A Luso-Dutch Naval Confrontation in the Johor River Delta 1603

By Peter Borschberg, Singapore

Historical Background

Following the amalgamation in 1602 of the early regional trading enterprises known as the voorcompagniën, it soon became clear that the newly formed United Dutch East India Company (VOC) would be a commercial and military force to be reckoned with. One of its key policy objectives in the first years of the 17th century was to penetrate new markets in the East, to contain the commercial and strategic expansion of the Iberian powers in Asia, establish a so-called rendez-vous point for home-bound vessels, as well as a permanent residence for the Governor-General.

The Dutch merchants were in favour of unimpeded market access and “free trade” in the East Indies. Their cause was chiefly directed against the rights of exclusive trade asserted by the two Iberian powers, Spain (specifically Castile) and Portugal. Africa, Asia and the New World as well as the navigable sea lanes leading to them were claimed by the two nascent colonial powers as their exclusive trading preserve. They asserted their trade monopoly on legal

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1 At the time of completing this article, the author was attached to the Institut für Ostasienkunde of the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Abteilung Sinologie, under an existing agreement with the National University of Singapore. He would like to extend his special thanks to the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in München, the Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa, the Biblioteca Nacional Española in Madrid, Cambridge University Library and the Library of the University of California at Berkeley for granting access to their specialist collections and rare books. The map of the Luso-Dutch battle of 1603 is reproduced with kind permission of Cambridge University Library.

grounds that included notably “the right of first discovery” (*terra nullius*), transfer of Imperial authority and Papal Donation. One would be greatly deceived to equate Dutch claims to “free trade” with contemporary arguments on the same issue. A noteworthy portion of their early trading activity was in fact little more than outright robbery committed under (the pretext of) the law of war. Thus, it can scarcely surprise that the victims of Dutch “commercial” aggression, notably merchants operating under Spanish and Portuguese flags, branded these Northern European traders as “pirates”.

Portuguese ships were generally seen by the Dutch East India fleets as “soft targets” and their seizure became politically sanctioned as “war booty” by the States-General and legally also by the Admiralty Boards in the United Provinces. The Dutch waged a war of “liberation” initially only against Spain, but when in 1580 the Spanish Habsburgs gained control over Portugal under the almost legendary Philip II of Spain, the Dutch extended their hostilities also to the Lusitanian kingdom. The Habsburg monarch and his immediate descendants ruled Spain and Portugal until 1640, when, during the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648), Portugal reasserted its independence against the Spanish Habsburgs. This period spanning some six decades is known in the history of Iberia as the Union of the Two Crowns.

During this personal union, Portugal was never incorporated into the historic territories that fell under the rule of the Spanish Habsburgs. As a result, the two colonial empires of Spain and Portugal continued to be administered as separate units. Despite the traditional rivalry that characterized the relation between the two early modern colonial empires, a degree of co-operation did emerge – albeit tense and unhappy as this might often have been – within the context of the Union. This was particularly true with regard to Spain and Portugal joining efforts to expel their commercial rivals from the Indies, especially the Dutch. Perhaps one of the best-known instances of such anti-Dutch co-operation was the naval expedition led by Spanish–Philippine Governor Juan de Silva that passed through the Straits of Singapore in 1616.

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3 The merits of these arguments were debated and re-debated in Spain and its dominions in the 16th century. Several well-known and historically influential discussions on the problems and legality of early colonial expansion were written by the learned authors of the so-called “School of Salamanca”, but the best-known and historically most influential of these discussions remain Francisco de Vitoria’s *Two Relections on the Indies*. Modern translations of these can be found in: *Francisco de Vitoria: Political Writings*. Ed. by Anthony Pagden and Jeremy Lawrence. Cambridge 1991.


5 In Portuguese sources referred to as João da Silva.
The first decade of the 17th century saw an escalation of Dutch commercial aggression first on part of the voorcompagniën, and later by the fleets of the VOC. Two incidents involving freebooting by the voorcompagniën are particularly well-known. The earlier is the seizure of the St. Jago, a Lisbon-bound vessel of the *Carreira da Índia* in March 1602. On board the St. Jago was the Florentine merchant-traveller Francesco Carletti\(^6\) who lost his fortune to the freebooting mariners from Zealand. Claims flooded the courts back in the United Provinces for the restitution of goods. Carletti, too, petitioned the courts for recompensation, notably on the grounds that he was a Florentine subject, in other words, a citizen of a territory, that was at peace with the Dutch Republic. Carletti eventually had a portion of his fortune returned to him.\(^9\)

The second incident took place off the coast of Singapore in February 1603. Admiral Jakob van Heemskerk, who had set sail for Asia in the employ of one of the voorcompagniën, captured the *Santa Catarina*, a Portuguese carrack bound for Malacca and Goa. After a fierce fight that lasted for most of the hours of daylight, the Portuguese skipper, Sebastião Serrão, and crew surrendered ship and goods. The cargo of the *Santa Catarina* was said to be one of the richest in many years,\(^10\) and when it was sold at a public auction in Europe, it yielded some three and a half million florins.\(^11\) The capture of the Portuguese trading ship by Captain Jakob van Heemskerk and his allies, the

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\(^8\) **Francesco Carletti:** *My Voyage around the World*. Translated by Herbert Weinstock. New York 1964.


\(^10\) **Manuel Lobato:** *Política e comércio dos Portugueses na Insulindia. Malaca e as Molucas de 1575 a 1603*. Macao 1999, p. 353.

Johoreans, dealt a serious blow to the merchants of Macao, who were reportedly steeped in losses to the staggering sum of one *conto de ouro*, or one million Cruzados, being the equivalent of about 30,000 kilogrammes of pure silver. This was at the time equivalent to approximately half of the paid-in capital of the United Dutch East India Company and more than double the capital base of its English counterpart, the Honourable East India Company, founded two years earlier in 1600.

The Portuguese were determined to take strong action, not only against the Dutch "rebels", "intruders" and "pirates", but also against the native Malay powers that traded with the Dutch and lent them active assistance in their acts of aggression. What began as a single incident off the coast of Johor established itself with a pattern of predictable and alarming regularity to the detriment of the Portuguese *Estado da Índia*. Since the Dutch launched many of their attacks in the region between Tioman and the Straits of Malacca, securing the sea-lanes linking trade between Portuguese India, Malacca, Macao and the Moluccas became paramount. Portuguese punitive expeditions, such as the ones dispatched in 1603 and again in January 1604, were intended to back diplomatic efforts with the force of arms and persuade the King of Johor to expel the Dutch from the waters around the Straits of Singapore and the Johor River Delta. The monarch, 'Al-a'udin Riayat Shah III and his half-brother, commonly known as Raja Bongsu, Raja Sabrang or Raja di Ilir, were not easily intimidated by the Portuguese and continued to cultivate commercial and political relations with the Dutch traders. These maintained since Heemskerk's visit in Johor in 1603 a resident agent by the name of Jacob Buijsen in the capital town of Batu Sawar.

Particularly after the incident surrounding the seizure of the Santa Catarina, the Portuguese government in Malacca dispatched naval squadrons to the mouth of the Johor River to anticipate the arrival of the Portuguese China fleet and give the ships armed escort to Malacca. In practice, however, the Dutch – or in one instance a party described as the English – engaged the Portuguese *armada* in battle, drove them out of the Johor River Delta, and lifted the crippling blockade on the riverine settlements, including the capital Batu Sawar.

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12 **Charles Ralph Boxer**: *Fidalgos in the Far East, 1550–1770. Fact and Fancy in the History of Macao*. The Hague 1948, p. 50, places the losses at one *conto de ouro* which is the equivalent of one million Cruzados or 800,000 Cantonese *tael* of silver.


14 On the location of this former capital of Johor, cf. *Rouffaer* 1921, 482f.
De Bry’s Map of the Luso-Dutch Naval Battle, October 1603

The maps and steel cuts of the three German cartographers by the name of Theodore, Johann Theodore and Johann Israel de Bry have long been cherished among scholars of history and armchair travelers. In volume VIII of their celebrated collection of voyages to the East and West Indies, one finds in appendix XIII, under “Images or true and exact descriptions of all memorable things and events” (Icones seu genuinae et expresse delineationes omnium memorabilium) the map of a Dutch-Portuguese naval battle that took place in the Johor River in the vicinity of Johor Lama. The De Brys also added a small commentary on the course of the battle, which is written in German language, and broadly corresponds to the more substantial account of the conflict compiled by the native of Danzig M. Gothardus Arthus.16

Like many of the other early accounts of Dutch activities in the Indies, the story also found its way into the first important historical account of the Dutch East India Company (VOC). This was published in Dutch by Isaac Commelin and bears the title: “The Beginning and Continuation of the United Netherlands East India Company” (Begin ende Voortgang Vande Vereenigde Neerlandsche Geestroyerde Oost-Indische Compagnie).17 Translations of this monumental work into French and English are extant.18 Commelin’s compilation of early eyewitness accounts and historically relevant

15 Ioannes Theodoricus and Ioannes Israel de Bry: Icones Seu Genuinae Et Expressae Delineationes Omnium Memorabilium, Quae in Hac Octava Indiae Orientalis Parte Annotata Sunt, Varias Simul Populorum in Terrae, Patae, Cande et Aliis Locis Habitantium Ceremonias, Mores, Habitus = Que Ob Oculos Ponentes. Accurato Studio et Opere in As Incise, & Studioso Novarum Rerum Lectori Communicate Exhibiteaque ... (Francofurti: In Officina Typographica Wolfgangi Richteri, 1607).


18 René Augustin Constantin de Renneville: Recueil des voyages qui ont servi à l’établissement et aux progrès de la Compagnie des Indes Orientales, formée dans les Provinces-Unies des Pays-Bas. Amsterdam 1725; A collection of voyages undertaken by the Dutch East-India Company, for the Improvement of Trade and Navigation, Containing an account of several Attempts to find out the North-East Passage, and other Discoveries in the East-Indies and the South Sea. London 1703.
material also reproduces a number of the prints that can be retrieved in the travel-related works of Theodore de Bry and his sons.

With specific reference to the map found in appendix XIII, this reconstructs the sequence of armed engagements that took place between three ships under the immediate command of Dutch Vice-Admiral Jakob Pietersz van Enkhuizen\(^{19}\) and the Portuguese armada of Captain Estêvão Teixeira de Matos\(^{20}\) between October 6 and 11, 1603. This virtually unknown chapter in the history of early-modern Johor is of considerable significance for understanding both the origins, as well as the course of, Johor-Dutch relations in the first two decades of the seventeenth century.\(^{21}\)

Teixeira de Matos, a seasoned officer and previously captain of the Portuguese fort at Ambon, Nossa Senhora da Anunciada,\(^{22}\) dispatched his armada to the Straits of Singapore to impose a blockade of the Johor River as well as to protect inbound vessels of the Portuguese China fleet. According to the testimony of David van Lochum dated 10 October, 1604, the armada consisted of vessels that had recently returned from battling the Dutch for supremacy in the Moluccas.\(^{23}\) It also transpires from Lochum’s testimony that Johor Lama (Oud Ior on de Bry’s map) had briefly come under the direct control of the Portuguese.

The incident surrounding the seizure of the Santa Catarina certainly raised eyebrows in Europe and fired the imagination of traders over the riches to be earned (or, in this case, robbed from the enemy) in the East Indies. The capture of the Santa Catarina seriously alarmed the Estado da India over its vulnerability to such actions of hostile engagement and loss of merchant

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\(^{19}\) Jakob Pieterszoon van Enkhuizen is erroneously attributed the name “Cornelis” by Jonge, vol. III (1866) p. 17. Several authors have copied this error, including Paul Anton Tiele, N. Mac Leod and Heert terpstra who are all cited in the course of this paper. Cf. also W. P.H. Coolhaas: “Een bron van het historische gedeelte van Hugo de Groots De Jure Praedae.” In: Bijdragen en Mededelingen van het Historisch Genootschap 79 (1965), p. 505 note 4.


\(^{23}\) Tiele 1883, p. 220; Coolhaas 1965, p. 506.
cargo. Not surprisingly, embarrassed Portuguese officials from Goa to Macao resolved that such an incident should not be able to repeat itself. The King of Portugal himself expressly instructed his Viceroy in Goa in a letter dated 27 December, 1604, that he should dispatch an armada to the region. This fleet should then be divided into different squadrons and patrol the waters around the Straits of Singapore, Sabam (Sabão, Bangka) and the Straits of Sunda in order to protect shipping to and from Portuguese Malacca.  

It goes almost without saying that, with such profits and booty at stake, the Dutch would not be easily deterred from preying on Portuguese merchant shipping. The early years of the 17th century saw numerous fleets of the VOC making their way to the Indonesian Archipelago, including notably the first VOC-organized expedition comprising fifteen craft of various tonnage sailing under the supreme command of Wijbrandt van Warwijk. On their arrival in the East Indies, Warwijk’s fleet separated and proceeded to call at different destinations in India, China and insular Southeast Asia. While Warwijk set course for Patani and China, the three ships under Vice-Admiral Sebald de Weert headed for Ceylon and Aceh. After casting anchor off the coast of Batikaloa, de Weert traveled by elephant to Kandy where he was courteously received by its ruler Vimala Dharma Suriya I.  

The Maharajah sought the assistance of the Dutch in expelling the Portuguese from their strongholds in Colombo, Cruz and Galle. De Weert promised to sail to Aceh and return with more ships. He kept his word, and returned in April 1603 from the North Sumatran city in the company of seven ships, three sloops and an embassy comprising two Acehnese delegates. The Dutch managed to seize four Portuguese vessels off the coast of Ceylon, but when the ruler of Kandy suspected that the Dutch were planning to capture and kill him, he had de Weert and forty-seven members of his crew murdered in cold blood on June 1, 1603. Three days later, on June 4, Jakob Pietersz

24 Paulo Jorge de Sousa Pinto: Portugueses e Malaios. Malaca e os sultanatos de Johor e Aceh, 1575–1619. Lisbon 1997, doc. 14, letter of the Archbishop of Goa to King Philip II of Portugal, dat. 6 April 1603, p. 286: “... e enviar dali a armada repartida em esquadras aos Estreitos de Singapura, de Sabão e de Sunda e aonde mais for necessário para que se assegure aqueles mare, e se alimpen dos ditos rebeldes [i.e. the Dutch] que por eles navegam, porque com ele assistir naquela cidade [i.e. Malaca] ...”

25 The incident is described at length in: Bry 1607, pp. 51ff.

26 Bry 1607, pp. 53–54.

van Enkhuysen was elected by his peers to the position of Vice-Admiral in replacement of the assassinated de Weert. The new Vice-Admiral’s ships proceeded to Aceh. On August 24, 1603, Pietersz and the three vessels Zierikzee, Hollandsche Tuin and Papagaaien set sail for Patani in the hope of procuring a cargo of pepper there. In the Straits of Malacca, the Vice Admiral intercepted several vessels and exacted information about markets, cargo, trade routes and topography from their respective crews.

Searching for the Straits of Singapore

In the final days of September, 1603, the three craft of Vice-Admiral Pietersz approached the Karimon Islands. In these waters they encountered strong adverse currents and unpredictable winds. Although the Dutch ships carried two Malay pilots on board, it does not appear that they were sufficiently familiar with the geo-morphology of the Straits of Singapore. The region presented itself to the Dutch crew and Malay pilots as a maze of islets, reefs and sandbanks that lay around shallow waters, or surfaced at low tide. The map of de Bry gives some indication of this and even provides the depth of water measured in key areas by the Dutch crew. The disoriented officers thus resolved, on September 27, to man two sloops and set out to find the passage through the Straits of Singapore to the South China Sea. The search continued for several days through narrow passages and around small islands, but the Straits of Singapore remained elusive.


28 Latinized as: “Iacobus Petri Enchusanus”.
29 Bry 1607, p. 67; Mac Leod 1927, p. 14.
31 Bry 1607, pp. 78ff.; Commelin 1646, pp. 34–36.
32 Commelin 1646, p. 36.
33 The depth of water was traditionally measured in fathoms (Dutch: vadem; Latin: orga). One vadem is equivalent to 1.67 meters; cf. Pieter van Dam: Beschrijvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie. Ed. by F. W. Stapel. Part I.1, The Hague 1927 (Rijks Geschiedkundige Publicatiën, Grote Serie. 63.), p. 741.
34 The term scapha is used in the Latin text of 1607.
On 30 September, seven members of the crew went on land to find fresh water and gather firewood. Unaware of any danger, the unarmed men were ambushed by angry locals, apparently mistaking the Dutch sailors for Portuguese soldiers. When their mates heard the commotion on land, they quickly dispatched a sloop to shore, finding one of the sailors dead and three men seriously wounded. The attackers meanwhile took flight in four prahus that had been left at the other side of the islet.

As evening fell the following day, the crew spotted a number of prahus assembling near the fateful island. Signaling to the Malays that they should come closer, the Dutch hissed a white flag. Still, the local warriors or fishermen were too afraid and kept their cautious distance. Noting this, the Dutch launched a sloop, carrying on board one of the Malay pilots, a white flag and the important message that the ships were Dutch and not Portuguese. Sensing that this might be a trick, the Malays used the imminent sunset to return to shore and pledged to return at dawn.

The following morning the prahus regathered as promised. As a matter of precaution, each party exchanged two members of the crew. On board the Zierikzee, the two Johoreans explained that there was now great hostility between Johor and Portugal. Pietersz also learned that two large ships, together with four galleys and between twenty and twenty-five bantins were holding guard in the mouth of the Johor River. After Heemskerk's infamous capture of the Santa Catarina, the Portuguese officials in Malacca were on their toes and determined to lend armed protection to their merchant fleet through the dangerous and treacherous waters of the Straits.

Extant sources reveal that Teixeira de Matos' armada was intended to fulfill a dual function. First, it imposed a blockade in punishment for Johorean co-operation with the Dutch, specifically also for their active support lent to Heemskerk during the Santa Catarina incident. As long as the Portuguese vessels were holding guard in the Johor River, they were able to disrupt

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35 Commelin 1646, pp. 36-37.
36 Described in the Latin text of 1607 as Æthiopes or simply “dark skinned people”.
37 Bry 1607, pp. 83-84; Commelin 1646, p. 37.
38 Commelin 1646, p. 37. - Hugo Grotius, who is sometimes celebrated in modern times as the “father” of modern international law, briefly touches upon this incident in his Law of Prize and Booty. In this he claims that the Portuguese had “two galleons” and more than twenty-five “foists and other long boats”; Hugo Grotius: De Jure Praedae Commentarius (1688), p. 331. - According to the testimony of David Lochum, printed in Coolhaas 1965, p. 506, the Portuguese fleet consisted of “two galleons or large ships, six galleys and twenty-four bantins or foists”.
39 Bry 1607, p. 84.
40 Concerning this cooperation, cf. also Borschberg 1999.
direct trade between the sea and Johor's riverine towns, including the royal capital at Batu Sawar which is said to have been located about six Dutch sea-miles or about thirty-six kilometers upstream. Second, the Portuguese armada was instructed to await the arrival of the Portuguese merchant ships from Nagasaki, Macao and Macassar and grant them armed protection for their onward journey to Malacca. The Dutch Vice-Admiral also learnt on this occasion that before returning to Europe, Captain Jacob van Heemskerk deployed members of his crew as agents, including Jacob Buijsen who now headed the new VOC factory at Batu Sawar. Pietersz hesitated no longer. He asked the Johoreans to show his craft the passage through the Straits of Singapore, and promised a reward for their services. The Johoreans answered that they were not seeking reward or remuneration, but rather, they came to assist their Dutch friends on the instructions of their monarch, 'Ala'ud-din Ri'ayat Shah III. The Vice-Admiral issued orders to raise anchor, and with his Johorean guides on board, he made his way to the Straits of Singapore. The local guides instructed the Dutch to “go back” because they were “not near the Straits”. It appears that the Dutch ships had proceeded too far South, and cast anchor near the Northern coast of Bulan or Batam, indicated on the map as Valsch Sinca Pora (“False” Strait of Singapore). Their further course cannot be reconstructed with certainty, but they did eventually arrive at a location that clearly fits the description of the old Dragon Teeth Gate (also commonly known as Lot's Wife), which used to be located at Tanjong Berlayar in the vicinity of present-day Labrador Park in Singapore.

The old Straits of Singapore are described (with some exaggeration, no doubt) as “a stone's throw” wide and “a cannon shot long.” Entering from the Northwest, the crew spotted on the left-hand side two columns or pillars. Nearby they sighted a “fine bay” – which is almost certainly

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41 Commelin 1646, p. 38; A. Botelho E. Sousa: Subsidios para a historia militar-maritima da India. Vol. 1. Lisbon 1930, p. 554. – One Dutch sea-mile, or the millarium Euroastrum, as it is called in the Latin text of 1607, is equivalent to about 5 nautical miles today, cf. Rouffaer 1921, p. 400.
42 Commelin 1646, p. 38; Tiele 1883, pp. 217, 218; Botelho E. Sousa 1930, p. 553.
43 Name latinized as Buis/sius; cf. Bry 1607, p. 85; Mac Leod 1927, p. 14; Netscher 1870, p. 8.
44 Tiele 1883, p. 217.
45 Commelin 1646, p. 37.
46 Rouffaer 1921, pp. 386–387.
48 Commelin 1646, pp. 37–38; Rouffaer 1921, pp. 388, 401.
present-day Keppel Harbour – as well as a town that is known by the name of “Singapura”, the exact location of which cannot be ascertained from the Dutch source.\textsuperscript{49} In the afternoon a Southwesterly breeze helped the ships steer clear of dangerous cliffs along the shores of Sentosa. Once the ships cleared the Straits, they plied a North-Northeasterly course, skirting the Eastern shores of Singapore Island.

**Preparing for Battle**

The following day, October 4, 1603, the three Dutch ships made their way toward “Patana”, described as the principal “port of Johor”.\textsuperscript{50} This is almost certainly the islet in the Johor River, known as Pulau Patani, that is located about five kilometers upstream from Johor Lama.\textsuperscript{51} Several prahu are reported to have gathered around the Dutch ships. One of them carried a Johorean official who is described as the “governor of Bintan”.\textsuperscript{52} A second prahu bore messages from the King and Jacob Buijsen.\textsuperscript{53} These documents explained the reasons for the Portuguese blockade, and that the armada of Teixeira de Matos was waiting for in-bound vessels from Japan, China and Macassar. Pietersz swiftly responded to these written messages with pledges to attack the Portuguese and engage them in battle. He also asked the Johor monarch and Buijsen to come aboard his vessel as soon as possible in order that further negotiations could be conducted in person. The Dutch crew then spotted several Portuguese craft holding guard at the mouth of the Johor River. Under the cover of night, the Dutch dispatched a few sloops and prahu for reconnaissance, but the Portuguese immediately took flight when they suspected enemy vessels approaching.

At dawn on October 5, 1603, a southerly breeze carried the Dutch ships further upstream. After passing two unidentified islands on their right-hand side, several prahu suddenly appeared from all directions and gathered around them. They apparently belonged to small traders and peddlers who sought to break through the Portuguese blockade under the armed protection of the Dutch ships, and reach the upstream towns that had been cut off

\textsuperscript{49} Commelin 1646, p. 38; Rouffaer 1921, p. 401.

\textsuperscript{50} Bry 1607, p. 85: “... versus portum Ior, qui alias Portus de Patana vocatur ...”; Commelin 1646, p. 38.


\textsuperscript{52} Bry 1607, p. 85: “... Gubernator Insula: Binthani ...”; Commelin 1646, p. 38.

from commerce and supplies. The Portuguese naval force was now only one and a half Dutch sea-miles or about nine kilometers further upstream. The Dutch ships cast anchor, waiting for the currents of the shifting tide to assist them in moving to the upper reaches of the Johor River.

At about three o’clock in the afternoon, a couple of foists and boats came to get a better glimpse of the newcomers, but they quickly turned around and headed back after realizing that they were dealing with enemy ships. That night, under the cover of darkness, the Zierikzee and Hollandsche Tuin hoisted anchor and quietly moved their position further upstream. The Zierikzee reportedly ran aground, but thanks to the swift response of its crew, the ship was soon afloat again and ready for battle.

A Portuguese renegado by the name of Codsa de Delsab, working in the services of the Johor monarch, arrived with a letter written in the Malay language and accompanied by a translation into Dutch prepared by Buijsen. In his letter, the monarch beseeched the Vice-Admiral to do all in his powers to help relieve Johor of the blockade and to drive the Portuguese out of the river. From a private note of Buijsen that accompanied the official letter, it transpires that the King publicly welcomed the Vice-Admiral’s earlier pledge of support. This message, Buijsen explains, evoked much rejoicing among the people of Batu Sawar and raised hopes that the Portuguese blockade may soon be lifted with Dutch help.

The Battle

At dawn the Dutch ships were now only two cannon shots’ distance from the Portuguese armada. Slowly, they glided toward the eastern shores of the Johor River toward the enemy. The Dutch crew said their prayers and then engaged Teixeira with the first cannon blast. The Portuguese returned fire with their smaller artillery. The battle lasted for most hours of daylight. Just before dusk, at five o’clock in the afternoon, the Portuguese flag-ship broke through the Dutch vessels and headed for the sand bank on which the Zierikzee had earlier run aground. It is believed that many Portuguese soldados lost their lives in this tactical move, but with the benefit of hindsight, it saved the flag-ship and the remaining vessels of the armada from suffering more extensive damage. On the Dutch side, the Vice-Admiral counted on his flag-ship three casualties and several men who had been wounded or

54 Bry 1607, p. 86: “Codsa ab Delsab”.
55 Commelin 1646, p. 39; Bry 1607, p. 86.
56 Tiele 1883, p. 218; Bry 1607, p. 87.
crushed. François Valentijn, in his monumental Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiëin claims that “[t]he only losses suffered in that fight were five or six men killed, and a few men wounded on both [Dutch] vessels.”

Throughout the hours of daylight one of the Johor monarch’s half-brothers, Raja Bongsu, Jacob Buijsen and many orang kaya in their company held watch in prahus of Johor’s royal fleet on the Western shore of the Johor River. When the Portuguese flag-ship broke through the Dutch vessels, the Johoreans made their way across the water toward the victorious crew. Raja Bongsu presented Vice-Admiral Pietersz with a beautiful kris and thanked him for his contribution in lifting the crippling blockade. The Johoreans also brought fruits and arak on board and celebrated with the Dutch sailors their victory over the Portuguese. The following morning, October 8, 1603, the Dutch crew discovered that the Portuguese ships, at high tide and under the cover of darkness, made their way across the dangerous sand bank and took flight down the Johor River. As the tide had already reversed by dawn, it was not possible to raise anchor and chase after them.

Meanwhile, the King of Johor moved with the remaining part of his fleet, consisting of four to five “magnificent” galleys and about forty prahus into the mouth of the Johor River. He was determined to chase the remains of the Portuguese armada out of his waters. The map of de Bry places them near a finger-shaped shoal off the Eastern coast of Singapore that is now reclaimed land in the vicinity of Tanah Merah Ferry Terminal and the new Changi Naval Base. The King was aboard the largest of the galleys, and his two brothers, Raja Bongsu and the Prince of Siak, were each aboard their own personal craft. During the morning hours they encountered strong contrary currents of the tide. By the afternoon, however, the tide began to reverse, and the proud Johorean fleet glided upstream. They spotted the enemy, anchored in the river at a distance of about two Dutch sea-miles, or approximately twelve kilometers. Later they were also joined by the Dutch ships. The King and the Vice-Admiral resolved to attack the following morning.

At dawn on October 10, 1603, Raja Bongsu, together with many orang kaya and the Dutch agent Jacob Buijsen, transferred onto the Zievikzee

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57 Hervey 1885, p. 129.
58 Latinized as: Rahu Bongsu.
60 Bry 1607, p. 87; Tiele 1883, p. 218; Mac Leod 1927, p. 14.
from where they could better monitor the battle. A Westerly breeze carried them toward the enemy, whose remaining craft were quickly gathering in formation toward the Eastern side of the river. Pietersz resolved to attack the flag-ship. The crew again said their prayers and manoeuvred themselves to the side of the Portuguese flag-ship. The exchange of fire began sometime between nine and ten o’clock in the morning and lasted for seven full hours. The Dutch crew fired at the sails of the Portuguese flag-ship in a tactical move to immobilize it. Pietersz and his Johorean guests observed how the Portuguese soldiers were abandoning ship, transferring personnel from the larger craft into their smaller galleys and prahus. The armada headed for the open sea, making their way toward Pedra Branca at the Eastern entrance of the Straits. As evening fell, the remains of the Portuguese armada assembled off the Northeastern coast of Batam.

Raja Bongsu, who supervised the entire naval operation aboard the Zierikzee, transferred back to his personal galley at twilight. He left Buijsen behind, issuing him with express instructions to keep a vigilant eye on all developments and to brief him the next morning.

At dawn of the following day, October 11, the Dutch crew spotted the Portuguese armada anchored off the Northeastern coast of Batam, about one Dutch sea-mile or six kilometers away. The Portuguese, too, were alert and had already spotted the Dutch ships which were heading toward them. Dreading a third round of attacks, the Portuguese quickly hoisted their sails and took off. Seeing this, Vice-Admiral Pietersz dispatched a sloop with a message for the King, Raja Bongsu and the Johorean fleet that the Portuguese were now definitely taking flight. The sea battle was won! With the Portuguese defeated and on the run, the King was able to bring Johor Lama back under his control.

Closer Ties

The Vice-Admiral moved his three ships into the safer waters of the Johor River where the crew could rest for a few days from the exertions of combat. The whole fleet of Johor, together with the King, his two brothers, and many

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61 Bry 1607, p. 88; Hervey 1885, p. 129.
62 Bry 1607, p. 88, rightly referred to in the Latin text by its commonly used Portuguese name Pedra Branca. This navigational landmark, however, is depicted on de Bry’s map as Pedro Blanco (White Rock), a literal translation into Spanish of the Portuguese name.
63 Bry 1607, p. 88; Commelin 1646, p. 41.
64 Coolhaas 1965, p. 506.
orang kaya came toward the Dutch vessels. It was raining heavily that day. The Vice-Admiral and Buijsen boarded the royal galley, where inside they found the King seated on a carpet and Raja Bongsu joined them soon after.

The King thanked the Vice-Admiral for keeping faith and for lending armed assistance. Since he had little wealth, the King wondered aloud how he would be able to repay his Dutch friends. Offers had been made earlier, on October 9 to be precise, to procure pepper from Kampar and Indragiri and unspecified "other places", presumably all on Sumatra. Even a man referred to as the "governor" of Kampar (who incidentally spoke Portuguese rather well) was in the company of the Johor monarch at the time and informed the Vice-Admiral as to whether there would be sufficient pepper in stock. This was evidently not the case. The King later explained that there was not sufficient pepper available at the present time, but in the event that the Dutch friends could return in four or five months, or better even, stay in Johorean waters, there would be abundant supplies at hand. Pietersz replied that the ships and crew had already been in the region for quite some time, and they would need to find cargo soon so that they may set out on their voyage home. The Dutch party extended an invitation to the King to visit them aboard the Zierikzee for a farewell. This was accepted. Raja Bongsu then took his leave, and the Dutch party escorted him back to his galley.

Shortly thereafter the King, Raja Bongsu, the Prince of Siak and several orang kaya arrived on board the Zierikzee and entered into the cabin of the Vice-Admiral. Dressed in fine silk the King seated himself with a pillow on a "table-shaped" singgasana. Next to him, on a "small bench", the Prince of Siak took seat and Raja Bongsu used a "Spanish chair". The orang kaya seated themselves on mats. The King had many words of praise for his Dutch friends, and thanked the Vice-Admiral for delivering Johor from the Portuguese. Pietersz presented the Johor monarch with a silver-hilted Japanese sword and Raja Bongsu with a musket. The subsequent round of discussions appear to have largely focussed on opportunities that had opened up with the lifting of the Portuguese blockade. Now that the river was free from enemy craft, pepper could be brought in from Sumatra

65 Commelin 1646, p. 40.
66 Bry 1607, p. 88.
67 Bry 1607, p. 89; Commelin 1646, p. 42; Tiele 1883, p. 218.
68 Bry 1607, p. 89. This visit is also mentioned by Grotius. Cf. Grotius 1868, p. 331.
69 Terms based on the Dutch text printed in Commelin. The Latin description reads as follows: Bry 1607, p. 89: "... Rex in mensam panino serico instratam, frater vero eius in scenum & Rahu Bongo in sellam iuxta eum consederunt."
70 Bry 1607, p. 89: "... scelopetum pulcherrimum ..."; "... gladium Iaponicum, capulo et vagina argenteis constantem ..."; Commelin 1646, p. 42; Teixeira 1961, p. 223.
and trade could flourish once more. The Johorean guests bid their hosts farewell. After bringing on fresh water and waiting for the wind to pick up, Vice-Admiral Pietersz issued orders on October 14, to raise anchor and set sail for Patani where he arrived on November 4, 1603.\textsuperscript{71} The cutter\textit{Pappagaaien} was dispatched to Bantam where the crew delivered news of their victorious engagement with the Portuguese\textit{armada}.\textsuperscript{72} Yet the words of the young lawyer and jurisconsult Hugo Grotius who defended Dutch aggression in the East Indies in his\textit{Law of Prize and Booty} doubtlessly reflect, an over-optimistic and greatly exaggerated view of Dutch achievements in the region: “... the whole [Portuguese] fleet was vanquished, Johor liberated, and a friendly King delivered from siege.”\textsuperscript{73}

The Aftermath

Jacob van Heemskerk’s seizure of the\textit{Santa Catarina} off the East coast of Singapore and his primordial defense alliance with the King of Johor would herald an escalation of violence in the waters of the Straits of Singapore and the Johor River Delta in which the armed showdown between Vice-Admiral Pietersz van Enkhuisen and Captain Teixeira de Matos marked only a second but nevertheless important episode.

The Portuguese meanwhile were concerned about the inherent vulnerability of their far-flung possessions in Asia. The Portuguese officials of the\textit{Estado da India} were growing painfully aware that the Dutch competitors were not only seeking to wrest the spice producing Moluccan islands from their control, they were now engaging in acts that seriously disrupted vital trading routes linking Japan and China with Malaya and India. The arrival of Vice-Admiral Pietersz surely gave cause for serious concern, as the Portuguese China fleet would now increasingly be exposed to the violent actions by what officials considered Dutch “thieves, liars and pirates”. It can therefore scarcely surprise that the Portuguese\textit{armada} – or whatever parts of it might have remained seaworthy – reappeared just days after the Vice-Admiral set sail for Patani. Significantly also, the new governor of Malacca, André Furtado de Mendonça, an officer seasoned in combat,
assumed his office just shortly before hostilities erupted with Pietersz on 1 September, 1603. He used this change of political leadership to launch a diplomatic offensive at the Johor court that some years later resulted in a peace treaty. Furtado de Mendonça was willing to hold out the olive branch to the King, providing that he sever his good ties with the Dutch, expel the factors from Batu Sawar, and confiscate their property. On the advice of Raja Bongsu, however, the King replied on February 8, 1604, that he would rather lose his entire kingdom than give into such preposterous demands. This surely ruffled Furtado’s ego. It transpires from a number of studies that in this period – the early months of 1604 – the Portuguese attacked targets in the Johor River. They failed to capture the capital Batu Sawar, but did, once more, seize and occupy Johor Lama. Judging from what Winstedt and Gibson-Hill contended some decades ago, it appears that the Portuguese toyed with the idea of reconstructing the fort at Johor Lama that would help them protect their shipping from attacks by the Johoreans and Dutch “pirates”. The engineer and cartographer Emanuel Godinho de Eredia, who also founded the Portuguese fort at Muar, spent some time examining the ruins of Johor Lama that very year. But Portuguese influence in the region was precarious and this, combined with logistical considerations, might very well have been the reason why the fort was ultimately not reconstructed.

Meanwhile co-operation of the Johoreans with the Dutch grew steadily. Admiral Wijbrand van Warwijk arrived at the mouth of the Johor River on May 3, 1604, much to the relief of the besieged monarch and Raja Bongsu. On this occasion, Warwijk supplied the Johoreans with gunpowder, weapons, ammunition and armour so that he may better defend himself against the Portuguese enemy.

Backed by their Malay allies and friends, the Dutch stepped up their attacks on Portuguese targets in the waters around the Peninsula and especially in the Straits of Singapore. In 1605, a Portuguese trading vessel arriving from Macao, the Santo António, was attacked and seized in the port

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75 Ibid., p. 225.
77 Boxer and Vasconcelos 1989, p. 61.
78 Rouffaer 1921, p. 402; Teixeira 1961, p. 223.
80 Botelho E. Sousa 1930, p. 548.
81 Hervey 1885, p. 131; Teixeira 1961, p. 224.
of Patani with the permission of the ruling Queen. The captured ship was dispatched by Admiral Warwijk in September 1605 to the Johor River with the aim of finding cargo there. The loss of the Santo António came despite heavy naval security dispatched to protect in-bound shipping during the monsoon season of late 1604 and early 1605. Furtado de Mendonça’s armada consisted of no less than seven galleons, thirty bantins, twenty foists and galleys as well as ten Javanese champans. These held guard in the Johor River Delta and launched attacks on Johorean positions, including Batu Sawar. Still, the Portuguese merchant fleet suffered in 1605 their largest losses yet in the waters around the Peninsula and the Singapore Straits. A ship belonging to the fleet of Warwijck captured on January 14, 1605, near Pedra Branca a vessel carrying a precious cargo of textiles from Cochin-China. The Dutch further succeeded in capturing a junk bringing provisions for Malacca and on June 16, 1605 also attacked and seized a craft arriving from the island of Solor that was laden with sandalwood and sea-turtle shell.

The largest Dutch expedition to visit the region to that date arrived with fifteen ships in April 1606. Admiral Matelieff de Jonghe concluded a standing treaty with the King of Johor. This treaty formalized the alliance between the Dutch and the Johoreans, ceded several rights and privileges to the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and foresaw a joint attack on Portuguese Malacca. In the event of victory, it was further agreed that the city of Malacca and some surrounding territory be ceded to the Dutch. Despite heavy fighting, Matelieff’s forces could not defeat the Portuguese. As history teaches, it would be another three and a half decades before the Dutch could wrest once and for all the legendary city of spice and trade from Portugal.

82 Commelin 1646, pp. 81–83; Terpstra 1938, pp. 24, 186; Boxer 1948, p. 51; Boxer and Vasconcelos 1989, pp. 55–58.
83 Commelin 1646, p. 83.
84 Ibid., p. 81.
87 An English text version of this treaty is printed in Hervey 1885, pp. 136–137 and Winstedt 1932, pp. 31–33.
Fig. 1: Map of the Luso-Dutch battle of 1603
Bücherbesprechungen


KARLHEINZ KESSLER, Erlangen
