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Spice War: Ternate, Makassar, the Dutch East India Company and the struggle for the Ambon Islands (c. 1600-1656)

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IX. The art of the deal (1638)

As Van Diemen's ships approached Makassar on the 22nd of June, the city must have made an imposing sight. Over the last few years, the open war with the VOC had prompted the sultan to embark upon an ambitious project to extend and improve the city's already impressive fortifications, mobilizing great numbers of corvée labourers, and possibly enlisting Portuguese and English advice. Now clearly aimed at protecting the coast and the entrepôt from seaborne attack, these improvements included greatly reinforced walls around the Somba Opu castle and four round bulwarks on the seaside, mounted with heavy guns.

Unsurprisingly, Van Diemen's fleet was not met with a warm welcome: five blood flags were flying from the Makassar forts. Van Diemen himself had a white flag hoisted and fired a salute. The Makasars lowered their blood flags, but otherwise things remained quiet – the salute was not returned, no white flags were hoisted, no envoy sent. All that could be seen from the ships was a great many soldiers rushing into Somba Opu to defend it if necessary. Van Diemen, under the circumstances, was too wary to send anyone ashore, and thus found himself in an uneasy standoff.

An Acehnese embassy also visiting Makassar to present the credentials of the new Acehnese sultan, however, provided an opening the next day. Van Diemen sent a launch to the Acehnese vessel, and the Acehnese envoys agreed to act as go-betweens. Through them, it was established that both parties were willing to reach a peace treaty – Makassar had recently been ravaged by an epidemic and saw nothing to be gained from further conflict.[611]

After the initial overtures back and forth, the Dutch appointed Antonio Caen, one of the principal Company officials on this expedition, as their main envoy, not only because he spoke excellent Malay, but also because the Makasars knew him from his earlier visit as an envoy (see chapter VI) and he had apparently made a good impression. While Sultan Alauddin was present at the negotiations, the Dutch sources indicate the pivotal role in the negotiations of the 'Prince of Tallo', ostensibly merely there to translate but clearly also having substantive input into the negotiations.[612]

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611 Feddersen, 'Principled Pragmatism', 270-275.

612 This could refer to Karaeng Kanjilo, but more likely it refers to Pattingalloang. The former (r. 1623-1641, still advised by his father until the latter's death in 1636) was the son of Karaeng Matoaya, and the older brother of the later chancellor of Gowa,

Fig 9.1 Somba Opu as depicted on a bird's eye view of Makassar by Johannes Vingboons, c. 1665, showing the bulwarks of Somba Opu on the sea side, with the northern part of the city, including the Danish and English lodges, to its left. This watercolour probably shows the Makassar roads as they would have appeared several decades before the image was created. Collection Nationaal Archief, inv nr. VELH 619.97.

In an interesting reversal of established notions about the role of treaties in Asian diplomacy in general, and Makassar in particular, it was Sultan Alauddin rather than Van Diemen who wanted to have an extensive written treaty detailing the provisions of the peace agreement. With the frequent changes of Governors-General, he told the Dutch, verbal arrangements would not be durable enough.[613]

The proactive and canny way in which the Makasars navigated these negotiations, and the implications this has for our ideas about European-Asian diplomacy and treaty making, have been discussed at length elsewhere.[614] For our purposes, the most important demand the Dutch made was that the Makasars would cease their navigation to the 'enemy' territories of Melaka and Western Seram. The Makasars made an interesting counterproposal: under the treaty, the VOC would be free to attack and seize Makasar ships if these were found in these 'unfree waters', without, however, this being a breach of the treaty and cause for war. They thus put the responsibility for enforcing this demand entirely

Pattingalloang. For the latter, see below, chapter XII, paragraph 'affairs of state'. Cummings, *Chain of Kings,* esp. 110.

613 Van Diemen and Council to Directors, 9 December 1637, quoted in Tiele-Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, II, 324.

614 Feddersen, 'Principled Pragmatism', 235-324.

with the VOC. This provision was ultimately put into the treaty.[615] The VOC was furthermore once again allowed to trade in Makassar during the trading season, but had to leave its lodge unoccupied when its ships left, and was prohibited from making war on its enemies, European or otherwise, within the sultan's domain and on the Makassar roads.[616]

Van Diemen himself, although successful in bringing the conflict to an end, did not expect the treaty to last very long; and certainly not while the Ambon itself was still so fractious and unstable.[617] Van Diemen therefore also sought to make another deal: one with Sultan Hamzah, meant to definitively settle all the affairs in the Ambon region. He started preparing to head back out to Ambon in person almost as soon as he had returned to Batavia.

These negotiations have earlier been studied by Gerrit Knaap, who dedicated an article to these negotiations.[618] We will revisit them in some detail here, however, as they are crucial to understanding subsequent developments in the region, and therefore an integral part of the story that this dissertation tries to tell. That is not, however, because they were so successful. While both Hamzah and Van Diemen were mighty pleased when the negotiations were concluded, the new status quo they had agreed upon started unravelling before they had even left the islands.

Quarrelling allies: Sultan Hamzah and the VOC

Sultan Hamzah, as we may remember, had originally been decried by the Dutch as an untrustworthy Spanish creature. In practice, he had turned out to be a keen politician sailing his own course, rather than bow to the will of either the Spanish or the Dutch. He managed to play the two European powers against each other while shoring up his relations with the court of Tidore, increasing his own influence and freeing his hands to see to his own centralizing policies.[619] Meanwhile, he hardly gave his Dutch allies an easy time of it. In letter after letter, he

615 Ibid., 279-280.

616 Van Diemen's report of the negotiations, including the final treaty, in *Dagh-register Batavia*, 1637, 280-284.

617 Van Diemen and Council to Directors, 9 December 1637, quoted in *Bouwstoffen*, II, 324.

618 Gerrit Knaap, 'The Governor-General and the Sultan: an attempt to restructure a divided Amboina in 1638', *Itinerario* 29 (2005): 79–100 .

619 For a general assessment of his style of rule and his centralizing policies, see Andaya, *World of Maluku,* 159-163.

aired his annoyance at Company demands concerning the war with the Spanish in the region, while the Company itself was always too preoccupied elsewhere. He noted with frustration that the escalating conflict with Makassar, which the Dutch could not be bothered to help him fight outside the Ambon Islands, was eating away at his domains: 'For how shall this be? When we were maintaining our state on our own, without the Hollanders, we flourished, and now that we are allied with the Hollanders our peoples and lands are taken from us by others.'[620] Should the Dutch persist in failing to hold up their end of the bargain and pawn him off with idle promises, he delicately reminded them on one occasion, he might also be able to procure weapons from the enemies and rivals of the company, be it the Spanish, Javanese, Malays or the Makasars.[621]

All the same, the Dutch had rather warmed up to Hamzah, as they found that having a strong-willed and capable ally certainly also had its upsides. Whereas his predecessor Muzaffar had been far more malleable to the wishes of the Dutch, he had also lacked real power over his own subjects. While, under Muzaffar, it had often basically been the Dutch holding the Ternaten domains together, Hamzah's heavy-handed centralizing policies turned the tables: now, subjects of the sultan often clamoured to the Dutch for protection from their overbearing sultan. This put the Dutch in the comfortable position of having an ally who kept his domains and subjects under control, with them being able to balance the sultan and his subjects against each other when it suited them.[622] In addition, this gave the Dutch some hope that Hamzah might actually be able to turn things around in the part of his outer domains they were most concerned with: the clove-producing regions on and around Hoamoal.

Hamzah had offered to come to the Amboina Quarter himself to set things straight there more than once – lastly in his letter to Van Diemen of May 1637 mentioned in the last chapter. Van Diemen was the first to take him up on his offer, inviting him to come to the Amboina Quarter early next year. Hamzah accepted on the condition that they would also come to an agreement with respect to those areas that the sultan felt were historically his domains. These basically comprised all of the Muslim areas of the Ambon Islands - included Hitu and the

620 Sultan Hamzah to Governor-General Brouwer, Hamzah, 11 July 1634, in *Bouwstoffen,* II, 251.

621 Sultan Hamzah to Governor-General Specx, 10 August 1631, in *Bouwstoffen,* II, 194.

622 For an enlightening example, see the attempted coup against Hamzah, and the way the Dutch navigated it, as described in Van Lodensteyn to Governor-General Jacques Specx, 7 April 1631 in *Bouwstoffen,* II, 189-192.

southern parts of the Lease Islands.[623] Hamzah apparently saw an opportunity to kill two birds with one stone: shoring up his power over Hoamoal, where the overtuires of kimelaha Leliato towards Makassar were a genuine cause for concern, and expand his influence in the archipelago. Van Diemen, seeing the mutual benefit, was not ill-disposed towards such an arrangement.[624]

Thus, on the 20th of January 1638, Van Diemen once again sailed east at the head of a large fleet, to meet with the sultan of Ternate. It was to be a momentous occasion – not only had no Ternaten sultan visited the Ambon region in living memory; it was also the first meeting between a Ternaten sultan and a governor-general since Laurens Reael had used Ternate as his residence twenty years earlier.[625] The extant full journal of the expedition provides important insights, particularly into the motivations of the various parties involved in the scramble for control over the region.

Waiting for the king

On his way out to the Ambon islands, Van Diemen first called at the Butonese capital again for another attempt at retribution. Trying to profit from the element of surprise this time, he immediately disembarked a force of 1225 men upon arrival on the 3rd of February. Making use of local guides, the troops tried a different approach up the hill, bringing siege ladders. The ultimate result of their effort, however, was much the same as before – the Company troops made it up until right beneath the walls of the town, but saw no way forward from there, and retreated. Van Diemen then exacted his revenge on the surroundings of the town, destroying small villages, coconut groves, vessels and fish fences further up the coast and on the islands in the strait. After several days of such raids, VOC troops briefly managed to set up a battery slightly to the east of the town, and in spite of heavy Butonese return fire, managed to lob a few mortars into the walled town. After that, they packed and left, and by the 10th, after a week of terrorizing

623 Neither of these letters has apparently survived, but their content is summarized in Van Diemen and Council to Directors, 9 December 1637, quoted in *Bouwstoffen*, II, 325-327.

624 Van Diemen and Council to Directors, 9 December 1637, quoted in *Bouwstoffen*, II, 326.

625 The only written reference to a visit of a Ternaten Sultan to the region is in the *Hikayat Tanah Hitu*: see Ridjali, *Historie van Hitu,* 42 and 117-118. This episode has been tentatively dated at 1545; the last meeting between a Sultan of Ternate and a Governor-General of the VOC was in 1618, when Governor-General Laurens Reael held residence in Ternate and had regular interactions with Sultan Muzaffar.

the Butonese coast, the fleet was on its way again.[626] It anchored in the Bay of Ambon two weeks later.[627]

There was as yet no sign of Sultan Hamzah. Van Diemen decided to make the best of his time: after conferring with governor Ottens and receiving delegates from the region for a few days, he sailed off to visit and inspect Banda. He was received with much pomp and ceremony there, took a grand tour through the islands, and had the good fortune of being there just as the English ship *Pearl* arrived in the islands from Makassar for another attempt at retaking the island of Run. The English commander, John Hunter, was bewildered to find his efforts curtailed by none other than the Dutch governor-general himself, and eventually left the islands empty-handed.[628] By the 10th of April, after spending a full month in Banda, Van Diemen was back in the Ambon Islands - at the Hituese coast, as adverse winds prevented the fleet from running into the Bay of Ambon.

Being at Hitu was just as well, as its status was high on the agenda of the upcoming meeting. But things looked worrisome. Before Van Diemen had left for Banda, most of the communities on Ambon and the Lease Islands had come to pay their respects and bring gifts to the governor-general. The Hituese perdanas, however, had initially stayed away, only making their appearance one week later – and then, according to Wouter van Seroijen, the Dutch resident at Ureng, only to see what they could learn about Dutch intentions. Kakiali had not been part of the delegation, sending his cordial greetings to the governor-general but regretfully unable to greet him in person as 'the fatigue from wearing a chain for so long prevented him from doing so.'[629] That, at least, left little to be desired in terms of clarity. More surprising, and in some ways more concerning to the Dutch, was that the perdana Tanihitumesen, the great ally of the Dutch who had been given the title of 'perdana tua' last year, had similarly been absent from that first delegation, only coming to visit the next day with a small retinue of his own. The relations between the Tanihitumesen family and the other three ruling

626 Full report of the campaign against Buton in VOC 1126, fol 385v – 395r.

627 For an overview of what had happened in the months before Van Diemen's arrival, see Knaap, ' The Governor-General and the Sultan', 81-84.

628 Report of Van Diemen's visit, 6 March – 8 April 1638, in: VOC 1126, fol 403r-.416v. While he was in the islands, Van Diemen also saw a huge 24-foot python who had swallowed an enslaved woman whole and had subsequently been killed by VOC soldiers. (409r, 25 March.) Somewhat surprisingly, this was the only event in the entire expedition that the clerk deemed worthy of noting in the margin of the report.

629 Report of Van Diemen's visit, 5 March 1638, in: VOC 1126, fol 402r.

families had soured to such a degree that they were no longer willing to form a delegation together. This worried Van Diemen, who remarked that the loyalty of the perdana Tanihitumesen was, perhaps, 'a little too fierce', putting internal relations within Hitu on edge and therefore hampering his efforts to come to an understanding with Kakiali.[630]

Now after his return, and upon receiving another Hituese delegation from which Kakiali was similarly absent on account of a 'bad foot', Van Diemen decided to send a delegation up to him, seeing what he could learn about Kakiali's disposition. The opportunity to have a good look at the Wawani fort, which 'was of great repute', was an added bonus. Wouter van Seroyen headed the delegation. After making it up to the fort, he was welcomed in by Kakiali, and somewhat surprised to discover that the latter did in fact have an infected wound to his foot. Kakiali was presented with some gifts, and, becoming less reserved, told Van Seroyen that, admittedly, there were some additional reasons for his continued absence. Bad rumours had been spread, most notably by the perdana Tanihitumesen, about him smuggling cloves and bringing a force of Alfurs to Hitu. His friends and allies had warned him that the Dutch would once again arrest him if he came down. And he was still aggrieved about the title of 'orangkaya tua' bestowed upon the perdana Tanihitumesen, a move which undermined his own position and which had not been up to the Company in the first place. Now that the Dutch had come up with gifts and shown their good will, however, he promised he would happily come down to them soon. On that reassuring note, the Dutch delegation took its leave, subsequently also informing the governor-general that the fort itself had not quite lived up to its reputation, being made of loose piled-up coral stone, and defended by only seven swivel guns.[631]

While Van Diemen tried to come to an understanding with Kakiali, Hamzah's continued absence was increasing tensions within the region. When word of his impending visit had first spread through the islands, Van Diemen and Ottens had had to send out instructions to their subjects and allies to curb their enthusiasm and please not yet ready their kora-kora until the sultan had actually arrived.[632] Leliato, for his part, had scrambled to prepare, having a large and monumental *baileu* built at Kambelo, and mustering his hongi. Now, more than one-and-a-half months later, the initial elation and startled surprise had

630 'al te heftich', Report of Van Diemen's visit, 6 March 1638, in: VOC 1126, fol 402v.
631 Report of Van Diemen's visit, 26 April 1638, in: VOC 1126, fol 422r-v.
632 Report of Van Diemen's visit, 5-6 March 1638, in: VOC 1126, fol 402r-v.

made way for anxiety and a grim tension. Leliato, presumably on a hunch that the coming visit of his sultan and the governor-general might end badly for him, had started fortifying the coastline of Kambelo against a possible Dutch attack. Makasar and Javanese vessels had started coming in in the meantime, bolstering the forces of the kimelaha and bringing some 230 muskets, among other arms and ammunition.[633] The inhabitants of Lesidi and Luhu, the friends of the Dutch on the Hoamoal peninsula, began to despair of Sultan Hamzah still coming to the islands at all, and watched Leliato's fortification efforts with increasing concern.[634]

Then, however, word of Hamzah arrived. He had not been able to leave Ternate until late March, due to strong opposition in the Ternaten Council of the Realm against this whole venture. The fleet had subsequently faced adverse weather and various other setbacks, but eleven of the sultan's kora-kora, in the presence of one Dutch ship, were now off Manipa and making their way to Kambelo. Van Diemen directed his fleet north to meet him there.[635]

The meeting of two rulers

The sultan kept the Dutch waiting for a few more days, which added to the tense and awkward situation. Van Diemen's fleet was already anchored off Kambelo, with the foreign traders still present, their vessels hoisted up behind the makeshift fortifications, and the kimelaha asking the Dutch to please refrain from coming ashore until the sultan was finally there.[636]

By the 4th of May, however, the sultan's hongi finally arrived before Kambelo, and the sultan promptly set up camp slightly to the north, where a house was

633 This, the Dutch were told, happened without the blessing of the sultan of Gowa, with whom the Dutch had recently concluded their peace treaty, but the 'Prince of Tallo', who had been so crucial in formulating that treaty, was in on it.

634 Report of Van Diemen's visit, 22 April 1638, in: VOC 1126, fol 420r.

635 Report of Van Diemen's visit, 27 April 1638, in: VOC 1126, fol 423r.

636 An attempt at contact over this period did allow the Dutch to have a look at the defenses that had been erected on shore to protect the vessels of the traders. These are described as a 3,5 feet high stone wall filled with earth and topped with sharp bamboos, flanked by two small bulwarks on the side. This sounds like the same basic layout as the makeshift fortifications Philip Lucasz found himself confronted with at Kambelo eight years earlier. (See above, chapter VII, paragraph 'A standoff.) The same entry also contains a list of the foreign vessels present, including the names of their captains. Report of Van Diemen's visit, 29 April 1638, in: VOC 1126, fol 424r-.425v;

swiftly built for him. Salutes were fired from the Dutch ships, and later that day, the sultan, with an impressive retinue including the former sultan of Tidore and the sultan of Jailolo, was festively received on board Van Diemen's ship, presented with gifts of golden necklaces and Chinese gold, and led to the great cabin of the ship which had been adorned with tapestries for the occasion.[637]

As they sat down, the sultan told Van Diemen that he had long looked forward to this moment, but was unable to hide his concern that Van Diemen might use the occasion to kill or capture him. Van Diemen jovially told him that that was not why they had both come to the region. His Majesty, however, immediately announced that he was tired from the journey and wished to retire back to his camp. The real talking would have to wait until the next day. That evening, the Dutch witnessed from their ships how the people of Kambelo and Lesidi came parading to the sultan's quarters, carrying flags, bringing gifts, exercising with their weapons and performing the *cakalele*, the traditional Malukan martial dance.

Hamzah returned to the ship the next day, and he and Van Diemen got down to business. The governor-general started off with a long speech about the history of the conflict in the region – how the local leaders in Hoamoal had disregarded the contracts, and how Dutch attempts to enforce them had led to 'bloodshed on both sides', which had worked to the benefit of Makassar, eating away at Ternaten influence both in Hoamoal and elsewhere. So it was great that Hamzah was here to assert his power over the region and keep the foreign traders out – and what better place to start than the rabble currently holed up in Kambelo? Let's see to that immediately, Van Diemen briskly suggested. Let's call for the kimelaha and the captains of the foreign vessels to come on board here, immediately arrest them and burn their vessels! Hamzah, while in agreement about the root of the problem, was less enthusiastic about Van Diemen's proposed solution - arresting the lot on board Van Diemen's flagship might make the wrong impression on his subjects. He did, however, order the kimelaha to tear down the extra defences along the shoreline. By then, the kora-kora of the communities of Ambon and the Lease islands had also found their way to Kambelo to formally pay their respects to both the sultan and governor-general, and the next day was

637 At the time, Jailolo, a bone of contention between Tidore and Ternate, had become affiliated with Ternate. The former Sultan of Tidore was Ngarolamo, who had lost the throne to another contender, Gorontalo, and then taken refuge in Ternate with his family. His daughter was wed to Sultan Hamzah. Tiele-Heeres, *Bouwstoffen,* II, 283pp.

duly spent with festivities and ceremony. Meanwhile, the Dutch noted that no effort to tear down the forts was actually underway.

By the 8th of May, it became increasingly obvious that Hamzah and Van Diemen had come to the meeting with rather different priorities. That morning, Hamzah sent two delegates and a translator, who informed Van Diemen that the sultan had no desire to come to the ship that day. That whole affair about the smugglers had surely been satisfactorily dealt with by now, and he would like to move on to discussing his claim to overlordship over parts of the region. For those talks, considering all the orangkaya involved, the cabin of the ship was certainly too small and they should be held on land, in his camp.

Van Diemen, outraged by this 'absurd and entirely unexpected message', sent a furious reply: absolutely nothing had been done about the foreign traders and other matters they had previously discussed, and he would not entertain any of the sultan's claims before this had been seen to.[638] The delegates relayed the rather brusque message, so embarrassed that, according to the Dutch officers who went along, they had the translator do most of the talking. While putting the sultan in a 'grim mood', it did have the intended effect: Hamzah immediately sent word to Leliato that if the coastal defences were not torn down right away, Hamzah would join forces with the Dutch and do it for him. Work on tearing them down started the same day, and two Dutch defectors were turned over the next, providing valuable information when interrogated. Most prominently, they informed Van Diemen that a great many foreign traders were actually hiding in the archipelago, shipping weapons and trade goods to Kambelo in smaller vessels. Among them, they reported, was a nachoda called Ince Seliman, who was bringing Leliato two iron cannon, a thousand cannonballs and the English gunpowder to go with it, with the compliments of the sultan of Gowa – which cannot have left Van Diemen very hopeful about the effect of the recent treaty. In fact, Leliato was currently so well-armed that the defectors expected he might be prepared to stand up to the Dutch and the sultan both, if the latter forced the situation with the traders.[639]

These traders, meanwhile, were still in Kambelo, and were turning out to be a difficult matter. While Van Diemen was eager to arrest the lot and burn their ships, Hamzah was concerned that such a course of action, particularly if it looked like the Dutch were doing it with his blessing, might alienate his own

638 Report of Van Diemen's visit, 8 May 1638, in: VOC 1126, fol 431r-v.
639 Report of Van Diemen's visit, 9 May 1638, in: VOC 1126, fol 432.

subjects from him, create 'general confusion' among them and be detrimental to their goals of regaining some control over the peninsula. As if to illustrate the point, the traders were once again threatening to run amok among the inhabitants of Kambelo if anything was undertaken against them. Van Diemen and Hamzah made a compromise: the traders could leave unharmed if they allowed their vessels to be searched for cloves and would obtain a pass from Van Diemen's flagship before departure. Nothing came of it. The traders, citing necessary repairs to their ships, and their people having partially retreated inland to the nearby fortified hill settlement of Masili, wanted a month respite before leaving. Only two small vessels dared to come to the Dutch fleet for a pass and left. The rest remained holed up in and around Kambelo. However Van Diemen tried, the foreign traders, a force of their own as always, did not budge. [640]

Van Diemen did use the tensions around this situation to pressure Hamzah into arresting both kimelaha. It actually worked: on the 12th of May, Hamzah reported that he had both kimelaha in his custody, and requested two companies of VOC soldiers to be brought to his camp to help ensure that no-one would try to bust them out.

By the 14th, Hamzah exasperatedly let Van Diemen know that the foreign traders continued to ignore his orders and that he now saw no other way of bringing them to heel than by military means. He had told the remaining women and children in Kambelo to evacuate inland to Masili. That was all Van Diemen needed to hear. He started preparing for an attack on Kambelo. Hamzah got cold feet almost immediately and tried to 'put a spoke in the wheel', telling van Diemen that there was still the risk of the traders causing bloodshed, which might lead to a general uprising of his people. Van Diemen, for his part, harboured the sneaking suspicion that this volte-face of the sultan had more to do with the traders having 'filled his pockets'. He ignored the sultan's pleas and continued his preparations.[641]

On the 16th, under continued protests from Hamzah, ten companies of Dutch soldiers, a hundred sailors with torches and other incendiary equipment, and an unnamed number of Mardijkers, Bandanese, Ambonese and slaves, landed at Kambelo. They occupied the town, established a perimeter and then, after a signal from the fleet, proceeded to put everything to the torch. Over 200 houses

640 Report of Van Diemen's visit, 12 May 1638, in: VOC 1126, fol 437r-v.

641 Report of Van Diemen's visit, 15 May 1638, in: VOC 1126, fol 439v-440r. 'Filled his pockets' is actually 'de handen gevult.'

and 50 vessels were destroyed. Armed foreign traders and locals hurled protests and insults at the troops from the surrounding area, uttering their outrage that the Dutch got away with this under the eyes of the sultan, who had surely not ordered this attack. Whereas they did not attack 'except with the mouth', blood flags were flying from the indigenous forts further inland and tifa drums could be heard from them. By four in the afternoon, the town lay in ashes and the Company troops re-embarked.[642]

In the following days it would still come to open clashes, as the foreign traders came to vent their anger at the company troops still guarding the kimelaha onshore, taunting them until a group of soldiers had had enough and gave pursuit up the hill behind the sultan's camp. The ensuing confrontation escalated into a firefight, which prompted the Dutch to go fully on the offensive the next day, and attempt to fight their way up to the well-defended hill fortification of Masili, which proved almost unassailable. The Company troops then began to set up a battery to burn Masili to set it ablaze with firebombs, but this plan was stopped short: the fleet was moving out to Hitu for the negotiations about Hamzah's claims.

The deal: on paper...

The day after the Company's destruction of Kambelo, Hamzah had sent a note to Van Diemen in which, in addition to uttering his disappointment about how things had gone down there, he asked if they could now please get on with discussing his claims to Hitu, Lease and other parts of the region. Van Diemen, who was, in turn, disappointed with the sultan, and was getting the impression that he had the upper hand, answered that he intended to move his fleet to Hitu, and that he would be happy to discuss any matters there. Making the crossing to Hitu in the increasingly rough seas was a problem for the sultan, whose vessels had been badly battered by the outward journey, but he agreed, if Van Diemen would please allow him a few days to patch up his fleet. Also, would Van Diemen mind if kimelaha Luhu was now released from his custody? Van Diemen replied that that would be fine if Leliato would be handed over to him for now. The latter was promptly delivered to Van Diemen's ship. Van Diemen set sail to Hitu the next day.[643]

642 Report of Van Diemen's visit, 15 May 1638, in: VOC 1126, fol 439v-440r.

643 The short trip took several days due to adverse winds, and Van Diemen arrived on the 26th of May.

Van Diemen had a couple of days to see to the affairs in the region before Hamzah would catch up. His first priority was to make sure that Kakiali would actually come to the meeting. He sent another delegation up to Wawani. Playing both sides, he had Kakiali informed that Sultan Hamzah was going to make a claim to the overlordship of Hitu, and that if Kakiali felt this claim was unwarranted, he had better come down to the meeting. Kakiali told the delegate that they had, perhaps, fallen under the sultan of Ternate long ago, and were on good terms with him, but had been independent for as long as they could remember. Other Hituese orangkaya told the Dutch as much over the following days. The sultan's claim of having been the overlord of Hitu until 1605 certainly held no stock in their eyes.

On the 5th of June, the sultan arrived – on a fleet that was rather more impressive than the 11 battered kora-kora Van Diemen had left behind at Kambelo. In the meantime, kora-kora from the entire Ternaten realm had come in - from Sula, Banggai, Makian, Buru, and Hoamoal and the surrounding islands themselves – so that the fleet now consisted of 44 vessels, carrying 4000 men, of which 1500 were bearing arms. Hamzah was asserting his claim on the region with a show of might and power.[644]

The ceremony and festivities with which the sultan was welcomed to Hitu were not only noted in Dutch sources, but also extensively described by Rijali in the *Hikayat Tanah Hitu*, testifying to the weight of the occasion:

> Then, His Majesty departed [from Kambelo] to the land of Hitu with the Hollanders. All the communities came out to honour him. All this was done entirely according to the law and custom of the land: there were those who carried weapons and marched in line, there were those only walking along, there were those carrying fine foods, there were those carrying valuables. The royal parasol of His Majesty Sultan Hamzah – victor thanks to God, the King, Shadow of God on earth – was accompanied by music. All of the Ambon region assembled to pay their respect.[645]

Rijali's report of the subsequent meetings, however, remembers the outcome of

644 A full list of the vessels and their origins in: Report of Van Diemen's visit, 5 June 1638, in: VOC 1126, fol 454v-455r.

645 Rijali, *Historie van Hitu,* 179-181. Note that 'communities' is a translation of *negeri*, and that 'laws and customs' is a translation of *adat*.

the negotiations rather differently than we know them. According to Rijali, the sultan, upon hearing that Kakiali could not attend the meeting, and that none of the participants had copies of the original treaties with the Dutch on hand, declared that under those circumstances, he could not come to a decision on any pact with Hitu, and left the region without having reached any kind of agreement.[646] Rijali's notion of a pact, rather than a tributary relationship, is in line with his general description of the relation between Hitu and Ternate as an alliance on equal footing.[647] That, however, was not how Hamzah saw it.

The first few days after the sultan's arrival were spent waiting for several more delegates from throughout the region. Not everyone was apparently willing to come. The Muslim communities of the Lease Islands, presumably aware of what the sultan was trying to do and less than thrilled, sent word that they would like to keep it at the agreements made last year, when, during the *landdag,* Kaicili Sibori had tactfully evaded any concrete statement on the status of Hatuhaha and Ihamahu.[648] Even more important to the legitimacy of the proceedings was, of course, Kakiali's presence. The latter had apparently only learned of kimelaha Leliato's arrest and captivity after the arrival of Sultan Hamzah. Understandably, this did not allay his mistrust of the intentions of Hamzah and the Dutch, and he sent word that he would only come down if Leliato was released. When Hamzah and Van Diemen subsequently sent a heavy Dutch-Hituese delegation up to him, threatening him with war unless he came down within two days, Kakiali, annoyed at what he considered a grave overreaction, told them alright, he would come down, but subsequently let the deadline pass. Hamzah and Van Diemen, rather than making good on their threat, decided to just go ahead without him.[649]

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646 Rijali, *Historie van Hitu,* 181-184. The word Rijali uses is 'perjanjian', which can also have the more narrow meaning of 'treaty'.

647 See the excellent analysis in the introduction to the Hikayat: Rijali, *Historie van Hitu,* 77.

648 He had stated that it was the wish of the sultan that these communities were obedient to the Governor of Ambon rather than the kimelaha. Knaap, 'Crisis and failure', 18. also see last chapter, paragraph 'Van Diemen's intervention'.

649 Saliently, the delegation consisted of the perdana's *except* for the perdana Tanihitumesen who, considering the discord between the two, feared for his head if he would go along. Some Dutch delegates were also present. Hamzah felt slighted afterwards, as the delegation had left without him being informed, which had robbed him of the chance to send someone from his own retinue along. Report of Van Diemen's visit, 9-10 June 1638, in: VOC 1126, fol 457r-458r.

On the 12th, then, in a specially prepared pavilion near the VOC's redoubt at Hitu, the proceedings began in earnest. In the middle of a wooden enclosure, a newly built *baileu* gave room to the representatives. Around it, sheltered from the rain and sun by tent canvases spanned overhead, stood Dutch soldiers, their weapons at the ready. Under the palmleaf roof of the *baileu* gathered the governor-general and other VOC officials, the heads of the communities of Ambon and Lease, both the VOC's subjects and the rest, 'all except the Kapitan Hitu, those of Kapahaha, and those of Iha, Mahu and Hatuhaha.'[650] Then, Sultan Hamzah arrived, with all his dignitaries, and escorted by a thousand armed men. Everyone sat down. The proceedings could begin.

Sultan Hamzah spoke first, telling the gathered leaders that he had not only come to see to the issues with the foreign traders, but also to resolve the disputes over certain territories that existed between him and the Company. He yielded to kimelaha Luhu, who referred to the existing treaties, but told the meeting that, unfortunately, his own copy of the treaty with Van der Hagen was still in Ternate, and that Leliato's copy had been destroyed in the attack on Lesiela. Kakiali supposedly also had a copy, but he was not here.[651] While they were all there to solve a historic dispute, and acknowledged that the treaties should form the basis of such a solution, no copies were apparently at hand. [652]

So the sultan simply asked the Hituese perdanas. These, apparently shying away from open argument with His Majesty, professed their ignorance of the whole matter, and referred the question back to kimelaha Luhu. From there, the meeting apparently devolved into bickering over the exact divisions of the various spheres of influence along the Seramese coast. The representatives of Luhu and the other clove-producing polities on Hoamoal used the opportunity to make a case for a higher clove price, which Van Diemen parried with the usual argument about the costs of 'protecting' their allies by maintaining forts and garrisons – costs that the 'undercutters' from Makassar and Java did not have to make. The meeting was adjourned, to be resumed in two days. In the meantime, the sultan conferred with some of the local leaders to become better informed about the extent of his domains.

When the meeting reconvened, Hamzah had apparently learned what he

650 Report of Van Diemen's visit, 9-12 June 1638, in: VOC 1126, fol 457r (description of the pavilion) and fol. 459r (first real day of the proceedings).

651 Rijali adds that Kakiali's copy had been lost during his captivity and the troubles in Hitu. Rijali, *Historie van Hitu*, 181-184.

652 Report of Van Diemen's visit, 12 June 1638, in: VOC 1126, fol 458v-460v.

wanted to know, and confidently proclaimed himself ruler of Hitu. None of the Hituese leaders demurred. The sultan then went on to claim that the Muslim villages on Hitu's west side were also part of his domain. These villages were not part of Hitu but officially resorted under the rule of the Company. The sultan's claim was backed up by the *orangkaya* of Ureng, one of these communities, which, it may be remembered, had sided against the Dutch in the recent troubles in Hitu. Van Diemen, less squeamish about standing up to the sultan, would have none of it. Hitu's west corner had always resorted under the Dutch. The discussion became increasingly heated.

As this specific dispute dragged on into the next day, something unsettling happened. Just as a tropical rainstorm came pooring down, rendering the muskets of the Dutch soldiers unusable, some seven or eight hundred armed Ternatens came storming into the pavilion, dragging part of the flimsy wooden enclosure with them. The startled Dutch demanded to know what this was all about, but Hamzah immediately tried to set them at ease, telling the Dutch that this was merely his escort back to his kora-kora, and ordering the armed men to leave the pavilion. They hesitatingly did so, but then stormed right back in, tearing down more of the enclosure in the process. Hamzah, overseeing the situation, decided it was probably best to call it a day, and went back to his kora-kora, leading the men away. We may speculate that Hamzah, or someone, had resolved to use force if his claims to Hitu's west corner were ignored, and then thought better of it, but there is no way to tell. The Duch were completely in the dark about what had just happened, and no sources provide us with insights from the Ternaten side.[653]

The next day, no meeting was held, and the Hituese perdana used the opportunity to privately confer with Van Diemen, telling him that they were unhappy with how things had gone down: they did not historically fall under Ternate, but out of awe for the sultan, not to mention the considerable military force he had arrived with, had not dared to speak up in the meetings. Oh, that was a problem, Van Diemen told them. The deal was already done! How could he possibly renege on it, now that they themselves had accepted his claims while in session? Had they but spoken up, he would have been happy to assist them, but there was little he could do now.

This might give us pause to come to a more general assessment of what had happened. Even before sailing to the Ambon region, Van Diemen had informed

653 Report of Van Diemen's visit, 15 June 1638, in: VOC 1126, fol 461v-462r.

the directors that he would be happy to restitute parts of the region to Ternate, to improve the working relationship with Hamzah and in recognition of his assistance with regard to the kimelaha and the foreign traders in Hoamoal. Even though he then found this assistance slightly underwhelming, his actions do seem to have been based on such a *quid pro quo* – discussing the status of Hitu was contingent upon arresting the kimelaha and getting rid of the foreign traders. When the status of Hitu was subsequently discussed, there was a general understanding among the participants of the meeting that the division between the Dutch and the Ternaten sphere of influence had been established in a treaty with Van der Hagen – but no one had thought to bring a copy.

The treaty they referred to is presumably the one concluded in February 1605 between Steven van der Hagen on the one hand, and the perdanas and Kapitan Hitu on the other, in the wake of the conquest of Portuguese-ruled Ambon.[654] That treaty contains no reference to Ternate at all, and Hitu is treated as a separate polity, which swears loyalty to the States-General and the Governor of Ambon in recognition of their help in getting rid of the Portuguese. Even if we cast our net wider and consider all the treaties involving either Ternate, Hitu or Hoamoal up to 1609, we do not find any clear references to Hitu being a Ternaten tributary. Rather, these treaties show that the Dutch had consistently treated Hitu as a separate and independent political entity.[655] If the sultan of Ternate was seeking proof of his claims, the treaties with the Dutch were the wrong place go

654 Included in *Corpus Diplomaticum,* XIV, 31-33. Note that the footnote there calls the Kapitan Hitu a representative of the sultan of Ternate, but its references concern either the post-1638 period or the period of the first Dutch expeditions to Asia, when the Dutch were indeed under the impression that Hitu was a tributary to Ternate.

655 *Corpus Diplomaticum,* V, VI (12-14) and XIV (31-33, already considered above) are the treaties with Hitu of 1600, 1601 and 1605, all of them treating Hitu as an independent polity. XXII, with Ternate (1607), 51-53, and its confirmation in a new treaty in 1609 (XXVIII, 61-65) lists the tributaries of Ternate without referring to Hitu. XXVI and XXVII, 58-61 (with the various polities of the island of Haruku, including Hatuhaha, 1609, and with Rumahkai, on Seram, respectively), likewise makes no reference of Ternate and instead assert that these polities had resorted under the Portuguese before and therefore now fell under the VOC. XXXII, 70-72 (1609), is especially insightful, as this treaty was concluded with both Hitu and the various polities of Hoamoal. It refers to the sultan of Ternate as being in the position of determining the clove price for all of these areas. Whereas a footnote in *Corpus Diplomaticum* (72n1) once again marks this as evidence that Hitu fell under the sultan, the more likely explanation is that Hitu and Ternate were allies and had historically coordinated in matters such as these. Cf. Rijali, *Historie van Hitu,* esp. 36-44.

look for it. As discussed in chapter II, Hitu, while allied to Ternate and periodically working together with the sultan against the Portuguese, was certainly not a tributary the way that Hoamoal and the surrounding islands were.[656]

Whatever we may think of the fact that none of the indigenous participants to the negotiations apparently had a copy of the treaty at their disposal; it seems very unlikely that no copy of the treaty would have been available to Van Diemen and Ottens, and not bringing those up for the negotiations would thus have been a conscious choice. This reinforces the impression that, rather than this having any real historical or legal basis, this was simply power politics, a trade-off between Hamzah and Van Diemen.

In any case, the negotiations were nearing their conclusion. When the meeting reconvened on the 18th, Hamzah had apparently relinquished his claims on the villages on Hitu's west side. Several communities once again tried to renegotiate the clove price with Van Diemen, which the latter once again ignored. A golden *kris* with rubies was presented to the sultan by Van Diemen. Many more gifts for him and the other dignitaries that had come to the meeting were to follow over the next few days.[657]

A final small matter that Hamzah and Van Diemen discussed privately as the meeting was concluded, was what was to happen with Leliato. Sultan Hamzah asked Van Diemen to return Leliato to his custody, so he could put him on public trial in Ternate, as an example to his subjects and dignitaries. Van Diemen, however, had a counterproposal. He would like to take Leliato with him to Batavia, show him to the Council of the Indies and then send him on to Ternate if Hamzah so desired. This was acceptable to Hamzah. We may assume that some motives remained unuttered: Van Diemen would rather keep control of Leliato to make sure he did not end up being set free for one reason or another, to then find his way back to Hoamoal. Hamzah had to consider how it would look if Van Diemen took one of his high officials to Batavia and did his dirty work for him. Incidentally, Van Diemen would never actually send Leliato to Ternate - he would remain a prisoner in Batavia until 1643, when he was executed there with the blessing of the sultan.

By the 20th, of June, the text of the treaty was finalized. In it, Hamzah prom-

656 See e.g. Van Fraassen, 'Ternate, de Molukken en de Indische archipel', esp. Ch. 3; Ridjali, *Historie van Hitu,* esp. pp. 36-44.

657 Report of Van Diemen's visit, 18-20 June 1638, in: VOC 1126, fol 463r-465r and 472r-473v contain various lists of the gifts.

ised to take all Ternaten dignitaries and their families back to Ternate, leaving none on Hoamoal. The foreign traders could only come with a pass and trade at the places where the Dutch had a fortification. The sultan's existing domains were confirmed, and added to them were Hitu, as well as Seram (without further specification), Ihamahu and Hatuhaha. The latter are interesting as their leaders had declined to join the meeting. The Dutch governor would be authorized to collect the sultan's tribute in the region, and then send it on to Ternate. Additionally, the sultan had an added yearly bonus of 4000 rials of eight to look forward to if the monopoly actually held, but would not receive it if the foreign traders kept coming, giving him a considerable financial stake in the matter. The treaty would later be ratified in Ternate, in the presence of the Council of the Realm. This, it is worth emphasizing, was purely a deal between Van Diemen and Hamzah; none of the political leaders of the regions now being put under Ternaten rule were signatories to it.[658]

... and in reality

Van Diemen, declining an invitation by Hamzah to join him in Ternate (but sending two ships there and promising more substantial reinforcements from now on), set sail to Batavia the next day. Hamzah, it would seem, was more than pleased with the agreement. Van Diemen himself was not too unhappy either, and later wrote the directors that they could 'rest assured with regard to the affairs in Ambon'. He hoped and trusted that, after the violence and destruction of the past few years had made the Dutch extremely hated in the region, a more moderate course would be possible from now on.[659]

It seems, however, Van Diemen's optimism and Hamzah's satisfaction were not as warranted as they thought. Hamzah, in particular, whose arrival in the islands had been such a source of prestige, so highly anticipated and celebrated, seems to have made a rather bad impression by his subsequent political manoeuvrings. The arrest and extradition of Leliato, the burning of Kambelo, and the way in which large swaths of the Ambon region had been ceded to the sultan

658 *Corpus Diplomaticum,* CXXVII, 316-324 contains the text, as does Valentijn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën*, II.2, 119-122 and VOC 1126, fol. 467r-471v, with slight variations between them. The report does not mention the contract being signed at the time, but just its 'overhandingh', with the actual siging later taking place in Ternate in the presence of the Council.

659 Van Diemen and Council to directors, 22 December 1638, in: Tiele-Heeres, *Bouwstoffen,* II, 344.

without their consent, had created no small amount of resentment in the islands. Hamzah learned this soon enough; staying on in the Ambon Islands after Van Diemen had left, he noticed that all his newly acquired tributaries resisted the new arrangements to some degree. Another attempt to get Kakiali to come down and confirm the new treaty failed. The communities around the bend of Kaibobo absconded to the mountains rather than pay the new tribute which the sultan tried to impose on them, and sought to make a pact against him with Ihamahu, which was also less than thrilled about the new arrangements. Perhaps more surprisingly to the sultan, his subjects in Hoamoal were also less than cooperative. As the sultan's hongi made its way back north in early August, he found that the inhabitants of Kambelo as well as the foreign traders were still holed up in Masili, unwilling to either come down to the sultan or let him come up. Among them was kimelaha Luhu, who was certainly not planning to come along to Ternate, and seems to have basically entrenched himself in Leliato's old position, belying Hamzah's earlier impression that he had him under control. The sultan, rather than appointing a rival kimelaha the way he had appointed kimelaha Luhu himself ten years ago, appointed four *hamda raja's*, lower functionaries, each responsible for one of the areas that remained loyal to him: Luhu, Manipa, Ambelau and Lesidi. Kimelaha Luhu, however, was in a position to look on with some indifference, as he remained the *de facto* ruler of much of Hoamoal. Governor Ottens, noting after Van Diemen's departure that things were not going the way they had imagined, asked Hamzah to stay on in the islands for a while longer and help him enforce all the new arrangements. But with most of the VOC ships and troops now gone, his own hongi already largely dispersed, and with other matters requiring his attention in and around Ternate, Hamzah saw nothing to be gained from staying any longer, and went back north.[660]

The outcome

By late 1638, then, the developments in the region had largely reverted back to a depressingly familiar pattern. Kimelaha Luhu made hit-and-run attacks on places like Luhu and Lesidi, forcing the Dutch to reinforce their defences there. Kakiali remained engaged in what amounted to a low-level civil war with the perdana Tanihitumesen, but managed to stay just short of open war with the Dutch. The Dutch, making use of the *hongi,* kept attacking the settlements loyal to the kimelaha with varying success. In March 1639, a Dutch attack on

660 Rumphius, 'De Ambonsche Historie', I, 164-167.

Kambelo and Masili went disastrously, as the latter proved so unassailable and well-defended that the Dutch were driven off suffering 19 dead and 40 wounded. At other times, the Dutch booked some small victory against the kimelaha, but with neither party really able to defeat or dislodge the other, the region remained deadlocked in conflict.[661] Also depressingly familiar was the change in Van Diemen's attitude towards the region as news about all this reached Batavia. By late 1639, as he also learned that Hamzah, apparently now pandering to the anti-Dutch elements among the Ternaten dignitaries, was portraying the Dutch part in the proceedings of 1638 in the worst possible light, and to boot, had made peace with Tidore in an unprecedented move which bewildered the Dutch and Spanish alike, he lost the last vestiges of his original optimism. 'Not policy, but treachery, deceit and lies are the norm among this perfidious crowd', he bitterly wrote to the directors. [662] While he ached to resolve the matter by sending another large expeditionary force east, his hands were tied by the war against the Portuguese he was waging throughout Asia.[663]

Concluding remarks

In his article about the meeting between Hamzah and Van Diemen, Gerrit Knaap concludes that the process leading up to the treaty 'bears a very rational character', in that both parties came to the negotiations with very clear objectives and were able to trade these off.[664] While in cold political terms we might consider the trade-off that they made rational, we might also call it naked power politics. The negotiations were pervaded by an atmosphere of mutual distrust, and leave the overall impression that Van Diemen was permitting Hamzah to make a major power grab in the region in exchange for his cooperation in securing the clove monopoly. While it was in the mutual interest of the two to establish firmer Company control over Hoamoal, the move to acknowledge Hamzah's claim on Hitu, the Muslim areas of the Lease Islands and 'Seram' went against the wishes of the inhabitants of these regions and also against how the Company had historically conceived of these regions. Hitu had always been considered a separate state by the VOC, as its earliest treaties concluded in the region make

661 I am here glossing over the exact developments in the conflict, but see Rumphius, 'De Ambonsche Historie', 167-184 for a general overview.

662 Van Diemen to directors, 18 December 1639, in: Tiele-Heeres, *Bouwstoffen,* II, 388.

663 For an overview, see Knaap and Den Heijder, *Oorlogen Overzee,* 85-90; Witteveen, *Antonio van Diemen,* 253-274.

664 Knaap, 'The Governor-General and the Sultan', 97.

abundantly clear. That none of the Malukan participants in the negotiations had a copy of these treaties at hand whilst considering them the basis of such claims and the negotiations is one thing, but that Van Diemen and Ottens did not have access to them cannot have been anything but deliberate. The way in which the acknowledgement of Hamzah's overlordship over Hitu was subsequently pushed through, against the wishes of its orangkaya with their most prominent political leader, Kapitan Hitu, absent from the proceedings and with none of the areas in question being signatories to the treaty, could also be called cynical.

It also did not work. Many of the areas in question were averse of the agreement even before it was made, and saw their worries confirmed when Hamzah immediately banked on his new tributaries by levying heavy tributes throughout the region. The responses of his new supposed subjects varied from dragging their heels to outright armed resistance. Knaap concludes that we should consider the provisions of the treaty as a move towards a form of indirect rule where Sultan Hamzah was left to rule the Muslim areas and the Company concentrated on the Christian ones. It should be noted, though, that it was extremely unsuccessful, as Hamzah managed to alienate much of the Muslim region from him during his visit, but was unable and unwilling to durably effectuate any kind of real control.

In case of the two most consequential Muslim leaders in the region, Kakiali and kimelaha Luhu, this alienation took a very concrete form: they turned to Makassar for help. The sultan of Gowa had of course loomed in the background of the conflict as an alternate source of political protection for two decades, but Kakiali and kimelaha Luhu now raised the stakes. They openly offered up the rule of their domains to the sultan of Gowa.