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Decay or defeat ? : an inquiry into the Portuguese decline in Asia 1580-1645

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CHAPTER IX

THE RÉIS VIZINHOS

The Asian role

Whilst both writer and reader may have tended to concentrate on the vicissitudes of the Portuguese 'empire' and its 'dismantling' by the Dutch, one should not forget that both the Portuguese and Dutch communities in Asia were simply dwarfed by the indigenous societies around them. Obviously, maintaining a European presence in Asia was not only a matter of using force, but also one of common interest. The European invaders were allowed to stay because they had something to offer: silver and gold, more trade, more income for the treasury, protection against a stronger enemy or the supply of attractive items such as Arabian horses or elephants from Ceylon.

The power of the *Estado da Índia* lay at sea, but to exercise that power, the Portuguese were dependent on agreements and contracts with their 'neighbour kings', the *réis vizinhos*. These treaties formed the basis for trade, the supply of food and mutual military assistance against common enemies.¹ Even the establishment of new missions and churches² and the extradition of Portuguese *moços*, the soldiers who had escaped from the control of the *Estado*,³ were regulated on paper.

Since their arrival in India the Portuguese had had problems with the *réis vizinhos* and frequently they had to change the wording of their contracts, especially after the kingdom of Vijayanagara, their trading partner, was destroyed by four of the Bahmani kingdoms.⁴ However, upon the arrival of the other Europeans into Asia, the Portuguese treaties on mutual assistance had to become increasingly more specific and concerned with those intruders. For example the treaty of 1617 with the king of Kandy stipulated that he should not admit the Dutch, French, English or any other hostile nation and that he should be '*amigo dos amigos, e inimigo dos inimigos*' of the Portuguese.⁵ In 1620 the treaty with the king of Aracan confirmed that he would not maintain friendship with the Dutch and English and would not allow them to take fresh water and

¹Do Couto's description of the treaty of 1530 with the king of Tidore takes this splendidly together: 'Que elRey de Tidore pagaria certos bares de cravo. Que nunca mais recolheria em seu reino Castelhanos, nem os favoreceria, nem ajudaria mais contra Portugueses, nem contra seus amigos & aliados' [J.F.J. Biker, *Coleção de tratados e concertos de pazes que o Estado da Índia Potugueza fez com os reis e senhores com quem teven relações nas partes de Asia e Africa oriental desde o princípio da conquista até ao fim do século XVIII* (Lisbon 1881-1887) Vol.I 54].

²Biker 1881: I, 189, 223, 283.

³Biker 1881: I, 286.

⁴In 1538 the old Bahmani kingdom gave way to five new kingdoms: Bijapur, Golconda, Ahmadnagar, Bidar and Berar. In 1564 four of them united to attack the southern kingdom of Vijayanagara. In doing so, they cleared the way for their own destruction as in the North the Moghuls were preparing for southern conquests [Romila Thapar, *A history of India* (Harmondsworth 1969) Vol.I, 326-327].

⁵Biker 1881: I, 218.

food on board.⁶ After 1630, when in Europe the peace with England had been concluded and the Spanish entertained the hope that through mediation by the English the hostilities with the Dutch might come to an end, these types of clause were deleted from the new contracts.

Predictably, the promises of mutual assistance would bring the Portuguese into difficulties when the equilibrium of power around their settlements changed or when the promises were taken too literally. They often had a political or military role to play in dealing with the local rivalries. On the other hand, the Portuguese were very much dependent on the local rulers for the supply of products for the *Carreira da India*, of food for their fortifications and fleets and for the recruitment of native soldiers.

Just as the Portuguese had done when they arrived in Asia, the English and Dutch did not hesitate to make use of discontent among the local rulers or of the shifts in the power balance, by putting extra weight on one side or the other. The difference was that at their time, the Portuguese (and the Dutch at the end of the sixteenth century) had been confronted with numerous small powers. However, in the early part of the seventeenth century some important political changes took place in various parts of Asia, which had the effect that more often than not the Asian rulers could play their own tunes. European historians have hardly ever recognized the importance of these changes in Asian history and their effect on the Portuguese presence there.⁷ Only recently has due attention been paid by authors as Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Teotonio de Souza and Anthony Reid, whereas Leonard Blussé has stressed the diplomatic efforts of the Dutch at the princely courts, in order to gain access to the local markets and to raise sympathy for their case against the Portuguese.⁸

The Dutch

When the Dutch arrived in Asia, they found a kind of 'medieval' world of aristocratic little chiefs and governors, paying tributes to their rulers, promoting their own personal interests and playing politics on a large scale. In the previous chapters there are plenty of examples of local governors, 'princes' or even 'kings', as the Dutch sometimes called them, seeking Dutch support against their own rulers, their neighbours or the Portuguese. Their role was often

⁶Biker 1881: I, 229.

⁷A typical example of Euro-centric writing is W.H. Moreland, *From Akbar to Aurangzeb. A study in Indian economic history* (London 1923). Illustrative for the European approach towards Asian history is also C.R. Boxer, 'Anglo-Portuguese rivalry in the Persian Gulf, 1615-1635' in *Portuguese conquest and commerce in Southern Asia 1500-1750*, Variorum reprints (London 1985) I, 52-53: 'An even more deeply interested party in the spectacle of Anglo-Portuguese rivalry in the Gulf was the Persian himself. Unfortunately, being guiltless of any knowledge of the Iranian tongue, I cannot claim to have translated a mass of Persian and Arabic documents on the subject, and do not even know if such exist. If by any chance they do, it would be interesting to study them for the sake of getting an insight into their point of view; but it is improbable that they would have much importance to add to the voluminous English, Portuguese and Dutch accounts'.

⁸Leonard Blussé, *Tussen geveinsde vrienden en verklaarde vijanden* (Amsterdam 1999).

a passive one, but without their discontent or frustration the Dutch would never have been able to intrude into the existing balances of power and into the Asian markets.

For instance, on their first arrival in the East Indies, the Dutch were able to get the prince of Bantam to sign a contract of mutual assistance. Of course we do not know whether he really knew what he signed for, but he certainly wanted to demonstrate his independence from his lord, the prince of Demak. Furthermore the Dutch could always reckon on a certain goodwill in Atjeh, because the Atjehnese were regularly at war with the Portuguese in Malacca.⁹

In the Moluccas, the Portuguese and Ternatans had been competing for the possession of land on the Amboina islands where, since 1570, the cultivation of cloves had been introduced. Further stimulated by religious motives (Islam *versus* Christianity), this had culminated in a war between the two, with the effect that the Portuguese had to leave their fort on Ternate and re-establish themselves on Tidore and Amboina. To their regret, the Amboina fort gave no access to the production of cloves, because these were only grown in the Islamic territories of Amboina, whereas the trade remained in East Javanese hands. When Steven van der Haghen took over the fort of Amboina, he received the full support from the Ternatans against the Portuguese, but in the end the Dutch found themselves in the same position as the Portuguese. They had no direct access to cloves in the areas under Christian control (see figure 9.1) and remained dependent on their contractual exclusive right to purchase from the Ternatans and on the 'open' purchase contracts with the independent rulers of the islands of Hitu and Hoamoal, who continued to supply Macassar against a price that was 50 per cent higher than the price that the Dutch were willing to pay.¹⁰

When, at the end of 1604, the same Van der Haghen arrived in Calicut he found a ruler whose predecessors, after the Portuguese had arrived there, had lost their power to the advantage of the Rajahs of Cochin.¹¹ The old anti-Portuguese feelings were still alive and Van der Haghen had little difficulty in concluding a treaty with the *sâmundri*, or *samorin*, aimed 'at the suppression of the Portuguese'.¹² In 1608 this could be reconfirmed again by Verhoeff.¹³ For a long time the *Heeren XVII* ignored the wish of the local ruler to give this alliance more substance in the form of a Dutch military presence. Probably they saw very little in a trade which had to take place so near to the Portuguese settlements, where prices would be high and one would run the risk of attack.¹⁴ The local indigenous governors or *Nayaks* in Coromandel had more success in attracting

⁹See chapter 8.

¹⁰G.J. Knaap, *Kruidnagelen en Christenen. De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie en de bevolking van Ambon 1656-1696* (Dordrecht/Providence 1987) 13-20. See also chapter 8.

¹¹M. Antoinette P. Roelofs, *De vestiging der Nederlanders ter kuste Malabar* (The Hague 1943) 7.

¹²See chapter 8.

¹³Roelofs 1943: 41-44, CD 1907: I, 53-54.

¹⁴The next Dutch visitor who came overseas was Pieter van den Broecke in 1616. In March of the same year a few English stayed behind in Cranganor and moved to Calicut. The ruler was still seeking support against the Portuguese and Cochin, but the English closed their establishment a year later because of insufficient trade [Roelofs 1943: 50].

the attention of the Dutch, allowing them to settle in Masulipatam and to build a fort in Pulicat and giving them trading privileges.¹⁵ The Portuguese counteracted by an attack on Pulicat and by handing out money to the appropriate people,¹⁶ but as from 1615 the Dutch VOC was firmly established in its new fort *Gelria*. Thereafter, their presence remained dependent on them being accepted by the local rulers and traders.

The conduct of the VOC remained ambiguous: the Dutch presence along the Coromandel coast did not have the full support of the *Heeren XVII*, although the Company had a strong interest in getting access to the Coromandel textiles in connection with the trade East of Malacca. Its merchants engaged in activities that brought them into difficulties with the local rulers and traders.¹⁷ On the other hand, they did not refrain from co-operation with the Portuguese and to obtain control over the local shipping they took over the Portuguese *cartaz* system, which was mainly applied to Asians. At the end of 1629 the Governor-General advised the *Heeren XVII* that in view of the many connections that existed between the Indian traders, the Coromandel trade should probably be a bit relaxed, in order to prevent difficulties in Surat.¹⁸

The Moghuls

Of far more consequence than the previous examples were the political landslides on the Indian continent caused by the expansion of the empire under Akbar (1556-1605) (see fig. 9.2), the first ruler whom the Portuguese called the *Grão Mogol*. In 1572 he annexed Gujarat, with its textile and indigo trade, the backbone of the *cartaz* system, and in 1576 Bengal came under his control. One of Akbar's major objectives was to outshine the Ottomans. In order to gain support from the Portuguese, he tried to gain their friendship by showing an interest in their Catholic mission and allowing a number of Jesuits at his court in Delhi, where they spent a long time without any visible results. From their side, the Portuguese were very conscious of their weak position along the West coast of India and took great pains not to antagonize the Moghuls. Both parties had an interest in prudently maintaining the existing situation, so that the trade between Gujarat and Goa would continue and the Moghuls could receive their part of the South American silver and convert this into their own local silver currency.

This uncertain equilibrium was disturbed when in 1612 Akbar's successor Jehangir allowed the English to establish a trading post in Surat. In revenge, the Portuguese took a ship of the Moghuls coming from Mecca with a rich cargo; this led to the Moghul siege of Daman, which in turn was answered by the Portuguese, shooting up a number of towns under Moghul administration and causing much injury to the Gujarat shipping.¹⁹ After two years of war a peace treaty was signed in 1615 containing, as a major condition, that the Moghul would send the English and Dutch away from Surat and

¹⁵George D. Winius, *The merchant-warrior pacified. The VOC (The Dutch East India Company) and its changing political economy in India* (Delhi 1991) 12-15.

¹⁶See chapter 8.

¹⁷*Generale Missiven I*, 154-159 of 27/1/1625.

¹⁸*Generale Missiven I*, 273-274, of 15/12/1629; ARA 1.04.02 inv. 1100, fo 61-64.

¹⁹*Moreland* 1923:36-37.

would refuse from thereon to admit and protect their ships or to allow them even to refresh.²⁰ However, that same year Sir Thomas Roe, envoy of the English crown, was well received at the Great Moghul's court: Jehangir was apparently very much impressed by the English power at sea. The Portuguese, afraid that they would antagonize the Moghuls again, closed their eyes to this breach of contract and even allowed their ships to leave Gujarat without *cartaz*, with the condition that instead they would pay the Portuguese duties on imports and exports in Daman.²¹ In 1620 the Dutch also obtained trading rights in Surat, similar to those of the English.²² Until the Dutch obtained access to Vengurla, Surat and its natural harbour in the basin of Suali were to be used as a base for the individual and combined English and Dutch fleets privateering against Portuguese vessels near Hormuz and along the coast of India.

The pressure on the Portuguese increased after Shah Jahan had taken over. The emperor had objections against both the Portuguese administration in India and the Portuguese renegades and adventurers in Bengal. In 1632 his troops attacked Hughli, where many *lançados* had established themselves and had an important share in the export to Cochin and Goa of saltpetre, rice and silk destined for the *Carreira da India*. According to the viceroy, count of Linhares, two hundred Portuguese were taken prisoner, together with their six hundred Christian slaves.²³ The supply of saltpetre could still be maintained from Tuticorin, but the Moghul attack put an end to the flourishing Bengal trade, profitable both for the *Estado* and the Portuguese traders, until at least 1660. During the 1630s and 1640s, the loss of Hughli was a serious setback for the Portuguese intra-Asian trade.²⁴ Of course, the Dutch were keen to take over the Hughli trade and kept themselves prepared, but their efforts were undermined by the English competitors.²⁵ They had to wait until 1636 to obtain the official *firman* from the Great Moghul for free passage and free trade in Bengal.²⁶

The next Moghul conquest was that of Ahmadnagar in the Deccan, where the Portuguese had their forts and tax collection centres in Chaul, Bassein and Daman (see figure 9.1 and appendix 4.1). Until 1600 there had always been problems between the *Estado* and the *Nizam Shahi*-rulers of Ahmadnagar. These worsened when in 1604 the Portuguese had obtained the right to collect half of the property tax, a right that the collectors exercised in their usual rough

²⁰ Biker 1881: I, 189-192.

²¹ Teotonio R. de Souza, *Medieval Goa. A socio-economic history* (New Delhi 1979) 29.

²² As from 1618 the Dutch made serious attempts to penetrate the trade from Surat. [ARA 1.04.02 inv. 1068, fo 438 (Copy of a *firman* from prince sultan Khurram, the future Shah Jahan, allowing the Dutch to trade in Surat); inv. 1072, fo 215-216, 228-238; inv. 1070 fo 445-451.

²³ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese empire in Asia 1500-1700. A political and economic history* (London/New York 1993) 165-168. According to De Souza 1979: 29 a few thousand Portuguese men, women and children were taken prisoner, carried to Agra and converted to Islam or enslaved. Dutch estimates of the strength of the Portuguese colony in Hughli in 1631 and 1632 vary between 5-6,000 souls and 3,000 [Generale Missiven I, 7/3/1631, 287-296 and 1/12/1632, 338-339].

²⁴ Subrahmanyam 1993: 167.

²⁵ Generale Missiven I: 15/8/1633, 379-380 and 1/4/1636, 522-527.

²⁶ ARA 1.04.02 inv. 1119, fo 1865.

manner. New hostilities followed until in 1615, under the threat of the Moghuls, peace was concluded. It was however clear that before long the Great Moghul would claim the principedom of Ahmadnagar. The king of Portugal found it therefore necessary to explain to the viceroy that in the first instance he had to keep the Moghuls on his side, against the Dutch, in the hope that the Portuguese would be allowed to keep their privileges.²⁷ Apparently he was succesful, because the arrival of Shah Jahan in 1636 meant the end of Ahmadnagar and the *Nizam Shahi*, but not yet of the Portuguese settlements.²⁸

Bijapur

South of Ahmadnagar was Bijapur. Notwithstanding the fact that in 1510 the Portuguese had taken Goa and in 1543 the provinces of Salcete and Bardez, until the first quarter of the seventeenth century the relationships with the rulers of Bijapur had remained generally peaceful. The Portuguese had even asked the ruler Ibrahim Adil Shah to act as a mediator with the *Nizam Shahi*. However as a result of mutually created provocation and revenge, tensions had increased so that in 1623 the Bijapuris approached the English to obtain support against the Portuguese. The English were not inclined to do so: Roe had decided to stay at a safe distance from the intricacies of Indian politics. In 1629 two ships of Adil Shah were attacked in the Persian Gulf by the Portuguese and the crews were murdered. Thereupon, Adil Shah confiscated a Portuguese ship and the Portuguese responded by taking another of his vessels. The Bijapuris reacted by withdrawing their embassy from Goa, closing their ports for Portuguese ships, stopping the food supply to Goa and threatening an invasion of Bardez and Salcete. The Portuguese understood that they could not permit themselves open war with Adil Shah but they were lucky in that in 1632 the combined force of the Moghuls and Ahmadnagar began a siege of Bijapur. The Adil Shah called upon the Portuguese to assist with gunners, powder and ammunition. The assistance was given, in secret, apparently to do Adil Shah a favour, but in fact because a victory of the Moghuls would finally mean disaster for the centre of the Portuguese 'imperium'.²⁹

New problems arose for the Portuguese, when in 1637 the Adil Shah allowed the English and Dutch to set foot in Dabhol, Karwar, Rajapur and Vengurla.³⁰ In particular the concession to the Dutch, allowing them to establish a refreshment and trading post in Vengurla,³¹ was a major strategic loss to the Portuguese. Vengurla, about 40 miles North of Goa, became the supply and watering station for the Dutch fleet that blockaded Goa, with the aim to keep the Portuguese fleets away from the scenes of Dutch-Portuguese war around Malacca and in Ceylon, and it was also a haven for VOC spies.

In October 1639 the Dutch fleet near Goa carried the adjective 'offensive' instead of 'defensive', a true sign of the change of spirit on the Dutch side. Its new commander Cornelis Symonsz van der Veer undertook a feverish diplomatic campaign to get the king

²⁷ De Souza 1979:31.

²⁸ Subrahmanyam 1993: 190.

²⁹ De Souza 1979: 31-33.

³⁰ ARA 1.04.02 inv. 1128, fo 214-217; inv. 1127, fo 76-79.

³¹ Generale Missiven II: 18/12/1639, 48-50.

of Bijapur fully on his side³² and even went so far as to suggest the possibility of Dutch assistance to Sjah Jahan against the Portuguese, although he did not commit himself.³³ It is not quite clear whether the Dutch tried to get the Adil Shah to attack Goa over land or whether this was his own idea which they promised to support by intensifying their attacks at sea.³⁴ Whatever may have been the case, the Adil Shah appears to have agreed to these plans and even the split up of the booty had already been arranged. However, in 1641, according to the Dutch, the Adil Shah did not live up to his promises and moved his priorities to Kanara,³⁵ so that the Portuguese in greater Goa escaped for the time being. In 1642 the Bijapuris were still raising the issue,³⁶ but it was 1654 before they invaded Bardez and Salcete again.³⁷

Kanara

From their arrival in Goa the Portuguese had always maintained excellent relationships with Kanara. It consisted of a number of small principalities, with whom the Portuguese had directly concluded their treaties and from whom they directly received a tribute of rice. Their contracts assured the delivery of the pepper cargo for the *Carreira* vessels and the supply of teakwood for the shipyard in Goa.

As from the beginning of the seventeenth century difficulties arose because the rulers, or Nayaks, began to show expansionistic inclinations *vis-à-vis* small rivals, with whom the Portuguese had their establishments and trading posts and through whom the pepper deliveries took place. Logically, the Portuguese saw the expansion by the Nayaks as a threat to their interests and the crown gave orders to undermine their tendencies by setting up the Adil Shah against them and by creating a form of co-operation with the other princes of Kanara. For the Portuguese it was difficult to offer effective direct support to the little princes of Kanara and consequently king Venkatappa Nayak could expand his kingdom without any real resistance.

His next step was to contact the English for the sale of pepper and to play them off against the Portuguese, who in 1620 concluded a treaty with him. This was the first of many where the Nayaks of Ikkeri would dictate their conditions to the Portuguese who continued buying most of their pepper supplies from them.³⁸ The resulting price increase in 1621 could still be compensated by higher prices in Lisbon, but that of 1626 found no sympathy at all in Europe: prices in Lisbon were at their lowest in 1627 (see appendix 3.4).

³²ARA 1.04.02 inv. 1129 fo 359-361; inv. 1132 fo 166-168; inv. 1129 fo 362-366; inv. 1132 fo 160-165. fo 478-479.

³³ARA 1.04.02 inv. 1132 fo 174-176; inv. 1133 fo 480.

³⁴The Dutch Governor-General, in his message to the Gentlemen XVII of 9/12/1637, put it slightly differently: 'Goa is in danger of being attacked by the king of Bijapur'. [Generale Missiven I: 596, 605-607, 616, 661, ARA 1.04.02 inv. 1127, fo. 153-159, 161, 162].

³⁵Generale Missiven II: 12/12/1641, 145.

³⁶ARA 1.04.02 inv. 1144, fo 233.

³⁷De Souza 1979: 33.

³⁸A.R. Disney, *Twilight of the pepper empire. Portuguese trade in Southwest India in the early seventeenth century* (Cambridge Mass.1978) 37.

The successors of Venkatappa, who died in 1629, made the supply of rice and other privileges to the Portuguese dependent on their preparedness to accommodate the increasingly higher demands in the pepper market. The Portuguese obtained permission to stay in Basrur and could get as much wood for their shipyard in Goa as they wanted, but they were obliged to buy pre-established volumes of pepper against pre-established prices. Under the pretext that the English were prepared to pay more, the price was increased by 30 per cent a year later. Finally the Portuguese refused to accept the price, notwithstanding the prohibition on rice deliveries, which was the response. As a result the *Carreira* vessel had to leave for Portugal with only 600-700 *quintals* of pepper on board, instead of the 3,000 *quintals* one would expect on average.³⁹ But the Portuguese were still sufficiently strong to intensify their control on shipping and to prevent pepper or rice leaving Kanara for other destinations. Consequently, the Nayak had to give in: after all, the deliveries to the Portuguese yielded a nice 500,000 *pagodas* (equivalent to 11.5 tons of silver) per year to his treasury. In return the Portuguese supplied him with guns, powder and ammunition, to defend himself against the Adil Shah. The next Nayak, who came on the throne in 1645, drove the Portuguese away from all their settlements in Kanara. Circumstances were favourable: the Portuguese were fully engaged in their war with the Dutch over Ceylon and in Goa they were preparing themselves for an invasion by the Adil Shah.⁴⁰

Ceylon

In Ceylon, until 1620, the Portuguese had been able to maintain a kind of peace with the kings of Kandy⁴¹ and to begin a form of colonisation with the registration of land and the collection of taxes.⁴² Between 1624 and 1628, fearing that the Dutch or the Danish, who had founded their own East Indian Company, might invade Ceylon via Trincomalee and Baticaloa, the Portuguese occupied these places themselves.⁴³ However, suspicious that the king of Kandy might be seeking co-operation with either of the North European companies and stung by letters from the new viceroy Linhares accusing him of incompetence, the captain-general in 1630 undertook an expedition against the king of Kandy. His army consisted of about 4,400 *lascarins* and maybe four hundred-and-fifty European troops. After ransacking and burning the king's palaces in Badulla the Portuguese troops were ambushed and a considerable number of the Europeans, amongst whom the captain-general, were killed.⁴⁴ As a result, the

³⁹From appendix 3.1 c and 3.3 one may conclude that in 1591-1600 per average ship of 1136 tons an average 4376 *quintals* of pepper would arrive in Lisbon. Around 1630 the average tonnage amounted to 790 tons, so that one would expect an average of 3043 *quintals* on board.

⁴⁰De Souza 1979 34-38.

⁴¹See e.g. the treaties of the king of Kandy with Portugal in 1617, *Biker* 1881: I, 203-218.

⁴²Tikiri Abeyasinghe, *Portuguese rule in Ceylon, 1594-1612* (Colombo 1966) 125.

⁴³George D. Winius, *The fatal history of Portuguese Ceylon. Transition to Dutch rule* (Cambridge Mass. 1971) 11-13.

⁴⁴Winius 1971: 15-27. A statement in ARA 1.04.02 VOC, inv. 1099, fo 326, which is a translation of a Portuguese letter written in Negapatam, that 700 hundred white Portuguese out of 1500 to 2000 would have been killed, is probably an exaggeration.

Singhalese had their hands free to lay siege on Colombo and Galle, to pick up the old thread of their connections with the Dutch and to ask for their protection.⁴⁵ The result was the treaty of 1638, wherein the Dutch obtained from the king of Kandy the right to trade in exchange for military assistance and protection.⁴⁶ In May 1638 a combined Dutch-Singhalese army captured Baticaloa and a year later the Dutch took Trincomalee, followed in 1640 by Negombo and Galle, so that the cinnamon trade fell almost completely into Dutch hands.⁴⁷

Persia

Because it was a point of no return in the war between the Portuguese and English and because the English played an important role in it, historians have paid much attention to the fall of Hormuz.⁴⁸ The prime cause of this event was however that Shah Abbas of the Safavid dynasty, who ascended the throne in 1587 and established his residence in Isfahan, wanted to free himself from the Ottoman embrace. From 1603 he conducted a number of wars against the Ottomans, reconquering Azerbaijan and Armenia and taking Bagdad in 1623, ending up with an empire that stretched from the Tigris to the Indus. During this time, his requests to the Spanish king and to the Portuguese viceroy in Goa for assistance, received no response and, for a long time the reaction of the English, French and Dutch remained lukewarm.⁴⁹ Thereafter his need for money led him to declare the silk trade a state monopoly and to seek an outlet via the Persian Gulf.⁵⁰ He could only achieve this with assistance from the English, who blockaded the island of Hormuz and defeated the Portuguese fleet that had been sent from Goa. Then he besieged and took the Portuguese fortress. The fall and destruction of Hormuz in 1622 made the way free for Gombroon, later to be called Bandar Abbas, as the port of Isfahan, where the Dutch would also establish a factory. The Portuguese were able to maintain their positions in Muscat and in Basrah and whenever an English or Dutch fleet came to visit Gombroon they managed to make a nuisance of themselves.⁵¹ For the *Estado da Índia* the loss of Hormuz represented a financial loss of more than 4 tons of silver per annum and to the private trade of course still more.⁵²

Atjeh and Johore

See also *Generale Missiven I*, 293-296.

⁴⁵*Generale Missiven I*, 7/3/1631, 293-296 and 15/12/1633, 392, 411.

⁴⁶ARA 1.04.02 inv. 1126 fo 328-334; CD I, nr.CXXVI.

⁴⁷*Israel* 1982: 278.

⁴⁸*Boxer* 1985: I, 46-129 and *Steensgaard* 1973: 211-343.

⁴⁹In 1611 Prince Maurits, *Stadhouder* of Holland proposed to the States-General to start, together with the French and the English, negotiations with the Persians on Hormuz. But for the time being, nothing happened. [RSG NR : Vol.1, 417].

⁵⁰*Subrahmanyam* 1993: 148-149.

⁵¹*Steensgaard, Niels, Carracks, caravans and companies: the structural crisis in the European-Asian trade in the early 17th century* (Copenhagen 1973) 353-358.

⁵²See appendix 4.1 and chapter 4. *Steensgaard* 1973: 346 quotes the English view, that with the fall of Hormuz the Portuguese lost one of the buttresses of their empire, whereas the English only received a symbolic share in the customs revenues from Gombroon.

Against the background of all the negative news at the end of the 1620s and the 1630s the only positive point for the Portuguese was their victory against the Atjehnese, who in 1629, from Deli, had begun a large-scale siege of Malacca.⁵³ Initially the power equilibrium between Atjeh, Johore and Malacca⁵⁴ had threatened to get out of balance to the detriment of the Portuguese, but because the Sultan of Johore had lent them assistance with a large fleet,⁵⁵ the Portuguese position had been secured again.

During the whole Luso-Dutch confrontation in Asia the sultans of Johore demonstrated themselves to be the most unpredictable allies of both sides. As far as the Dutch were concerned, similar feelings must have existed in Johore. In 1606 Matelieff had asked and obtained the written promise of the sultan to co-operate in the siege of Malacca, but this did not materialize. The Dutch insisted that if Malacca should be taken they should occupy it, but the sultan refused to participate if he would not be allowed access to the town and asked for Dutch assistance in an attack on Atjeh instead. The Dutch refused because the Atjehnese were their trading partners. The discussion ended with the signing of a contract, agreeing that the Dutch would attack Malacca and would be allowed to build a reinforcement near the river and to use Johore as a centre of their Asian business.⁵⁶ After having landed his troops near Malacca, Matelieff was chased away by a large Portuguese fleet and left the place, with nothing but the contract in his hands, sailing to the Moluccas and China, thereby exposing the sultan to Portuguese revenge.⁵⁷

In 1608 Verhoeff, expecting again co-operation from Johore in a new siege of Malacca, was disappointed to find that in the meantime the sultan was engaged in negotiations with the Portuguese. The sultan refused to collaborate but was quite prepared to accept Dutch assistance instead for an attack on his other arch-enemy, Patani. The Dutch moved their fleet to Johore and proposed to build a Dutch fort there to protect the sultan against the Portuguese, which the sultan refused, allegedly because he was afraid that the Dutch would go after the native women, just as the Portuguese did.⁵⁸

When Verhoeff left he was given a letter from the sultan to the States-General and the *Stadhouder*, proposing the conquest of Patani and complaining that the Dutch did not fulfil their contractual obligation to conquer Malacca and that they were constantly changing the contract, for instance with their proposal to build a complete fort.

Verhoeff left two ships behind, as if to demonstrate a Dutch protective presence, but very soon they also departed and in May 1609 a Dutch sloop arrived from Bantam with the message of the Twelve Years' Truce, which meant that the Dutch would be at peace with

⁵³Boxer 1985: IV, 105-121, 'The Achinese attack on Malacca in 1629, as described in contemporary Portuguese sources'.

⁵⁴Meilink-Roelofs 1962: 139-142.

⁵⁵Subrahmanyam 1993: 164-165.

⁵⁶E. Netscher, *De Nederlanders in Djohor en Siak, 1602 tot 1865* (Batavia 1870) 9-15.

⁵⁷*Opkomst*: III, 80.

⁵⁸Netscher 1870: 16-17.

Portugal.⁵⁹ Johore, left on its own again, then had to survive a Portuguese blockade which lasted one year and which ended with a peace treaty with Malacca in 1610.⁶⁰

Nevertheless, the Dutch continued to aim for a good relationship with Johore, because Governor-General Pieter Both and his Council were still looking for a place to establish their seat and had a certain preference for Johore above Jacatra. However, the princes of Atjeh did not accept the peace treaty between Johore and the Portuguese and attacked the town in 1613 and 1615, which led to its total destruction and the death of the sultan. After his brother had taken over, another attack followed in 1623, this time because the new sultan had sent his wife, a princess from Atjeh, back home. The new town of Johore was also destroyed and this seemed to be the end of Johore, never to be heard of again.⁶¹ Until in 1629 a new sultan of another new Johore was asked to lend assistance to the Portuguese against the Atjehnese who this time were attacking Malacca.

In 1637 Johore moved to the Dutch side again, even in alliance with its arch-enemy Atjeh, to participate in the blockade of Malacca. The co-operation with Atjeh came to nothing and Johore was very hesitant to lend the assistance they had promised. It was only when the Dutch brought almost their complete fleet in Asia to the Malacca Straits, demonstrating that this time they were serious and there to stay, that the sultan decided to send his troops.

In August 1641, at long last, the story of Johore apparently found its happy ending: a peace treaty was signed between Johore and Atjeh, through the good services of the new governor of Malacca, Johan van Twist.⁶²

Japan

In Japan, during the latter part of the fifteenth and until the end of the sixteenth century, civil wars were needed to accomplish political, economic and cultural unification. The process was completed by Hideyoshi and after his death in 1598, Tokugawa Ieyasu was able to grab power and to take over Hideyoshi's system of control. Thereafter it took the three *shoguns* Ieyasu, his son Hidetata and his grandson Iemitsu still another half a century to complete a centralized unified state. During this time the role of their retainers, or vassals, changed from administrators that simply carried out the policies of their ruler to, after 1632, a controlling and policy making *Bakufu* that had absolute power.⁶³

In this process of state formation and centralization, where the power was gradually coming into the hands of civil servants and administrators, where the revenues flowing into the central treasury continued to increase and where the official positions came into the hands of families, any group of outsiders was to be seen as a threat and had to be taken seriously. The Japanese

⁵⁹Netscher 1870: 25-27.

⁶⁰Opkomst III, 89-90.

⁶¹Netscher 1870: 29-32.

⁶²Netscher 1870: 33.

⁶³Eiichi Kato, Unification and adaptation, the early Shogunate and Dutch trade policies' in Leonard Blussé, Femme Gastra (eds.) *Companies and Trade* (Leiden 1981) 209-212.

Christians, in 1609 estimated at 222,000,⁶⁴ were such a group and their persecution was harsh and effective. In 1612 the first decrees prohibiting Christianity were issued and 1614 saw the beginning of the general persecution of Christians and the expulsion of the Portuguese Jesuit missionaries.

Having more or less initiated the solution of the Christians' problem, the next step was to control the foreign influences that came into the country via the foreign trade. In 1616, the year of the death of Ieyasu, the *Bakufu* concentrated all foreign trade on Nagasaki and Hirado, but the Portuguese traders were still allowed to do their business, albeit without the mediation of Jesuits. The China-Japan trade was the prime mover in the Portuguese Asian trading system, but, of course, it was also to the advantage of the *Bakufu*. From the Japanese point of view it had one commercial disadvantage: the Portuguese had virtually a monopoly on the direct route between the two countries.

The arrival of the Dutch was an opportunity to get out of this situation and to create competition amongst the Europeans. Jacques Specx was the ideal man to encourage the Japanese ambitions, but at first he found little support with his superiors.⁶⁵ Once he had convinced them, they began to rush the matter, claiming to have a monopoly on the trade between Taiwan and Japan, at the expense of the Japanese merchants who regularly visited the island. The attitudes of the Dutch closed the door again and to most of them the Japanese reaction must have been totally incomprehensible, different as it was from that of other Asian rulers. The mending of the broken relationship took about four years of careful maneuvering and diplomacy.

The ascendance of a new *Shogun* in 1635 announced a new *Bakufu* policy towards foreign trade and foreign influences. The first step, in the years 1633-1636, was the restriction of Japanese trade and, under pain of death, Japanese travel overseas and the prohibition for Japanese who had settled abroad to return to Japan. The next step was the restriction of Portuguese traders to the island of Deshima and Nagasaki. The total prohibition of the Portuguese trade thereafter, in 1639, was also a well considered move: the Chinese were allowed to take over the bulk of the Portuguese direct trade via Nagasaki and the Dutch were now restricted to the artificial island vacated by their Portuguese rivals. The VOC presence in Deshima thus offered an alternative route for formal contacts with the West. The Japanese 'isolation policy' was more effective than the Counter Reformation and the Inquisition in Europe: by the time that Iemitsu died in 1651, the *Bakufu* had almost eradicated Christianity, were in full control of foreign trade, its revenues and the transfer of foreign culture and thinking into the country and had gained considerably in domestic and international legitimacy.⁶⁶

Summary

⁶⁴George Ellison, *Deus destroyed. The image of Christianity in early modern Japan* (Cambridge Mass.1973) x.

⁶⁵Kato 1981: 218-221.

⁶⁶Ronald P. Toby, *State and diplomacy in early modern Japan. Asia in the development of the Tokugawa Bakufu* (Stanford Cal.1984) 55.

Looking back on the influence of the Asian history proper on the downfall of the Portuguese 'imperium', Subrahmanyam wrote: 'These third parties often crucially mediated the outcome of even the Luso-Dutch conflict, and while at a global level the Dutch triumph may have had an air of inevitability about it in view of their superior resources and mode of functioning, it was by no means so in a number of specific instances. And had all these instances gone one way rather than the other, this might well have had a decisive influence on the global outcome as well'.⁶⁷

Subrahmanyam must have chosen his words very carefully to come to this kind of understatement. When the Portuguese arrived in Asia they could only set foot on land by the use of cruel force or by negotiation, offering the small local rulers protection or support against their enemies, in exchange for food, water and trade. The *Estado da Índia* which developed from there, lost its grip in the first three decades of the seventeenth century, due to the processes of expansion and state formation that took place under the Moghuls, the Nayaks, the Safavids and the Tokugawas and due to the resurrection of the Sinhalese kingdom in Ceylon. It is therefore not surprising that the serious intrusions into Asia by the English and Dutch took place in the early part of the century, just when and where these changes made themselves felt.

The expansion of the Moghul empire caused changes in the balances of power, which undermined the Portuguese positions on the Indian continent. The Dutch jumped at these opportunities by sending their envoys to the princely courts, offering presents and military support in exchange for the right to establish their trading factories.

But the Moghul expansion caused also shockwaves that went far beyond their actual conquests. The problems of the Portuguese with Bijapur led among others to the establishment of a Dutch factory in Vengurla, which became an essential strategic element in the blockades of Goa, which were deemed necessary for the siege of Malacca and the Dutch conquest of Ceylon.

The local rulers in their turn used the presence and competition of the other Europeans to thwart the Portuguese and to improve their position vis-à-vis their enemies. Due to the English interest in buying their pepper, the Nayaks of Ikkeri could fix higher prices, which was one of the factors that had a negative effect on the profitability of the pepper trade via the *Carreira da Índia*.

Outside India, the failure of the Iberians to lend assistance, even if it were only with money, to Shah Abbas of Persia, who was fighting their arch enemy, the Ottomans, brought him to the other side with the final result that the Portuguese lost Hormuz.

Around the Malay peninsula, the rulers of Atjeh, Johore and Patani played their own political games and had their own wars, for which they sought assistance, either from the Portuguese or the Dutch. Keeping them under control was an illusion and the Portuguese were only lucky that when the Atjehnese attacked Malacca, the sultan of Johore was willing or able to help beat them off.

Finally, there was of course no way that either the Portuguese or the Dutch had any kind of control on the developments in Japan. The Europeans and their trade were totally dependent on the decisions of the *Bakufu*. It was mainly due to the fact that they did not make

⁶⁷ Subrahmanyam 1993: 145.

any effort to convert people and to their diplomatic efforts that the Dutch were finally allowed to maintain a small presence on Deshima. For the Portuguese Jesuits the so-called 'closure' of Japan meant a considerable blow to their missionary activities and for the merchants of Macao the loss of a profitable business. For the revenues of the *Estado da Índia*, though, it was only a minor loss.