Although Akbar was brought up as a Sunni Muslim, his religious views changed gradually to the point that he adopted ideas which were spread by the different creeds in Indian society. During the latter half of his reign Muslims were even subjected to persecution.⁵⁷

Turkey deserves a more prominent place in ascribing influences on Aceh.⁵⁸ The principal consideration is that the Ottoman emperor, who was the main supplier of Aceh's artillery and cannons, technicians and artisans in the second half of the sixteenth century, was regarded the caliph of the Suni Islamic community; he was the example of power, piety and courage. The official contacts between Aceh and Turkey started in 1565, when Sultan Alau'd-din R'ayat Shah (al Kahar) sent an official delegation to the emperor with the request to form a military alliance against the Portuguese in Malacca. The Ottoman emperor even declared that he was the king of the West and that the king of Aceh was the king of the East.⁵⁹ It is quite logical that ideas on statecraft also flowed from that same direction.

We gather from the *Bustan* and from several of the royal letters that the Acehnese rulers used the Turkish title 'sultan'⁶⁰; the Moghul rulers were in favour of the title 'shah'. Akbar was the

⁵⁶ Looking at the construction of the Taman Ghairah with inside its borders a mosque and pools, Anthony Reid is of the opinion that 'it was not simply a garden for pleasure, but for that highest form of pleasure represented by the mystic communion with God' (*An Indonesian Frontier*, 134).

⁵⁷ *The Oxford History of India*, 357-359.

⁵⁸ See for example: Anthony Reid, "Sixteenth century Turkish influence in western Indonesia" in: *Journal of the Historical Society of the University of Malaysia*, (Kuala Lumpur: 1969, vol. X), 411 onwards.

⁵⁹ *Hikayat Atjéh*, 18.

padshah. The private army of Iskandar Muda was trained like the Turkish *janissaries*.⁶¹ In Turkey they formed an elite army of celibates who lived according to strict rules. Whether this was the case in Aceh cannot be established.

As distinct from G. P. Rouffaer who speaks of similarities between the Moghul and Acehnese seals⁶², and H. Djajadiningrat who claims that Aceh copied the Moghul emperor's seal⁶³, Anabel Teh-Gallop establishes, that the seal of Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah (Sayyid al Mukamil), the grandfather of Sultan Iskandar Muda, resembles the Ottoman seals of the late 16th century, 'yet Ottoman influence cannot be discerned in all formal aspects of the seal. For example the continuous round border inscription is not typically Ottoman, as in most Ottoman seals with border inscriptions the inscription is usually contained within a number of distinct cartouches, sometimes separated by rosettes or elaborate plaited knots; nor is the hand directly comparable with that found on other Ottoman seals of the same period. This strongly suggests that the seal was made in Aceh, but within a climate of a considerable degree of acculturation, and leaves open the possibilities that the seal was either made by a Turkish craftsman, perhaps long resident in Aceh and adjusted to Acehnese norms, or by an Acehnese or other foreign craftsman with some knowledge of the iconographic vocabulary of Ottoman seals'.⁶⁴

It may have been the Acehnese 'imperial ideal' based on crushing Portuguese authority and hegemony and its resonance with the Ottoman Empire, that enhanced the sultan's power towards the second half of the sixteenth century and well into the seventeenth century.

60 A. H. Johns, an expert on Islam in Asia, explains that the word *sultan* according to the Qur'an means authority. With the Seljuks it became a regular sovereign title. While the title *caliph* connotes religious authority by a 'valid' line of succession, anyone who had sufficient charisma and was at the right place and time could become *sultan*. In: "Political Authority in Islam: Some Reflections Relevant to Indonesia" in: Reid (ed.), *The Making of an Islamic Political*, 23.

61 A. Reid, *An Indonesian Frontier Acehnese & Other Histories of Sumatra*, 88.

62 G. P. Rouffaer, *De Hindostansche oorsprong van het negenvoudig sultans-zegel van Atjeh*, ('s-Gravenhage:Smits, 1906).

63 H. Djajadiningrat, "Critisch overzicht van de in Maleische Werken vervatte gegevens over de Geschiedenis van het Sultanaat Atjeh", BKI 65 (1911), 176.

64 A. Teh-Gallop, "Ottoman influences in the seal of Sultan Alauddiin Riayat Syah of Aceh (1589-1604)", in: *Indonesia and the Malay World*, vol. 32, issue 93, July 2004, 176-190.

1. 2. 6 Succession

The seeming absence in Aceh of a strict rule of primogeniture was one of the causes of dynastic disputes and rebellion, liquidation and usurpation, as the historical reality especially of the sixteenth century and the first part of the seventeenth century demonstrates. Neither the hand-book for kings, the annals or chronicles, nor the code of law, the *Adat Aceh* outline the rules for succession. Although the preferential claim of the eldest son to succeed his father on the throne was usually acknowledged, his absolute right was not established. The sultan nominated his successor, sometimes overriding the claim of his eldest son. Most curiously, Ralph Croft, an assistant of the English General Thomas Best, who was in Aceh in 1613 mentions the following:

‘If the King have more sons than one, when he dies they are all put to death save the eldest, or conveyed furth of the kingdome into some other countree, because they shall not contend for the crowne after the Kinges death’.⁶⁵ Even if the story is twisted, it was the tendency to appoint sons as governors in far away territories; Alau’ d’-din Ri’ayat Shah (Sayyid al Mukamil) appointed one of his sons son as his governor in Pedir, while the prince who he destined for the throne lived with him in the palace. After his abdication rivalry for the throne broke out between the two, which threw the country in turmoil.

Alau’ d-din Ri’yat Shah (Sayyid al Mukamil) was an usurper, most probably a former *panglima* and the *primus inter pares* of the Acehnese *orangkaya*. The sultan he served was murdered with or without his knowledge. After a rebellion of the *orangkaya* in 1589 in which the young crown-prince, Raja Buyong, also known as Raja Ashem, who was under his protection, was liquidated, Alau’ d-din was installed on the throne which some sources say, he claimed in the name of his wife who was a relative of the murdered sultan.⁶⁶ This is

⁶⁵ W. Foster, *The voyage of Thomas Best to the East Indies 1612-14*, ‘Journal of Ralph Croft’, 176. (London: Hakluyt Society, 1934).

Croft was no witness of an accession, he was there in 1613 and the war for succession had raged in 1604 when the two sons of Alau’ d-din Ri’ayat Shah (Sayyid al Mukamil) were contesting for the throne. One was the governor of Pedir while the other was destined by his father to succeed him. He ascended the throne in 1604 as Ali Ri’ayat Shah.

The situation sketched here, was not unique of Aceh; it apparently that this happened in many kingdoms in the Malay world and also in other parts of the world.

⁶⁶ R. Heine-Geldren establishes in his influential essay on kingship in Southeast Asia that in many Asian polities there have been attempts to prove legitimacy for the throne; ‘again and again usurpers have striven for a semblance of legitimacy by construing genealogies linking themselves to the dynasty they had overthrown or to

mentioned by John Davis who also learned from the locals that Alau'd-din was a former fisherman who ascended to the exalted function of advisor to the sultan. The same is mentioned by Francois Martin, who participated in the French expedition of 1602 to Aceh and the rumour persisted, for Augustin de Beaulieu who was in Aceh two decades later in 1621 also mentions this. Eventually and inevitably the local people's perception and gossip helped to shape the global view of Acehnese kingship.

The *Bustan as-Salatin* however calls Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah the son of Firman Shah of the Dar al-Kamal dynasty; evidently a prominent antecedent was a major criterion to accept a candidate for the throne when he was not the legitimate successor. One is prone to ask if the *Bustan* which is the work of a religious scholar, ascribes legitimate power bestowed by God, or did it sanction power by those who had the skill to seize it? The conditions prevailing at the time were important indicators of how to solve problems of succession. The situation was as follows: the murdered crown prince Buyong was the young son of the sultan of Johor and a daughter of the sultan of Aceh. It seems in my opinion most likely that the *orangkaya* rebelled against his accession, to save Aceh from the disgrace of becoming Johor's vassal state and appointed Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah as sultan of Aceh. I thus assume that this *coup d'état* served a higher purpose, it was therefore legitimate and usurpation was accepted.

Alau'd- in Ri'ayat Shah's grandson Iskandar Muda also seized the throne in 1607 from his maternal uncle who governed the port of Pedir; he was an usurper too. The young prince had proven his prowess in action against the invading Portuguese in 1606 and his determination impressed his uncle, the sitting sultan and the elites of the realm. His ambitious mother was the driving force behind his run for the throne and with the support of important courtiers whom she paid large sums of money, he was installed the same day the ruling sultan died. As What does Islam say of usurpation? According to Bernard Lewis there were different views on usurpation posed by various Islamic jurists of different sects, but 'only one requirement survived the rest – that the ruler rules justly. The notion of usurper thus lost its meaning; but that of tyrant remained. In other words, when a ruler was challenged on religious grounds, the challenge was not based on the manner in which he had gained power, but on the manner in which he exercised it – not usurpation, but tyranny.' Important aspects in exercising power were public acceptance, maintenance of Islamic ritual practices and moral principles. 67

a dynasty which at an earlier period had governed the country'. "Conceptions of State and Kingship in Southeast Asia", (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, paper no. 18, 1956).

67 *The Political Language of Islam*, 103.

This explanation echoes the admonition of the *Taj as-Salatin* that a ruler should be *adil*.

As I earlier mentioned, the *Taj as-Salatin* admonishes righteousness and it is noteworthy that the *Arthasastra* promulgates that moral perversity may also exclude a prince from succession, ‘a wicked son, though an only one, should never ascend the throne’. It warns the rulers against the intrigues both of sons and wives, ‘for princes, like crabs, eat their own parents’.⁶⁸ Princes in Aceh were educated and trained with great care; captured princes and the sons of vassals were also part of these training processes. The *dalam* or palace known at that time as the *Daru’ d-Dunya* (Dar al-Dunya) provided this royal education. We may infer that the activities of the princes were strictly controlled to ensure that they would not revolt against the sultan. According to the *Bustan* Sultan Ala’ud-din Ri’ayat Shah abdicated in 1604 in favour of his son the Sultan Muda (crown prince), and died shortly afterwards. Abdication was not the usual way to end one’s reign as the conditions of the latter part of the sixteenth century show. Alau’ d-din’s two sons competed for the throne which coincided with the calamity of droughts and famine, resulting in the death of numerous people. The *Bustan* does not refer to the rivalry for the throne, which is strange because Sheikh Nuru’ d-din al Raniri must have known about the events.

The crown prince came to the throne as Sultan Ali’ Ri’ayat Shah and ruled from 1604-1607. When he died his nephew Iskandar Muda seized the throne with the help of influential courtiers. As the son of Raja Mansur Shah of the Mahkota Alam dynasty and the grandson of Alau’ d-din Ri’ayat Shah (Sayyid al Mukamil) of the Darul Kamal dynasty, he represented two royal dynasties. It is clear that the writer of the panegyric on Iskandar Muda, the *Hikayat Aceh*, made use of the alluring quality of myth to announce the birth of his protagonist, legitimising his usurpation of the throne and establishing him as the symbol of Acehnese unity. Following his grandfather and uncle, Iskandar Muda executed a number of *orangkaya* to avoid their rebellion. It implicitly shows the influential position of the *orangkaya* in matters of succession.

1. 2. 7 The appointment of the Prince of Pahang as Sultan

Iskandar Muda nominated his successor long before he passed away in 1636. The *Bustan* tells us that the sultan summoned Sheikh Shamsu’ d-din Pasai and the Kadi Maliku’ l-‘Adil to

⁶⁸ R. P. Kangle (ed./ transl.), *The Kautiliya Arthasastra*, 3 vols, Pt.i, (Bombay, 1960), 17.

officially announce to them and the assembled courtiers that he had appointed Sultan Hussain, a captured prince from Pahang, who he had renamed Sultan Mughal, as his successor.⁶⁹ This must have taken place before 1629, the year in which Sheikh Shamsu'd-din Pasai passed away. The appointment of this prince long before his own death in 1636, was not an impulsive act, but it had been carefully planned and it was a solid decision. Our source, admiral Augustin de Beaulieu, claims that Iskandar Muda had only one legitimate son, whose cruel disposition made him unfit to rule.

The appointment of the prince of Pahang came after Iskandar Muda had invaded Pahang twice in succession, in 1617 and 1618 to crush Aceh's enemy Johor's control over Pahang where the *orangkaya* rebelled against their ruler who was inclined to Johor and where the Portuguese had tried to become influential. In Pahang, as well in Johor, the descendants of the expelled Sultan of Malacca were ruling. By appointing the Pahang prince as his successor, it looks as if Iskandar Muda wanted to legitimise his power over Pahang, dealing a blow to Johor's ambitions to control its neighbouring (kin)-state.⁷⁰ It was part of his geo-political strategy. This was later used by Nuru'd-din al Raniri to lift Pahang to an almost divine status, because it delivered Aceh a king.

The appointment of the prince of Pahang came as a surprise to the assembled *orangkaya*, even though the candidate in question was married to Iskandar Muda's eldest daughter. The *perdana menteri* (first minister), straightforwardly asked the sultan why he wanted the prince of Pahang to succeed him. Alerted, Iskandar Muda said that if they (the assembly) had somebody else in mind they should make this immediately known.⁷¹ Dread of rebellion and conspiracy was a continuous anxiety for the sitting sultan, he was therefore obliged to listen to what his *orangkaya* had to say, whether he paid serious attention to their grievances or took their council or not. In this case it was merely an order to accept his decision.

The prince of Pahang was appointed without known opposition. One wonders if the *orangkaya* were convinced that the choice was a good one, recognizing the political purport; Pahang was important as the opponent of Johor. Or were they too weak to oppose the strong

69 The 'judge of the righteous king'.

70 This is a subject of Part Three of this dissertation.

71 *Bustanu's-Salatin*, 13 : The *perdana menteri* said: "Ya tuanku Shah Alam, barang ma'alum kira-nya bahawa ngadap nobat itu kapada suatu penjuru jua". This can be paraphrased as: 'Our Lord, we are sure you will understand that we pledge our loyalty in one line'. This statement shows the assembled men's confusion to accept a candidate who did not hail from the Acehnese royal line.

Iskandar Muda? The relationship between the ruler and the *orangkaya* was by tradition a difficult one; although the European merchants mention several cases of Iskandar Muda's cruel treatment, humiliation and execution of *orangkaya* and the confiscation of their goods, they do not speak of an actual rebellion against him. Instead, from the documentation we draw that in matters of the trade, the *orangkaya* were influential and Iskandar Muda often listened to them. It seems that the *orangkaya* formed a pretty extensive group, ranging from a number of courtiers and other functionaries, governors who held sway over provinces, to a relatively large number of district chiefs and rich merchants.

The installation of the Pahang prince as the ruler of Aceh in 1636 took place without the customary rebellion and bloodshed, despite the fact that the great men behind his appointment, Sultan Iskandar Muda himself and Sheikh Shamsu'd-din Pasai were already dead. It was unprecedented in the history of kingship in Aceh.

The prince ruled as Sultan Iskandar Thani Alau'd-din Mughayat Shah for four and a half years until his sudden death in February 1641. The *Bustan* briefly mentions that he died of poisoning.⁷² It can only mean that the relation between Iskandar Thani and Acehnese society had suffered during the years of his reign. Because he left no heir to the throne, the principal men of the realm assembled together to appoint a new ruler. The orthodox clergy who had become increasingly influential at the Court of Iskandar Thani, wanted a candidate of Arab stock which was against the wishes of the *orangkaya* who rivalled among themselves.

Transition of kingship was again a matter of contest and bloodshed, causing the death of large numbers of people.⁷³ The *orangkaya* settled their disputes and nominated Iskandar Thani's widow Putri Sri Alam Permaisuri, who was the eldest daughter of Sultan Iskandar Muda, but they found strong opposition from the clergy who warned against female rule. In the end the *permaisuri*, the princess-consort was appointed. She ruled as Taju'l-Alam Safiatu'd-din Shah from 1641-1675. It was almost certain that she would leave no heir, for she was childless, and the prospects for marriage were tactically reduced by the now powerful *orangkaya*. They would not allow her to marry a prince from Johor.⁷⁴ Their *coup d'état* of 1589 in which crown prince Buyong was liquidated to avoid his accession which would make Aceh a vassal state of Johor, is fresh on one's mind. Johor remained Aceh's worst indigenous enemy. The

⁷² *ibid.*, 46.

⁷³ Nicolaus de Graaff witnessed the events when he landed in Aceh. He mentions that the situation was unpredictable and that the Dutch merchants closed the factory for five days. *Reisen van Nicolaus de Graaff 1639-1687* (Linschoten Vereeniging, 1930), 13- 14.

⁷⁴ D. F. A. Hervey (tr.), Francois Valentyn's Account of Malacca (JSBRAS, 1890, vol. XXI-XXII), 246.

Permaisuri's succession would thus eventually be decided by these men, whose influence in society gained impetus. The existing view among scholars is, that the *orangkaya* deliberately put a female on the throne to assert their power over her. But it is indisputable that the introduction of Islamic orthodoxy in Acehnese society under Sultan Iskandar Thani put serious limitations on their religious and social freedoms and that of society in general. To break the power of the Islamic orthodoxy was an important requirement to gain back their former freedoms and bring social stability back in society. By appointing the daughter of Iskandar Muda as the ruler of Aceh, they implicitly spoke out in favour of the royal dynasty to continue. During her reign which lasted 34 years, no *orangkaya* seized the throne.

The *Bustan* tells us that Iskandar Muda knew from the start, by looking at the pleasant features of the young Pahang prince, that he would make him his successor.⁷⁵ His successor was revealed to him in a dream.

Nuru'd-din al Raniri described Iskandar Muda's conquest of Pahang as divine intervention. This is a pastiche of the reality. He imbued his audience with the idea that the prince's accession was divinely ordained, calling Iskandar Thani the descendant of sultans who implored the help of the Almighty. He was the most righteous!

*Ia-lah perkasa terlalu berani,
Turun-temurun nasab sultani,
Ia-lah menyunjong inayat rahmani,
Bergelar Sultan Iskandar Thani.*⁷⁶

A text that seems to make such a strong case for Iskandar Thani's succession would continue to have a positive function, for it made clear that Iskandar Thani was in every respect Iskandar Muda's rightful heir and predestined to rule Aceh. Nurud-din al Rainiri adorned his patron with a numinous aura and lifted Pahang to an illustrious place in the Malay world. The political conjecture is quite clear; in 1638, when Nurud-din al Rainiri began to compose the *Bustan*, Johor had tried to reassert its control over Pahang which was 'at peace' with Aceh in 1637, after Iskandar Muda again invaded the port in 1635. Nurud-din made the story fit his ambitions for Aceh. The text extols and is narratively compelling. He wrote the eulogy of his

⁷⁵ Islam favours a ruler with agreeable looks.

⁷⁶ *Bustanu's- Salatin*, 44 ' He is the most courageous prince; a descendent from sultans; he is blessed by the Almighty; his title is Iskandar Thani (II).

protagonist with one clear objective: to mark Aceh as the best example of an Islamic polity and the new ruler as the most *adil*. This vigorous eulogy by the ‘Sheikh al-Islam’ seems to be justified by the facts as seen from his point of view. He calls Iskandar Thani *maulana*, the Indian term for *ulama* and even furnishes him with the title *khalif*.⁷⁷ By alluding to the story of ‘prophet’ David, who chose among his children ‘prophet’ Solomon as his successor, he raised the prince to an exalted position.⁷⁸ In orthodox Islam there is no separation between religious and political powers and the archetype of a ruler is the imam or caliph.

Notwithstanding the fact that Nuru’d-din al Raniri was the more orthodox of the host of religious scholars at the Acehnese Court, advocating the eradication of *Wugudyah* mysticism, he recognized that allusion to myth was important and could be used as a powerful instrument.

The preamble of the letter of Sultan Iskandar Thani to Dutch governor-general Van Diemen written around 1637 says: ‘I am the king of the entire world who is like a God over it’.⁷⁹ If this is indeed correctly translated by the Dutch clerks and if Nuru’d-din al Raniri stood behind the text, he is to blame that he had no qualms in reconciling the idea of the ruler as God. It is exactly the *Wugudiyah* philosophy he dismissed, which does not distinguish between creator and man.

The guidance of his guardian who was a masterful man prone to exert his authority without much regard for other people’s views, steadfastly undermined the credibility of Iskandar Thani. People lost their freedom to follow their religious inclinations and were confused.⁸⁰ There was fierce opposition against Iskandar Thani’s introduction of religious orthodoxy and his rigid measures against the *Wugudyah* mystics. This may have cost him his life; there had

⁷⁷ *ibid*, 45.

⁷⁸ *ibid*, 43 : ‘*Shahdan maka ada-lah di-ilhamkan Allah ta’ala dalam hati Raja Iskandar Muda memilih Sultan Mughal akan ganti-nya itu saperti Nabiu’-lah Daud memilih dalam antara anaknya Nabiu’lah Sulaiman akan gantinya.*’

⁷⁹ NA VOC 1.04.02: 11264 : this is the translation.

⁸¹ Snouck Hurgronje held the view that the Acehnese potentates were fully aware that ‘they should show all possible honour to the upholders of religion, to declare verbally that they set the highest value on their wisdom, and now and then, merely as a matter of form, to grant them access to their councils.’ (*The Acehnese*, vol. 1, 7)

The theme of narrow cooperation between sultan and *uleema* (*ulama*) is also discussed by Anthony Reid in ‘Kings, Kadis and Charisma’ in: Reid, (ed.), *The making of an Islamic Political Discourse in Southeast Asia*, (Monash Papers on Southeast Asia - no. 27, (Clayton: Monash University, 1993), 84-107.

‘To ambitious kings, the new religion (Islam) offered the possibility of claiming a unique role as God’s representative on earth in a newly-defined territorial unit. It was the strongest kings who saw advantages in allying with the *uleema* to undercut the legitimacy of rivals and powerful vassals.’

been an attempt to poison him after he was only eight months on the throne.⁸¹ Nurud'din al Raniri does not enter into details of his patron's sudden death and instead goes into lengths to describe his magnificent funeral ceremony as if to celebrate his brief rule.

The observation or even logic that it was the strongest kings who saw advantages in allying with the *ulama* to undercut the legitimacy of rivals and powerful vassals halts.⁸² It is usually presented as having been brought to a conclusion. In the case of Iskandar Thani, his unreserved dependency on his orthodox guardian Sheikh Nuru'd-din al Raniri, shows precisely the opposite. The persecution and execution of *Wugudyah* mystics and the burning of their books during his reign impacted profoundly on Acehnese society. Court actions against heterodoxy show a dramatic deviation from the line followed by Sultan Iskandar Muda and his predecessors. The picture one has of Iskandar Thani as a peace loving man with a mild character, is rather distorted.

1. 2. 8 Significance of divine ordinance

Even if the Islamic scholars imbued the idea of the state as a divine instrument established by God with the rulers as His chosen representatives, Acehnese reality shows that divine right was not the real essence of Acehnese kingship. Although Iskandar Thani took on the position of *khalifat Allah* (deputy of God), his rejection of *Wugudyah* mysticism and the persecution of the mystics undoubtedly led to his premature death by poisoning.

In the last quarter of the sixteenth century Alau'd-din Perak, a captured prince from the Malay port of Perak was placed on Aceh's throne. The *Bustan* calls him a pious, righteous king, strong in his belief of what was right or wrong, who called for the implementation of religious laws, instructing the people to pray five times a day and installed the Friday prayer in the mosque. He ruled for eight years but he too was murdered. His virtuous example as written in the *Bustan* was clearly no guarantee against rebellion and liquidation. His grandson and successor, prince Buyong was liquidated in 1589 in what I see as a *coup d'état* of the *orangkaya*.

⁸¹ Djajadiningrat, "Critisch overzicht", 184. *Bustanu's Salatin*, 46. Here is mention of an attempt to poison him.

⁸² For example Reid in: *The making of an Islamic Political Discourse in Southeast Asia*, 94.

It is meaningful to dwell at the proposition made by L. F. Brakel about Aceh ‘being characterised by a strong Islamic element and perhaps equally strong ties with Moghul India.’ (see also page 21). ‘It is certainly far from incidental that the first Acehnese king under whom, as far as we know, heterodox mysticism flourished, Alau’ d-din Ri’ayat Shah, is referred to in the sources as Sayyid al-Mukammil (My Perfect Lord). In this way concepts of kingship which originated in Hindu religious theory could be integrated in a remarkably painless way to a Muslim context. Of course, this process was in no way exclusive to Aceh, similar accommodations and reinterpretations occurring wherever the local tradition of kingship was maintained in a Muslim environment. It may, however, facilitate our understanding of the role of the king of Aceh in relation to the ceremonies in which he participated and of the awe in which he was held by his subjects if continuity of older monarchical structures was assumed.’⁸³

Brakel’s proposition is certainly interesting, yet the argument marshalled in support of it is unconvincing. Islam and the *Tasawwuf* (Sufi) ideas took hold in northern Sumatra before Alau’ d-din Ri’ayat Shah (Sayyid al Mukamil) came on the throne and mysticism was practiced before Sheikh Shamsu’ d-din arrived in Aceh. A further remark is that the title Sayyid is usually conferred on the descendants of Prophet Mohamed; it means that any claim by a Sayyid to the throne is therefore justified. The reality was that Alau’ d-din was an usurper, installed as sultan by the *orangkaya*. There are two versions of his background which I have earlier brought to the attention, the folk story is that he climbed from a modest fisherman to the position of principal courtier, the second is the version from the *Bustan* which says that he was a member of the Dar al-Kamal dynasty. It seems plausible that the title Sayyid was brought in by Sheikh Shamsu’ d-din Pasai to give legitimisation to Alau’ d-din’s usurpation of the throne. He canalised his idea of ordained kingship through what looks like a covered passageway. In his footsteps Sheikh Nuru’ d-din al Raniri awarded the posthumous titles Iskandar Muda and Iskandar Thani to the two important successors of Alau’ d-din Ri’ayat Shah, alluding to the myth of Alexander the Great as the great forebear, at the same time underlining and glorifying their greatness and heroism.

I demonstrated that the claim to divinity did not go unchallenged and it made little difference to the secular sphere of the realm, even if the *orangkaya* pledged allegiance to the sultan. The

⁸³ L. F. Brakel, “State and Statecraft in 17th century Aceh” in: Reid and Castles (eds.), *Pre-colonial State Systems in Southeast Asia*, (JMBRAS, monograph no. 6, 1975), 56-66.

sultan's authority and his survival depended much on his abilities to draw the loyalty of the *orangkaya*.

The uniqueness of Acehese royalty is also attuned to the need to refer to the great power of the Ottoman empire. As the *Hikayat Aceh* mentions, the Ottoman emperor declared that by divine decree there were two great kings who shared the world: the king of the West (Rum/Byzantium) and the king of Aceh in the East', which referred to the two great kings of the past: Solomon and Alexander the Great.⁸⁴ Whether this resonance with the Ottoman empire proved powerful enough to withstand the challenges of the time, is explored further in the following chapters.

1. 2. 9 Metaphor symbols and ceremonies

How sweet is mortal Sovranty' - think some:

Others – 'How blest the Paradise to come!'

Ah, take the Cash in hand and waive the Rest;

Oh, the brave Music of a distant Drum! ⁸⁵

The big drum announced the day of installation of the new sultan and as such its significance was well understood.

Water became a meaningful metaphor in Acehese kingship. 'The king is like the source of a river. If the source is pure, the flow of the river will remain clean'.⁸⁶

In the *Hikayat Aceh* water plays an important role in representing Aceh's unity and the *Bustan* mentions that Sultan Iskandar Muda received a dream in which a palace descended in a fountain of water from the mouth of an angel. The bridal couple (his eldest daughter and the Prince of Pahang) took a bath in this holy water. It was clear to the sultan that the couple was destined for marriage.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ *Hikayat Atjéh*, 67.

⁸⁵ (from: The Ruba'iyat of Omar Khayyam verse xii : translation by Edward Fitz Gerald).

⁸⁶ Taufik Abdullah in: Reid. (ed.), *The Making of an Islamic Political Discourse in Southeast Asia*, 44.

⁸⁷ *Bustanu's Salatin*, 24.

Bathing was both a ritual purification act and a physical act to cleanse oneself. The sultans regularly went to their bathing place called *Mata Ie* ‘the eye of the water’ especially on important days of the Islamic calendar. The water which came from the mountains possessed healing properties and the foreigners in Aceh observed that the people used to bath in the river for a speedy recovery of their amputations.

Let us for a moment dwell at the ceremonial funeral of Sultan Iskandar Thani, which is taken by Saya Shiraishi as the subject of a study of metaphor in the *Bustan as-Salatin*.⁸⁸

By looking at the architecture of the *gunongan*, a stone hill in the royal garden, built as a place for the royal princesses to relax, Shiraishi proposes a remarkable thesis: ‘the pedestal on one side and a cemetery on the other, sovereignty as marriage ceremony and sovereignty as funeral ceremony are the two sides of a coin.’

Examining the magnificent funeral procession from its mythological underpinnings, Shiraishi prosaically concludes: ‘The funeral procession described in the *Bustan* is the allegory of kingship itself. Kingship is both wild and domesticated, and at the same time neither wild nor domesticated. Because kingship belongs to no category, it belongs to all categories simultaneously. It swims in the water, dwells in the forest, and flies in the air. It presides over extraordinary powers, wages war, and commands music. People enjoy and admire it from a respectful distance, fearful of approaching too close.’

In Iskandar Thani’s funeral procession, wild and domesticated animals took part such as large numbers of elephants, ridden by brave men and heroes who were dressed in hunting outfits, war horses, *raksasa* (giants) with bared teeth, a *naga* (half lion and half lizard, appearing often in Hindu mythology), buffaloes, tigers, singha (lion), deer, birds and various other animals. These were followed by silver platforms on which singers from Java, Pahang and Johor had taken their place; finally came the seven-tiered golden structure topped by the tombstone, guarded by maidens carrying the sultan’s regalia and the royal drinking water. ⁸⁹ Here we once again notice the importance of water.

Noteworthy is Nuru’d-din al Raniri’s enumeration of the different groups from outside Aceh.

⁸⁸ Saya Shiraishi, “The Study of *Bustanu’s-Salatin*” (The Garden of the Kings), in: Audrey Kahin (ed.), *Reading Southeast Asia* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1990), 55-73.

⁸⁹ *Bustanu’s Salatin*, 61-69.

It is apparent that he wanted to bring to the attention that these foreign groups were the sultan's subjects. It fitted in his marking of a Aceh as a large and important political and religious entity.

The *Adat Aceh* includes an enumeration of the royal insignias, notably the (royal) sword (*silah*), the betel caddy (*puan*) and the betel-bag (*bungkus-kain*). These are followed by the three symbols of royal dignity, 'tokens' (*temanda or tanda*) employed when the chiefs (*hulubalangs*) make obeisance to the sultan; these are the *alif*, the first letter of the Arabic alphabet and the symbol of the 'caliphate on earth', the *ajam angon*, a tame hen, and the *bantal besar*, a gold embroidered cushion. The *payung* or parasol also carried great meaning as an important symbol of royalty. Its main function is to give shade where the sun shines mercilessly, rather than protecting against rain. Parasols could be seen displayed at the sultan's side during public events when he received obeisance. The handles of these royal *payung* were of solid gold inlaid with precious stones.

The metaphor of the ruler providing shade to protect his subjects from evil, was known in the Islamic communities where parasols were used in religious rites and ceremonies. In Aceh it was not only the prerogative of the sultan to display them, but commoners too used them at various occasions, in processions and as ornaments during marriage celebrations in which the bridal couple briefly assumed the position of royals.⁹⁰ In the procession to his father's grave, Sultan Iskandar Thani took with him hundreds of *payung*.⁹¹

The ceremony of paying obeisance to the sultan was practiced on the day called *hari raja djungdjung duli*, the principal day to pay homage to the sovereign, usually on the day of his installation. The simple raised platform of stones, situated outside the *dalam* (palace), where the sultan was seated to receive obeisance from the chiefs and the important men of his realm and from foreign envoys was known as the *pra'na seumah* (Ach.) the 'high seat of sovereignty'.⁹² A bigger contrast with royal grandeur and the splendour inside the sultan's court is hardly conceivable. If one looks for similarities with the customs at the court of the Moghuls, it is worthy to note that Emperor Akbar also reclined on a low platform made of bricks.

⁹⁰ This was explained to me in Aceh in 1990 by A. Hasjmy, *ulama* and historian.

⁹¹ *Bustanu's Salatin*, 57.

⁹² The Malay translation is *peratna sembah*.

The *Adat Aceh* does not speak of the crowning of a new ruler, but only of his installation. This seems in agreement with Islamic usage.⁹³ However, the term crowning often appears in the literature, without the authors entering into details.⁹⁴ Paradoxically the words for crown such as *taj* (Arabic) and *mahkota* (Malay) suggest the crown as the ultimate symbol of sovereignty. The royal headdress in Aceh was a turban, studded with jewels.

The *Adat Aceh* provides insight in both ceremonial as well as practical aspects of statecraft as it was or should have been. Scholars call it the Constitution of the Sultanate, but while it certainly is a *corpus juris*, we search in vain for the rights of the common Acehnese folk.

The regulations in the parts 3 and 4 are:

1. *sekalian madjlis radja*: ‘regulations concerning kings’
2. *dan madjlis hulubalang*: ‘regulations concerning government officials’
3. *dan madjlis tabal pada hari memegang puasa*: ‘regulations concerning the ceremonies during the days before the fasting month’
4. *dan madjlis berangkat jang kedua hari raja*: ‘regulations concerning the processions on the days of the two religious feasts’
5. *dan madjlis djundjung duli*: ‘regulations for the obeisance to the king’s sovereignty’
6. *dan madjlis berangkat hari Djum‘at*, ‘regulations for the kings going to the mosque on Friday’
7. *dan madjlis berangkat bulan Safar*: ‘regulations for the procession on the final Wednesday of the month of Safar’
8. *dan madjlis djaga-djaga*, ‘regulations for the vigils (in the night of the *kadar* in the month of *Ramadan*)’
9. *dan madjlis Bandar Darussalam*: ‘harbour regulations’

Drewes and Voorhoeve ascribe these regulations to Sultan Iskandar Muda.

Ritual and ceremony were important means of communication between the sultan and his subjects. The mythical and divine power which covered him at his installation, was reinforced in the course of his reign by ceremonies and rituals. In times of danger these could serve the purpose of proclaiming his superior rights or debunking the pretensions of a rival.

⁹³ Lewis, *The political language of Islam*, 22 ‘Muslim sovereigns were neither crowned nor enthroned, their installation was celebrated with certain ceremonies which could take days. Some of these ceremonies in time developed into complex and highly charged language, full of symbolism and often polemic.’

⁹⁴ Anthony Reid uses the word crowning but omits to explain the ceremony. See his article “Royal Power in Aceh” in: *An Indonesian Frontier*, (Leiden, KITLV Press, 2005), 107.

An example is when Iskandar Thani was informed in 1638 by Dutch envoys that his enemy Johor was ready to participate in the Dutch-Aceh coalition to attack Malacca, he demanded that Johor first accepted his *daulat* 95 before he could be seen in the company of his ‘blood enemy.’ 96

The sultan and his advisors gave much thought in developing local procedures for the Islamic festivals; the *Adat Aceh* starts with a summary of the ceremonies on the days before the fasting month (*madjlis tabal pada hari memegang puasa*) (3). A large drum known as the *Ibrahim Chailil* is beaten to announce the most important day in the calendar of Islam. On this day the royal insignias are carried in procession (to the mosque?).

The drum was probably the most important instrument, featuring prominently at the sultan’s installation. The *Ibrahim Chailil* was also the major drum of the *nobat* (nine drums) used at court ceremonies at the Malay courts. Whether the other drums of the *nobat* were used in Aceh is not ascertained. In contrast to Western sovereigns who were crowned, the Malay kings were ‘drummed-up’. 97

In describing the scene on the *raja hadji*, the most auspicious day of the Islamic calendar, the *Adat Aceh* compares the sultan to the famous conqueror Alexander the Great. The sultan rode on his elephant from the great mosque to his palace, accompanied by a large entourage as prescribed by the *madjlis*. ‘Then the king returns from the mosque to the palace; he is like Iskandar Dzu’l - Karnain setting out from Rum to conquer the world.’

Several ceremonies were held in connection with the Islamic calendar. The *Adat Aceh* contains a description of the religious days and the processions which left from the *Daru’-d-dunya* to the great mosque, the music which was played, the number of animals in the procession and the royal regalia which were carried. The sultan led the religious processions and festivities and by doing so he fulfilled one of the main obligations of an Islamic ruler, that of leading the Friday-prayer. The sultan prayed in a secluded section in the presence of his closest religious advisor: in the case of Iskandar Muda this was Sheikh Shamsu’d-din Pasai; and in the case of his successor Iskandar Thani, this was Sheikh Nuru’d-din al Raniri.

95 For more on the subject of *daulat* see: A. H. Johns “ Political Authority in Islam” in: Anthony Reid (ed.), *The Making of an Islamic Political Discourse in Southeast Asia*, 21.

96 The subject is treated in Part Three, Chapter V.

97 ‘The *genderang tebal* was beaten; all the music struck up; the installation drum was fired; and the warriors and people did homage and obeisance crying out: ‘O, King, live for ever, thou Shadow of God upon Earth’.

Ibrahim Chailil is translated as ‘Abraham the friend of God’
R. J. Wilkinson, “Some Malay Studies” (JMBRAS, (vol. X, 1932), 82, 83.

Sheikh Shamsu'd-din Pasai was Iskandar Muda's most trusted advisor and faithful servant. His importance at Iskandar Muda's Court and that of his grandfather Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah cannot be easily overstressed. Combining the parts of scholar, mystic, mentor, author, courtier and man of affairs he was the sultan's 'Jonathan'. John Davis probably refers to him when he reports: They have an Archbishop and Spirituall Dignities. Here is a prophet in Achien whom they greatly honour; they say that hee hath the spirit of Prophesie, as the Ancients have had. He is dignified from the rest in his Apparell, and greatly embraced of the King.'⁹⁸

1. 2. 10 The council and the administration

Among the sultan's practical duties were the collecting of taxes, the granting of trade contracts, the sending and receiving of envoys, the building of mosques, the governing of subjugated territories. This evidently necessitated a corps of officials engaged in the execution of the tasks. ⁹⁹

The *Taj as-Salatin* admonishes the king to listen to the advice of his principal men. John Davis who informs us on Aceh under Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah (Sayyid al-Mukamil), says: 'His State is governed by five principal men, with their inferiour officers, his Secretarie, and four called Sabandars, with these resteth all authoritie. The Kings will is their Law'. 'His women are his chiefest Counsellors'.¹⁰⁰ His admiral at that time was a woman named Keumalahayati who was in function when the first English fleet under the command of Lancaster visited Aceh in 1602.

Aceh's rise as the region's most important emporium and powerful overlord, steadfastly needed more officials for functions in Aceh itself and its extended territory.

The *orangkaya* were a privileged class, constituting rich merchants, nobles, chiefs and officials. They were better protected than the common men and women. In the historiography this is not always recognized. Because the Acehnese sultans are usually portrayed as absolute

⁹⁸ *The Voyages and Works of John Davis the Navigator*, 151.

⁹⁹ For a closer look at governance and Aceh's institutions I refer to Ito Takeshi's elaborate study *The World of the Adat Aceh*.

¹⁰⁰ *The Voyages and Works of John Davis the Navigator*, 150.

rulers and potentates, it is important to examine whether the administrative council had any authoritative power.

From the primary European sources we draw that the European traders communicated and dealt with several of these functionaries such as the *shahbandar*, the *penghulu kawal*, the clerks of the *Balai Besar*, harbour officials, the *laxamana* and the *panglima bandar*. There is no evidence that the merchants interacted with the *perdana menteri*, the Acehnese equivalent of prime minister. He is not mentioned in their accounts of their negotiations.

Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah (Sayyid al Mukamil) delegated the trade negotiations to a *shahbandar*. Francois Martin observed in 1602 'the King has his *Syabandar* who is like the Constable who gives all the orders. He is very avaricious and no one can obtain anything from him without giving or promising him something.'¹⁰¹ In 1599 Cornelis de Houtman of the *Zeeland* expedition from the United Republic, negotiated the price of pepper with the *shahbandar*, while the sultan negotiated a strategic contract with De Houtman. Although he intervened in some instances, (see Part Two of this study), Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah generally left it to his *shahbandars* to deal with foreign traders.

The English Admiral Lancaster appeared before the *kadi*, and a *shahbandar* in 1602 who made friendly interrogations and subsequently made their recommendations to the sultan. It cleared the way for his good reception by the sultan.

Iskandar Muda was inclined to listen to the advice of his *orangkaya* when it came to licensing the northern Europeans to trade on the west coast. In his talks with the Dutch traders this was brought to light. Part Two explores the trade relations.

In *Adat Aceh* the audiences for the *orangkaya* are stipulated; they were held on Saturday (*hari sabtu*). The *orangkaya* addressed the sultan with *Tuanku* (my Lord). The establishment of the Saturday audience is proof that the sultan was at least prepared to listen to the important men of his realm, whether he gave full consideration to their advice and qualms or not.

The question now passes if the Acehnese rulers were bound by the cobweb of texts and regulations? The answer is that they were not at all limited by constitutional controls, and even if they infringed too palpably on religious laws there were hardly any checks on their sovereignty.¹⁰² Iskandar Muda himself was in many instances the law-giver and one should bear in mind that the sultans either commissioned or patronized the writing of the extant texts.

¹⁰¹ Cited from A. Reid, *Witnesses to Sumatra*, 61.

Looking at the Hindu kingdoms of the *Arthasastra*, it is apparent that kings could not infringe to palpably on religion without sanction, they could be sure to suffer opposition from the brahmanic (priestly) caste. Caste was absent in Aceh and the only real force threatening the sultan's position were the secular *orangkaya*.¹⁰³ Their rebellion was a dangerous threat to his security; in reality the only real check upon his arbitrary authority was his ever-present fear of rebellion and assassination. He took unceasing precautions against conspiracies. At one point during his reign Iskandar Muda established a scheme of guard of the palace in which the *orangkaya* had to patrol in shifts, unarmed, and were kept in check by his private army of bodyguards. He said to Augustin de Beaulieu in 1621 that they would otherwise plot against him during the night.¹⁰⁴

The almost customary regard Iskandar Muda showed the *orangkaya* by allowing them weekly audiences, was an effective method, resolved merely to announce his decision: the appointment of the prince of Pahang as his successor serves as an example of this. However, the sultans recognized that they had to accommodate to the wishes of the *orangkaya* for their own sake. In practice they depended to a certain extent on the advice of these men. In granting trade licenses and privileges to the European traders, Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah as well as his grandson Iskandar Muda were cautious not to go too much against the advice and wishes of the *shahbandar* and merchants. Iskandar Muda was advised by his

102 Bernard Lewis asserts "The effectiveness of religious law as a limitation on the power of the sovereign was flawed in two important respects. One was that the law itself gave the ruler extensive autocratic powers. The second was that while the law prescribed limitations both on the authority of the ruler and the duty of obedience of the subject, it established no apparatus and laid down no procedures for enforcing these limitations, and no device for preventing or challenging a violation of the law by the ruler, other than force. *The political language of Islam*, 113. What we know with regard to Aceh is that the *Taj as Salatin* was an advice book for the Islamic rulers on how to act and rule virtuously. This means intrinsically that there was no apparatus and procedures for enforcing the law on the ruler.

103 A. Reid, 'Trade and the problem of royal power in Aceh' in Reid and Lance (eds.), *Pre-colonial state-systems in Southeast Asia* (JMBRAS, 1975). The author translated from Augustin de Beaulieu who describes the *orangkaya* in the heydays of their wealth, a period decades before his own visit to Aceh:

'The Orangkaya's lived extravagantly, and following the affections of their nature were addicted to novelties, insolent, and proud. The great wealth their predecessors had left them, in lands and houses in the city, as well as gold and silver, supported this life; no kings have oppressed them nor foreign nation plundered them. The town was six times as populous as it is at present, and so crowded that it was difficult to move in the streets. The wealth of the island being scattered in diverse hands, there was such a great number of merchants that there was no city in the Indies where trade so flourished. Moreover there was no Alfandegue (customs office), or other duties than that of the tjiap, so that the merchants could do their business in a fortnight....the orangkayas had beautiful, large, solid houses, with cannons at their doors, and a large number of slaves, both as guards and servants. They went out superbly dressed, with large retinues, respected by the people. Such great power very much diminished royal authority, and even safety, for the principal orangkayas had such authority, that when they tired of the domination of one king, they massacred him in order to install another. Thus a king was very lucky if he enjoyed his crown for two years. If he lasted longer it was with such exertion and such obligations towards several orangkayas, that nothing remained of his dignity except the title'.

104 Lombard, *Mémoires*, 114.

important merchants to bring the pepper from the west coast to Aceh itself which drew revenues and opened financial opportunities not only for him, but for them too. In 1639 Sultan Iskandar Thani was rebuked by his governors on the west coast for granting the Dutch ship *Grol* exemption from paying tolls and dues; he was forced to come back on his promise to the Dutch to avoid their rebellion and ordered the merchants to pay the tolls in the respective ports of the west coast.

The question whether the sultan and his council formed a legislative body, is one which can be answered as follows: the promulgated royal edicts (*sarakata*) were in fact orders referring to special cases; the sultan was the law-giver. I infer that established custom or *adat* was usually looked upon as inviolable, yet the sultan's commands sometimes overruled these customs and became law. We gather from the Dutch captain Frederick de Houtman's account of his ordeal as a hostage in Aceh from 1599 to 1601, that he appeared before a court of Islamic judges who threatened to execute him if he did not convert to Islam. Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah ordered De Houtman's capture and conversion, but also the dissolution of the case.

The foreign sources speak of at least three courts of justice in the city of Aceh, a civil court, a religious court and one for the disputes concerning trade. Francois Martin says that justice was closely applied 'according to their laws and customs.' 'There are some judges called *poullo cauaillo* (Penghulu kawal), who are the judges of the prisoners. They are concerned with justice and study all the arguments and complaints on both sides, the parties presenting their own cases themselves.'¹⁰⁵

1. 2. 11 Conclusion

The pervasive presence of myth and legend, purposefully disseminated by religious scholars, shows that Acehnese kingship cannot be taken out of its local context. Herein lies its meaning, that Islam could maintain itself because of the transcending presence of the local cultural elements, whether in kingship or in ordinary life. The (in)fusion of Islam with indigenous patterns was not exceptional, and Islam in Aceh certainly borrowed a great deal from the

¹⁰⁵ Quoted. Francois Martin, "Aceh in 1602" in: Anthony Reid (ed.), *Witnesses to Sumatra* , 60.

locale. Those systems of Islam that were syncretised, were those more readily accepted by the people.

The court texts give important information on Acehnese 'thought' in its dual dimension: morality and expediency in kingship and political life. They transmit certain concepts and morals. The *Taj as-Salatin* does not discuss completely utopian issues, despite the fact that its advice is rather pedantic. The principle that the king was or should be *adil* endowed with all virtues and should follow the advice of his councillors can be in a way misleading in establishing his actual inclination and power.

The *hikayat* (epics) are often regarded by the common people as statements of absolute historical facts. These epics seem to be founded on imagination and vague traditions of the sultanate.

The writers of the texts were faced with social and political changes on a large scale which is foregrounded in their texts. Iskandar Muda is brought forward by Sheikh Shamsu'd-din Pasai as the symbol of Aceh's unity; despite the fact that he was an usurper, he was the descendant of the two royal dynasties Dar al-Kamal and Mahkota Alam.

Sheikh Nuru'd-din al Raniri, the orthodox scholar at Sultan Iskandar Thani's court interpolated contradictions and juxtapositions in the *Bustan as-Salatin*, which betrays a heterodox treatment of his subject.

Nuru'd-din al Raniri quite ambitiously brought Iskandar Thani forward as the sublime king and even as the heir to the throne of the Sultanate of Malacca because of his Pahang origin. In him the prototype of an Islamic ruler was made visible: 'God's representative on earth (*khalifat Allah*) and sultan. Iskandar Thani was his Leviathan.

The kingship of these two sultans was 'prophesised' and they were heralded as men who would be of great significance for Aceh and Islam.

The religious scholars and text-writers as well as the secular *orangkaya* were instrumental in the shaping of Acehnese kingship.

Although primogeniture in succession was a tendency, the most able royal candidate was preferred to become sultan. This should lead to a wider acceptance of the transferral of power and more able rulers.

The paying of obeisance by the *orangkaya* and subsequently their acceptance of the sultan's *daulat* or sovereignty, demonstrates that the contractual element of kingship was a reality. Any limitations on a sultan's authority took effect because he was afraid to lose his throne and his life.

The regulations which became part of the code of law the *Adat Aceh*, whatever their use and whether these were put together by lay men or clerics, are among the most rewarding proofs of Sultan Iskandar Muda's methods and principles of government. Their subsequent incorporation into categories of law indicates an enhanced function of a record of royal pronouncements on the governance of the realm and even an understanding of them as a genre of legislation.



Spanish piece of Eight (Segovia 1618)



Collection of Acehnese coins

PART TWO

A TASTE FOR SPICE

Part Two

CHAPTER I

THE GENESIS OF ACEH-EUROPEAN RELATIONS (1599-1607)

‘Somewhere a strange and shrewed tomorrow goes to bed
Planning a test for men from Europe; no one guesses
Who will be most ashamed, who richer and who dead.’ (W. H. Auden)

2. 1. 1 Towards understanding international relations

The turn of the sixteenth into the seventeenth century brought Aceh in the limelight of European interest. Seafaring was an extremely important source of livelihood in countries with long seaboard, such as Portugal, Spain, England, the United Netherlands, France and Denmark. The Dutch, English and French in succession made their way to the bustling port-city Bandar Aceh in search of pepper and subsequent trade contracts. There was a growing market for pepper in Europe and Aceh was a major supplier of the spice. Indians, Chinese, and Arabs bartered their goods, such as textiles, porcelain and spices from the Moluccan islands for pepper, silk, gold, tin and benjuin.

Patani and Pahang situated on the east coast of the Malay peninsula and Jambi on Sumatra's east coast were pepper stations in their own right, while the Sultanate Johor, which assumed the position of successor of the Sultanate of Malacca also provided pepper and other commodities but its trade was less significant than its strategic importance.

The Asian littoral steadfastly became the *terra cognita* where the audacious European merchants pounced upon the local trade and boldly treated with the local rulers, who did not always submit without conditions to their wishes and demands, asking favours in return, thus cementing the foundation for an equal partnership.

We owe it to the inquisitive and certainly also imaginative minds and the writing capabilities of men on board the first Dutch, English and French fleets that visited Aceh, such as John Davis, Frederick de Houtman, William Lancaster and Francois Martin, that an intimate - not a completely accurate - picture of Aceh, its ruler and its people at the start of their contacts with

the northern Europeans, develops. Their journals and narratives do also provide some hindsight notions of Aceh.

Before I set out to explore the visits of these northern Europeans with their historical impact, it is certainly instructive to know why and how international relations develop.

Foreign visits exudes prestige on a country and its government and says much of the country's attributes, for example its political or strategic significance, its size and its commodities. This means that the visits are intentional.

There is a positive correlation between the foreign visits and the growing importance of a state. Questions such as who are one's friends and who are one's enemies, who is weak and who is strong, represent the bread and butter issues of international relations; they underlie the 'images' one has of these relations.

Diplomacy and the accompanying avowal of friendship and the offering of assistance were advantageous as statements of the ruler's prestige and a recognition of his political power. It was usually confirmed by gifts and effusive letters which stressed friendship, devotion and offerings of peace. A letter from Prince Maurice of Nassau to Sultan Alau'-din Ri'ayat Shah of 1600, gives some insight in the relationship. The prince ends his letter by saying ' I kiss the hands of your Majesty. Your servant: Maurice de Nassau'.¹ The prince 'dwarfed' himself for the sake of gaining the sultan's friendship, after the terrible events in 1599 which involved the Zeeland expedition under Cornelis de Houtman. It is a recognition of the Acehnese ruler's sovereignty and Prince Maurice's fervent wish to continue relations with this Asian ruler of standing.

Diplomacy could be a means of recognizing, but also a means of devising boundaries between states. We need to realize however, that a state's power attributes provide only the basis of its power, not power itself. In order to influence others, capabilities must be exercised.²

As I shall try to demonstrate that Aceh's contacts with the outside world exemplified this train of thought. European presence and interest contributed significantly to further shaping Aceh's position and policies and greatly affected the geopolitical plane and the terms of trade. The successive Acehnese rulers made the most of the new opportunities created by this new development and we glean how they confronted the concomitant developing issues. But it is too presumptuous to make any sweeping statement about their behaviour at that budding stage

¹ The letter is published in: Unger (ed.), *De oudste reizen van de Zeeuwen*, 134-5; J.E. Banck, *Atchin's verheffing en val*, (Rotterdam, 1873).

² Steve Chan, *International Relations in Perspective: The Pursuit of Security, Welfare and Justice* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company; London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1984), 42. According to Chan power is intrinsically a 'relational' concept.

of the relations. Surely there were certain trends in their behaviour and thinking and one may perhaps detect aspects of changes in norms, experienced as Aceh took part in trade and diplomacy within a wider world.

2. 1. 2 The first Dutch expedition to Aceh

‘Is this the way of the country?’ ‘Yes! It is the way of the king and of all kings before him’.³

When the *Zeeland* expedition which was fitted out by the company of Balthasar de Moucheron from the town of Veere⁴ in the province of Zeeland, arrived in the Bay of Aceh on 15 June 1599, Aceh’s fame as a powerful state and chief trading centre in the Malacca Straits was known far beyond the Red Sea ports with which it traded. The world was no longer that of the *mappamundi*, maps produced in the Middle Ages and based on the Scriptures, often showing it as a flat disc. The voyage to Aceh took about three months; the fleet rounded the Cape of Good Hope and picked its way to the Indies, sailed along the west coast of Sumatra to the Maledives from where it continued its voyage to Aceh.

The command of the fleet which consisted of the *Leeuw* (Lion) and *Leeuwinne* (Lioness) and several pinnaces, was in the hands of Cornelis de Houtman. His younger brother Frederick was the captain of the *Leeuwinne*.

Sultan Alau’-din Ri’ayat Shah (Sayyid al-Mukamil), was ten years on the throne and since 1593 experimenting with trade with Portuguese Malacca, Aceh’s arch enemy since the Portuguese conquered Malacca in 1511. He set a historical precedent by allowing Malaccan merchants to reside in his port. There is no indication that the Dutch were aware of this fact.

³ “*Itoe adda tjerre ('cara') negrij Sini?Ia, begitoe adda tjerre raija Sini, lage raija iang doeloeu adda poen begitoeu.*” Frederick de Houtman, *Spraeck ende woord-boeck in de Maleysche en Magaskarsche Talen met vele Arabische ende Turcse woorden* (Amsterdam, 1603).

Frederick was a prisoner in Aceh from 1598 –1601 where he made an effort to learn the Malay language.

⁴ According to John Davis, the chief pilot of the fleet, they departed from Flushing (Vlissingen) on March 15: Unger, *De oudste reizen van de Zeeuwen*, 41.

Frederick de Houtman mentions as date of departure 25 March 1598, in: Unger, 64.

The Zeeland expedition came to buy pepper in Aceh. The regional Dutch companies almost simultaneously sent their fleets to the archipelago where they hoped to procure pepper, cloves and nutmeg.

Cornelis de Houtman was no stranger in the archipelago, in 1595 he took part in one of the first Dutch expeditions financed by the *Compagnie van Verre* in Amsterdam. He was supposedly the commander of this expedition, but J. K. J. de Jonge, editor of *De Opkomst van het Nederlandsch Gezag in Oost-Indië* presents ‘new’ facts showing that Cornelis de Houtman was entered in the list of principal crew as a *commies* (customs officer).⁵

The expedition turned out to be a complete fiasco; the loss of almost half of the crew was a tragic testimony of Dutch explorations in the archipelago. In spite of the vagueness concerning De Houtman’s role in the tribulations of the expedition, he was seen as a trouble shooter. There were brawls and violent confrontations with the local populations in Bantam on Java which accounts for a negative image of his personality.

Notwithstanding the trepidations, De Houtman saw positive prospects for future trade in the archipelago, but the Amsterdam merchants were reluctant to appoint him on their next voyages. The Flemish merchant and ship owner De Moucheron who was looking for experienced sailors employed him and his younger brother Frederick for his expedition to the East Indies.

The historiography speaks of a hostile reception of the *Zeeland* expedition in Aceh. This is a twist of the reality. John Davis, chief pilot of the expedition paints a totally different, even glossy picture of the crew’s reception at the sultan’s palace and Frederick de Houtman too draws a positive sketch of the expedition’s reception in Aceh.⁶ Frederick de Houtman’s narrative of the voyage is particularly important to obtain a intimate picture of the expedition’s fate. Both men sketch the copious banquets to which they were invited, the splendid entertainment in their honour and the special presents Sultan Alau’d-din Ri’ayat Shah presented his esteemed visitors. The sultan’s conversations with admiral Cornelis de

⁵ J.K.J. de Jonge, *De Opkomst van het Nederlandsch gezag in Oost-Indië*, 13 vols. (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), vol. II, 196.

⁶ “Cort Verhael van’tgene wedervaren is Frederick de Houtman tot Atchein” in: Unger *De oudste reizen van de Zeeuwen*, 63-111.

John Davis’ journal of the voyage is published in Unger, *De oudste reizen van de Zeeuwen*, 59-63, under the title “The voyage of captaine John Davis to the Easterne India, pilot in a Dutch ship, written by himselfe” (taken from Purchas, *His Pilgrims* (London, 1625), reprinted by Hakluyt Society (London, 1880).

Also published by Markham, *The voyages and works of John Davis the Navigator*, 129-156; I refer in this chapter to Unger’s publication.

Houtman and John Davis show his keen interest in the political affairs and state structures in Europe. John Davis was clearly overwhelmed by his avid interest in England and his undisguised adulation for Queen Elizabeth whose fleet had triumphed over the Spanish armada.⁷

Vessels from Arabia and Pegu were anchored in the bay to load pepper, a sign of some lively trade. Significant is John Davis' statement that four Portuguese ships arrived from Malacca under the command of Alfonso Vicente 'to prevent our trade, as the sequel doth shew'.⁸ One should realize that the sixteenth century was one of wars between Aceh and Malacca. 'The Portugals here have often times warres with the king of Achem, which standeth in the island of Sumatra; from whence commeth great store of pepper and other spices every yeere to Pegu and Mecca within the Red Sea and other places.'⁹ Their mutual belligerence unexpectedly came to a halt when in 1593 Portuguese merchants from Malacca braved what may seemed an unbridgeable distance between them and Aceh, to petition the sultan for trade with his country to which Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah consented. *Realpolitik* won from belligerence, even if the Portuguese authority in Goa was apprehensive about this uncertain development. Malacca was dependent of trade.

Why would Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah consent to such an experiment? He saw in the Portuguese rapprochement an opportunity to humiliate his enemy Johor with whom Aceh was at war. Johor even at times sided with Malacca against a rising Aceh.

The trade and diplomatic relations between Malacca and Aceh brought an unprecedented stable political climate in the Straits.

Frederick de Houtman gives us a sense of the Acehnese harbour procedures. Several officials arrived in a small canoe to make their investigations. One held out a red stick as a sign that he was the sultan's messenger. They inquired about the reason for their visit and measured the length and width of the ships, took the number of crew and the number of ordnance.

⁸ *De oudste reizen van de Zeeuwen*, 47.

With this in mind, I like to refer to Martine van Ittersum's study *Profit and Principle Hugo Grotius, Natural Rights Theories and the Rise of Dutch Power in the East Indies (1595-1615)* (Leiden: Brill, 2006) in which she advances the thesis that Hugo Grotius used the attestations of the Dutchmen, to serve his purpose, namely to explain the local hostilities against Dutch citizens and Dutch trade efforts as incitements by the envious Portuguese.

⁹ William Foster (ed.), *Early Travels to India, 1583-1591* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1940), 41.

Two officials remained on board as *ostagiers* (hostages), at the same time the admiral delegated several men to the palace to be introduced to the sultan. They presented the sultan a bracelet of coral, a drinking glass and a looking glass and were treated to a banquet and entertainment.¹⁰ The delegates returned the next day escorted by a palace eunuch who carried the sultan's golden *chapp*¹¹ hanging from a golden chain on his neck, with the message of peace and welcome for the admiral, and the promise of plenty pepper. John Davis asserts that it was the custom to take the *chapp* in the hand and listen to the sultan's order.¹² Admiral Cornelis de Houtman was summoned to be at the palace at midnight. Even if it was a discomfoting thought to have to leave the ships at the odd time of midnight, the admiral did not hesitate to follow the order, taking with him his second in command while the *shahbandar* stayed on board as *ostagier*.

The sultan sent two elephants to carry De Houtman to the palace. He found himself in the company of the crown prince who was richly adorned with golden bracelets and precious jewels, and many nobles, all seated on elephants while court musicians played their instruments all the way to the palace. This respectful reception can only mean that the expedition was held in high esteem.

De Houtman had been invited to the celebrations of the Islamic new year, to the occasion of which the sultan had invited several Asian and Middle-Eastern ambassadors. The guests were feasted on a lavish banquet of endless dishes served on golden plates, washed away with a distilled beverage called *arak*, made of rice or palm fruit, of which there was plenty.

It was Acehnese court custom that foreigners were attired in the traditional outfit of white Indian linen before they were presented to the sultan. Sultan Alau'd-din presented De Houtman a ceremonial *keris*, a traditional weapon which carried special value when it was given by the sultan. John Davis mentions that it was strictly forbidden for the average person to carry a *keris*.⁴ This Cryse is a kind of dagger.....it is death to weare this Cryse, but from the King's gift: and having it, there is absolute freedom to take Victualls without money, and command the rest as slaves.¹³ It is likely that he exaggerated what he had been told.

¹⁰ Frederick de Houtman, *De oudste reizen van de Zeeuwen*, 69.

¹¹ The *c(h)ap(p)* or *tsiap* was the royal insignia which expressed permission. The Europeans often refer to this word to say that they received a license to trade or permission to land or to leave.

¹² John Davis, *De oudste reizen van de Zeeuwen*, 47.

¹³ *idem*.

2. 1. 3 Negotiations between De Houtman and the Sultan

De Houtman procured only 25 *bahar* of pepper. Sultan Alau'd-din was evidently more interested in the strategic advantages of the visit of the expedition than in the yet unimagined financial prospects of broader international trade. He asked De Houtman to assist him with his ships for a war expedition to Johor for which he would pay him a shipload of pepper: "As touching your merchandize, it shall be thus: I have warres with the King of Ior (Johor), you shall serve me against him with your ships; your recompense shall be your lading of pepper; this was agreed".¹⁴ The sultan evidently set the condition. He forbade the local merchants to sell their pepper to the Dutch, to force De Houtman's assistance for the expedition to Johor.¹⁵ Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah without hesitation drew his European visitors in the internecine conflicts with his Malay enemy. He wanted to avenge Johor's attack on Acehnese territory and vessels, which was Johor's revenge for the liquidation in 1589 of the Acehnese crown-prince Raja Buyong, who happened to be a son of the Sultan of Johor. The murder of the prince staged Alau'd-din's accession. In Part three of this study I explore and discuss the Aceh-Johor conflicts.

This request by an Islamic state to Europeans who are classified as 'infidels' to assist in attacking another Islamic state was without precedence. The momentous occasion presented itself. Johor on the other hand some times sided with the Portuguese 'infidel' against Aceh.

After he consulted with his staff, De Houtman agreed to assist the sultan in the expedition to Johor¹⁶. At that time the Dutch were obviously ignorant of Johor's strategic and political stature in the Straits, a reality which the VOC shortly afterwards would recognize as a factor of major importance for its future operations and strategies; Johor's key position in the affairs of the Straits made the Dutch perform their balancing footwork when dealing with the feuding rulers.¹⁷

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 48.

¹⁵ According to Frederick de Houtman it was agreed that the expedition to Johor would take maximum three months. The sultan would provide rice, meat and wine. One person would remain in Aceh as *ostagier*. *De oudste reizen van de Zeeuwen*, 73.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 72.

A contract was signed by both Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah and Cornelis de Houtman, supposedly a novel experience for the Acehese ruler.¹⁸ It was agreed that De Houtman would receive 1000 *bahar* of pepper before the expedition to Johor and another 1000 *bahar* of pepper after returning in Aceh. A salient facet is that the sultan pledged an oath with a commoner, by which they both declared that the agreement was made without fraud.¹⁹

2. 1. 4 The Sultan's inclination to the English

Upon hearing that the chief pilot of the fleet was English, Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah immediately sent for him, anxious to meet the Englishman. English victory over the Spanish armada in 1588 had been an occasion of great joy for Aceh. A decade afterwards John Davis gloried over a flattering reception at the sultan's palace.

'He enquired much of England, of the Queene, of her Basha's, and how she could hold warres with so great a King as the Spaniards (for he thinketh that Europe is all Spanish)'.²⁰

Sultan Alau'd-din was remarkably well informed about the developments in Europe and he started to show a growing inclination towards the English. His admiration for England and the special attention he gave John Davis, annoyed Cornelis de Houtman, who could not restrain himself and threw some unpleasant remarks at the Englishmen serving on board his ships. He boldly requested from the sultan that the locals stopped calling him English, because he was from Flanders.²¹

'The twentieth, our Baase being with the King was exceeding well entertained, the King very importunate to know if he were English: Tell me truly (said the King), for I love souldiers; and I must further tell you, Alfonso (Vicente) hath been earnest with me to betray you, but it shall not be; for I am your friend: and therewith gave him a Purse of Gold. He giving thanks,

¹⁷ J. L. Blussé postulates that in the early modern period the Dutch had a reputation for performing a soft-handed approach in order to reach their objectives in Asia. "Amongst Feigned Friends and Declared Enemies" in: Solvi Sogner (ed.), *Making Sense of Global History* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2002), 2.

¹⁸ *De oudste reizen van de Zeeuwen*, 73. The contract probably got lost in the attack on the ships which took place soon afterwards.

¹⁹ *idem*.

²⁰ *ibid.*, 49.

²¹ *ibid.*, 48. Flanders was a province in the United Republic of the Netherlands.

answered that he was not of England but of Flanders, and at the Kings service. I have heard of England, said the King, but not of Flanders: what land is that? He further inquired of their King, State, and Government; whereof our Baase made large report, refusing the Authoritie of a King, relating the government of Aristocratie. He further made sure to the King, to give commandment that his subjects should not call him English: for it was a bitterness unto him which the King granted. Againe he required to know if there were no Englishmen in the ships he answered, there be some English in the ships, but they have been bred up in Flanders. I understand, said the King, that there be some that differ both in apparel, language, and fashion: what are those? He answered, English; of which my chiefe pilot is one. Well, said the King, I must see those men.’²²

‘The sixe and twentieth, our Baase came aboard with a boatload of pepper, reporting words above credit, how the King had used him, of his mightie fortune, and of the wonderfull trade that he had procured, with no small ‘*Gaudeamus in superbia nostra*’ (let us rejoyce in our pride): he further said, that the king did often demand of him if he were not of England, which he did strongly denie, using some unfit speeches of our Nation. Further, said he, being aboard, I wish I had given a thousand pound that we had not English among us: thus we poor soules, were thrust into the Corner.’

Cornelis de Houtman’s arrogance and his abhorrence of his English crew fuelled the uneasy relationship with John Davis. When he set foot in Aceh, Cornelis De Houtman was a self-possessed ambitious man, who owed it to his qualities as a capable sailor that he was appointed commander of the *Zeeland* expedition. When the sultan declared that he had never heard of a country called Flanders, De Houtman boasted that he came from a country with a government by Aristocracia.²³ His reaction shows pride and prejudice. One clearly wonders what the Acehnese ruler thought of this outlandish system. Since autocratic rule was the form of government in Aceh, and in fact the only system known to the outer ends of the globe, it must have been difficult to envisage a government represented by a plurality of persons of more or less equal authority. Before he was installed as sultan, Alau’ d-din was the pre-eminent *orangkaya* at the court of the former sultan and the protector of the young crown-prince whose liquidation opened his way to the throne. The *Bustan as-Salatin* calls him the son of Firman Shah, a prince of the Daru’l Kamal dynasty, one of the two dynasties before

²² *ibid*, 49.

²³ *ibid*, 48.

Aceh's unification in 1500.²⁴ His enthronement brought a change in the dynastic line which had been dominated by the Mahkota Alam dynasty. John Davis mentions that when he accessed the throne, he eliminated thousands of fellow *orangkaya* to make sure that they would not rebel against him. By appointing new *orangkaya*, he hoped to draw their loyalty, a basic condition to keep the throne and rule the state.²⁵ According to local gossip Alau'd-din was a former fisherman who, because of his bravery, gained the former sultan's favour and became his *laxamana*.²⁶

It is quite ironic that John Davis whom Alau'd-din showed so much honour calls him 'a lustie man, exceedingly fat, who doth nothing all the day but eate and drinke, from morning to night there is no end of banquetting'. 'Hee, his great men and women doe nothing but eate and drinke and talke of venerie. If the Poet's Fables have any shew of truth, then undoubtedly this King is the great Bacchus. For he holdeth all the Ceremonies of Gluttonie.'²⁷ Davis put to use his literary skill to pose an opinion, a notion of what he himself disapproved of, giving details of Alau'd-din's life and doings when he was of old age. This ludicrous description has contributed to the lasting view one has of the character of Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah which transpires from the literature.

2. 1. 5 A turn of events: violence at the docks

The friendly atmosphere which marked the reception of the *Zeeland* expedition changed when contrary to what was agreed, the *shahbandar* raised the price of the pepper from 8 to 15 *real a bahar*. De Houtman was not amused by this deception and complained to the sultan, who stoically replied that he left the business of the trade to his *shahbandar*.²⁸ It signifies a

²⁴ *Bustanu's Salatin*, 34.

²⁵ Leonard Blussé identifies polities in Southeast Asia with unstable *primus inter pares* administrations. This intrinsically challenges the historical view that these polities were ruled by absolute monarchs. See: 'Amongst Feigned Friends and Declared Enemies' in Solvi Sogner (ed.), *Making Sense of Global History*, (Oslo: Universiteitsforlaget, 2002), 154-168

²⁶ *De oudste reizen van de Zeeuwen*, 54.

²⁷ *ibid*, 55.

²⁸ John Davis speaks of four *shahbandar* in Aceh, which shows the extent of the trade. (Unger, *De oudste reizen*, 55) The historiography gives evidence of four *shahbandar* in the port of Malacca at the time the Portuguese

delegation of tasks from which he detached himself, but it fundamentally shows his reluctance to make amendments in favour of the foreigners and against his own *orangkaya*. His detachment from the business contradicts the accepted view that he was the absolute ruler of the Acehnese realm. The *orangkaya* remained a powerful class and he had to consider their complaints, a pre-condition for a *modus vivendi*.

The day before the expedition departed for Johor (in the course of September), when they were loading the ships with ordnance, the Dutch sensed that something was very wrong and immediately took measures. John Davis relates ‘We, mistrusting some treachery, filled our tops with stones, made fast our gratings and prepared our weapons, whereat our Baase (boss) was exceeding angry, commanding all to be dissolved, but we would not.’²⁹ It illustrates above all that De Houtman did not anticipate a physical confrontation and believed in the good relationship with the Acehnese. His directors were resolute that the costly expedition would pass without the spilling of blood and without violating the rights of the local people. If he had any reason to suspect the locals, he should not allow them aboard armed with weapons and was permitted to castigate the violators³⁰. The *corcun* (secretary) and the chief *shahbandar* came on board with armed soldiers. They brought different kinds of meat and a large jar of *arak* with them of which John Davis claims that these were poisoned; after eating and drinking they were in a gay mood.³¹

The Acehnese attack on the ships was swift and brutal; Cornelis de Houtman and twenty eight of his men were murdered and in the ensuing battle many locals too lost their lives, like the *shahbandar* Abdalla, a relative of the sultan. John Davis, who escaped the onslaught, with obvious satisfaction writes :

‘In this great miserie, it was some pleasure to see how the base Indians did flye, how they were killed and how well they were drowned, the sea was covered with Indian heads, for they swamme away by hundreds.’³² Frederick de Houtman and another twenty two men were ashore and captured by the Acehnese.

arrived there. Malacca was a great trade emporium. The fact that four *shabandar* in Aceh were in charge of handling the trade, says something of Aceh’s importance as a trade centre.

²⁹ *De oudste reizen van de Zeeuwen*, 51.

³⁰ *ibid*, 30 onwards: ‘concept-Instruxtie ende memorie voor Cornelis de Houtman’

³¹ *ibid*, 50.

³² *ibid*, 51.

The motif for the Acehese attack at that most cheerful moment when they were celebrating the departure of the expedition to Johor is a haunting question. One should realize that the climate in Aceh was highly politicised at that time of European encroachment and interest. The port was alive with intrigue and conspiracy, where no one could trust anyone else. At the centre of power, like a spider in his web, was the sultan surrounded by a network of courtiers and intelligence which included Portuguese intelligence. There is little doubt that the Portuguese instigated the attack, threatened as they felt by Dutch intrusion into their preserve. They spread the rumour that the men from Holland were no more than pirates who had fought with the local people of Bantam. Noteworthy is the view of Manuel Lobato, a Portuguese historian, that the Hollanders encountered problems on their first visits to Bantam and the Sunda islands because of Portuguese instigation; in Aceh they were attacked because of Portuguese diplomatic intervention, which marked the apogee in the relations between Aceh and the Estado da India.³³ The sultan earlier confided in Cornelis de Houtman that Alfonso Vicente vehemently warned against De Houtman, saying that his misconduct in Java was a forewarning of his bad intentions in Aceh. It seems that the pugnacious Vicente was deliberately manufacturing a *casus belli*.³⁴

³³ Lobato, "Malaca" in: de Oliveira Marques (ed.), *Historia dos Portugueses no Extremo Oriente*, 55-56: 'Os Holandeses experimentaram grandes dificuldades nos primeiros anos da sua frequencia da Insulinda. Em 1595-1596 os irmaos Hourman tiveram serios problemas em Banten, parece que por instigacao dos portugueses de Malaca. En 1599 foram atacados em Sunda e no ano seguinte no Achem, aqui por instigacao da diplomacia portuguesa, facto que marca o apogeu do relacionamento entre Achem e o Estado da India.' Lobato's conclusion is based on several sources which he names: Denys Lombard, *Le Sultanat d'Atjeh*, 23; C.R. Boxer & Frazao de Vasconcelos, *Andre Furtado de Mendonca 1558-1610*, 124 ; Coutre, *Andanzas*, 161.

³⁴ Investigating the sources on Portuguese conspiracy in the East Indies used by Hugo Grotius in his *De Jure Praedae*, which are based on sworn statements of Dutch captains, merchants and mariners, Martine van Ittersum argues that Grotius interpreted these statements from a perceived nefarious Portuguese conspiracy. 'This reinterpretation of history was corroborated by the attestants' conversations with the Pangoran of Bantam and Sultan of Aceh, who were only too happy to play along. Malaccan envoys and Portuguese renegades were conveniently blamed for previous 'misunderstandings' between the new allies, such as the Acehese attack on two Dutch merchantmen in September 1599.' (56). 'In their eagerness to please their new allies and explain away previous 'misunderstandings', both rulers were happy to confirm the attesters' worst suspicions about the Portuguese. The result was a radical reinterpretation of the early Dutch voyages to the East Indies, which Grotius accepted uncritically and incorporated into *De Jure Praedae*.'(82) What is sadly missing in section 2.3 of her book is the account of John Davis - not a Dutchman but an Englishman – who mentions that four Portuguese ships arrived from Malacca under the command of Alfonso Vicente 'to prevent our trade, as the sequel doth shew'. Davis mentions too that the Portuguese were usually present when Cornelis de Houtman was with the sultan. It is legitimate to ask why the Acehese would suddenly act with such vengeance against the Dutch when there seems no clear reason for this, especially not since De Houtman had agreed to assist in the attack on Johor. If Alau'd-din was out to please his new allies (the Dutch), why would he hold Frederick de Houtman hostage when several Dutch fleets had arrived in his port asking for De Houtman's release? Van Ittersum's assertion that the attestants' accounts (in the context of the events in Aceh) backed up 'the reinterpretation of history', rests on very thin ice.

There was evidently more at stake, Malacca engaged in friendly relations with its neighbour Johor, the head of the important Malay alliance and it was essential for continued Portuguese trade and shipping to have access to the Malay ports on either sides of the Straits. The Portuguese would not suffer the petty Dutch to come to Aceh's help to defeat Johor. After decades of strategic operations and flirtations with local rulers, they could not stand by and see the Dutch ruin their existence, while Aceh was a slumbering tiger ready to prey on their trade and shipping, remaining their fiercest local opponent. It would threaten the power equilibrium which the Portuguese now cannily controlled, if Aceh came out victorious from the confrontation with Johor.

Cornelis de Houtman's arrogance provokes the suggestion that the Acehnese attack on his ships was Aceh's answer to his smugness, yet, from John Davis' statement that De Houtman ordered his men to stop taking defensive actions and to refrain from aggression, one gathers another side of Cornelis de Houtman, one showing caution and restraint.

The surviving crew escaped to sea with both ships, leaving behind two pinnaces and all the goods, pepper and cash. It was a great financial loss for the company and the young enterprising merchants who partook in the expedition.

When the hostages were chained the Portuguese jubilantly cheered *agorasta grand fiesta*, calling it a day of celebration. Alfonso Vicente, whom Frederick de Houtman called 'the traitor', acted as spokesman for the sultan and demanded one of the ships in return for their freedom. Frederick answered him that they did not have the power to decide because they were only the servants of the company, paid to do their work.³⁵ To negotiate the release of the hostages, the sultan sent one of them, Guyon le Fort, to the crew onboard the ships from which he did not return. The ships stayed for a time in the close vicinity of the port to try to free the hostages. They were attacked by Portuguese ships.³⁶

The sultan seemed contrite, calling Frederick de Houtman more than once to the palace, telling him he had ordered the capture of the crew but not their killing, accusing the *shahbandar* of the killings.³⁷ He was exceedingly apologetic for the death of so many Dutchmen but claimed that he had lost men too.

³⁵ *De oudste reizen van de Zeeuwen*, 78.

³⁶ John Davis mentions that in the confrontation with the Portuguese, the Dutch sunk one of their ships and 'beat the rest, so they fledde'. *De oudste reizen van de Zeeuwen*, 52.

³⁷ *ibid.*, 81.

He reiterated this when they were at his bathing place in the company of Symon Nunes the Malaccan ambassador and a Catholic priest, who advised him to send the Dutch hostages to the mountains to prevent them to escape from Aceh. Alau'd-din refused to follow the advice. We have to consider the fact that he had no experience in dealing with two mutually hostile European nations and not sure whom to trust. It shows the condition prevailing in the Acehnese realm at a precise moment.

The horrendous event had damaged his standing, something he gradually came to realize. He derived more prestige by the visit of foreigners. Aceh was the first port in the Straits where northern Europeans called to trade. He demanded from Frederick De Houtman to stay calm (*'dat ik geen zwarichheyt stellen soude'*) promising to restore his dignity, by giving him a prominent position and a wife.³⁸

Sultan Alau'd-din's confession that he did not order the killings, puts the general assertion that he had absolute control of Aceh's affairs in a different light. Although the capture of the Dutch crew was premeditated, the killings are an indication of activities undermining his authority.

The captives were sent to a prison in Pedir. The change in their status came because Frederick de Houtman refused to convert to Islam, which the sultan demanded with the aim to use him as his spokesman when the Dutch eventually returned. De Houtman passionately defended his Belief in front of a court of Islamic judges and did not submit to their threats, not even when the executioners put a sword in his neck. He declared that it was to no avail to try to convert him, because he was a true Christian and could never become a Muslim. It took several agonizing days before the sultan ordered a stop to the threats. It looks as if Alau'd-din had a passion for pleasure and a gift for compassion.

In Pedir the prisoners laboured on the pinnace which had fallen in the hands of the Acehnese. They laboured under inhumane conditions, receiving for food a small portion of un-boiled rice twice a day, being chained when they were not labouring.

The Portuguese were still treated by the sultan as friends, walking in and out of the palace. It is crucial for contemporary understanding of the political transformation taking place after almost a century of wars and hostilities between Aceh and Malacca to gain the deeper

Frederick de Houtman does not explain why he ordered the capture of the crew; on the other hand he mentions that the sultan had several of the murderers captured 'for his own gains', to extract money '300 pieces of eight in gold', which was missing from the ransack of the Dutch ships.

³⁸ idem.

significance of Alau'd-din's willingness to establish relations with Malacca in 1593. His positive demeanour to the overtures of the Malaccan merchants seems to have served one clear purpose, namely to celebrate his legitimacy and to underscore the regularity of his succession after the liquidation of the crown-prince whose father was the Sultan of Johor. The political conjecture is evident. By drawing Portuguese loyalty from Johor towards Aceh, the power scale which was not favourable for Aceh was in balance.

The triangular affairs were shaped by geo-political ambitions. Johor did escape the Acehnese attack in 1599; thanks to Portuguese interference the momentum was lost and De Houtman's assistance for Aceh had become redundant. Malacca thus controlled the power equilibrium. In 1600 the Acehnese armada was on its way to Johor, when the news came that Dutch ships had arrived in the vicinity of Aceh. After only one day at sea the armada swiftly returned to fend off a possible Dutch attack. Frederick de Houtman had been enlisted in the war expedition to Johor. It is an ironical twist of history that Dutch interference twice saved Johor the humiliation of an Acehnese attack.

2. 1. 6 Relentless Dutch efforts for trade monopolies

The violence against the *Zeeland* expedition did not deter Dutch fleets from coming to Aceh. They were not refused to enter the port of Aceh. Various companies presented themselves at Sultan Alau'd-din's court to ask for trade contracts and all requested the release of the hostages.

When Pieter Both arrived with a large fleet owned by the *Brabantsche Compagnie* in the Malacca Straits, he immediately sent his second man, vice-admiral Paulus van Caerden, to Aceh in the course of November 1600 with a letter for the sultan from Prince Maurice of (Orange) Nassau, who was at that time 'Stadhouder' of the provinces Holland and Zeeland and three other provinces³⁹. The prince asked for a contract to procure pepper and the release of the hostages. From the very start of the Asia expeditions, the prince was involved in the operations.⁴⁰

³⁹ The function of *stadhouder* can be equated with that of governor. Maurice also became stadhouder of Utrecht, Gelderland and Overijssel.

⁴⁰ His close involvement in the Zeeland expedition is evident from the 'Artikelenbrief van Prins Maurits voor de *Leeuw* en de *Leeuwin* voor de reis naar Indië in: Unger, *De oudste reizen van de Zeeuwen*, 24-30.

Van Caerden received a polite but otherwise cold reception. The letter from prince Maurice remained unopened, because Alau'd-din was incensed that it had been written on pigskin.⁴¹ Van Caerden, who perceived Portuguese incitement, set fire to one of their vessels and captured several of its crew. Aceh was again the stage for European animosity and rivalry. The Portuguese remained a nuisance to Alau'd-din in spite of his friendly demeanour towards them. Frederick de Houtman mentions that the Portuguese molested Arab ships in the harbour, after which the king took all their weapons and put guards around their houses.

In spite of the fact that Van Caerden's action was an insult to his sovereignty, Alau'd-din allowed him to trade, obviously pleased that northern Europeans again called at his port. Van Caerden was able to negotiate a very favourable contract for the procurement of pepper with the *shahbandar*.⁴²

The contract, written in Malay in Arabic characters was based on the following conditions for the Dutch:

- exemption from the payment of tolls;
- the right to be the first buyer;
- exemption from payment in advance;
- payment in gold for goods traded in Aceh;
- a time limit of 3-4 months for the delivery and loading of the goods;
- a set price of 7 *tael* per *bahar* of pepper.

It was a trade contract *par excellence*. The company would be paid in gold for the goods they sold and it paid in silver *tael* for the goods they bought. But there was a snag. Captain Vlamingh in charge of the official signing of the agreement discovered to his dismay that the agreed exemption to pay in advance for the ordered pepper, was not included and therefore refused to sign. The *shahbandar* infuriated by his rejection of the contract, tore up the document, telling Vlamingh to leave and come back another time. It was a heavy setback in the positive development of the trade relations. The Acehnese merchants obstructed every move of the Dutch, wary of their cunning ways and persistence to obtain the sole rights in the pepper trade. Van Caerden turned to the sultan, with the request to reinstate the earlier agreed

⁴¹ De Jonge (ed.), *De Opkomst*, vol. II, 231-32.
It is well known that Muslims consider pigs impure (*haraam*).

⁴² A translation of the contract is included in: J. E. Heeres (ed.), *Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlandico Indicum*, 6 vols., (Leiden: BKI, 1907), vol. I, (1596-1650), 19, 20.
The contract is registered as NA 1.04.01: *Archieven van de Compagnieën op Oost-Indië, 1594-1603*, inv. no. 171.

conditions, like the exemption to pay in advance, but Alau'd-din seemed careful not to go too much against his *shahbandar* and merchants, telling him that he delegated the business of the trade to his *shahbandar*. Yet he cunningly came with what looks like a Solomon's ruling, ordering that a new contract be drawn. The price for the pepper was now 8 *tael a bahar* and a toll was levied for outgoing goods: 5 (*tael?*) to 100 (*bahar?*). The condition that the company would be paid in gold for goods they sold in Aceh, was erased. These were essential alterations. Hence the new contract still gave the *Brabantsche Company* the priority as first buyer, although it did not give it the right of sole buyer. With this contract in his pocket Van Caerden could still proudly show up before the company directors.

Alau'd-din's cautious interference, shows that he wanted to prevent a rebellion by the *orangkaya* at any cost. By tradition the relationship between the ruler and these men was one of mistrust and therefore fragile and combustible. We should realize that in Europe the relation between monarchs and their nobles at that time was not very different.

When the news of the arrival of Dutch ships in the port reached the hostages in Pedir, they escaped from there confinement and sought refuge in Van Caerden's ships, but he had to hand them over to the authorities.

At his departure, Van Caerden, still resentful of the *shahbandar's* deception and the fact that the hostages were not allowed to leave, robbed several Muslim ships destined for Aceh of their goods, seized one ship and captured sixty men who he did not want to set free unless the sultan released the hostages, but in the end he left the ship and the captives behind.⁴³

Van Caerden's actions were criticized at home, for it had brought Dutch relations with Aceh at jeopardy. Significant is the fact that compensation was paid for the loss of the goods through the services of Laurens Bicker one of Prince Maurice's delegates to the sultan in 1601.⁴⁴ The settlement of the case which took a long time, shows that the Dutch, at least at the start of their operations in the Indies, relinquished to International Law.⁴⁵ To obtain the

⁴³ *De oudste reizen van de Zeeuwen*, 95-96.

⁴⁴ Mentioned in a footnote in W. Ph. Coolhaas, *Generale Missiven van gouverneurs-generaal en raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, ('s-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1960), vol. I, 54: footnote in the missive of Reynst, dated 26 October 1615).

We are told that a financial agreement was reached through Laurens Bicker in Amsterdam with Arab merchants, for the payment of compensation for their goods which Paulus van Caerden lightened from their ships. On 16 November the Gentlemen XVII of the VOC deposited 'een halve ton' (50.000 florins) in the bank. J.K.J. de Jonge mentions however that the *Brabantsche Compagnie* had to pay for this. It concerned a sum of 50.000 *real*. *De Opkomst*, vol. II ,234.

⁴⁵ Van Ittersum asserts that Grotius developed his rights and contract theories for eminently practical purposes. 'De Jure Praedae was a brilliant vindication of the VOC's privateering campaign in the East Indies, as

monopoly of the pepper trade was obviously the decisive factor in settling the case with the sultan of Aceh, whose contacts with the Red Sea ports and India were most helpful in developing their trading networks.

2. 1. 7 The dawn in Aceh-Dutch relations

The arrival in Aceh on 23 August 1601 of Gerard le Roy and Laurens Bicker of the *Zeeland* company with the ships *Zeeland* and *Lange Barke*, brought the necessary repose in the anguished contacts. They functioned as delegates of Prince Maurice of Nassau, which started a new trend, that of diplomatic relations. Their visit marked a historical milestone in the contacts between Aceh and the United Republic of the Netherlands, giving impetus to a relationship based on friendship and alliance. Their voyage to Aceh took them through the Commoros islands where they made a stop at the island of Anchouan, whose king gave them a letter of recommendation for the sultan of Aceh with whom he engaged in trade. Whether this letter helped to reassure Alau'd-din of the good intentions of the Dutch, cannot be ascertained. When he complained to the delegates about the actions of Van Caerden against Muslim ships destined for Aceh, they said that their Prince was innocent of what had happened. Obviously convinced, Sultan Alau'd-din read the letter of Prince Maurice and marked it with his *cap* as evidence thereof. The prince eagerly solicited his friendship, offering him assistance against the Portuguese whom he accused of incitement against Cornelis de Houtman and requested the release of the hostages.⁴⁶ He sent the sultan some extraordinary gifts like gold plated weapons, mirrors and one thousand *real*. Frederick de Houtman and his mates were immediately released and returned home with Le Roy and Bicker.

The new relationship allowed for establishing the *Zeeland* factory in 1601, probably the first Dutch factory in the region. Earlier Dutch merchants rented a house in Bantam from where

exemplified by Jacob van Heemskerck's capture of a Portuguese merchantman in Singapore Straits in February 1603 . 'Grotius' rights and contract theories largely served to justify the dispossession of the native', (xxxviii). I should stress here that Van Caerden's actions against the Portuguese in Aceh's waters and his robbing of Muslim ships destined for Aceh took place before Hugo Grotius wrote *De Jure Praedae* in which he argues 'that in the absence of an independent and effective judge, each private person resumed his sovereign powers and executed judgment in his own cause', *Profit and Principle*, (Introduction, xxiii). It is a significant fact that the VOC paid compensation for the lifted goods.

⁴⁶ The letter dated 11 December 1600 is published in Banck, *Atchin's Verheffing en Val*, 23.

they operated and stored goods. A second factory was opened shortly afterwards by the same *Zeeland* expedition in Patani, located on the east coast of the Malay peninsula.

To oversee the trade two commissioners with their three assistants remained in Aceh. The sultan even offered them loans to facilitate the procurement of pepper during the harvest season. Of significance is the fact that he gave them a letter of recommendation for the king of Cambay, one of the foremost trading ports on the west coast of India, supplier of the bulk of textiles and several other goods to former Malay Malacca. It was an important Acehnese contribution to Dutch trade initiatives in Gujerat where the merchants went to make investigations.

Even though the relations between Aceh and the Dutch were good, the procedures to procure pepper and also other goods in Aceh remained time-consuming and very costly. One of the reasons was that the pepper had to be brought to the port of Aceh (Bandar Aceh) from Pedir. This hampered the departure of foreign ships who were dependent on the favourable winds. Several Dutch fleets therefore decided to set sail to the island of Ceylon, where they found an abundance of spices and other commodities, available against far lower prices and less time-consuming procedures than in Aceh.

2. 1. 8 Acehnese envoys visit the United Republic

Encouraged by Prince Maurice's wish for friendship and his pledge for assistance against the Portuguese, Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah sent several envoys with Le Roy and Bicker to the United Republic to be introduced to the States General and Prince Maurice. It was the first diplomatic mission of a Southeast Asian polity to Europe. Alau'd-din sent a signal to the Portuguese, that he established relations with an independent European state. The Portuguese had abused his kindness, vehemently meddling in Aceh's affairs, embarrassing him in the eyes of the Dutch and the neighbouring rulers. He turned his back on the Portuguese when their warships started to cruise in Aceh's waters, threatening its security. Malacca's support for Johor which was out to re-establish control of the east Sumatran port of Aru, marked the end of the decade of calm and contacts between Aceh and Malacca.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ 'After 1600, when Aceh and the Portuguese started to war, the relations with the Dutch improved'. Femme Gaastra, *De Geschiedenis van de VOC* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2002), 39.

The Acehese delegation to the United Republic constituted an ambassador, an admiral and a cousin of the sultan, accompanied by their servants. In his letter to Prince Maurice dated 24 August 1601 Alau'd-din enumerated the gifts he sent for the prince. These were 'a small jewel and a ring with four big stones and some smaller stones, a dagger with a gold and copper sheath wrapped in a silver cloth, a golden cup and saucer and a gold-plated silver pot and two Malay speaking parrots with silver chains. He ordered that the gifts be divided over the two ships, probably with the idea that if only one ship made it to its destiny there would still be gifts for the prince.⁴⁸ The home bound voyage turned out to be very fortunate for the expedition. When the expedition arrived before the island of Saint Helena in the South Atlantic where it waited the arrival of its sister ship the *Zwarten Arent*, the Portuguese carack *San Jago* which was on its way from Goa to Lisbon and richly laden with pepper and valuable goods suddenly sailed by. A confrontation between the rivals could not be avoided. In the battle the Dutch were able to seize the carack, dropped off the crew on the island Juan Fernando de Noronha off the Brazilian coast and took their price to Zeeland.⁴⁹ The sultan's envoys were witnesses to the hostilities between the two European antagonists and they fortunately escaped humiliation by the Portuguese if the Portuguese had been victorious in the sea battle.

The envoys were treated with due respect and given a grand tour of the provinces where they visited important towns and met with local authorities; they were received by the States General and by Prince Maurice and had the opportunity to see 'the government of aristocracia' at work. J. E. Banck calls the relationship between Prince Maurice and the sultans of Aceh an *inter pares* relationship⁵⁰ which is not accurate, because the prince was *stadthouder* of several provinces and not the sovereign ruler of the republic.

No costs were spared to please them, banquets and exuberant entertainments were arranged in their honour. The States General invited European monarchs to send their representatives to meet the Acehese visitors. It was a successful strategy to give publicity to their warm relations with an important Asian ruler and trading partner at a time when Spain was still a

⁴⁸ A translation of the letter is published in: *De oudste reizen van de Zeeuwen*, 136-37.

⁴⁹ *De oudste reizen van de Zeeuwen*, XLVII, XLVIII. Here is mentioned 'galeon', while the *Besluiten van de Raad der Admiraliteit in Zeeland* speak of a 'carack' (144, 156, 157, 166).

⁵⁰ *Atchin's Verheffing en Val*, 24.

menace in Europe.⁵¹ The eldest of the envoys, Abdul Hamid, died three months after arrival and was buried in a church in the town of Middelburg in the province of Zeeland, in the presence of important dignitaries. The other envoys, Sri Muhammad and Mir Hassan, returned to Aceh in 1604 with the fleet of Admiral Steven Verhaegen.

The peregrination of the Acehnese, which lasted about fifteen months was an expensive investment for their hosts, but with the eye on trade contracts no costs were spared. The expenses of the visit were divided between the different chambers.⁵²

A solid foundation was laid for a strategic alliance against the Portuguese.

In quick succession several Dutch fleets visited Aceh: a second fleet fitted out by De Moucheron arrived in August 1602 under command of Joris van Spilbergen who seized a Portuguese carack in front of Aceh in close cooperation with the English admiral William Lancaster. Another fleet under command of Sebald de Weert was fitted out by the United *Zeeland* Company in which De Moucheron participated.⁵³ Admiral Van Heemskerk made port in Aceh with a fleet of 8 ships in 1602 from where he went to Johor.

2. 1. 9 The English obtain the Privilege in 1602

The English not only looked for spices, but for outlets for their wool and iron.

In 1580 Francis Drake returned home from his voyage around the globe with spices from the Moluccan islands even before the Dutch set foot in the area. Already in 1592 an English fleet consisting of three tall ships was on a reconnaissance mission in the Straits of Malacca. One of the vice admirals was James Lancaster.⁵⁴ J. S. Furnivall's remark that the English followed the Dutch like 'gadflies' in the archipelago is therefore arguable.⁵⁵

⁵¹ At that time Ambrosio de Spinola, a general in the Spanish army of Felipe III of Spain had demonstrated his military skill in the siege of Ostend in 1603.

⁵² *De oudste reizen van de Zeeuwen*, XLIX.

⁵³ *ibid.*, LII.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 94.

⁵⁵ Quoted by Hall, *A History of South-East Asia*, fourth edition, 319.

The East India Company (EIC) was established on 31 December 1600 by royal charter and obtained a monopoly to trade in the region between the Cape of Good Hope and the Magellan Straits for a period of fifteen years.

The first official fleet which consisted of the tall ships *Dragon, Hector, Ascension and Susan* left London for the East in February 1601. James Lancaster was in charge of the expedition, having as his chief navigator the indefatigable John Davis, the chief pilot of the ill-fated De Houtman expedition. The English indubitably profited from the firsthand knowledge of John Davis about the situation in Aceh and elsewhere. The Dutch accused him for spying for the Earl of Essex, which is not ill founded, because his journal of the De Houtman expedition is addressed to ‘the Right Honourable, mine exceeding good Lord and Master, Robert, Earl of Essex, etc.’ In the preamble he refers to the directions which the Earl gave him at his departure, ‘when it pleased you to imploy mee in this voyage for the discovering of these easterne parts of the world, to the service of her Majestie and the good of our countrey’. The competition between the Dutch and the English was a fact.

It must have been an impressive sight to see the four tall ships accompanied by a supply ship sailing into the bay of Aceh in June 1602, confirming Sultan Alau’ d-din’s image of the mighty England. Lancaster added great distinction to the visit by declaring to the palace messenger that he would personally deliver the letter from Queen Elizabeth to the king, since it was the established custom in Europe that an envoy delivered the letter from his sovereign in person. The court custom in Aceh was that the letter from a foreign sovereign was delivered to the sultan before the envoy presented himself at the palace.

The letter of Amity and League signed by Queen Elizabeth was one out of six copies all with a blank space in the middle in which the name of the local ruler at whose port he called needed to be filled in. In their letters to their counterparts in the East, Elizabeth I and later her successor James I proclaimed themselves queen and king of several European nations. In the preamble of the letter the queen introduces herself as ‘Elizabeth, by the grace of God, Queene of England, France and Ireland, Defendresse of the Christian Faith and Religion.....’

The show of sovereign power was not unusual in the contacts between sovereigns. The Asian monarchs equally associated power with territorial expansion and gloated about their victories in their letters to the European kings and princes.

Lancaster also boasted of the help given by Elizabeth to Holland in its struggle against Spain. Sultan Alau’ d-din curiously demanded to know what kind of relationship existed between the two countries. At that time his envoys were visiting the United Republic of the Netherlands.

Against this background it is interesting to know that two decades later in 1621 Sultan Iskandar Muda, equally intrigued by the power hierarchy in Europe enquired of the French admiral Augustin de Beaulieu whether the king of France was a subject of the king of England. Beaulieu deftly responded that France had always been one of the greatest Christian kingdoms, and that it had only for a short period been subjected to Spanish authority. He elaborated on the legitimacy of the French monarchy saying that it had been in existence for 1300 years and ruled successively by 64 kings. Iskandar Muda outwitted him and said that he had received several letters from the king of England in which he called himself 'King of France'.⁵⁶

The expedition left England with the objective to procure pepper and to find outlets for English iron and wool. William Foster claims that they (the English) didn't want to interfere with Spanish and Portuguese settlements.⁵⁷ But there were collisions with the Portuguese all the same. Lancaster seized a Portuguese vessel in the Straits and took its cargo. In 1603 he and the Dutch admiral Joris van Spilbergen cooperated in attacking a Portuguese galleon.

The sultan sent six elephants to carry the envoy of the much admired English queen to the palace. He sent Cornelis de Houtman in contrast only two elephants. The Queen's letter was wrapped in a piece of silk and gold cloth, put under a canopy on the back of the largest elephant, a sign that the document was most significant. Lancaster followed on the second elephant. Musicians took part in the procession and played their trumpets, drums and wooden flutes, all the way to the palace. Passing three courts they arrived at the audience hall, which was attached to the sultan's private apartments and decked out with beautiful carpets and draperies woven with golden threads. To enter the hall they had to take off their 'leg wear' and were dressed in the traditional Acehnese outfit and headdress. They saluted the sultan in the manner of the country, raising their hands above their heads and bowing to the ground. It signified that they accepted the sultan's *daulat* (sovereignty). Similar court rituals full of symbolism existed almost everywhere in Asia.⁵⁸ When Lancaster announced that he came in

⁵⁶ Denys Lombard (ed.), *Mémoires d'un voyage aux Indes Orientales 1619-1622, Augustin de Beaulieu un marchand normand à Sumatra*, (Paris: Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1996), 155,156.

⁵⁷ W. Foster, *England's quest of Eastern Trade*, (London: Black), 1933), 127.

⁵⁸ Blussé describes the 'strange practices' in which the Europeans took part when dealing with the local authorities, 'most of which the vast majority of Europeans could never have been coerced to do; they were willing to "kowitz", the Chinese and Japanese practice of sitting on their knees while bending their heads over and touching the ground, or to follow the Siamese Court's practice of lying sideways and moving, crab like, across the floor.' In: "Feigned Friends and Declared Enemies".

the name of the Queen of England and the purpose of his visit, the sultan kindly hushed him, telling him to sit down and take refreshments, ‘you are very welcome, and here you shall have whatsoever you will in any reasonable conditions demanded, for your princesse sake; for she is worthy of all kindness and franke conditions, being a princesse of great noblesse, for fame speaketh so much of her.’⁵⁹ Certainly the establishment of the English-Turkey Company, initiated in 1579 by William Harburn, Elizabeth’s envoy, showed the English as reliable friends of the Muslims. Alau’-d-din’s undisguised admiration for the valiant queen was unprecedented. A splendid reception was held in their honour with a gargantuan banquet consisting of numerous dishes served on plates of gold and *tambaga*, a kind of brass much appreciated by the Acehnese rulers. They were sitting cross-legged on the floor and enjoyed the entertainment performed by dancing girls. The sultan reclined on a raised platform and drank to the queen’s delegates. The gifts sultan Alau’-d-din received from Queen Elizabeth were ‘a belt or girdle, a case of pistols, some plumes (fan) and an ewer of silver.’ He seemed most pleased with the plumes and immediately ordered one of his female servants to fan him. Among the assembled guests were the ambassadors of Siam, Pegu and Patani, who discussed the prospect of a military alliance against Malacca. It emerges that in 1602 the political configuration was changing; strategic issues against the Portuguese were high on the agenda in which Siam Pegu and Patani collaborated with Aceh. It is odd that the strategic discussion took place when the Portuguese were still present in Aceh. Lancaster was in the palace when a Portuguese ambassador from Goa proposed to Sultan Alau’-d-din the construction of a fort at the entrance of the harbour, suggesting that the city needed defence works to protect it since its wooden buildings were prone to fire. Alau’-d-din sneered back: ‘Hath your master a daughter to give unto my sonne, that he is so careful of the preservation of my countrey?’ When Lancaster complained to him that the presence of Portuguese spies at his court was discomforting for the English, he answered that the Portuguese were as much his enemies as he was theirs. He deferred a trip by Alfonso Vicente to Malacca, to enable Lancaster to pass through the Straits un-harassed by Portuguese ships.⁶⁰ In his letter to Queen Elizabeth Sultan

⁵⁹ W. Foster (ed.), *The voyages of Sir James Lancaster to Brazil and the Indies 1591-1603*, (London: Hakluyt Society, 1940) Second Series no. LXXXV, 92.

⁶⁰ It is evident that Alau’-d-din did not consider trade relations with Malacca as the end of their enmity, but the relationship was reconciled to geo-political ambitions. According to Bernard Lewis there is an essential addition in the law books stipulating that the state of war between the *Dar-al-Islam* and the *Dar-al-Harb* could be interrupted, when expedient, by an armistice or truce of limited duration. ‘It could not be terminated by a peace, but only by a final victory. *The Political Language of Islam*, 73; Also: Van Koningsveld, *De Islam*, 115-21.

Alau'd-din admitted that the Portuguese were his enemies 'now and forever so we shall cause them to die in whatever place soever we meet them, a public death.'⁶¹

Lancaster appeared frequently at the palace, but to his great disappointment the sultan was more interested in the political affairs of England, in the manners and customs of the people and in England's military success against Spain than in trading. He did not for one moment touch upon the purpose of the expedition which was to obtain a contract to procure pepper. However much he esteemed Lancaster, strangely the latter was summoned to appear before the *kadi*, who is the chief Islamic judge whom Lancaster calls a very wise man and the *shahbandar* whom he calls a noble aristocrat of old lineage, to explain in detail the reasons for his visit 'and many questions passed betwixt them.' Again we note that Alau'd-din detached himself from the mundane procedures even if this concerned the revered English and left these to his courtiers.⁶² Lancaster impressed these prominent courtiers by brilliantly responding to their inquiries into Queen Elizabeth's reasons to establish relations with Aceh and about his own demands. He painstakingly imbued them with the importance of wider international trade, telling them that it brought prosperity and revenues to the countries involved and that kings acquired more strength and prestige if their subjects were wealthy because commerce generated wealth.⁶³ It was of course a counsel's speech with an eye on a trade contract.

Sultan Alau'd-din bestowed special honour on Lancaster by anointing him and calling him 'my son', which made little impression on the single-minded 'merchant', whose prime interest was a solid trade contract.

Led by his adoration for the queen whose fame had travelled to the East before John Davis first set foot in Aceh in 1599, the sultan granted Lancaster the 'Privilege', which gave the English the right to trade freely in Aceh and its dependencies, exempting them from paying customs dues and the freedom to bequeath their goods to whom they choose'. It gave them at the same time jurisdiction over their citizens on Aceh's soil. This was unsurpassed and

⁶¹ 'Letter of Sultan Alau'd-din to Queen Elizabeth of England written in the year 1011 H (1602), (JSBRAS, 1898), 108-110. The original letter is missing. A copy is included in the Annex. Also in: Sir George Birdwood (ed.), *The Register of Letters of the Governour and Company of Merchants trading into the East Indies, 1600-1619*.

⁶² Anthony Reid speaks of an absolutist trend at the expense of the *orangkaya* in Aceh (and also in Bantam) under Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah. "Trade and Statepower in the 16th and 17th century Southeast Asia" (Bangkok: Seventh IAHA Conference, 1977), 391 onwards. However, the negotiating procedures show his detachment in the business of trade. He was involved when serious arguments between the parties caused a deadlock.

⁶³ *The voyages of Sir Lancaster*, 96-98.

certainly raised doubts with the *orangkaya*, the Asian diplomats and the Dutch merchants in Aceh. ‘The king was ready to enter into peace and league with Her Majesty and for his part would hold it truly.’⁶⁴ William Foster asserts that Lancaster had hoped for the conclusion of a formal commercial treaty between the two nations, as a basis for further trade. ‘Such an arrangement, however, was not consistent with Oriental notions. No sovereign could bind his successor; and indeed any concession he himself might make was to be regarded as revocable at his pleasure. So Lancaster had to be content with a document in which the king authorized the English to trade freely with his people, without the payment of customs dues, and accorded them some minor concessions.’⁶⁵ Foster’s comment that ‘such an arrangement was not consistent with Oriental notions’ suggests that everywhere in the East, the notions were similar. In the case of Aceh it is true that the history of succession has been a matter of bloodshed and usurpation, which does not guarantee a continuity of policies. It would be erroneous to expect from a successor to abide by a treaty made by his predecessor - who could be wicked or weak – that could ultimately threaten his sovereignty and put his country at risk. Looking at Europe of the seventeenth century we also see a tendency towards more power for national assemblies and parliaments, who increasingly questioned decisions and the king’s absolute authority. They expected that their opinions would be heard and that their traditional rights would be recognised. Royal authority in Aceh was supported by the *orangkaya*, but it was challenged on its absolutism or its weakness.

Granting the English this great Privilege in fact demonstrates that the sultan did not behold the consequences of far reaching English privileges in his domain. The reality of the day was that the Portuguese were still a menace to the region’s integrity and the Islamic trade. Another European nation obtained the means to become one.

Despite their privileges, the English were made to pay an excessive high rent for a dilapidated building, which badly needed repairs before it could be used as storage. Lancaster discovered too that he paid much more for a *bahar* of pepper than the Dutch earlier paid. John Davis told

⁶⁴ F.C. Danvers and W. Foster (eds.), *Letters Received Letters Received by its Servants in the East*, 6 vols. (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, 1896), vol. I, 1- 4:

‘.....we, by the grace of God, great king of Dacheim and Sumatra for us and our heirs and successors do promise by our princely word instead of an oath inviolably to maintain and preserve and will cause to be inviolably kept, preserved and maintained from time to time and at all times hereafter, and for the more ratification we command all our captains, judges, customers, governors and servants.....that they be obeyed in all points accordingly as long as the Queen of England of her part shall duly keep and observe this league and holy peace expressed in this privilege.....’

⁶⁵ *The voyages of Sir Lancaster*, xxvii.

him that they paid only 4 *real* the hundred (weight), in contrast to the 20 *real* he had to pay for the same quantity. The *Zeeland* expedition paid only 8 *real* for a *bahar*.

The Acehnese merchants were evidently pursuing their own interests in spite of the special relationship with the English or perhaps because of it. It appeared to Lancaster that the Privilege had merely symbolic value and did not lead to a profitable trade. Seeing no prospects he decided to leave Aceh taking all merchants with him. Before his departure from Aceh Sultan Alau'd-din asked him if he could rent the pinnace for an expedition to Pedir, to castigate pirates who were molesting his subjects. He paid Lancaster '100 marks in gold for every person employed'. Lancaster offered him the assistance of 15 men. When one of them fell ill and could not serve, he returned 100 marks to the king who refused to accept it, saying that what he had given, he would not take again.

He sent Queen Elizabeth several gifts, such as a ring set with rubies, two beautiful garments embroidered with gold, placed in a purple box of Chinese porcelain.

His high esteem for the English is demonstrated by the remarkable farewell he took of Lancaster.

'The king said unto him: 'Have you the Psalms of David extant among you?

The general answered: Yea, and wee sing them daily. Then said the King: I and the rest of these nobles about me will sing a psalme to God for your prosperitie; and so they did, very solemnly. And after it was ended, the king said: I would heare you sing another psalme, although in your owne language. So, there being in the company some twelve of us, we sung another psalme'.⁶⁶

2. 1. 10 The visit of the French in 1602

Sultan Alau'd-din could rightly pride himself on the number of fleets from Europe who called at his port seeking his favours. A small French fleet from St. Malo arrived on 24 July 1602, in the wake of the English who arrived a month earlier. One of the earliest French expeditions

⁶⁶ *The voyages of Sir James Lancaster*, 112.

set out in 1529 from Dieppe to China ended in disaster after it made landfall in the west coast port of Tiku where the crew was killed by the local people.⁶⁷

François Martin, head merchant of the 1602 expedition, left a rather imaginative account of life in Aceh, but gives hardly any details of the procedures to procure pepper.⁶⁸

Sultan Alau'd-din spent three hours with the commander of the fleet Monsieur de la Bardelière who honoured him with fine crystal glassware and a silver cup and bowl. Again we observe that Alau'd-din showed particular interest in the political affairs and local customs of a European state.

‘The sultan gave him fifty crowns in small pieces which is the money of that land and had him sent back on an elephant, promising him free use of all commodities within his kingdom. From that day some of our sailors slept on land, finding for sale there poultry and *arak* which is their drink made from sugar cane, rice and coconut, distilled in earthenware stills. This drink is as strong as brandy....’⁶⁹

According to Martin the sultan promised him ‘free use’ of all his commodities (did he mean exemption of dues?). It is almost tantalizing to see in this gesture an arrangement with the *orangkaya* to make it look attractive to draw foreigners to trade in his port and once it came to an official contract, to disregard the promise. Or was it just an alluring light-heartedness which seemed part of Alau'd-din's nature ?

The expedition remained in Aceh until October where it traded without difficulties, before it set sail to the port of Tiku, - a trip which took fifteen days - where they were able to procure a shipload of pepper.

⁶⁷ Ch. Schefer (ed.), *Le Discours de la navigation de Jean et Raoul Parmentier de Dieppe* (Paris : Ernest Leroux, 1883).

For more on this expedition see: Denys Lombard, *Le sultanat d'Atjéh au temps d'Iskandar Muda, 1607-1636*, (Paris : Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1967), 25.

⁶⁸ François Martin, *Description du premier voyage fait aux Indes Orientales par les françois en l'an 1603* (Paris: Laurens Sonnius, 1604).

I have drawn from Reid (ed.), *Witnesses to Sumatra A Traveller's Anthology*, 55 –63.

Martin's observations of Aceh's social scene is a unique addition to the accounts of John Davis and Frederick de Houtman and James Lancaster. Reid mentions that some historians dismiss him as inaccurate because of his tendency ‘to run the specifics of Aceh with the generalities of ‘the Indies’ (55).

⁶⁹ A Reid.(ed.), *Witnesses to Sumatra*, 56.

2. 1. 11 Accord between Aceh and the VOC in 1607

The Dutch United East India Company (VOC), into which the early companies merged, was founded in March 1602 under the Charter of the States General of the United Republic of the Netherlands. The formation out of former regional companies was with the objective to consolidate Dutch commercial interest in Asia. The board of directors resided in Amsterdam and consisted of seventeen members, who were known as the *Heeren Zeventien* (Gentlemen XVII), chosen from among the participating companies.

The States General authorized the company to appoint governors, to make treaties with local rulers, dispatch military forces, build forts and wage wars, which gave it the character of a state in a state. The monopoly to trade was for twenty-one years.

In 1605 an impressive VOC fleet consisting of eleven ships under the command of Cornelis Matelieff de Jonge was dispatched to the Malacca Straits on a dual purpose mission: to establish a *rendez-vous* for Dutch ships and to capture Malacca from the Portuguese.

Matelieff discussed with the sultan of Johor, Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah, namesake of the Acehnese ruler a combined strike on Malacca and the construction of a fort on a strategic site in the Straits area. They concluded a treaty in June 1606 which gave the VOC the right to establish a *rendez-vous*, on the condition that Malacca would be captured from the hands of the Portuguese and given to Johor.⁷⁰ Already in 1603 admiral Jacob van Heemskerck visited Johor and established friendly relations with the sultan and his brother Raja Bongsu after he intercepted a Portuguese galleon.

Malacca was heavily injured by Matelieff, but not captured. The treaty became redundant and was replaced by a new one following September. This stipulated that the VOC only received the right to maintain a factory in Johor. It is needless to say that it was a great disappointment for the Dutch who frantically hoped to obtain a foothold in the Straits to monitor Portuguese shipping. Yet, it was a major concession by the Johor ruler, because it would have amounted to a clear provocation of his Portuguese neighbours in Malacca.

Matelieff's vice admiral Olivier de Vivere went to Aceh to discuss with the new sultan Ali Ri'ayat (Mughayat) Shah the conditions for a Dutch *rendez-vous*. Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah had abdicated in 1604 in favour of his son - the crown prince who rode in the procession with Cornelis de Houtman in 1599 - and died shortly afterwards. Rivalry for the throne between him and his brother, the governor of Pedir, marked his succession which was

⁷⁰De Jonge, *De Opkomst*, vol. III, 214 and 217.

tainted with bloodshed and came in the midst of a cataclysm resulting from prolonged drought and famine that took the lives of a huge number of Acehnese.

De Vivere negotiated a very favourable 'Accord' for the VOC on 17 January 1607 with Sultan Ali Ri'ayat Shah. The treaty was based on a strategic partnership against the Iberians and gave the VOC the right to establish a *rendez-vous* and jurisdiction over its citizens on Aceh's soil in return for military assistance. Of interest is article 7 which stipulates 'Those who trespass against religious ethics fall under the penal code of their own government'. This is an example of limited jurisdiction and perhaps the earliest acquired Dutch jurisdiction outside the United Republic.⁷¹

Probing into the motives of Ali Ri'ayat Shah to grant the VOC these far reaching privileges in return for military assistance is important to obtain a picture of the conditions prevailing in Aceh. The critical situation in Aceh was unprecedented; rebellion, droughts and famine had weakened Aceh's strong position and the Portuguese could not be deterred without the help of a powerful ally. The Portuguese who set out from Goa in 1606 to attack Aceh, took advantage of the dire situation to castigate Aceh for closing friendships with the northern Europeans. They aborted their landing efforts to succour Malacca from the siege by Matelieff and were confronted by the Dutch fleet coming to Aceh's help. In the ensuing battle the Portuguese were heavily injured and lost a large number of ships and men.

The strategic alliance Ali Ri'ayat Shah closed with the Dutch cannot be regarded as a filial piety for a father who established friendship with the Prince of Nassau. Ali Ri'ayat Shah was compelled to follow his own way. As a prince he had witnessed Portuguese presence and their meddling in Aceh's affairs. The military power the Dutch represented and their proven willingness to come to Aceh's help was essential to withstand future perils. The important provision of the treaty concerned Dutch military assistance against the Iberians. As Article 10 stipulates, the Dutch were committed to assist Aceh against the Portuguese and the Spaniards. Both parties were exempted from assisting in a war with other nations, except in circumstances when they were attacked. It was unlawful to make peace with the king of Spain (Iberians), without mutual consent. The treaty officially established an equal partnership relation based on the exchange of services. The character of the first contract with De Houtman was distinctly the same.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, 223;

Also: *Corpus Diplomaticum*, vol. I., 48.

Forced by the unprecedented circumstances and a Portuguese assault in 1606 Ali Ri'ayat Shah consented to a Dutch *rendez-vous* in his domain and the subsequent establishment of a Dutch colony. For some insight into the Dutch political configuration, it is worthy to note that the Accord was concluded in the name of the States General, the highest political body of the United Republic. Even though the Prince of Nassau was fundamentally involved in the contacts with the Asian rulers, he was no party in its passing; his name is not mentioned in the document.⁷² By sheer contrast, article 4 speaks of the need for other nations (including Dutch private traders) to be in the possession of *het bescheydt van onsen Koningh* 'the license of our king'. Failure to produce this document would lead to repercussions, legal proceedings and ultimately war.⁷³

Apart from revealing Dutch ambivalence with their own type of government, article 4 underlines Dutch aim to monopolise the pepper trade. To oblige traders to carry a permit from their Prince, resounds the system maintained by the Portuguese, which required from ships passing through their 'sphere of influence' to be in the possession of a *cartaz*, a document of authorization. Taxes were levied for cargo on which the Portuguese claimed monopoly. The Dutch were unambiguously endeavouring to establish their own sphere of influence in the Straits.

Shortly after the Accord was signed, Sultan Ali Ri'ayat Shah died. His short rule has hardly received attention from scholars. He is portrayed by William Marsden as follows:

'the new king, who took the name of Ali Maghayat Syah, proved himself, from indolence or want of capacity, unfit to reign. Neglecting affairs of state, always surrounded by women'. 'Those who put the crown on his head were not better requited, particularly the *maharadja*, or governor of the castle'.⁷⁴ *Litera scripta manet!* This picture of the sultan as an indolent man is certainly at odds with the turbulence that preceded his installation and attendant horrors of bloodshed, drought and famine, which left him little room for a life of leisure and pleasure.

⁷² It was a well known fact that the Prince of (Orange)Nassau was often called upon to act as sovereign. Sir John Chardin, *Travels in Persia 1673-1677* (New York: Dover Publications, 1988), 79 'They are accustomed throughout the East to the Yoke of one Man, whose Caprice is a sovereign Law, and who does and undoes as he himself pleases, without either reason or sense. The Hollanders, that they may not offend these manners, speak always of their country as of a monarchy after the way of other countries.'

⁷³ De Jonge, *De opkomst*, vol. III, 223 :

'Sall ook Syne Majesteyt niet toelaten datter eenige Hollanders, Europische volckeren offte naekomelingen in eenige van zyne landen sullen mogen handelen offte sullen bescheydt van onsen Koningh moeten brengen ende hetzelve niet hebbende sullen als vyanden gehouden en vervolgt worden'.

⁷⁴ W. Marsden, *The History of Sumatra* (London: Longman, 1811), 437 .

He had to cope with a Portuguese invasion in 1606. The *Bustan as-Salatin* tells us only that his rule coincided with a climatic calamity which caused a devastating famine and the death of great numbers of people. The resident Dutch mention that the drought lasted for about three years.

2. 1. 12 Conclusion

The initiatives of the merchants from Malacca in 1593 to establish trade with Aceh was a case of *realpolitik*. The continuing wars with Aceh were detrimental to their trading business and existence. They preferred profitable trade above relentless, destructive wars.

For Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah it was advantageous to draw Malacca's loyalty away from Johor showing that he also understood *realpolitik*. The political climate in the Straits was stable during the period of trade relations with Malacca which lasted for almost a decade until about 1602. The arrival of the first Dutch expedition under Cornelis de Houtman shook the political balance; Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah immediately seized the opportunity to ask De Houtman's assistance for an attack on Johor in return for a shipload of pepper. The Portuguese intervened to abort the war expedition to Johor.

In 1602 the political configuration was in the process of transformation when Aceh discussed with Siam, Pegu and Patani the possibilities of a pact to overthrow the Portuguese authority in Malacca.

Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah showed an inclination to detach himself as much as possible from the business of trade, leaving it to his *shahbandar*. It was a sure way to guarantee the loyalty of the *orangkaya*. The *orangkaya* put their heels down if the price and conditions went against their own and Aceh's interest. Although the evidence is meagre, it supports an understanding of the power of the *orangkaya* as almost equivalent to that enjoyed by the ruler. The assistance of De Houtman in exchange for a shipload of pepper, shows the beginning of a system of equal partnerships.

Alau'd-din's decision to send a mission to the United Republic was a mature way to make public that he engaged in relations with an important and independent European state. It was the start of a strategic partnership with the Dutch and strengthened the new course he was setting out.

England's victory over the Spanish armada was the overriding motif for Sultan Alau'd-din to grant the English the Privilege. The founding of the English-Turkey company in 1579 was a strategic step of the English to obtain a prominent place in the East India trade. The close ties between Aceh and Turkey since the second half of the sixteenth century certainly inspired Alau'd-din to cherish relations with the English.

Sultan Ali Ri'ayat (Mughayat) Shah recognized that the imminent threat to Aceh's sovereignty was not Johor but Malacca. He acknowledged the necessity of having a strong European ally to secure Aceh's safety against the Portuguese who supported Johor in its bid over Aru and invaded his country in 1606. A strategic alliance with the Dutch was therefore essential. The Accord of 1607 gave the Dutch the right to establish a *rendez-vous* within Aceh's territory and limited jurisdiction over their citizens. The English Privilege of 1602 did not make Aceh and England strategic partners. The English and the Dutch both acquired jurisdiction within Aceh's domain. Competition between them could lead to insurmountable problems for Aceh if they confronted each other in pursuing their ambitions.



The unveiling by his Royal Highness Prince Bernhard on October 24, 1978 of the marble plaque in memory of Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah's ambassador Abdul Hamid, who died during his visit to the United Republic of the Netherlands in 1602 and was buried in the Oude Kerk in Middelburg.

Part Two

CHAPTER II

CHALLENGES AND CHOICES: A LITMUS TEST

‘The worms may master the tallest tree, and the Dutchman’s glass sees far and knows
That seeming-great though our princes be,
They are stately ships that some dinghy tows.’ (translated from Malay by R. J. Wilkinson)

2. 2. 1 Centralization of the trade

When the grandson of Sultan Alau’-din Ri’ayat Syah, known to us as Iskandar Muda was installed on the throne in 1607, he made centralization of the trade one of his priorities. It is safe to assert that the years of droughts leading to unprecedented famine, internal instability and a Portuguese invasion in 1606 gave impetus to this new strategy. The Portuguese vigorously tried to botch Aceh’s trade with the northern Europeans. When they failed in their efforts, they set out in 1606 to invade Aceh.

Iskandar Muda’s enthronement was made possible by his proven dexterity to lead the troops against the invading Portuguese. When Sultan Ali Ri’ayat Shah suddenly died in 1607, the prince was installed as his successor, before his uncle, the governor of Pedir, arrived to claim the throne. He liquidated the throne pretender and with him a large number of *orangkaya* to prevent their rebellion. His grandfather and uncle also resorted to the same strategy.

Raised at his grandfather’s court the prince was no stranger to politics and intrigues. He had witnessed the successive European expeditions arriving in Aceh, learned about their objectives and their vigorous efforts to obtain trade contracts and monopolies, which motivated him to start centralizing the trade. He devised ways to regulate the trade, ordering the officials of the *Balai Besar*, the Public Hall to make certified copies of his edicts.

Before I set out to explore the relations between Iskandar Muda and the European merchants, and his relations with the ports within Aceh’s realm such as Tiku and Priaman, it is relevant to know that in 1602 Sultan Alau’-din Ri’ayat Shah sent his *firman* to the port of Tiku to announce that admiral Lancaster and captain Middleton of the first English expedition to

Aceh were under his protection and received his letter of authority to trade.¹ Under Iskandar Muda the foreign merchants needed a license to trade in the ports, which had to be negotiated. Within the concept of a centre-periphery hierarchy, the centre usually has high ranks on various capability attributes especially economic and military capabilities.² Iskandar Muda was willing to use the attributes of power such as Aceh's strong navy and land army to establish his control over the ports.

2. 2. 2 Annulment of the Privilege of 1602 and the Accord of 1607

In 1608, the Dutch and English returned to Aceh after years of absence. The destructive droughts and famine, the political instability and peril between 1603 and 1607 was the reason why they halted their visits to Aceh. Dutch merchants were still residing in the port, looking after their factory, but the English who came under Lancaster, packed and left in 1602 despite the fact that they were in the possession of the Privilege.

With an audacious prince on the throne, who had shown prowess in withstanding a Portuguese invasion, the northern Europeans were eager to implement the Privilege of 1602 and the Accord of 1607.

In 1608 a Dutch fleet commanded by Pieter Willemszoon Verhoeven (Verhoeff) accidentally anchored in the Bay of Aceh. It was on a special mission to the Malacca Straits and forced by bad weather to shelter among the islets in the bay. This was no ordinary commercial fleet, but one with a military mission concerning the capture of Malacca.³ Verhoeven was instructed by the Board of Directors of the VOC, the Gentlemen XVII, to include the king of Aceh and the rulers of the neighbouring ports in any military strategy regarding the siege of Malacca.

Verhoeven was chiefly directing his attention to Johor and in a hurry to discuss with its ruler, Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah, arrangements for the siege. At that time it was already clear

¹ Published by Rev. W.G. Sheallabear, (JSBRAS, 1898), 113, 121-122.

² 'Generally a *firman* was a royal order or grant, usually given for special objects, as to a traveller to insure him protection and assistance' Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 2nd ed. Cambridge University Press, 2002), 260-261.

³ John Galtung has written on structures in relations between core and periphery states, between developed and developing nations and between East-West relations. *The True Worlds: A Transnational Perspective* (New York: Free Press, 1980).

³ De Jonge, *De Opkomst*, vol. III, 68: 'Secret Instruction' for admiral Verhoeff.

that Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah had to be encouraged to participate in the siege for he was not firm in his stance against his Portuguese neighbours. Another pressing point of discussion was the construction of a Dutch fort in the Straits. It was discussed and negotiated with the sultan by admiral Matelieff and led to the agreements of June and September 1606 between Johor and the VOC.

Once in Aceh, Verhoeven decided to delegate the chief merchants Le Fieff, Hertsing and Segers to pay their respects to the new sultan and to 'learn more about the situation in the Indies.' They presented him with an exquisite piece of red cloth, several bundles of red coral and a few guns. The delegates were impressed by the display of wealth at the palace, the copious banquet served in their honour and the entertainment with cockfights and dances.⁴ The next morning Sultan Iskandar Muda sent for the admiral, but Verhoeven had secretly gone ashore on a brief inspection of the area and sent several captains to the palace. The just installed sultan was dressed to impress his prominent visitor, adorned with myriads of diamonds and various precious gems and surrounded by women bodyguards and eunuchs, some thirteen hundred armed soldiers and a large number of *orangkaya*. He was dumbfounded that his 'confederate' had not come to greet him.⁵ The captains told him that the admiral needed to remain on board to foil a Portuguese attack on their ships. Quite significant at this stage is Iskandar Muda's use of the word 'confederate', for he denied the existence of the 'Accord' of 1607 which made Aceh and the Dutch official allies against the Iberians. The annulment was reported to Verhoeven by the resident merchant.⁶ Was Iskandar Muda indeed unaware of the existence of a treaty, when he could have known what was discussed between Olivier de Vivere and his predecessor Sultan Ali Ri'ayat Shah, or was he starting on a new course in which there was no place for special privileges, such as the establishment of a *rendez-vous* and foreign limited jurisdiction in his domain?

⁴ M. E. van Opstall, *De reis van de vloot van Pieter Willemsz. Verhoeff naar Azië 1607-1612* (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972). The journal of the visit to Aceh is included on pages 239-241. The author also points to a secret instruction: 'The 'Memory' for Verhoeff is above suspicion, and speaks of trade and related matters, while the tone set in the secret instruction is quite aggressive and shows how the VOC thinks of pursuing its objectives in Asia by destroying the Iberian's fleets (20-21).

⁵ *ibid.*, 239.

Before the first governor-general of the Indies took his function in 1610, the admirals functioned as the highest Dutch officials. The first governor-general was Pieter Both who served from 1610 to 1614.

⁶ NA VOC 1.04.02 : 1055 'Originele missieve Aelbrecht Willemsz. Aan Pieter Willemsz. Verhoeff', (1608).

It is quite remarkable that, at this crucial moment in the relationship, Verhoeven did not present himself at the palace to imbue the sultan with the importance of having a strategic partnership as laid down in the treaty, especially in view of his military mission to the Straits. By denying or annulling the treaty it is not as if he did not perceive the importance of having northern Europeans residing in his port, for he granted permission for the stationing of two merchants to assist the resident merchant with the business. Aceh's position as an important trade centre had weakened after the years of internal struggle and persistent droughts and the presence of foreign traders in the port was essential to re-strengthen this position.

Unconcerned, as it seems, with the sudden void because of the annulment of the Accord of 1607, Verhoeven proceeded to Johor to make arrangements with its ruler Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah for an attack on Malacca. He was informed of a pending armistice between Spain and the United Republic, but adamant to accomplish his mission to capture Malacca.

Willem Janszoon and Arent Martenszoon arrived in Aceh from Bantam in 1609, close at the heels of Verhoeven, to discuss with Sultan Iskandar Muda the implementation of the Accord of 1607.⁷ He received them cordially, but he vehemently denied the existence of a treaty.⁸ The delegates were astounded by his blunt denial which they considered a deception. Quite odd is the fact that at the same time, they handed him a letter from Prince Maurice of Nassau in which the prince informed the sultan of the pending armistice between the United Republic and Spain. An armistice with Spain is a demonstration of the fact that the Dutch did not abide by the stipulations regarding peace with the Iberians laid down by the Accord of 1607, the implementation of which the delegates came to request.

One may surmise that the news of a pending armistice between the Dutch and Spain came as a bolt from the blue to Iskandar Muda. It made it more confusing since Verhoeven was on his way to attack the Portuguese in Malacca. He courteously replied to Prince Maurice that he understood his reasons for a truce with Spain, yet he stoutly declared that the Portuguese were the enemies of Islam and that he would continue with the task of his forefathers to pursue them in eternity, no matter what the prince decided.⁹ I refer to the letter of his grandfather

⁷ VOC 1.04.02: 1055 'Memorie voor Willem Jansen gaende van Bantam nae Atchin ende Custe van Coromandel'.

⁸ P.A. Leupe, "VOC relations with Aceh" (Leiden: KITLV Neg. 219/IH164).

⁹ *Translaet van de brief van de Sultan van Atchin (1610) registered as NA: VOC 1.04.02, 11243. See Annex. Published in Atchin's Verheffing, 74-75.*

Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah to Queen Elizabeth, in which he used words of similar purport.

The implications of this combination of religious obligation and political control, which played such a major role in Iskandar Muda's reign, shall be explored further in the following chapters.

Can we regard Iskandar Muda's denial of the treaty, as his response to Dutch deception, which is peace with Spain? The chronology of the talks shows that he was informed of the pending armistice after he denied the existence of a treaty between Aceh and the Dutch.

Iskandar Muda had great doubts about granting the Dutch such far reaching privileges, provided by the treaty, like the establishing of a colony of Dutch families with limited jurisdiction. Aceh's friendship with the Dutch and English had provoked a Portuguese invasion in 1606 and Aceh could become the scene of inter-European rivalry.

The invalidation of the Accord made the constituent component of Dutch military assistance redundant. That was the consequence Iskandar Muda had to accept. Noteworthy is that along the lines of communication between the Dutch and his predecessors, the term 'brothers' was coined and it acquired a meaningful connotation in the ongoing relationship. It presented Iskandar Muda an opening out of the conundrum, hoping that a strategic partnership would sustain, even when the treaty was redundant. In their shaky relationship both he and the Dutch would call for assistance by steadfastly referring to their 'brotherly' bond.

I earlier put in plain words why I think that the notion of the 'inviolability' of agreements could hardly sustain. Dynastic squabbling, European encroachment and interest fundamentally created a politically susceptible milieu which did not allow for 'eternal' commitments and favours. Foreign jurisdiction within Aceh was detrimental to Aceh's political integrity. A further consideration is that no ruler could downplay the important role of the *orangkaya* in Aceh's development and trade, as much as he would like to deny their contribution. Their advice could not be totally ignored nor their interests put at risk, if he wanted to prevent their rebellion. Granting trade privileges and the concomitant freedoms to foreigners worked unfavourably for the Acehense *orangkaya*.

With the Accord expunged and the prospect of a *rendez-vous* in Aceh gone¹⁰, the Dutch harassed the English *Union* in Aceh's harbour, obviously resentful that the English were in the possession of the Privilege granted them by Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah in 1602. Their action was an offence to Aceh's territorial integrity. It was a case of *déjà-vu* of a situation in 1600 when Paulus van Caerden took revenge and robbed pepper and other goods for Aceh from several Muslim ships. He too took arbitrary action in Aceh's territorial waters. Despite the fact that Dutch aggression was an insult to Iskandar Muda, he did not resort to punitive measures, probably realizing that the Dutch represented a power factor which he could not deny. His own success as commander of his uncle's troops in repelling the Portuguese in 1606 owed much to admiral Matelieff de Jonge's thoroughness to confront the Portuguese fleet .

Even with the Privilege of 1602 in his pocket, a disillusioned Lancaster left Aceh and bought pepper in the port of Tiku where the pepper was far cheaper than in Aceh itself. He traded there with the *firman* of Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah.

The new, stringent regulations of Iskandar Muda made it difficult to procure pepper in Tiku and Priaman without a royal license. It was the very reason why the *Union* called at Aceh in 1609 to request Iskandar Muda to observe the Privilege of 1602. To their utter dismay he turned down their request and no longer even allowed them to run an office in Tiku; the Privilege had ceased to exist.¹¹

Iskandar Muda realized that the northern Europeans were his best paying clients, a concrete reason not to drive them away from Aceh; Bantam and Jamby were rival pepper ports and very attractive to them.

Although rivalry with the Portuguese in Malacca was a major consideration for the Dutch to hold on to friendship with Malacca's nemesis, the sultan of Aceh, the monopoly of the pepper trade was their principal aim. This is absolutely clear from the stipulations in the Accord of

¹⁰De Jonge is convinced that if the Accord of 1607 was observed, Aceh and not Batavia would have been the seat of Dutch authority in the East. At the beginning of their explorations in the archipelago, the Dutch considered the Straits of Malacca of major importance to establish a *rendez-vous* for their shipping. *De Opkomst*, vol. III, 51-52.

¹¹ *Letters received* vol. I, 244 :

'It is true that the Union called at Achin in 1609 and was well received, despite the efforts of the Dutch to prevent her from trading there. The real cause, however, of the reopening of relations with Achin four years later, was the success of its monarch (grandson of the one with whom Lancaster had treated) in extending his power over Tiku and the neighbouring pepper ports, and his adoption of a policy of excluding foreigners from those places and forcing them to confine their trade to Achin itself.'

1607 in which they oblige traders to carry the written permit of their 'sovereign', thus establishing their own sphere of influence.

A compelling reason for the English to come back to Aceh was the development of their trading business in India, which meant that they were inclined to stay in the race for trade contracts. Indian *callycoe*, a type of textile, was in strong demand in the Sumatran ports where it could be bartered for pepper and other commodities. Another important reason was the protracted presence of the Dutch in Aceh, which rendered their own presence there essential. If the 'gadfly theory' applies, it was evidently so in Sumatra where the English followed the Dutch.

Competition between the Dutch and English was growing, in spite of the friendly relations during the first years in the archipelago. A letter from Samuel Bradshaw of 12 February 1612 who visited Aceh, to the director of the EIC office in Bantam sheds light on the Dutch-English encounters and competition :

'Whereupon having kept the coast four days and sometime in danger it was resolved by the best experienced of our ship, to shape our course for Achen in hope to meet with some Guzerats with whom we might truck away our English commodities, and about 17th June we arrived there, and within 7 days had admittance to the King by means of our presents *which* we were enforced to bestow, the Hollanders seeking to debar our trade, but the more they sought the less they prevailed in what they sought, 'by gifts they sought to prevent us, but by gifts we obtained.' 'Although my doings fall out therein a greater charge to the Company than I expect, yet I thought it not fit in a matter so important to be outborne for small presents; in sum they did us all (the) despite they could, their aspiring minds being to admit no traders in the Indies but themselves.'¹²

'Upon the 28th of June we went to the Court with our King's letter and for a gift we carried one piece of ordnance, two barrels of powder, twelve fowling-pieces, ten swordblades and six fine baftas; these things were conveyed in great state, the letter on an elephant with three canopies over it and before us about half a score trumpeters.'¹³

Both the English and the Dutch fervently tried to obtain trade contracts and sole rights by presenting valuable gifts to the sultan. Iskandar Muda gloried over their competition, because

¹² *ibid.*, 251 (letter dated 12 February 1612).

¹³ *Letters Received.*, vol. III, 225.

they were willing to lavish him with what he asked: money, artillery and all kinds of presents which he craved, like dogs and strange outfits, to obtain sole rights. These presents came on top of the official harbour dues and the fees, which they paid in accordance with the regulations for the port of Aceh.¹⁴

The harbour regulations stipulate that the merchants first report at the Custom House to secure a stamped permit to stay in the port; they pay taxes according to their nationality, in Indian textiles. Minor dues are paid to all functionaries working in the harbour office and the workmen on board the vessels. The regulations laid the foundation for the emoluments of the harbour officials. In other ports similar systems seem to have existed.¹⁵

2. 2. 3 An English *Orangkaya*: Thomas Best in Aceh

General Thomas Best was appointed by the English East India Company to lead an expedition to the East in 1612 to find a market for iron and to persuade the sultan of Aceh to reinstate the Privilege of 1602. When he arrived in Aceh in 1613, Iskandar Muda had a tight grip on the trade of the west coast and he stood out as the most powerful ruler in the Straits area, having subdued successively Deli and Aru, two ports on the Sumatran east which were under the influence of Aceh's enemy Johor, around 1611 and 1612. His armada had just come back from a victorious expedition to Johor where it captured members of the royal family and 22 Dutchmen who came to the sultan's assistance against the invading Acehnese.¹⁶

The account of the voyage mentions that upon arrival of the fleet in the port, a palace eunuch came on board with the king's *chapp*¹⁷ for landing and some victuals in return for the gifts of two muskets the general had sent to the king, 'for the custome is at landinge to present the

¹⁴ G. W. J. Drewes and P. Voorhoeve (eds.), *Adat Atjèh*, (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1958).

The *Adat Atjèh* lays down the enumeration of the gifts for the sultan (pp. 116-117). It also enlists the gifts for the harbour officials. Gifts for the lower officials are enumerated under the heading *adat air- air*, referring to rose-water or its equivalent in cash.

When the sultan received a letter conveyed by a foreign envoy, he presented them with garments in return: Muslims were given imported vestments; Europeans and other non-Muslims were given Acehnese clothes and articles.

¹⁵ The *Undang Undang Melaka* in which the trade in the port of pre-Portuguese Malacca was regulated, probably served as an example for Aceh's trade regulations.

¹⁶ The expeditions to Johor are closely examined in Part Three of the study.

¹⁷ The *chapp* (*cap*) was the royal permit. It was the seal of the sultan. W. Marsden describes the *chapp* as a flat silver box, 6 to 8 inches long holding the written permission of the king. See: *A history of Sumatra*, 127.

king with some small thinge and he requiteth it by several dishes of meate.¹⁸ There is no mention of the measuring of the ships and the taking of numbers of crew and artillery, as was the case when the first fleets arrived during the reign of Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah. It may show a maturing way of dealing with the arriving northern Europeans.

The account sketches the palace etiquette:

‘This daie our kinges letter was sent for by the King of Achin, with an ellofant and a share (chair) of statt (state) in the forme of a casle (howdah) upon his back. After wentt the general to the Courtt, where he presented the kinge with a rich present from our Kinge: and the King likewise give unto our General a vest, with mr. Moore and mr. Oliver. He entertained us with fightinge of ellofants, beffeloes, and great rames; and afterwards was provided a great banquet, with many dishes and great store of arack. The banquet was served in dishes of pure gold and silver. They brought in tow (two) chests of gould, which they do use to keep their beetle (bettle nut) of which they use to eatt of very much. Great curtesye by the King was offered, and that the country was att our command; but the Generall as yet nott altogether satisfied, for that he hopeth of furder commerce with the King, and at large to deliver his mynd unto him.’¹⁹

Just like his grandfather in 1602, Iskandar Muda ceremoniously declared that his country was ‘at their command’. The problem however was that such a declaration raised expectations, which were not usually met. When it came to issuing Thomas Best a license, Iskandar Muda prolonged the negotiations with the intention to draw extra gifts or money. He turned down Best’s request to trade duty free as was provided by the Privilege of 1602.

Best had captured a Portuguese vessel from Malacca sailing to Aceh, which carried an envoy who came to solicit diplomatic relations with the sultan, the victorious conqueror of Malacca’s neighbour and ally Johor (1613). Iskandar Muda requested from Best to hand him over the envoy, the ship and the goods therein, which he eventually did with much apprehension. Iskandar Muda showed him his appreciation by bestowing on him the title of *orangkaya puteh*.²⁰

¹⁸ William Foster (ed.), *The voyage of Thomas Best to the East Indies 1612-14*, (London: Hakluyt Society, 1934), 158, 159.

¹⁹ *ibid*, 158.

²⁰ *ibid*, 160.

The 12th of May we took a Portingal barque, not far from this road, wherein came an ambassador from Malacca, but at the earnest request of the King, our General released her, for which he did him much honour, and give him the title of *Orankaya Pute*, which is white or clear hearted lord.’

Much to Best's chagrin, the handing over of the Portuguese envoy and the barge did not result in the restoration of the Privilege, neither did Iskandar Muda quicken the procedures. Although Best was promised a license to trade in Priaman, it still took several months and a train of gifts, before the permit was finally issued and it was valid for a limited period of only three months, which left the merchants little time to procure the esteemed amounts. Sailing depended on the monsoon winds, and an early departure from the port of Priaman would render the trade unprofitable.

The physical conditions of the sailing area on the west coast were known to be hazardous, while the climatic conditions proved detrimental to the health of the Europeans.²¹

Best had hoped to receive the royal *firman* to trade in the west coast ports, which would be in compliance with the Privilege. The arduous negotiation procedures exasperated the general (his title according to the documents), who became very annoyed by Iskandar Muda's insatiability. But it did not stop him from visiting the palace to engage with the sultan in conversations on a range of matters. He was a welcome guest at the palace.

The Acehne sultans had a keen interest in European affairs and both Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah and Iskandar Muda loved the discourse. Thomas Best was also invited to the royal baths where he and the sultan spent several hours sitting in the refreshing water where they were served a full banquet which they washed away with lots of *arak*.

Despite his closeness to Iskandar Muda, Best was unable to effect the release of several Gujerati merchants, who were friends of the English authorities in Surat. They were captured by the Acehne for trading in the port of Perak, well-known for its tin. Aceh jealously controlled the trade of Perak. Even after he offered Iskandar Muda two of the best pieces of artillery from his ship the *Dragon* for their release, he refused to let them go. He had confiscated their junk, which was worth hundred thousand crowns, 'and made all its people slaves.' The longstanding good relations between Aceh and Gujerat did not stop Iskandar Muda to decree a ban on Gujerati shipping and trading in Aceh which indubitably affected the relationship with the Moghul emperor who assumed sovereignty over Gujerat. This stringent

'And further to acknowledge his thankfulness to me, sould me his bengiamin at myne pryce, his love and much esteeme of me; willinge me to aske and require whatsoever I woulde of him. I required only his letters of favoure unto Pryaman; which he promised'.

²¹ *ibid.*, 69: 'Robert Portman dyed. This day I was under saile, but could not gett out. Here in this roade I stayed 11 weeks, and bought 120 or 115 tonnes of pepper, and burried of our men 25, all which either dyed or contracted their deaths at Passaman and not at Teccoe. And certeynely had wee not attempted tradinge at Passaman, they had beene, either all or the greatest parte of them, now lyvinge. Therefore I doe wish all our nation never to attempt the sendinge of our men to passaman; for so contagious is there the ayre, and the water so evill, that (it) is impossible for a Christian to live'.

measure caused a shortage of much appreciated Gujerati textiles in Aceh. The English stepped into this void and established a lucrative business of various kinds of Indian textiles in Aceh. A very critical account of the procedures in Aceh is by Ralph Croft, an assistant of Thomas Best:

‘When Best tried to free the Guserats, offering the King a faire peece of ordinance of the Dragon for the libertie of four of the chief of them, the King refused to do it under a great some of money. Whereupon our General took leave, haveinge found him always reddie to promisse much and in the end to performe little. But his bassenes has not onelie bene evident to his owne subjectes butt also unto us, nott performinge whatt formerlie he had promised unto our General. He diverse tymes shewed us his glorie, but never his loialltie nor fidellitie; and therefore we will leave him to that infidellitie he doth professe’²².

‘Many nations have trad for this illand, more for the commodities yt affordes then the affabilitie of the people; for they are inhumayne and basse, and much unworthy to inhabite so sweet a countree.’²³ This portrayal of Iskandar Muda by Europeans merchants, shows him as an untrustworthy, resentful and impulsive man, unabashedly demanding.

As a gift of friendship Iskandar Muda sent king James I an Acehnese dagger, a lance, several pieces of fine muslin and four camphor dishes.

Thomas Best’s accomplishments in Aceh were moderate, but he boasted of his successes, proud to be called *orangkaya puteh* and honoured that he was assigned a personal assistant, one of the former envoys to Holland.

He sold Iskandar Muda 168 *bahar* of iron at 5 *tael* per *bahar* and bought 23 *bahar* of benzoin for which he offered him 25 *tael* the *bahar* and reckoned that this was a very good deal, because the sultan first demanded 35 *tael* for a *bahar*.²⁴ He self-importantly mentions that he purchased the benzoin ‘at myne price’. The Board of Directors in London was not at all content with his opulent style and performance. Some members even accused him of squandering by pursuing his own gains and advancing his own business, calling it damaging for the company. For many years the Board dreaded to employ him on another assignment.²⁵

²² *The voyage*, 174.

²³ *ibid*, 176.

²⁴ *ibid.*, 53: ‘Quality of money and weightes at Achen’: ‘Yowe have a great weight called a bahar, which doth conteyne 385 ll. English. Yowe have also a small weight called cattee (Malay *kati*, varying from one to two pounds), which makes 2 ll. English. Yowe have gould, ther coyned, called masses.’ (John Davis noted in 1602 that sixteen of these made a gold *tael*, ‘an imaginary coin.’)

²⁵ *ibid.*, ‘Court Minutes of 24 October 1615’ (vol. III, p. 523), 290:

2. 2. 4 Continuing English efforts for trading rights

Captain William Keeling, who was since many years in the East and familiar with the area, set sail with the *New Year's Gift* from Bantam to the port of Priaman where he arrived on 12 March 1614, evidently ignoring Iskandar Muda's rules to obtain a license in Aceh. He offered the governor of the port several yards of Indian *calico* (a type of textile) and some sword blades, which enabled him to procure pepper for which he paid in cash and confidently declared: 'many occasions of presents to be given in this business wherein you must do as you see cause'. He was able to bring down the price of fifty dollars for a *bahar* to twenty-two and a half and categorically refused to pay the added exorbitant taxes. He bartered fifteen bars of iron for an extra *bahar* of pepper. Despite his negotiating skills, the local merchants cheated him with the weight: sometimes the *bahar* was 400 lb. and in other instances only 340 lb.²⁶ In evading the rules set by the Acehnese sultan, the Europeans were occasionally assisted by opportunists, who gained personally from the deals, or by the local merchants rebelling against the suffocating royal dictates. In Priaman an annual supply of 2500 *bahar* of pepper which came from the mountainous hinterland, could be easily obtained. During his fifty days' stay on the west coast Keeling bought 1385 *bahar* of pepper, some gold and some benzoin. He said that the governor treated him very friendly, but the Acehnese *penghulu* was very hostile. This seems not at all strange, because he presented only the governor with valuable gifts.

It became difficult and dangerous to sidestep Iskandar Muda's decrees, most attempts to buy pepper without the mandatory royal *chapp* were fruitless, because of his threats to punish the local offenders. He let it be known to the ports that he would kill everyone who evaded his decree by cutting open his stomach. His capacity to use force against the ports, steadfastly gained him almost full control over their trade.

'At Achein he putt the Company to extraordinary expences by his greate guiftes (gifts) and pompe hee used in his carriage; wastinge a greate deale of tyme, without doinge anythinge for the Companies good [not] soe much as renewinge the ould capitulations; bought no commodities butt a parcel of very bad benjamyn for the Companies accompt, and very good for himselfe'.

²⁶ *Letters Received*, vol. I, 274 .

The foreign sources provide the orientation of the drama which developed in the relationship between Iskandar Muda and the ports and the cast of characters in this drama.

The English tried to treat with him for the establishment of a factory in Tiku and Priaman but he answered them that his subjects would be bereaved from business if he licensed them. The English writer's account presents a different picture of the relationship between Iskandar Muda and these people, one which was less considerate: 'These subjects were ordered to send their principals once a year to Aceh to give a clarification of their doings, if they be faulty it costs them their legs, arm or lives, the law being in the King's breast; if no occasion can be found then by means of some concurrent it cost them their whole estates to continue in their place, as some of them reported, being forced to return home with never a penny in their purse.'²⁷

The relations between Iskandar Muda and the English started to break down. Pieter Willemsz Floris and George Chauncy informed Th. Aldworthe at Surat on 16 November 1614 that the *Osiander* (one of the ships of Thomas Best), was on its way to Priaman 'where the English were in great danger of the king of Aceh.' The king was furious that they had established a factory in Priaman without his permission and sent several *prahu* and fusts to bring them from there to Aceh. The merchants hoped that the *Osiander* could prevent the Acehnese from doing that.²⁸

Another English attempt (1615) to buy pepper in the port of Tiku failed, because they did not turn up with the royal *chapp*. The officials in the port were evidently frightened to act against the sultan's decree.

The English insisted that the Privilege of 1602 be honoured. The *Hector* went to Aceh to discuss the matter with the sultan whose resolution remained unaltered 'but he was induced by means of presents, to allow the merchants to trade at the subordinate ports for limited periods'. In the words of John Sandcroft one of the merchants aboard the *Hector* 'the king craved for presents and demanded without restraint whatever he liked: 'a piece of ordnance, an anchor, a barrel of powder, several knives. He also eagerly desired a corselet and a helmet, of the kind the English noblemen were used to wearing, and he was desirous of the two dogs

²⁷ *ibid.*, vol. III, 226 : Letter from John Millward of 13 November 1615.

²⁸ *ibid.*, vol. II, 165.

on board, an Iceland cur and a Shepherd's cur. 'These two, being given the king, was daily as he went abroad led after him with two sundry slaves'.²⁹

The merchants detested the local people saying that they were greedy and insatiable. Arthur Spaight wrote in very strong words to Nicholas Downton in Bantam: 'with a beggarly kind of people nothing is to be done without presents'.³⁰

When Iskandar Muda sent his messenger to buy 30 swords from the English, for which he offered 30 *mas* for one piece, the merchant in charge did not allow him to take the swords until they were paid for and demanded his ring in deposit. Utterly offended by this insolence of the foreigner, Iskandar Muda cancelled the purchase. This episode demonstrates that hard bargaining was not the prerogative of the sultan and that he was not always victorious in dealing with the foreign merchants. Another confrontation between them occurred when Iskandar Muda offered 5 *tael*³¹ for English iron. Merchant Oxwick demanded 8 *tael* for the lot. The sultan insisted on 5 *tael*, whereupon Oxwick brusquely responded 'leave it'.

According to Oxwick the king angrily retorted that 'Acheen is not beholden to us, but we to Acheene.'³² Iskandar Muda profoundly realized the importance of Aceh for the Europeans who yearned for trade contracts. But he also badly needed English iron to build his galleys for his planned attack on Malacca, eventually paying the price which the merchant demanded. Later he came even with Oxwick when the man impudently asked for a license to buy pepper 'as cheap as possible' in Tiku and Priaman. Iskandar Muda snapped that he could buy pepper in the port of Aceh or go.

2. 2. 5 Humiliation and retaliation of the Dutch

Iskandar Muda was extremely confident that the European traders had no choice but to accept his rules. This self-fulfilling prophecy manifested itself in the deteriorating relations with

²⁹ *ibid.*, vol. III, 190.

³⁰ *ibid.*, 103.

³¹ A *tael* is an imaginary coin. John Davis mentions in 1600 that sixteen *mas* make a gold *tael*. The (golden) *mas* is coined in Aceh.

³² *Letters Received*, vol. III, 115.

them. His tightening grip on the ports of the west coast and his smugness obstructed a normal trade between the northern Europeans and these ports.

The Dutch especially felt let down by his refusal to observe the Accord of 1607; many obstacles were thrown in their way when they tried to procure pepper in Aceh.

Utterly challenged, the authorities in Bantam resolved to stop their ships from going to Aceh, keeping them 'on the coast'. The embargo caused the trade from the Moluccan islands which consisted of Chinese wares, cloves and nutmegs for the markets in Aceh, to come to a standstill. No boats came for almost two years from about 1612 to about 1614.³³

The domineering Acehnese ruler suddenly faced the fact that a European power started to dictate the terms of the trade and evidently underestimated Dutch determination to ignore Aceh for such an extended period. Angered by this obstruction, he threatened to harm the resident merchants. Several of them fled the country fearing for their lives. The anguish felt by merchant Willemsen that the sultan would take revenge by killing him and seize the company's goods is a sign of the total collapse of the relationship; he asked to be relieved from his duty in Aceh. The situation exacerbated when Acehnese vessels molested Dutch ships in the area and they fired at each other. It was a nadir in their relationship.³⁴

Jan Pieterszoon Coen, since 1614 director-general of the VOC business in Bantam, held the view that a complete break with Aceh was detrimental to the company's trade of Moluccan spices and Chinese wares against textiles brought there by the Gujeratis, because the company did not trade directly in Surat. Despite his disdain for the Asian monarchs 'who ruled their countries like tyrants according to the Indian aphorism the strongest is king'³⁵, his common sense won over his resentment. Coen was infuriated that Iskandar Muda was holding 22 Dutchmen hostage, captured by his armada in Johor in 1613 when they took up arms against the invading Acehnese in defence of the sultan of Johor.³⁶ Although he regarded this as a humiliation of the company, he was adamant that to keep the friendship with Iskandar Muda

³³ H.T. Colenbrander and W.P. Coolhaas (eds.) *Coen's Bescheiden Omtrent Zijn Bedrijf in Indie*, 7 volumes in 8 parts ('s Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1919-1953), vol. I, 60-61.

³⁴ J. L. Blussé points to Holden Furber's dictum 'we should not represent that 'partnership' too romantically. Market traffic is based on mutual interest and competition, and occasionally that economic traffic was also compelled by the threat of violence.' "Feigned Friends and Declared Enemies", 3.

³⁵ *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. I, 215 'Dewyle alle dese Orientalische coningen seer tirranich sijn regeerende, ja, alsoo dat sy alle haren staet met enkel gewelt sijn houdende, gelijk het Indiaens spreekwoord: de sterckste is conink.'

³⁶ The Acehnese invasion in Johor shall be discussed in detail in part 3 of this study.

which was necessary to continue the trade with Aceh.³⁷ Dutch geo-political ambitions especially with an eye to oust the Portuguese from Malacca gained momentum and played an important role in this.

It immensely troubled Coen that the competitive English were licensed on the west coast where they did some brisk trade. At his orders Hans de Haze went to Aceh in 1615 with the *Rooden Leeuw met Pylen* with merchandise amounting to the sum of fl.80.891. De Haze was hard-pressed to bargain a trade contract for the west coast, by offering Iskandar Muda the assistance of several ships for his planned attack on Malacca.³⁸ Coen perceived that the real cause of Iskandar Muda's tyrannical behaviour was the company's failure to assist him with ships to assault Malacca, for Iskandar Muda earlier complained that the governor-general did not live up to the 'brothers in-arms' understanding. In this respect Coen also pointed to the merchants' assistance for Johor against Aceh.³⁹ The Treaty of September 1606 with Johor does not explicitly stipulate Dutch assistance against Aceh. The merchants evidently defended their business in Johor against the invading Acehnese.

The mission of Hans de Haze to Aceh was doomed. Merchant Ryser who arrived in his company disembarked without waiting for the royal *cap* for landing and was severely punished for this trespass by being thrown three times to the elephants. He miraculously survived, but sustained broken limbs and bad bruises, and died when his ship made an unsuccessful attempt at landing in Bantam several months later. Ryser's oversight was not merely an insult of the local custom as some authors mildly put it, it was a violation of the law. One should realize that breaching the rules could impair a country's integrity and ultimately the safety of its ruler and people. The protection of these values depended very much on inbuilt securities, such as the requirement of the royal *cap* when entering Aceh. Iskandar Muda sent a warning to visiting foreigners that they should respect his laws and that they could not perpetrate a blunder or a crime and get away with it. But to subject Ryser to such inhumane treatment, merely shows that the special relationship between Aceh and the Dutch was damaged beyond repair. De Haze discovered to his chagrin that the resident merchants had fled from Aceh, causing Iskandar Muda's vexation that they had left without his permission. To make matters worse, floods had completely destroyed the storage buildings and the goods had washed away. It was a financial loss for the company totalling

³⁷ *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. I, 60.

³⁸ *ibid.*, vol. II, 'Memorie voor Hans de Haze', 53..

³⁹ *ibid.*, vol. I, 130.

fl.6.337 which added to the total misery. When Iskandar Muda downright refused to give him a contract to trade on the west coast by excluding the English, a disheartened De Haze closed the factory in April 1616.⁴⁰ It was too costly to run a non-productive factory.

The officials in Bantam decided that military assistance for Iskandar Muda would only take effect if he licensed the company instead of the English to trade in Tiku and Priaman. An embittered Coen said that the king had abused their friendship by favouring the English and by his cruel punishment of merchant Ryser. Yet, despite his grievances against Iskandar Muda he still preferred a 'dead friendship' with him instead of violent measures against him calling it an alarming trend that the local rulers were backing away from the company and became more demanding and obnoxious when the company followed their whims.⁴¹

2. 2. 6 The nerve-system of the trade

'The king hath engrossed all the pepper into his hands, as the report goeth, and the Protector or Governor and the Sabendare (*shahbandar*) are his merchants.'⁴²

The reports of the European merchants lay bare the nerve-system of the trade as it pertained in Aceh and the ports on the west coast. Paying bribes – even after having received a license or a contract to trade - was a main condition to purchase pepper. Prices were often set at will while the duties levied were usually higher than the actual pepper price.

Iskandar Muda could be induced to alter his earlier decisions when he was given extra sums of money and valuable presents and the merchants - although grudgingly - usually gave in to his demands in order to be licensed.

The Regulations of the Port of Aceh (*Madjlis Bandar Darussalam*) as described in the *Adat Aceh* were developed when Iskandar Muda ordered the officials of the Public Hall (*Balai Besar*) in the year 1015 H (1607), the year of his accession 'to make a certified copy' (*suruh tandakan surat seperti*) of his edicts (*tarakata*). These officials were *Orangkaya Seri Maharadja Lela* who was the Acehnese equivalent of a prime minister, *Penghulu Kerkun*

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, vol. VII, (pt. 1), 93.

⁴¹ *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. II, 'Memorie voor Hans de Haze', 53 .

⁴² *Letters Received*, vol. III, 103.

Radja Setia Muda, *Kerkun* Katibul Muluk Seri Indera Su(a)ra and *Kerkun* Seri Indera Muda, who were the official clerks.⁴³

The *Madjlis* reveals that much thought was given by the sultan and his council to the development of a system in which a network of high and low officials gained an income from the trade, setting the different dues and taxes and the sequence of the steps to be taken by foreign traders arriving in the port. Every service rendered had to be paid in kind or cash. There was a clear distinction in the goods and dues which the different nationalities, Europeans, Indians and Arabs, were required to pay. One of the taxes was the *adat kain* (tax paid in textiles): ships from Gujerat paid 2 *kayu* (pieces) white ‘bafta Berotji’, those from Coromandel, the Maldives and Malabar paid 5 pieces of ‘batik mori’, 1600 stockfish and one jar of ‘rutu’ (fish-paste). In addition the traders paid the tax for the court which was called ‘*adat kain yang kedalam*’ paid to the *Panglima Bandar*, the chief harbour officer, the *Penghulu Kawal*, (head of the garrison), and the *Wakil Furdah*, (harbour master). It concerned 7 pieces of silk for ships coming from Gujerat.

A manifold of dues was required from the foreign traders, from the payment for stamps (*adat tjap*), to paying free meals and *sirih pinang* (local tobacco) to the sultan’s men working aboard the incoming ships.

Arriving Europeans were required to bring the sultan a roll of cloth (not specified) and a barrel of gunpowder. The sultan in return presented them with garments: Muslims received imported vestments, while Europeans and other non-Muslims were presented Acehnese dress and gifts.

Leaving Aceh they paid the departure tax: *lapik memohon berlajar* (permit for ‘sailing’).

It should be borne in mind that the *Madjlis* does not explain how the situation was in reality; but how it ought to be. The sultan could exempt foreign merchants from paying the taxes.

2. 2. 7 Conclusion

Iskandar Muda’s rejection of the Privilege of 1602 and the Accord of 1607 underscores his line of thinking about a new economic order. Unlike his grandfather Alau’ d-din Ri’ayat Shah,

⁴³ *Adat Atjèh*, 17, 18.

who detached himself from the trade negotiations, he was the central figure in these negotiations. Centralization of the trade became his fixation.

He designed a system of regulations, which encouraged the development of relevant state institutions and laid down the emoluments of a range of functionaries. The regulations depict Aceh as a well-ordered society. However, the long-drawn negotiations, in fact the diverse obstacles thrown in the way of the European merchants, obscure this notion. Gift giving was the recourse for the European traders to obtain contracts. Iskandar Muda was willing to change his decisions, depending on the gifts the merchants bestowed on him. His displeasure with the insolence of the English merchants faded when they gave him the things he craved and licensed them to trade in Tiku for a period of two years.

By showering him with expensive presents and artillery the European merchants in fact created a standard for his manipulation.

From Iskandar Muda's reply to Prince Maurice of Nassau in 1610 about the armistice between the United Republic and Spain, it is entirely clear that he saw it as his religious obligation to pursue the Portuguese in Malacca as long as he lived because they were the enemies of Islam. He honoured his forefathers and continued their struggle against the Portuguese.

His rejection of the Accord of 1607 was not brought about by the Dutch-Spanish armistice of 1609. He refused to give jurisdiction in his domain and trade privileges to the northern Europeans on the basis of treaties they either obtained or negotiated from his predecessors. The signing of an armistice with Spain on the other hand shows Dutch failure to abide by the stipulations regarding peace with the enemy as laid down in the Accord of 1607.

The VOC's embargo on its shipping to Aceh demonstrates Dutch frustration with Iskandar Muda who totally disregarded their (his ally's) economic interest. The embargo demonstrated to Iskandar Muda the growing significance of the VOC in the Asian trade, for he was bereft of essential goods which Dutch ships brought from the Moluccan islands and elsewhere to Aceh. Iskandar Muda's grip on the trade of the west coast, antagonised the local chiefs and merchants and aggravated the intrinsically taut relations which existed between overlord and vassal.



Bronze cannon gift from King James (Jacobus) in 1617 to Sultan Iskandar Muda (Museum Bronbeek, Arnhem)

Part Two

CHAPTER III

TRIANGULAR AFFAIRS AND INTER-EUROPEAN COMPETITION

2. 3. 1 English efforts for trade contracts

Iskandar Muda's threats were effective to put a stop to the evasions of his decrees in the ports on the west coast. In 1615 William Keeling went to Aceh with a request from King James I to trade in Tiku and presented him some extraordinary gifts such as 10 mastiff dogs and 10 bitches, and 'a great gun wherein a man could sit upright' which he earlier requested. Keeling received a fine reception, which is remarkable in regard to the fact that the English had opened a factory in Priaman without Iskandar Muda's authorization, whereupon he sent a fleet of small *prahu* to castigate Priaman for transgressing his rules. By recognizing Iskandar Muda as the central figure in the trade of the west coast and offering him extraordinary gifts, it looks like the English could do no wrong. He gave Keeling a contract for two years to trade in Tiku and sent his 'Letter of Privilege' to the authorities in the port, to announce that Keeling came to trade under his protection.¹ He called Keeling *orangkaya chuche atti* (clear-hearted); earlier he called Thomas Best *orangkaya putih* (white *orangkaya*), at the same time refusing Best a contract for an extended period to trade in Tiku. It is quite clear that he called these men *orangkaya* because of the great gifts and money they lavished on him.

Quite revealing is Iskandar Muda's reply to an earlier request by King James I for trade on the west coast, which Thomas Best took home in 1613.²

¹ *Letters Received*, vol. IV, 373:

-Letter to King James of July 1616;

-'Privileges at Tiku'. This is a document Iskandar Muda sent to the authorities in Tiku to announce that he had granted William Keeling the right to trade under his protection under a tax of 7 per 100 for goods imported and exported.

² The letter is in the possession of the Bodleian Library (MS. Laud Or. B 1 R).

The translation and the Malay text are published by W.G. Shellabear: 'An account of the oldest Malay Manuscripts now extant' (*Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asian Society*, vol. XXXI 1898), 121-130;

‘Now it is stated therein that the king requests that the English people may trade in Tiku and Priaman, and that they may settle there to trade, as in the time of His Highness the late Saidu ‘l-Mukammil (Sultan Alau’d-din Ri’ayat Syah al Mukamil).

Now it is my decree that the English people cannot, as described trade in Tiku and Priaman, and that they may not settle there to trade, for those countries are wild, and moreover are distant from us. If the people of Tiku and Priaman should molest them, we should certainly get an infamous report with King James. By the grace of the Lord of all universe, if the English people who are servants of the King desire to send their factors to trade, let them trade in Acheen: and if they desire to send their factors to trade, let them send them to Acheen, so that whoever shall molest them we may quickly make inquiry and punish with a just punishment, since they are the servants of the King who is in correspondence with us.’ Iskandar Muda’s declaration shows that he had serious problems in controlling the ports, even after five years on the throne. To admit this weakness to foreign traders is proof that he was still a novice in diplomacy.

2. 3. 2 The English in the lead of the pepper trade

By anxiously following each other in the archipelago, competition between the Dutch and the English grew to the extent that confrontations could not be avoided. To protect their interest in the Moluccan islands, the Dutch spread the rumour among the local populations that they would not see an English ship but for once in four years. Far from amused by Dutch insults and stern efforts for the sole trade, John Jourdain, head of the East India Company business at Bantam, called the Dutch the company’s mortal rivals in the trade.³ Jourdain was killed when the two rivals clashed near the port of Patani in the Malay peninsula in 1615. The rulers of the ports had to deal with two very ambitious European companies and it is not strange that occasionally they took advantage of their competition .

Interesting to note is that Iskandar Muda does not call King James his friend or ally, but that he is ‘in correspondence with us’. His relation with Prince Maurice of Nassau was based on ‘brotherly’ alliance.

³ *Letters Received*, vol. II, 15.

Jan Pieterszoon Coen, director-general of the company's business in Bantam, asked the Board of directors, the Gentlemen XVII to find a solution for the problems with the English to prevent the situation in the East to get out of control.⁴

It looks as if the annulment of the Privilege of 1602 and the Accord of 1607 by Iskandar Muda made the two rivals even more anxious and suspicious of each other, which took their rivalry to new levels. They lavished Iskandar Muda with artillery and gifts to either secure contracts or to obtain the monopoly over the pepper trade.⁵ Their competition to gain his favour turned their erstwhile chicanery into a real contest.

Taking advantage of the furtive departure in 1615 from Aceh of the Dutch resident merchants and the subsequent closing of their factory in 1616, the English incited Iskandar Muda that they had left Aceh never to return with the result that they could occupy the vacant houses of the Dutch.⁶ They were now formidable and cunning rivals of the Dutch and the sole European traders in Aceh and licensed to procure 1200 *bahar* of pepper in Tiku which they loaded in the *Hector*.

The declining conditions for the VOC in Aceh worried Coen who was utterly dismayed by the deception of the English who occupied the company's houses and surreptitiously filled the vacuum created by his merchants' stealthy retreat from there. He claimed that the company owned it to its lack of common sense and its vague overall policy that led to an ineffective supervision of the business in Aceh, made worse by a shortage of cash, ships and yachts giving the English a big advantage.⁷

It was not plain sailing on the west coast for the English, not even with the sultan's contract in their pocket and the Letter of Privilege he had sent with Keeling to the authorities in the ports. The local traders and functionaries deceived and obstructed them. When William Nichols, the resident merchant in Aceh told the sultan of the problems the merchants in Tiku experienced and of the swindle in the weight of the pepper, he responded that if he found the defaulters he would deal with them as he had dealt with the late *panglima*⁸, explaining that he

⁴ *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. I, 130 : letter dated 15 October 1615.

⁵ The Dutch do not explicitly mention what presents they offered the sultan.

⁶ *Letters Received*, vol. IV, 165-166.

⁷ *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. I., 205-206: letter to the Gentlemen XVII dated 10 October 1616

⁸ *Letters Received*, vol. VI, 204.

daily meted out punishments to his subjects in the city who were found to be immoral and acted against the law and that it did not surprise him at all that the people in Tiku were corrupt, 'since they were far away from his justice.' Again we note this extraordinary disclosure to outsiders of his difficulties in controlling the ports. It stands in stark contrast to the contract and Letter of Privilege he earlier granted William Keeling.

The merchants had already given him a suit of red velvet, 'Portugal fashion which he desired to have', knives, cable and anchor, and several other things. In accordance with the custom regulations applying to all ships arriving in the port, they had paid the *laxamana* and harbour officials 112 *tael* for their services.⁹

Iskandar Muda self-righteously declared that if they persisted to trade in Tiku and Priaman he would send three boats to bring all the pepper from there to Aceh. Because of his insistence that the merchants procure pepper in the port of Aceh, Nichols was sure that the obstructions in Tiku came from Iskandar Muda himself, confirmed by the arrival in Tiku of his principal officers who exchanged his oddments of textiles for pepper.¹⁰ Nichols daringly suggested to the merchants in Tiku to bribe the local authorities to draw them on their side for he knew that Iskandar Muda would bring all pepper from there to sell this to the French who had arrived with the Saint Michel in the port of Aceh.¹¹ [... 'he having tasted the sweetness of profit by 360 *bahar* lately sold to the Frenchmen, which men the king hath told me have promised him to bring him gold in payment for his pepper hereafter: this king not esteeming of (silver) *reals* although I have told him of their being current all the world over, besides so also that an English ship may bring *reals* and buy his commodities, as pepper or other...']¹²

By haughtily announcing to the English that the French would pay him in gold for future pepper deliveries, Iskandar Muda stirred their competition. Noteworthy is that Aceh was an

'The manifold abuses offered them [the merchants in Tiku] by one Possegonge, late Pouleema of Tecoo and divers others which I had long before advice of from them, and having met here with the late Poleema, two months before this ship's arrival, I acquainted the King of him, who caused his members forthwith to be cut off....' The 'Poleema' was the Acehnese *orangkaya Panglima*. The cruel punishment of his official in Tiku shows that Iskandar Muda did not take lightly any disobedience against his rules.

⁹ The merchants kept a list of the presents and fees given to all the functionaries and the taxes they were obliged to pay. See: *Letters Received*, vol. III, 95-101.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, vol. VI, 70 '...proceeded out of secret command from the king to weary us thence. (which Deago affirms to have seen), whereby they also having been advised of the worth of pepper here, might rather have bribed and forborne some wrongs.'

¹¹ The French were briefly in Aceh in 1617 after a long absence since 1602. The Dutch mention that they offered 25 *real* for a *bahar* of pepper which Iskandar Muda refused to accept. The English eventually sold them their stock.

¹² *Letters Received*, vol. VI, 80.

exporter of gold which came from the Minangkabao highlands. Priaman was the port of the Minangkabao territory. It is quite evident that Iskandar Muda punished corrupt local officials not because these men obstructed the English who traded under his protection, but because they evaded his decrees. Nichols mentions that the king had been ill for about ten months and was often distracted and behaved cruelly by putting people to death, 'which he afterwards repented.'¹³

He did not permit the *Rose* to moor in Tiku and Priaman to sell its cargo of salt and procure pepper unless he was given four pieces of artillery. The merchants were against paying for the 'privilege' to trade, since Keeling's contract had not expired. Iskandar Muda stoically declared that he had not licensed the English, but Captain William Keeling in person, because of the fine gifts he brought him. His cheekiness undermined his credibility and showed his gluttony. It was a betrayal of his promise to King James that the English could trade in Tiku for two years as corroborated in his letter of 1615.

The obstructions and delays started to take their effects on the English, captain Diego insulted Iskandar Muda by recklessly saying to him in Malay, that if he would not be licensed to trade in Tiku, he would immediately leave with his ship from Aceh. He evidently overstepped the bounds of Iskandar Muda's tolerance for he had him and the master of his ship thrown out of the palace.

'The King is almost a madman, wilful and wild; and Deago having spoken to him in abrupt manner in Malay at his first denial of giving liberty for landing the *Rose*'s salt, that if he would not grant he would be gone, the King caused him forthwith to be turned out of his further gates with the master, to no small disgrace; and never after would hear my motion in that behalf. Signor Deago having likewise in a drunken humour at my house and before my face told the Sabandar in Mallayes that if the Acheins would trade he was willing, if fight, he was ready; which I did presently reprehend him for in hope that it would have given the Sabandar satisfaction, but he glad of that occasion as being a merchant wont to gain much by Tecoo trade, whereas now frustrated by our trading there, told their king and many of his nobles of his words, which indeed the rather moved the King to displeasure towards him.'¹⁴

This account fundamentally tells us that the *shahbandar* supported Iskandar Muda's policy. One should understand that by canalising the trade from the west coast to the port of Aceh, he

¹³ *ibid.*, 73.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 69.

and many *orangkaya* profited. No wonder that when the *Osiander* arrived from Masulipatam with a variety of goods, the *orangkaya* spread the rumour that the goods would be transferred to the *Rose* and sold in Tiku. Their insinuation worked, Iskandar Muda immediately demanded from the English four pieces of ordnance to trade their salt in Tiku.

A dejected Nichols wrote ‘.....and wish myself, even with my soul, that I had never seen this place, being a King and people void of all honesty, having and craving.’¹⁵

Nichols called a meeting of all captains and merchants to discuss Iskandar Muda’s conditions.

“Council held ashore in Acheim (1 August 1617)’, ‘wherein each man is to write his particular opinion to the sequel, viz.’:

‘Whereas this King doth absolutely deny his having granted general trade for two years unto the English at Tecoo, but in particular unto General Keeling’s fleet, saying that in regard of his large gifts by two ships and many others, such goods as he landed at Tecoo, let them trade and turn the penny during the said time’s expiration, but for any other shipping to trade or land goods upon pretence of being General Keeling’s he gave them but for such goods as were in his former two ships, nor will suffer any other English goods to be landed there during the two years unless he may have given him four pieces of ordnance; and that but for this only ship the *Rose*’s goods, wherein is nought but some salt with some 2000 *rials* of eight to be invested in cloth here for Tecoo, that will yield 50 per cent profit; etc.....

Considering the premises that the King’s will is a law, and that it may be doubted, if the foresaid pieces be not given him, he will send such letters to Tecoo as the year’s trade to come at Tecoo granted general Keeling will be lost: whether most fit to give the King his foresaid demand or stand to hazard of the King’s displeasure.’ (James Fernandus)

‘The opinion of me, Walter Bennett, is that in regard of the King’s rash answer, and likewise his ill usage, and in regard that he will not permit us to speak with him any more, I think it not fitting to let our demi-culverin go out of our ship; for in my simple opinion they will not stand in any stead, in regard the King is resolved that he will do nothing afore such time as another general or ambassador comes from England; other I cannot say.’ (Walter Bennet)

‘My opinion is that in regard of the slender stock in the *Rose* and that it is resolved that the *Unicorn* now at Tecoo will be laden and departed thence, leaving the factory bare,

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 80.

is not fit to give this King his unreasonable desire as four pieces of ordnance. But for two demi-culverin pieces (although as thrown away), better in my judgement to give for the continuance of the two year's trade; whereby the King shall see we do not stand in opposition to his will but flexibly strain to pleasure him, as by his knowledge of the *Rose's* slender lading of salt he cannot but consider hereafter, although now he may not please to consider it, but in his selfwill accounts to have what he list; which is once granted will be an ill precedent for further time.' Wm. Nicholls.

The considerations and arguments brought forward by the merchants, give us a sense of the reality and the merchants' urgency to trade. They resolved to give the king some 'fair gifts' (two demi-culverin pieces?) with the result that the *Rose* was licensed to trade in Tiku.¹⁶

The obstructions in Tiku did not end when they were licensed. The locals refused to buy the salt from the *Rose*, because the rumour spread that merchant Gillman relieved himself in the chamber-pot in the room where the salt was stored.¹⁷ It looks like the people of Tiku made their own decisions.

Whatever obstacles the English experienced in trading on the west coast, they were busily engaged in the textile trade from Surat and Cambay in the port of Aceh where *candykens* and blue *baftas* yielded good profits. Since he had banned the Gujerati traders from his port, Iskandar Muda bought much of his textiles from the English. As if eager to destabilize their trade, he bought *candykens* and different textiles from the French who had arrived from the Red Sea. It proves that he jealously guarded the trade in his realm by refusing other traders to become dominant. Nichols incited him against the French by telling him that they had lifted these textiles from eleven Muslim ships from Gujerat and Dabul. He retorted that every wrongdoer had to answer for his particular offences to God, and he was not responsible for what had happened.¹⁸

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 29 onwards.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 30: Letter from Lewis Smyth of 25 November 1617 to George Ball at Bantam. 'The Polema hath bought all our salt at thirty measures the mace (mas), each measure being near half an English peck, each mace three shillings. All the country people refuse to buy it because Mr. Gillman lay in the chamber over it and used to do his needs in the chamber-pot and hired a Chynaman to carry it out every morning, which Chynaman reported to the country people that the English used to do their needs among salt. This is the country people's report'.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 70.

2. 3. 3 Coen's 'discourse'

Moeten patientie hebben, want daer niet en is, verliest de keyser zijn recht (We need to be patient, because absence means losing our rights)¹⁹

Baffled by Iskandar Muda's disregard for the VOC and his clear inclination to the English, Coen resolved that the company no longer be mistreated. He could not accept that the English obtained privileges from the king of Aceh for they did not lift a finger to fight the Portuguese. Another set back for the company was that Gujarati ships did no longer trade in Aceh, a condition which was detrimental to the barter trade of Moluccan spices for textiles from Surat. Coen called it great negligence that the business in Aceh had been abandoned and the English had become the sole traders.²⁰ He ranted about the incapability of the resident merchants to judge the conditions in Aceh, where the English had picked up on the barter with textiles. Even though he frequently called the local rulers tyrants who ruled by violence,²¹ and fostered a grudge towards the 'Atchynder' (a derogative the Dutch used specifically for Iskandar Muda), he was intent to end the existing impasse with him. As a strategic partner in the battle against the Portuguese, the king of Aceh - whoever was the incumbent ruler - remained exceedingly important. Coen therefore opted to follow a more pragmatic course. He sent the *Enckhuysen* in 1616 with plenty of goods and cash to Aceh, to request from Iskandar Muda a trade contract. The instructions for Everart Deyn and captain Dirck Allertsen are an expression of Coen's anxieties about the unprecedented conditions in Aceh. He warns them to remain vigilant, expecting that the king might retaliate the fact that the resident merchants had left in 1615 without his *cap* which was considered an act of insurgency.²² The Ryser incident was fresh on Coen's mind and another incident could mean a total break with the king. The ships should remain anchored until Acehnese *ostagiers* came on board, only then the delegates would go ashore, leaving the main crew behind. They needed to explain to

¹⁹ *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. VII, 396.

²⁰ *ibid.*, vol. I : letter of 10 October 1616, 205-06:

'Is voorwaer een groote onachtsaemhey, dat desen handel nagelaten en de d'engelsen alleen vergunt zy'.

²¹ *ibid.*, 215 *'Dewyle alle dese Orientalische coningen seer tirranich sijn regeerende, ja alsoo dat sy alle haren staet met enkel geweld sijn houdende, gelijk het Indiaens spreekwoort: de sterckste is conink.'*

²² *ibid.*, 'Instructie voor Everart Deyns aan boord van de *Enckhuysen*', dated 4 Juni 1616, 122,123.

the king that Hans de Haze was forced to close the factory (in 1616) because of his (the king's) evident resentment towards the company, for it had not made immediately available a fleet for an attack on Malacca. The main reason to close the factory was that the company suffered serious financial losses because of his refusal to license the merchants to trade in the ports on the west coast. They came to establish whether he was willing to continue the old friendship and to give them a license to trade in Tiku and Priaman and the ports within his jurisdiction where they wanted to buy the whole supply of pepper on offer. This was absolutely necessary to make trade profits, vital to run the company's factories, to pay its servants and to maintain ships: 'without these profits, this would be a difficult task for even the mightiest potentate in the world, whatever his financial situation.'

Of special significance is the message to the king that in the previous year (1615) governor-general Reynst sent a fleet to the Straits of Malacca, in response to his request for assistance and 'thanks to God it humiliated the enemy's fleet in the Straits. But it was also God's will that the king's armada had just returned to Aceh when the fleet arrived in the Straits.'²³ The merchants needed to emphasise that it took some time before a fleet could be made available, because of the war waged in the Moluccan islands, which was caused by the deception of the English. The fleet urgently returned to the Moluccan islands to defend the company's 'labours and profit' against the encroaching English. The governor-general was on his way to attack Malacca with the fleet of Verhaegen, but when he arrived in Bantam he was informed about the situation in the Moluccan islands and could not continue his trip to the Straits to destroy the Spanish fleet of Don Juan de Silva which was on its way from the Philippines, because the English prevented this wonderful opportunity.²⁴

Then came the syllogism: 'It was unacceptable for the Dutch that the His Majesty allowed the English the sole trade, while he demanded Dutch assistance to attack the Portuguese, their common enemy. As long as he favoured the English above the Dutch, he could no longer

²³ The fleet of Verhaegen which came from the Moluccan islands attacked several Portuguese vessels and lifted their cargo and artillery. Verhaegen's encounters with the Portuguese are explored in Part Three.

²⁴ *idem* :

'Dat het zoo lange is eer derwaerts een vloote gesonden sy, ende de schepen soo haest wederom van Malacca sijn gekeert, is eensdeels oorsaecke den swaren oorloge, welck ons in de Moluccos wordt aengedaen, maer ten anderen voornamelijck d'ondercruyppinge welck d'Engelsen aldaer sijn doende, ende ten waere door d'Engelsen genootsaecht sijn geworden de schepen wederomme na de Moluccos te zenden opdat sy de vruchten van onse arbeyt niet en souden plucken, d'E. heer generael ware met alle voorneemste macht na Malacca gevaren, ende soude deselve aldaer een tijt lanck gehouden hebben; waere sulcx geschiet, de Spaense vloot van don Juan de Silva die naderhant tot Malakka arriveerde, soude mede geresconteert ende met de genade Gods oock wel geslagen hebben, soodat claerlijcken blijkt d'Engelsen ons dit verhindert ende soo heerlijcken daet belet hebben.'

count on Dutch assistance. To re-establish the strategic bond and be assured of assistance, he should order the loading of a shipload of pepper (against payment). This would be a demonstration of his good will towards the governor-general and the company.

The English would make him all kinds of promises, paying only lip-service, for they had never risen against the common enemy and would not likely do so, because of their truce with the king of Spain.²⁵ The purport is clear. Coen deliberately played out Dutch assistance to imbue Iskandar Muda with the practical importance of licensing them instead of the English. To maintain a fleet in the Straits was a costly affair which had to be paid from the incomes of the trade. Coen's 'discourse' illustrates his frustration with the situation in which the English acquired the upper hand in the trade of Aceh. Coen's appeal for sole rights flows from the idea of an equal partnership between Aceh and the VOC which - in his view - gave the Dutch the intrinsic right to trade contracts. D.G. E. Hall claims that the VOC conducted a concentrated national offensive against Portugal and Spain, and they bitterly resented the intrusion of the English into the spice trade, since the latter had lost much of their Elizabethan hatred of Spain and would gladly have made peace with the Portuguese on a basis of live and let live in the East.²⁶ It is quite pathetic of Coen to accuse the English of 'treason', when the United Republic and Spain had signed an armistice in 1609.

Although the facts, as they are presented above, are not in doubt, Coen deliberately blamed the English for undermining the Dutch everywhere, declaring that English interest in the archipelago had long been protected and represented by the Dutch.²⁷

He was deliberate to break the English efforts to trade in the archipelago, reasoning that the European market for spices was fairly limited and competition worked against a profitable trade. The allegation that the English were bystanders in the struggle against the Portuguese,

²⁵ idem :

'Hierop dient U.I. ditto coninck van Atchin selffs in consideratie te geven, hoe ongerijmt het zy, dat syne Majesteyt d'Engelsen alleene den handel vergunt ende ons ten oorloge assistentie eyscht, ende oock selffs wel can begrypen wy geen assistentie connen doen, noch aldaer geen oorloge connen voeren, soolang hy d'Engelsen de negotie ende selve ons niet alleen verleent. Derhalven begeert sijn Majesteyt de vrientschap te continueren, begeert hy aldaer assistentie ende schepen, dat hem gelieve alsnu syne goede affectie te betoonen, ende sulcke ordre te geven, dat dit schip (mits betalende) met peper geladen worden, opdat zyne Majesteyts gunst by d'E.Heer Generael werde bespeurt. Belangende d'Engelsen, dat syne Majesteyt genouch sullen beloven, maer hy van hun niet te verwachten heeft, want noyt gehoort is, dat tegen onsen gemeenen vyant in dese quartieren iet notabels, ja, in 'tminste niet hebben gedaen, te meer wesende haer coninck met Spaenjen in vrede.'

²⁶ *A History of South-East Asia*, 321.

²⁷ On Dutch-English rivalry in the East Indies the *gadfly theory* (proposed by J. S.Furnivall *Netherlands India: a study of Plural Economy*, 1939 , p. 26-27 and also suggested by B.H.M. Vlekke, *Nusantara*, 1945, p. 111) is about the English pursuing the Dutch wherever they go in the Indies. This is however contested by Hall, p. 309-10) who mentions earlier voyages of the English to Ternate by Sir Francis Drake in 1580.

was not completely true. Even if they did not make it their objective to dislodge the Portuguese from Malacca, Thomas Best fought and damaged a Portuguese carrack close to India in 1612 and he handed over to Iskandar Muda a captured Malaccan vessel. Lancaster attacked Portuguese vessels in the Straits of Malacca in 1603 in cooperation with Dutch admiral Spilbergen. Keeling intercepted three Portuguese ships destined for the Manilla and Goa fleets in 1615 and lifted their cargoes. These actions inflicted serious damage on Portuguese shipping.

2. 3. 4 Cornelis Comans appointed special ambassador to the Sultan of Aceh (1616-1619)

Utterly challenged by Iskandar Muda's disregard for the company, Coen vowed to break with the trend 'to meekly follow the Muslim princes who treat us as if we are their slaves, but they don't understand that they need us as badly as we need them. God willing this situation shall change and we shall soon be in the position to determine the rules.'²⁸

The Dutch historian M. A. P. Meilink Roelofs asserts that Coen had been called 'the most ideal servant' of the VOC, and that he did not favour the use of force at all in 1614. After he became director-general of the company's business, he adopted his masters' standpoint in its entirety and implemented their policy in the future with the utmost consistency.²⁹ There is however proof that the Gentlemen XVII also adopted several of Coen's ideas.

From the very start of their relations, Dutch military assistance for Aceh was closely linked to trade contracts and privileges. Now Coen made the profits from the pepper trade a *conditio sine qua non* to send a fleet in the Straits to battle the Portuguese.

By following Cornelis Comans on his three missions to Aceh, we obtain an intimate picture of the deliberations and negotiations between the envoy-merchant and the sultan, for the trade monopoly on the west coast. Coen intentionally appointed Cornelis Comans as governor-general Rael's special ambassador to Iskandar Muda to give the mission more dignity and

²⁸ *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. II, 48.

²⁹ *Asian Trade and European Influence in the Indonesian Archipelago between 1500 and about 1630*, 208.

respectability. It was an important diplomatic move. His instruction of 10 October 1616 for Comans is the same as the instruction of 4 June 1616 for the crew and merchants of the *Enckhuysen*. Added is a protocol of ceremonial aspects, to give Coman's visit that extra weight.³⁰ Much thought was given to an impeccable conduct, for Coen had set his sights on far more ambitious goals than maintaining the profit margins of the company. His 'discourse' shows an absolute commitment to obtain the monopoly of the pepper trade on Sumatra's west coast, by ousting the English from there and to frustrate Portuguese efforts to trade in the area. Comans was appointed the commander of the entire fleet which cruised in the area to monitor the movements of the Portuguese. He would proceed with the *Neptunus* and the *Valck* to Aceh. The flag would fly from the tallest mast of the principal ship in which he as the commander sailed. He would present Iskandar Muda spices from the Moluccan islands and a piece of red cloth with a value which would not exceed 400 *real*. This limit was set in case Iskandar Muda would refuse to license them.

In the *Adat Aceh* we find an enumeration of the gifts foreigners were obliged to present the Sultan; European and Christian ships calling at the port of Aceh were obliged to present the Sultan with a roll of textile and a barrel of gunpowder. The *shahbandar* would offer them meat, oil and rice if they took up their abode in their factories ("djikalau ia duduk di gedung").³¹

It is obvious that Coen tried to counter Iskandar Muda's imputations by creating answers. When he would lash out that no Dutch ships came to Aceh with merchandise (the embargo between 1612 to 1614), the answer was that the advance of the English in the Moluccan islands was the very reason for this; their former friends were causing the company greater worries than the Iberians. The merchants' flight from Aceh was blamed on their bad inclinations and drinking habits. If Iskandar Muda insisted on having a merchant stationed in Aceh, the answer was that the request would be conveyed to the governor-general with whom all decisions rested.

Coen's fervent plea for the trade on the west coast may sound melodramatic, but he had a valid cause especially in view of the military assistance Iskandar Muda expected from the company which had to be paid for.

³⁰ *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. II, 156-160.

³¹ *Adat Atjèh*, 116-117.

How ironical was the arrival in Aceh of governor-general Reynst's special ambassador; Iskandar Muda was ill and could not receive him.³² Yet, in spite of this unforeseen turn of event, Comans was received by the court officials with due respect. He departed with two letters for the governor-general, one from the sultan and one from the *laxamana*, in which they both brought up the furtive departure of the merchants in 1615 without the obligatory royal permission. It is a testimony of Iskandar Muda's vexation that foreigners defied his rules. Royal regulations and etiquette carried important judicial weight. The fact however, that the merchants were able to depart without his *cap* may show a gap in Aceh's security web. Coman's mission was not completely unaccomplished. When Iskandar Muda was informed of the ambassador's arrival, he immediately ordered the English to vacate the Dutch houses they had occupied. It demonstrates that he was eager to have Dutch merchants back in Aceh. In his letter to the governor-general, he declared that he would like to continue the friendship by 'offering his country for trade.'

On his return to Bantam, Comans called at the port of Tiku, but he could not buy pepper without producing the royal *cap*. It confirmed his anxiety that Iskandar Muda had total control over the trade of the west coast. The king of Tiku³³ however assured him that when he was licensed he could count on an annual supply of 2000 *bahar*. The news already spread in the ports that the Dutch would be licensed after the contract with the English expired.

Coen was cautiously optimistic that the delay was caused by the current contract of the English, which would shortly expire. The *Neptunus* destroyed a Portuguese galleon and hopes revived that Iskandar Muda would honour this proof of being brothers in-arms.

2. 3. 5 The promise of a contract

Comans once again travelled to Aceh with the *Arendt* in June 1617 to push for a contract, carrying letters for the king and the *laxamana* in which they were promised '*sonderlijcke vriendschap*' (exceptional friendship) and assistance in return for a two year's contract which

²³ William Nichols too mentions his long indisposition. In: *Letters Received*, vol.VI, 73.

³³ The VOC sources speak of both the king of Tiku and the governor of Tiku. It is instructive to know that the dependencies or *t'aklukan* were usually represented by an Acehnese *panglima*, acting as Iskandar Muda's representative or governor.

would give the Dutch exclusive rights for the trade in Tiku and Priaman.³⁴ The *laxamana* presided over the court in the custom house (*alfandique*), where all the disputes among traders, locals and foreign, were heard.³⁵

Comans was under great pressure to draw a contract. A testimony of the new course followed by Coen is his bold instruction that in case the 'Atchynder' deceived him, he was to seize all Muslim ships and lift their cargoes of pepper. This should take immediate effect if Iskandar Muda delayed a decision.³⁶ For shipments which fell under free trade he would pay the market price. It was a disguised declaration of war. An explicit declaration of war was the assistance for the king of Tiku, to help him oust the Acehnese from his territory.³⁷ We may infer that the king of Tiku was a different person than the governor of Tiku who was Iskandar Muda's representative. This means that the King of Tiku was still a man of authority even after Tiku was incorporated by Aceh in the sixteenth century. Comans was ordered to trade on the west coast with or without Iskandar Muda's permit. The consequence of such fissiparous actions, which was war with Aceh, seemed not to concern Coen any longer. His bold proposal to assist the king of Tiku against the 'Atchynder' in exchange for trade monopolies, shows that he wanted to obtain the trade of the west coast at any cost.

Iskandar Muda made it clear to Comans that he could not refuse the English to trade on the west coast because they had given him 2000 *tael*. He stirred the competition between the rivalling Europeans who paid him extra money, artillery and precious gifts to win his favour and gloried over their rivalry. He understood that the basis for sound war finance was a prosperous economy; Aceh's wars with the Portuguese and the successive expeditions to the Malay ports, devoured huge amounts of money even if he himself - according to De Beaulieu - did not pay for the maintenance of his fleets which was left to the important *orangkaya*. The discussion of the war expeditions and war finance is in Part Three.

Even if the VOC was short of money, Comans was authorized to spend 16.000 *real* on procuring pepper, which again shows the importance Coen attached to becoming the sole trader. A defiant Iskandar Muda accused Comans of trying to wrest a contract from him, and

³⁴ *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. II, 260 'Translaet van een missieve aan de Coninck van Atchijn' *ibid.*, 261 'Translaet van een missieve aan de Orangkaya Laxemana'.

³⁵ Augustin de Beaulieu quoted by Anthony Reid, *Witnesses to Sumatra*, 68.

³⁶ *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. II, 262-63 : *Instruction of 3 August 1617*.

³⁷ *ibid.*, vol. II, 263.

warned him that he considered to extend the licence of the English, reiterating that they had given him 2000 *tael*. He also said that his *orangkaya* advised him against licensing foreigners on the west coast and to give his subjects in the ports the chance to earn a living from the trade.³⁸ It is evident that the Acehnese *orangkaya* advised against licensing foreigners in the ports on the west coast, because they profited from the incomes if the trade was drawn to the port of Aceh. They were responsible for the maintenance of the war ships.

From the very start of the Aceh-European trade interactions, the *orangkaya* showed their discontent when the Europeans were given favourable conditions and contracts.

After six weeks of uncertainty Comans was invited to a public audience in the palace, also present was the English commissioner. To his surprise the sultan announced that he decided to grant the Dutch a license to trade in the port of Tiku for a period of two years. He declared that he would take his share first, for he had already sent 6000 *tael* to Tiku. Comans asked him for a written promise, but he responded ‘don’t reject my words, say to your general to immediately send two ships and I shall fill them with pepper. Half of my money is spent, if the other half was not invested, I would have licensed you immediately’.³⁹

The promise of a license did little to raise Comans’s spirit who left Aceh again without one peppercorn.

It is very clear that Iskandar Muda wanted to continue the relations with the Dutch, having ordered the English to vacate their houses. He seemed eager to have Dutch merchants stationed in his city. But his unpredictability was a serious obstacle for the merchants to follow his whims and to follow their own devices; apparently Comans did not resort to apply the recommended sanctions. When he returned in Bantam without a license, Coen’s patience which had stretched to its limits, burst. He was ready to break Iskandar Muda’s grip over the west coast by helping the local chiefs to oust him from their territory.⁴⁰

On 14 February 1618 an indefatigable Comans went for a third time to Aceh with the *Valck*. Finally on 29 January 1619 he informed Coen that he was licensed and that the English were ordered to leave Tiku. The year spent in Aceh was not completely unproductive, for it transpires from the records that several Dutch vessels procured pepper in the port of Aceh. There were however pitfalls on the road to buy pepper in the west coast ports. Comans was required to buy Iskandar Muda’s oddments of pepper before the license to procure 1000

³⁸ *ibid.*, vol. VII (2) , 396-400 : Letter of 28 January 1619.

³⁹ *ibid.*, vol. I, 329.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, vol. II, 262-65 : Instruction of 3 August 1617.

bahar in Tiku was issued and grumblingly paid 8.000 *real* for the stuff. Two of Iskandar Muda's junks had arrived in the ports loaded with textiles worth 6000 *real* raided by his armada in Kedah in 1619. The local merchants were forced to accept these in return for their pepper. The ports were now saturated with textiles, making it impossible for Comans to barter his textiles for pepper and he was duly forced to pay in cash. On top of this the *panglima* (the governor) was ordered to reimburse him in textiles for the remaining 30 *bahar* of pepper Iskandar Muda still owed him.

2. 3. 6 Threats against the Dutch

The mood in the ports was grim, the locals in Tiku were incensed by what they perceived as the arrogance of the Europeans and their cunning ways of obtaining pepper on their own terms. I mentioned earlier that the English resident merchant Nichols believed that the obstructions came from the king himself. This is apparent, for he sent his officers with his oddments to the ports to buy the available pepper.⁴¹

A group of some 200 people threatened to make an assault on the lodge of the Dutch. The exact reason for this is not mentioned. It was only through some friendly Acehnese who came to the help of the Dutch merchants, that the situation calmed down. The problems were latent, and the hostilities erupted because the Dutch were reluctant to pay the duties of 20 *real* per *bahar* which exceeded the pepper price of 17-19 *real* a *bahar*. To these was added a tax on the price of all goods which were locally traded. This was 7 *real* for both import and export against 20 *real* per *bahar*, while the authorities demanded for every 100 *bahar* exported 50 *real* for the *panglima*, 25 *real* for *orangkaya* Suriij Raija and 10 *real* each for the clerks.

In the port of Priaman a similar situation existed; the Acehnese authorities there could not be moved to lower the dues. Comans was exhausted from the prolonged dealings and called their demands excessive. Sensing his disgruntlement, Raja Lila, a local chief of the port of Priaman secretly approached him with his request for assistance to remove the Acehnese from his country, in exchange for the pepper trade. The raja had fled from Aceh because Iskandar Muda laid his eyes on his wife and demanded her as his concubine. He was a hunted man,

⁴¹ *Letters Received*, vol. IV, 165 John Millward in Tiku to general Keeling in Bantam of 10 September 1616 mentions that the king's officer 'Addick Raia' buys all the pepper.

relentlessly pursued by the Acehnese. Suspicious of the locals who had proved unreliable and conniving, Comans was apprehensive to accept his proposal.

The Dutch suffered constant abuses in Tiku. In one horrendous instance several locals who were taking their side were kicked to death by angry mobs of discontented people who feared that they would lose their livelihood to the privileged European traders. Merchant De Rassièr who was on his way to Aceh via Tiku accompanied by Acehnese ambassadors returning from a visit to the *Pangoran* of Bantam, was murdered in 1618 by local Achenese. Coen immediately demanded justice from Iskandar Muda. In the end the call for justice was honoured. Two innocent slaves were accused of the murder and condemned to death. The Dutch merchants intervened on their behalf and in the end they were released.⁴²

One of the local traders, Raja Muda, dodged Iskandar Muda's decree and sold Comans a catty of camphor in exchange for certain goods he wanted from Jacatra. He owned large stores of pepper and promised Comans to sell these to him, but unconvinced as Comans was of his honesty, he instructed the resident merchant Casembroot in Aceh, to inform Iskandar Muda of Raja Muda's evasion of his decree. Casembroot refrained from doing this.

The rivalry between the English and the Dutch arrived at a serious level with clashes between them in Bantam and the Moluccan islands. Iskandar Muda ordered the English to leave the west coast when he licensed the Dutch, but they surreptitiously returned through the backdoor by means of gifts. They presented Iskandar Muda an exceptional piece of artillery from their ship the *Dragon*. In several Sumatran ports, including the ports of Aceh, Tiku and Priaman they purchased 7000 sacks of pepper. Despite having obtained a contract to trade on the west coast, the Dutch felt threatened by the presence of the English, who were able to prolong their trade in Tiku for another two months.⁴³ The Dutch were convinced that the English were planning the establishment of a *rendez-vous* on the west coast, and intent to drive them away from there. They seized the *Dragon* while three other ships surrendered to them, and confiscated their cargoes of pepper and artillery. To understand their action against the English, it is important to know that since 1615 the Gentlemen XVII proclaimed the statute known as the 'Principael Hoofdpoint van onsen Handel' ('Core Principle of our Trade'). Its essence was the enforcement of Dutch monopoly by using force and weapons 'if gentle warnings did not help to drive out the Chinese, Javanese, Indians and Malays and in particular

⁴² *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. I, 551-552.

⁴³ Some EIC sources speak of a prolongation of one year.

the English and French from the Moluccan islands, Banda and all other places where the VOC established factories or obtained contracts.’ It became the cornerstone of the company’s trade and an important pillar of its geo-political strategy.⁴⁴

Mindful of the fact that their action against the English in the waters of Tiku was an offence of Aceh’s territorial integrity, Coen instructed Casembroot to apologize to the king by declaring that they defended the honour of their prince, ‘your Majesty’s friend’ against the arrogance and deception of the English.⁴⁵ It was a calculated way of saying that there existed a special bond between the Dutch and Aceh. The unfortunate Casembroot needed to straighten out various difficulties to obtain the king’s trust. The following one concerned the furtive departure in 1615 of the merchants. He conveyed Coen’s apology to the king, saying that these merchants were renegades who had neglected the company’s business and were more interested in the ‘pot of Arac’. Was this merely a false accusation, a desperate effort to obtain a favourable position in the trade? Given the fact that the merchant’s unauthorized departure was brought up again, demonstrates that Iskandar Muda did not take lightly that the local rules were evaded. Obviously the king had to be pacified.

The anxiety of the Dutch was unprecedented, they were anxious that Iskandar Muda would retaliate their arbitrary action against the English in Tiku. Merchant Van der Meer reported on 27 November 1619 that he wanted to sail to Aceh to load sulphur and pepper, but the crew refused to go there, fearing that the king would capture and ultimately murder them.⁴⁶ It was another nadir in their relations with Aceh. Coen was utterly worried that if no ships were going to Aceh the company would suffer a backlog of at least one year and that the Danes who were newcomers in the area’s trade, would step in, taking advantage of the rift between the company and the king.

The scramble for pepper which was led by the sultan, clearly possessed the characteristics of a theatre drama in which every party felt victimized by the others. Iskandar Muda would not forego his position as the principal trader; he did not give away his prerogative to be the first purchaser and subsequent supplier of the valuable spice.

⁴⁴ *Coen’s Bescheiden*, vol. IV : Resolution of the Gentlemen XVII, 332.

⁴⁵ *Coen’s Bescheiden* , vol. II, 627:

‘‘Soo den coninck van Atchijn sich belcht dat sijn reede niet verschoont en hebben, excuseert de sake met aller beleeftihey, ende vriendelijcke bede dat het ten besten gelieve te verstaen, alsoo wy nootelijcken gedrongen sijn geworden d’eere van onsen prince, syne Magisteyts vriendt, tegens d’insolente presuntie ende hovaerdye van d’Engelsen te maintaineren...’’

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, vol. VII, (pt. 1), 479.

2. 3. 7 A Dutch charm offensive

The dire situation in Tiku required that the company radically changed its attitude for the sake of a profitable trade. Coen now instructed Comans and Casembroot to do everything to win the hearts of the officials and the men in the street and buy their favour by dispensing tokens of gratitude and friendship to purchase pepper against more favourable prices than the English.⁴⁷ His anxiety to deal a blow to the trade efforts of the English did not stop. He sent the *Zeewolf* to Aceh with 24.000 *real* to buy all the pepper available before the English claimed it. In line with the company's policy to frustrate the English and French efforts on the west coast and drive them from there, the merchants were instructed to bid at a higher price. In spite of their efforts to pacify the locals, these locals still obstructed the trade and their hostilities did not subside. The Acehnese regent of Tiku refused Comans permission to build a house there and out of sheer necessity he stayed in the house of the English merchants. The price for a *bahar* of pepper soared from 12 to 20 *real* and Iskandar Muda threatened to remove them from the west coast if they refused to pay the dues. Coen was distressed and wound up that his merchants were constantly mistreated and humiliated and almost sovereignly vowed to bring an end to it.

2. 3. 8 Comans' plan to seize the trade of the west coast

‘ This year I spotted two comets in these quarters. Only the Almighty knows what it means.’
(Cornelis Comans, 1619)

Comans' knowledge of the area, of local politics and people, made him some kind of a regional expert. He was warned that within two to four months Iskandar Muda would claim all the available pepper on the west coast. Encouraged by Raja Lila's appeal to assist him in ousting the Acehnese from Priaman in return for trade, he developed a plan of action to this

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, vol. II, 397.

objective. Raja Lila and Raja Setia Pahlawan boasted that they could bring around four to five thousand men, but Comans thought that even a quarter of the number would suffice to carry out the plan. The two rajas proposed to send their representatives to Jacatra where the company had moved its main office, to present their plan and explain its execution .

The plan was to incorporate Tiku and Priaman and construct a fort on the west coast to monitor the movements of the Acehnese. This required a force of four to six hundred men to make a land expedition and 4 to 5 ships, ‘some large Javanese *prahu* and some smaller yachts to cruise close to the coast’. Comans calculated that an annual supply of 3 to 4 à 5000 *bahar* of pepper would be adequate to compensate for the high expenses of maintaining the fleet and emphasised that the added attraction in having a stronghold there was the real prospect of an annual supply of gold from Kota Tenga and the Gunung Bukit mountain, transported from there by Javanese, Gujeratis and Kelings.⁴⁸

Quite significant is the information that Iskandar Muda decreed that the people of Priaman plant banana trees to make sure his elephants would not starve when they arrived there. This royal decree brought great agitation among the people of Priaman for they expected that something terrible would happen. It is apparent that Iskandar Muda knew of the conspiracy against him, for he immediately ordered the construction of a fort in Tiku to defend the place against external aggression. Against such a naval force, Aceh’s elephants alone could not successfully protect the beleaguered port.

Although Iskandar Muda knew of the complot against his authority, he did not declare war on the Dutch, but he took preventative measures to deter all foreigners from the west coast and

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, vol. VII (pt.) 1, 396-400 : Letter of 28 January 1619

‘*Soo den Ed. Hr. genl. geraden vindt, alhier sal binnen 2,3 a 4 maenden veel peper naer Atchijn gevoert werden, soo van den coninck als andre, die gevoechel. souden cunnen waernemen ende voor onse schade aenslaen. Mijns oordeels, onder correctie souden dese plaetsen Tiku ende Priaman wel te incorporateeren sijn, soo men maer een tocht met 4 a 600 man te land mach doen ende om omsicht te maecken 4 a 5 schepen ende om ‘tselve te houden ende continueeren, soude men een fordts moeten maecken bestant tegen den Atchynder, ongetwijffelt souden toeval van die van ‘tlandt krijgen, principael van de Priamanders ende van Orangkaja Maharadja Lilla, die mij sulcx is aenpresenteerende ende quanttiteyt volck op syn handt heeft ende bestant om haer met sijn volck alleen te dwingen. Off men nu ‘tyser smeden sal, derwijle ‘t heet is, ofte dat men haer onredelycheijt ende ongerechticheyt sullen verdragen ende toestaen, sullen U.E. ordre daervan verwachten. Soo hierin iets gedaen soude werden, soude noodich sijn eenighe groote Javaense prauwen om tot roijtuych te gebruijcken ende lichte schepen ende chaloupen om dicht aen wal te mogen setten. D’oncosten souden vooreerst groot loopen, daertegen soude men jaerlijcx, als de cust vrij haden , twelck genoch met een a 2 schaloupen gedaen can werden, van dese plaetsen trecken 3,4 a 5000 bhaer peper, die al met Guseratsche cleeden ende goede avance gehandelt souden werden, mitsgaders valt hier jaerlicx, soo in Cotatenga als andre plaetsen, goede pertije goudt, dat door de javanen van den Gounong Boukit, Guseratten ende Clingen vervoert wert, soodat, als den handel in treijn was, mijns oordeels rijckel. betaelen souden d’oncosten, die men doen souden. D’onredelijckheijt van de Atchynders ende haer tollen sijn te groot ende onlijdelijcken, hierop sullen U.E. ordre verwachten.*

increased his threats of the local populations who breached his decrees. There is no evidence however that Comans' plan was indeed implemented.

A vengeful Comans developed a second plan to undermine Iskandar Muda, whose armada was on a war expedition to Kedah in 1619. The war expeditions are discussed in Part Three. He proposed that 'if the king is victorious in Kedah and decides to proceed to Malacca, we will combine our forces and invade the city together. After a successful invasion of Malacca, we shall overpower the Acehnese armada and even if this is not a 'holy' act, the tyrannical and hostile attitude of the 'Atchynder' towards our country and our prince justifies this. It would mean a double success. Our friendship and alliance with the king of Johor may turn his wrath on us.'⁴⁹ His remark that Dutch friendship with the king of Johor could have negative results is quite significant and shows another source of friction between them.

Of relevance for the historical accuracy is Coman's information that two Gujerati ships had arrived in the port of Aceh, for it indicates that Iskandar Muda's ban on Gujerati shipping was no longer effective. More importantly, merchant Van der Broecke in Surat mentions in his letter of 10 May 1621 that the 'prince's ship' had arrived from Aceh, bringing with it 300 bales of pepper but little other commodities. According to W. Ph. Coolhaas it concerned the ship of prince Khurram, the later Moghul Emperor Shah Jehan.⁵⁰ This is a first reference of Aceh-Moghul relations during the reign of the sultans of the seventeenth century. The same Van den Broecke mentions the arrival in Surat in the first half of 1628 of twelve elephants which the king of Aceh sent the Moghul king.⁵¹

⁴⁹ idem.

'Soo den Coninck van Atchijn victorie in Queda becompt, daer syn vloot na doe is, souden wel cunnen gebeuren alsdan naer Malacca te trecken, want seer op deselve gestoort is, sulcx geschiedende, souden onder correctie twee vliegghen met eenen lap connen geslaegghen werden, te weten onsen macht nevens de syne voegende (soo sulcx mocht geschieden) om voorsz. stadt te vermeesteren ende geincorporeert sijnde, ons alsdan Mrs. ('masters'?) van de stadt ende syn vloot te maken, en is wel niet Godlyck, evenwel sijn cleynachtinge van onse prince ende natie als sijn tyranique ende leugenachtige handelinge, gelyck aen ons bethoont heeft, is sulcx wel meriterende, oock moeten ons voorsekert houden, soo verstaet, d'onse eenige alliantie met die van Jhoor syn hebbende, syn affectie te minder, syn wraeckgiericht te meerder t'onswaerts wesen sal....'

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, vol.VII, (pt. 2), 697.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, 1302.

2.3.9 Bad performance of the Dutch merchants in Aceh

It is quite surprising that Coen dismissed Comans, the governor-general's special envoy to Aceh, from the company's service. The reason was that Comans refused to pay the price of 24 to 25 *real* for a *bahar* of pepper which was demanded in Tiku, insisting on 20 to maximum 22 *real*. Coen was enraged by this perceived blunder which was why the *Zeewolff* left Tiku with the slightest amount of pepper. He considered this a serious neglect of the business since the company experienced an absolute low point on the west coast and the running contract was for only two years. Comans in his turn blamed the Achenese for making a fraudulent contract, but Coen alleged that this was due to his own obstinate behaviour.⁵² The controversy was fundamentally a clash of principles between the envoy-merchant, who time and again dealt with an unreliable king, deceiving officials and traders, and the VOC's business director, (in 1619 appointed governor-general), whose main aim at that time was to thwart the English from the trade of the west coast and to that extent started a charm offensive to win the hearts of the people in Tiku. It is however true that Comans' obstinacy put the company at a very disadvantageous position, because the contract was for two years and the shortage of vessels delayed the purchase of pepper in time. Coen explicitly instructed both Comans and Casembroot to buy all pepper available at whatever price before the English could lay their hands on it. Merchant Casembroot did not follow the instruction to sell the expensive cargo of cloves on board the *Vlissingen* in Tiku to utilize the money to buy all the available pepper; instead part of the cargo went to the Coromandel coast.⁵³

If dealing with the local authorities and traders was a frustrating and time-consuming affair, communications between the officials in Bantam and the merchants in the field did not deserve a beauty award. The merchants in Aceh complained about the failure to provide them with necessary cash, textiles and goods. Because of the embargo on Aceh from 1612 to 1614 Willemsen did not have the opportunity to barter fresh merchandise for Gujerati textiles to

⁵² *ibid.*, vol. I, 471.

⁵³ *ibid.*, vol. II, 627. This transpires from Coen's letter to Nicolaes Casembroot of 23 December 1619.

put to use in Ambon and the Moluccan islands.⁵⁴ In 1615 Van Berchem asked for generous supplies of merchandise to ‘saturate’ the ports in the area and frustrate Portuguese trade efforts. The Portuguese were indeed barred from several ports, because of the promise the Dutch merchants made the local merchants in these ports to bring them a variety of goods. When the merchandise failed to arrive the locals ridiculed them.⁵⁵ I should say here that Coen was well aware of the importance of textiles necessary to trade in the ports of Sumatra.⁵⁶ Shortly after he was appointed director-general in Bantam in 1614, he took actions and sent Hans de Haze with De Rooden Leeuw met Pylen with plenty merchandise to Aceh. De Haze eventually closed the factory in 1616 because Iskandar Muda showed his displeasure with Dutch behaviour and was not at all interested in the renewed efforts to trade. Confusion and collisions between the officials in Bantam and the merchants was detrimental to the business, different responsibilities and aspirations caused frictions. While Coen oversaw the business in its entirety and recognized relevant trajectories, the merchants were focussed on one division and entrusted with the *modus operandi* of the pepper purchase and of other commodities. Eventually their director’s single mindedness to obtain the monopoly over the pepper trade at any cost, perturbed the merchants who needed to adapt to the changing and sometimes unfathomable moods and strategies of their director. Coen did not hesitate to resort to questionable methods if this was for the sake of the company. He instructed Comans to accuse Hans De Haze of furtively taking the merchants with him, reassuring Iskandar Muda that the governor-general would be informed of this shameless action and would deal accordingly with De Haze.

A fragment of an anonymous internal VOC letter, supposedly written by Coen is published by the English, which describes the poor performance of the merchants in Aceh.⁵⁷

‘Aceh is a place which cleaveth to the trade of the coast of Coromandell and more other western places, where there is sometimes great vent of cloth and other merchandises, and in between there is much goods to be had and other things needful for the aforesaid coasts.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, vol. I, 57.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, vol. I, 59.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, I, 485.

⁵⁷ *Letters Received*, vol. I, 77 (‘A fragment of a paper, translated from Dutch, anonymous and imperfect’) It is not established how this letter came into the possession of the English. Both companies had offices in Bantam and during the brief period of the Anglo-Dutch alliance from 1619 until about 1623, cooperation, but probably also intelligence was practiced between them.

They give good advance for there is brimstone, pepper, Bournesh camphor, pewter from Perak, gold for the coast of Coromandell and other wares all which, as I have afore said may be had for Gouseratish cloth with very good advance, and the best advance is yet to be had in the cloth there.

This factory of Atchin if it had been used and ruled as it should have been, it would have been one of the principallest factories in India for the Company, but there hath always been no regard taken of it and besides that it hath always been furnished with debauched persons which study more in the Arrack pot than to the company's good service, and so that factory will come to nought before any diligent and experienced person be sent, which will seek the Company's profit and not his own and which may be suffered to have a little in the going and coming ships. And also that it may be overseen by greater men of charge, and that it be so used that Factory may have his yearly cargoson belonging thereto of Cloths, otherwise all will come to nothing.'

2. 3. 10 Conclusion

The pepper trade was frenetically pursued by all parties. Pepper was in high demand in Europe. It became the most important source of income and an extraordinary stimulant for Aceh's economic development.

Policy-making power begins with the acquiring of revenue and Iskandar Muda understood that by centralizing the trade to the port of Aceh, he secured a steady income from revenues. He insisted on having European traders stationed in his port to boost his prestige and the trade. The Acehnese officials and *orangkaya* profited enormously from the centralization of the trade. The *Adat Aceh* stipulates the emoluments for the harbour functionaries.

The Dutch and the English, in order to maximise benefits out of their trading activities, entered into a deliberate policy of 'friendship' with the sultan. By giving in to his demands and by showering him with gifts and artillery, they established a standard. Despite the fact that they called him untrustworthy and tyrannical, loathing the way he drew the highest benefits, they held on to trading with him, contributing to his increased control of the ports. The reason the English remained in Aceh was that they found a good market for their textile trade from India, their iron and cotton wool.

The objectives of the Dutch to keep a good relationship with Aceh was dual: economic and strategic. Their wish to remain in Aceh was *grosso modo* the pepper monopoly, but friendship with the sultan was essentially based on geo-political ambitions: the removal of the Portuguese from Malacca and consequentially the take-over of Malacca. They expected that their strategic alignment with Aceh would secure them contracts and trade monopolies. A contract became a *condition sine qua non* for their military assistance.

The Dutch were undisguisedly bent on expelling the English from Priaman and Tiku for which they were willing to forfeit their reservations and resentment against Iskandar Muda. The English realized that they were up against a staunch Dutch move to monopolize the pepper trade. Iskandar Muda triumphed over their competition by drawing valuable artillery and presents in return for a license or a contract.

In conducting their relations with Iskandar Muda, the chief consideration of the Dutch was the dispersion of the Portuguese from the Straits region. The strategic partnership was absent in Aceh-English relations. English ambitions were not geared to capturing Malacca from the Portuguese. To put it differently, the English were neither allies nor rivals in the battle for Malacca. Consequentially the relationship between them and the sultan was less charged. Iskandar Muda paid with his oddments of textiles or in cash for the pepper he drew from the west coast ports, which demonstrates that he did not completely disregard the interests of the merchants at the periphery of his realm. The Acehnese *orangkaya* supported his centralizing policy from which they gained incomes and benefits.

The strategic deals between Cornelis Comans and the King of Tiku show that Tiku was never absolutely incorporated into the Acehnese realm.



Ancient fort (date not established) Indrapatra circa 20 km outside Banda Aceh (photo: own collection)



Outer wall of the fort (photo: own collection)

AN INEFFECTIVE ANGLO-DUTCH ALLIANCE

2. 4. 1 The Treaty of Defence

As incident upon incident between the Dutch and the English followed, the English company requested the Lord Treasurer Salisbury to take this up with the States General of the United Republic. D.G. E. Hall mentions that in 1611 the English ambassador in The Hague suggested that pressure should be brought to bear upon both companies by their respective governments to negotiate an agreement for joint trade.¹

In 1615 Jan Pieterszoon Coen, at that time director-general of the VOC trade business in Bantam, appealed for a solution to the combustible situation, crying foul that the English were deceiving the Dutch and humiliating their country and their prince.²

The call for a settlement of the ‘undeclared war’ between the United Republic and the Kingdom of England, led in the end to the establishment of an Anglo-Dutch alliance signed in London in 1619. As a result the ‘Treaty of Defence for the East Indies’ came into effect on 21 April 1620; it was a major step to overcome the latent problems and hostilities between the two companies and not in the least to mutually oppose the local ‘potentates’.

The resolutions gave both companies the right to buy half of the pepper available. Of the spice trade of the Moluccas, Amboina and the Bandas islands, the English would have a third of the share. Both companies kept their own factories and forts.³

It is not, perhaps, surprising, that Coen had his qualms regarding these resolutions. The English from the start of their presence in the archipelago, refused to fight the Portuguese from the Spice Islands⁴ and now they would share in the trade the Dutch had wrested from Spain and Portugal.⁵ The inference I make is that the Defence Treaty overruled the

¹ *A history of Southeast Asia*, 322.

² *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. I, 130 : Letter to the Gentlemen XVII dateT 22 October 1615.

³ *ibid.*, vol. IV, 46- 47 : ‘*Resoluties van den Raad van Defensie 21 April 1620-20 Janari 1623*’

⁴ Foster asserts that the English did not want to interfere with Spanish and Portuguese settlements. *England's quest for the eastern trade*, 127.

'*Principael Hoofdpoint*' of 1615, to which I referred earlier; to thwart the English, French and other traders from the places where the Dutch established factories and built forts, which Coen advocated, was the *raison d'être* of the VOC which clearly transpires from this statute. Despite his serious doubts considering the provisions of the Defence Treaty, Coen went to celebrate the new alliance on board one of the English ships at Bantam. He commented that the English were overwhelmed with joy with such an advantageous treaty and welcomed the Dutch aboard with salute gun shots.⁶ To oversee the cooperation, the Council of Defence was installed, consisting of four members drawn from each company, having at its disposal a defence fleet composed of ten ships from each side. One of the English members in the Council had been the director of the English factory in Aceh. The Council held the view that Bantam and Aceh were of major importance for the trade and for the procurement of pepper. Combined actions were undertaken to inform the local ports of their established bond. The English *Bull* and the Dutch *Hert* took off together to the west coast to meet the English fleet and announce the good tidings of their alignment. Coen clung to the hope that the establishing of an Anglo-Dutch Defence alliance would safeguard their mutual interest and that it would damage the interests of their enemies.⁷

Concerning their interests in the Straits region, the Council set out a strategy for the procurement of pepper, by refraining from bidding against each other and for sharing equally in the profits. Coen warned his merchants not to abuse the English by bidding against them and to avoid the chances of being manipulated by the local rulers who had gained from their competition.⁸

It is not difficult to imagine that Iskandar Muda was unreservedly disgruntled with the new alliance of old foes and in no mood to give in to their demands. He set the price for pepper on the west coast at 43 *real a bahar*, which was much higher than the price he set for the Muslim

⁵ According to A. Reid 'Coen was appalled to learn that a treaty had been signed in Europe in July 1619 whereby the English and Dutch were to cooperate in the East, sharing equally the burden of military actions with each taking half the available pepper and the English one-third of Malukan spices. Since Dutch forces in Indonesian waters were predominant and Coen was determined to use them to maximum advantage, the treaty failed to halt Dutch-English conflicts.' *Southeast Asia in the age of commerce 1450-1680* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1993), vol. II, 274.

⁶ *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. I, 545.

⁷ *ibid.*, vol. II, 682-683.

⁸ *idem*. 'Den prijs van den peper sal U.E aldaer tegen d'Engelsen niet opjaghen, maer eendrachtelijck coopen tot alsulcken prijs als met den anderen goetvinden sult, de peper daerna egalijck deylende volgens accoord door de heeren Mayores met d'Engelse Compagnie gemaect, mits goed regard nemende, dat u d'Engelsen niet abuyseren.'

traders which moved between 25 and 30 *real*. The merchants categorically refused to pay more than 40 *real* for a *bahar*. He defiantly declared that he preferred to send his stock of 1500 *bahar* to the Red Sea in stead of selling it to them against a lower the price. The existing deadlock was unprecedented and caused Iskandar Muda more worries than he had foreseen. He took drastic measures to secure his interests in the ports on the west coast, promulgating a decree which banned the locals from trading with the foreigners, threatening ‘to cut them up’ if they evaded this. He sent a small fleet of *prahu* to the ports to make certain that they did not sell their supplies on board the European vessels and reserved 1500 *bahar* of pepper from there for which he paid with his oddments of textiles, setting a time limit for the supply between three and four months.

The European merchants were constantly obstructed. In Priaman the Dutch procured only 400 *bahar* since they lacked textiles to barter for pepper and because the locals were afraid to trade because of Iskandar Muda’s threats.

2. 4. 2 The king and the beggars

‘Kamu mau berkelahi ke Tiku?’ Do you want to fight in Tiku?

Since the murder in Tiku in 1618 of merchant Rassiére, the contacts between the Dutch merchants and the locals had reached their lowest point, but the merchants stoically held on to their business there.

Whatever were the misgivings, Casembroot requested to see the king to discuss an extension of the contract for trade in Tiku, but Iskandar Muda was ill. He was successful in his second attempt and together with the English representative he went to the palace.⁹

Iskandar Muda was confrontational and uncompromising. He showed unrestrained anger when Casembroot requested an extension of the contract even though the current one was still effective for another couple of months. He raised his voice at the assembled European merchants and remarked in Malay ‘that their shame was not like that of the prophet Mozes’. Casembroot anxiously tried to calm him down, saying that he did not come by himself, but

⁹ They apparently went together to show Iskandar Muda that they were committed to support each other in their bid for fair prices and contracts.

that he acted on the orders of his superiors. Iskandar Muda then yelled that he was as much a king as the king of Holland and the king of England. ‘Did they think that he did not possess enough gold and silver and depended on them?’ ‘Did he and his people had no right to trade in their own country?’ He challenged them by saying ‘if you want war, I am ready; if you come with 70 ships, I will bring 600 and I will assemble all the people from Aceh and bring them to the west coast to fight.’¹⁰ It was an implicit declaration of war and the merchants understood that the threat to come with 600 ships was not merely bluff, Iskandar Muda possessed one of the largest naval forces of Asia.¹¹

Iskandar Muda ordered all the available pepper from the west coast to Aceh which he offered the merchants for the price of 43 *real* a *bahar*. They refused to pay the high price, offering 32 *real* instead. He unequivocally responded ‘if you don’t want to pay for it, then don’t buy it’. He said that he was building a ship to transport 1500 *bahar* of pepper to the port of Mocha in the Red Sea.

J. Coetelij, a Dutch fiscal official who was visiting Aceh, paints his version of the charged atmosphere during the meeting. The king used offensive rhetoric saying to Casembroot ‘Are you not ashamed of yourselves to come and beg at my door once again? Beggars go to different houses because they are ashamed to knock on the same door time and again.’¹²

¹⁰ VOC: 1.04.02: 1072/ 52 a 53;

Coen’s Bescheiden, vol. VII (pt.1), 614-17:

‘Op den 26 ditto ben ick near den Coninck gegaen en de Engelsche waeren mede binnen, hebbe ick den Coninck voorgehouden volgens Ed. ordre den handel van Ticco ende Priaman, vraechde mij, off daer noch Hollanders waeren, zeyde jae, onsen tijt was noch omtrent 4 maenden, heeft ditto Coninck geantwoort, waeromme wij den handel altijt daer versochten, te meer wij daer noch waeren en onsen tijt noch niet uijt en was, vraechde mij, off ick myn niet schaemde dat te vragen, antwoorde dat ick d’ordre van myn meesters, die mij, sulcx schrijvende, belasten, aen syne Magt. aendienien moste, dat ickt niet en dede uyt mijn selve, d’Engelsen versochten die tijt mede den handel van Ticco, heeft den Coninck haer en mij al op een wijse geantwoort, vraechde ons, ofte wy meenden, dat hij gout en silver courang hadden, dat hij alle de proffijt van ons hadde ende oock, ofte wij meenden, dat hij ende syn natie oock niet en mosten handelen in Ticco, om daer mede proffijten te genieten, heeft tot diversche maelen geseght, malou kamou tida sabaggij moses benjage ketico, seyde oock, dat niet en vraechden naer den Coninck van Engelant ende Hollant, waren sy Coninck, hij was oock een Coninck, heeft ten laesten geseght kamou mou backelij ketico wecht?, comt seyde hij, daer, ick sal alle mijn volck uijt Atchijn naer Ticco brengen, dat niet een persoon hier blijven sall, hebt ghylieden 70 schepen, ick sal der 600 doen maecken, oock seyde, ick ben geen mensch, soo ick alleen tegen U lieden al tsamen en wil vechten, met sulcke ende dierglycke redenen heeft ons gemoet op tversoecken van den handel in Ticco. Ick meene, dat den Coninck aen niemant den handel in Ticco noch Priaman aen ons niet meer sal vergunnen, vermits al over langhe genoch gesien hebbe, dat alle de peper aldaer soeckt hier te brengen ende alsoo selfs wil ten dierste vercoopen...’

¹¹ Aceh’s naval capacity is discussed in Part Three.

¹² *Coen’s Bescheiden*, vol. VII, (pt.1), 610-11; VOC: 1.04.02: 1072/50 a 51.

Aware of the fact that the *pangoran* of Bantam had burnt his pepper vines and that the Europeans were now chiefly depending on him, he self-importantly told them that a catty of pepper was worth a catty of silver.

Based on the different reports he received, governor-general Carpentier (1623-1627) wrote in colourful words to the Gentlemen XVII that the lunatic king called the Dutch and the English the beggars of Europe, who were condemned to eat the pepper out of his hand at his price.

Carpentier could not disguise his dislike of the ‘Atchynder’ who he considered worse than the sultan of Bantam, because of his decrees, his control of the trade and his vigorous attempts to subdue all the pepper ports of Sumatra. ‘Vanity and arrogance have driven this man to such lengths that his fall is near.’¹³

Both Casembroot and Coetelij mention that the king was willing to give the VOC a two months permit to trade in Tiku, on the condition that the company bought his stock of pepper of 1500 *bahar* for the price of 13 *tael* per *bahar* and that they assist him with two ships for an attack on Malacca. This was most probably the stock of pepper which he boasted to send to the Red Sea port of Mocha.

2. 4. 3 A botched strategy

Iskandar Muda set the price for pepper in Aceh at 48 *real* per *bahar*. A resolution taken by the Defence Council stipulated that the merchants were not allowed to pay more than 40 *real* per *bahar* pepper. The factories would have to be closed if the king persisted in keeping the price at an unreasonable level and the merchants would then depart from Aceh.¹⁴

‘.. *schaemt ghij U niet sulcx wederom aen mij te versoecken, een bedelaer en sal niet altijd aen een huijs comen bedelen, maer sal aen diversche huijsen om schaemtshalven sijn toevlucht nemen ende niet, gelijk ghij doet, altyt tot myn huijs compt bedelen..*’

¹³ *ibid.*, vol. I, 595:

‘*De bedelaers van Europa, soo noempt hij ons ende d’Engelsen, noch uyt sijne handt de peper sullen moeten comen eten dnde tot sulcken prijs als sijn lunatique hoeft sal gelieven te eyschen; hij darff oock wel seggen, alwaer’t dat voor een catty peper een catty silver betaelden, niet te veel soude wesen, gemerckt Bantam, soo hij meent, sijne peper verbrandt heeft ende nu geen ander als bij hem alleen te becomen is. Glorieusheyt ende hoogmoet hebben desen man soo verre gebrocht ende betovert, dat, soo ‘t gemeene spreekwoort ons niet en bedrieght, sijnen val seer nabij moet wesen.*’

Dien coninck soud gaerne alle den peperhandel van Sumatra in sijn handt alleene hebben, om de peper na sijn appetijt te venten. Een graet erger dan de pangoran van Bantam heeft hy het over lange gemaect. Den Aichijnder mach wat wupsteerten, stoffen en blasen, te sijnder tijt moet hyder almede aen.’

The Council proposed a flexible approach as a last resort to the deadlock, with the fervent hope that it would work, instructing the merchants to convince Iskandar Muda that they were serious to remain trading in Aceh by offering him 40 *real* per *bahar* for a maximum of 200 *bahar*, as a gesture to meet him halfway and insist on a lower price for the rest, until their available cash was spent. Then the time had come to close the door behind them and leave Aceh. It was a strategy for a permanent retreat from Aceh.

The strategy did not work, Iskandar Muda refused to lower the price. He was sure that he would get rid of his stock of pepper. As I mentioned earlier the Moghul Prince Khurram who visited Aceh in 1621, left with a shipload of pepper.

In the midst of the gridlock between Iskandar Muda and the Anglo-Dutch alliance, a French fleet under the command of Admiral Augustin de Beaulieu arrived in January 1621 with two ships *Montmorency* and the *Ermitage*.¹⁵ It came at a most unsuitable time for the alliance which feared that the French would accept Iskandar Muda's price for the pepper.

De Beaulieu was clearly a novice to the local customs although he had been in the archipelago in 1617. He was immediately put off guard when the king's messenger came with the royal *cap* demanding that he gave him the emerald ring which he wore. He answered the messenger that he would personally bring the ring to the king the following day, but he was ordered to give it immediately. It is evident that Iskandar Muda became more demanding, showing ill-behaviour towards a foreign visitor.

A very gifted narrator De Beaulieu tells us of his first encounters with the English and Dutch captains who gave him an elaborate rundown of the 'indignities and extortions' to which the king and the *orangkaya* daily subjected them and they told him that Iskandar Muda demanded 54 *real* for a *bahar* while they had offered him 40 *real*.¹⁶ It is utterly clear that the captains saw in De Beaulieu an interloper who might profit from the gridlock which existed between them and the king. The presence of the new *arrivee* unnerved the alliance, its solid stance

¹⁴ *ibid.*, vol. IV, 46-47: 'Resolutiën van den Raad van Defensie' (21 April 1620 – 20 January 1623), 24 June 1621.

¹⁵ The French fleet came into problems when it sailed on the west coast of Sumatra and suffered from a lack of water. Many crew were sick. The Dutch came to their assistance and transported some of them to Aceh where they went to look for their admiral. *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. I., 608: Letter to the Gentlemen XVII dated 8 January 1621.

¹⁶ Lombard, *Mémoires*, 105-106 :
'*La journée se passa en plusieurs discours entre les capitaines anglais, hollandaise et moi; ceux-ci me contant une infinie de griefs qu'ils dissent recevoir journellement de ce roi, qui ne leur veut vendre le poivre a moins de 54 reales le bahar; ils en avaient offert jusques a 40 reales, ce qui est encore tres cher.*'

seemed no longer effective and the hope of getting the king on his knees by dropping his price, vanished with a third party around.

They resorted to mean practices to hinder the French. De Beaulieu learned from Portuguese captives of a plot by the northerners to poison him. He turned ill after spending an evening in the house of an Englishman named Robert, where he was lavished with food and drink and only afterwards realized that his hosts themselves had abstained. He became extremely weak from nausea which continued for several days and only recovered from the food poisoning by curing himself with an antidote he called 'coco de Maledives'.¹⁷ It is obvious that the alliance did not take lightly the trade ambitions of the French.

To obtain an intimate and overall picture of the situation and conditions in Aceh at that moment when the interests of all parties involved in the pepper trade collided, we should pay attention to De Beaulieu's account of his negotiations and conversations with Iskandar Muda. His talks with the northern Europeans certainly prepared him for the things to come.

He arrived in Aceh unprepared for a visit to the Court of the sultan. His company ineptly supplied him with some insignificant and cheap gifts for a king. Not wanting to offend him, De Beaulieu gracefully offered him a full set of cavalry weaponry, richly engraved and decorated. Yet to all intents and purposes it was also a practical decision to avoid the scorn of the northerners who were eager to ridicule him. He was embarrassed that his company had failed to provide him with a letter of recommendation for the king and hurriedly wrote a letter in the name of the king of France, which he sealed with the French national coat of arms, addressing it : '*A notre très cher frère, le Roi d'Aceh*', having it translated into Portuguese by an interpreter.¹⁸

His first public meeting with Iskandar Muda turned out to be a test of wills.

The king wanted to know how much he offered for a *bahar* of pepper, but De Beaulieu was very hesitant to mention his price. The king insisted that he made this known. Through an interpreter De Beaulieu offered 32 *real* for a *bahar*. The dumbfounded interpreter did not dare to mention the price he offered. The assembled *orangkaya* sat rigid and straight faced, whereupon the interpreter, now almost panicking, directed his attention to Aliq Raja, the *shahbandar*, to whom he whispered the price. The *shahbandar* too was uneasy and avoided to repeat what the interpreter mentioned.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 106-107.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 109.

Portuguese was the language of communication in the contacts between the Acehnese authorities and the Europeans. Prince Maurice wrote his letter to Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah in Spanish.

The scene is illustrative of the existing tense mood in Aceh, showing the anguish felt by everybody in the audience hall. The king started to tremble from impatience and demanded to know what De Beaulieu offered. Utterly offended by this low price, he pledged that whoever offered him less than 64 *real* (which equals two catty) per *bahar*, was not welcome to trade in his country.¹⁹ He scorned the Dutch and the English for offering him only 1.5 *catty* for a *bahar*. De Beaulieu stood firm, declaring that he had less money to spend than the Dutch and English. The king said that he did not go to less than 48 *real* a *bahar* and ended the meeting. This was the maximum price the alliance had in mind.²⁰ The sources give different prices which Iskandar Muda set for a *bahar* of pepper. Apparently the price for pepper from the west coast was lower than the price they had to pay in the port of Aceh. Even though Iskandar Muda eagerly tried to get rid of the pepper from the west coast, he dragged the negotiations with De Beaulieu, who requested a contract to purchase pepper in Tiku. Even when he showed interest to buy other goods, the *orangkaya* of the *alfandique* told him haughtily that they were not interested in *reals*. One wonders if they were following orders from the palace or whether they acted independently. The trade had come to a complete standstill. If nothing else, Iskandar Muda was eager for some company and confided in his French guest that he despised the Dutch and English because of the shameless way in which they pursued trade contracts and monopolies; they made war with the sultan of Bantam, which was the reason that the latter cut down his pepper vines. He confided that he set the price for them at 64 *real* a *bahar* but that he was not at all interested in selling them his pepper.²¹ In his letter to the Gentlemen XVII governor-general De Carpentier also mentions the exorbitant price of 64 *real* a *bahar*.²² De Beaulieu went seven times to the palace and every visit to the king required fresh gifts. Just like the English and the Dutch he was appalled by Iskandar Muda 's greediness and that of the harbour officials, whom he called insatiable thieves. During the six months that he remained in Aceh, De Beaulieu discovered that Iskandar Muda was keen to know more about France, its relations with England and whether the king of France possessed a large army and artillery. Iskandar Muda said to him that if he had not fallen sick he would have gone on an expedition to besiege Malacca. He cunningly informed of De Beaulieu if he would have been willing to accompany him on the expedition, to which

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 141. A catty is 32 *real*; One and a half catty is 48 *real*.

²⁰ *ibid.*, 142-143.

²¹ Lombard, *Mémoires*, 113.

²² *Generale Missiven*, vol. I., 106.

the latter responded that he would be honoured to assist him.²³ Obviously Iskandar Muda wanted to find out if he had found a new ally against the Portuguese since he could not rely on the Dutch.

De Beaulieu also mentions that Iskandar Muda seriously feared a rebellion of the *orangkaya*. One day when he visited the palace, several female guards were tortured. For three hours he heard their screams of agony. They either died from the tortures, or were thrown in the river after their bodies were viciously mutilated.

The king explained that they had refused to tell him what had caused the noise of the previous night which had wakened him from his sleep and was convinced that they were concealing a plot against him. After his initial shock De Beaulieu faintly responded that a country indeed needed justice. As if encouraged by his words, Iskandar Muda said that if he did not punish the offences of his people, his life would be in jeopardy. He called the *orangkaya* cruel, stressing that their immoral behaviour provoked the wrath of God. He was God's instrument, who needed to apply justice over them. They had no reason to complain about him because he protected them against neighbouring kings and against foreigners, allowing them to follow their religious inclinations and he gave them the occasion to enrich themselves and live comfortable lives with their families and slaves.²⁴

This is the first overt reference in a foreign source to the anguished relationship between Iskandar Muda and the *orangkaya*. De Beaulieu describes a scheme of guard of the palace in which the *orangkaya* had to take turns in shifts and were closely watched on by Iskandar Muda's private body-guards. The Dutch and English do not speak of a troubled relationship between Iskandar Muda and the *orangkaya*, at times referring to his punishments of those *orangkaya* who evaded his decrees. They mention on the other hand that he tended to listen to their advice. Iskandar Muda certainly relied on Sheikh Shamsu'd-din Pasai in matters concerning Aceh's internal and external affairs.

It is instructive to make a leap to France, De Beaulieu's homeland to try to put the political system in Aceh in perspective. The foreign merchants' perceptions were fundamentally based on their backgrounds. When De Beaulieu set out for the East, the Thirty Years War had just started. Cardinal Richelieu's '*Le Raison d'Etat*' through which the French monarch gained

²³ Lombard, *Mémoires*, 113-14.

²⁴ *idem*.

Iskandar Muda was convinced that his own mother was behind the plot because she favoured a prince of Johor to succeed him on the throne. That same evening the prince was killed at the orders of the king, together with a prince of Bintang and one of Pahang. They were captured princes who stayed in the palace.

absolute power over any contesting power of the various classes in society, guided the country during the war. The system of government which Richelieu advocated was hierarchic and abrasive. The kings Luis XIII and Luis XIV were focussed on destroying the powers of their nobility and the traditional privileges of the provinces in order to establish a centralized monarchy. While Richelieu developed his philosophy for the state, Sheikh Shamsu'd-din Pasai advised Iskandar Muda and his grandfather Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah not only on religious, but also on social and political issues, which concerned the Acehnese realm, and on Aceh's relations with the outside world. Religious advisors in both states were influential at the courts.

The extended negotiations for a license may suggest that Iskandar Muda was not at all anxious to sell his pepper to the 'interloper'. When De Beaulieu was unsuccessful to obtain a license to trade in Tiku, he set sail for Kedah a well known pepper supplier on the west coast of the Malay peninsula. His efforts to purchase pepper there were not very successful, because the Acehnese armada had invaded Kedah in 1619 and cut down all the pepper vines with the result that there was hardly any pepper available. He returned to Aceh to once again push for a license to buy pepper in Tiku which he finally obtained. It was valid for a very limited period of 21 days. He bought 400 *bahar* of pepper for the price of 25 *real* a *bahar* which is far less than the price asked in the port of Aceh. It demonstrates that the trade in Tiku was not completely in the hands of the king of Aceh.

As a gesture of friendship, Iskandar Muda sent the king of France 8 *bahar* of pepper.

2. 4. 4 European retreat from Aceh and Iskandar Muda's retaliation

The west coast enjoyed abundant harvests of pepper which were claimed by Iskandar Muda. There was plenty of pepper available in Aceh, more than the Dutch ship the *Orangeboom* could carry. The English *Unity* loaded 1200 *bahar* pepper for which the merchants paid with textiles which were still very much in demand. The Dutch suffered from a lack of textiles and procured only 694 *bahar* of pepper, which gave them the feeling of onlookers in the trade.²⁵ Quite curiously merchant Van der Broeck wrote from Surat that if the merchants of the *Thoolen* had been supplied with cash instead of textiles, they could have procured the finest

²⁵ *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. I, 680.

quality of pepper in Aceh.²⁶ These differing opinions do not give a realistic picture of the prevailing conditions in Aceh.

Nicolaes Casembroot asked for plenty of textiles and some nice Dutch gifts to present to the authorities, because it was expected that within three months there would be an enormous surplus of pepper 'which needs a master' (buyer). He said that within a few years there would be vast quantities of pepper available, when the plantations in Aceh itself would start to produce. Iskandar Muda gave permission for free trade because he could not get rid of the supplies. He asked Casembroot 2000 *tael* for one year's trade in Tiku, but eventually went down to 1500 *tael* (which amounted to about 6000 *real*), confiding in Casembroot that he did no longer draw any tolls from the ports and that the people there did not want his textiles.²⁷ This dramatic revelation to a member of the Anglo-Dutch Defence alliance he so despised, illustrates his desperation with the existing situation. His authority over the ports rested merely on dictation and threats, but his threats did not always work, as the example of Tiku, where he could not get rid of his textiles, shows.

Casembroot's tireless efforts to convince the company authorities in Bantam to remain in Aceh, bore no fruit. From his letter to them transpires that he was still confused by the company's changing policies and strategies.²⁸

The Gentlemen XVII were compelled to reorient their policy due to the war in Europe and not in the least because of the obstructions by the Portuguese, French, English and Danes who were strongly influencing the markets, the sale of pepper had almost come to a standstill. The profits for the VOC were negligible because of the high prices the merchants paid in Asia. The enormous surplus had to be sold with great loss.²⁹ It was resolved that the factories in

²⁶ *ibid.*, vol. VII, (pt. 2), 1041: Letter of 8 December 1622.

²⁷ *ibid.*, 932-934: Letter dated 15 February 1622.

²⁸ *idem.*

²⁹ *ibid.*, vol. IV, 562:

'Staet te letten dat den peperhandel alrij verscheyde tegenspoet heeft, eerstelijck, dat alhier te lande soo veel peper nu niet en can vercocht werden, als wel te voren, soo ten regart van d'oorloge, als het belet door de Portugesen, Francen, Engelsen ende Deenen, die ons alomme in 't belet sijn ende merckten alomme verdueren. De tweede tegenspoet is, dat de peper in Indien soo dier ingecocht wordt, dat het onmogelijk is eenich profijt te cunnen doen ende daerover getracht moet werden de peper in den inkoop te doen dalen tegens 1 1/5 a 2 realen van 8ten de Bantanse sack. De derde tegenspoet is in den handel der peper, dat de veelheyt die U.E. overgesonden hebt, mede causeert dat den peper met grote schade moet vercocht werden.'

Aceh and Patani should continue with a minimum of costs and were resolute that no violence would be used against the local rulers, but to leave their ports in friendship.³⁰

In spite of the Europeans' dislike of the 'Moors', they were mindful not to offend them.

Without much restraint they invested capital and energy in their relationship with the local men and women power holders. However, Iskandar Muda, the man who put a heavy stamp on their trade, often upset and infuriated them. Focussed as they were on their own interests, they were unable to describe him in any other terms but as a tyrant. He became the *bête noir* among the local monarchs.

A disheartened Casembroot closed the factory in Aceh in the course of 1622 and traded from his ship. The English left after first securing 1000 *bahar* of pepper. Iskandar Muda was clearly insulted by the official departure from Aceh of the merchants; it tainted his glory if there were no longer Europeans residing and trading in his port.

He was provoked by the slightest mistakes of the Dutch, accusing them of shooting from their ships at one of his *prahu* in the Straits. He sent a warning to Casembroot, saying that if this was proven true, he would send his armada to Batavia to drive out (*vernestelen* the Dutch from there).³¹ It was his first explicit threat to Dutch authority in the archipelago. He demanded a couple of horses which the VOC owned in Batavia, or to stay away from his domain. The relationship between them was in constant limbo, but evidently neither wanted to completely give up on the other.

Both the English and the Dutch made the pepper port of Jambi their focus, where for many years they ran a profitable business. The Portuguese too frequented Jambi, their trade made possible by the armistice of 1615 between Malacca and Johor. Apparently the Dutch felt that the king of Jambi was intent on peace with Malacca and more inclined to the Portuguese than to them and the English, which threatened their trade.³² The Portuguese set fire to one of their vessels in the Jambi river, trying to chase them away.

³⁰ *ibid.*, 538-540.

³¹ *Generale Missiven*, vol. I, 174 :Letter from Pieter de Carpentier to the Gentlemen XVII dated 27 October 1625.

³² *ibid.*, 476- 477: Letter dated 5 August 1619:

'Die van Jambi doen groote neersticheyt om vrede met die van Malacca te maecken, waarover d'onse vry wat vresen van de Portugiesen aengetast te worden, omdat de coninck haer gunstiger dan ons off d'Engelsen is. Doch U.E mogen wel verseeckert wesen, dat de sterckste den handel van Jambi behouden sal.'

Dutch assistance for the king of Jambi in 1624 against Iskandar Muda demonstrates that their patience with their old brother in-arms was over. The English did not want to become involved in the struggle, explaining that they had invested money in Aceh.³³

The cracks within the Anglo-Dutch Defence alliance already showed when in 1623 Coen set out to conquer the Banda islands, which he justified by claiming that the Bandanese were selling their produce to the Spaniards in Tidore. The English were not willing to participate in the expedition, declaring that they lacked enough ships.³⁴ Incensed by their refusal Coen warned the Gentlemen XVII that they were nurturing a serpent in their bosom, who did not deserve one grain of sand in the Moluccas, Amboyna and Banda.³⁵ He reproached them, saying that if they worked for the grace of God and the welfare of the country, they should get rid of the English.³⁶

In 1624 the Acehnese armada raided the port of Indragiri on Sumatra's east coast where Portuguese and the Dutch ships procured pepper, brought there by the Minangkabao people from the mountainous hinterland. In 1616 Aceh was the biggest buyer of pepper in Andragiri for which Iskandar Muda paid with padi, gold and slaves.

His threat to invade Jambi impacted on the trade of the entire region which had almost come to a standstill. The developments were anxiously followed in Batavia. Governor-general Carpentier and the Council of the Indies were brooding on a plan to encircle the 'Atchynder' with ships if he obstructed Dutch efforts to trade on the west coast and refused to sign a 'friendly' contract.³⁷ They informed the Gentlemen XVII that the king of Aceh was preparing an invasion of the ports of Oulaccan and Indrapoura (on Sumatra's west coast) and if he succeeded he would be in full control of the pepper trade from Aceh to Celebar (Silebar).³⁸

The Dutch acknowledged that Iskandar Muda was the kingpin of the trade. They understood the importance of renewing their relations with him, confident that he was anxious to be courted by European traders. They acted accordingly and in the course of 1632 captain Stadtlander arrived in Aceh with the *Buyren* to pledge assistance for a combined attack on

³³ In Part Three the problems between Aceh and Jambi are explored.

³⁴ *A history of Southeast Asia*, 332.

³⁵ *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. I, 543-544: Letter of 11 May 1620.

³⁶ *ibid.*, vol. I, 564.

³⁷ *Generale Missiven*, vol. I, 144, 145: Letter dated 3 January 1624.

³⁸ *ibid.*, 192-194: Letter dated 3 February 1626.

Malacca which had come out victorious from the Acehese attack of 1629, in return for a shipload of pepper or payment in tin and/or gold and toll free trade in Aceh's ports.³⁹

Evidently pleased with Dutch rapprochement Iskandar Muda promised Stadlander a license to trade in Perak which was known for its tin, and four years exemption of tolls for the purchase of pepper in all trading ports within his domain on the condition that they assist him with 10 ships and artillery for an attack on Malacca.⁴⁰ As a gesture of appreciation for the renewed friendship he sent the governor-general one hundred *picul* of pepper, which was about 125 Dutch pounds⁴¹, two pots of *minyak tanah* (oil) and an elephant which was respectfully refused, because the big animal would not be able to stand in the boat. It is evident that both parties realized the importance of the re-instated alliance. The Portugese were still not beaten.

The English followed with apprehension the renewed friendship between the Dutch and Iskandar Muda; the crew of the *Exchange* even spread the rumour in Tiku that the king of Mataram had captured Batavia the seat of Dutch authority, which caused problems for the Dutch to come to purchase pepper in Tiku. They succeeded in purchasing 1300 *bahar* of pepper in Tiku for which they paid with little textiles and mostly in cash.⁴²

The Defence alliance was deranged since Dutch extirpation strategy in Ambon in 1623. It is clear that the revitalized relations with Iskandar Muda bore fruit for the VOC, in 1634 it booked a profit of fl. 47.369 on the west coast, while the profit in Aceh for one voyage amounted to fl. 3.874.⁴³

In 1633 Iskandar Muda invaded the port of Indrapoura, south of Tiku and Priaman and created mooring taxes there. Although the relations were renewed, he demanded gifts from the Dutch before he allowed them to procure pepper there and he set the price for 100 *bahar* at 408 *real*. When the local people rebelled, the Acehese confiscated 500 *bahar* of pepper, brought it to Tiku and set fire to the pepper vines and other crops. The Acehese actions there amounted to no less than extirpation. Worried by the developments Governor-General Brouwer wrote to the Gentlemen XVII 'our favourites in Indrapoura are massacred by the

³⁹ The Acehese attack on Malacca is discussed in Part Three.

⁴⁰ *Dagh-Register 1631-1634*, 126-130.

⁴¹ The weights are described in *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. VII (pt. 2), 1875.

⁴² *Generale Missiven*, vol. I, 412 : Letter to the Gentlemen XVII, dated 15 December 1633.

⁴³ *ibid.*, 475: Letter to the Gentlemen XVII, dated 27 December 1634.

Acehnese⁴⁴ Notwithstanding the fact that the relations with the Dutch were restored, Iskandar Muda seemed out on the monopoly of the trade. Brouwer's report of 4 January 1636 to the Gentlemen XVII reveals his mood. Although VOC ships were visiting Aceh where some lively trade took place, he remarked 'Aceh is the enemy of our enemy and therefore our friend. The company never supported the king of Aceh against the Indian rulers because the company had no intention to make him big.'

2. 4. 5 Conclusion

The three missions of Cornelis Comans to Aceh show that Iskandar Muda's grip on the pepper trade steadfastly strengthened. He would not forego his position as principal trader in the ports on the west coast.

The European merchants in general spoke of Iskandar Muda's bad temper and his untrustworthiness; everything they felt was in conflict with their own interest, was in their view against the freedom of trade. He in turn, was appalled by their greed and their unscrupulous ways to achieve their goals and did not hesitate to even call them 'beggars'. The Anglo-Dutch Defence Alliance was not successful in bringing Iskandar Muda to his knees to set a lower price for the pepper. Even though he seemed eager to get rid of his supplies, he dragged the negotiations with French Admiral De Beaulieu and enjoyed his presence at the court and the discourse with him. The process shows that Iskandar Muda did not take advantage of the arrival of a third party to sell his supplies. Trade seemed no longer his big obsession. He used the visit of De Beaulieu to merely ignore the Dutch and the English. Whatever the merchants dislike of Iskandar Muda, he was still the key person of the trade and they had to follow his whims or leave Aceh, which they hesitantly did. It had not been unprofitable to trade there.

The Anglo-Dutch Defence alliance cracked over support for the king of Jambi against Iskandar Muda. The English refused to assist Jambi because they did not want to jeopardize their trade in Aceh; the Dutch were ready to defend Jambi against an Acehnese invasion because their business in Jambi was threatened. Iskandar Muda's threat to invade Jambi

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 412.

brought the area's trade to a standstill. It shows that he was the kingpin of the trade who decided the course of events. He usurped the trade of the west coast ports by violent means. The relationship between the Dutch and Iskandar Muda was based on reciprocity; they both set their conditions. He asked for assistance against Malacca in exchange for trade contracts, they asked contracts in exchange for their assistance. Their relationship was in a constant impasse, but it survived the animosities. Iskandar Muda made no effort to drive the Dutch from Batavia. Both parties realized that their strategic alliance was of utmost importance if they wanted to free the Straits from the Portuguese.

PART THREE

WAR AND SUBJUGATION

PRELUDE TO THE WAR EXPEDITIONS

3. 1. 1 Entangled interests: the real and the ideal

What was Iskandar Muda's major motive to go to war? Was it gain or perhaps glory? Was war a means to an end or was it good for its own sake and thus to establish the sultan as a glorious conqueror? According to his own statements, Iskandar Muda was out to dispel the Portuguese from the Straits region. War against the Portuguese was a religious obligation. It is not so much royal religious ideology so to speak with which I shall concern myself principally in this part of the study, for I shall consider the implications of the diverse documents produced within the context of Iskandar Muda's policies and actions, such as those written by the European merchants in the area. Essential to the discussion is that when the Portuguese settled in Malacca at the start of the sixteenth century, they imposed the *cartaz* system on shipping in their 'sphere of influence' which damaged the traditional trade and forced vessels to deviate from the followed routes. It owes it to the Muslim merchants who moved from Malacca to the other side of the Straits, where they based their trade with the rest of the archipelago and the Muslim ports of the Red Sea, that Aceh derived its strength and became an important transit point for the Muslim trade. It rose from its rather inconspicuous position to that of a prominent trade centre which rivalled Malacca. The Acehnese historian Amirul Hadi claims that this rise constituted the basic foundation for the Golden Age of the kingdom in the seventeenth century, especially during the reign of Sultan Iskandar Muda (1607-1636).¹ I should make it clear however, that this milestone was not a goal in itself but an achievement. The dispersal of the Portuguese from the Straits was the ultimate goal of the Acehnese rulers since the foundation of the sultanate. It lent the Acehnese campaigns against the 'infidels' the character of a 'holy war'. At the annual gatherings in Mecca the Muslim leaders among other things discussed the wars against the 'Moors' on the Iberian Peninsula and Portuguese incursions in Asia and the possibilities for establishing a *Pacta Islamica*.²

¹ *Aceh and the Portuguese: A study of the struggle of Islam in Southeast Asia, 1500-1579*, 2.

² The term *Pacta Islamica* is used by Hadi, 118.

We have to bear in mind that the Portuguese not only set out to control the sea routes of the world, but to spread Christianity. In many regions of Asia missionaries worked alongside soldiers and traders.

Aceh took on the role of leader of the Islamic opposition against the Christian invaders. Johor, the successor state of the overthrown Sultanate of Malacca was either too weak to fend off the Portuguese or unwilling to follow a consistent policy of opposing the conqueror. Given the constant in Acehs politics to clear the Straits region from the Portuguese, the seventeenth century started on a sombre note, confronting the reality that Aceh's dream and relentless efforts to put an end to Portuguese presence had not come true. The Portuguese keenly manipulated the geo-political power equilibrium for their own survival and sustenance. They remained a political force of the first rank. Their invasion of Aceh in 1606, showed Sultan Ali Ri'ayat Shah that he needed to strengthen Aceh's capabilities to protect its territorial integrity against the enemies of Islam. This is the fundamental basis of the Accord of 1607 between Ali Ri'ayat Shah and the Dutch. The support of a powerful ally was essential to fight the Portuguese, even if the ally demanded a *rendez-vous* for Dutch ships, c.q. jurisdiction in exchange.

The exploration of the trade- and diplomatic relations between Iskandar Muda and the northern Europeans, has brought to light that the European efforts to secure privileges and obtain trade monopolies steadfastly intensified. By centralizing the trade Iskandar Muda showed that he did not tolerate foreign encroachment on the region's trade. The port of Aceh was the centre of government and the hubbub of the trade of the Acehnese realm. The evocative question is, whether Iskandar Muda's obsessive control of the trade in his extended domain and beyond its boundaries, came forth from a craving for wealth or from a zealous ideal and ardent duty to save the Islamic trade from usurpation by the 'infidel' in Malacca and from other usurpers. He vowed to pursue the Portuguese as long as he lived, which is unmistakably clear from his letter of 1610 to Prince Maurice of Nassau, because they were the enemies of Islam. This highlights his religious motivation and obligation. He continued the policy of his forebears and predecessors.

The discussion in Part Two has demonstrated that Iskandar Muda was acutely aware of the challenges of the times: the geo-political ambiguities and the unprecedented economic

Frederick de Houtman, a hostage in Aceh in 1600, mentions that Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah was visited by a Portuguese envoy and a 'paap' (priest) who advised him to send his hostages to the mountains. Joao Paulo Oliveira E Costa pays attention to Portuguese Christian zeal in his article "The Padroado and the Catholic Mission in Asia during the 17th Century" in: *Rivalry and Conflict, European Traders and Asian networks 16th and 17th century*, (Leiden: IGEER & CNWS), 2003.

opportunities. He realized that a steady income of revenues was essential for a sound economy and to maintain the region's best equipped and largest armada.

The implications of the combination of zealous defender of Islam and kingpin of the trade which notably played such a major role in Iskandar Muda's reign, shall be discussed further in the following chapters, by exploring his war expeditions to several ports on the Malay peninsula and the island of Sumatra. Was he a rapacious conqueror out on the riches of the neighbourhood or perhaps a religious paladin? The question may seem outlandish and is perhaps premature, but it is essential to establish his motifs for waging wars on the ports. For a good understanding of the issues of war and peace and the local realities, it is important to establish and follow the chronology and analyse the character of the expeditions.

3. 1. 2 Aceh's Forces

The early visitors to Aceh were surprised to arrive in a city which was open, not protected by walls and prominent defence works, while Aceh had been almost constantly at war with Malacca and with Johor. It is even more surprising that when French admiral Augustin de Beaulieu visited the port two decades later at a most critical time when the Anglo-Dutch Defence alliance formed a potential threat to the safety of Aceh, he noted that the city was not protected, with the exception of a fort at the mouth of the river leading to the city.³ At the same time he observed that it was quite difficult to reach the port because of the entwined waterways with their narrow entrances to the shore and the dense, almost impenetrable vegetation at its edges.

Aceh's large naval force was an effective deterrence against foreign infiltration and aggression. According to De Beaulieu this naval force was divided over three fleets, which were strategically stationed in the main port Bandar Aceh, in Pedir on the east coast and in Daya on the west coast.

John Davis, the chief pilot of the De Houtman expedition which arrived in Aceh in 1598 and of the English expedition under admiral Lancaster in 1602, gives us the first sketch of Aceh's naval force under Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah (al Mukamil).

³ *Mémoires*, 206.

‘Alau’-din Ri’ayat Shah hath very many Gallies, I thinke an hundred, some that will carry foure hundred men, made like a wherrie, very long and open, without Decke, Fore-castell, Chase, or any upper building. Their Oares are like Shovels of foure foote long, which they use only with the hand, not resting them upon the Galley. They beare no Ordnance; with these hee keepeth his Neighbours in obedience’ .’A woman is his admiral, for hee will trust no men. Their weapons are Bowes, Arrowes, Javelings, Swords, Targets; they have no defensive Armes, but fight naked. Hee hath great store of Brasse Ordnance, which they use without Carriages, shooting them as they lye upon the ground. They be the greatest that I have ever seene, and the metal is reported to be rich of Gold. The trust of his land force standeth upon his Elephants’.⁴ The navy’s *laxamana* at the time of the arrival of William Lancaster’s fleet in 1602 was a female, a relative of the sultan, named Keumalahayati. There is no proof that she was in function when the preparations for the war expedition to Johor in 1599 took place in which De Houtman would participate.

Ito Takeshi who made a study of Aceh’s internal structure and institutions, sees no indications that a standing army existed under Iskandar Muda, but he mentions the existence of a slave and elephant corps.⁵ Our witness, Augustin de Beaulieu notes that when the king plans a war all his subjects with no exception are obliged to march at his first command at their own expense, and take provisions with them for three months.⁶ ‘The king could assemble forty thousand eligible men for war from all over Aceh. He provides them with weapons which are registered and these weapons have to be returned when they come back and he provides iron, gunpowder and rice if the expedition takes more than three months.’⁷ One may suppose that the village chief or the district chiefs were responsible for the recruitment of the men and the registering of the weapons. Whether these chiefs in return received some kind of

⁴ *The voyages and works of John Davis the Navigator*, 149;
De oudste reizen van de Zeeuwen, 59.

⁵ *The World of the Adat Aceh*, 51.

⁶ *Mémoires*, 211.

Interesting in this context is Bernard Lewis’ assertion : ‘According to Muslim teaching, *jihād* is one of the basic commandments of the faith, an obligation imposed on all Muslims by God, through revelation. In an offensive war, it is an obligation of the Muslim community as a whole (*fard kifāya*) ; in a defensive war, it becomes a personal obligation of every male Muslim (*fard ‘ayn*). In such a situation, the Muslim ruler might issue a general call to arms (*naḥr ‘amm*).’ In: *The political language of Islam*, 73 .

P. S. van Koningsveld (125-26), is of the opinion that in today’s discussions the *defensive* character of the *jihād* is amplified, while classical teachings on *jihād* at the same time buttresses expansion.

I mention in the chapter Geo-historical Setting that Ibn Battuta speaks of a *jihād* by the sultan of Pasai against Batak tribes.

⁷ *Mémoires*, 211.

compensation from the sultan cannot be ascertained. It is on the other hand very conceivable that they would be punished if they did not follow his orders.

Iskandar Muda placed the responsibility for the maintenance of the galleys and big ships with his principal *orangkaya* obliging them to equip and repair them, putting at their use enough men to help them with these tasks. The *laxamana*, the admiral, fitted out the largest ship, paid for its maintenance and its replacement in case of loss. This reputed ‘man of war’, the *Cakra Dunya* (wheel of the world), was renamed by the Europeans ‘Terror of the world’.

Interestingly De Beaulieu observes ‘the navy consists of around one hundred galleys (galères) ‘bigger than the ones found in Christendom. These ships are masterly built, but too heavy, for they are broad and high; each can carry 4 pieces of cannon which shoot balls weighing up to 40 pounds. The largest is manned with 600 to 800 rowers ‘who are not slaves, but poor men’. Besides the heavy ordnance, the ships also carry some lighter guns. A moderate sized galley measures about 120 feet (English?) in length. The oars are operated by two men who remain standing.

Iskandar Muda boasted that he possessed 5000 canons, but De Beaulieu estimated that he owned no more than 2000 pieces, all made from bronze. Of these there were 1200 pieces of a moderate size and 800 were large.⁸

While De Beaulieu was fully aware of the fact that Iskandar Muda received part of his ordnance as ‘gifts’ or payment from the European traders in exchange for trade contracts⁹, it escaped him that Iskandar Muda most probably obtained a vast amount of artillery and ships from his latest war expeditions to the Malay ports of Johor, Pahang and Kedah.

The war expeditions cost Iskandar Muda hardly anything. The warriors left on their own expenses and were obliged to take their own provisions with them for a period of four months. According to De Beaulieu it was a system unknown in Europe of that time.¹⁰ As mentioned above the sultan provided artillery, gun-powder and weapons which were all registered. After

⁸ idem.

From the Turks the Acehnese learned the art of canon-making ; the Ottoman emperor sent manpower, equipment and artillery to assist Aceh against the Portuguese.

⁹ The *Adat Aceh* enumerates the gifts and dues foreign traders were obliged to present the Sultan and his officials; the value and the goods differed according to their nationality. Takeshi describes the administration of the port, the trade and taxation current in the seventeenth century in extenso: *The World of the Adat Aceh*, chapters V and VI. He calls the imposition of import duties ‘hybrid’ in nature, because of similarities with pre-Portuguese Malacca and Pasai in the sixteenth century (p. 341).

¹⁰ *Mémoires*, 211-212 ;

Also: Lombard, *Le Sultanat d Atjéh au Temps d'Iskanda Muda*, 90 onwards.

the expedition the warriors were obliged to return the weapons they carried under the penalty of death. Their relatives were held responsible for any misconduct of their sons, brothers and husbands, for which they could be executed.¹¹ In this way the sultan held a major part of the population hostage. We have to bear in mind that this was not an Acehnese device, because similar conditions existed elsewhere in the region.

When De Beaulieu arrived in Aceh, Iskandar Muda was busy to equip three galleys for an expedition to the west coast, each carrying one elephant and 400 men, to capture one of the chief local authorities who had fled and was hiding between Priaman and Indrapoura and castigate the local population for harbouring the fugitive. Dutch envoy Cornelis Comans referred in 1620 to the expected expedition, saying that Iskandar Muda ordered the people of Priaman to plant banana trees to feed his elephants, a decree that frightened these people for they knew that something terrible was going to happen.

Elephants and horses were used in the land expeditions. As we note above, John Davis observed the importance of elephants in Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah's army. According to the *Hikayat Aceh* elephants formed the major deterrence against foreign invasions which was principally the reason for the absence of defence walls around the city.¹² The great reliance placed on elephants by the Acehnese tacticians was, from the practical point of view, not very realistic, as the next quotation clarifies: 'Although fighting elephants may strike terror in an invading army unused to them, these animals were by no means unbeatable; we see that the Romans found ways to defeat the elephants of Pyrrhus and Hanibal while the Greeks, Turks and other invaders steadfastly lost their fear of the Indian fighting elephant. Even the best trained elephants, overcome by panic especially caused by fire, could throw off its riders and trample the troops of its own side turning the course of the battle.' The elephants in Aceh were very useful as carriers in the riverine and bushy Acehnese terrain. Iskandar Muda is qualified as a brilliant mahout who loved to go on elephant hunting expeditions and to train his elephants. Elephant fighting was a royal sport much appreciated by the successive sultans. The *Bustan as-Salatin* too refers to elephant-hunting expeditions by the sultans. Iskandar Muda possessed around nine hundred elephants, while his successor Iskandar Thani owned one thousand. It is obvious that the size and expansion of Aceh's naval force did not make the use of elephants redundant. Supposedly every one of the war ships carried at least one

¹¹ idem.

¹² *Hikayat Atjèh*, 166.

elephant. Royal prestige was clearly supported by a large herd of elephants. The favourite royal animals bore fantastic names and people in the streets greeted them with respect.

Part Three

CHAPTER II

BELLIGERENCE BETWEEN ACEH AND JOHOR

3. 2. 1 The early conflicts

As I set out in the chapter Geo-historical Setting, the actual belligerence between Aceh and Johor started when the rulers of Aceh began expanding their territory by invading and incorporating several Malay speaking ports on Sumatra's east coast like Pedir and Pasai, in response to Portuguese infiltration in these ports. Johor saw Aceh as a danger to its authority, while Aceh regarded Johor as a traitor because it often sided with the Portuguese in Malacca. When in 1540 the queen widow of the East Sumatran port of Aru sought help from Johor against Aceh's Alau'd-din R'iyat Shah (Al-Kahar) who attempted to invade her country, Johor's ruler acted promptly by dispatching a fleet to Aru's defence and successfully defeated the Acehnese at the river Panai. The sultan of Johor moreover married the widow to align their countries. The east Sumatran ports where Malay was the vernacular and Malay culture was dominant, were inclined to Johor. Aru was in an unenviable position, intermittently controlled by the two antagonists. The last change of authority over Aru took place in 1611 when Sultan Iskandar Muda's fleet invaded the port which was under Johor's umbrella. Johor and Malacca had just (1610) signed a truce. As discussed in my chapter 'Genesis' in Part One, the Portuguese supported Johor in its quest for control over Aru, indubitably to shatter Aceh's ambitions for control of the east Sumatran coast. The Dutch admiral Joris van Spilbergen who patrolled the Straits in 1602 witnessed how little boats from Johor hid in the waters of Aru, to attack Acehnese vessels.¹ Another example of the animosity between the two sultanates is when in 1564 the Acehnese invaded Johor, abducted the royal

¹ I. Commelin, *Begin ende Voortgangh van de Vereenighde Nederlantsche Geoctroyeerde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, (Amsterdam: Jan Jansz., 1646), 45. Van Spilbergen's account is of September 1602.

family, and installed one of the sons of the defeated ruler on the throne of Johor, making him a puppet ruler. This ruler was overthrown shortly afterwards by his uncle, whereupon the Acehnese sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah (al-Kahar) sent his armada to attack Johor, 'but when it arrived, the city had recovered from the rebellion and strongly defended itself against the Acehnese who beat a quiet retreat.'² There were however brief moments of peace and even cooperation against Malacca between the contenders.³

Again war between them erupted after the young crown prince of Aceh, Raja Buyong, also known as Raja Ashem, who was the son of the king of Johor and the daughter of the deceased Acehnese sultan was murdered around 1589 in a rebellion by the Acehnese *orangkaya*. We have to consider the fact that the crown prince, the incumbent ruler of Aceh, was a son of the sultan of Johor. Given the lingering antagonism between the two sultanates, it is understandable that the Acehnese *orangkaya* fiercely opposed the enthronement of a son of the sultan of Johor, bringing about his liquidation. It staved off the likelihood that Aceh, which was the political and ideological force in the region, would become a vassal state of Johor. Whether Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah (Sayyid al Mukamil) at that time a principal courtier, had a hand in the murder of Raja Buyong who had been under his protection, is impossible to ascertain. We may declare with confidence that Aceh owes it to the rebelling *orangkaya* that it was saved the humiliation of becoming Johor's vassal state.

Intermarriage was certainly not the way to salve the inherent antagonism between the two sultanates. Johor progressively launched several attacks on Aceh to avenge the murder of Raja Buyong and Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah (Sayyid al Mukamil) involved the Dutch in this internecine conflict when he requested Cornelis de Houtman's assistance for his attack on Johor in 1599 as payment for a shipload of pepper. John Davis reports: 'The first hereof (11 september 1599) the king made shew (sure?) that we should receive in ordnance for the battery of Ior (Johor) and take in soldiers to depart for that service. There were many gallies manned and brought out of the river, riding halfe a mile from our ships; the sea full of prawes and boats, all manned.'⁴ The assault on the Dutch ships, instigated by the Portuguese, prevented the war expedition to Johor. The Portuguese with whom the sultan maintained trade and

² P. A. Tiele, *De Europeërs in den Maleischen Archipel*, (BKI, 1881), vol. XXIX, 169-170.

³ C. A. Gibson-Hill, "Johore Lama and other ancient cites" (JMBRAS, vol. XXVIII, Pt. 2), 144: 'Finally we must account for the Portuguese statement that in 1574 Raialle 'king of Jor and Bintan' was secretly supporting the Acehnese in their war against Malacca'.

⁴ *The Voyage and Works of John Davis*, 147; *De oudste reizen*, 48.

diplomatic relations since 1593, refused to assist him to attack Johor which was his condition to allow them the building of a fort within his domain.

Aceh's solitary attempt in 1600 to attack Johor was aborted, because of the sudden arrival in the waters of Aceh of a Dutch fleet under the command of Paulus Van Caerden. The Acehnese feared an attack to free Frederick de Houtman.

3. 2. 2 Aceh's invasion in 1613

When he was in his seventh year as ruler of Aceh, Iskandar Muda sent a war fleet to Johor where on the 6th of June 1613 it burnt down the city of Batu Sawar, the new capital, and captured several members of the royal family. A number of twenty two Dutchmen who were in the city and took up their arms in defence of Johor, were also captured and carried away to Aceh together with a large number of the local people. A VOC delegation led by Abraham Theunemans had just arrived in Batu Sawar with the merchant ship *De Hoop* which lay at anchor in the river, to restock the factory.

The Acehnese armada which consisted of several big galleys and a large number of small boats departed on 7 May 1613 for Johor. Sailing into the Johor river on its way to Batu Sawar, it encountered the Dutch *De Hoop*. According to the Dutch sources, the *laxamana* of the armada sent a messenger to the crew to remain neutral with the promise that no harm would be done to them. But the merchants in town who were unaware of this request, fired at the invaders. Was this reaction because they panicked? They had just delivered cash and goods worth about 26.000 Dutch guilders, hastily burying 10.000 guilders, together with 44 *tael* gold, two golden swords (*keris*) and the contract of the factory in the soil beneath the factory. In the ensuing battle the Acehnese captured twenty two Dutchmen including the visiting Theunemans and members of his mission; two men were killed and four who were wounded managed to escape with a *prahu* to the ship *De Hoop*, while eight men disappeared.⁵ The captured men were taken to Aceh as prisoners of war, where they apologized to Sultan Iskandar Muda, saying that they were bound by their treaty of 1606 with Johor to defend the sultan who was a friend of Holland. There can be little doubt that Iskandar Muda was troubled

⁵ Coen's *Bescheiden*, vol. I, 26 : Letter to the Gentlemen XVII, dated 1 January 1614;
VOC 1.04.02: 1056, 51 a 52 : Missive Theunemans en Boekholt uit Atchin dated 22 July 1613.

by the fact that the Dutch had come to the defence of his Malay enemy, yet he allowed the captives to stay in their lodge on bail of the company's goods.

Was Iskandar Muda envious of the relationship between Johor and the VOC and therefore out to punish them? He certainly felt offended when Admiral Verhoeven whom he called his 'confederate' refused to visit him in 1608, instead Verhoeven was in a hurry to depart for Johor to discuss an attack on Malacca with Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah of Johor. From his rather lenient attitude towards the captives appears that he was not aiming at a total break with the Dutch, even at a time when the VOC put an embargo on its shipping to Aceh from 1612-1614 because of his refusal to grant the merchants a trade contract. The VOC was reluctantly sucked into a local conflict and at the mercy of the Sultan of Aceh. Jan Pieterszoon Coen, at that time president of the factory in Bantam feared that his merchants' actions against the invading Acehnese in Johor had further damaged the relationship between the company and the king of Aceh.⁶

To obtain an overall picture of the invasion and its ramifications, I summarize the events following the invasion.

In the course of 1614, within a period of six months after the invasion, Raja Bongsu, also known as Raja Seberang and Raja Ilir (the ruler of the downstream area), youngest brother of Sultan Alaud'din Ri'ayat Shah, was married off to Iskandar Muda's sister and sent back to Johor to take possession of the throne of his brother, known as the *Yang di pertoean* (Malay title for the ruler). The new ruler took the name of Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah and was sultan of Johor from 1614 until his death in 1624.

There is a striking similarity with the Acehnese invasion of Johor in 1564 when the invader Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah (al-Kahar) replaced the captured ruler of Johor with his sibling and after marrying the candidate off to one of his relatives, sent him back to Johor as his vassal.

⁶ Coen's *Bescheiden*, vol. I, 26.

3. 2. 3 The fate of Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah

What happened to Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah when the Acehnese invaded his country, kept the minds of historians busy, but has not been satisfactorily resolved.⁷ The earliest accounts of the events are by the Dutch captives themselves. From the letters of Theunemans and Boekholt one extracts the information that they were brought together with Raja Seberang, the *orangkaya* and a large number of Johorites to Aceh.⁸ They do not mention the capture of Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah. What happened to the sultan? If he was not captured by the Acehnese, it is likely that when he learned of the imminent Acehnese attack he escaped to a refuge. The *Sejarah Melayu* on the other hand mentions the death of the sultan while in captivity in Aceh, '*Marhoem yang mangkat di Atjeh*'.⁹

From the following account of Sir Richard Winstedt, well known authority on Malay history, transpires that Sultan Alau'd-din had died in Aceh:

'Was he (Alau'd-din) present at the second attack (which happened in 1615) on Batu Sawar? Or was he still a prisoner in Aceh or already dead? Clearly he died between 1613 and 1615 and in Aceh, so that it is very doubtful if the grave thought to cover his bones at Makam Sultan, Kota Tinggi, is really his. His *bendahara*, Tun Sri Lanang, composer of the Malay Annals was a prisoner with the Sultan at Pasai and records in the introduction to that work that his master died at Aceh: he also says his master was a ruler who liked music better than administration.'¹⁰

One is inclined to take the information that the sultan died in Pasai on the east coast of Aceh for true, somebody as close to him as his *bendahara*, (the Malay equivalent for prime minister), cannot be mistaken when claiming that his patron died in captivity in Aceh. But the question is rather: was Alau'd-din captured during the invasion of 1613 or when Aceh for a second time invaded Johor in 1615?

⁷ Gibson-Hill "On the alleged death of Sultan Alla-al-Din of Johore ate Aceh, in 1613", JMBRAS, vol. XXXI (1), 1965;

D. K. Bassett claims that Sultan Alla-al-Din Ri'ayat Syah II of Johore escaped when the Achinese overran Batoe Sawar in June 1613, but died a few years later. His half-brother Raja Bongsu or Raja Seberang, was taken to Aceh, married to Iskandar Muda's sister, and sent back to Batu Sawar as Sultan Abdul'lah Ma'ayat Syah (1614-1624), in: 'Changes in the Pattern of Malay Politics, 1629-1655, (JSEAH, vol. X, no. 4, 1969).

⁸ VOC 1.04.02 : 1056 , 51 a 52 '*Missieve Theunemans en Boekholt uit Atchin*' dated 22 July 1613.

⁹ Cited by Husain Djajadininggrat , "*Critisch overzicht van de in Maleische Werken vervatte gegevens over de geschiedenis van het Sultanaat van Atjeh*," (BKI, vol. 65: 1911), 180.

¹⁰ R. Winstedt, "A History of Johore" (JMBRAS, vol. X: 1932), 33.

General Thomas Best who witnessed the return of the armada in Aceh in 1613 from its expedition to Johor, speaks of the arrival of the king of Johor and his brother, thus confirming the bendahara's claim that Sultan Alau'd-din was a prisoner in Aceh. However, the bizarre account of Thomas Best's assistant Ralph Croft contradicts this:

'The General of the Armada, for his welcome, because he did not bring the ould King of Joar, who was an ould decreped man, and had assigned his kingdome to his son, was by the King forced to eat a platter of turdes (turds) and afterwards to wash his bodie in them, to the King's great infamie and dishonour, for so base a thing to be published amongst foreyners and strangers. Although this seeme strange, yet it is trew, as God is in heaven.'¹¹

Winstedt calls Croft's rather bizarre story 'a romantic tale of a purser'.

It indeed looks as if Ralph Croft was more interested in the banality of Iskandar Muda's punishment than in the fate of the Sultan of Johor. But one cannot deny the fact that from his account a tantalizing picture emerges: was the 'old decreped king' who had left his country to his son, Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah? In another account Croft mentions that Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah escaped to the island of Bintam before Aceh invaded Batu Sawar in 1613: 'In June, 1613, Batu Sawar and Kota Seberang were occupied by the Achinese. A number of the Malay leaders were taken prisoner, including Raja Bongsu, the Sultan's half-brother, but Sultan Alla-al-Din himself escaped to Bintam and the Acehnese were still searching for him at the end of the year.'¹²

Another account is from Pieter Floris who served on board the English vessel *Globe* (1611-1615) who mentions "...The king of Atchin had sente the younger brother of the King of Johor, Raja Bounsoe, backe agayne with great honoure, in companye of 40 prawes and 2000 Atchinders, for to build upp agayne the forte and citie of Johor, with good store of ordinance and other necessaries, having married him to his sister; and was gone for Bintam some 14 daies ago, saying that the olde King, should be disposed, and hee settle upp in his place."¹³

This seems in accordance with the observation of Ralph Croft that the sultan had fled to Bintam and should be disposed.

¹¹ *ibid.*, 32

Also in Foster, *The Voyage of Thomas Best*, 172.

¹² Gibson-Hill, "Johor Lama and other ancient sites", (JMBRAS: 1955, vol. XXVIII, Pt. 2), 158.

¹³ *ibid.*, "On the alleged death of Sultan Alla-al-Din of Johore at Aceh in 1613" (JMBRAS:1956, vol. XXIV (pt.1)).

A last explanation comes from a legitimate source which is Sultan Iskandar Thani, the successor of Iskandar Muda, who told the Dutch envoy Cornelis Simonszoon van der Veer when the latter visited him in 1637, that the Sultan of Johor was captured in 1613 and had been taken to Aceh, where he was executed, because he had refused to assist Iskandar Muda against the Portuguese.¹⁴ One expects that as the successor of Iskandar Muda, he was justly informed about the fate of the sultan.

These differing explanations have contributed to the conundrum of the disappearance of Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah. The Dutch could have provided the most reliable story, but they cared little about the fate of Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah so it seems, since they do no longer refer to him in their correspondence. Once he was out of sight, he was out of their minds. From the very start of their contacts with this ruler they had mixed feelings about him. Admiral Matelieff de Jonge who negotiated the successive treaties of June and September 1606 with him, was not at all taken to Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah, who left the government to his younger brother Raja Bongsu, the one with whom he discoursed. In Matelieff eyes Alau'd-din was a dud, 'a man of little energy, who slept till noon, then ate and washed and proceeded to drink himself drunk so that in the afternoon it was impossible to do business with him. Provided he had wine and women, he cared neither for his kingdom nor his subjects.'¹⁵

The Dutch were relieved that Alau'd-din had disappeared from the political scene, for he was growing out of touch with them and made advances to the Portuguese. Raja Bongsu on the other hand was much inclined to them.

¹⁴ E. Netscher, *Djohor en Siak 1602 tot 1865: Historische Beschrijving* (Batavia: 1879), 31; Also in: *Verhandelingen van het Bataafs Genootschap*, vol. XXXV, 30, 31

¹⁵ Cited from: Joost Hartgers (ed.), Amsterdam, 1648 *Journael ende Historische Verhael van de treffelijcke Reyse gedaen naer Oost-Indien ende China met elf schepen door den Manhaften Admiraal Cornelis Matelief de Jonge uitgevaren in den jare 1605*, 12.

“*Jan de Patuan is ook een persoon van weinigh bedrijfs/ghewoon tot bij den middagh te slapen/dan te eten en te wasschen/ende voorts droncken te drincken/so dat na den middag met hem niet en is te handelen/want men moet almede met hem drincken/ en droncke-mans dingen doen. Hij bemoeyt hem geen dingen/maar laet het al op de Edelen ende Raya Zabrang staen/mach van geen swarigheyt hooren/ende als men hem aenspreeckt van net te doen/als volck op te brengen oft dierghelijcke/soo swijght hij al/en al vraeght men hem 2. oft 3. mael/het is al 't selfde/ In somma is nergens min bequaemt toe als tot koningh te wesen/denckt noch op Rijck noch op onderdanen/als hij slechts wijn heeft en vrouwen.*”

The treaty signed in May 1606 is included in the journal of Matelieff de Jonge (14).

3. 2. 4 Raja Bongsu installed as vassal ruler of Johor

Because of his fiercely anti-Portuguese stance Raja Bongsu was obviously the most suitable candidate for Iskandar Muda to be his vassal ruler, even if several years earlier the same Bongsu asked Dutch assistance for an attack on both Malacca and Aceh.

As the new ruler he was escorted back to Johor in great state, accompanied by several frigates and a large number of *prahu*, clearly to impress Malacca and the rulers of the neighbouring ports. With him a workforce of two thousand Acehnese went to Johor to reconstruct the city of Batu Sawar. The victorious Iskandar Muda also sent his representative Raja Lela Wangsa, the admiral of the armada, to Johor. It is not clear what his actual function in Johor was; strangely the Dutch envoy Adryaan van der Dussen who was in Johor in 1614 to discuss reparation for the losses the VOC had suffered during the Acehnese invasion and to propose the construction of a fort, refers to Raja Lela Wangsa as the *coninck* (king), at the same time also referring to Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah as *Syne Majesteit* (his Majesty) and *Coninck* (king), which blurs the actual functions and roles of these men.¹⁶ There is no evidence that he nor the successive Dutch envoys and merchants directly dealt with Raja Lela Wangsa in Johor.

Iskandar Muda's appointment of Raja Bongsu as sultan of Johor, ushered in a new era in Acehnese-Johor relations. Their shared wish to dislodge the Portuguese from Malacca was the uniting factor in their relationship, which was sealed by the marriage of Raja Bongsu with Iskandar Muda's sister. It should be clear at this point that kinship relations between the two courts was no guarantee for lasting good relations and peace between them; the historical examples of the sixteenth century show, that allegiance was not secured by establishing kinship ties.

¹⁶ "*Cort verhael vant wedervaeren van Adryaen vander Dussen, Opperkoopman, enz*". in: Tiele (ed.), *Bouwstoffen*, vol. I, 70-79.

3. 2. 5 Dutch-Johor relations

The Dutch perceived Aceh's invasion of Johor as another proof of Iskandar Muda's tyranny. Peter Borschberg, a specialist on seventeenth century geo-politics in the Straits, is of the opinion that Aceh was hard to blame for feeling isolated and alone, after its allies-in arms Johor and the VOC had concluded different peace treaties with the Lusitanian.¹⁷ Yet his assertion that Aceh and Johor were allies is a misconception; the historical facts show that they were antagonists. It should also be said that although an armistice was pending between the United Republic and Spain, admiral Verhoeven was still out to attack Malacca in 1608, this was also clear to Iskandar Muda. The rivalry between the Dutch and the Portuguese was certainly not over in Asia.

On 25 November 1610 the Dutch resident merchant in Batu Sawar the new capital of Johor, Jacques Obelaer wrote to his head office in Bantam that the Portuguese had blocked the entrance of the Johor river with their frigates for almost a year. This was to avenge Verhoeven's actions against them after he had discussed an attack on Malacca with Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah, and the possibility that the Dutch obtain the sultan's permission to construct a fort in the Straits area. The Portuguese blockade of the Johor river was very effective; the non-arrival of Dutch ships unnerved Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah and his brother Raja Bongsu who felt abandoned and powerless against their Portuguese neighbour. When in October 1610, after one year of blockading, the Malacca administration sent its envoy Joao Lopes d'Amoira¹⁸ to talk Sultan Alau'd-din into signing a peace treaty, he hardly needed to convince him. The envoy found support from the sultan's half brother, who was the ruler of Siak on the east coast of Sumatra. He, together with the *orangkaya* of Johor led the coalition for a peaceful settlement with Malacca.¹⁹ It is obvious that the *orangkaya* of Johor saw no positive prospects by honouring the treaty of 1606 with the Dutch, since it had

¹⁷ P. Borschberg, "Luso-Johor-Dutch Relations approx. 1600-1620" in: *Rivalry and Conflict*, European Traders and Asian Trading Networks, 16th and 17th century, (Leiden: IGEER & CNWS, conference papers, 2003), 154.

¹⁸ De Jonge, *De Opkomst*, vol. III, 304-305.
Letter of Jacques Obelaer. He calls him Joan Lopes de Morere Tombongon, a Portuguese by birth.

¹⁹ Winstedt, "Johor, Portugal, Holland and Aceh", (JMBRAS, vol. X, 1932), 26-34 : 31.

neither brought economic gains nor effective support against Malacca. They reckoned that a truce with Malacca was advantageous for Johor's trade against textiles.²⁰

Between the Sultan and Raja Bongsu his co-regent, there existed serious differences over the course Johor should follow. Raja Bongsu was not at all in favour of an armistice with Malacca. He was the co-signatory of the treaty with the VOC and he was much inclined to the Dutch since the visit of the first Dutch fleet in 1603 under admiral Van Heemskerck. Bongsu later even implored Verhoeven to help him take Patani which he claimed in the name of his eldest brother, the murdered ruler of Patani. The VOC could not grant this request, because it maintained good relations with the ruler of Patani and quite understandably did not want to jeopardize its trade with Patani where it had established a factory. Moreover, it did not want to become embroiled in the local feuds of the Malays.

Despite the fact that the Portuguese merely forced the armistice on Johor, it was definitely a breach of the September Treaty of 1606 between Johor and the Dutch, which stipulates that neither of the parties shall have the right to make peace with the King of Spain without mutual consent (art.10). The situation in far away Europe on the other hand shows that the Dutch had signed a truce with Spain on 2 February 1609 in The Hague, for a period of twelve years, even before the Johor/Malacca armistice was in place. This truce consequentially affected their operations in Asia. Yet, Peter Borschberg contends, that 'secret amendments to the treaty which were made in the presence of English and French ambassadors, foresaw a continuation of the hostilities outside the European scenario'.²¹ Verhoeven was indeed informed of a pending truce between the United Republic and Spain, but he did not mention this during his visit to the sultan. He proposed to attack Malacca by land and sea and to take the construction of a fort in the Straits at hand to defend Johor against the Iberians. Hence Alau'd-din and Bongsu considered an attack by sea and land impractical. Verhoeven sensed that they were looking for a *modus vivendi* with the Portuguese and harangued them on the existence of the September Treaty, warning them that an armistice between Johor and Malacca implied a breach of the treaty.

²⁰ The provisional treaty with the VOC was concluded in May 1606, based on mutual cooperation against the Iberians. The capture of Malacca would entitle the Dutch a place for a *rendez-vous* in the Straits. Since Malacca was not captured by Matelieff, the treaty was replaced with a new one in September of 1606. According to this one the Dutch were only entitled to maintain a factory in Batu Sawar. De Jonge, *De Opkomst*, vol. I (1569-1610), 46-62.

²¹ *Rivalry and Conflict*, 154.

Since 1607 a large Portuguese fleet patrolled the waters of Johor, whose inhabitants frightened by this manifest presence, fled to the mountains. Peace negotiations between Malacca and Johor had come to nothing. Curiously, from a letter written by a Dutch merchant in Patani to Bantam transpires disillusionment that the Dutch had not delivered on the promise made by Matelieff to send ships to Johor and that they were guilty for the misery in which Johor had arrived. First they had drawn the sultan in the war with Malacca merely to forsake him afterwards. The Johorites wanted peace with Malacca.²²

Clearly the years of friendship between the Dutch and Johor had not brought Johor the political and economic gains it had envisioned; Matelieff did not drive out the Portuguese from Malacca in 1606 and Dutch ships seemed more interested to trade in Patani, one of Johor's Malay rivals, than coming to Johor. Yet the Dutch heavily counted on Raja Bongsu's support in opposing an armistice with Malacca. There was much at stake for the VOC if Johor and Malacca would agree on a truce. The chances to establish a *rendez-vous* in the Straits would go up in smoke.

There is also the question why Malacca was pushing Johor into an armistice to fend off the Dutch, when the Peace Accord of The Hague was signed. Perhaps Verhoeven's violent actions against Portuguese ships in front of Malacca were proof that the Dutch were not dissuaded by the Accord to press forward with their plans to capture Malacca. The secret amendments to the Accord are proof that the rivalry for the Asian trade would persist with all its ramifications.

3. 2. 6 Johor's capitulation to Malacca in 1610

One may infer that Sultan Alau'd-din gave in to the truce with Malacca under heavy pressure from his *orangkaya*. Fear of a rebellion was undoubtedly the thrust to sign the armistice. Jacques Obelaer informed his head office at Bantam that on 23 November 1610, a day after the Johorese delegates went to Malacca to officially sign the armistice, Raja Bongsu came to the lodge to talk in secret 'about an issue of great importance'. Bongsu was unreservedly apologetic, declaring that he had to make concessions for the sake of his brother the *Yang di*

²² De Jonge, *De Opkomst*, vol. III, 79-80. This refers to a letter written by Victor Sprinckel, the head merchant in Patani to Bantam, dated 27 December 1608.

Pertoean and therefore consented to an armistice with Malacca, saying that he would never forsake the Prince of Nassau nor the Dutch as long as he lived. He said he was forced to sign the armistice because of the dearth which had befallen his country, caused by Malacca's blockade of the river.²³

Bongsu's mood changed when he learned from the letter from the Prince of Nassau²⁴ about the new situation in Europe and the Accord which Holland and Spain had signed. He was overwhelmed by the news and felt deeply hurt. In their reply to the Prince Maurice of Nassau, the royal brothers uttered their deep disappointment that Holland was at peace with Spain: 'to whom should we now turn to deliver us Malacca?'²⁵ Curiously the letter to the Prince shows only the stamp of Raja Ilir who is Raja Bongsu. One wonders if Sultan Alau'd-din had distanced himself from the Dutch for the obvious reasons. Or was he not at hand when the letter was written? Was he in neighbouring Pahang where he went on a campaign in 1612 to reassert Johor's control over the 'rebellious' state? Or had he left the government of the state to his younger brother as Matelieff experienced? It may seem irrelevant, yet it is a fact that Sultan Alau'd-din was not personally involved in the correspondence with Prince Maurice of Nassau. I should reiterate that Alau'd-din was open to Malacca's advances before he even knew of the The Hague Accord.

There is a striking difference in the reaction of Raja (Ilir) Bongsu and that of Iskandar Muda when the latter was informed by the same Prince Maurice of the The Hague Accord. Iskandar Muda was disappointed with the Prince's decision, but he understood that it was difficult for the Prince not to give in because Spain was located in the close vicinity of the Republic and he could not assist the Prince. But he made it absolutely clear to the Prince that he would pursue the Portuguese as long as he lived no matter what the Prince decided. The point is that Johor and Malacca were close neighbours and Johor could not fight the Portuguese on its own.

The echoes of the Spanish-Dutch Treaty reverberated in Johor, whose royals considered it a breach of the Treaty of September 1606. Obelaer frantically tried to keep the dejected Raja Bongsu on Dutch side against the Portuguese. Bongsu retorted that the (governor)general

²³ *ibid.*, 304-305: Letter from Jacques Obelaer dated 25 November 1610; *ibid.*, 90.

²⁴ The letter is not included in the Dutch records and the date unknown, but I assume that it was handed to him by Obelaer during their nocturnal meeting.

²⁵ De Jonge, *De Opkomst*, vol. III, 305-307: translation (undated) of the letter from the Sultan and Raja Bongsu of Ilir to Prince Maurice of Orange Nassau.

should send an envoy with special authority with whom a permanent agreement should be made, because he was tired and wary of the changing policies of the Dutch.²⁶ His indignation and hurt are genuine: he had lost face. The VOC had not made good on its promises, instead over the years a succession of admirals (Van Heemskerck, Van Warwijck, Matelieff, Both, Verhoeven) had all arrived with their requests and ambitious plans.

The signing of the armistice with Malacca was more than anything else an expression of Johor's desperation. It underscored Dutch inability to come to its defence against the Portuguese who blockaded the Johor river. Even if Matelieff injured the Portuguese naval force, he did not capture Malacca, the principal condition for the establishing of a Dutch *rendez-vous* within Johor's territory. The earlier treaty which was signed in June 1606 had become redundant and was replaced by the a treaty signed in September 1606. According to this new treaty the Dutch were no longer allowed a *rendez-vous* within Johor's territory, but had to be content with a factory in Batu Sawar.

Raja Bongsu's eloquent stance and his prominence in the affairs of the state, clearly hints at a system of dual government in Johor. This was not uncommon in the Malay region, in Perak, Siak and Barus one observes that political authority was divided between the *Ulu* and *Iilir* (upstream and downstream) constituencies, yet in the case of Johor this is not acknowledged. But the argument which strongly supports the idea of dual government is that Raja Bongsu was also known as Raja *Iilir* and Raja *Seberang* (the other side). Here he had his fort and his residence. His constituents included the *orang laut*, sea-nomads whose habitat was the seascape surrounding the Riau archipelago. He was the co-signatory of the treaties with the VOC and the armistice with Malacca and he was the one who signed the letter to Prince Maurice of (Orange) Nassau. Statecraft in Johor at that time was divided between the two brothers. Their different leanings painfully demonstrates the weakness in the rule of Johor and may have contributed to its discomfiture.

²⁶ibid., 304, 305.

3. 2. 7 Aceh's motif to invade Johor

An examination of the extant documents enabled us to seize up the complex political situation in the Straits. Johor's significance for all parties in the field of trade and geo-political aspirations was its strategic location and its influence over the Malay ports such as Pahang, Patani, Siak, Aru, Andragiri, Kampar and Jamby, important suppliers of pepper, bezoar stone, camphor, silk and gold. The Dutch expected that as the assumed successor of the Malaccan Sultanate, Johor could be an important ally against the Portuguese. It should be said that Johor's trade was of little significance; the pepper it supplied came mainly from Jamby, while Pahang too was an important pepper supplier. The Dutch only briefly refer to the trading of bezoar stone and gold.

The brisk developments in the Straits demand that we consider the Acehnese invasion in its perspective. It is essential to the understanding of the political realities to explore the possible motives of Iskandar Muda for the invasion of Johore and its protracted repercussions.

To surrender to the hypothesis that the invasion was simply a matter of Iskandar Muda's tyranny and therefore an end in itself, would render the whole discussion futile. Yet this seems to have been the paramount charge by the Europeans who were in the area.

The *comunis opinio* among historians is that Aceh's incessant envy of Johor was the very reason for its invasion. Let us ponder the possible motifs for Aceh's aggression before we arrive at our own conclusion.

1. Islam versus the 'infidel'

Against the background of Iskandar Muda's religious commitment to pursue the Portuguese, it felt like a blow to him that Johor as the heir of the Sultanate of Malacca closed a pact with the 'infidel' and invader. The armistice between Johor and Malacca intrinsically put Johor's vassal states and in fact the whole Straits area in an exposed position towards Portuguese unambiguous ambitions. Johor's sphere of influence included a considerable part of the Sumatran east coast. The Malacca-Johor constellation effectuated by the armistice could turn the power scale in favour of the Portuguese and diminish Aceh's chances to dispel them from Islamic soil.

2. Dutch-Johor friendship

The special friendship between the Dutch and Johor can be regarded the reason for Aceh's invasion. However, between June 1606, when the first treaty between Johor and the Dutch was concluded and 1613, the year Iskandar Muda invaded Batu Sawar, seven years passed by without actions by Aceh against Johor. The Dutch persisted in their relations with both Johor and Aceh even though the relationship between Iskandar Muda and the VOC towards 1613 had suffered and made worse by the fact that the company put an embargo on its shipping to Aceh. Yet, on the basis of the fact that the *laxamana* of the Acehnese war fleet requested the crew of the *De Hoop* not to interfere, promising that no harm would be done to them, it is overwhelmingly clear that the motif for the invasion was not Johor's indulgence of the Dutch and the fact that the Dutch maintained a factory in Batu Sawar. Denys Lombard's assertion that Aceh was out to destroy Dutch factories is not accurate.²⁷ The facts presented here give reason to assert that Iskandar Muda's motif for the invasion of Johor, was Johor's capitulation to Malacca. Iskandar Muda considered Johor a traitor, who now *de jure* was on the side of the 'infidel', making the balance of power skid to the Portuguese. It was a continuation of the geo-politics of the Straits since the Portuguese arrived in Malacca just over a hundred years ago.

3. 2. 8 Portuguese reactions to the events

The Portuguese in Malacca were bewildered by the events. Johor was invaded by their worst enemy in front of their very eyes, and the Dutch were making their come-back in Johor. There is ample evidence that Malacca sent an envoy to Aceh to persuade Iskandar Muda to give up his planned attack on Malacca. Thomas Best mentions (1613) that he intercepted a Portuguese barque in which came an ambassador from Malacca. Iskandar Muda strongly requested that he hand him the barque and its complete cargo, which Best finally did. He was therefore rewarded with the title *orangkaya puteh*. Best did not pay further attention to the political implication of the visit of the Malaccan envoy. But where he left, the Dutch continued to report. Governor-general Both wrote to the Board of Directors or the Gentlemen XVII on 10 November 1614 that the powerful king of Aceh and his confederated states were preparing

²⁷ *Le Sultanate d'Atjeh au temps d'Iskandar Muda*, 92: « Iskandar cherchait surtout à détruire la factorie hollandaise et n'entendait point laisser les Portugais, ou quelque autre puissance, s'installer dans les ruines de Batu Sawar »

for a siege of Malacca, 'albeit the fact that Malacca had sent an ambassador to persuade the king to desist from the use of force.'²⁸

The audacious Iskandar Muda could not be persuaded to abandon his plan for an attack on Malacca. The Portuguese grew increasingly desperate, because they were suffering heavy setbacks in Pegu²⁹. An attack on Malacca by Aceh with the help of its allies could ultimately mean the loss of the city.

3. 2. 9 The come-back of the Dutch in Johor

After their humiliation by the Acehnese, the Dutch regained their spirit when the merchants were released and sent back to Johor together with Raja Bongsu, who was the newly appointed Sultan Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah, where they started sorting out their business, even if the factory was destroyed by fire. They seemed comfortable with the replacement of Sultan Alau'd-din with Raja Bongsu as sultan of Johor.³⁰ He was still inclined to the Dutch. In their letters to Bantam, written during their captivity in Aceh, Theunemans and Kistiens do not refer to their inhumane treatment by the Acehnese. It seems that their intervention on behalf of Johor had not led to insurmountable problems between Iskandar Muda and the VOC. The Dutch prisoners of war were released together with Raja Bongsu. Trailing behind the large fleet of frigates and *prahu* which convoyed Raja Bongsu to Johor, the Dutchmen pillaged a small Malaccan boat. The Portuguese intercepted them and in the ensuing fight five of them died and 15 were taken to Malacca where they were severely handled. The head-merchant was stabbed to death and his dead body was left for two days rotting like that of a dog in the streets.³¹ Several survivors were later sent to Goa, while the rest went to the

²⁸ *Generale Missiven*, vol. I (1610-1638), 37.

²⁹ *idem*.

³⁰ Also: Gibson-Hill: "Johor Lama and other ancient sites on the Johor River", (JMBRAS, 1955, vol. XXVIII), 158, footnote 84 'Bongsu was unpopular with the Portuguese for his pro-Dutch sympathies, and it was his 'bad counsels' which were responsible for Alla-al-Din's defiance of the Portuguese threats in 1603/04, when dom Furtado wanted the Malays to expel the Dutch factors at Batu Sawar.'

³¹ *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. I, 28: Letter to the Gentlemen XVII dated 1 January 1614. The name of the head merchant is not mentioned.

Philippines in 1616 with the returning fleet of the Spanish governor Juan de Silva who had died in Malacca during his short stay there.

In Johor the persistent rumour went that the Dutch themselves set fire to their factory before the Acehnese invaders could lay their hands on it. They had buried cash and goods under the factory. This did not go unnoticed and was reported to the 'self-proclaimed king', an enigmatic figure who is not named in the merchants' letters.

Jan Pieterszoon Coen hinted to the Gentlemen XVII that the *Yang di Pertoewan*, divided the money between himself and his nobles.³² Was this Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah? Curiously, even Sultan Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah spoke of this enigmatic person as the *coninck*. *De Hoop* returned to Johor in 1614 to claim the money and goods, but by then these had disappeared. The 'self-proclaimed king' had divided the loot between himself and his *orangkaya*. When the factory went up in flames, a part of the goods vanished and the Acehnese invaders seized the rest. The merchants had buried about 16.000 Dutch guilders, 10.000 *real*, 44 *tael* gold, 2 golden krisses and the old contract of the factory in the night of 7 May.³³ Sultan Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah registered the names of the persons to whom the money was given, with the intention to return this to the Dutch in due time.

Following up on the talks between Obelaer and Sultan Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah, envoy Adriaen van der Dussen had arrived in Johor in August 1614 to discuss permanent arrangements with the sultan. It is noteworthy that he too referred to the enigmatic person as *coninck*.

One wonders what kind of permanent arrangements the sultan had in mind: a defence alignment against Malacca or one with broader ramifications, for example to evict the Acehnese from Johor? Abdullah was in neighbouring Pahang where the ruler, a puppet of Johor had been murdered in a rebellion staged by the *orangkaya*. These *orangkaya* threatened that they would ask the Portuguese for assistance in convoying their candidate who hailed from the Bornean fraction, to take possession of the throne. These developments were threatening Johor's political authority over Pahang.

When Abdullah received the message that the Dutch envoy was in Johor, he immediately returned overland by elephant, seemingly eager to meet his important visitor.

³² *ibid.*, 35: Letter dated 1 January 1614 .

³³ *ibid.*, 26.

Van der Dussen expressed the governor-general's 'condolences with the loss of the city' and immediately brought up the issue of reparation for the losses the VOC had suffered as a result of Aceh's invasion. He tried to persuade Abdullah to compensate for these losses, since – as he put it – the Dutch had come to his defence, even though the Acehnese had requested them not to interfere and promised that no harm would be done to them. He made it clear that they had felt bound by the September Treaty of 1606 to defend Johor against foreign aggression. Abdullah, quite detached, replied matter-of-factly that the Dutch had betrayed him and that it was their duty to defend him and his country. He lamented that he had lost his city, his home and his people and could not reasonably be held responsible for the losses of the VOC.³⁴ Albeit the painful confrontation, the two men went on to discuss the terms for renewed cooperation. Abdullah was still inclined to the Dutch and said that if they had only reassured him that they would come to Johor's assistance, he would never have signed the armistice with Malacca. He asked the VOC to assist him with ships for an attack on Malacca.³⁵ In exchange the company would be allowed the construction of a fort at a chosen site. High spirited Van der Dussen promised him assistance. Abdullah immediately had two vessels prepared to guide the envoy on a reconnaissance of the area from which he chose the island of Crymon (Carimon) as the most convenient site for the construction of a fort.³⁶ 'Seeing that the king was inclined to us and wholeheartedly presented a site to construct a fort, I gave his Majesty the assurance that the issue would undoubtedly be taken up and effectuated.'³⁷ From merchant Ryser, who had been in Johor before he travelled to Aceh in 1615, the Dutch merchants in Aceh learned that Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah requested Iskandar Muda to grant the VOC permission to construct a fort in the Straits. Eventually Iskandar Muda allowed this request. According to Van der Dussen the 'ambassador of Aceh' in Johor (Raja Lela Wangsa?) also offered his cooperation for the construction of a fort. Could he perhaps have been the so-called *coninck*?

Two important facts can be drawn from this: Iskandar Muda had no grudge against the VOC and Sultan Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah could not decide autonomously and depended on his

³⁴ Adriaen van der Dussen, "*Cort Verhael vant wedervaeren van Adryaen vander Dussen Opperkoopman etcetera*" in: Tiele, *Bouwstoffen*, vol. I, 70-79.

³⁵ Abraham van den Broeck, who talked with Sultan Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah in his hiding place in the waters around Bintan in 1615, mentions in his letter of 30 September 1615 to J. P. Coen, that the Sultan spoke of 20 ships for a period of 3 months, as promised by Van der Dussen. *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. VII, (pt.1), 41

³⁶ De Jonge, *Bouwstoffen*, vol. I, 76.

³⁷ *ibid.*, 75.

Acehnese sovereign. Iskandar Muda's endorsement was obviously given in by the promise made by Van der Dussen to assist Johor with ships for an attack on Malacca. The strategic partnership between the VOC and Johor, as well as the one between the VOC and Aceh looked finally to come into effect by this planned combined action against Malacca. Governor-general Both informed the Gentlemen XVII that Aceh and Johor were preparing to attack Malacca. He spoke of Aceh and its 'confederated states', but he refrained from mentioning the assistance promised by Van der Dussen to Sultan Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah.³⁸

3.2. 10 A time of flux: fusion and fission

One may suppose that as the conqueror of Johor, Iskandar Muda set the terms under which Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah functioned. Abdullah was evidently obliged to join in an assault on Malacca. It means *inter alia* that Abdullah, even after Aceh's devastating actions in Batu Sawar, still possessed a navy and could make available an army. An attack on Malacca was not against Abdullah's own wishes for he never forgave the Portuguese that they had seized Malacca from his grandfather as he reiterated in the presence of his visitors. The Portuguese blockade of the Johor river in 1609 had brought his country at the brink of starvation and had led to Aceh's aggression.

The Portuguese were aware of an impending attack on their city and obviously despairing. They were suffering heavy setbacks in the region; in Pegu the fortress built by Don Felippo de Britto was taken in a popular revolt and the governor together with a number of officials was beheaded, while a number of Portuguese were captured and brought as prisoners to the hinterland. The Dutch governor-general hoped that this development would work to the company's advantage.³⁹

Against all odds the Portuguese set out from Malacca to induce Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah, who was at his fort in Ilir, to consent to a new peace agreement. They must have sensed Aceh's weak authority over Johor, notwithstanding the presence of Raja Lela Wangsa and a large garrison of Acehnese conscripts who were busy reconstructing the city and garrison and they

³⁸ *Generale Missiven*, vol. I, 37 :Letter to the Gentlemen XVII dated 10 November. 1614.

³⁹ *idem*.

quickly seized the opportunity to intrude before the assistance promised by Van der Dussen arrived.⁴⁰

They hotly pursued Abdullah who fled from his fort in Ilir to the island of Bintam in the Riau archipelago and manoeuvred him into a defenceless position. Pushed to his limits Abdullah had no option but to give in and signed a second truce within two years on the island of Bintam in 1615.⁴¹ The haunted Abdullah immediately started to construct a fort because it was painfully clear that Iskandar Muda would retaliate, notwithstanding the fact that their relationship was sealed with Abdullah's marriage to Iskandar Muda's sister.

In the records of the English East India Company we find some rather curious information regarding the relationship between the two kings. Captain Arthur Spaight mentions that when he arrived in Aceh on 15 April 1615, the king (Iskandar Muda) was in Pedir with the king of Johor who has married his sister. 'Although he be his prisoner, they do often drink together.' Was this Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah? The pen of John Millward sketches a similar scene, he found 'the king of Aceh sitting with the king of Johor in a place built for the reception of strangers. He used us very kindly and drunk much (ar)rack, which we must pledge.'⁴²

When they arrived in Johor in September 1615 the Dutchmen Abraham van den Broeck and Hendrick Bruystens were told that Sultan Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah had fled to Bintam. They redirected their vessel to the Riau Archipelago where they found the sultan and his family miserable and dejected in a hiding place protected by the *orang laut* (the sea-nomads who lived in the seascape around the islands). Abdullah seemed relieved when the visitors told him that they came on special orders of their director in Bantam. But he became upset that 'the general' (governor-general Both) had not delivered on the promise by Van der Dussen to

⁴⁰ The VOC was at that time focussed on the developments in the Spice Islands where the English were strengthening their presence. The problems in Bantam were also growing and ships were not readily available.

⁴¹ Rather curiously Gibson-Hill claims 'in 1615 the fugitive Sultan Alau'd- Din signed a treaty with the Portuguese at Malacca, to assume government of the state'. "Johor Lama and other ancient sites", (JMBRAS, 1955, vol. XXVIII, Pt. 2), 158
According to our sources Sultan Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah who had fled to Bintam was visited by the Portuguese in 1615 and forced to sign the armistice in 1615.

⁴³ *Letters Received*, vol. III (1615), 222, 225.

- Winstedt claims that Abdullah was abstemious from youth and evidently had no stomach for these potions. He is therefore convinced that the king of Johor in this case was Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah.
"A History of Johore", (JMBRAS: 1932, vol. X) (Pt. IV), 44.

send him ships for a three months siege of Malacca. He said that Dutch failure to come to his assistance had one again forced him to make peace with Malacca.⁴³

Richard Winstedt has analysed the relationship between Johor and the VOC as one based on mutual apprehension: ‘Apparently after being placed on his throne by the Achinese, Sultan Abdullah remained at his fort across the river, whence he sent a secret envoy to the Dutch at Bantam. Thereupon on 25 August 1614 Adriaen van den Dussen came to Batu Sawar to reiterate the request Verhoeff (Verhoeven) had made in January 1609 for leave to build a fort for its protection. Again this request excited distrust and was refused: had it been granted, Johor would have been saved the agony of many sieges and Malaya would probably be under Dutch instead of English protection’.⁴⁴

The Portuguese had openly confessed to Abdullah that they feared an Acehnese attack on their city and proposed that Malacca and Johor combine their fleets together to withstand the Acehnese armada.⁴⁵ They went as far as to offer him and his family sanctuary in Malacca and promised to protect them to their last person. But Abdullah - always distrustful of them - rejected this offer. By signing a truce with Malacca, Abdullah also sealed his fate, so to speak. He knew that Iskandar Muda would retaliate.

The issues of war and peace in the Malacca Straits region went beyond Johor’s capitulations to Malacca and Aceh’s repercussions. It is warranted to focus on the events in Pahang to arrive at a critical assessment of the developing processes .

As earlier mentioned Sultan Alau’ d-din Ri’ayat Shah invaded Pahang in 1612 to repulse local agitation against his authority.⁴⁶ In 1614 his vassal Abdul-Ghafur, was murdered by his own rebelling son who was against Johor’s authority over Pahang. Sharply divided on the issue of succession, Pahang was now in the middle of a deep crisis. The parricide son was eager to access the throne, but Johor waited in the corridors with its own candidate Raja Bujang, son

⁴³ *Coen’s Bescheiden*, vol. VII (pt. 1), 44: Letter dated 30 September 1615. The original missive of Van der Broeck is registered as VOC I.04.02: 1060; 91a 92;

⁴⁴ “A History of Johor”, 44.

The author claims, after he examined the Malay Annals and the description given by *bendahara* Tun Sri Lanang of his patron Sultan Abdullah, that ‘king Abdullah is the most pleasing and worthy figure among the rulers of old Johor. While Sultan Ali Jalla Abdul-Jalil Shah stands out as a fighter, Sultan Abdullah stands out as a diplomat, who fell, because he could not serve three masters.’

⁴⁵ *Coen’s Bescheiden*, vol. VII (pt. I), 42.

Van den Broeck mentions that Aceh’s force consisted of twenty thousand men and one hundred galleys, which was expected to attack Johor, while Sultan Abdullah Ma’ayat Shah could assemble around three thousand men (slaves not included).

⁴⁶ Winstedt quoting Peter Williamsz Floris, “A history of Johor”, (JMBRAS, vol. X, 1932), 32.

of Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah. The *orangkaya* of Pahang on the other hand preferred a candidate from Borneo and asked Malacca for assistance against Johor. Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah just back from captivity in Aceh, immediately went with a fleet of small boats (*prahu*), accompanied by three Acehnese galleys to fetch the princess of Pahang, a daughter of the murdered ruler, who was betrothed to his nephew Raja Bujang, the candidate for the Pahang throne. The Portuguese prevented Abdullah from entering Pahang, leaving the combined Johor-Acehnese fleet no choice but to retreat.⁴⁷ It was a humiliating experience for the new Aceh-Johor federation.

The crucial information given by Abraham van der Broeck is, that the Portuguese, instead of convoying the candidate from the Bornean fraction to Pahang as the *orangkaya* had requested, convoyed the Johor candidate Raja Bujang with two vessels to Pahang to take possession of the throne, after Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah signed the second armistice in 1615.⁴⁸

At this point in the developments one thing is very clear. Even after a century into its existence, Portuguese Malacca had to sustain itself amidst an inherently hostile environment. The Portuguese were able to exploit noble factions, or disaffection within the Malay ports, to their advantage. The *orangkaya* of Johor as well as those of Pahang were looking to the Portuguese for the same reason: trade and political power.

3. 2. 11 Aceh's revenge

Johor's second truce with Malacca was the ultimate challenge to Iskandar Muda. It was a setback in the power equilibrium in which Aceh gained over Malacca.

Malacca's ability to coerce Abdullah evidently shows Aceh's ineffective authority over Johor. Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah had taken residence in Bintan when the Acehnese armada arrived in Johor in the course of September 1615 and for the second time destroyed Batu Sawar. The English vessel Solomon which had just arrived from Patani at the entrance of the Straits, was visited by Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah : 'the king of Johor accompanied by five or six praws, came aboard our ship, who flying from the King of Achin durst not remain in his own country

⁴⁷ "*Cort Verhael*", in: Tiele, *Bouwstoffen*, I, 70 –79.

Van der Dussen relates his conversation with Sultan Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, vol. I, 118. Admiral Steven van der Hagen (Verhaegen) who was in front of Johor with his fleet in 1615, mentions that the Portuguese convoyed Raja Bujang to Pahang.

but lived on the water like a fugitive.’⁴⁹ There is no documented evidence that the English assisted Johor against the Portuguese or Aceh.

One of the principal VOC fleets of that time, under the command of Steven van der Hagen (Verhagen), departed from the Moluccan islands to the Straits of Malacca at the beginning of 1616, with the aim to seize a Macao carrack and a galleon on their way to Goa and secondly to defend VOC’s interest in Johor and the island of Carimon.⁵⁰ The fleet of five big ships and two smaller yachts, left at the instruction of governor-general Reynst for what seems assistance for Johor, as promised by Van der Dussen in 1614. Yet the fleet was badly needed in the Moluccan island to fend off the advancing English.

At the same time a Portuguese fleet was on its way from Goa to succour Malacca against an expected Acehnese attack and hoped to assemble with a Spanish fleet coming from the Philippines, to attack the Dutch in the Moluccan islands.

It is warranted to look at the situation as it evolved to get a picture of the interests of the parties involved.

To his great astonishment Admiral Van der Hagen found a situation in the Straits which was utterly different from what he expected. He was astonished to note that the Acehnese had burnt down the city of Batu Sawar ‘for which we find no other reason than the said king’s unmatched tyranny and ambitions’.⁵¹ Given Dutch anti-Portuguese feelings and their ambition to capture Malacca, it is surprising that Van der Hagen was unable to perceive Aceh’s invasion of Johor other than Iskandar Muda’s tyranny. It is a fine example of the political idiom so often used by the Europeans to describe local resistance against their own intrusion and unconcealed ambitions. It is proof that he came too late to secure Dutch interest in Johor. Van der Hagen mentions in his account that the Acehnese armada which consisted of 300 vessels and thirty to forty thousand men had entered the river and completely burnt down the already vacated city of Johor.⁵² His dismay over Aceh’s devastation of Johor

⁴⁹ *Letters Received*, vol. III, 213: Letter from Lucas Antheunisz. dated 31 March 1616.

⁵⁰ I mention in Part Two chapter III that a fleet from the Moluccan islands was made available for the Straits. In 1617 Jan Pieterszoon Coen instructed Cornelis Comans to bring this under Iskandar Muda’s attention to obtain a contract for the pepper trade on the West coast. The fleet hastily returned to protect Dutch interest in the Moluccan islands against the English.

⁵¹ ‘Letter addressed to the ‘Bewindhebbers der O.I. Compagnie’ (Gentlemen XVII), dated 10 March 1616 in: *Bouwstoffen*), vol. I, 118-131.

⁵² *Bouwstoffen*, vol. I, 118.

transpires from his letter to Bantam in which he literally says that he had not been able to capture the king of Aceh who was at war with the king of Johor, and that he would do everything in his power to defend the king of Johor who resided in Bintam.⁵³

Returning homewards from Johor, the Achenese armada encountered the fleet from Goa which came to Malacca's relief. In the battle that ensued one of the four Portuguese galleons exploded from its own fire. The Acehnese captured between fifty and sixty Portuguese, took them to Aceh and confiscated their artillery. Iskandar Muda some time later released these captives, one of which seemed to have been the son of the governor of Malacca. This started the rumour that Aceh and Malacca made peace, but this is not supported by any further evidence.⁵⁴

Chancing upon the remaining three Portuguese galleons St. Bento, St. Laurenco and Nossa Senhora del Ramejo which were lined up together in the bay of Isla das Naos, an islet right in front of Malacca, Van der Hagen was able to claim victory. But he was successful only because after a long vehement fight, suddenly the Portuguese panicked, jumped overboard and swam towards the land, after setting fire to one of their own ships, while the second one also caught fire. The Dutch took the Nossa Senhora, pillaged all gunpowder and artillery and recovered the artillery from the two wrecks.

It had been a hard battle and one which Van der Hagen's men thought they were losing because they did not know the area well. Two of their ships almost ran aground, on account of the shallow waters and the head winds. The yachts *Aeolus* and *Neptunus* encountered Portuguese ships and in the bloody battle that followed many lives were lost. From Dutch side 21 men died; the exact number of Portuguese victims is not given, but it transpires that over two hundred men perished. The Dutch were evidently relieved that the confrontation with the Portuguese ended with so much luck for them. Van der Hagen lost men, but not ships. The Macau carrack and galleon on their annual trip to Goa had not arrived which was a set back for the Dutch. The Spanish fleet from the Philippines was expected to leave Manilla in January for the Moluccan islands. The fleet had to return swiftly to the Moluccan islands to

Van den Broeck estimated a number of twenty thousand men.

⁵³ Coen's *Bescheiden*, vol. VII (pt.1), 68: Letter of 25 December 1615 : 'Wij hebben den Coninck van Atchin, midts de oorloghe tusschen hem ende den coninck van Johor, niet connen becomen ende zullen alle middelen aenwenden omme den coninck van Johor, die wij alsnoch nijet en hebben gesproken ende sich hem onder Bintam onthoudt, in devotie te houden'.

⁵⁴ Coen's *Bescheiden*, vol. I, 180: letter to the Gentlemen XVII dated 31 March 1616.

thwart the English from there and to prepare for the Spanish fleet.⁵⁵ Before he left the Malacca Straits, Van der Hagen presented some of the artillery he had seized from the Portuguese ships to Sultan Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah, to defend himself against Aceh and Malacca.

Taking in Van der Hagen's unusual remark that he was unable to capture the king of Aceh, it appears that the Dutch even at that time had not established a clear policy to secure their interest in the area. Jan Pieterszoon Coen earlier brought the disturbed relations with Aceh under the attention of the Gentlemen XVII and claimed that Iskandar Muda's tyrannical behaviour towards the VOC and its servants was caused by the fact that it had not responded to his request to assist him with several ships for an attack on Malacca. He stressed the urgency to assist Iskandar Muda with ships.⁵⁶

Later in 1617, Coen wittingly used Van der Hagen's presence in the Straits and his success against the Portuguese galleons, as the company's response to Iskandar Muda's request to assist him with ships against Malacca. As brought forward in Part Two chapter III he instructed Cornelis Comans who went as special ambassador to Iskandar Muda to stress the fact that Van der Hagen had booked a triumphant success in the Straits.⁵⁷

The fleet from the Philippines under the command of vice-governor Don Juan de Silva arrived in the Straits in 1616 when Van der Hagen had returned to the Moluccan islands. The Castilleans cut down all the fruit trees in Johor Lama (old Johor) and in Batu Sawar to castigate Johor for befriending the Dutch after Johor had signed an armistice with Malacca and to demand the artillery captured by Van der Hagen.⁵⁸ Their brutal action shows that Aceh was absent from Johor.

From Jambi the Dutch overseer Andries Soury informed Bantam that Iskandar Muda was preparing 200 small *prahu* 'to catch the king of Johor'.⁵⁹ It was Iskandar Muda's third castigation expedition within four years. The regularity of the expeditions lays open Aceh's weakness. Although Iskandar Muda possessed a tremendous capacity to strike, he was

⁵⁵ See Coen's instruction to Cornelis Comans who visited the sultan of Aceh during the period 1617-1619. *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. VII (pt. 2), 15.

⁵⁶ This is discussed in Part One, chapter III of this book.

⁵⁷ *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. VII (pt 1), 157.

⁵⁸ *ibid*, 152.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 279.

incapable to control Johor and spent money and time to pursue Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah. One wonders what had become of Johor, was it a no man's land? The sources do not refer to trade in Johor itself after Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah went into refuge. In 1624 the Acehnese drove away a downhearted Abdullah from the island of Lingga, destroyed his residence and captured a vast number of his subjects. According to local history Iskandar Muda was enraged that Abdullah had sent his one of his wives, the sister of Iskandar Muda, back to Aceh. It may be a valid reason, but Iskandar Muda relentlessly pursued him. The fact that Abdullah carried on some trade with Malacca, because he was deprived of textiles and other necessities, was a major reason. The Dutch were aware of Abdullah's connections with the Portuguese and tried to convince him to stop this trade with Malacca, but their advice fell on a deaf man's ears.⁶⁰

M.A.P. Meilink Roelofs's assertion that the fierce rivalry between the two Malay states Aceh and Johor was an important factor in the continued existence of Portuguese Malacca should be put into perspective.⁶¹ Malacca's manipulation of Johor in the period described here, drew Iskandar Muda's aggression against Johor. One should bear in mind that Johor's capitulation facilitated Portuguese infiltration in Johor's vassal states on the peninsula and in the ports on Sumatra's east coast. Malacca's divide and rule strategy - exemplified by convoying the prince of Johor to Pahang instead of the candidate of the Bornean faction -, deviated Iskandar Muda's wrath towards Johor and towards Pahang.

It is interesting to compare our own analysis of the historical developments with that of the authority on Malay history, Sir Richard Winstedt.

“On the scene of Johor's history there are six principal actors: the Malays, the Portuguese, the Acehnese, the Dutch, the Bugis and the English, overlapping but in that order of time. Trade brought them together and prompted their endless fighting though other lesser motives for war occur. The three actors first on stage sometimes advanced the Cross and the Crescent to excuse bloodshed; and a motive older than Christianity and Islam compelled those dynastic struggles that caused the sacking of Johor Lama by Aceh in 1615”.⁶²

⁶⁰ In his letter to the Gentlemen XVII of 6 September 1622, J. P. Coen suggested to blockade the shipping (from the Portuguese) to Lingga and Bintan, because it was disadvantageous for the VOC. *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. I, 739.

⁶¹ M.A.P. Meilink Roelofs, *Asian Trade and European Influence in the Indonesian Archipelago between 1500 and about 1630* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962), 298.

⁶² “A History of Johore”, (JMBRAS, 1932), vol. X: quoted from the Introduction, 1.

With this *tour de horizon* I have attempted to put the political realities under scrutiny and to project the picture of the shifting loyalties and geo-political developments. I feel that in general scholars shrink from contemplating the motifs of war, preferring instead to describe war's impact rather than to analyse the dynamics at work.

3. 2. 12 Conclusion

The truism that war and conquest do not occur spontaneously but only for a valid reason, may offer a guideline to understanding Aceh's motifs for the invasions of Johor in 1613 and 1615. Johor was an important local power factor as the successor of the Sultanate of Malacca and in this quality it asserted authority over several Malay ports. Portuguese influence over Johor subsequently gave Malacca access to the Malay ports on the Peninsula and the island of Sumatra. Iskandar Muda's invasions of the ports of Aru and Deli which were under Johor's umbrella, took place around 1611 and 1612 and must be viewed against this background. These were calculated attacks aimed at deterring the Portuguese who were able to sign a truce with Johor in 1610. The *locus standi* between Aceh and Johor was not their commonly perceived rivalry. The hostilities between them started early in the sixteenth century. In the eyes of Aceh it was Johor's indulgence of the Portuguese invader in Malacca that conditioned the further course of events.

Malacca's blockade of the river Johor was in response to Dutch encroachment and their treaties with Johor. The VOC fleet under admiral Verhoeven had just left the Straits after inflicting heavy damage on Malaccan ships when the Portuguese took their chance to blockade the Johor river. The truce which they forced on Johor in 1610 was to draw Johor away from the Dutch. Although the rulers of Johor were divided over the course Johor would follow, in the end they signed the armistice with Malacca.

Iskandar Muda invaded Johor in 1613 because of Johor's capitulation to Malacca. On the face of it, his invasion was successful in that he secured an alliance against Malacca by installing Raja Bongsu as his vassal. Bongsu, however, was not strong enough to withstand the Portuguese on his own. The Portuguese in Malacca were intimidated by Iskandar Muda's striking capabilities, but recognized his weak authority over Johor. The second peace treaty

they forced on Johor in 1615, intrinsically shows Iskandar Muda's ineffective control of Johor.

The motif for Aceh's invasion in 1613 was not because of Dutch presence and privileges in Johor but because of Malacca's influence in Johor. Johor's capitulation caused the balance of power to skid to the Portuguese. The invasion in 1615 was again in response to Malacca's coercion of Johor to sign a second truce.

From admiral Verhagen's shocked reaction to Iskandar Muda's devastation of Johor in 1615, it is quite clear that the Dutch had not yet articulated a clear policy to address the interstate conflicts in the Straits which affected the geo-political balance of power.

Part Three

CHAPTER III

EXPEDITIONS TO MALAY AND SUMATRAN PORTS

3. 3. 1 The castigation of Pahang in 1617 and 1618

The Portuguese convoyed Raja Bujang, the prince of Johor, to Pahang in 1615. It was another set back to Iskandar Muda's efforts to shatter Portuguese authority and diminish Johor's influence in the Straits. In the ongoing struggle between Malacca and Aceh for hegemony in the Straits region, the Portuguese jealously guarded that the power scale would not turn in favour of Aceh. This was understandably their strategy to survive in an inherently hostile environment, where they were never sure of the loyalty of the local rulers on which they relied substantially for their basic needs like food and for their trade. While in 1614 they deterred the combined Johor/Acehnese fleet from infiltrating in Pahang, coming to the support of the *orangkaya* of Pahang, they now supported Johor in its bid to gain authority over Pahang. This turn came after Sultan Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah signed the forced armistice in Bintan to break Aceh's authority over Johor in 1615.

An interesting question is whether Iskandar Muda earlier supported Johor in its bid to put a Johor prince on the throne of Pahang whence the combined Johor/ Aceh fleet went? It is undeniable that Iskandar Muda would have influence over Pahang through his vassal state Johor.

Malacca's intervention in the internal politics of Johor and Pahang, now even convoying the Johor prince to Pahang to take over the throne, invited Iskandar Muda's response. His armada attacked Pahang in 1617 and took members of the royal family and thousands of the inhabitants as prisoners of war to Aceh. Sultan Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah grieved that Iskandar Muda had taken his son (or was it his nephew Raja Bujang?) to Aceh and requested Dutch

assistance to bring him back in return for his favours.¹ Calculating as the Dutch were, they seriously considered Abdullah's request, because they counted on his mediation to obtain permission to trade in the ports of Campar and Andragiri located on Sumatra's east coast over which Johor had strong influence. It is a clear indication that Iskandar Muda did not control these ports, but that Abdullah assumed a degree of authority over these ports.

The dire conditions in which the war captives found themselves in Aceh accounted for many deaths. They were basically left to starve in the streets of the city, many dying from hunger and neglect. They rebelled against the Acehnese *laxamana* and in this revolt the *laxamana* was injured. It was the second time that they had sought to murder him. If we are to believe the report of Cornelis Comans who was on his mission to Aceh, Iskandar Muda had hundreds of the rebels viciously murdered by hurling them to death against a wall and their bodies dumped in the river.²

Nothing could be of greater contrast with this inhumane action than the interpolation in the *Bustan as-Salatin* by Nurud'din al Raniri, the religious leader and ideological force behind Sultan Iskandar Thani. He insisted on Pahang's divine status for it delivered Aceh Sultan Iskandar Thani, who was captured during the Acehnese invasion. It is instructive to know that both Pahang and Johor were successor states of the Sultanate of Malacca where the sons of the deposed sultan set up their courts. In the quest for authority over the Malaccan territories they became rivals. Iskandar Muda's second invasion of Pahang in 1618 was his punishment for Pahang's friendship with the Portuguese. Remarkable is Denys Lombard's claim that 'Johor and Pahang were strategic crossing points of commerce, which Iskandar Muda invaded to control and not to destroy.'³ The weakness of this claim is, that when the Acehnese armada attacked Johor for a second time in 1615 and burnt it to the ground, it eventually and unmistakably destroyed its prospects for commerce and trade. Iskandar Muda's ruthless actions in Johor do not underscore Lombard's claim that he wanted to establish control over its trade. Johor was left abandoned of its people and of its trade. The Spanish fleet which arrived in the Straits from the Philippines in 1616 cut down all the remaining fruit trees in Johor Lama and Batu Sawar, apparently without intervention or resistance from the Acehnese. Iskandar Muda was evidently more interested in destroying Abdullah Ma'ayat

¹ *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. I, 329 Letter to the Gentlemen Seventeen, dater 24 June 1618.

² *ibid.*, vol.VII, 404. Extracted from a letter from Cornelis Comans at Priaman dated 22 February 1619. 'In Atchijn is *orangkaya* Laxamana van de Pahanders gequetst twelck nu de tweede mael is, dat se hem gesocht hebben om te brengen, den coninck heeft meer als hondert van de principale Pahanders doot doen smijten ende in de rievire doen werpen'.

³ Lombard, *Le Sultanat d'Atjéh*, 93.

Shah and pursued him wherever he took his refuge. For the VOC it was not profitable to invest in a volatile situation in which the king of Johor was on the run for the king of Aceh.⁴ As I earlier stated, Johor became a no-man's land and the focus of attention of the European traders changed to where Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah took his refuge, which was the island of Bintan.

3.3.2 The fate of a captured prince

Sultan Iskandar Thani, a captured prince of Pahang was the son of the ex ruler Ahmad who was overthrown by his brother Abdul-Ghafur. The *Bustan* describes the scenes of his appointment by Iskandar Muda many years before the latter's death as divine ordinance: 'Iskandar Muda conquered Pahang because it was Allah's will and he followed this because he was Allah's faithful servant. Comparing Pahang to Egypt, the composer of the *Bustan* Nuru'd-din al Raniri, expounds that Allah likewise gave Egypt to his faithful servant 'prophet Joseph.'⁵ The story that Pahang had to be conquered, to bring Sultan Iskandar Thani on the throne of Aceh was a pastiche of the reality. Nuru'd-din al Raniri gave marvellous explanations of disturbing events and occurrences, true historical facts in the guise of prophecies and myths. Aceh could therefore assume leadership of the Malaccan territories, rivalling with Johor. I discussed the occupational anxieties of the composers and writers of the chronicles and *hikayat* in Part One Chapter II.

It may be in the interest of the historical accuracy, to try to establish who ruled Pahang after Sultan Abdul-Ghafur, the pro-Johor ruler, was murdered by his son in 1614. The *orangkaya* were in favour of a candidate who hailed from the Borneo faction and relied on the Portuguese to convoy their favourite to Pahang. Having obtained the trust of the *orangkaya*, the Portuguese hoped to obtain a foothold in the South China Sea. In the end the Portuguese

⁴ The Gentlemen XVII thought it unwise to proceed with constructing a fort in Johor, because they saw no profits there and since they suffered great losses in 1613 (during Acehs invasion). They also contemplated that it would be better to close useless forts and factories, because they were draining the Company's resources. *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. IV, letter dated 30 November 1615, 324.

⁵ *Bustanu's-Salatin*, bab II, fasal 13

'Sultan Iskandar Muda mena'alokkan negeri Pahang antara lain ia-lah kerana Allah hendak melakukan iradatnya kepada sa-orang hamba-nya. Saparti juga Allah hendak mengurniai kerajaan Masir kepada Nabiu'l-lah Yusuf. Bagitu pula hakikat Sultan Iskandar Muda mena'alokkan negeri Pahang itu kerana hendak menyambut Sultan Iskandar Thani supaya menggantikan-nya sa-bagai raja Acheh. Dengan ilmu fringat di-lihat oleh Sultan Iskandar Muda kebahagiaan pada muka putera tersebut.'

convoyed Raja Bujang, son of the former Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah of Johor to Pahang in 1615. I.W. Linehan offers a view of the political situation based on an account from a Chinese source which says “the parricide prince, son of Sultan Abdul-Ghafur, who usurped the throne in 1614, was still ruling in 1618, but Pahang had become a piratical State in which revolts and disorder were rife; there were two competing princes, the scion of indigenous Pahang stock, son of Sultan Abdul-Ghafur, and Raja Bujang, (later Sultan Abdu'l-Jalil III of Johor), the nominee of Johor.”⁶

The information that the parricidal son of Abdul-Ghafur ruled the country in 1618, adds much to the confusion. What happened to the Johor pretender Raja Bujang, was he captured by the Acehnese in 1617 and brought to Aceh or was he on the run ? Did Sultan Abdullah Ma'yat Shah of Johor refer to him when he asked the VOC to help in bringing his son back from captivity? If Raja Bujang was indeed captured by the Acehnese, it means that Iskandar Muda released him at a certain point in time, for he succeeded Sultan Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah in 1624 as Sultan Abdu'l -Jalil III of Johor. In 1638, two decades after a second Acehnese invasion which occurred in 1618, a truce was signed between Aceh and Pahang shortly after Sultan Iskandar Thani (the Pahang prince), was installed on Aceh's throne. This *inter alia* means that Aceh's control over Pahang after its invasions, had gradually ceased and a truce was needed to restore Aceh's influence.

3. 3. 3 The ravage of Kedah in 1619

Iskandar Muda's determination to destroy Portuguese hegemony and European influence in the region grew stronger year after year. The incomes from the trade gave him ample room to enlarge his fleets, made bigger by the confiscation of ships and ammunition from the invaded ports. His armada invaded Kedah, a pepper port on the west coast of the Malay peninsula in 1619, cut down all pepper vines, killed all the cattle and destroyed everything in its way. The Portuguese were the principal traders in Kedah and this vengeful act was most certainly Iskandar Muda's response to their lingering presence in the port. As a result of this extirpation, Kedah was no longer available to procure pepper. Like the Portuguese, the Dutch

⁶ I.W. Linehan, “A History of Pahang”, (JMBRAS, vol. XIV), 35. The Chinese source quoted here is “Tung Hsi Yang K'an.

had been regular customers in Kedah which was famous as a pepper supply station. Jan Pieterszoon Coen, at that time governor-general (1619-1623) wrote to the Gentlemen XVII that the *Orangeboom* could not procure pepper in Kedah any longer because the Acehnese cut down all the pepper vines. It redirected its course to Aceh to procure 116 *bahar* of pepper against 44 *real a bahar*.⁷ I should refer to merchant Casembroot's letter in which he mentioned that there was plenty of pepper in Aceh, 'more than the *Orangeboom* could carry.' (Part Two: chapter IV). Iskandar Muda had dropped his price from 48 *real* to 44 *real*. The fierceness of the Acehnese attack even struck the diehard Coen with astonishment. His loathing for Iskandar Muda had mounted since the latter requested that the Dutch deliver him the king of Johor in exchange for a shipload of pepper. Dutch loyalty to Johor and especially to Sultan Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah was unprecedented; this loyalty was not only based on Dutch geo-political ambitions and the power strategy, but it came also from deep sympathy for Abdullah.

Coen feared that Iskandar Muda would continue from there to Patani which had sent 2000 men to assist Kedah. 'It looks like the Atchijnder is out to attack all his neighbours, just like the 'Mataram' (Sultan of Mataram on Java), is doing to the Javanese kings.' A reproachful Coen spoke in one breath of the wickedness, cruelty and Godliness of the Atchynder and the Mataram who were out to establish an empire, like the King of Spain did in Europe.⁸

The cold blooded rape of Kedah came right at a time when it was most vulnerable. For several years it had endured epidemics, diseases and famine which raged havoc and caused the death of two thirds of its inhabitants. The king's forty elephants and a huge number of cattle succumbed to diseases. At that desperate moment the Acehnese attacked. They operated with wickedness, destroyed everything in their way; only a few people were able to escape and were left behind in a desolate situation. The devastation tactics had all the characteristics of a *hong*i expedition.⁹

French admiral Augustin De Beaulieu is our most eloquent source with regard to the events in Kedah where he witnessed the aftermath of the Acehnese rampage which had taken place two

⁷ *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. I, 708: Letter dated 26 March 1622.

⁸ *idem*

'Den Atchijnder is met alle zijn macht op Queda gevallen, van meninge zijnde Patani daernaer mede te besoecken. Die van Patani hebben naer Queda 2000 man te hulpe gesonden. 'tSchijnt, dat het den Atchijnder op alle zijn gebueren gemunt heeft, even gelijk den Mattaram op de Javaense coningen doet. Sy souden hier immer soo groten monarchie wel stabilieren willen, als de coninck van Spangien in Europa soect te doen'

⁹ A 'hongi' expedition was similar to extirpation. The VOC carried out *hong*i expeditions in the Spice islands.

years ago. He went there on the advice of Portuguese captives he bought free in Aceh, who were acquainted with Kedah and told him about the fine quality of the pepper the Portuguese procured in Lankawi also known as Pulau Lada (pepper island). They accompanied him and functioned as his mediators with the local authorities. From the *penghulu* in Lankawi with whom he hoped to negotiate the procurement of pepper, he learnt that the incumbent king of Kedah, who resided in Perlis on the main land, still assumed control over Lankawi.¹⁰ He was the son of the captured king. This remarkable information makes clear that Iskandar Muda had not established political authority over Kedah and Lankawi. The king was willing to sell De Beaulieu 30 *bahar* of pepper in exchange of 2 canons, but the latter thought it unwise to risk Iskandar Muda's wrath for he was returning to Aceh to pursue a license to trade in Tiku.. The Acehnese had besieged Kedah for three months, at times standing waist-length in the water. Iskandar Muda had threatened his men that if they did not bring him the king of Kedah he would cut them in two pieces.¹¹ The king and his family had taken refuge behind the fortress. He surrendered to the Acehnese after they convinced him that Iskandar Muda would not hurt him because he admired his great stamina and the manner in which he controlled his dependencies. The miserable king was left no option, because he lacked food and was badly injured. The crown prince who advised his father against surrendering, was able to flee and evade the Acehnese without his father's approval.

The Acehnese destroyed all the fruit trees, killed the surviving cattle, burnt down the city, and took 7000 people to Aceh. The devastation was so complete, that even after several years it was impossible to see where the city once stood. The few survivors in the ill-fated place were traumatized to such an extent by the past event, that every time they spotted even a small *prahu* at the horizon, they ran for cover to the hills fearing that the Acehnese or their allies were coming back to attack them. They were bereft of even their tools and depended for their food on the neighbouring countries. Patani sent some 2000 men to assist Kedah and an amount of rice 'of which they were plundered 'to the bereaved people who were starving.¹² The Acehnese had confiscated their tools, to prevent them from building houses, or to do anything for which they needed these tools. By ravaging the land and cutting down all the pepper vines, the Acehnese made sure that Kedah was no longer available for foreigners to procure pepper.

¹⁰ Lombard, *Mémoires*, 159.

¹¹ *ibid.*, 169.

¹² *ibid.*, 168.

When they arrived in Aceh, the captives were chased to the outskirts of the city, where they were bereft of food and necessities, many starved to death. Out of a total of 7000 captives only 500 survived, a tragic testimony of Iskandar Muda's growing callousness. He executed the king and his family and the *orangkaya*, justifying it as God's punishment for their impiety. De Beaulieu mentions that the people of Lankawi sneered at the executed king of Kedah, saying that he was a cruel tyrant and impious and that he had evoked God's wrath because of his bad inclinations.¹³

In stark contrast to De Beaulieu's account of the horrors which befell Kedah through the Acehnese rampage and to the observations of the VOC merchants, is the following statement in the 'Encyclopaedy Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Melayu':

'Iskandar Muda menakluki Johor, Pahang dan Perak, dan ikut persahabatan dengan Kedah.'
'Iskandar Muda conquered Johor, Pahang and Perak and made friendship with Kedah.'¹⁴

Friendship with Kedah is a distortion of the historical reality.

When De Beaulieu was in Lankawi in July 1621 the Acehnese armada consisting of three large galleys and 25 to 30 smaller vessels was on its way to Perak the renowned tin supplier. Rumours were circulating that the armada would proceed from there to Lankawi to cut down all the pepper vines on the island.¹⁵ This is neither confirmed by De Beaulieu nor by the northern Europeans in the area.

3. 3. 4 The subjugation of Perak in 1620 and the threat to Patani

D.G. E. Hall is convinced that Iskandar Muda victimized Perak because of its tin¹⁶. Thomas Best reported in 1613 that the king confiscated a ship from Surat because it had been in Perak, which he considered his enemy.¹⁷ Perak played a significant role in Aceh's development. In

¹³ *ibid.*, 169.

¹⁴ (Kuala Lumpur : Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1999), 5 vols.), *jilid I*, 2nd ed. of the first publication, 79.

¹⁵ Lombard, *Mémoires*, 158.

¹⁶ *A History of Southeast Asia*, 469.

¹⁷ Thomas Best used the word 'enemy' thus underlining the already troubled relationship in 1613.

the fifties of the sixteenth century the Acehnese built a fort in Perak to protect the trade from Malabar against Portuguese attacks. Located at shoulder length of Malacca, Perak was a strategic port to monitor the shipping in the Straits of Malacca. The Acehnese captured the royal family and a Perak prince was installed as sultan of Aceh, ruling from about 1577 to about 1585 when he was assassinated. He was known as a pious ruler who called for the Friday prayer.

Jacques Coetelij of the VOC who visited Aceh reported on 1 July 1620 to the head office at Bantam that almost all of Iskandar Muda's galleys had departed from Aceh to assault Perak. Coetelij was sure that Aceh's fleet would be deterred by four Portuguese men of war in front of Malacca.¹⁸ The manifest presence of these Portuguese force in the Straits at that time demonstrates Portuguese readiness to defend their interest in the Straits region against Aceh. Iskandar Muda asked the Dutch for assistance to attack the Portuguese ships in return for an extension of the contract in Tiku.¹⁹ Merchant Adriaen van der Dussen who was in Jamby reported on 27 December 1620 that Malacca was busy erecting walls and bulwarks as if it expected an attack by the Acehnese.²⁰ Two VOC ships under the command of Cornelis Comans were patrolling the waters around Malacca and were within easy reach of the Portuguese vessels. It worried Malacca which feared that a fleet of 40 VOC ships was on its way to attack her. The Portuguese asked king Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah to sell them 10 pieces of artillery for which they would pay four *bahar* of gold, but Abdullah responded indignantly that his artillery was not for sale, even if paid in gold.²¹

Despite the fact that the Dutch had for long been trading in Perak, their presence there so far had not been of real concern to Iskandar Muda. But the withering relations with the Dutch and the English added to his anxiety concerning the region's trade. His armada invaded Perak in 1620 and took thousands of captives to Aceh. The sources are silent about a confrontation between the Acehnese and the Portuguese. Iskandar Muda now controlled the tin trade.²²

¹⁸ *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. VII, (pt.2), 610.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 612 mentioned by Nicolaes Casembroot.

²⁰ *ibid.*, 686.

²¹ *ibid.*, vol. VII, (pt.1), 686.

²² In 1639 the VOC negotiated a contract with Sultan Iskandar Thani to buy tin in Perak which means that for many years Perak was controlled by Aceh. Interestingly after the fall of Malacca in 1641 the Dutch governor of Malacca approached the ruler of Perak with the request to give the VOC the sole rights of the tin trade and exclude all foreigners. He was categorically refused. Angered, the VOC launched a blockade of the Perak river. The ruler managed to hold out in the face of the blockade. Unsuccessful to wrest a contract, the VOC could not but approach the queen of Aceh, Taju'l-Alam Saffiatu'd-din Shah to ask her blessing. The VOC obtained a

Governor-general Pieter de Carpentier (1623 to 1627) informed the Gentlemen XVII that Perak had been conquered and that Iskandar Muda was busy to project an invasion of Patani. He said that fear also held in its grip Jambi, Andragiri and all the Sumatran ports. As earlier mentioned Iskandar Muda's vast grip on the trade of the west coast was reason for a defiant Carpentier to propose a blockade on Aceh and the ports of Tiku and Priaman to deter vessels from going there and to encircle the Acehnese armada with a fleet of sailing yachts and flat bottomed boats if Iskandar Muda proceeded with his plan to assault Patani, 'This would mean the end of the Atchynder'!²³ One can imagine Dutch anxiety for they had been trading in Patani since 1601, where they set up a factory after they established the *Zeeland* factory in Aceh. Patani was well known for its pepper, silk, rice and benzoin. In 1620 all the available pepper in Patani was in the hands of the Dutch.²⁴

The female ruler of Patani expected an attack by the Acehnese because she had sent 2000 men to assist Kedah against the Acehnese and feared Iskandar Muda's retribution.

As early as 5 October 1614 the English merchant Adam Denton wrote to London that 'the queen of Patani was suffering no junk nor man or person to depart, reserving all for the Achinders who are certainly expected with the first of the Spring to be here, being already arrived at Jor (Johor), with great forces, yet some think he will attempt Malacca itself.'²⁵

The queen allowed the Portuguese to trade in her port since they threatened her country's territorial integrity by entering her waters. Interesting is her apology to the Dutch, explaining her difficult position, saying that she had no choice but to make peace with Malacca, begging for a continuation of the friendly relations with her country and requesting them not to molest her ships going to Malacca and the Moluccan islands as well as the Portuguese vessels in Patani's waters.²⁶ In his reply of 2 July 1619 Jan Pieterszoon Coen said that although the company preferred that she continued the war with Malacca, Dutch ships would not molest

contract on the condition that the company and Aceh would share equally in the tin trade, excluding other traders.

²³ *Generale Missiven*, vol. I, 614: letter dated 9 July 1621.

²⁴ *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. VII (pt. 2), 662.

²⁵ Foster, *Letters Received*, vol. II, 52.

²⁶ *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. I., 613: Letter to the Gentlemen XVII, dated 8 January 1621. Strangely only in this letter I find a reference to the letter of the Queen of Patani of which no date is mentioned. The reply by Coen was on 2 July 1619.

her ships but would treat them friendly. He keenly requested that she send rice to Jacatra and left open her request to refrain from attacking Portuguese ships.²⁷

The general consternation of an imminent Acehese attack on Patani has contributed to uncertainty about its materialization. The foreign sources give no evidence of this. One should realize that Patani's location in the far corner of the northeast coast of the Malay peninsula would take the Acehese fleet several weeks to reach. It was a dangerous undertaking with the Portuguese 'men of war' in front of Malacca and the likelihood of the Anglo-Dutch defence alliance coming to Patani's help. Iskandar Muda undoubtedly realized that the rate of success was minimal. His many and diverse enemies were ready to attack him.

A letter written by Iskandar Muda to the King of France on 27 June 1621 may provide the clue to the political reality. In the preamble of this letter Iskandar Muda calls himself 'the conqueror with the help of God of many territories in the east: Deli, the kingdom of Johor and its dependencies, the kingdom of Pahang, the kingdom of Kedah, the kingdom of Perak and in the west: the kingdom of Priaman, the kingdom of Tiku and the kingdom of Passaman.'²⁸

Patani is missing from the list.

3. 3. 5 The intimidation of Jambi

In the course of 1624 Aceh's armada chased away Johor's Sultan Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah from the island of Lingga. That same year the sultan, long friend of the Dutch, died, a hunted wanderer, on the Tanambel islands, from what the Dutch called 'a broken heart'. Governor-general Carpentier feared that this was the end of the famous empire of Johor.²⁹ But he was wrong, Johor remained an important factor in the regional power play.

The rulers of Andragiri, Kampar, Jambi and Palembang, who were all connected through kinship ties and to the Johor royal family, feared that Iskandar Muda would attack their lands.

²⁷ *ibid.*, vol. II, 574.

²⁸ Lombard, *Mémoires*, 151,152.

²⁹ *Generale Missiven*, vol. I, 144, 145: Letter to the Gentlemen XVII dated 3 January 1624 .

Earlier in 1620 Andragiri asked Malacca's help against Aceh, promising a constant delivery of pepper. It resulted in Aceh's attack of Andragiri in 1624. Aceh's attack did not lead to its permanent control over Andragiri. From the VOC sources we gather that the ruler of Andragiri invited the Dutch to trade in his port after the Acehnese invasion of 1624 but they saw no advantages.

One of the widows of Sultan Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah's was a daughter of the king of Jambi. After her husband's death she fled with her young son to her father. Iskandar Muda sent his envoys to Jambi to request their extradition, with the clear message that if he refused to comply he would destroy Jambi.³⁰ Sultan Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah's young son was the heir to the throne of Johor and destined to reign Johor as soon as he would come of age. It should be reiterated that the sultan was also married to Iskandar Muda's sister in 1614 when he was a captive in Aceh. The king of Jamby did not comply with the request and started preparing a resistance force of 4000 men; he sent all women and children to the mountains. The ruler of neighbouring Palembang, whose daughter was married to a prince of Jamby, sent another 4000 men to Jambi's relief, while a force of 3000 Minancabao men was ready to defend Jamby.³¹ It was a unified effort to counter an imminent Acehnese attack.

Although the king of Jambi had at his command some 11.000 troops, he requested from the English and the Dutch protection against an Acehnese attack, in exchange for trade contracts. The English explained that they had significant cash standing out in Aceh and a number of merchants residing there and could therefore not afford to assist Jambi, which the Dutch considered a pretext to remain on good terms with Iskandar Muda.

Bartholomeus Kunst, the successor of Van der Dussen in Jambi, promised the king Dutch assistance against Aceh. He even promised assistance to the ruler of Palembang when he learned that Iskandar Muda also threatened his port.³² He asked Batavia to send 'a respectable fleet' to Jambi, but at the same time advised that no hostile actions be taken against the Acehnese, obviously hoping that the presence of the fleet would work as a deterrent.

Even if the governor-general was a strong critic of Iskandar Muda, he was apprehensive to comply with the request of his merchant to send a fleet to Jambi, seriously pondering the odds, fearing that the company would lose out on the west coast which Iskandar Muda controlled. In the end he resolved to send a small fleet under the command of Jan Willem

³⁰ *ibid.*, 194 : Letter to the Gentlemen XVII dated 4 february 1625.

³¹ *ibid.*, (footnote 59).

³² Tiele, *Bouwstoffen*, vol. II, XXVI.

Verschoor, when it looked certain that Aceh was preparing an attack on Jambi in 1625.³³ Jambi had gradually become the chief supplier of pepper to the European traders. It became extremely difficult to obtain pepper on Java. One of the reasons to send a fleet to succour Jambi was that Dutch private traders committed piracy on vessels from Jambi, which caused the king's great irritation towards the VOC.³⁴

It must have been a great relief for the Dutch that the Acehnese threat of Jambi did not effectuate, because war with Iskandar Muda was a last resort to defend their trade in Jambi. As I set out in Part Two chapter IV, the fear of an Acehnese strike impacted heavily on the region's trade which had almost come to a halt. Jambi's king refused to let anyone trade with the Minancabao people who brought their produce from the highlands. The Dutch seriously considered to leave from there, fed up with his 'unbearable' procedures. For a while the merchants operated from their vessels, which was less costly and easier in case of an attack by either the Portuguese or the Acehnese. The English too closed their factory in Jambi.

3. 3. 6 Conclusion

The tangled interests of the actors in the geo-political playing field, make it precarious to look at the events in isolation and base an opinion on these, without acquainting oneself with the issues of war and peace which intrinsically encompassed geo-politics in the Malacca Straits region. Underlying motifs can often prove to be the missing links to a coherent understanding of the logic of the developments. Fusion and fission were evidently the norms, but the issues behind these realities are not always clear.

Iskandar Muda's attacks and invasions of the ports were linked to Portuguese presence there. This is especially clear in the case of Pahang, Kedah and also Jambi, while the letter of the Queen of Patani to the Dutch speaks of the Portuguese trading in Patani.

Aceh's key role in opposing the Portuguese could not be divorced from controlling the trade and politics of the ports. The ports bore the brunt of the Acehnese obsession to dispel the

³³ *Generale Missiven*, vol. I, 160: Letter to the Gentlemen XVII dated 27 January 1625.

³⁴ Tiele, *Bouwstoffen*, vol.II, xxvi.

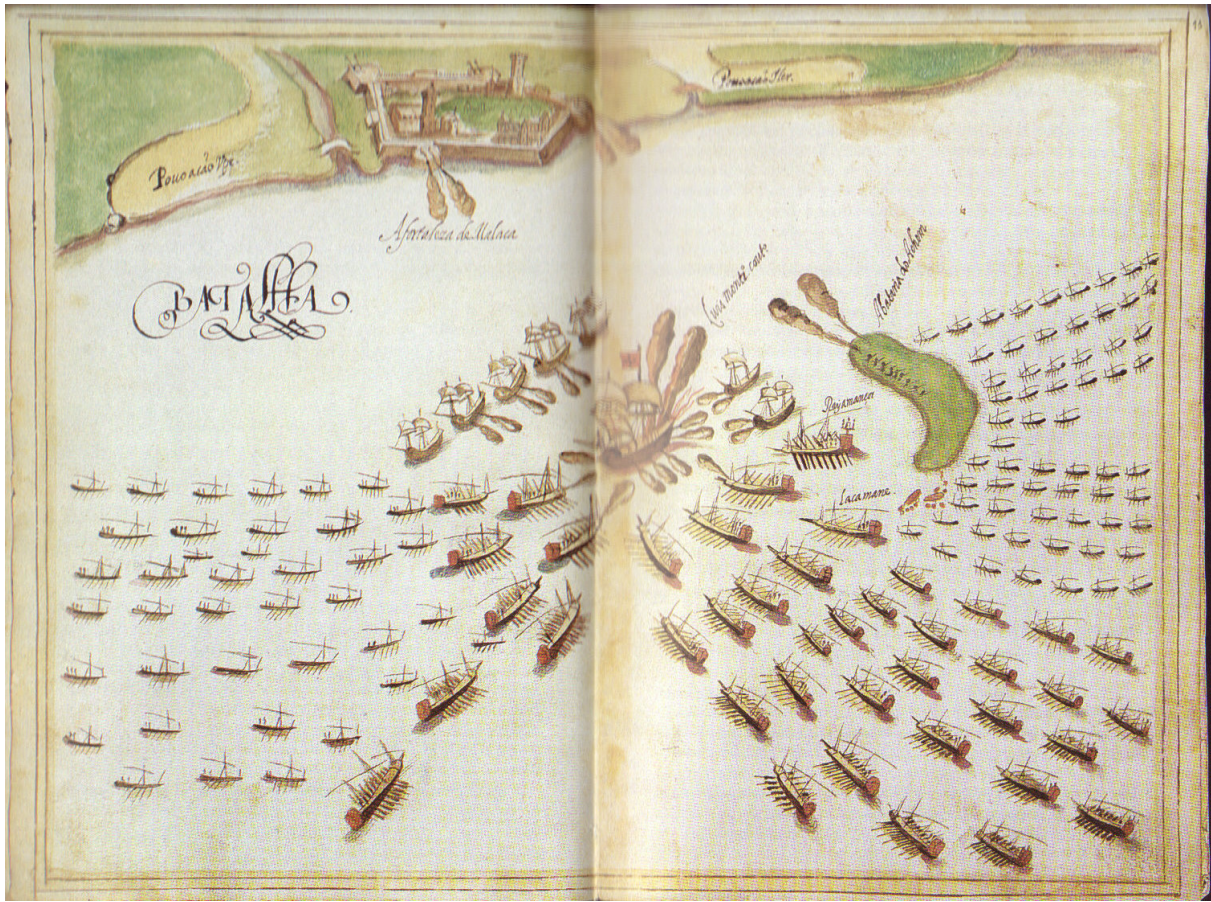
Portuguese from the Straits. Iskandar Muda's actions set forth protracted struggles with the local rulers whose lands he invaded and devastated and whose trade he usurped.

A cohesive stance against the Portuguese was not easy to bring about, because the ports traditionally sustained from trade with the outside world and were not willing to give up this right. The Portuguese were no longer newcomers in the Straits, having been there over a century and especially to the merchant *orangkaya* it seemed more advantageous to trade and cooperate with them than to antagonize them. These ports were wary of a new political order embodied by Aceh, which dictated the rules and norms and regarded their interest as futile, claiming monopoly over their trade. When possible they supported each other with troops and food against the brutal invasions of the domineering sultanate

The encroachment of the northern Europeans and their efforts to obtain trade monopolies also contributed towards Iskandar Muda's aggressive actions against several ports especially on Sumatra's west coast. Aceh's invasions of the ports are perceived as 'conquests', but scholars leave issues like the nature of these conquests undiscussed. Certainly in the case of Johor it is apparent that 'conquest' did not involve the absorption of the conquered state, but merely its reduction to a vassal state in which the vassal - in this case Johor - maintained an administration and a naval force. Johor is a clear example of a vassal state which was poorly overseen by its Acehnese subjugator, posing a persistent problem to Aceh's efforts to break Portuguese authority. Traditionally members of the ruling families were often still in place as vassal rulers alongside an Acehnese *panglima* acting as governor. This system had its flaws and posed an unexpected problem for the victorious conqueror, because the vassal rulers were vulnerable to manipulation by powerful neighbours like Malacca and foreign merchants. Even Johor which was reduced to a vassal state of Aceh was able to assume control over Pahang with the help of the Portuguese. Tiku is another clear example where the king of Tiku and the Acehnese representative both dealt with the foreign merchants.

Iskandar Muda's power rested principally on his great military force which enabled him to attack the ports, but he did not develop a system of permanent and effective control over them. A consequence of this political limitation was regional instability, because the Portuguese were forcing agreements on the rulers of Johor, Pahang and the unconquered Patani which was in constant fear of an Acehnese reprisal. The *Bustan as-Salatin* includes a chronological summary of Iskandar Muda's war expeditions. Comparing this summary with the accounts of the Europeans in the area, one notes some variance.

The *Bustan* does not mention the second expedition to Pahang in 1618, nor an expedition to Patani and the one to Andragiri in 1624, while it mentions an expedition to the island of Nias in 1624.



Aceh's siege of Malacca (16th century)

Part Three

CHAPTER IV

THE ATTACKS ON MALACCA IN 1629 AND IN 1641

3. 4. 1 The besieger besieged

The long drawn war between Aceh and the Portuguese which occupied the sixteenth century had seen no winners. In geo-political terms however Aceh controlled a substantial area of both the east and the west coast of Sumatra. The Portuguese had devised various ways to conquer the sultanate; in 1588 D. Joao Ribeiro Gaio, bishop of Malacca, sent the king of Portugal a treatise of 46 chapters in which he advocated the conquest of Aceh and of Johor.¹ The long period of conflict made place for trade relations between Malacca and Aceh, which lasted from 1593 until about 1602. However, Portuguese meddling in Aceh's affairs, their incitement of the violence against the De Houtman expedition and their ongoing support for Johor spelled the end of the decade of relative peace.

At a most critical time when the sultanate was weakened from internal rebellion, resulting from a contest for the throne, which coincided with a long period of droughts and famine, a Portuguese fleet from Goa attacked Aceh in 1606, resentful that the Dutch and English gained a firm foothold and obtained trade contracts and privileges from Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah who had passed away in 1604. According to the traditional history, the Portuguese invasion was successfully repelled by the Acehnese land army in which the young prince Darma Wangsa, also called Perkasa Alam, the later Sultan Iskandar Muda, was the commander of his uncle's troops. His bravery ultimately destined him for the throne.

I earlier established that it owed much to Matelieff's siege of Malacca that the Portuguese beat a hasty retreat from Aceh to succour Malacca.²

¹ De Roteroy y relacion que don joan ribero gaio obispo de malaca hizo de las cosas de achen para Elrey Nuestro senor', referred by Manuel Lobato in his article « Malacca » in : de Oliveira Marques (ed.), *Historia dos Portugueses no Extremo Oriente*, (vol. I, Tomo II), 38.

² The battle between Matelieff and the Portuguese is published in: P. A. Tiele, *De Europeers in den Maleischen Archipel*, vol. I, 61;

The Goan fleet commanded by Martin Alfonso de Castro, consisting of 14 galleons, 4 galleys and three thousand men started to assault the port, apparently unaware of the fact that the Dutch were in front of Malacca. The Dutch stopped their siege to confront the Portuguese and in the ensuing fierce battle both parties suffered heavy damages with the Portuguese in the end losing a wealth of ships.³

Matelieff's intervention came at a most convenient moment for Aceh. This demonstration of Dutch audacity and their military capability must have established Sultan Ali Ri'ayat Shah's confidence in his European friend. It resulted in a bilateral agreement for a strategic alliance signed in January 1607. As already mentioned, the treaty became redundant because his successor, Sultan Iskandar Muda, denied its existence. Yet the necessity to have a solid front against the Portuguese which was expressed through the mutually reiterated pledge to assist each other, acquired much strength.

Iskandar Muda's indulgence of Portuguese presence in Malacca and trade with the ports had reached its limit. His assaults on Portuguese ships in the Straits did not end Portuguese manifest presence and their meddling in the affairs of the port kingdoms as the examples of Johor, Pahang en Kedah clearly demonstrate. An all out attack on Malacca, which for long had been on his mind, did not occur, although he possessed one of Asia's largest armadas. Portuguese pertinent trade with Jamby, Andragiri and Lingga during the second decade enticed him to act more forcefully. In 1626 he started preparing his armada for the mother of all wars. Although the Dutch were aware that Iskandar Muda was preparing a huge armada, they spoke of one thousand boats and the Homeric number of seventy to eighty thousand men, they were not at all sure whether he would attack Malacca or Patani or even Jamby.⁴ It is only from Jan Oosterwijk's dispatch of 15 March 1630 from Jamby, that one learns that the Acehnese armada left in 1626 with 30 'goraps' and 350 smaller boats and a number of sixteen thousand men and had occupied the Red Island close to Malacca around the month of July 1628.⁵ The English merchants Henley and Bix in Goa informed their office in Bantam on 20 August 1629 that Malacca had received 5 ships from Lisbon to spoil the Dutch and the

N. Mac Leod, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie als Zeemogendheid in Azie*, vol. I, 1602-1632; *De Opkomst*, vol. I, 46-62.

³ An English account of the siege of Malacca is by William Finch published in: William Foster (ed.), *Early Travels in India 1583-1619* (London: Oxford University Press, 1921).

⁴ *Generale Missiven*, vol. I, 233: Letter from governor-general Carpentier, dated 13 December 1626.

⁵ Tiele, *Bouwstoffen*, 166: Letter of Jan Oosterwijk in Jamby, dated 15 March 1630.

English, and 30 frigates had left Goa to succour Malacca against the Acehnese who were lying in siege in front of Malacca. Dutch and English documentation of the event is scant, but the sequel shows that their validity for the representation of the siege and the attack is not in doubt. This documentation supports the information derived from the Portuguese accounts.

3. 4. 2 The momentum lost

From three contemporary Portuguese sources published by C. R. Boxer, a lucid and intimate account of the siege, the attack and its aftermath appears.⁶ These are a) the Dispatch of Nuno Alvares Botelho to the Governors of India⁷; b) Narrative of the Great Victory which the Portuguese won against the King of Achem in the Siege of Malacca of Roque Carreiro and c) Dispatch of the Captain-General of Malacca, Antonio Pinto Da Fonseca, to the Governors of India. One should bear in mind that these accounts are from the Portuguese side.

Malacca for many years expected an Acehnese assault and started reinforcing its fortress and its suburbs, but it only learned about the imminent attack some two and a half months before the actual siege started. From the narrative of Roque Carreiro sent from Goa to Lisbon we are informed in detail that a son-in-law of Iskandar Muda, who was a captured Johorese prince⁸, was able to steal away with a ship from the port of Odelim (Deli?), where Iskandar Muda and his armada had assembled, and fled to Malacca where he informed the authorities in detail of the forthcoming assault. The Acehnese went after the prince, but he succeeded to evade them and was taken on board one of the two Malaccan galliots which patrolled the waters.⁹ The

⁶ C. R. Boxer, "The Achinese attack on Malacca in 1629, as described in contemporary Portuguese sources", in: J. Bastin and R. Roolvink, (eds.), *Malayan and Indonesian Studies*; Essays presented to Sir Richard Winstedt (Oxford University Press, 1964), 105-121.

⁷ D. Fr. Luis de Brito, Bishop of Meliapor, was succeeded on his death by a triumvirate, consisting of three governors, including Nuno Alvares Botelho, captain-general of the High Seas Fleet (*Armada de Alto-bordo*). Botelho assumed command of the relief-expedition which left Goa on 22 September, leaving his two colleagues in charge until the arrival of the incoming viceroy, Dom Miguel de Noronha Count of Linhares who assumed office on 21 October 1629. (Boxer in: *Malayan and Indonesian Studies*, 112, footnote 2).

⁸ The sources do not identify this prince. Was he perhaps the son of Sultan Abdulla Ma'ayat Shah who had asked the Dutch in 1615 to help him bring back his son who was captured by the Acehnese and brought to Aceh?

⁹ The prince who was in great despair, related to the Portuguese that he had to witness how Iskandar Muda killed his baby-son, by dashing him against a wall. The king was offended by his grandson's incessant crying when he took him in his arms. He uttered that since the boy started to show his displeasure with him at this early age, it could only become worse at an older age. He therefore smashed him to his death.

Portuguese, at peace with Johor, treated the Johor prince with due respect and furtively dispatched a ship to Negapatam from where three messengers went overland to Goa to inform the vice-king of the Acehnese intentions.¹⁰ English merchants in Goa as well as Dutch merchants in Surat reported the arrival in Goa of 5 ships from Lisbon ‘to spoil’ the Dutch and English, and that 40 frigates left Goa ‘to succour Malacca against the king of Achin who lies before it.’

The Acehnese were patrolling the waters to push back ships going in and out of Malacca, a tactic to starve and weaken the people inside Malacca. When the armada finally arrived in front of the city on 4 July 1629, the sea was full of ships ‘as far as the eye could see’. The Portuguese estimated that the armada consisted of 246 vessels which included 48 galleys ‘much larger than ours’ and around 19.400 men spread over the two contingents. The total number of warriors and coolies is higher than the number estimated by the Dutch.

Very curiously, Iskandar Muda appointed two commanders at the head of the Acehnese expedition, one was the *laxamana* and the second was the *maharaja* who was a relative. The *maharaja* whose function was that of *perdana menteri* (‘prime minister’) offered to conquer Malacca and was appointed commander of the fleet. The *laxamana* was in command of the land troops.¹¹ These two men disagreed from the start on crucially important strategic matters which is also mentioned in the *Bustan as-Salatin*.¹² The *laxamana* disembarked at the mouth of the river and marched with 4000 to 5000 men towards a hill where they made camp. The *maharaja* sailed with the fleet into the river. On the fourth day the Acehnese warriors assaulted the convent of *Madre de Deos* located on a hill known as *Sao Francisco* (*Bukit Cina*). There were only 200 Portuguese to defend the fort, but they were at an advantageous position and even though they were far fewer in number than their attackers, they were successful in killing more than 300 Acehnese. They lost a total of 128 men. The Portuguese admired their enemy’s great quality as builders, saying that their bulwarks were very strong, ‘not even the Romans could have built them any quicker and stronger.’¹³ Nonetheless the Acehnese suffered fatal losses at every Portuguese counter-attack which made them flee into

This is the first account which speaks of Iskandar Muda’s presence at the departure of his armada. There is no evidence that he went on the successive war expeditions.

¹⁰ *Malayan and Indonesian Studies*, 110.

¹¹ *Hikayat Atjéh*, 47.

¹² *Bustanu’s Salatin*, 35.

¹³ *Malayan and Indonesian Studies*, 112.

their ships. To their great consternation they discovered that it was low tide and their ships could not depart. The complete fleet was stuck for seven days in the river before it could finally lift anchor. From the dispatch of Antonio Pinto Da Fonseca, the captain-general of Malacca to the governors of India transpires that five relief ships arrived on the last day of September, sent by the Bishop of Meliapor, with Miguel Pereira Borralho as their captain-major. To these were added five Malaccan pinnaces, a pontoon carrying siege-guns, 6 galleys and 40 small prahu, carrying 450 men. On 21 October the lord governor¹⁴ arrived with his whole fleet accompanied by two merchant ships and a pinnace. He blockaded the river Duyon in which the armada had sailed and before it was able to come out of the river, the assembled Portuguese mercilessly attacked the Acehnese from the pontoons and from their ships, bombarding them by day and by night. According to the narrative of Roque Carreiro, the king of Johor sent 150 sail boats to assist Malacca, most of these belonging to his aunt, the Queen of Patany. He had earlier sent 50 vessels to supply the Portuguese with many provisions.¹⁵ Two of Aceh's great galleys were sunk. Some five to six thousand Acehnese fled into the jungle. 'abandoning the finest fleet that had ever been seen in Asia, full of great and small cannon, as well as much booty, of which our soldiers took good advantage.'¹⁶ The laxamana first tried to negotiate a safe conduct with the Portuguese lord governor, promising that he would surrender, but he fled into the jungle where he wandered around for fifteen days before he finally gave himself up to the king of Johor. He implored the king not to hand him over to the Portuguese, but what he dreaded most, eventually happened, he was extradited.¹⁷ The *maharaja* is said to have died from chagrin, 'seeing himself vanquished and bottled up in a river which he had entered without forethought.'¹⁸ The numbers of Acehnese killed in the battle and those who fled into the jungle were large. Among the death were seventeen well known captains and three governors and captain-majors of provinces. Four thousand men were killed during the siege on land and another thousand men succumbed to diseases. The Acehnese man of war and flagship *Cakra Dunya* surrendered to the Portuguese who took their fantastic trophy to Goa. They were euphoric and revelled in their glory. The great Acehnese

¹⁴ This was most probably Nuno Alvares de Botelho.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 116. When the King of Johor was notified of the coming of the Acehnese fleet, he immediately ordered his vassals to send provisions to Malacca which they did promptly and abundantly.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 113.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 120.

Tiele, *Bouwstoffen*, vol II, 166-168: Letter written by Jan Oosterwijck dated 15 March 1630.

¹⁸ *Malayan and Indonesian Studies*, 113.

laxamana so much held in awe, was now in their hands. One assumes that he was the *laxamana* who commanded the fleets that invaded several of the ports in the past years. He and several of his officers were sent as prisoners of war to Goa on board their own ship *Cakra Dunya*, but the *laxamana* died on the way in Colombo, from what is said to have been an incurable abscess in his private parts. During the attack on the Acehese armada, the Portuguese lost about 66 men .

Encouraged by this milestone victory the Portuguese dispatched a fleet under the command of Dom Jeronimo da Silveira to Perak, which had been invaded by Aceh in 1620, 'to either subjugate it or to forcefully restore her trade with Malacca.'¹⁹

The Acehese were defeated because of the incredible blunders of their commanders. Both the Acehese and the Portuguese sources are unanimous in their opinion that the dissent between these men decided the fate of the expedition. Almost a decade later the successor of Iskandar Muda, Sultan Iskandar Thani too came back on the wrong decision to have two commanders at the helm in his letter to the Dutch governor-general. This is discussed in a following section.

It is certainly odd that the complete Acehese fleet had sailed into the river. The besieger was besieged! It led to the Acehese armada's near obliteration in which 'many Muslims lost their lives.'²⁰ Aceh's defeat was felt as a great relief in the region. The subjugator had lost almost his whole fleet and could not invade the ports. Yet it would be erroneous to assume that the Dutch and English were in a celebratory mood now that the intolerable Iskandar Muda had suffered a disastrous blow. That, at least, was far from their minds. The Portuguese confronted the Dutch in the Jamby river in 1630 and damaged two of their yachts, the *Oostsanen* and *Cleijn Heusden*. One of the large ships, the *Walcheren*, exploded from its own fire after it was attacked by Nuno Alvares Botelho, who was mortally wounded. The Portuguese seized the English yacht *Coster*.²¹ Portuguese victory over the Acehese armada was a serious setback to Dutch commercial and political ambitions. Although weakened by the battle, Malacca was still in Portuguese hands.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 108.

²⁰ *Bustanu's Salatin*, 35: 'Kerana kedua2 panglima itu berbantah2 antara satu sama lain maka banyak-lah orang Islam mati shahid'.

²¹ Tiele, *Bouwstoffen*, vol. II, 168.

The defeat at the hands of the Portuguese was the most humiliating event Iskandar Muda had suffered and it tarnished his glory. Not only had he lost a wealth of ships, artillery, canons and men, but Johor and Patani had played a significant role in his ruination. From his point of view this was the ultimate deception; the Malay states had again taken the side of the enemy of Islam. In his dispatch to the governors of India, the governor of Malacca, Antonio Pinto Da Fonseca mentions that the Johor fleet captured two Acehnese galleys on their way with dispatches to Iskandar Muda, 'which was of great consequence for us.'²² The Portuguese were now in the possession of much of Iskandar Muda's artillery and vessels.

The few Acehnese survivors were executed on their arrival in Aceh. Others surrendered to the Portuguese. It needs little imagination to envision the situation in Aceh after the news spread of the armada's humiliating defeat. Iskandar Muda was beside himself with anger that his *laxamana* had surrendered to his enemy the king of Johor. The bereaved families of the warriors who died in the battle were now at the mercy of the sultan who without mercy confiscated their possessions to compensate for his heavy losses, while probably taking the widows and daughters of the important officers into his service. Iskandar Muda was not idling, he immediately started to devise how to avenge the Portuguese.

3. 4. 3 Incitements by the Dutch

Jan Oosterwijck, Dutch merchant in Jamby regretted that the company had not come to Aceh's assistance with three to four ships to deter the Johor and Patani fleet which came to succour Malacca.²³ The governor-general and the Council of the Indies in Batavia were in a ambivalent mood. Aceh's disastrous defeat was to a certain extent a relief, for they dreaded to see Iskandar Muda's power extended to the Malay ports and ultimately Malacca. Yet it must have been bitter to them that the Portuguese held on to Malacca, now strengthened with captured Acehnese vessels and artillery. Malacca's victory was however fragile since there was scarcity of food made worse by the fact that the gardens and fruit trees were destroyed in the battle. It merits consideration to look at the view of Governor-general Specx and the Council of the Indies on the events and developments. They were of the opinion that with the

²² *Malayan and Indonesian Studies*, 120.

²³ Tiele, *Bouwstoffen*, 166.

assistance of several Dutch ships a second attack could be disastrous for Malacca. But they pondered at the same time that even if the Dutch conquered Malacca and could draw Malacca's trade with China, Japan and the Philippines, the profits and fruits would not cover the expenditures of an attack on Malacca. Secondly, they were not sure whether it was right to cooperate with the 'Atchynder' and advised 'to let the Acehnese and Portuguese bodies wrestle with each other and debilitate' instead of engaging the company in their struggle, because there were no real profits for the company.²⁴ One cannot avoid to note a tradition of hesitation on Dutch side on the issue of cooperation with the sultan of Aceh on the attack on Malacca. Yet it would be wrong to assume that this view was adopted in its entirety by the company's directors, the Gentlemen XVII. Malacca was of great strategic importance for shipping in the Straits and it remained one of the ambitions of the Dutch to become the master of the city. After thirty years of battling the Portuguese, the idea of abandoning this geopolitical goal was unthinkable. Therefore cooperation with Aceh was seriously considered. Between the VOC and Aceh there were no agreed terms regarding the spoils of war, in this case the city of Malacca itself. In this respect I like to point to the treaty of June 1606 signed by the VOC and Johor which laid down the conditions after Malacca was captured in a combined effort. This treaty became redundant when Matelieff failed to capture Malacca that same year and thus a new treaty was drawn in September 1606. It is not clear at this point how the spoils of war would be divided between the VOC and Aceh. It seems that the proposal which Cornelis Coman sent to Jan Pieterszoon Coen in 1619 for a combined run with the Acehnese on Malacca, and once inside, to overawe the Acehnese, found no favour in Batavia.²⁵ Was it because of the establishing of the Anglo-Dutch alliance that same year and its corollary for the defence of the Indies, that made the proposal no longer opportune? The Dutch clearly realized that Aceh's single operation in 1629 was insufficient to wipe the Portuguese from Malacca.

The VOC choose to revive its friendship with the king of Aceh. To this end captain Dirk Stadlander and Adriaen de Groot were delegated to Iskandar Muda in 1632. They were instructed to incite him against the Portuguese, promising him assistance to avenge Malacca. The governor-general hoped that the Portuguese would not prevail against a combined attack and that an attack on Malacca would rouse the sultan of Mataram, sworn enemy of Iskandar

²⁴ Tiele, *Bouwstoffen*, Letter of governor-general Speck to the Gentlemen XVII, dated 7 March 1631, 168-173.

²⁵ The issue is discussed in Part Two, Chapter III.

Muda, to come to Malacca's assistance and by being involved in the war, to distract his attention from the pepper areas on Java.²⁶ It is a fine example of the scheming tactics of the Dutch in trying to achieve their goals. On the face of it, the capture of Malacca seemed the prime goal, but trade privileges were even more important.

Iskandar Muda most graciously received the envoys who seemed almost intimidated by the wealth and extravagance of his court. He received them reclining on a splendid golden chair, fabulously attired and bejewelled. Previous visitors to Iskandar Muda do not refer to this extravagant side of him. It looks as though he was out to impress his visitors, imbuing them that he was the powerful and wealthy sovereign even after his discomfiture in 1629.

Notwithstanding this show of self-importance, he made it absolutely clear to the delegates that their request for special trade concessions depended exclusively on Dutch military assistance. It implies that he could not make it on his own to attack Malacca for a second time. Pleased with Dutch rapprochement, he lavished his guests with banquets and entertainment and promised them exemption from tolls for four years on the explicit condition that the VOC would assist him with several ships to attack Malacca. The restoration of the bilateral relations shows that Iskandar Muda was led by pragmatism, even when he despised the Dutch. The 'brothers in arms-turned-foes' opted to mend the fences to overthrow Portuguese authority in Malacca. Three decades had passed in which they had acted independently against their common enemy.

3. 4. 4 The end of an era and the end of a false start

Iskandar Muda's death on 27 December 1636 signalled the end of Aceh's unconstrained power over the Straits region and brought a sigh of relief in the neighbourhood, in Malacca and in Goa. The year 1629 was the most critical year of his reign, when his armada was annihilated in the battle with the Portuguese. It was also the year that Sheikh Shamsu'd-din Pasai, his trusted advisor, died. Notwithstanding the humiliating defeat, Iskandar Muda was

²⁶ *Generale Missiven I*, 448: 'Naer Atchin is van Batavia gesonden in augusto lestleden ons schip Buyren met cap. Stadlander. D'Oorsaecke derselver besendinge is meest geschiet om den Achijnder tegens de Portuguyssen aen te hitsen ende dat revensie van sijne geleden schaede soude haelen om die van Mallacca weer werck te geven, ten eynde den mataram bespeuren mach het cleyen vermogen, dat bij haer is om hem assistentie toe te seynden.'

still powerful enough to control much of the region's trade. No foreign power tried to invade Aceh. His assiduous efforts to dispel the Portuguese from the Straits contributed significantly to weakening Malacca's strength, but he was unsuccessful in capturing the famous port. Pursuing their own goals, the Dutch renewed the friendship with him by offering assistance in exchange for trade contracts and an exemption of tolls in the ports under his control, as discussed with Stadlander in 1632. Until Iskandar Muda's death in December 1636 no actual concerted effort was made to attack Malacca. It means *inter alia* that until then the VOC did not obtain exemption from paying tolls.

Yet the VOC was busy on different fronts to beleaguer the Portuguese. It was building up its presence in the Straits of Malacca where captain Simonszoon van der Veer was in command of the patrolling fleet from 1636 until 1639. In 1637 he spearheaded the campaign to solicit Sultan Iskandar Thani's assistance for a combined attack on Malacca as agreed in 1632 between Stadlander and Sultan Iskandar Muda. The new sultan of Aceh, a prince of Pahang, explained that he waited for his fleet to return from Pahang where it tried to hold back an invasion by Johor, before he could make ready a fleet to attack Malacca.

Another VOC fleet under command of Philip Lucaszoon was in Ceylon to inflict damage on the Portuguese. It resulted in the signing of an accord between the Dutch and the king of Candia in 1638.²⁷ The Portuguese anxiously watched the rising power of the Dutch which strongly manifested itself in the Indian Ocean. To reduce Dutch influence over the new ruler of Aceh, Goa sent a delegation to establish friendly relations with him. The delegation showered him with generous gifts, such as precious diamonds with which he was most delighted. The Dutch were alarmed by Portuguese overtures and their warm reception by Iskandar Thani. It must have been a relief to them that the rapprochement between the two arch enemies was a fleeting affair. The Portuguese captain, while in Aceh, misappropriated several royal slaves which he intended to take to Malacca. The sultan without pardon had him captured and thrown into prison.²⁸ Some time later, a delegation from Malacca, which came to request the captain's freedom, again misbehaved and insulted the locals. The perpetrators were immediately captured and thrown for the elephants who kicked some of them to death.²⁹ The prospect for peaceful coexistence between the antagonists seemed lost.

²⁷ *Corpus Diplomaticum*, vol. I nr. CXXVI.

²⁸ J. A. van der Chijs, *Dagh-Register int Casteel Batavia anno 1640-1641*, ('s Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1887), 332: Letter of Governor-general Antonio van Diemen dated 9 December 1637.

²⁹ Tiele, *Bouwstoffen*, 364-65: Letter of Governor-general Antonio van Diemen dated 12 January 1639.

3. 4. 5 Dutch-Aceh negotiations for the siege of Malacca (1637-1640)

Following up on his talks with commander Van der Veer, Sultan Iskandar Thani sent three ambassadors to Batavia in the course of 1638 with a letter for governor-general Antonio van Diemen in which he elaborated on the problems between Aceh and the Portuguese.

Significant is his request to Van Diemen for assistance against his enemy Johor which supplied the Portuguese in Malacca with necessary foodstuffs.³⁰ The Acehnese ambassadors Rassia Radja, Siri Bidia Endra and Radja Endrabhana were most courteously received in Batavia with the shooting of muskets and canons and banquets held in their honour by the Council of the Indies. In spite of the flattery of a grand reception, they were stunned when Van Diemen told them that Johor had offered its assistance for the attack on Malacca. They retorted that Johor could not be trusted for it provisioned Malacca with foodstuff and had many times taken the side of Malacca against Aceh. They pointed out that Johor tried to assert its control over Pahang which was the country of birth of their king. Van Diemen explained that he considered to take Johor ‘under his wings’ to disentangle the sultanate from the Portuguese, and stressed that Johor was not an ally like Aceh, but a necessary underling needed to capture Malacca from the Portuguese.³¹ Reassured by the governor-general’s high esteem for Aceh, the ambassadors returned home in the company of Jochum Roelofsen van Deutecom, the ex-governor of Ambon, who Van Diemen delegated to the king of Aceh to make plans for the approach of the siege of Malacca.³²

When they broke the news of Johor’s participation to the sultan, Iskandar Thani was completely overwhelmed. He did not understand the governor-general’s leniency towards Johor who sided with the Portuguese and was not to be trusted. He made it absolutely clear that Johor was his enemy which invaded his country Pahang. It implies that he considered himself the sovereign of Pahang. His frame of mind showed that it would be difficult to persuade him to fulfil his promise for assistance given earlier to Van der Veer. It took Van

³⁰ idem.

³¹ *Dagh-Register 1640-1641*, 10-11.

³² *Generale Missiven*, vol. I, 606. One may assume that Van Deutecom left in the last quarter of 1637, because Van Diemen mentions his departure in his letter to the Gentlemen XVII of 9 December 1637.

Deutecom almost a year to induce the sulking king to cooperate in the attack to which he half-heartedly consented. Iskandar Thani invited Van Deutecom for a visit to the shrines of holy men and kings in Pasai. Noteworthy is the fact that the Paduka Raja of Johor who was sent to Aceh by the King of Johor, also accompanied the delegation of the sultan to Pasai.³³ If it is easy to see in Van Deutecom's presence in Pasai a sign of trust of the king in the Dutch, the presence of the Paduka Raja of Johor - Aceh's enemy - makes it unsafe to make such a positive statement.

One delegate after the other arrived from Batavia in Aceh to induce Iskandar Thani to accept the participation of Johor in a coalition against Malacca. One of them, Justus Schouten came in the course of 1639 to officially announce to the king the alliance with Johor, '*den aangegane alliantie met de Johoriet grondig berigt te doen*'. It came as a blow to Iskandar Thani to learn that Van Diemen had ignored his serious concerns and his grievances against Johor and that he had invited his blood enemy to participate in the attack on Malacca. He declared that he would not take part in an expedition in which Johor was participating. He angrily spoke his mind to Schouten, declaring bluntly that he was not convinced that the Dutch and Johor would not turn against him afterwards.³⁴ Earlier he voiced his fears of a Dutch-Johor coalition to different Dutch delegates. He immediately ordered the building of a dam in the river on the west side of the city, which was most accessible from sea, to protect Aceh against a Dutch-Johor invasion and had a new canal dug for the convenience of the local people.³⁵ This is the very first evidence that Aceh took defensive measures against a feared foreign invasion.

The Dutch enjoyed the status of most favoured foreign nation in Aceh. Van Diemen was very mindful not to endanger this position.³⁶ He imbued his officials with Aceh's importance for

³³ *Bustanu's- Salatin*, 25. No reason is mentioned for the prince's visit to the sultan of Aceh.

³⁴ *Dagh-Register 1640-1641* of 10 September, page 1 mentions 'the king of Aceh looked askance at the advancement of the Dutch'.

³⁵ *ibid.*, 22 October, 59.

³⁶ According to commissioner Van Deutecom the king promised the VOC far reaching privileges on the west coast, at the exclusion of other nationalities. Iskandar Thani however firmly declared that this was based on serious misunderstanding by Van Deutecom and summoned the merchants to pay local tolls to the governors on the westcoast who were not inclined to exempt the merchants. He was not going to compel the owners of the pepper to 'intolerable servitude'. He summoned the governors to send half of his own half to Aceh, needed to barter for goods brought by traders from Bengal, Coromandel and Dabul. He declared to the Dutch merchants that if they were interested in the rest,

obtaining trade contracts, at the same time stressing the need for an even-handed approach towards both Aceh and Johor. In a last effort to reconcile the king with the idea of Johor's participation, Van Diemen sent one of his chief diplomats Johan de Meer(e), who was appointed second in command of the fleet in front of Malacca, on the delicate mission to Iskandar Thani. De Meer was instructed 'to urge the king to come to our assistance, to flatter him by saying that it is impossible for us to conquer Malacca without his help. If this be refused, then we are to ask him to help us with a good quantity of gun-powder against reasonable compensation. Otherwise we have to abandon the siege in discharge.'³⁷ According to Ito Takeshi, Aceh was able to produce gunpowder since the sixteenth century, for which it possessed the raw material.³⁸

By the time the high ranked diplomat arrived in Aceh in May 1640, Iskandar Thani was wary of Dutch pressure on him. One is prone to ask why Van Diemen insisted on Aceh's assistance, when he offers no real insight as to why Aceh was so important for a successful attack on Malacca. Was he afraid that Iskandar Thani and the Portuguese would overcome their enmity and work together to hold back the Dutch? Van Diemen was certainly at pains to reassure Iskandar Thani that the inclusion of Johor was not meant to anguish him, but to harm the enemy (the Portuguese). He declared that the relationship with Aceh was of far greater significance to him than that with Johor and that he liked to see it continue for another fifty years and hoped that their alliance against the Portuguese would sustain'³⁹ De Meer wrote in his letter that when the governor-general's letter was read out in the *balai*, the king showed a range of emotions: from almost dazed to laughing loudly and speaking harshly. De Meer called it '*een gansch glorien gemoet*' which may be translated as 'a totally glorious mood'. But the governor-general's fine words could not convince Iskandar Thani to accept Johor's inclusion. He was furious about Batavia's deception and the pressure on him to accept Johor and fulminated that Johor could not be trusted since many Portuguese had married Johorese

they had to pay the local dues and taxes to his governors in *reals* and warned them to comply to the rules. See: *Generale Missiven II*, p. 55-58. Letter dated 18 December 1639.

Iskandar Thani's firm stand may show that he was no longer willing to give privileges to the Dutch who were adamant to have Johor in the coalition to attack Malacca. It may also be true that the governors overruled his ruling to exempt the Dutch from paying tolls. Van Diemen thought that the exemptions would be valid for the however admitted that earlier privileges were honoured and that the company made a profit of f. 3.1276.71 on the west coast.

³⁷Mac Hacobian (tr.), P. A. Leupe, "The Siege and Capture of Malacca from the Portuguese in 1640-1641", (JMBRAS, 1936), vol. XIV, 128-429, appendix VII.

³⁸*The World of the Adat Aceh*, 71.

³⁹VOC 1.04.02: 1136: Letter from Antonio van Diemen (1640), f. 948 v.

daughters. It would be humiliating for him to be seen together with his blood enemy. ‘What will all the kings say when they see me in the company of Johor? How can I explain that I am aligned with Johor, whose rebel king has invaded my homeland Pahang?’ He accused Batavia of being oblivious to Aceh’s position in the region and declared that this stubborn attitude threatened their friendship. He warned that if the Dutch choose to take Johor under their wings, they would not be allowed to set foot in Aceh ever again.⁴⁰ How did Johor react to Aceh’s rejection of a coalition in which it participated? The Dutch learned from the *laxamana* of Johor that Pahang belonged to his ‘master’. They fought the Acehnese over Pahang and were able to destroy 7 *ghorabs* and held back between four to five hundred Acehnese.⁴¹ Yet there is no hint that they had serious objections against participating in a coalition with Aceh. Earlier Iskandar Thani pleaded with Prince Frederick Hendrick of (Orange) Nassau – in reply to the Prince’s letter - to continue the friendship like it was with the late Iskandar Muda, ‘like a golden chain that could not break.’⁴² De Meer feared that the relations between Aceh and the company had cracked (*een grooten krack gecregen heeft*) and advocated that the governor-general should pay attention to the king’s grievances, even though he himself believed that Iskandar Thani merely used Johor’s participation as a pretext to withdraw from the expedition. He strongly believed that the king’s main concern was the rising power of the VOC.⁴³

De Meer made a sincere effort to gain the king’s confidence, promising him that the company would try to convince Johor to send a representative to pay his respects to him. Did this mean to accept Iskandar Thani’s sovereignty (also sovereignty over Pahang?)? This concerned his most fundamental objection to participate in a coalition with Johor.

Notwithstanding the fact that Iskandar Thani had firmly spoken his mind, the show of good intentions between the old brothers-in-arms was not yet exhausted.⁴⁴ The frantic diplomacy in

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 1133 : *Bescheiden van Jan de Meere (Aceh 1640)*.

⁴¹ Tiele, *Bouwstoffen*, vol. II, 392.

⁴² *ibid.*, 11264: Letter from Iskandar Thani to Prince Frederick Hendrick, *Translaet van den Tijtelen des Conincx van Atchin*.

The original letter written in Arabic characters is in the possession of the Library of the University of Leiden. (L.U.B., Cod. Or. 4818a 1-3, B B1): see the Annex.

The letter from Prince Hendrick to Iskandar Thani could not be traced.

⁴³ *ibid.*, 1133: *Bescheiden van Jan de Meere; Dagh-Register 1640-1641, 2; Tiele, Bouwstoffen* vol. II, 2-4.

which both parties tried to convince the other to submit to its view continued. The king once again sent two ambassadors, Sri Nara Wangsa and Tuan Atamossafia to Batavia to convey his message to the governor-general.⁴⁵ A remarkable diplomatic instance occurred when the ambassadors requested the governor-general to release Dutch merchant Symon de Geus, who was condemned to death for his misdeeds against the VOC while he was stationed as head merchant in Aceh. Their request was granted ‘because of weighty considerations and the mediation of other people’ (*‘om wichtige consideratien ende mede door ‘voorbidden van andere vergunt wiert’*).⁴⁶ The demonstration of empathy by the ambassadors evidently put across the message that their sovereign did not hesitate to mediate on behalf of a subordinate Dutchman, showing him a true friend of the Dutch. It had not only symbolic, but also strategic value. Friendship with the Dutch was utterly important for Iskandar Thani, whose latest experiences with the Portuguese proved to him that Aceh was vulnerable and needed a strong ally against the Portuguese. Van Diemen clearly understood the significance of the diplomatic gesture and responded accordingly, reassuring the ambassadors that the friendship with Aceh would persist no matter what their king decided and bestowed them each with a golden chain and a diamond ring.

It is instructive to have a closer look at Iskandar Thani’s letter to Van Diemen. His deep resentment against participating in a coalition with Johor is again revealed. One of his chief concerns was that his prestige would be tainted when he was aligned with his blood enemy Johor. ‘How can I appear in Johor’s company; how will the governor-general solve the problem to bring two nations together who are not at peace with each other; if they start to fight each other, what will the governor-general do?’ His worries were genuine, coming from a man very conscious of his exalted position, that of ‘God’s representative on earth, protector of all his subjects and sovereign of the most wealthiest state in the widespread area which had brought to its submission many territories on both sides of the Straits. He had recently signed (1638) a peace accord with Pahang, the country of his birth, after Johor tried to re-assert control over it. This also implies that the Acehnese invasions of Pahang in 1617 and 1618 had not led to Aceh’s permanent authority over Pahang. Iskandar Thani wore the burden of two

⁴⁴ A last ditch effort to urge the king to send his force to Malacca was by Adriaen Anthoniszoon who went to Aceh with the yachts the *Reynsburg*, *Valkenburg* and *Bredamme* on his way to Malacca. *Generale Missiven*, vol. II, 109: Van Diemen to the Gentlemen XVII of 30 November 1640.

⁴⁵ The names of the ambassadors of both missions are included in Iskandar Thani’s letter. *Dagh-Register 1640-1641*, 6-9.

⁴⁶ *ibid*, 2, 3. Symon de Geus succeeded merchant Jan van der Meulen in Aceh where he misappropriated the Company’s goods and cheated in the books. He also brought a concubine in the lodge.

crowns, as the king of Aceh he inherited the enemy Johor. He was the son of Sultan Ahmad of Pahang who was deposed by his brother, a puppet of Johor. Johor had played an essential role in his father's downfall. He insisted that the Dutch and Aceh would go together without Johor, but if the governor-general decided otherwise, that the Dutch and Johor would go together, without him. He was adamant that if they would be unsuccessful to capture Malacca, the governor-general should immediately cut all ties with Johor. 'If the almighty Lord permits, the Dutch and Aceh Daru's Salam will together besiege Malacca 'as if they are of one blood, united in arms to dispel the enemy' (*sullen die van Atchin Darou Salam ende de Hollanders niet anders zijn als een bloet, dewelcke ook mede eene wapenen met malcanderen sullen voeren...*).⁴⁷

Van Diemen, unquestionably an intelligent man, quite naively took the refusal as an obstinate act of a cantankerous and arrogant man.⁴⁸ He could not understand Iskandar Thani's deep resentment towards Johor and saw no fundamental reason why a coalition with Johor would harm Aceh. He seemed oblivious of the long historical enmity between Aceh and Johor, with all its implications. Since his appointment as governor-general, Van Diemen made the capture of Malacca one of his principal objectives.⁴⁹ In his eagerness to seize Malacca from the Portuguese he downplayed the objections of the Acehnese ruler that it was dangerous to have two antagonists in a coalition. The unsuccessful mission of his chief envoy gave the whole undertaking a negative impulse, De Meer had been his last hope to bring Iskandar Thani to his senses. Van Diemen criticized De Meer's conduct in the important affair, saying that his prominent position required a stronger handling in order to get the king's promise that he would participate, although he admitted at the same time that it was perilous to serve two 'masters' (*'t is kwaad twee heeren te dienen*').⁵⁰ Pursuing what seemed an impossible alliance was turning into a dilemma for Van Diemen, but the fact that Johor often succumbed to Malacca's coercive actions, was decisive 'to take Johor under our wings'. He saw no other way of approaching the situation and would not allow the 'Atchynder' to destroy the 'Johorite'. To try to make sense of Van Diemen's words we need to look at his letter of 9

⁴⁷ NA VOC 1131: 'Translaet van de Missive des Coninx van Atchin aen d'Ed. Heer Gouverneur Generael ende de Heeren Raden van India' in: *Dagh-Register 1640-1641*, 6-9: 7.

⁴⁸ *Generale Missiven*, vol. II, 57.

⁴⁹ Van Diemen served as governor-general from January 1639 to February 1645. He vigorously pursued policies to eject the Portuguese from the Moluccan islands and to conquer Malacca.

⁵⁰ *Dagh-Register 1640-1641*, 46.

December 1637 to the Gentlemen XVII. He expresses his opinion that ‘the company should not allow the Indian princes to become big by supplying them with Dutch artillery, but to keep them in balance against one another.’ He suggests to call on all of them to combine forces against the Portuguese which would relieve the company of expensive costs.⁵¹

If De Meer failed to persuade Iskandar Thani to participate in a broad coalition with Johor, he was successful in securing trade privileges for the VOC. The king sent his *firman* to his *panglimas* on the west coast to give notice that he had licensed the VOC to trade without paying tolls. Resident merchant Compostel informed the commander of the fleet in front of Malacca that De Meer had been treated well and that Iskandar Thani called him *orangkaya Panjang* (the tall *orangkaya*).⁵²

The intensive and extended diplomacy between the governor-general and the sultan took place on two levels, through their delegates and through some very reflective correspondence. Iskandar Thani did not hesitate to discuss sensitive issues concerning the enmity between Aceh and Johor. Quite puzzling is his statement that ‘it was not Aceh’s intention to conquer Johor, as it had done with Pahang, which it rid of the evil-doers.’ He stressed the fact that Pahang was his country, the country of his birth and that of his forefathers, ‘something the whole world knows.’ Significant is his assertion that ‘Paduka Marhoum Mahkota Alam’ (the late king Mahkota Alam known to us as Iskandar Muda) made a great mistake by appointing two commanders at the head of his expedition to Malacca in 1629. He blamed Aceh’s defeat on their discord and rivalry.⁵³ He said that because of their rivalry the combined fleets of Malacca and Johor came in an advantageous position and that, if the *laxamana* had not defected to Johor, Malacca would certainly have been captured by the Acehnese. He used the example of the rivalling commanders to underline that it would be a grave mistake to have Aceh and Johor, two hostile parties, in a coalition, emphasising the absurdity of forcing them

⁵¹ *Generale Missiven*, vol. I, 605.

⁵² One is warned not to be too appreciative of this title to foreigners. General Thomas Best and captain William Keeling were flattered when Iskandar Muda called them respectively *orangkaya puteh* and *orangkaya chute atti*. These gentlemen showered him with exceptional gifts. Thomas Best was reprimanded in London for his spendthrift in Aceh and the fact that he had accomplished very little. In spite of the fact that Keeling obtained a license for the English, the visiting ships were not allowed to trade in Tiku unconditionally but were forced to pay in cash or goods to Iskandar Muda.

⁵³ The *Hikayat Potjut Muhammad* merely warns against dual government, which is the cause for chaos and dichotomy in the state. It is seen as detrimental to the state’s unity and security. A kind of dual government was Johor under Alau’-din Ri’ayat Shah and his younger brother Raja Bongsu.

together: ‘Imagine that they start attacking each other, what will the governor-general think of them, how will he solve the problem?’⁵⁴ The Acehnese ambassadors tried to imbue Van Diemen with the idea that it was ‘dishonourable’ to have two enemies in a coalition to capture Malacca, which the Dutch translated with *‘niet eerlijk’*, (unfair). Iskandar Thani’s non-equivocal remark that Aceh never intended to conquer Johor may have suggested that he was reaching out to Johor, yet on his conditions. The Johorese officials should first accept his *daulat* or sovereignty, only then would he pardon Johor.⁵⁵

There is little doubt that Sultan Iskandar Thani was influenced by his religious advisor, Sheikh Nuru’d-din al Raniri whose main aim seems to have been the aggrandisement of Aceh and its ruler and the lifting of Pahang in the Malay setting, degrading Johor, which assumed the role of successor state of the Malaccan sultanate.⁵⁶ Although Johor’s participation in a coalition to attack Malacca was the fundamental obstacle for Iskandar Thani, yet fear that another European power might replace the Portuguese was definitely on his mind. From his letter to Prince Frederick Hendrick of Orange speaks his anxiety that the VOC would harm his trade with the Indian ports. He requested the prince to make sure that the Dutch would not molest ships coming to Aceh from Surat, Masulipatan, Bengala, Dabul and several other ports. It is proof of the fact that he acknowledged and feared the VOC’s powerful position. Through the long years of negotiations Iskandar Thani and Van Diemen went out of their ways to convince each other of the importance to continue their friendship. They sent each other valuable presents: Iskandar Thani sent the governor-general a *keris* with a golden shaft and different other valuable presents, while Van Diemen showered him with several guns a golden pipe, three beautiful horses, a great number of precious diamonds, and some ‘ingenious inventions’ such as a telescope.

⁵⁴ *Dagh-Register 1640-1641*, ‘Translaet van de Missive des Coninx van Atchin’, 7.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 6-9.

From Van Diemen’s letter of 18 December 1639 transpires that the *laxamana* of Johor declared to one of the Dutch captains when they assembled in front of the island of Carimon, that Pahang inherently belonged to his king and not to the Acehnese. He would never accept Iskandar Thani’s sovereignty over Pahang. *Dagh-Register*, 392.

⁵⁶ This I brought to bear in Part One, chapter II and in Part Three, chapter III.

3. 4. 6 The fall of Malacca

On the 14th of January 1641 the glorious city of Malacca fell to the Dutch after a siege of five months and twelve days. The Dutch commanders Lucaszoon Van der Veer and Jan de Meer succumbed to diseases a short time before Dutch victory and died on their ships.

The landing in Malacca was led by commander Minne Willemszoon Kaertekoe.

The Portuguese put on a brave defence of the city they had held for close to a century and a half, although they were starved and weakened from the long siege. Francois Valentijn mentions in his account on Malacca that they were deprived of necessary food because the Dutch and the Johorese prevented the small Malaccan crafts to enter and leave the city.⁵⁷

It was not an easy victory for the Dutch, who lost about one thousand warriors. They congratulated themselves with their victory and gloried at the thought of having gained even more respect and honour because they took the unconquerable city without the assistance of the 'Atchynder' and downplayed the help given them by Johore.⁵⁸

The wretched Sultan Iskandar Thani died on 15 February 1641 from poisoning. He was besieged from various directions, externally - and so it seems - internally. After his death Aceh once again became the scene of turmoil and bloodshed concerning the appointment of a successor for the throne. The throne went to Iskandar Thani's widow, Taju'l Alam Saffiatu'd-din Shah the eldest daughter of the late Iskandar Muda, who ruled Aceh until 1675.

3. 4. 7 Conclusion

The crushing Acehnese defeat by the Portuguese in 1629 can be blamed on the fact that two commanders were appointed at the head of the Acehnese force and their disagreement on strategic matters. The defeat was even more bitter because of the superiority of the Acehnese

⁵⁷ D. F. A. Hervey citing from Francois Valentijn's account of Malacca , (JSBRAS, 1890, vol. XXI-XXII, 223-246), 227.

⁵⁸ Leupe , "The Siege and Capture of Malacca from the Portuguese in 1640-1641" (JMBRAS, 1936), vol. XIV, 128-429, appendix VII.

De Reizen van Nicolaus de Graaff 1639-1687 (Linschoten Vereeniging, 1930), 10-11. *Dagh-Register 1640-1641*, 124. They received 11 ships and 600 men assistance from Johor; Patani sent presents to the Dutch commander.

armada. Johor and Patani played a significant role in Aceh's ruination, by sending ships to Malacca's relief and handing over the *laxamana* to the Portuguese.

It is difficult to determine precise inclinations of loyalty between the Malays and the Portuguese. One observes a shifting pattern of alliances and sympathies among them and in their relations with Malacca. The sultan of Johor, Abdu'l Jalil III (the former Prince Bujang) and successor of Sultan Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah since 1624, had his moment of glory when the Acehnese *laxamana* begged him not to hand him over to the Portuguese. The Acehnese prevented him to access the throne of Pahang to where he was convoyed by the Portuguese after Johor and Malacca signed a second truce in 1615. Iskandar Muda twice invaded his homeland Johor and deposed his father Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah in 1613.

Boasting in their fragile victory, the Portuguese set off a new stage in Dutch-Aceh relations, which the two parties very eagerly sealed in 1632 when Stadlander visited Sultan Iskandar Muda.

The years of frantic diplomacy between the Dutch and Sultan Iskandar Thani for cooperation in an attack on Malacca took up all of Iskandar Thani's time as Aceh's ruler. While he had to shake off the Portuguese, his growing fear was that the VOC and Johor would in the end turn against him. Out of anxiety he took unprecedented measures to defend his country from foreign invasions by deviating the source of the river leading to the city. This was the first real sign that Aceh felt vulnerable towards outside intervention.

Van Diemen's explanation that he would take Johor 'under our wings' to disentangle the sultanate from the Portuguese, did not bode well with Iskandar Thani. As a prince of Pahang, he was understandably against being allied with his blood rival Johor who had contributed to his father's downfall. At that critical time of negotiations with the Dutch, he was fighting off Johor which tried to reassert its control over Pahang in 1638. Although Iskandar Thani considered Johor's provisioning of Malacca with food as a treacherous act, he too fleetingly flirted with the Portuguese. It was an episode that taught him that the Portuguese could not be trusted. He was ready to attack Malacca together with the Dutch but not in an alliance with Johor. Van Diemen took various diplomatic steps to convince Iskandar Thani of Aceh's unmatched significance for an attack on Malacca. The prolonged diplomatic process shows that Aceh remained from the very start of their presence in Asia, a factor of unprecedented importance for Dutch geo-political ambitions. Iskandar Thani in his turn stressed the brotherly bond with the Prince of Orange. He desperately tried to keep the Dutch on his side against his Malay enemy Johor. The relationship between Aceh and the Dutch through the decades

received heavy blows, but the pleas from both sides to keep the ‘brotherly’ bond shows, that their common aim and ideal, which was the overthrow of Portuguese authority in Malacca, was the *raison d'être* of their relationship.

Part Three

CHAPTER V

SUBJUGATION AND SLAVERY

3. 5. 1 Introduction

The influx of vast numbers of people in Aceh who came either voluntarily, as merchants and adventurers, or involuntarily, as slaves and war captives, was intrinsically connected to Aceh's development into a vibrant trade centre and its rise into a sovereign power of the first rank. The host of foreigners contributed to the cosmopolitan society, which was a salient characteristic of the great trading ports. The upshot of Sultan Iskandar Muda's many war expeditions was the movement of thousands of war captives into the Acehnese orbit. In this chapter I like to focus on the plight of the people who came involuntarily, either as war captives or as slaves and debt-bondsmen. Because the European merchants in Aceh almost without exception point to the subjected people as slaves, the haunting question is, whether the war captives who hailed from Islamic ports on the Malay peninsula were regarded as slaves by their Acehnese captor. The extant sources are neither explicit nor exhaustive in explaining the position of the war captives in Acehnese society. Augustin de Beaulieu is our most eloquent source in this respect, whereas several scholars examined and described the social conditions which prevailed in Aceh during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; their observations and conclusions are to a certain extent helpful in gleaning the conditions of the seventeenth century.

3. 5. 2 Demographic need for the invasions

Denys Lombard and in his footsteps Anthony Reid and other historians, adopts the view that Iskandar Muda's war expeditions to the Malay ports were necessary to (re)populate the Acehnese realm. There is no clarity on what observations and sources these historians base

this opinion, except for the comment by Augustin de Beaulieu that Iskandar Muda populated his realm by way of conquests.¹ This unavoidably establishes the thesis of a mono-causal objective for the invasions, making the acquiring of humans Iskandar Muda's sole consideration. This is falsified by the surfacing facts in the discussion which show that the motifs for his invasions of the ports were Portuguese trade interests and their meddling in the political affairs of the ports.

We may however consider the fact that the increasing trade with foreigners and the developments in Aceh demanded a growing labour force. Taking also for true that several rulers had huge numbers of *orangkaya* and other persons murdered when they seized the throne, it is understandable that they needed fresh human resources to provide them with new cadres. Most importantly, the assumed role of protector of Islam could only be upheld by the availability of manpower for the war against the 'infidel' in Malacca. Religious mobilization requires a readiness to go to war from all classes of society. Although Iskandar Muda was often victorious in his wars, he too suffered human losses which had to be made good. But were the war expeditions directed to acquire human resources?

I established earlier that the invasions were fundamentally inspired by idealistic considerations, yet the acquiring of humans was a most welcome spin off but not a goal in itself. One should understand that in the nexus between de-population and re-population, taking away the enemy's subjects, artillery and ships, were means not only to strengthen one's own power, but the defeated opponent was seriously weakened and his efforts to launch a counter attack were completely diminished. The conqueror was feared in the neighbourhood and this instilled in him a sense of supreme authority. Iskandar Muda let it be known to the ports in the region that they could not accept Portuguese friendship or intervention without impunity.

Pondering the postulation that the invasions were geared to (re)populate Aceh, it is interesting to know that in 1599 John Davis observed that the port of Aceh was a spacious city with a large population: 'the town spreadeth over the whole land with a great concourse of people living in the city which had three markets.'² He wrote this ten years after the just installed

¹ Lombard, *Mémoires*, 224.

De Beaulieu says here literally that Iskandar Muda populated his town by way of conquests, or more properly, by ravaging Johor, Deli, Pahang, Kedah and Perak.

² *The Voyages and Works of John Davis the Navigator*, 147 .

Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah (Sayyid al Mukamil) had thousands of his subjects massacred and before the multiple war expeditions under Iskandar Muda had taken effect.

The assumption that the war expeditions were inspired by Iskandar Muda's need to populate his domain, also founders in the face of De Beaulieu's own account that the people from the invaded Malay ports were treated inhumanely and left to starve and die in the streets of the city. Is this the way to treat people who are badly needed to populate Aceh? About twenty thousand captives from Pahang, Kedah and Perak had been brought to Aceh between 1617 to 1620. Whether the five thousand captives from Perak mentioned by the Dutch is included in this number is not confirmed.³ Out of the total of seven thousand captives from Kedah in the end only five hundred survived because of the appalling conditions under which they lived at the outskirts of the city where they were deprived of basic necessities.⁴ Rebellion of the Pahang people against the Acehnese *laxamana* led to the execution of hundreds of them. The people from Johor who were captured by the Acehnese armada in 1613, were left on the streets where they starved and many died.

The waste of so many lives is a tragic testimony of Iskandar Muda's callousness. It does not underscore the thesis that the conquests were geared to populate the Acehnese realm.

3. 5. 3 Dominant relations in Islam

In a sense the Sultanate Aceh Daru's-Salam was a paradox, where the egalitarian society advocated by Islam was imaginary; society was socially stratified with the rise of classes as a result of the developing trade based economic system. The *Adat Aceh* gives evidence of the stratification of a society, in which nobles, merchants and slaves formed important constituents.

One of the efforts of this discussion is to find an answer to the question of the status of the war captives who hailed from Islamic territories, such as the invaded Malay ports. This is important because the foreign visitors almost unanimously refer to the hostages and war captives as slaves. Such an effort may prove to be difficult, because by abandoning Western associations of slavery, one may find oneself strapped in a web of local dependency threads

³ *Generale Missiven*, vol. I. 103: Letter of Pieter de Carpentier to the Gentlemen XVII, dated 8 March 1621.

⁴ Lombard, *Mémoires*, 169.

which are difficult to disentangle and define. A genuine endeavour to perceive a connection between subjugation and slavery in Aceh, requires a frame of reference which pays heed to the special character and the anomalies of the Acehnese state.

Islam presents a key reference for the rules of conduct in a muslim society and is therefore a legitimate manner to do away with the time-honoured method of dealing with the imprecision of Western association and perception, which obscure rather than shed light on the Acehnese social scene. Opponents of the idea to look at the rules of Islam to examine subjection in Aceh, may question whether the Acehnese state was based on a clearly articulated religious system and cast their doubts about its rulers' adherence to the teachings of Islam, declaring the whole exercise futile.⁵ This may seem a valid objection, because the Acehnese rulers are generally depicted in the foreign documents as potentates who disregarded the interests of their subjects and those of other people. I have set out in chapter II of Part One that a fundamental requirement for Islamic rulers is that they are *adil* (righteous).⁶

In fact the Acehnese rulers' style of living challenged the teachings of the creed they claimed to profess: their pleasure in animal fights, their love of the alcoholic beverage *arak*, the display of incredible wealth and the opulence of their court seem proof that they strayed from the 'true path'. Interestingly, John Davis observed in 1602 that Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah surrounded himself with female advisors. A woman called Keumalahayati was the *laxamana* of the Acehnese fleet when Davis came to Aceh in 1602 as the chief pilot of Admiral Lancaster's fleet. From 1641 until 1699 four females in succession ruled Aceh.⁷ Following the orthodox view in Islam, women in powerful positions is an aberration. While the arguments against looking at the rules of Islam as a reference are not without persuasive power, they are, in my opinion, premature. Against all the odds, the identification of these rulers with Islam was public and categorical. According to the *Hikayat Aceh* Iskandar Muda built several mosques. Foreigners witnessed religious processions which departed from the royal palace to the great mosque in the city of Bandar Aceh where the sultan led the

⁵ I may refer to C. Snouck Hurgronje's critical stance on the nature of Islam in Aceh during the rule of its greatest rulers: *The Acehnese*, vol. I, chapter I. Snouck Hurgronje visited Mecca and evidently used the knowledge he obtained of Islam as a yardstick to evaluate Islam's influence on Acehnese society.

⁶ This is also advocated in the *Taj as-Salatin* by Bukhari al Johari.

⁷ Snouck Hurgronje made the following comment on female rule in Aceh: "The fact that four female sovereigns in succession have occupied the throne of Aceh must create an unfavourable impression in the mind of every Mohammedan who reviews the past history of the country. Yet in that very instance of female rule we have a remarkable example of how quickly a favourable experience may induce devout champions of Islam to lay aside their aversion even to such an anomaly as this. *The Acehnese*, vol. II, 335.

Friday prayer, one of the Islamic injunctions, as well as processions and celebrations on Islam's sacred days like *Idu' l-Fitri* after the end of the fasting month of Ramadan and on the day of sacrifice in the month of *Dhu'l-Hijja*. The *Adat Aceh* tells us that 'the sultan first puts a knife into the neck of one of the sacrificial animals: as soon as some blood appears Sheikh Shamsu'd-din takes over the knife and dispatches the victim'.⁸ One should realize that the *Adat Aceh* which is a compilation of - indeed - royal ordinances, stipulates the rules for religious conduct and Islamic festivals. It is obvious that the sultan was the 'law-giver'. He was aided by Islamic scholars at his court and by the highest Islamic judge, the *Kadi Maliku'l-Adil* (judge of the righteous king), who presided over the religious court. *Adil* or righteousness and just judgement is a fundamental principle which the Qur'an imparts on government and society in all aspects of life. It is an essential aspect in governing human relations.⁹

Noteworthy is the fact that the Acehnese *ulama* A. Hasjmy defends women's role in public positions, by bringing forward the example of Prophet Muhammad's wife Ayshah, who became a resistant soldier, translated the scriptures and set a precedent for Islamic women in political life.¹⁰

It is obvious that any study of Aceh should reckon that Islam played a crucial role in Aceh. This makes it opportune to look at the rules it set out with regard to subjugation and slavery and take this as a frame of thought and even as a methodological tool to examine the condition of the Islamic war captives in Aceh.

Islam in principle rejects privileges; caste and aristocracy do not exist, but it recognizes inequalities. Islam does not forbid slavery, but it does not allow a follower to enslave someone of his own faith. A freeborn Muslim can never become a slave. This religious constraint to enslave co-religionists thus compelled the purchase or the capture of people outside Muslim enclaves when there rose the need for slaves. Yet to manumit a slave was regarded highly meritorious. The early jurists of Islam reasoned that it would be illogical and detrimental to developments to ban slavery overnight in a society in which it had rooted. To

⁸ *Adat Atjèh*, 21.

⁹ Mahmoud Ayoub "The Muslim Ummah and the Islamic State" in: Syed Othman Alhabeshi and Syed Omar Syed Agil (eds.), *The Role and Influence of Religion in Society* (Kuala Lumpur: Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM), 1994), 49-57: 51.

¹⁰ Hasjmy found examples in the Qu'an to justify women's position in society. He alludes to several verses which show that women and men both had the same status: *59 Tahun Aceh Merdeka Di Bawah Pemerintahan Ratu*, (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1977), 22.

avoid serious social dislocations they took a gradual approach to the issue of abolition of the widespread system, by developing and promoting two steps for abolition:

1. Moral-religious: slave-owners were encouraged to free their slaves; this was seen as virtuous and commendable (*Sura 2: 177, 90:13*). To manumit slaves was one of the ways to atone for sins.

2. Legal: through a freedom contract.

The glitch in Islamic societies was, that there existed some form of domestic slavery, but it was generally permeated with a patriarchal character. Every Islamized society added its own traditional views to the new religion and evidently the egalitarian society was difficult to attain then as well as now. The acceptance through the centuries of these inequalities in Muslim societies have resulted in classification and regulation. The classification of ‘unfree’ people in orthodox Islam as summed up by Bernard Lewis is: slave, woman, unbeliever.

These groups lack the freedom to participate in the exercise of power.¹¹ Over the centuries Islamic rulers increasingly came to rely on their slave soldiers, examples are found in the Ottoman Empire, in Egypt of the Mamluks and in Moghul India. This dependency of the rulers on their slaves gradually led to instances in which these slaves became dominant in the military and government apparatus in which they started to occupy central positions.¹²

The Arabic word for slave *abd* is principally used as a metaphor for man in relationship to God or *Allah* to Whom he owes total submission. The Malay word used in the same context is *hamba (Allah)*. The composer of the *Bustan as-Salatin*, Sheikh Nuru’d-din al Raniri, tells us that ‘Sultan Iskandar Muda subdued Pahang, because God wished to carry out his plans through his slave’.¹³

Of special relevance for this discussion is the stipulation in the Islamic law books for the capture of people from other Muslim states. As regards the conflicts between Muslims, Islam accepts invasions of Muslim lands and their subjugation and the capture of co-religionists under set conditions. According to Bernard Lewis there is a special stipulation in the law books which is concerned with the capture of co-religionists from Muslim states ‘who are in

¹¹ *The political language of Islam*, 65: ‘Until the eighteenth century the Islamic terms for ‘free’ had a primary legal, and occasionally social significance and meant one who, according to the law, was a free man and not a slave. Neither term ‘free’ or ‘slave’ was used in a political context. Western use of the terms ‘freedom’ and ‘slavery’ as metaphors for citizen’s rights and oppressive rule is unknown in Islamic discourse. The central issue is justice and not freedom’.

¹² *idem*.

¹³ *Bustanu’s Salatin*, 12 ‘...bahawa sultan Iskandar Muda mena’alokkan negeri Pahang antara lain ia-lah kerana Allah hendak melakukan iradat-nya kepada sa-seorang hamba-nya.’

conflict with the state that declares war'. They are usually regarded as *baghi*, rebels, and may not, unlike the 'unbeliever' or 'infidel' be enslaved or held to ransom in captivity. The general purport is clear. Lewis mentions two categories of Muslim enemies against whom it is lawful to wage war: rebels and bandits. It was legal to make arrangements with rebels and these arrangements had to be honoured.¹⁴ The Malay ports which Iskandar Muda invaded can be considered rebel states who permitted the enemy of Islam (the Portuguese) to trade in their ports, or made peace pacts with the Portuguese.

3. 5. 4 The institution of slavery in Aceh

Tomé Pires, assistant to the Portuguese governor of Malacca from about 1511 to 1515 gives one of the earliest accounts of slavery in the Straits region and talks about the presence of slave-markets in Palembang, Deli and Aru.¹⁵ H. J. Nieboer an authority on slavery in the Southeast Asian context, asserts that the institution of slavery existed in Sumatra, but, it was not widespread. Among the Battak tribes the existence of slavery was sufficiently proved.¹⁶ In the Lingga-Riau archipelago there were debtor-slaves. But in large areas of Sumatra there was no evidence of slavery 'in the true sense'.¹⁷

Debt-bondage was a system long known in Southeast Asia. Several scholars have studied this system of dependency in the Asian setting.¹⁸ The historian Edward Loeb observes: 'In Aceh as among the Bataks and elsewhere, debtors who were without means bound themselves to their creditors to work out their debts as pawns. Pawns were able to purchase their freedom, while slaves could not do so unless their masters consented'.¹⁹ Debt-bondage is generally

¹⁴ *The political language of Islam*, 82.

See also : Robert Wuthnow (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Politics and Religion*, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1998), 425-426: 'In addition to the expansionist *jihad*, medieval scholars also dealt with internal conflicts against rebels within Islam. In this form of *jihad*, stricter rules of engagement and greater protection for the lives and property of the enemy applied than in the case of non-Muslims. The aim of this type of *jihad* was to rehabilitate the rebels as quickly as possible into the Muslim body politic.'

¹⁵ Armando Cortesao (ed.), Tome Pires *The Suma Oriental* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1944).

¹⁶ Aru and Deli were ports within the non-Islamic Batak territories.

¹⁷ H. J. Nieboer, *Slavery as an Industrial System*, (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1910), 32.

¹⁸ A. Reid (ed.), *Slavery, Bondage and Dependency in Southeast Asia*, (St. Lucia. London. New York: University of Queensland Press, 1983).

regarded a moderate form of slavery, combining feudal principles, customs and traditions with exploitative labour.²⁰ Anthony Reid points to linguistic patterns as paradigms to show that vertical bonding was the core of many social systems in this part of the world. He asserts that when Southeast Asians speak, they place themselves in a vertical relationship, demonstrating that they accept a system of unequal relations.²¹ Whether this practice can be regarded as a cultural matrix to explain unequal relationships is for the social scientists to decide, but it is nonetheless an interesting inference. Reid notes that the theoretical concept of human equality was latent in the three major religions in Southeast Asia, but that it was not present in the great texts of the Southeast Asian high cultures.²² If we consider the *Adat Aceh* a great local text, we surprisingly note an entry which gives evidence of the fact that slavery in Aceh was institutionalised.²³ No mention is made of a system of debt-bondage, but one assumes that this system existed. While the *Adat Aceh* interpolates rules for religious conduct, it defies the Islamic notions of equality and thus bears witness to a gap between the *adat* (local law) provisions and those of Islamic Law.

It is also worthy to note from the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* that the dominant relationship between master and slave in Persia was influenced by Sufism. There existed a domestic form of slavery of which the characteristics were: 1. usually good treatment; 2. integration in the family; 3. ease of enfranchisement.²⁴ We may consider the fact that the system of dominant relationships in Aceh was influenced by Sufism, the spiritual form of Islam which was highly regarded.

It may be instructive to look at the systems of slavery and debt-bondage in the Malay port of Perak and with little variation in the rest of the Malay world as they applied at the end of the nineteenth century and described by W. E. Maxwell (1882).²⁵

¹⁹ E. Loeb, *Sumatra Its History and People* (Oxford University Press, 1989), 230 .

²⁰ Quotation by V. Matheson and M.B. Hooker in: Reid, *Slavery, Bondage and Dependency*, 191: 'Maxwell states that the institution of debt-bondage is "a native Malay custom" and conflicts with Muslim law which is more lenient to debtors. (Maxwell 1890, p. 248).

²¹ *Slavery, Bondage and Dependency*, 6-7.

²² *ibid.*, 7.

²³ *Adat Atjèh*, 25.

²⁴ edited by H.A.R.Gibb, J.H. Kramer, E. Lévi-Provencal (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960, vol. 1), 36.

²⁵ W. E. Maxwell, "The law relating to slavery among the Malays", (JSBRAS :1890), vol. XXI-XXII : 248-297), 248.

‘Mohammedan law has however largely influenced Malay custom respecting slavery, and Arabic terminology is noticeable in many of the details incidental to the system. So far from being identical with the slavery lawful among Muslims in Egypt, Arabia, etc., the Malay institution is, in some respect, completely at variance with it, and in this particular, as in many others there is a never ending struggle between the *hukum adat* (customary law) of the Malays, and the *hukum shari’a* (religious law) of the Koran. Muhammadan priests, who would sometimes seek, if they could, to enforce the latter, are met by the plea that the practice denounced is lawful by Malay custom and it is thus that debt-bondage, like opium smoking, gambling, etc., is always defended.’ There are two classes of slaves: *hamba* and *kawan*. ‘The debt-bondsman (*orang berhutang*), is more correctly termed *kawan* (companion).’ The slave (*abdi*) (Ar.) is termed *hamba*.

A slave is either a captive taken in war; an infidel captured by force (i.e. Batak, etc.); a man-slayer (*yang bawa darah mati*);

The debt-bondsman is a free man, (*mardahika*) as opposed to a slave ‘though from his being obliged to serve his creditor in all kinds of menial employment, the two conditions are not always readily distinguishable’. It was custom among the Rawa Malays who originated from Sumatra, but had settled in Perak, to detain a debt bondsman ‘for two years only’. If the debt was not paid back at the expiration time, it was remitted as alms. The national customs in Perak on the contrary, when favourable to the debtor, have been openly disregarded and every kind of oppression has been practiced.’²⁶

3. 5. 5 European perceptions of slavery in Aceh

The European visitors perceived dependency relations, mis-treatment and castigation as slavery, whether this was locally regarded as such. A person’s freedom or rather the lack of it was the parameter for equating his condition with slavery. Let us look at some examples of what should be considered unqualified terms used by the European merchants in Aceh for the dependency relations. John Davis who was in Aceh in 1599 and 1602, perceived that Aceh was fundamentally a society of unfree people: ‘For it seemeth there is no free-man in the land,

²⁶ *ibid.*, 250.

for the life and goods of all is at the Kings pleasure.’²⁷ Interestingly, Nieboer advanced the proposition that despotic societies are not by nature slave societies: ‘The slave lives in a society that regards him as a slave; slavery cannot exist where there is not a society of freemen. Therefore the despot, however great his power, is not as much a master of slaves.’²⁸ Nieboer defines a slave as follows: ‘A slave is the property of another, politically and socially (a slave is) at a lower level than the mass of people and performs compulsory labour.’

An unqualified statement is by the English admiral Thomas Best who was in Aceh in 1613: ‘for this day he (the King) confiscated a junk from Suratt which was worth 100.000 crowns, and made all the people slaves, for that they had bene att a place called Pera(k), which people are enemies to this King of Achen.’ Worthy to note is the fact that their names suggest that they were muslims and as we know Islam forbids the enslavement of co-religionists.²⁹ The Dutch official Hans de Haze who was in Aceh in 1616 wrote to his headoffice in Bantam that the sultan was holding the captain of the Dutch factory *as a slave* and was going to take him to Malacca’.³⁰ He referred to merchant Ryser who was thrown to the elephants because he trespassed the local law to wait for the royal *cap*. The unfortunate man was suffering from broken limbs and it is unlikely that he was enslaved. After he recovered he left Aceh. Francois Martin observed a curious system in 1602 which allowed strangers to buy women for as long as they stayed there, ‘without the women being shocked by this’. ‘Men buy for money all their household – women, servants and slaves – and get rid of them when it suits them.’³¹ Martin in fact states that not only slaves but ‘free’ women too were bought and sold. Apparently slaves and women as well as servants could be owned. Against this background I like to point to a rather similar custom which was practiced in Aceh in 1989, although the conditions were clearly in favour of the woman. Known as a contract-marriage, this is the only accepted way for a temporary intimate relationship between a foreigner and an Acehnese woman and legitimate as long as the foreigner resides in Aceh. The main condition is that he submits himself to Islamic rites, for example by undergoing circumcision. Whether the

²⁷ *The Voyages and Works of John Davis the Navigator*, 148.

²⁸ *Slavery as an Industrial System*, 31.

²⁹ *The Voyage of Thomas Best*, 271 ‘Our general hath much endeavoured to redeem Abdela Cadir, father-in-law to Hoja Shan Allye, also Malyn Allye, Mea Hassan, Hassan Gemattee, Allye Croudia and Daud Bapon...’

³⁰ Quoted. Arun Das Gupta, *Aceh in Indonesian trade and politics 1600-1641*, 160.

³¹ “Aceh in 1602” in: A Reid (ed.), *Witnesses to Sumatra A travellers’ Anthology*, 58.

foreigner is married in his country of origin, is not relevant. The contract covers the rights of the woman to a house and her husband's belongings when he departs from Aceh and she is entitled to keep their offspring. It is profoundly a way to protect her against sexual exploitation.³²

Although he was in Aceh in 1688, decades later than the period which I set out to explore, the English traveller William Dampier sketched a picture of slavery as a kind of constituted order.³³ According to this picture the *shahbandar* owned no less than thousand slaves, some among them were chief merchants : 'they were all in some way each others slaves and all in general to the Queen and *orangkaya*. Even the less wealthy people, who did not own slaves themselves, hired slaves to carry rice for them. Slaves were also hired to check the money from the money-changers. Yet there is no rigour used by the Master to his slave, except it be the very meanest, such as do all sorts of servile work: but those who can turn their hands to any thing besides drudgery, live well enough by their industry. Yet though all these are slaves, they have habitations or houses to themselves in several parts of the city, far from their masters houses, as if they were free People.'³⁴ Slaves were encouraged by their masters to start their own business for which they lent them money 'whereby the servant lives easy, and with great content follows what his inclination or capacity fits him for; and the master also, who has a share in the gains, reaps the more profit, yet without trouble. When one of these slaves dies, his master is heir to what he leaves; and his children, if he has any, become his slaves also: unless the father out of his own clear gains has in his life time had werewithal to purchase their freedom there, I spoke of before'.³⁵

One would almost propose by looking at the European perceptions about dominant or dependency relationships, that the Europeans who maintained relations with the Acehnese port, in fact defined themselves.

In general writers are apprehensive and perhaps unable to define the boundaries of the unfree situation in which other people lived and laboured, and the structure of this situation. The numerous writings concerning this subject show that it is difficult to find a universally accepted definition for slave. J.L. Watson remarks that the writers' linguistic usage is limited and subsequently the word 'slavery' (between inverted commas) becomes the denominator

³² The author was acquainted with two couples who had closed a contract-marriage.

³³ Lombard calls Dampier a victim of his own categories and of his European vocabulary and the term 'slaves' as used for the situation inaccurate. See: *Le Sultanat d'Aceh au temps d'Iskandar Muda 1607-1636*, 75.

³⁴ N. M. Penzer (ed.), William Dampier, *Voyages and Discoveries* (London: Argonaut Press, 1931) , 98-99.

³⁵ *ibid.*, 90-101.

for all forms of subjection.³⁶ ‘Thus the open-ended notion of ‘slavery’ not only makes it difficult to isolate it as a specific social system, but it demonstrates that in the nexus between slave and victim, the West has created its own types of slaves.’³⁷ One should bear in mind that historical developments and events are often remembered by the linguistic usage shaping a situation, thus a wrongly used word can bring with it different perceptions, which blurs the socio-historical reality. In the dependency relationships it has profound significance to identify a person as a slave. It is evident that the tentative language used when describing and discussing phenomena of subjection, underscores the problem and indicates that we are dealing with complex social institutions.

There is also a marked scruple of local (Indonesian) scholars to discuss subjection and slavery as it prevailed in their homeland. This has resulted in the lack of a local perspective of the socio-historical reality and thus to a mainly western oriented view of the human conditions. A persistent, yet unjustified sense of embarrassment or shame is generally the reason for this neglect. The history of Aceh has no secrets, just missing information.

Whatever view one may hold on either side of the divide between Western and local ideas on human subjection, it is important to describe and understand the historical realities of dominant and dependency relations as they conditioned life in Aceh.

3. 5. 6 Treatment of royal captives and foreign *orangkaya* in Aceh

Since they were brutally captured in war and forced to work for the enemy, it is difficult to conceive that these people were loyal subjects, happily living their lives in the new environment. Be they persons who hailed from the highest social strata like the members of royal families, *orangkaya*, as well as the ordinary men and women, they all went through traumatic experiences. The majority of them were living in secluded areas at the boundaries of the city of Bandar Aceh, deprived of basic food and necessities. Rebellion resulted in their execution, as the case of the Pahang captives demonstrated.

³⁶ J. L. Watson: ‘...anthropologists are uncharacteristically diffident when they write about the institution of slavery. Only a few of the contributors even attempt a definition; most are content to get on with the task at hand and assume that they are writing for an audience of sensible people who know full well what slavery entails’. ‘Slavery as an institution’ in: *Asian and African Systems of Slavery, Asian and African systems of slavery* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), 2.

³⁷ *idem*.

Little is known of the vicissitudes of the captured members of the different royal families in Aceh. One of the historical most prominent was Raja Bongsu of Johor younger brother of Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah, whom Iskandar Muda appointed in 1614 as his vassal on the throne of Johor. Iskandar Muda gave him his sister in marriage, in a move to strengthen the ties between the two courts. There are more examples of kinship ties with different Malay courts. A captured prince of Pahang was given in marriage to Iskandar Muda's eldest daughter, he later succeeded Iskandar Muda on the throne as Sultan Iskandar Thani. Iskandar Muda's first wife was also from Pahang and many princesses from subjugated ports were among his wives and concubines.³⁸ A captured prince of Johor was married to another one of Iskandar Muda's daughters; this prince fled to the Portuguese in 1626 when the preparations for a siege of Malacca were underway, and informed them of an imminent Acehnese attack. From the onset of their captivity many of the captured royal princes lived in the royal palace which provided for their education. Dutch merchant Pieter van den Broecke on a visit to Aceh in 1618, witnessed a royal procession in which the just captured king of Pahang had to walk in front of the Sultan, carrying some of the royal regalia. He perceived this as a form of slavery: 'Iskandar Muda 'used him as a slave'.³⁹

According to the *Adat Aceh* which stipulates the ceremonial procedures and the groups that function in the royal procession, to wait on and accompany the ruler was a significant part of the duties in the category outer court functionaries.⁴⁰ Accordingly, these functionaries were not slaves, yet they symbolised and made manifest the elevated position of the Acehnese sovereign. The king of Pahang was deliberately humiliated and treated as a minor official.⁴¹ The fate of the captured ruler of Kedah presents a different example. After his belongings were confiscated he was executed together with his whole family and many of his *orangkaya*.

³⁸ De Beaulieu mentions that Iskandar Muda had twenty legal princesses from the enemies he conquered among his wives. Lombard, *Mémoires*, 205.

³⁹ W. Ph. Coolhaas (ed.), *Pieter van den Broecke in Azie*, 2 vols. (Nijhoff, 1962-1963), vol. I, 177.

⁴⁰ *Adat Atjèh*, 21. This describes the procession and the groups that accompany the sultan to the mosque. These were heralds, pages, bearers of the state insignia and standards, royal guards and members of the royal orchestra.

⁴¹ According to Lewis there was a special law in Islam concerning 'rebels': 'In fact, the unity of the Islamic society and polity, however firmly maintained in theory, had been lost in practice from the mid-eight century onward. Many different Muslim states came into existence, often in conflict with one another, sometimes at war. The paramount need to accommodate this fact in the legal framework was met through the law relating to rebels. The rebel, 'baghi', as discussed in the law books, is obviously rather more than a mere insurgent or mutineer. Muslim rebels have virtually full belligerent rights. According to some law books, they may be killed only on the battlefield and not otherwise. Unlike apostates, they may be given quarter; unlike unbelievers, they may not, if captured, be enslaved or held to ransom.' *The Political Language of Islam*, 80, 81.

We have no answer to the question why he was executed and not spared like the other captured rulers. The people of Lankahui told De Beaulieu that the king of Kedah deserved to be executed because he was a cruel and impious tyrant.⁴²

It is interesting to see what conditions were set by Iskandar Muda for the functioning of his vassal Abdullah Ma'ayat Shah of Johor, the captured Raja Bongsu. Although Radja Lela Wangsa was the Acehnese sultan's representative who accompanied the vassal to Johor, Abdullah was evidently in charge of governing. The Dutch and English kept communicating and dealing with him even when he went into exile in Bintam and Lingga. The Dutch always remained his friend, until his death in his refuge in 1624. The Portuguese forced him to sign a peace agreement in 1615 which indicates that he was indeed in command of the government and army of Johor and not the Acehnese Radja Lela Wangsa.

Several *orangkaya* who hailed from the invaded Malay ports were appointed in government functions. It is obvious that Iskandar Muda wanted to avoid conspiracies against him by drawing their loyalty and avoid their rebellion. The historian Dato F. W. Douglas sheds some light on the fate of some of the important Malay war captives in Aceh:

'The earliest records of the Malay Annals by another pen appears in the Bustan a's Selatin whose author was a Gujerati writing in Malay at Aceh in 1638 (Nuru'd-din al Raniri). He says that he met there Tun Muhamad, nicknamed Sri Lanang, the Bendahara (equivalent of Prime Minister) of Johor and the editor of these annals who had been taken captive when Mahokota Alam (Iskandar Muda) conquered Johor in May 1613. His sultan and thousands of Malays were removed to Aceh and left to starve in the streets. Amongst the loot was the large brass cannon now on the Penang esplanade, named Si Rambai, and bearing a silver plate let in by Mahkota Alam's orders recording its capture. Sri Lanang (his nickname means man, manly) would seem to have thrown in his lot with his captors since his son Tun Rembau became Sri Paduka Tuan at Aceh and married a daughter of Tun Mai Bendahara of Perak and a fellow captive there. Their eldest son became Bendahara of Aceh. So Sri Lanang must have enjoyed a serene old age, but would probably be surprised to find that 300 years later Malay schoolboys were reading his history as an example of good Malay and a record of life in Malaka during its greatest glory.'⁴³ These foreign *orangkaya* had thrown in their lot with their Acehnese captor, instead of rebelling against him, with the result that some sort of

⁴² Lombard, *Mémoires*, 169.

⁴³ Dato F. W. Douglas, "Notes On the Historical Geography of Malaya: Sidelights on the Malay Annals", in: Dato Sir Ronald Braddell, *The Study of Ancient Times in the Malay Peninsula and Straits of Malacca, and Notes On Ancient Times in Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur: M.B.R.A.S, 1980, Reprints, no. 7), 515.

symbiotic relationship came into existence between them. The ties between the Malay nobles were reinforced while they were in captivity in Aceh; intermarriages posed no threat to Iskandar Muda.

Sri Lanang who was the chronicler of the *Sejarah Melayu* (Malay Annals), which appeared around 1613, told Sheikh Nuru'd-din al Raniri in Aceh that he wrote what he had heard from his forbears of the Rulers of Melaka, Johor and Pahang and their descent from Sultan Iskandar D'zul-Karnain (Alexander the Great). It is evident that Nuru'd-din al Raniri put this firsthand information to good use when he started to work on his major opus the *Bustan as-Salatin*.

We draw the surprising information from the quotation by Douglas that three centuries later Malaysian schoolboys were ignorant of the fact that their revered hero Sri Lanang had been living a comfortable life in Aceh, the country of his captor and the enemy of the Malays.

3. 5. 7 The plight of European captives

In the years of relations with the northern Europeans during the rule of Iskandar Muda and Iskandar Thani, the differences and animosities between the actors did not lead to murdering northern Europeans on Aceh's soil. The Acehnese invasion of Johor in 1613 which prompted the Dutch merchants to take up arms in defense of Johor, resulted in their capture and temporary confinement in Aceh, but not in their execution. To my knowledge this was a unique case of capturing Europeans other than Portuguese. The murder of merchant Rassiére in Tiku in 1617 by a mob of discontented locals can be regarded as an incident. The killing of Cornelis de Houtman and many members of the Zeeland expedition in 1599 was incited by the Portuguese. John Davis who described the attack on the ships said 'the Infidels murdered all our men ashore, only eight excepted, *'whom the king fettered for slaves'*⁴⁴ As discussed in an earlier chapter, the condition of Frederick de Houtman and his mates went from reasonably tolerable to almost unbearable: from relatively free to move, to chained prisoners in Pedir, where they received only small rations of unboiled rice twice a day on which they barely survived while they laboured hard to restore the pinnace which the Acehnese had

⁴⁴ *The voyages and Works of John Davis the Navigator*, 144.

seized from them. He pleaded with Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah to let them go unchained, a request which was granted on the condition that this applied until such time when Dutch ships appeared in Aceh's harbour. The treatment of the hostages was utterly appalling, but can we establish that they were slaves?

It may be interesting to know that Islam sets out how the relations between the Muslim state and 'infidels' who wanted to establish trade relations could be reconciled and brought into practice. Interaction with non-Muslims was only possible if they accepted Muslim rule, Muslim protection and paid the poll tax to the Muslim state. The relationship between the Muslim ruler and a foreign state was in fact contractually based. Members of the non-Muslim community were allowed as temporary visitors, who enjoyed safe conduct and were granted a certain status, with certain duties and privileges.⁴⁵ The legal scholars of Islam declared that the natural and permanent relationship between the world of Islam and the world of the unbelievers was one of open or latent war, and there could, therefore, be no peace and no treaty.⁴⁶ Bernard Lewis asserts that truces and temporary agreements were, however, possible, and for these, the scholars found precedent even in the Qur'an.⁴⁷ It may make clear why from the outset the Portuguese conquerors of Malacca were seen as enemies against whom it was a religious commitment to wage war and why the northern Europeans who came to trade, accepted the sovereignty of the sultan and respected Aceh's territorial integrity, were accepted as visiting residents and even allies and friends. The provisions as laid down in the Privilege of 1602 and the Accord of 1607 even granted them jurisdiction on Islamic soil with far reaching consequences for the sovereignty of the Islamic host.

⁴⁵ Van Koningsveld asserts that it is a religious obligation of the believers to protect these foreigners: *De Islam*, 126.

⁴⁶ *idem*.

The author postulates that the right to protection was of a relative character and could be abrogated by Islamic scribes especially in cases of treason or in times of war.

⁴⁷ *The Political Language of Islam*, 78.

3. 5. 8 The human commodity

Aceh's rich merchant community and its trade based economic system worked as a magnet on destitute people from outside its borders who were desperately searching for a livelihood. The Coromandel and Malabar coasts of India catered, so to speak, in people who sold themselves into debt-bondage due to droughts, political instability and other calamities which resulted in famine and eventually death. For many years the unfavourable weather conditions in Paliacatte and the surrounding areas compelled destitute people to enter into dependency relations. They preferred debt-bondage and slaving in a foreign place, to the freedom to starve at home. We note that in 1622 Jan Pieterszoon Coen, governor-general in Jacatra (Batavia), instructed head merchant Andries Soury and governor Van Uffelen in Masulipatam to obtain as many slaves as possible to populate Jacatra, Amboyna and Banda. He explicitly referred to the large numbers of slaves that went from there to Aceh.⁴⁸ Coen received the information from Nicolaas Casembroot the resident merchant in Aceh, who may have provided an inaccurate report, saying that a number of threehundred slaves had arrived in one transport from Paliacatte. Andries Soury in Masulipatam on the other hand received confirmation from the *nachuda* of the ship that the cargo consisted of only forty to fifty slaves.⁴⁹ It was true that substantial numbers of people had left Paliacatte in previous years when the critical conditions had pushed them into debt-bondage. Soury's remark that the downwards trend would remain, 'unless it would please God to unleash the same plague on Paliacatte', unmistakably illustrates that forms of social thought were shaped by the primacy of a market economy.⁵⁰ On the basis of the information by Soury that the slaves who went to Aceh in the above mentioned shipment were mainly 'Moors' (Muslims) one may establish that there was no obstacle for Muslims to sell themselves as debt-bondsmen to people of the same creed. Ito Takeshi has taken the analogy a bit further and discerns a cleavage in Acehnese society between the ideas of Islam in theory and practice.⁵¹ It is not proven that the VOC traded in debt bonds-men to Aceh; the correspondence between Soury and Coen centres around the numbers of destitutes that went to Aceh from Masulipatam.

⁴⁸ *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. III, 177: Letter from Jan Pieterszoon Coen dated 8 May 1622; *ibid.*, vol. VII (pt.2), 983-94: letter from Abraham van Uffelen dated 7 July, 622; *ibid.*, 989-94: letter from Andries Soury dated 7 July 1622.

⁴⁹ I was not able to trace Casembroot's letter in which he refers to slaves from Paliacatte.

⁵⁰ quoted from the letter of Andries Soury, 990-991.

⁵¹ *The World of the Adat Aceh*, 410.

Cornelis Comans who frequented Aceh between 1617 and 1619 mentions in his letter of 28 January 1619, that the ‘Atchynder’ (the sultan) had laid an embargo on a Portuguese ship from Negapatam which arrived in the harbour of Aceh, and captured all people (Kalinga slaves) and goods, notwithstanding the fact that the king had licensed the Portuguese captain of the ship to trade in Aceh. Iskandar Muda also confiscated two Gujerati ships.⁵²

Ito Takeshi detects a steady arrival of slaves (he does not call them debt-bondsmen) from Coromandel and Bengal after 1630. A Kalinga ship arrived in 1642 from Porto Novo carrying ninety eight slaves and various kinds of textiles. Several weeks later a Danish ship from Pipli in Bengal arrived with twohundred slaves belonging to Muslim merchants on board the ship. Instructive is the information that the Danes earned 4 *real* per head of slave for freight charges, which is a concrete reference to their role as transporters. Rice cultivation in Aceh necessitated experienced labourers from rice-growing areas.⁵³

There is no solid evidence that Aceh was a (transit)market for slaves. There are only brief references to the sale of slaves. In 1613 Thomas Best bought several slaves : ‘Eleventh July (1613) Our General, hasting business, sent aboard 4 or 5 slaves, bought here at 4 or 5 taill.’⁵⁴ Augustin de Beaulieu describes how he was approached in 1621 by the ‘Moorish’ captain of a ship from Negapatam who requested him to help in buying back four Christian Portuguese captives in Aceh who the king used as slaves. For many years the unfortunate men were used for carrying stones for the construction of buildings which Iskandar Muda had ordered. They were in a miserable state. The Portuguese in Negapatam commissioned the captain to pay four hundred *real* to release them. After Iskandar Muda refused De Beaulieu once, he sent him the second time to the *laxamana* to make an arrangement. This man asked De Beaulieu one thousand *real* for the release of five men who had trained themselves to practice surgery. Iskandar Muda wanted to keep one of them for his private use. The deal was closed when De Beaulieu payed the king and the *orangkaya laxamana* six hundred *real*, and an extra sixty *real* to different other persons. The admiral drew from his own money to pay the extra for the release of these people. He was again approached by ten Portuguese sailors who had been forced by the Acehnese to convert to Islam, but even after that, they were bereft of anything to

⁵² *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. VII (1), 398.

⁵³ *The World of the Adat Aceh*, 398.
Also: VOC : 1.04.02: 1143.

⁵⁴ *The Voyage of Thomas Best*, 174-75.

sustain and this caused the death of four of them. De Beaulieu responded that he had not enough money, because he needed to load his ship with pepper which was expensive. For the money he had earlier paid to release the five men, De Beaulieu kept one of these men as his personal assistant and promised his release either later in Aceh or at their arrival in France.⁵⁵ Here we note that although the Portuguese prisoners were forced to convert to Islam, they were not redeemed and still badly treated.

Iskandar Muda paid with padi (rice), slaves and gold for the pepper he bought in Andragiri.⁵⁶ Thus slaves were also used to barter pepper.

Slaves were regarded a commodity. The *Adat Aceh* speaks in one breath of the import tax on rice and slaves.⁵⁷ The tax for slaves who were bought in Deli (Batak land), at that time a principal slave market was ‘one slave for every sixteen is payable to the Panglima of Deli’.⁵⁸ The import tax was sixteen to the hundred; which meant that out of hundred slaves sixteen were destined for the sultan, in addition two slaves were allotted to the *Panglima Bandar*, the principal harbour official. The provision in the *Adat Aceh* is known as the *Adat pada tebusan*. Literally *tebusan* means ransom or compensation. Ito Takeshi is of the opinion that the high tariff of 18% gives ample reason to establish that ‘considerable value was attached to slaves and their importance in Acehnese social and economic life’.⁵⁹ It is doubtful that Iskandar Muda paid for the acquisition of slaves. The tax on the import shows that the sultan acquired a substantial number of slaves from the slave trade and so did the *Panglima Bandar*.

The locals perceived that the more slaves one possessed, the more the slave-owner was respected. The distinguished Persian diplomat and poet Ibn Muhammad Ibrahim who visited Aceh on his way to Siam in 1685 noted that the natives reckoned high rank and wealth by the quantity of slaves a person owned. He mentions the existence of a system of hiring slaves, in which the hired slave was paid a certain amount of money which he gave to his master and performed whatever work was required of him.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Lombard, *Mémoires*, 129-31.

⁵⁶ *Coen's Bescheiden*, vol. VII (I), 224: letter from Andries Soury dated 27 November 1616.

⁵⁷ *Adat Atjèh*, 25.

⁵⁸ *ibid*, 46.

⁵⁹ *The World of the Adat Aceh*, 365.

⁶⁰ John O’Kane (tr.), Ibn Muhammad Ibrahim, *The Ship of Sulaiman*, (Persian Heritag Series, no. 11, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 177.

De Beaulieu who was able to closely observe life at the court of Iskandar Muda when he was in Aceh in 1621, gives a detailed account of the position of the slave at the court. He says that Iskandar Muda owned about fifteen hundred slaves.⁶¹ Slaves could conclude an agreement with the sultan concerning their working conditions and as a result of this they wore no chains and worked under the care of three or four superintendents. Out of every eight days they worked four days in the sultan's service; during the remaining days they worked for their own livelihood. Those who knew something about trade and were able to make a moderate living, could obtain exemption from his compulsory labour by paying Iskandar Muda five 'sols'. This to me seems a form of debt-bondage where the person is able to buy himself certain freedoms. De Beaulieu reckoned that slavery in Aceh was more tolerable than in other places.⁶²

One of the duties of the royal slaves, known as *hamba raja*⁶³ was to keep watch on the *orangkaya* and the eunuchs who patrolled the inner courts of the royal palace during the night. As I set out in a previous chapter in Part Two, Iskandar Muda designed a scheme of watch by the *orangkaya* with the aim to divide them and keep them from plotting against him. The royal slaves featured prominently in the system of intelligence designed by the sultan; the sultan's reliance on his slaves is thus apparent.

One of Iskandar Muda's sources of servitude was by entering widows, daughters and slaves of deceased (and executed) *orangkaya* and other subjects into his court while confiscating the dead men's possessions. According to De Beaulieu he became the heir to all his subjects if they had no male children.⁶⁴ The women of the court were confined to a life within its walls and not allowed to go beyond its boundaries. For their personal needs a special bazaar was held within the inner walls of the court. It is not surprising that the northern Europeans at that time perceived this situation in which the sultan decided upon the fate of his subjects as slavery.

'These slaves are drawn from every nation and race. Every day a certain number of them is delivered to the king's administration and when the king has finished grinding each individual like so much grain in the dust of the year's turning mill tax have been extracted in the form of the slave's services, the remainder is given back to the master and this whole procedure is not considered in any way base or unfair.'

⁶¹ Lombard, *Mémoires*, 215.

⁶² *ibid.*, 214 : 'Et à mon avis, l'esclavage est plus tolérable en ce lieu, qu'en aucun autre de ma connaissance....'

⁶³ The Malay word for slave and bondsman is *budak*. *Hamba* is used specifically in relations to God and ruler, for example *hamba Allah* which means God's servant.

⁶⁴ Lombard, *Mémoires*, 215.

3. 5. 9 The impact of subjugation and slavery on Acehnese society

“Yet that the slavery of some part of the human species, in a very abject degree, as existed in all ages of the world, among the most civilized, as well as the barbarous nations, no man who has consulted the records of history disputes. Perhaps, like pain, poverty, sickness, and sorrow and all the various other calamities of our condition, it may have been originally interwoven into the constitution of the world for purposes inscrutable to man.” (Edmund Burke)⁶⁵

Acehnese society was unique in the sense that the influx of people was unprecedented compared to the rest of the region. Whether these people hailed from subjugated countries, from pillaged vessels or from the slave trade, Muslims and non-Muslims alike added an important dimension to the development of Acehnese society which implied a unique process of nation-building. When Iskandar Muda’s war campaigns came to a halt, the influx of war-captives also stopped.

The gradual enforcement of orthodox Islamic rules when Sultan Iskandar Thani came to the throne, started to transform society into one in which heterodoxy was no longer an accepted reality.⁶⁶ Whether this transformation implied a reduction of slavery in Aceh cannot be conclusively answered. In the world of Islam the perfect society never existed; the egalitarian society was difficult to attain.

For some understanding of Acehnese society in the seventeenth century we rely on foreign historians and scholars writing in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. A rather curious observation is by Charles Lockyer, which - although observed many decades after the period of this exploration – may still be significant for our discussion.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Quoted by Gordon Lewis, *Main Currents in Caribbean Thought; the Historical Evolution of Caribbean Society in Its Ideological Aspects, 1492-1900*. (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1983), 114.

⁶⁶ As mentioned in ‘The Geo-historical setting’, Francois Martin witnessed in 1602 Hindu ceremonies regarding the self-combustion of widows.

⁶⁷ C. Lockyer, *An Account of the Trade in India* (London: 1711). I consulted the Dutch translation by Arnout Schuyt, *Beschrijvinge van den koophandel in Oost-Indiën* (1753), 33.

‘The natives are Malay, who speak the language fluently....but they are plumper and stronger built than the Indians from Coromandel, of which there are many here, slaves of the principallest merchants, and difficult to distinguish from the freeborn because they were considered friends and mates instead of servants. They deserve this because of their faithfulness and their numbers.⁶⁸ Aceh owes much of its wellbeing to these people, who take care of the rice fields, unknown to Aceh. They were driven by famine from the coast of Coromandel. They are more agile and smarter than the natives and more inclined to commerce and trade and are stimulated by their masters with cash and loans. I am not certain that they need to convert to Islam which is the religion of their masters....’⁶⁹

It is remarkable that Lockyer only seems to distinguish Indian slaves and ‘freeborn’ people. He does not speak of Malay, Batak, Niasese or Acehnese slaves nor does he make mention of a system of debt-bondage. Had these different ethnic groups assimilated into Acehnese society to the extent that it was difficult to distinguish them other than (Malay) natives? Lockyer’s description also makes clear that the number of Indian slaves in Aceh was quite substantial, but while he seems uncertain of the religious affiliation of these Indian slaves, a Dutch scholar on Islam, Th.W. Juynboll has established that ‘almost all slaves in Muslim countries converted to Islam’.⁷⁰ Here we bump into one of the elusive conditions in Islam: co-religionists could not be enslaved but slaves who converted to Islam did not automatically lose their status of slave. In other words it looks as if conversion in Aceh was not the path to redemption. One should realize however, that if all converted slaves automatically obtained their freedom as a result of conversion, slavery would have been quickly eradicated. Ito Takeshi speaks of a ‘hierarchy in dependence’ in Acehnese society : ‘...there exists for Aceh no sign that the door was open for slaves to play roles of great political importance as is known to have been the case in the Ottoman Empire. The so-called ‘slave-family’ system, on which the Ottoman Empire based its political institutions, did not develop in Aceh, and this absence of an elaborate slave system tightly connected with the political administration may have resulted in a relatively low political status for slaves there.’⁷¹

⁶⁸ The Malays call them *hamba kawan*.

⁶⁹ Arnout Schuyt, *Beschrijvinge van den koophandel in Oost-Indiën*, 33.

⁷⁰ Th. W. Juynboll, *Handleiding tot de kennis van de Mohammedaansche Wet*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1925), 233.

⁷¹ *The World of the Adat Aceh*, 409-410.

On the other hand the slaves or debt-bondsmen in Aceh owned extraordinary privileges which contributed to the general view that the system of slavery was mild or 'tolerable'. To quote Anthony Reid: 'Southeast Asia demonstrates very well the fundamental contradictions always inherent in slavery. The slave is a commodity and yet a human being; exploited and yet trusted to be loyal, inferior yet intimate. These contradictions have ensured that no system of slavery can be 'pure' or free from anomalies.'⁷²

The Dutch ethnologist C. Snouck Hurgronje found many slaves on Aceh's west coast at the closing decades of the nineteenth century; it concerned slaves raided from the island of Nias, an island in the Indian Ocean before the Batak territories. 'These people were an important factor in the development of the Acehnese race. They were raided in hundreds up to the end of the nineteenth century and were still clandestinely purchased in smaller numbers.

Compared to the number of slaves from Nias, the number of slaves from other nations and races was inconsiderable. The Acehnese set a high value on these (Nias) people as slaves. They described them as tractable, obedient, zealous and trustworthy. The women were more highly prized for their beauty than those of the dominant race, and many boys were trained as *sadati* (dancers) or otherwise were used as lust objects by the Acehnese.'⁷³ The author does not speak of Indian debt-bondsmen or slaves in that period, as if they did not exist.

We depend largely on the view of Snouck Hurgronje and his fellow ethnologist J. Jacobs to gain some insight in the ways a slave was manumitted. Jacobs mentions that a slave could not marry into the house of his master, according to the laws of Islam a person could not at the same time be the owner and the husband of a slave. He could on the other hand marry the slave of somebody else which happened frequently. One way of manumitting a female slave with the aim to marry her, was to prepare a meal and invite guests to the occasion. The marriage partners would sit at the meal together with the guests. To eat together in the company of eyewitnesses was proof that the master had set her free. From now on the community should accept her as a free person.⁷⁴ Yet slave-owners could own their female slaves as concubines (*goendih*). This makes clear that manumission was a simple formality. An important cultural trait which is brought forward by Snouck Hurgronje is, that the Acehnese lay great stress on descent from mother's side. 'Thus no Acehnese willingly

⁷² *Introduction to Slavery and Bondage in Southeast Asian History* (University of Queensland Press, 1983), 43-44.

⁷³ *The Acehnese*, vol. I, 20.

⁷⁴ *Het Familie- en Kampongleven op Groot-Atjeh*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1894), vol. I, 12.

becomes the father of children by his female slaves, although such a practice is freely admitted by Moslim law. It is for this reason that the intercourse of masters with their female slaves is very limited in comparison with other Mohamedan countries, and where it does take place, recourse is had to various methods to avert or nullify its natural consequences. All the same there is a certain proportion of children born of such concubinage.⁷⁵

The information put together from the diverse sources has brought to light that it is impossible to ascertain whether the Muslim war victims were regarded slaves by their Acehnese captor. Even if they were freeborn, they may have been driven by starvation into debt-bondage and also because of the inhumane conditions they met at their arrival in Aceh. The early scholars do not speak of Malay slaves, only of slaves from non-Muslim enclaves such as the island of Nias and the Batak territories, and of Indian slaves. They do not explicitly distinguish between slaves and debt-bondsmen.

We may conclude that Acehnese society constituted different components; it grew into an amalgamation of diverse races, cultures, ranks and classes. The incipient stratification of society, that logically emerges from a situation of different types of social relationships and categories of social entities, expanded when slaves and war captives came in large numbers to Aceh. The influx of people impacted significantly on society, both in the vertical and the horizontal sphere.

Vertical sphere: the economy

The growth of the trade necessitated labour and eventually generated slavery and debt-bondage. Rich people surrounded themselves with slaves and debt-bondsmen.

The sultan received slaves as import tax for slaves.

Slavery and debt-bondage formed a major motor of the sultanate's development..

Horizontal sphere: the social lay-out

The arrival and assimilation of people from different racial and cultural backgrounds contributed to the rise of the plural society.

Debt-bondsmen were often given responsibility over the business of their masters and were regarded as *hamba kawan* or friends. It follows that social mobility was a fact.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 21.

3. 5. 10 Conclusion

Slavery and debt-bondage were a reality in Aceh and the high number of war victims added to society's social and cultural make-up. Evidence of the existence of an institutionalised system of slavery is found in the *Adat Aceh*, while the tenets which uphold the Islamic ideal of human equality are missing. Stratification of society and the privileges that derive from this are embedded in the *Adat Aceh*. Slaves were an import commodity, mentioned in one breath with rice, no more, no less, and tax levied on the human commodity illustrates the existence of a degrading system. Yet the main obstacle for drawing an assessment of the incidence of slavery and debt-bondage is the absence of data and facts. There is no evidence that Aceh was actively engaged in importing debt-bondsmen from India. It was up to the decision of the people to leave Paliacatte and Negapatam in times of peril and calamities. The numbers of people who left to labour abroad, dropped significantly when the situation improved. According to the stipulations in the *Adat Aceh*, slaves were usually imported from the slave market in Deli. Aceh was not an export market for slaves.

The rise of slavery and debt-bondage can be associated with Aceh's development and it became a vital element in the accumulation of wealth. The moral standards seemed to have lost out and slavery, a *status contra naturam*, was an accepted reality.

Thus the indicators for the incidence of slavery and debt-bondage in Aceh are wealth, development and royal power. The paradox is that Aceh gradually entered the pre-modern era with the emergence of contractual trade relations with a number of foreign states and companies, the codification of regulations, a prolific literary upsurge and the development of crafts and skills, but slavery was not erased.

The status of the war captives from Islamic ports has pulled us to the question of Aceh's adherence to the rules of Islam. By trying to establish their status in the country of their captivity I posit two hypotheses:

1. Their brutal capture, their loss of freedom and their inhumane treatment as a result of which many starved and died, gives room to propose that these Muslims were not given equal rights which Islam concedes to 'rebels' and that they were slaves.
2. A rebel's action was detrimental to the very existence of Islam. Islam commands the punishment of rebels. The moral paradox is that although Muslims were captured and often

inhumanely treated and bereft of their freedom, there was the religious constraint to regard them as slaves.



17th Century royal architecture in the *Taman Ghairah* or Pleasure Garden.
(photo: own collection)



Pinto Khob, the gate at the back of the *dalam* or royal palace which was exclusively used by the royals. (photo: own collection)

CONCLUSION

A revised or reconstructed past is never the same as the past as it was. This is the reality we have to accept. The character of our analysis is chiefly determined by the nature of the surviving evidence, from the problematic information provided by the Acehese annals, to the other kinds of documentary evidence emanating from the court of the sultans and from foreign material. We have tried to determine the motives, aims, goals and intentions of the actors in the playing field of international and interstate relations from our fragmentary knowledge about their behaviour.

Two primary moments in Aceh's history are readily identifiable :

The conquest of Malacca by the Portuguese in 1511, bringing about the sultanate's genesis. War was the cataclysm for change: Aceh's subjugation of Pasai, Pedir and Daya resulted from Portuguese intrusion in these ports located on the east and the west coast of Sumatra. Portuguese manifest presence, their frantic efforts to usurp the Islamic trade and their incursions in Sumatra was the impetus for Aceh's expansion and the formative elements of kingship.

The second defining moment was the arrival of the northern Europeans at the turn of the sixteenth into the seventeenth century, bringing unimagined prospects for trade revenues, royal incomes and alliance forming. From being a powerful regional state and an important trade centre, Aceh steadfastly acquired international recognition, engaging in trade and diplomacy with countries outside the traditional boundaries of trade, religion and rivalry. Islam and the Islamic trade seemed no longer Aceh's *raison d'être*.

We establish that the Age of Aceh started when Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah was approached in 1593 by merchants from Malacca, followed at the turn of the sixteenth into the seventeenth century by traders from the United Republic, England and France, who came to trade with his country and to establish diplomatic relations. The Malaccan traders were in favour of a rapprochement with Aceh to advance their trade, instead of being engaged in endless wars which were disruptive to their trade and existence. *Realpolitik* won from power politics.

The northern Europeans saw in Aceh an important supplier of pepper and other commodities. At the same time they recognized Aceh's political prominence in the Straits and especially the

Dutch saw in Aceh an ally against the Portuguese. The Dutch were keen on breaking Portuguese hegemony on the Asian seas.

The encounters with the northern Europeans were of critical importance for the direction Aceh would eventually follow. It can be supposed that from his contacts with Cornelis De Houtman, Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah became aware of written contracts. The exchange of goods and services started an age of equal partnership between Aceh and the Dutch. The sultan used the opportunity of the presence of the *Zeeland* expedition to barter pepper for Dutch assistance in an attack on Johor. This request to the Dutch - staunch enemies of the Spaniards and Portuguese - was an open invitation to the Portuguese to come to Johor's assistance against the insufferable alliance, diminishing Aceh's chances to become the overlord of Johor and controller of the Malacca Straits. The unprecedented period of peace and stability with a level playing field in geo-politics which started in 1593, was upset. The relentless efforts of the Dutch to re-gain the sultan's trust and favour, demonstrates that Aceh's attributes were essential to their ambitions to monopolise the region's trade. The *Zeeland* factory, established in 1601 in Aceh, was the first official factory of the Dutch in Asia. The visit of the Acehnese ambassadors to the United Republic of the Netherlands in 1602 was the first Southeast Asian mission to Europe; a sovereign sultanate conducted diplomatic relations with an independent European state. It ushered in the start of a strategic partnership between the two states.

Dutch admiral Matelieff's thoroughness in intervening on Aceh's behalf by confronting the Portuguese fleet that tried to invade Aceh in 1606, was honoured by Sultan Ali Ri'ayat Shah who granted the VOC the right in 1607 to establish a *rendez-vous* in exchange for military assistance against the Portuguese and the Spanish. Sultan Ali Ri'ayat Shah's successor, his nephew Iskandar Muda, following his own course, made an implicit statement in 1608 when he denied the existence of a formal accord with the Dutch and the Privilege of 1602 to the English. He did not allow the VOC to have jurisdiction on Aceh's soil in exchange for military assistance. It is difficult to determine the precise consequences for the sultanate if these treaties with the northern Europeans were honoured, but the young sultan can be supposed to have recognized the dangers posed to Aceh's sovereignty if the Europeans obtained special rights. The Privilege of 1602 did not constitute English military assistance and in the bi-lateral relations assistance was not bartered for trade contracts. In the negotiations between the Dutch and the sultan a trade contract was the *conditio sine qua non* for Dutch military assistance. Sultan Iskandar Muda equally set the condition that they assist

him with ships to attack Malacca before he was willing to give them trade licenses. Yet the notion of being 'brothers in-arms' versus the Portuguese remained the backbone of their relationship. It was a kind of gentlemen's agreement which replaced the military component of the redundant Accord of 1607. The 'brotherly' bond was inspired by Prince Maurice of Nassau and highly esteemed by the Acehnese sultans. The special bond weathered the heavy storms in their contacts: Malacca remained a potential and an actual threat, politically and economically. But it was fundamentally the *idea* of being strategic partners that sustained the tempestuous relationship. They continually failed to meet their obligation. Although they both heatedly and repeatedly appealed for assistance, the evidence is that they operated independently against the Iberians. Often they acted like bantams, but eagerly ended their quarrels, the process showing a shifting pattern of sympathies and loyalties between them. This presumed equal partnership relation in which military assistance was bartered for trade contracts, lasted until the Dutch besieged and captured Malacca in 1641 without Aceh's actual participation. The extraordinary relationship between Aceh and the Dutch during this period is completely neglected in the historical literature, moreover, it is a *non-est*. We observe however that within the continuity of the special relationship there were contingencies.

In 1610 the balance of power in the Straits skidded to the Portuguese after Malacca and Johor signed an armistice. The failed attempt by his Dutch 'confederate' Verhoeven to capture Malacca in 1608 and the subsequent Portuguese coercion of Johor to sign the armistice in 1610, urged Iskandar Muda to come into action against the Malacca/Johor pact. In the light of these developments, Iskandar Muda's invasions of the Sumatran ports Aru and Deli around 1611 and 1612 acquire the character of a political *coup d'état* far more than that of aggressive conquest, since these ports were under Johor's umbrella and thus easily accessible to the Portuguese. The invasions of these ports cleared the way for Aceh's armada to reach Johor in 1613 undisturbed, to castigate it for signing the armistice with Malacca. Even though Iskandar Muda subjugated Johor, Aceh did not automatically become the overlord of Johor's vassal states such as Pahang, Siak, Andragiri and Jambi.

Even though he was pragmatic, Iskandar Muda did not consciously develop an expansion policy; he was not a great visionary who set himself the task to effect the systematic subjugation of the region. Conquest was not his chief ambition; he invaded those ports who either succumbed to the Portuguese by engaging in trade with them or by closing peace pacts. These were deliberate reprisals, legitimated from his point of view by his obligation to Islam

and to his forefathers. Accordingly, the acquisition of humans, vessels and artillery from the subjugated ports was an achievement, but not a goal in itself. Although the demographic scene changed in favour of Aceh, the invasions were not designations for acquiring human potential to (re)populate the Acehnese realm; it was an effective way to weaken an opponent. The death of thousands of war captives because of his neglect and his maltreatment underscores this proposition. There is no substantiated evidence that the Malay war victims were enslaved. But in the nexus between slave and victim the borderline was very thin.

The Acehnese sultans not only relied on their military strength to settle disputes, they also engaged in diplomacy with the Europeans and with neighbouring courts. Diplomatic relations were not thoroughly organized for there is no evidence that there existed a system of permanent ambassadors. These relations were maintained by envoys who were sent to conduct the special business at hand. One of the features of disrupted relations was hostage-taking. Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah reciprocated Prince Maurice's wish for friendship by releasing Frederick de Houtman and by sending his ambassadors to the United Republic of the Netherlands in 1602. In 1617 Iskandar Muda sent an envoy to the court of one of his rivals, the ruler of Bantam. In 1624 he sent envoys to the king of Jambi to request the extradition of the widow and young son of the deceased Sultan Abdulah-Ma'ayat Shah of Johor, who had died in exile. It was implicitly an order. After the king of Jambi refused to comply with this, Iskandar Muda threatened to destroy Jambi. It was intrinsically a declaration of war. There is no evidence that he officially declared war on the ports he subjugated. The attack on Jambi did not materialize. It is very unusual behaviour in a callous subjugator to know when to hold back. In this case it was, first of all, the strength of the resistance against him; the fact that the neighbouring rulers too had their own position to safeguard. This, together with the help Jambi received from the Portuguese and in particular from the Dutch, decided the course of events, showing that the most effective antidote to aggressive power is counter-power. Faced with a formidable opposition, Iskandar Muda balked at starting a confrontation. He viewed Dutch support with a small fleet for Jambi in 1624 as a deception. Be that as it may, the mere fact that Iskandar Muda threatened to stretch his military muscles to the neighbouring ports, halted their trade for several years. Thus he ultimately became the kingpin of the area's trade.

The critical year of Iskandar Muda's rule was 1629, the year of his humiliation at the hands of the Portuguese, when his armada was ruined. He made a strategic blunder to appoint two commanders at the head of the war expedition who were not in agreement with each other

about the strategy to follow. Given the superiority of the Acehnese armada, made the defeat more bitter. The Malay kingdoms Johor and Patani who came to Malacca's assistance, contributed to his ruination. The loss of his splendid fleet and thousands of warriors did not break Iskandar Muda's determination to fight the Portuguese, he remained a force to reckon with. During his reign Aceh did not suffer any Portuguese or foreign attack and even after his defeat he still controlled much of the region's trade. Aceh remained the most powerful state and fiercest opponent of the Portuguese. Out of economic and geo-political interests, the Dutch renewed the friendship with Iskandar Muda in 1632. Dutch rapprochement boosted his self-importance. By offering him their assistance in exchange for trade privileges in the ports under his control, the Dutch acknowledged that he was the key-figure in the region's trade. He was delighted with the renewed relationship. The equality of military power between them, discouraged conflict between them.

The Acehnese sultans were communicators. They communicated orally and in writing, relying on the capabilities of scribes, copyists, translators, envoys, chiefs and religious scholars. The sultan's authority would give the oral pronouncement made at an assembly or in a audience its power, similarly the royal letters, the *sarakatas* or edicts and the royal *cap* indicate that the written record of whatever had been decided, or what the sultan required, created an essential obligation on the part of whoever it was to do a certain obligation or whoever made a request. The royal edicts and the harbour regulations are proof of the fact that the clerks of the Public Hall and the harbour office acted on oral or written instructions from the court. Those officials who wrote their own letters, reiterated the sultan's wishes in these letters, and thus mediated the sultan's voice. Proof of this can be found in the letter of the *Laxamana* to the Dutch governor-general written in 1617 and given to ambassador Comans, in which he complains about the furtive departure from Aceh of the resident merchants, repeating the sultan's words. The records reflect more about the sultans' concerns in ruling the realm than any other source. The written word itself increasingly became an essential element of royal administration, local law, literature and religious expression. The royal support for the creation of literary works had a profound effect on the development of Acehnese cultural identity, and a lasting impact into the present.

The cooperation with the Islamic scholars was not only borne upon the sultans by the need for political legitimacy, these men were trusted to council them on a range of matters. The sultans could not rule by coercion alone; their legitimacy very much depended on the effective and

impartial administration of justice. The sultan's power was kept in check by his fear of a revolt against his rule. This established a *modus vivendi* between him and the powerful *orangkaya*. However, Iskandar Muda's authority over the *orangkaya* of the realm was unprecedented. This is especially clear when he announced the appointment of the foreign prince from Pahang as his successor. Accession was not followed by the customary rebellion and took place without bloodshed. No *orangkaya* seized the throne although the sultan himself and the influential Sheikh Shamsu'd-din Pasai, had already died.

Under Sultan Iskandar Thani, the socio-religious atmosphere changed. The ideological force behind him was Sheikh Nuru'd-din al Raniri, a Gujerati, who took Aceh on a more orthodox course. A period of religious intolerance entered. It brought Iskandar Thani in conflict with the *orangkaya* who had enjoyed a fair degree of religious freedom under the previous sultans. Iskandar Thani's orthodoxy did not make him a modest man; in the preamble of his letter written in 1637 to the Dutch governor-general he exalts his divine status *khalifat Allah*, at the same time boasting about his worldly riches. His short rule from 1637-1641 was an upsetting time for Aceh. The Portuguese courted him, but abused his kindness which ignited the old hostile feelings between them. The Dutch anxiously watched the courtship and they put heavy pressure on Iskandar Thani to cooperate in an attack on Malacca in which his enemy Johor participated. The talks on Johor's inclusion in a coalition to attack Malacca took up all his time as sultan of Aceh. He felt deceived by the Dutch. Despite the fact that Aceh did not participate in the final attack on Malacca in 1641, it steadfastly contributed to weaken Portuguese authority in Malacca.

Nuru'd- din al Raniri advocated a firm stance against the *Wugudyah* mystics and their teaching which led to their persecution. The sultan did not control and patronise, but antagonised both the spiritual and secular spheres in society. His premature death by poisoning represents his fall from grace. After his death in 1641, succession once again became a matter of rivalry and bloodshed, bringing schism in society. The Islamic leaders favoured a male and orthodox candidate on the throne, but the *orangkaya* showed an inclination for the royal dynasty to continue and nominated Iskandar Thani's widow, the eldest daughter of Iskandar Muda. The controversy between the religious and secular spheres demonstrates among other things that the *orangkaya* were not willing to suffer the orthodox tendency introduced at the court by Nuru'd-din al Raniri. It not only robbed them of their social and religious freedom, but it also impacted on society as a whole. They established a precedent by appointing a female ruler in Aceh. In the narrow historical view the appointment of a 'weak' female is seen as a strategy to assert their power over her. She reigned for thirty

four years (1641-1675) and her rule is marked by political stability in society and a fair degree of welfare.

Of the sultans discussed in this study, Iskandar Muda is generally seen as a composite super-king, not just because of his mythical descent and his role as unifier of Aceh because he was the heir of two dynasties, but because he provides a very powerful model. Bred in the court of his grandfather where he was tutored in politics and war, his reign was one of an almost continued state of military preparations or actual warfare. However, Iskandar Muda and his aims cannot be taken for granted, nor should these aims be assumed the equivalent of his achievements. To dispel the Portuguese from the Straits, entailed control of the trading ports; trade and religion could not be divorced, not when the overarching goal was to free the Straits from the Portuguese 'infidel' and from other trade usurpers. Whatever were Iskandar Muda's religious vagaries, the increasing possibilities of earning a constant flow of revenues and valuable gifts from trade with the northern Europeans, seemed a goal in itself. Trade with them implied a heavy focus on economics. Within these perimeters he operated. It was a major challenge of his rule. Whatever be the view taken of Iskandar Muda's personal character or of the effectiveness of his policies, it can hardly be disputed that he contributed to the steadfast disintegration of Portuguese hegemony and to establishing Aceh as the commanding and wealthiest player in the geo-political field in the Straits. Blatantly pursuing the Portuguese and aggressively protecting the area's trade from foreign usurpers, sadly involved the destructive invasions of the trading ports who were not willing or able to comply with his aims. Yet not only Aceh, but Malacca and Johor too formed a threat to their independence. It needed conviction on their part to conceive Iskandar Muda's aggressive actions against them as inspired by religious ideals and therefore legitimate. Such an assumption carried little weight against the background of the tragedies they suffered. The port rulers found themselves crushed between these two contending powers and an ambitious newcomer, the VOC.

A brief comparison between the developments in Europe and Asia is justified because of the East-West interactions which we have explored and described. Merchants from the United Republic of the Netherlands, from the Kingdom of England and from the Kingdom of France were frequenting Aceh and negotiated with the sultan and his officials. Their perceptions of the local political scene were generally based on their own cultural and political backgrounds.

In Europe the rise of the bourgeoisie and of bureaucracy was closely linked to the age of mercantilism. It is common knowledge, that after the Reformation, the principle that the authority of the king could not be questioned because he was God's chosen one, gradually died. We see that in both parts of the world the absolute authority of the ruler was often questioned and challenged. The two Asian treatises for statecraft to which I referred, the *Taj as-Salatin* and the *Arthasastra* warn against obeying a wicked monarch. The Jesuits and Calvinists of seventeenth century Europe did the same. The relationship between king and nobility in both parts was very ambivalent. Although the monarchs allowed their nobility to maintain their wealth and live opulent lives, they tried at the same time to prevent these nobles from passing on their lineage and wealth to their offspring. While seventeenth century Europe can be described chiefly in terms of war, Aceh's history since its foundation, was a history of war. Typical features of state formation processes in the European societies were the collection of taxes and acquiring of the monopoly over physical force. Internal stability made the development of capitalism possible: that of social differentiation (the rise of the entrepreneurial class, a working class and a class of farmers producing for the market). A similar trend is visible in Aceh, which is confirmed by the provisions in the *Adat Aceh*.

The Acehnese cast of *dramatis personae* included many foreigners, the most important one was Sultan Iskandar Thani, who originated from Pahang. Also included were *orangkaya* of foreign descent, of whom several functioned in high offices and religious scholars such as Nuru'd-din al Raniri from Gujerat in India. The ethnic plural society also constituted Malay war-victims, brought to Aceh by the victorious armada of Sultan Iskandar Muda and slaves from the Indian sub-continent, Batakland in Sumatra and the island of Nias.

The Dutch ethnologist J. Jacobs' interesting observation in the latter part of the nineteenth century is, that people from Malacca, Padang, 'pagen' Batak, Niasese, Kelings and different other tribes and even Javanese assimilated with the original people of Aceh and with the resident Hindus, and from this assimilation the generation of Acehnese evolved. They had taken some of their customs to the new land, making it difficult to distinguish the original customs.¹ Apparently Jacobs found a society which had absorbed the different cultural inputs. But can we propose that Aceh of our period was a *tabula rasa* on which every newcomer could leave his imprints as he wished? It is true that the newcomers, according to their ethnic

¹ J. Jacobs, *Het familie- en kampongleven op Groot-Atjeh: eene bijdrage tot de ethnographie van Noord-Sumatra*, 2 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1894), vol. I, 4.

background, lived in specially assigned living quarters in the city. Within defined limits, these people thus followed their own traditions in the new environment. I cannot pass over a curious etymological metaphor the Acehnese of today like to use when they point to the name Aceh. They maintain that A stands for Arab, C stands for Chinese, E stands for European and H for Hindu. While they distinguish different racial constituents, it also looks as if any native as well as any Malay element (Malay war captives formed a significant part of Acehnese society) is erased from the collective memory.

By following a practical level in the discussion has enabled us to look at Acehnese kingship in its mundane expression. We establish that the royal *cap* was the basic symbol of the sultan in his relations with foreign traders, while the *sarakata* or edict expressed his power over the realm. These two elements of kingship contributed to regulation and to institutionalisation during the reign of Iskandar Muda. Increased international trade necessitated regulations and laws. The *Adat Aceh* was the code of law of the Acehnese sultanate.

The discussion at the more theoretical level has provided us with a perspective of how kingship and society were conceived and more or less conceptualised.

The different *hikayat* and even the *Bustan as-Salatin* come with wonderful and distorted explanations of historical events and incidents disguised as prophecies and miracles. The accession of the throne by Iskandar Muda and of the prince of Pahang, Iskandar Thani, serve as clear examples; the writers' main concern was to make these prophecies fit their idea of the sultanate as the leading and divinely guided state. In this respect Shamsu'd-din Pasai and Nuru'd-din al Raniri were aiming for the same.

By approaching the phenomenon and evolution of Acehnese kingship from both angles, has provided more clarity over its essence. There is no single source of inspiration in the forming of Acehnese kingship and political identity. Kingship as a mythological phenomenon furnished it with a legitimating antiquity, and kingship as a contractual institution meant that the sultan could be removed from office. The sultan maintained his position chiefly through his ability to control and through patronage.

The Acehnese *orangkaya* were the kingmakers and the kingbreakers, yet they preferred dynastic kingship to a *primus inter pares* government. Unfortunately the term *orangkaya* which is primarily used in the foreign sources, does not distinguish between rich merchants, nobles, high officials and chiefs (*hulubalang*). This blurs the picture of the social and political realities in which they all fulfilled their specific roles.

Summa Summarum

The key to understanding Aceh is the role it played against the Portuguese and against foreign encroachment in general. The constant in kingship from the onset of its foundation, was the overthrow of the Portuguese ‘infidel’ in Malacca. Religious mobilization against the enemies of Islam was one of the evocative themes during the period of manifest Portuguese presence in Malacca which lasted for one hundred and thirty years. In this respect Iskandar Muda as well as his two predecessors followed the line set out by the early rulers of the sixteenth century. We may conclude that the war between Aceh and the Portuguese is one of history’s longest wars. The Acehnese aim to form an Islamic pact against the Portuguese did not prove successful; evidently Islam was not the critical criterion for cohesion and loyalty, fusion and fission were inherent factors in establishing political entities in the Malay region.

The third primary moment in Aceh’s history, is the conquest of Portuguese Malacca by the Dutch in 1641. Non-Muslim authority over Malacca was once again a fact.

It can perhaps be said that Aceh was created by external pressure and finally weakened by external pressure, yet it had an inner strength, a recognition of its own destiny that has assured its survival.

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GLOSSARY

Foreign, non Malay words are in italics: A =Arabic, D= Dutch, J = Japanese P = Portuguese, S = Sanskrit, Sp.= Spanish

alam : world

adat : local custom, local law

adil (A) : just, right

alfandique (P) : harbour office

arak : distilled beverage made of palm sap, rice or sugar cane.

baghi (A) : rebel

bahar : unit of weight widely used in Southeast Asia, varying slightly from place to place, sometimes amounting to 3 picul which is about 375 Dutch pounds and 385 English.

balai besar : public hall

bandar : port

bendahara : highest government official in the Malay ports (litterary ‘grand vizier’)

bongsu : younger brother

cartaz (P) : written permit

catty : small unit of weight of about 1-2 English pounds

cap: royal seal, written permit

caracque (P) : Portuguese freight carrier

coninck (D) : king

dalam : royal palace

daulat : sovereignty

g(h)orab : Acehnese vessel

goendih : concubine

hamba : slave

hikayat : epic story

hukum (A) : law, custom

hulubalang : Acehnese chief

ilir : downstream area

jihad (A) : religious war

kadi (A) : Islamic judge

kawan : friend

keris : ceremonial, often decorated dagger

laksamana : admiral

mahkota, meukuta : crown

mandala (S) : circle

mas (Sp) : coin

There were two kinds in Aceh: a golden coin amounting to 1/16 *tael*; a silver coin amounting to 1/8 Spanish *real*

nachuda (J): captain of a ship

nobat : music ensemble in the Malay world

orangkaya : rich man; in the Malay speaking world the term is commonly used to denote nobles, rich merchants and chiefs

padi : unhusked rice

panglima : field commander; title of the Acehnese governors of the port territories

payung : umbrella

permaisuri : princess, royal consort

picul : measure of weight amounting to 125 Dutch pounds

pinnacle : small sloop or galley

prahu : small local sail craft

penghulu kawal : chief guard, overseer

raja (S) : prince

real (Sp) : silver coin of Spanish origin current in the ports; several variations existed for example the *real* 'of eight'

sadati : Acehnese dancer

sarakata : royal decree, edict

sayyid (A) : title for descendant of the Prophet Mohamad

shah : Persian equivalent for ruler

shahbandar : harbour master

stadthouder (D): executive head in cooperation with the States General of one or several provinces of the United Republic; title of the prince of Nassau

sultan : ruler, monarch

tael : Chinese currency with varying value.
1 *tael* varied between fl. 3,50 and fl.4,=

taj (A) : crown

tambaga : a kind of brass metal

tuan(ku) : (my)lord

ulama (A) : Islamic religious leader

ulu: downstream area

wugudyah (A) : mystical movement within Islam

SAMENVATTING

In deze studie die betrekking heeft op de periode 1599-1641 is getracht de evolutie van het koningschap weer te geven tegen de achtergrond van Aceh's betrekkingen met de buitenwereld. Het was een tijdperk van dynamische ontwikkelingen die mede veroorzaakt werden door de relaties met Noord-Europese handelaren die vanaf 1599 Aceh aandeden op zoek naar contracten voor de peperhandel. Het Sultanaat Aceh Dar as-Salam werd de belangrijkste tegenspeler van de buitenlandse handelaren in het gebied rondom de Straat van Malakka en op de westkust van Sumatra. Op geo-politiek gebied was Aceh de meest dominante staat van deze regio. De zestiende eeuw was er een van constante oorlogvoering tegen de Portugezen ('de ongelovigen') die zich in 1511 van het belangrijke Islamitische handelsbolwerk Malakka hadden meester gemaakt met de bedoeling de handel te usurperen. In 1565 zond Aceh een gezantschap naar de Sultan van Turkije, hoofd van het Ottomaanse Rijk, met het verzoek om assistentie tegen de Portugezen. Sultan Selim II was blij met een bondgenoot in het Oosten tegen de Portugezen en zond Aceh schepen, manschappen en artillerie. De Portugezen zagen de acties van Aceh eerst als *razzia's*, maar kwamen al gauw tot het besef dat het ging om een *jihad* of religieuze strijd tegen hen.

De machtsverhouding wisselde regelmatig vanwege het vormen of het uiteenvallen van allianties en door conflicten tussen Aceh en het Sultanaat Johor dat de opvolger was van het Sultanaat van Malakka. Johor was ofwel te zwak om de Portugezen te weerstaan of koos bewust de zijde van de Portugezen tegen Aceh, wiens opkomende macht een bedreiging vormde voor haar positie als hoofd van de Maleische confederatie dat zich uitstreekte tot op de oostkust van Sumatra.

De constante in Aceh's politiek was om de Portugeze overheersers uit Malakka te verdrijven.

Handelaren uit Malakka namen in 1593 het initiatief om handelsbetrekkingen met Aceh aan te knopen. Het was een kwestie van *realpolitiek* want de voortdurende oorlogen hadden desastreuze gevolgen voor de handel van Malakka en daar was het afhankelijk van. Het inwilligen van dit verzoek door Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'yat Shah (Sayyid al Mukamil) was gunstig voor Aceh omdat de band tussen Malacca en Johor daardoor aan sterkte verloor en de Portugezen zijn troonsbestijging (usurpatie) daardoor erkenden. Door het nieuwe machtsevenwicht kwam er een periode van ongekende rust in de Straat van Malakka.

Door de komst van de eerste Nederlandse expeditie in Aceh in 1599, uitgevoerd door de Zeeland Compagnie, begon het machtsevenwicht te wankelen. De Nederlanders werden door de sultan betrokken in zijn vijandigheid tegenover Johor. Hij bood hen een scheepslading peper aan in ruil voor assistentie in een oorlogsexpeditie naar Johor. De kiem werd gelegd voor een relatie van gelijke partners die deze periode kenmerkt.

De Portugezen die niet gediend waren van Nederlandse inmenging in de politiek en handel van het gebied, schilderden de Nederlanders af als onbetrouwbare, vechtlustige lieden die in 1596 in gevecht raakten met de sultan van Bantam op het eiland Java. Hierdoor wisten ze de expeditie naar Johor te verhinderen en te voorkomen dat Aceh de machtigste staat werd. De moord op admiraal Cornelis de Houtman en een flink aantal expeditieleden net voor de expeditie naar Johor zou plaatsvinden, was het gevolg van deze interventie. Kapitein Frederick de Houtman, de jongere broer van de admiraal en een aantal van zijn bemanningsleden werden gevangen genomen.

De verhouding tussen Aceh en de Portugezen kwam vooral door dit incident weer op scherp te staan en kort daarna was de situatie tussen hen weer vijandig. Het *inter bellum* tussen Aceh en Malakka duurde minder dan tien jaar.

De verhouding met de Nederlanders werd in 1601 na enkele vruchteloze pogingen van Nederlandse zijde, weer hersteld en werd zelfs vriendschappelijk. In 1602 bezochten Acehse ambassadeurs de Republiek der Nederlanden, waar zij Prins Maurits van Nassau ontmoetten en bezoeken aflegden aan de Staten Generaal en verschillende steden, wat impliceert dat Aceh als eerste Aziatische staat de onafhankelijkheid van de Republiek der Nederlanden van Spanje erkende. De sultan gaf impliciet te kennen dat hij de Spanjaarden en Portugezen als vijanden beschouwde. Het was ook het jaar dat de Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC) waarin de oude handels compagnieën werden samengevoegd, werd opgericht. Vanaf toen werd de VOC de Nederlandse handelspartner van Aceh.

Door de komst van de Nederlanders in 1599, gevolgd door de Engelsen en Fransen in 1602, werd Aceh van regionale grootmacht, een belangrijke internationale exporthaven voor peper en een bondgenoot van de Nederlanders tegen Malakka. De zogenoemde 'broederband' tegen de Portugezen en Spanjaarden tussen de Nederlanders en de opeenvolgende sultans, hoewel nooit werkelijk nageleefd, was een bijzonder kenmerk van de periode 1599-1641.

De relaties met de Europese handelaren was winstgevend voor de sultans. Maar deze liepen niet altijd vlot. Het akkoord dat in 1607 door Sultan Ali Ri'ayat Shah, de zoon en opvolger van Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'yat Shah (Sayyid al Mukamil) met de VOC werd gesloten waarin

Nederlandse assistentie tegen de Portugezen en Spanjaarden werd geruild voor het recht om een *rendez-vous* te stichten voor Nederlandse schepen wat samenging met een beperkte jurisdictie op het grondgebied van Aceh en het Privilege dat de Engelsen in 1602 van Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah kregen, waarbij zij tol-vrij in de havens konden handelen, werden door Iskandar Muda, die na het overlijden van zijn oom, Sultan Ali Ri'ayat Shah, de troon usurpeerde en tot 1636 aan de macht was, ontkend c.q. geannuleerd. Iskandar Muda begon zijn regeerperiode met het centraliseren van de handel. Er moest worden betaald voor vergunningen en langdurige contracten, hetzij in geld of door het schenken van artillerie en andere goederen, of door het verlenen van assistentie tegen de Portugezen.

Hij probeerde de handelshavens in de regio onder zijn controle te brengen om de Portugezen vandaar te weren en om andere buitenlanders te verhinderen handelsmonopolies te verwerven. Hij ondernam felle acties tegen de overtreders van zijn decreten en voerde strafexpedities uit naar verscheidene handelshavens.

Iskandar Muda werd de meest geduchte vijand van de Portugezen omdat zij de vijand waren van de Islam en vanwege hun pogingen de handel van het gebied te usurperen. Hij ging daarbij nietsontziend te werk en legde zijn wil op aan de handelshavens.

Iskandar Muda profiteerde van de rivaliteit tussen de Nederlanders en de Engelsen door deze nog meer aan te wakkeren; hierdoor verkreeg hij artillerie, geld en waardevolle geschenken in ruil voor handelscontracten. Zelfs de in 1619 tot stand gekomen *Defence Alliance* tussen de Nederlanders en de Engelsen, die druk op hem uitoefende om de prijs van de peper te verlagen, kreeg hem niet op de knieën. Dit was niet zozeer zijn sterkte, want zij vertrokken uit Aceh en gingen zich meer richten op Jambi, Aceh's lokale rivaal, de peperhaven op de oostkust van Sumatra.

De expedities naar de handelshavens waren niet ingegeven door een bewuste expansiepolitiek, hoewel ze Iskandar Muda veel profijt leverden, zoals geconfiscerde schepen en artillerie, of de inkomsten uit de peper- en tinhandel en textiel. Ook nam hij duizenden krijgsgevangenen uit de veroverde gebieden mee naar Aceh. Het waren strafexpedities naar die havens die contacten onderhielden met de Portugezen. Toch was er geen sprake van een permanent Aceh's gezag over deze veroverde gebieden.

De Portugezen wisten de machtige Acehse armada die in 1629 voor Malakka verscheen een grote klap toe te brengen en veroverden bijna alle schepen en artillerie. De door hen zo gevreesde Acehse *laxamana* (admiraal) viel in hun handen. Hoewel het een grote vernedering voor Iskandar Muda was en zijn armada was gedecimeerd, bleef hij de handel domineren tot

in Indrapoura en Silebar op de zuidwestkust van Sumatra. Op de oostkust kwam hij tot Andragiri. Noch de Portugezen, noch de Nederlanders of Engelsen en lokale vijanden voerden aanvallen uit op Aceh gedurende zijn regeerperiode. De vriendschap met de Nederlanders werd in 1632 hersteld.

Iskandar Muda's opvolger Sultan Iskandar Thani, een gevangen genomen prins uit het Sultanaat Pahang, de erfvijand van het sultanaat Johor, die beide voortkwamen uit het Sultanaat van Malakka, was niet bereid om met de Nederlanders op te trekken in een aanval op Malakka, omdat Johor door Gouverneur-Generaal Antonio van Diemen was gevraagd te participeren in de aanval op Malakka. De vijandschap tussen Aceh en Johor liep als een rode draad door de geo-politiek van het gebied.

Sultan Iskandar Thani erfde van twee kanten een last: Johor was de vijand van Aceh en zijn vader, Sultan Ahmad van Pahang, was afgezet door tussenkomst van Johor. Gedurende zijn gehele regeerperiode van 1637 tot 1641 werden intensieve onderhandelingen tussen de Nederlanders (VOC) en hem gevoerd, waarbij beide hevig probeerden elkaar van hun standpunt te overtuigen. Het kwam niet tot een samenwerking; de verovering van Malakka in 1641 door de Nederlanders geschiedde in samenwerking met Johor en zonder de participatie van Aceh. Er kwam een einde aan het tijdperk waarin Aceh het voor het zeggen had.

RINGKASAN

Studi ini menyangkut masa 1599-1641 dalam sejarah Kerajaan Aceh Daru's-Salam dan mengulas evolusi yang terkait dengan kesultanan di dalam kontéks hubungan Aceh dan dunia luar. Gejolak yang terus timbul dalam politik Aceh sejak Portugis merebut benteng perdagangan Islam di Malaka pada tahun 1511 adalah mengusir para penguasa Portugis dari Selat Malaka dan pelabuhan-pelabuhan di Sumatra dan menghalau mereka ke arah Samudra Hindia. Bagi bangsa Aceh, abad keenambelas merupakan masa peperangan berkelanjutan melawan bangsa Portugis ('kaum kafir'), yang bermaksud mengambil paksa kuasa atas jalur perdagangan Islam dari mereka. Pada tahun 1565 Aceh mengirim utusan ke sultan Turki, kepala Kekaisaran Ottoman, untuk meminta bantuan guna melawan Portugis. Sultan Selim II senang menjadi sekutu dunia Timur untuk melawan Portugis dan mengirimkan kapal-kapal, manusia dan artileri ke Aceh. Orang-orang Portugis awalnya memandang tindakan Aceh sebagai *razzia*, namun kemudian menyadari bahwa tindakan Aceh tersebut merupakan *jihad* atau perang yang dilandasi semangat keagamaan melawan mereka.

Hubungan kekuasaan berganti secara teratur karena terbentuk maupun runtuhnya persekutuan lokal serta akibat perselisihan antara Aceh dengan Kesultanan Johor sebagai penerus Kesultanan Malaka. Johor entah terlalu lemah untuk melawan Portugis atau dengan sadar memilih untuk berpihak pada Portugis guna melawan Aceh, yang kekuatannya mulai tumbuh dan mengancam posisi Johor sebagai kepala konfederasi Melayu.

Ketika pada tahun 1593, atas inisiatip para pedagang di Malaka, hubungan dagang antara Malaka dan Aceh berkembang maju, datanglah masa damai di Selat Malaka. Hal itu mencerminkan fakta politik, bahwa peperangan terus-menerus antara Malaka dan Aceh telah mengakibatkan kehancuran perdagangan Malaka dan memungkinkannya. Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'yat Shah (Sayyid al Mukamil) dari Aceh memperoleh kehormatan besar dengan menerima dan menghendaki kunjungan musuh.

Kedatangan ekspedisi Belanda yang pertama di Aceh tahun 1599, yang dilakukan oleh Zeeland Compagnie, menciptakan keseimbangan kekuasaan di wilayah tersebut. Orang-

orang Belanda dilibatkan oleh sultan dalam perangnya melawan Kesultanan Johor. Sultan Aceh menawarkan satu kapal-penuh lada kepada orang-orang Belanda atas bantuan mereka dalam ekspedisi perang ke Johor. Dengan demikian benih hubungan rekanan yang setara telah ditanamkan.

Orang-orang Portugis bermaksud menghalangi ekspedisi orang-orang Belanda dengan menggambarkan mereka sebagai perompak, yang pada tahun 1596 terlibat perselisihan dengan Sultan Bantam. Terbunuhnya Laksamana Cornelis de Houtman dan banyak anggota tim ekspedisi merupakan dampak dari fitnah pencitraan yang buruk ini. Kapten Frederick de Houtman, adik laksamana dan sejumlah awaknya dipenjarakan. Hubungan antara Aceh dan bangsa Portugis akhirnya memanas dan tidak lama kemudian putus. Hubungan dengan bangsa Belanda diperbarui pada tahun 1601 dan berkembang hangat. Pada tahun 1602 duta-duta Aceh mengunjungi Republik Belanda dan bertemu Pangeran Maurits van Nassau. Mereka juga menyambangi *Staten Generaal* dan sejumlah kota. Semua ini menyiratkan bahwa Aceh merupakan negeri Asia pertama yang mengakui kemerdekaan Republik Belanda. Sultan Aceh secara mutlak menyatakan bahwa dia menganggap orang-orang Portugis dan Spanyol sebagai musuh.

Dengan kedatangan bangsa Belanda pada tahun 1599, disusul bangsa Inggris dan Perancis dalam tahun 1602, Aceh menjadi pusat penting persediaan lada di daerah Selat Malaka. Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah memperoleh kesan bahwa para pedagang luar negeri, khususnya Eropa, bersaing dengan sehat.

Tumbuh dan berkembangnya persaudaraan antara bangsa Belanda dan para sultan selanjutnya dalam menghadapi bangsa Portugis dan Spanyol, meskipun bukan tanpa cacat, merupakan ciri istimewa dari masa 1599-1641. Namun hubungan itu tidak berjalan mulus. Perjanjian yang dicapai pada tahun 1607 antara Sultan Ali Ri'ayat Shah, putra dan penerus Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah, dengan Belanda serta hak istimewa yang diperoleh Inggris pada tahun 1602 dari Sultan Alau'd-din Ri'ayat Shah, tidak diakui oleh Iskandar Muda, yang setelah mangkatnya sang paman, Sultan Ali Ri'ayat Shah, merebut tahta mahkota dalam tahun 1607 dan berkuasa hingga 1636. Iskandar Muda memulai pemerintahannya dengan politik-baru sentralisasi dan pengaturan perdagangan di wilayahnya. Mulai saat itu, para pedagang luar negeri harus membayar kontrak maupun perizinan. Dia mencoba menguasai semua pelabuhan dagang di sekitar Aceh demi

menghalau bangsa Portugis dan bangsa-bangsa asing lainnya dari kemungkinan kontrak-dagang dan monopoli barang-barang komoditas. Iskandar Muda mengambil berbagai tindakan terhadap para pelanggar kebijakan di wilayahnya. Ia menjadi musuh yang paling ditakuti oleh bangsa Portugis, yang mengalami banyak kesulitan selama Aceh berada di bawah kekuasaan sultan tersebut. Melalui surat, Iskandar Muda mengatakan kepada Pangeran Maurits bahwa dia akan terus berperang mengusir bangsa Portugis karena mereka merupakan musuh Islam dan bahwa memerangi musuh Islam merupakan perintah wajib para leluhurnya. Memang, sekutu tidak bekerja sama dalam hal ini.

Persaingan antara bangsa Belanda dengan Inggris mengakhiri kekuasaan Sultan Iskandar Muda; dia memanipulasi hubungan demi kepentingan sendiri dan memperoleh artileri, uang dan hadiah-hadiah yang tak ternilai harganya dengan imbalan kontrak dagang. Pada tahun 1619 Belanda dan Inggris mencapai kesepakatan, yang mendesak Iskandar Muda untuk menurunkan harga lada, namun sang sultan tidak mau memenuhi tuntutan itu. Hal itu mendorong Belanda dan Inggris berpaling ke Jamby, pesaing Aceh dalam perdagangan lada.

Iskandar Muda mengobarkan peperangan terhadap pelabuhan-pelabuhan Malaya dan Sumatra, yang mengizinkan bangsa Portugis membuka usaha dagang dengan mereka atau siapapun yang melakukan perdamaian dengannya, dan dengan demikian Iskandar tidak mengenal kompromi. Hal ini bukan ekspansi-politik yang disadari, namun besarnya kekuatan prajurit yang dikirimkannya telah memberi Iskandar Muda banyak keuntungan, seperti mendapatkan kapal dan artileri, serta aneka pemasukan dari perdagangan lada, timah, dan tekstil. Dia menjadi ‘gembong’ (*kingpin*) perdagangan. Kendati demikian, adalah suratan sejarah bahwa kekuasaan Aceh atas pelabuhan-pelabuhan itu tidaklah abadi.

Malaka sungguh-sungguh melemah akibat berbagai tindakan Iskandar Muda, namun masih sanggup menyingkirkan armada Aceh yang kuat, yang pada tahun 1629 muncul di Malaka, memberikan sebuah pukulan besar dan menghancurkan kapal-kapal dan artileri Aceh. Laksamana Aceh yang mereka takuti jatuh ke tangan mereka. Namun Malaka tidak serta merta telah menaklukkan Aceh. Betapapun peristiwa tersebut merupakan kehinaan besar bagi Iskandar Muda dan armadanya berkurang banyak, Iskandar Muda tetap mendominasi perdagangan sampai dengan Indrapoura dan Silebar di pantai barat Sumatra.

Di pantai timur dia tidak lebih jauh daripada Andragiri. Baik Malaka maupun musuh-musuh lain menyerang Aceh sepanjang periode pemerintahannya. Penerus Iskandar Muda, Sultan Iskandar Thani, seorang pangeran dari Kesultanan Pahang, saingan utama Kesultanan Johor, yang dua-duanya merupakan keturunan Malaka, tidak bersedia bergabung dengan orang-orang Belanda untuk berperang melawan Malaka, sebab Johor telah diminta oleh VOC untuk berpartisipasi menjatuhkan Malaka. Permusuhan antara Aceh dan Johor menjadi semacam benang merah geopolitik di Selat Malaka.

Sultan Iskandar Thani mewarisi persoalan dari dua sisi: Johor merupakan musuh Aceh dan ayahandanya, Sultan Ahmad dari Pahang, dikalahkan oleh campur tangan Johor. Sepanjang seluruh masa pemerintahannya dari 1637 sampai dengan 1641, perundingan-perundingan intensif berlangsung antara Gubernur Jenderal Antonio van Diemen dengan Iskandar Thani, di mana keduanya mencoba saling memaksakan pandangannya masing-masing. Perundingan-perundingan itu tidak pernah menjadi kesepakatan kerjasama; penaklukan Malaka pada tahun 1641 oleh Belanda membuka jalan kerjasama Belanda dengan Johor tanpa keterlibatan Aceh. Maka berakhirilah masa kejayaan Aceh sebagaimana telah diuraikan.

ANNEX

THE LETTER OF THE KING OF ACHEEN TO THE QUEEN OF ENGLAND.

Glory be to God, who hath magnified himself in His works, ordained Kings and Kingdoms; exalted himself alone in power and majesty. He is not to be uttered by word of mouth; nor to be conceived by imagination of the heart: He is no vain phantom; no bound may contain him; nor any similitude express him. His blessing and His peace is over all. His Goodness in the creature: He hath been proclaimed by His prophet heretofore, and since that often; and now again by this writing at this present, inferior unto none. For this city, which is not slack to shew their love, hath manifested it, in the entertainment of that Society, which filleth the horizon with joy, and hath confirmed it to the eye by a sign, which bringeth knowledge of remembrance of it generally, and particularly: and for that their request is just, with purpose for exchanges; and they themselves of honest carriage, and their kindness great in doing good in general to the creatures; helping the creature in prosperity and adversity jointly; giving liberally unto the poor, and such as stand in need of their abundance; preserving the creature in their uttermost, with a willing mind: which for them now is extended unto *India* and *Arach*; sending forth the chiefest men of discretion and note, calling all the best of the creatures to Council herein.

This is the Sultana, which doth rule in the Kingdom of *England*, *France*, *Ireland*, *Holland* and *Frizeland*. God continue that Kingdom and that Empire long in prosperity.

And because that he, which hath obtained the writing of these letters from the King of the Kingdom of Ashey, who doth rule there with an absolute power; and for that, there came unto us a good report of you, declared and spread very joyfully by the mouth of Captain James Lancaster; (God continue his welfare long!) And for that, you do record that in your letters, there are commendations unto us, and that your letters are patent privileges; Almighty God advance the cause of this honourable consociation, and confirm this worthy league.

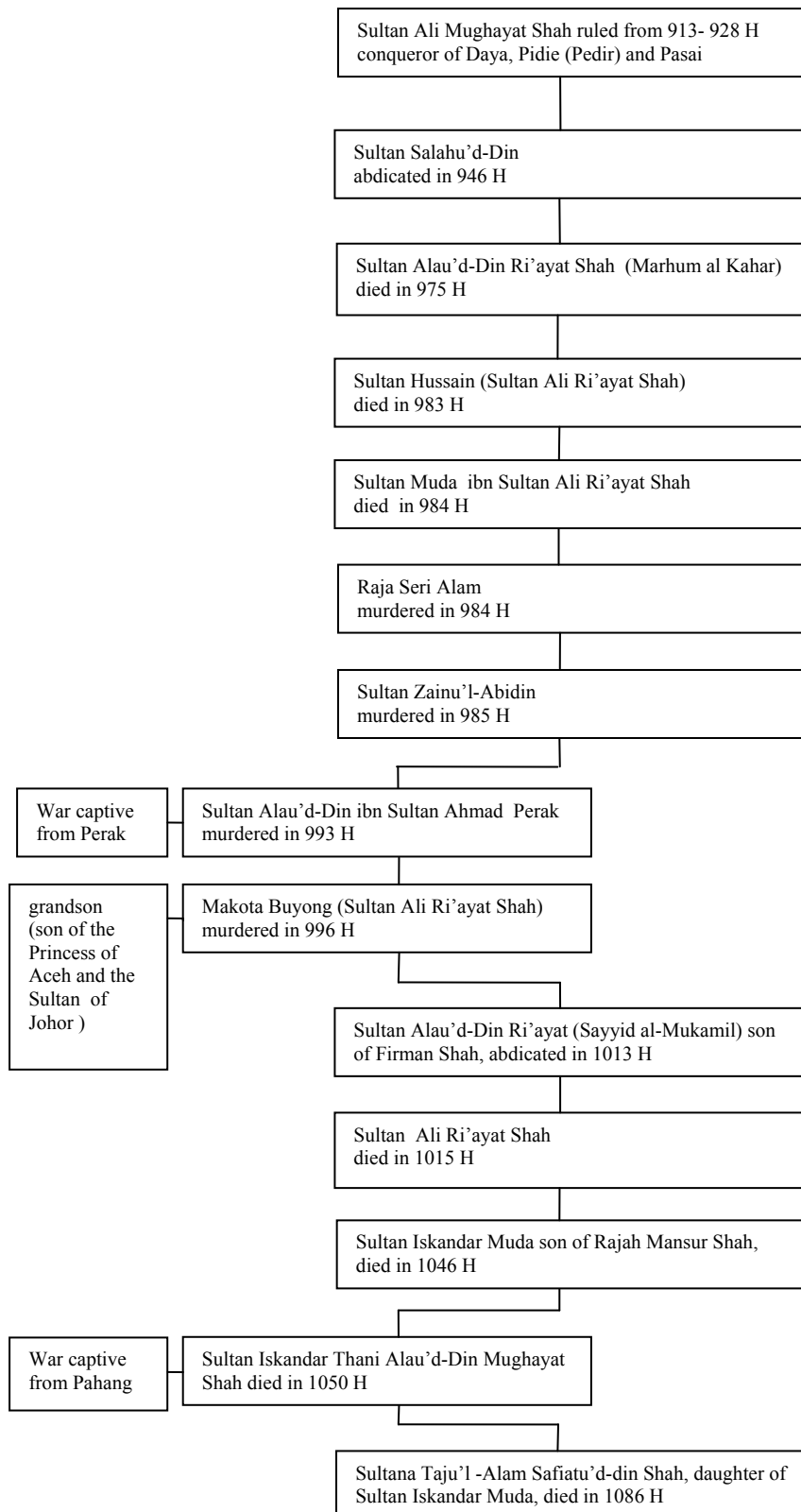
And for that you do affirm in them, that the Sultan of *Afrangie* is your enemy, and an enemy to your people, in whatsoever place he be, from the first until now; and for that he hath lift up himself proudly, and set himself as the king of the world: Yet, what is he besides his exceeding pride, and haughty mind? In this therefore is our joy increased, and our Society confirmed; for that he and his company are our enemies in this world, and in the world to come; so that we shall cause them to die, in what place soever we shall meet them, a public death.

And moreover you do affirm, that you desire peace and friendship with us: To God be praise and thanks for the greatness of His grace! This therefore is our serious will and honourable purpose truly in this writing, that you may send from your people unto our *Bandar*, to trade and to traffic: And that whosoever shall be sent unto us, in your Highness name, and to whomsoever you shall prescribe the time, they shall be of a joint company, and of common privileges: for this Captain and his company, so soon as they came unto us, we made them of an absolute society. And we have incorporated them into one Corporation and common dignity: And we have granted them liberties, and have showed them the best course of traffic. And to manifest unto them the love and brotherhood between us and you in this world, there is sent, by the hand of this Captain, according to the Custom, unto the famous city, a ring of Gold beautified with a ruby, richly placed in his seat; two vestures woven with Gold, embroidered with Gold, inclosed in a red box of Tzin. *

Written in Tarich of the year 1011 of *Mahomet*. Peace be unto you.

SUCCESSIVE RULERS OF ACEH

(based on the enumeration in the Bustan as-Salatin which uses the Hijrah dates)



CURRICULUM VITAE

The author who is a Dutch citizen, was born in Paramaribo, Suriname, on 16 March 1947 and spent part of her youth from 1952 to 1959 in Leiden, the Netherlands. In Suriname she followed high school and enrolled as a student at the faculty of Law, but changed her study after one year to enter the school of Linguistics where she obtained her diploma to teach Spanish. She was a civil servant for both the Dutch and Surinam governments until 1977.

In 1984/85 she obtained a post-graduate diploma in International Relations and Development at the Institute for Social Studies in the Hague, the Netherlands. She received her Master's degree in International Relations and Development from the Fairfax University in the USA in 1993. The title of her MA thesis is *State Formation and Nation Building Processes in Indonesia*. From February to July 1995 she was invited as a guest lecturer at the Andalas University in Padang, West Sumatra, Indonesia and developed a curriculum for a course in International Relations and Development. In 1997 she gave guest lectures in International Relations at the IBA university of Palembang, South Sumatra, Indonesia. From 1999-2000 she was employed by the University of Zimbabwe as a tutor for the Media and Communications Studies in the town of Masvingo and as a reviewer at the Media Studies faculty in Harare. She was a free-lance journalist for the *Weekkrant Suriname* in the Netherlands.

During her peripatetic life until 2000 in countries in the Middle East, Asia and Africa she wrote articles on socio-historical and socio-political issues which she published in daily papers such as *De West* and *De Ware Tijd* in Suriname and the *Jakarta Post* in Indonesia. She contributed two articles on Javanese immigrants in Suriname for which she did fieldwork in Suriname and in Indonesia: "Between the East and the West" (*Lembaran Sejarah: Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta*, 2004). "*In het hart van Sumatra*" (*Oso: Stichting ter bevordering van de Surinamistiek*, no. 2, jrg. 16, 1997).