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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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XII. THE MONOPOLY AND ITS DISCONTENTS (1647-1651)

Arnold de Vlaming's governorship was to receive relatively good press from contemporary authors. Rumphius qualified him as an 'experienced gentleman, not only in Latin, but also in affairs of state,'⁷⁶⁹ praising him for the rigorous way in which he acted 'when seeing that the old scars started festering again.'⁷⁷⁰ Livinus Bor, De Vlaming's secretary from 1650 onwards, writing his *Amboinse Oorlogen* as an impassioned defence and glorification of his superior's handling of the trouble that broke out in 1650, specifically made a point of absolving him of all responsibility of the outbreak of the war in the first place. Interestingly, the latter's arguments do suggest that such criticism was in fact making the rounds:

I have heard that there are people who have made him out to be a driving cause behind the war, as though he had incited the natives to it by his severity. God help us, what shamelessness! What patent falsehoods!⁷⁷¹

Bor passionately countered the specific accusations: De Vlaming had *not* tried to stifle Islam ('Ask your religious leader if he was ever prohibited from speaking!'), he was innocent of the overuse of *corvée* labour and the malpractices in the buying of cloves, and if anything had tried to curb such practices among Company employees.⁷⁷²

The accounts by Bor and Rumphius leave us with an interesting problem, as the region was unusually peaceful when De Vlaming became governor of Ambon, and would explode into the largest and most concerted revolt against the

769 Rumphius, 'De Ambonsche Historie', I, 266.

770 Ibid.

771 Livinus Bor. *Amboinse oorlogen door Arnold de Vlaming van Oudschoorn als superintendent, over d'boesterse gewesten oorlogachtig ten eind gebracht beschreven door L. Bor*. Delft: Arnold Bon, 1663, 50. At the end of the conflict, De Vlaming himself also mentioned that 'many evil rumours, not only here in the Indies but even in the fatherland, have circulated about me', for instance, that it was his own harsh rule that had caused the revolt. He mentioned his predecessor Demmer as being among his accusers, and announced that he hoped his nephew Cornelis de Vlaming van Oudshoorn, a prominent Amsterdam 'regent' who, for instance, was one of Amsterdam's four burgomasters for numerous terms, would help him clear his name back home. De Vlaming to governor-general, 30 Sept. 1655, in: VOC 1211, esp. 806pp.

772 Bor, *Amboinse oorlogen*, 50-54.

Company the region had ever seen, just months after he left. This chapter, then, tries to account for the causes of the outbreak of the Great Hoamoal War by exploring the period from the beginning of De Vlaming's governorship in 1647, to the large and concerted surprise attacks on the Company's outposts in Hoamoal in early 1651 that constituted the beginnings of the war.

THE CHALLENGES OF AN ESTABLISHED MONOPOLY

While De Vlaming inherited the Ambon Islands under firmer Company control than they had ever been, the attainment of the monopoly turned out to come with its own particular challenges. This was driven home to the governor during the harvest season of 1647, when the islands produced an unprecedented bumper crop of 2500 bahar of cloves – larger than any earlier harvest on record. It prompted Company officials to wonder about these records – was this really an unrivalled 'great season', or had they vastly underestimated the scale of production and smuggling before?⁷⁷³

To De Vlaming, that question was academic; the unexpectedly large harvest gave him more immediate problems. He only had 40.000 rials of eight at his disposal as the cloves started coming in. The treaties stipulated that he should buy them all, at 60 rials per bahar – initially putting him about 110.000 rials short. Over the next year, even as additional cash came in from Batavia, it took all of De Vlaming's creativity to keep the whole venture afloat. He borrowed money from private individuals and the orphan's chamber.⁷⁷⁴ He paid partly in textiles to whoever was willing to accept this. He wrote out IOU's to several other suppliers.⁷⁷⁵

The situation seems to have startled him into making some decisions, and developing a range of policy ideas, aimed at avoiding such problems in the future. For one, he decided to collect outstanding debts in a somewhat curious way. The Company had had a number of debtors among the Hituese elite, many of whom were dead, missing or destitute after the turbulent past few years. De Vlaming held the Hituese population collectively responsible, retaining what amounted to six-and-a-quarter rial per bahar (or slightly over ten percent) of the price paid

773 Governor-General Van der Lijn and Council to Directors, 18 January 1649, as excerpted in Tiele-Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, III, 360-361.

774 Governor De Vlaming to Governor-General Van der Lijn and Council, 30 April 1648, VOC 1167, fol. 225v.

775 Governor De Vlaming to Governor-General Van der Lijn and Council, 24 September 1648, VOC 1167, fol. 158r.

to Hituese suppliers, towards the settlement of the debt. While the Hituese were less than thrilled and considered the arrangement a tad peculiar, De Vlaming claimed he had been able to convince them of its fairness.⁷⁷⁶

Having already taken the liberty of implementing this measure, he furthermore ventured a number of suggestions to the governor-general and his council. He suggested increasing the weights used at the various Company lodges by some 5 percent, effectively cheating the local suppliers – the Company could use the extra income for such costs as the upkeep of school teachers and pastors. He would also like to equalize the value of the rial of eight between Batavia and Ambon, which would save the Company money at the cost of the Hituese. Finally, he also once again raised the spectre of overproduction. Should such abundant harvests become more common, which struck him as a distinct possibility, the Company would be obliged to buy up more cloves than it could hope to sell. He therefore suggested a cap on the amount of cloves that each community was allowed to sell to the Company each year, based on its population. This would not only discourage overproduction, but would also make the clove trade in Ambon more predictable for the company, nicely passing all the problems caused by the great fluctuations in the harvest onto the local population.⁷⁷⁷ These measures, De Vlaming imagined, would keep the strongboxes in Castle Victoria better-stocked in the future, would prevent surprises like the 1647 harvest, and would hopefully also contribute to keeping the Company's global clove sales profitable.

Back in Batavia, however, De Vlaming's suggestions were met with outrage and alarm. In the eyes of Governor-general Van der Lijn, who had succeeded Van Diemen after the latter had died two years earlier, the Company should now do its utmost not to cause new disaffection after the recent conflicts and the hard-won peace. As his return letter hammered home, effectively cheating the population in various ways when buying up the cloves, tampering with the original contracts or the price, or capping the amount they could sell was, in his eyes and that of his council members, a recipe for disaster. Adding to the worries in Batavia was the apparent spread of corruption in the region. Abraham Pittavin, the resident at Hila, for instance, had turned out to use false weights and to

776 Governor De Vlaming to Governor-General Van der Lijn and Council, 30 April 1648, VOC 1167, fol. 232r.

777 The idea was not that the excess cloves would be destroyed, but that the community that produced them would store them, to offer them to the Company again the next year. Governor De Vlaming to Governor-General Van der Lijn and Council, 25 August 1648, VOC 1167, fol. 161r.

generally abuse the VOC's power over the Hituese to enrich himself and defraud the clove suppliers of their due payment. When complaints started adding up, De Vlaming had recalled Pittavin to the Castle to work there as secretary and fined him 2500 rials, the better part of which would be used to compensate the Hituese he had defrauded. Van der Lijn found this way too lenient, and ordered De Vlaming to set an example by properly trying Pittavin, who was ultimately sentenced to five years of exile on Rosengain in the Banda Islands. According to Van der Lijn, acting feebly on this sort of behaviour constituted another factor in the disenfranchisement of the people of the region, which might ultimately lead to alienation and renewed revolt.

Besides admonishing De Vlaming, Van der Lijn took some additional measures. He had new copper weights produced, with their weight imprinted on them both in Dutch and in Arabic lettering, ordering that all existing weights used at the various Company posts were replaced with these. Bills describing the exact procedure of weighing and paying both in Dutch and Malay, were to be posted with each of them.⁷⁷⁸

De Vlaming was a bit peeved and surprised, also because he took Van der Lijn's orders to imply a general objection against limiting production:

With your Honour's permission, we know no better than that in former times, the Governors-General and his council members have more than once ordered to prevent all further planting of clove trees, as the Gentlemen were aware that Amboina alone would otherwise produce more than the entire world could consume within just a few years - as will happen now if things continue down this road.⁷⁷⁹

This, in turn, annoyed Van der Lijn, who wrote back that he had not actually written any such thing, and far be it from him to contradict his predecessors. He had merely pointed out that if any such measures were taken, they should not violate the treaties or established practice, as De Vlaming's earlier decisions and suggestions very much had.⁷⁸⁰ Van der Lijn was, however, quite happy about

778 Governor-General van der Lijn and Council to governor De Vlaming, 21 November 1648, as reproduced in Tiele-Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, III, 407-414.

779 Governor De Vlaming to Governor-General Van der Lijn, 27 April 1649, VOC 1173, fol 35v.

780 Governor-General Van der Lijn and Council to Governor De Vlaming, 14 Feb. 1650, VOC 874, fol. 19v.

the methods De Vlaming had employed further afield. A hongi sent out the year before had managed to get rid of several clove and nutmeg plantations along the Seramese coast, outside the area of effective Dutch control, not by brute force, but by 'sweet persuasion' – convincing the population to cut them down themselves and rewarding them with gifts afterwards.⁷⁸¹

This was, perhaps, enough encouragement for De Vlaming to keep on brooding on production limitation schemes – also because another unusually bountiful clove harvest came in from late 1649 onwards, once again exhausting De Vlaming's reserves of money and putting him in just about as difficult a spot as two years ago.⁷⁸² So in May 1650, when Majira, along with the orangkaya of the entire region, were received at Castle Victoria with pomp and ceremony for a meeting, De Vlaming thought he might try to simply persuade them to voluntarily eradicate a number of trees.

His suggestion was met with irritation and sarcasm. Majira and the various orangkaya asked how the Company was so sure that the world market was only 1500 bahar – they were happy to keep the surplus and prove the Company wrong by selling it to someone else. Orangkaya from the Christian areas under direct Company rule reminded De Vlaming that he was bound by treaty to buy all the cloves of sufficient quality, and that finding a market for them elsewhere was the Company's problem. De Vlaming diplomatically dropped the matter; he had merely been floating an idea.⁷⁸³

The various orangkaya, however, might not have forgotten De Vlaming's

781 Governor-General Van der Lijn and Council to Governor De Vlaming, 14 Feb. 1650, VOC 874, fol. 21r-v.

782 Governor De Vlaming to Governor-General and Council, VOC 1179B, 21 April 1650, fol. 442r-v; Cf. Reniers and Council to Gentlemen XVII, 10 December 1650, in *Generale Missiven*, II, 410. The actual size of the harvest does not seem to have been preserved either here or in any other of the usual places; see footnote below for further explanation.

783 Rumphius, 'De Ambonsche Historie', II, 289-290. It should be noted that for this meeting, and more generally for this crucial period, primary sources are scarce: the VOC papers sent to the Netherlands in late 1650 are terribly waterlogged, so that many sources from this period are damaged or missing altogether. This includes the part of the General letter of December 1650 dealing with the eastern archipelago, and many of the letters that would have been sent along with it. The Dagb-register Batavia for this year has not been preserved either. The proceedings of this meeting have, as a consequence, only been preserved in the writings of Rumphius and Valentijn, who had access to sources in Castle Victoria that are, by all appearances, no longer available today.

suggestion so lightly. They had reason to consider them part of a worrisome wider pattern – they were now dependent on the Company as the sole buyer of cloves, and all they had seen from De Vlaming on that front were schemes to limit production and lower payment. To some of them, these concerns were broader than just cloves: the Company had also come a long way towards monopolizing political power in the region. This particularly went at the cost of Ternaten power, and led to frustrations within Ternaten ranks.

RESISTANCE TO POLITICAL CONTROL: TERNATE AND ITS DEPENDENCIES

In Ternate, Sultan Hamzah had died on 6 May 1648, after which the race was once again on for a successor. It just so happened that Antonio Caen, former governor of both Ternate and Ambon, was visiting Ternate as a commissioner, to check on the Ternaten governor of that time Wouter van Seroyen, who was considered corrupt and incompetent. This gave Caen, who was well-acquainted with Ternaten politics, the opportunity to try and influence the succession. The three most suitable candidates were the three sons of Muzaffar, the sultan who had come before Hamzah. When Muzaffar himself had died, these were all still young children, the eldest only four years old and barely eligible for the throne.⁷⁸⁴ Now, they were all in their twenties. The eldest son of Muzaffar, named Tahu-bo, was the favourite candidate of the Company – in fact, he had been partly educated by Dutchmen and spoke Dutch. In him, the Company hoped to have an amenable, moderate and capable future ruler. His younger brother, Manilha, was the favourite of those members of the Ternaten nobility less well-disposed towards the Dutch, and had apparently been the favourite of Hamzah while he was still alive. Caen noted, however, that he had recently become weak-minded, perhaps due to poison, was therefore not actually capable of effectively ruling, and that those supporting him mostly did so to secure power for themselves. The third son, Kalamata, was a devout and studious Muslim, and as such, the favourite of the religious leaders.⁷⁸⁵

A lot had changed in the relation between the Company and Ternate since 1627. Whereas, during the last succession, the Dutch role was not very clear and the Ternaten Council of the Realm was ultimately able to pick a candidate not at

⁷⁸⁴ See above, chapter V, paragraph ‘Two princes’.

⁷⁸⁵ Report by Antonio Caen, 1 July 1648, as excerpted in Tiele-Heeres, *Bouwtoffen*, III, 391-392.

all to the liking of the Company, Caen was able to entirely dominate the process this time. He personally convened the various leaders as soon as he heard about Hamzah's death, and informed them that a successor should be picked *before* Hamzah's burial, to avoid factionalism and bloodshed – a marked departure from established practice. He also immediately announced that Tahubo was, as far as he was concerned, the only suitable candidate, inviting the gathered dignitaries to speak freely if they disagreed. The only one who dared speak, after a long silence, was a man named Seramaholi, and rather than disagree, affirmed everything Caen had just said. Even after asking each dignitary individually, Caen got no dissenting voices, except for the remark that the representatives from Makian had not arrived yet, and they should really wait for them before reaching a final decision.

After the dignitaries from Makian had arrived five days later, two representatives of the Council of the Realm came to Caen to ask if they could now proceed with Hamzah's burial. Caen flat-out told them that they should first elect the new ruler, as agreed upon. The Councillors pleaded with him: there really was no ruse to elect someone else; they were even willing to serve as hostages to guarantee Hamzah's accession to the throne, but it would really go against what they considered proper to first joyfully elect a new sultan only to bury the old one afterwards. Caen finally gave in. The sultan was buried, and just a few days later, Tahubo was crowned as the new sultan, taking the ruling name of Mandarsyah. Caen made sure that the newly elected sultan immediately swore to uphold the treaties with the VOC, notwithstanding attempts of some Ternaten to prevent this. A few days later, this was reaffirmed when Mandarshay visited Castle Oranje and signed new copies of the treaties.

Mandarsyah's election and ascension to the throne presents a stark contrast to that of Hamzah twenty-one years earlier. During the latter, Company officials had mostly been onlookers, unable to prevent the Council of the Realm from electing a new sultan they strongly opposed to. This time, Caen was able to direct the whole thing from start to finish. The change is indicative of the wider shift in power in the region, as well as the Company's earlier heavy-handed methods in the Ambon region, as Caen himself was very much aware:

We found the [Ternaten] leaders so meek... because they were all aware of the decapitation of the kimelahas Luhu, Leliato, and others; the unfortunate end of Kakiali, and the deportation and imprisonment of hukum Limuri, so that

everyone is now mindful of his own head, and fears that when defying the Company, he might be treated in a similar way.⁷⁸⁶

Before Caen left, bringing the disgraced governor Seroyen with him to stand trial in Batavia, and leaving Jasper van den Bogaerde as the new governor, he also managed to convince Mandarsyah to take up the war against the Spanish and Tidorese again as soon as the 40 days of mourning for Hamzah was over, rather than picking fights further afield.⁷⁸⁷ While this was encouraging, nothing much would come of it in the long run: just as these events unfolded in Ternate, Dutch and Spanish envoys were signing the Peace of Munster back in Europe, ending hostilities between the Dutch Republic and the Spanish crown. As news of the peace would subsequently reach Asia and the peace would take effect there, the Company, annoyed at now being robbed at the means to keep pressure on the Spanish-held areas (which also produced a small amount of cloves), and the chance of driving the Spanish from Maluku altogether, attempted to at least keep the war between Ternate and Tidore going in some form. The Ternaten leaders themselves, however, found this ‘ridiculous’ – how could they continue the war with Tidore, with which they were so ‘intimately related’, while their respective European allies were at peace?⁷⁸⁸ Even the new sultan could not sell this idea, although he tried, and hostilities between the Ternate and Tidore ceased in early 1650.

In general, the young new sultan appears to have been more impressionable than his predecessor, as is nicely illustrated by the first visit Majira brought to his court. In April 1649 the kimelaha and a host of dignitaries from Hoamoal arrived from the Ambon islands to pay their respects to the new sultan. Majira used the opportunity to see if he could reinforce his position under the new

786 Report by Antonio Caen, 1 July 1648, as excerpted in Tiele-Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, III, 395.

787 Over the past period, Hamzah had been campaigning on the north coast of Sulawesi, most notably against Gorontalo, which was contested between Gowa and Ternate. He had even been able to enlist Company support from Seroyen in these campaigns, which was not in the interest of the Company at all; rather, it was a threat to its relations with the sultan of Gowa, who took strong exception to the Company partaking in attacks on areas it laid claim to. Report by Antonio Caen, 1 July 1648, as reproduced in Tiele-Heeres, *Bouwstoffen*, III, 388-390. For an overview of the struggle for control of North Sulawesi in the 16th and 17th centuries: David Henley, ‘A superabundance of centers: Ternate and the contest for North Sulawesi’, *Cakalele* 4 (1993): 39-60.

788 Governor Van den Boogaerde (Ternate) to Governor-General and Council, 26 May 1650, in VOC 1179B, 266r-269v.

leadership. Four years ago, shortly after confirming him as the new kimelaha, Hamzah had authorized Demmer, the Ambonese governor of that time, to represent the sultanate in the Ambon region.⁷⁸⁹ This implied a significant reduction of the status and powers of the kimelaha himself, whose official function was just that. Majira, who had been able to rise to the position of kimelaha by working together with the Company, had thus seen his further rise stymied. While he was still cooperating with the Company to the latter's satisfaction, he was apparently more than willing to try and see if he could reverse this particular decision.

During his audience, Majira impressed upon the young sultan that the decision to grant the governor of Ambon such authority over his domains had been a mistake, that it had gone to the detriment of Ternaten authority. To illustrate the point, he enumerated what the Company had been doing with its powers: it controlled the Muslim settlements on Hitu's southwest coast, which rightfully belonged to the sultan! It was forcibly converting some Muslim hostages from Buru in Castle Victoria! It was also introducing Christianity to the animistic communities around the Bend of Kaibobo, and along Seram's south coast, which were the sultan's domains, flying right in the face of the earlier treaties!⁷⁹⁰ Majira was able to persuade the sultan to fire off a brief and heated letter to Governor De Vlaming, ordering him to cease the conversion of his subjects and informing him that he would not follow in the footsteps of his predecessor by making the governor of Ambon his official representative in the region.⁷⁹¹ Majira would once again have full authority over the sultanate's domains, with powers as absolute there as those the governor wielded over the Company's domains.⁷⁹²

Both De Vlaming and Van den Boogaerde tried to resolve the issue, taking some token measures to show that the kimelaha actually still held some power, but also explaining that no Burunese hostages had been forced to convert, and that the villages along Hitu's southwest coast had never been part of the sultan's

789 See above, Chapter XI, paragraph 'the dissolution of the old political order'.

790 Rumphius, 'De Ambonsche Historie', I, 276-277; Van den Boogaerde (Ternate) to Governor-General and Council, 16 May 1649, in: VOC 1173, fol. 112r-v.

791 Formally, this was necessary as Hamzah's commission to the governor of Ambon was not heritable to his successors. Governor-general Van der Lijn therefore requested that the sultan bestow the same honour on the governor of Ambon in the first letter he wrote to him after his inauguration. Governor-General Van der Lijn to Sultan Mandarsyah, 27 February 1649, in: VOC 873, fol. 12r-v.

792 This letter has been partially preserved, albeit very damaged: Sultan Mandarsyah (Ternate) to Governor De Vlaming (Ambon), 1 May 1649, in: VOC 1173, fol. 105r. Its content is also summarized in Rumphius, 'De Ambonsche Historie', II, 277.

domains. They explained why, in their view, it was in everyone's best interest if the Company looked after the sultan's affairs. Soon enough, the sultan was persuaded to reverse his decision with regard to the governor of Ambon representing him, and let the other matters rest. When De Vlaming next met with Majira in September, the latter denied any wrongdoing: he had honestly told the sultan of the state of affairs in the Ambon Islands as he knew it, and if the sultan had misinterpreted him or overreacted, that was not his fault.⁷⁹³

One of the things Majira had told the sultan was actually on the mark: the VOC had been probing the various communities of Seram's south coast for their interest in Christianity, and had sent school teachers and preachers to those that seemed promising, which included Amahai, Makariki, Suahuku, Kaibobo, all towards the west of Seram's south coast, as well as Hulaliu, located in the Muslim area on Haruku. However, as De Vlaming explained, this was not in contravention of the treaties at all! The treaty between Hamzah and Van Diemen, for instance, only forbid the conversion of Muslims to Christianity, but said nothing of those communities with animist, polytheistic beliefs.⁷⁹⁴

Religion, it bears reminding, was deeply intertwined with political and cultural affiliation in the region, and had been a major factor in the various conflicts and rivalries there since the time of the Portuguese. Converting people to Christianity in those areas that the Company had officially recognized as Ternaten territory therefore had significant political connotations for all involved. Interestingly, the surviving Company correspondence on the matter does not discuss this beyond the observation that the kimalaha was apparently trying to prevent the conversions. Company officials merely talked devoutly about the desirability of 'bringing these poor people... the beatific knowledge of Christ', musing that this did not conflict with being loyal subjects to the Ternaten sultan. In the same breath, though, those officials mused that these non-Muslim areas were no good to the sultan anyway, and that he might as well cede their *de facto* rule to the Company. In February 1650, prompted by De Vlaming, Cornelis van der Lijn officially requested, 'if it please Your Highness, to put all the heathens living on the Seramese coast under our obedience, so that these may be kept in your power

793 Rumphius, 'De Ambonsche Historie', II, 279.

794 Rumphius, 'De Ambonsche Historie', I, 272-280;

and proper obedience all the better...⁷⁹⁵ Mandarsyah was persuaded to oblige, transferring *de facto* rule of these areas to the Company in May 1650.⁷⁹⁶

Sultan Mandarsyah, might not have personally minded his increasing dependence on the Company so much, as he was sharing in the benefits of established Company control. Under his predecessors, the Ambon region had been unruly and difficult, with its population, and even the sultan's own representatives, jealous of their autonomy, happy to ignore the wishes of the court or even to cast their eyes around for a new overlord. Now, the region was giving the Ternaten court far fewer headaches, the Company was collecting the sultan's tolls in the region, and it was paying 4000 rials a year in recognition of the sultan's cooperation in maintaining the monopoly.

Among the rest of the Ternaten leadership, however, this was breeding resentment. The Tomagola family in particular had a vested interest in the Ambon region in that the kimelaha ruling it had come from among its ranks. To them, the Ambon region had been an important and profitable power base, but Majira found himself in a position rather different from that of earlier kimelaha. The days when visiting traders from Java and Makassar paid sky-high prices for cloves were gone. Hoamoal was destitute after the wars of the late 1630s and early 1640s. Ternaten power in the region had waned since 1638, and the kimelaha's own standing and authority had been severely limited. His attempts to restore some of his powers after Mandarsyah's ascension ended in disappointment. Meanwhile, De Vlaming's preoccupation with limiting clove production, and his brisk suggestion that the inhabitants voluntarily cut down some of their own clove trees, did not augur well for the future.

The kimelaha was not alone in minding the loss of Ternaten power to the Company. The cession of the rule of large parts of Seram and the Company's efforts to spread Christianity were particularly considered an affront by many of the Ternaten leaders. Only two months after Mandarsyah's decision to cede these regions, the Ternaten leadership tried to get rid of him.

A COUP IN TERNATE

The morning of the last day of July 1650, a Sunday, proceeded rather unusually

795 Governor-general Van der Lijn to Sultan Mandarsyah, 21 February 1650, in VOC 874, fol. 71r.

796 Governor Van den Boogaerde (Ternate) to Governor-General and Council (Batavia), 26 May 1650, in VOC 1179B, fol. 271r-v.

at Fort Oranje in Ternate. Four high-ranking Ternaten leaders made their appearance and briefly informed governor Van den Boogaerd that they no longer recognized Mandarsyah as their sultan, and intended to elect his younger brother Manilha in his place later that day.⁷⁹⁷ A startled Van den Boogaerd uttered his surprise and told them to hold off any kind of royal election – it was not a matter to be taken lightly, he had never heard any complaints about Mandarsyah before, and would not simply allow this just like that. If they would please come back tomorrow, they could discuss the matter further.⁷⁹⁸

Interpreters were immediately sent to Mandarsyah to inquire what was going on. Sure enough, the sultan informed them, ‘with his usual chagrin’, that he had allowed the Ternaten leadership to go ahead and elect one of his younger brothers if they all hated him so much. Van den Boogaerde sent a return message admonishing him about this foolishness that would serve to his eternal shame and might bring about his utter ruin, but the damage was done. Two days later, ‘the entire Ternaten leadership’ carried Manilha through the streets of Melayu on a chair, a parasol held over his head, proclaiming him the new sultan.⁷⁹⁹

Things quickly escalated from there. Van den Boogaerd, afraid that Mandarsyah might be killed, hastily had him brought into the Company castle. The Ternaten leadership had people announce in the streets that the Dutch intended to kill the entire Ternaten leadership, and that whoever cared for their lives should move out and join them at Sula, a rocky defensible outcrop on the north coast of the island. Most of the population heeded the warning, and men, women and children packed their belongings and joined the Ternaten leaders there. Van den Boogaerd responded by pulling most of the soldiers back from the smaller fortifications around the island to reinforce Fort Oranje.

The Ternaten leaders were rather reticent about their specific grievances about Mandarsyah – all Van den Boogaerd learned was that the sultan had been rude to them and it was difficult to get an audience. He suspected, however, that both

797 Kaicili Musa, the royal chancellor, and Kaicili Saidi, the kapita laut. Both were of the Ternaten royal family (Fraassen, ‘Ternate, de Molukken en de Indische archipel’, II, 14-20). Furthermore, the kimelaha Marsaoli, who was the leader of the *soa* Marsaoli. (Ibid., II, 40-58). Finally, Hukum Laulata, who was of the Tomagola family. Hukum was a position comparable to magistrate - he maintained contacts between the chancellor and the various leaders of the Ternaten *soa*.

798 Governor Van den Boogaerde to Governor-General, 17 August 1650, in VOC 1179B, 287r-v.

799 Governor Van den Boogaerde to Governor-General, 17 August 1650, in VOC 1179B, 288r-v.

the commission to De Vlaming to act as his representative and his recent cession of the non-Muslim regions of Seram were the main causes, in addition to the fact that Caen had driven through Mandarsyah's election two years previously. He also suspected that the Ternaten leadership had elected Manilha, who had, by all accounts, recently become weak-minded, so as to arrange things their way without opposition.

The timing of the coup was opportune. The yearly fleet with reinforcements to Ternate had foundered in its entirety on a reef at Kabaena, near the southeast of Sulawesi last March. The Ternaten governor was therefore starved for supplies and soldiers. The governors of Ambon and Banda had sent what supplies and soldiers they could spare in the wake of the shipwreck, but all the same, Van den Boogaerde was in no position to adequately respond to Mandarsyah's overthrow. All the same, he soon found back his resolve, also because he felt that more than just the Ternaten throne was at stake. 'If we allow this... then our control of the Ambon islands, which we have finally obtained after so many trouble... will also completely unravel again', he predicted.⁸⁰⁰ That was not an option. As soon as reinforcements from Batavia arrived, he intended to restore Mandarsyah to power, and kill the instigators of this coup, even if it risked causing a war in Ternate.

In Batavia, efforts to send reinforcements got on their way as soon as the news reached them. A fleet of five ships, bringing 500 soldiers, was assembled. It was to be led by none other than Arnold de Vlaming, who happened to have arrived in Batavia in September, leaving his second-in-command Simon Cos to govern the Ambon region for the time being. One of the reasons De Vlaming had come back was his health – over the course of his governorship, he had been sick more often than not, incapable of leading the *hongi* in person most of the time, and sometimes too miserable even to see to his administrative duties. In spite of not yet having fully recovered, he had himself persuaded to lead it.

After its departure on the 24th of December, the fleet took an unusually long time to reach Ternate – it had some matters to attend to *en route*, such as a visit to Buton, which, after a new sultan had succeeded to the throne there in 1647, was once again on Ternate's and the Company's good side. During the recent shipwreck, the sultan had assisted the Dutch castaways, and had, in the estimation of the Company, been crucial in preventing the wrecks being plundered and

800 Governor Van den Boogaerde to Governor-General, 17 August 1650, in VOC 1179B, 292v

their crews murdered.⁸⁰¹ De Vlaming, in addition to thanking the sultan and presenting some gifts, also picked up some of the survivors there, who could go right back to work as he needed every man he could in his coming campaign.⁸⁰² The fleet continued on its way, with one ship sailing directly to Ambon, bringing the prospective new governor, Willem van der Beeck. De Vlaming himself transferred to the fastest ship in the fleet and sailed out ahead of the slower vessels towards North Maluku. Per his instructions, he meant to take stock of the situation before everyone was aware a major fleet was on its way.

He arrived before Makian, at the Dutch fort at Ngofakiaha, on 2 March. As it would turn out, he had plenty of time to inform himself, as the rest of the fleet was running into all kinds of delays and would only arrive on the 21st. He soon learned that getting Mandarsyah reinstated would not be easy: inviting the Makian leadership to the fort and discussing the present situation with them, they unabashedly told him that they would sooner have their heads cut off than recognizing Mandarsyah as their sultan again. Forswearing all Ternaten rule and putting themselves directly under the Company would actually have their preference.⁸⁰³

De Vlaming made his way to Melayu, meeting with the governor and the sultan, laying contact with the Spanish governor at Gamalama (also to make sure that he did not aid the rebels in any way), and sending off a letter to said rebels, who had since crossed the water to Halmahera and fortified themselves there in a strategic location. The only reply he had gotten was to the effect that unless the Company was willing to recognize Manilha as the new sultan, there was nothing to talk about. On the 21st of March, the other Company ships arrived, and De Vlaming decided to see if a well-armed fleet might change the rebels' minds. It did not. The site where they had ensconced themselves was well-chosen, as it was impossible to come in close with the ships and use the cannon. The shore was heavily fortified with barricades and strewn with caltrops. A Dutch attempt to land on the 28th of March was met with musket fire from the forest, and De Vlaming, realizing the situation was too risky, broke off the attack and returned to Makian with the fleet.⁸⁰⁴

There, with the fleet at his back and by uttering some threatening and indig-

801 Schoorl, 'Het eeuwwide verbond', 38-40.

802 Journal De Vlaming, 16-21 January 1651, in: VOC 1186, fol. 73r-84v.

803 De Vlaming to Governor-General and Council, 4 May 1651, as included in his journal, VOC 1186, fol. 224v.

804 Journal De Vlaming, 26-28 March 1651, in: VOC 1186, fol. 156v-158v.

nant words, he was finally able to make some headway into getting the Makian leadership to recognize Mandarsyah as their sultan again. By 2 April, the leadership of the islands of Makian and Moti was persuaded to swear an oath of loyalty to Mandarsyah.⁸⁰⁵

That was, of course, only the start of getting Mandarsyah fully reinstated. Most of the sultanate was still in revolt against him. Their entrenched position on Halmahera still held strong. De Vlaming's orders also stipulated that he should punish the rebels in absentia by seizing their possessions and, of course, cutting down their clove trees, 'as Amboina was providing the Company with more than enough of that spice'.⁸⁰⁶ While De Vlaming would no doubt have relished that opportunity, he did not get around to it yet. Worrying news had just reached him from Ambon.⁸⁰⁷

A SURPRISE ATTACK IN THE AMBON ISLANDS

In February, things had still appeared quiet in the Ambon region. Its inhabitants had shown no great interest in the upheavals at the Ternaten court. Majira had ostensibly been surprised and had personally assured resident Cos that he would remain loyal to Mandarsyah and the Company.⁸⁰⁸ In the course of February, however, some worrying reports started reaching Cos. Letters from the rebels had been arriving in the region, asking the various communities to support the new sultan. Majira had reportedly been attending various meetings with the *orangkaya* in the islands. Some of the Muslim communities, and Majira himself, had been moving their possessions up to mountain strongholds.

During the first days of March, Cos personally went up to Luhu to discuss the matter. Majira was able to convince him that these rumours of impending revolt were unfounded, although he did have some concerns with the spread of Christianity along the Seramese coast, the effect that the revolt might have in the Ambon islands, and the Company's recent eagerness to cut down the clove trees, as he roundly told Cos. Cos tried to put Majira's mind at ease on all these

805 Included in Journal De Vlaming, 2 April 1651, in: VOC 1186, fol. 171v-172r.

806 Instructions for De Vlaming, 22 December 1650, in: VOC 1175, quote from fol. 356v.

807 Note that Rumphius, 'De Ambonsche Historie', II, 4, incorrectly states that De Vlaming was able to end the revolt and reconcile Mandarsyah and Manilha again. Valentijn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën*, I.II, 288-289, differs from Rumphius in this matter, (correctly) stating that De Vlaming left the islands without being able to end the revolt.

808 Letter from Simon Cos as summarized in Journal De Vlaming, 5 March 1651, in: VOC 1186, fol. 109v-111r.

matters. He returned to Castle Victoria under the impression that there was no cause for concern.⁸⁰⁹

That impression was unfounded. On 11 March, the attacks began, first around Kambelo and Lesidi. The Company fort at Lesidi fell outright to a surprise attack. At Kambelo, the Dutch soldiers and a local work crew outside the fort were attacked and killed. The Company lodge down on the shore was taken later after some fierce fighting, and the retreating Company personnel fled to Fort Hardenberg up on the hill above the town, where the Company personnel was effectively trapped. Two days later, another, much larger wave of surprise attacks washed through the islands. The Dutch strongholds at Laala, Nusatelo, Hatuhaha, Asaudi, Boano, Ambelau and Manipa all fell in short order. The garrisons there were as yet unaware of the what had transpired at Kambelo and Lesidi, and were therefore largely oblivious to the concerted effort to drive them from the region. The indigenous attackers were typically able to lure out part of the garrison or gain entrance to the fort by means of a subterfuge – at Laala, part of the garrison had been invited for a meal by the local leader; at Nusatelo, a group appeared with urgent news for the local sergeant, and rushed in to take the redoubt as soon as the gate was opened. The vast majority of the soldiers and other Europeans were killed, even after surrendering. A few were spared and brought to the kimelaha for questioning, and the attackers also took care to keep alive any constables they captured – the kimelaha expected he might have use for some capable gunners later, as he had also captured a generous number of Dutch guns in the attacks. All in all, eight Company fortifications were taken and overrun in those few days.⁸¹⁰

Information about all of this came trickling into Castle Victoria over the next few days – slowly. The surprise attacks had been so successful that many of the captured outposts had not been able to send out any kind of message. When Cos sent off the yacht *Wolf* to Ternate to inform De Vlaming of these events, he was aware of the fall of Kambelo, Lesidi, Nusatelo and Laala, but could only speculate as to the others.⁸¹¹ What he did know, however, was that he needed help, urgently.

809 Cos to De Vlaming, March 1651, as paraphrased in *Journal De Vlaming*, 2 April 1651, in: VOC 1186, fol. 164r-168r; Rumphius, 'De Ambonsche Historie', II, 3-6.

810 The most comprehensive overview is Rumphius, 'De Ambonsche Historie', II, PAG-INANRS.

811 Cos to De Vlaming, March 1651, as paraphrased in *Journal De Vlaming*, 2 April 1651, in: VOC 1186, fol.168r.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Looking at the ostensibly peaceful years leading up to the outbreak of the Great Hoamoal War, it is hard to escape the impression that VOC policy, particularly as it was conceived in the Ambon region, greatly contributed to the resentment in both Ternate and Hoamoal that would ultimately cause the war to break out.

De Vlaming's schemes to arrange the clove trade so as to be even more disadvantageous to the population of the region, and the way in which local VOC officials already abused the power they had over the local population to enrich themselves, certainly did not contribute to the Company's popularity. These, however, most prominently affected the areas under direct Company control, Hitu in particular, which would remain outside the epicentre of the subsequent revolt. In any case, the governor-general in Batavia, seconded by the Council of the Indies of which two members were former governors of Ambon at the time, did not exactly approve of De Vlaming's policies, tried to make sure the corruption was properly countered, and nipped most of De Vlaming's initiatives in the bud.

More clearly at the basis of the revolt were the various policies which disenfranchised the Ternaten leadership in general, and kimelaha Majira in particular. Majira, who had become kimelaha by cooperating with the Company but had then found the power of his station much reduced, subsequently faced Company policies and plans nibbling away at what little power he had left, such as attempts to 'voluntarily' reduce clove production, and efforts to Christianize, and take away from his control, some of the non-Muslim areas in the region. Meanwhile, Mandarsyah, the new Ternaten sultan who was helped to the throne by heavy-handed Company intervention, seemed extremely amenable to the Company's policies and suggestions. He was ultimately unresponsive to Majira's attempts to regain some of his power, and readily transferred control of the non-Muslim regions of the Ambon islands.

This transfer of control and the attempts at conversion in these regions seem to have been a particular source of disaffection both in Ternate and in Hoamoal. Not only was it considered a violation of the deal with the Company; religion was intimately tied up with the identity and rivalries of the various communities in the region. As a consequence, such policies were considered an insult and raised concerns about the Company's intentions. As we will see below, Majira capitalized on such concerns, gathering support for his revolt by claiming that the Dutch meant to forcefully Christianize the entire region.

Bor's impassioned protests notwithstanding, those unnamed voices in Bata-

via putting the blame of the revolt on De Vlaming himself therefore did so with some justification. Ironically, he was now on the spot to try and restore Company control.