





# The *Santa Catarina* Incident of 1603

## Dutch Freebooting, the Portuguese *Estado da Índia* and Intra-Asian Trade at the Dawn of the 17<sup>TH</sup> Century

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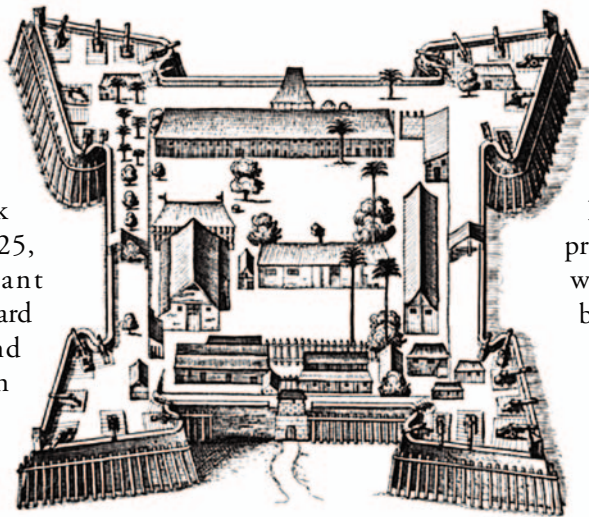
### WHAT WAS THE *SANTA CATARINA* INCIDENT?

The “*Santa Catarina* incident” emerged as a milestone in seventeenth-century colonial expansion and in the history of international law. The Portuguese-flagged 1400-ton carrack was outbound from Macao en route to Malacca and Goa when it was attacked and seized by Dutch Admiral Jakob van Heemskerck off Singapore on February 25, 1603.<sup>1</sup> According to extant reports, the ship carried on board seven hundred *soldados*, and scores of merchants, women and possibly children. The loss of this ship and cargo dealt a serious blow to the merchant community of Macao. Brought back to the Netherlands as a prize of war, the carrack’s merchandise yielded at public auction the staggering sum of about three and a half million florins. At the time, this was equivalent to one half of the paid-in capital of the Netherlands’ United East India Company (VOC), established in 1602, and more than double

that of its English counterpart, the Honourable East India Company (EIC), founded in 1600.

The “*Santa Catarina* incident,” as it has been called in several recent publications,<sup>2</sup> is of special interest not only to historians of Asia, but also to researchers concerned with the history of political thought and the genesis of modern theories of international relations. This is because its wider repercussions entailed far more than the seizure of a Portuguese-flagged carrack as a prize of war. It emerged as an event with truly international and broad-based implications, acting, as some scholars contend, as a cornerstone for the events that were to unfold within the first two decades of the seventeenth century. The seizure of the *Santa Catarina* marks the first major incident in which the Dutch, either under the VOC or any of its legal

predecessors, seized a Portuguese merchant vessel in the waters around the Singapore Straits, the Karimons, Pedra Branca or the waters south of Tioman Island. As history would clearly demonstrate, this region near the south of the Malay peninsula emerged as one of the preferred locations for the Dutch to prey on inbound Lusitanian vessels from Macao, Japan, CochinChina, Macassar and Borneo.



Fort Nassau, Banda Islands. From I. Commelin, *Begin ende Voortgangh...*, Amsterdam, 1646.

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Battle between the Dutch and Portuguese fleets, near Bantem, 1601.  
Engraving by Claes Jansz (Maritiem Museum, Rotterdam).

## ENCONTROS E DESENCONTROS EUROPEUS NO MAR DO SUL DA CHINA I

The “*Santa Catarina* incident” made VOC directors and the regents of the Dutch Republic cognizant of how profitable policies of freebooting and despoiling the enemy could be; it also raised their awareness of the *Estado da Índia*’s geographically conditioned vulnerabilities.<sup>3</sup> The Singapore Straits had long been perceived in Macao, Malacca and Goa as one of the weaker – if not the weakest – link in the intricate networks of trade that spanned the far-flung *Estado da Índia*.<sup>4</sup> But the arrival of Northern European competitors in the waters of insular Southeast Asia, coupled with the “*Santa Catarina* incident” of 1603, placed considerable pressure on the Viceroy to step up security in the Straits. Should he fail in this, the *Estado da Índia* would not only be placed on the defensive, but would be severed in two: for if the Dutch successfully secured the Singapore Straits, they could impose a stranglehold on Portuguese traffic, trade, and revenue. Lusitanian officials were painfully aware not only that it was necessary to formulate a new forward-looking policy for the Singapore Straits, but also that the period of relative peace and tranquillity they had enjoyed since the destruction of Johor Lama (“Old Johor”) had drawn to a definitive close.<sup>5</sup>

This awareness that the Singapore Straits represented a potential Achilles heel in the *Estado da Índia*’s maritime security provides the immediate historic context not only for the carrack’s seizure, but also for the legal defence of this seizure by Dutch juriconsult Hugo Grotius (Hugo de Groot), who is frequently upheld as the “father of modern international law.” As a young man of twenty-two, Grotius wrote an apology legitimizing Heemskerck’s recourse to violence. This defence gave Grotius the opportunity to contend and familiarize himself with pertinent legal issues surrounding trade, war, peace, the taking of plunder from the enemy, and access to ports and emporia around the globe, and furthermore to explore key dimensions of international alliances and treaty-making. In his lifetime, only one chapter of this substantial legal work was published, anonymously, as *Mare Liberum – The Freedom of the Seas, or the Right which Belongs to the Dutch to Participate in the Indies’ Trade* (1609) – but the main body of the Latin text remained unknown until its rediscovery in the 1860s.<sup>6</sup> Since this date, research has conclusively proved that a substantial portion of the legal parameters worked out in this earlier apology for

the *Santa Catarina* incident was subsequently incorporated into his *De Jure Belli ac Pacis Libri Tres* [Three Books on the Law of War and Peace], 1625, the work that is remembered in modern times as Grotius’ most outstanding contribution to international law and jurisprudence.

The present article revisits at a microscopic level, the events of the “*Santa Catarina* incident,” presenting them against the backdrop of recent research completed by Martine van Ittersum in her excellent doctoral dissertation submitted to Harvard University in 2002 and published in a meticulously researched article in the *Journal of Asian Social Sciences* in 2003.<sup>7</sup> On the basis of both Dutch- and Portuguese- language material, the incident shall be placed within a broader context of Luso-Dutch rivalry in the Malay world—more specifically, in the Singapore Straits and Malacca. It shall be shown in this context that the seizure of the *Santa Catarina* acted as an important trigger for several decisions made by the *Estado da Índia* and by the nascent VOC. Security for inbound shipping from China, Japan, Macassar and Timor became paramount for the Portuguese. Apart from beefing up forts and fleets, they developed a forward-looking policy for Southeast Asia that combined effective diplomacy and military muscle. What also becomes very apparent in the course of the present account is how important the Macao merchants really were to the *Estado da Índia*, how deep into Southeast Asia their networks of trade extended, and how, despite suffering a number of severe setbacks as a result of VOC freebooting, they managed to recuperate from these blows with amazing agility and perseverance.

THE “*SANTA CATARINA* INCIDENT”

The unexpectedly poor business prospects and dearth of cargo encountered by Heemskerck after his arrival in Asia in 1602, together with his discovery that seventeen Dutch sailors had been executed at the hands of the Lusitanian authorities in Macao, led the Admiral to adopt a downright hostile disposition towards the *Estado da Índia*.<sup>8</sup> He was deeply suspicious that Portuguese officers had conspired with several Southeast Asian princes to close Dutch factories, confiscate their goods, and bring these Northern European interlopers to “justice.” More significantly perhaps, his efforts to source cargo proved futile. In

## EUROPEAN ENCOUNTERS AND CLASHES IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA I

Patani on the Gulf of Siam, an earlier visit by his Dutch compatriot van Neck had depleted the Malay port-polity's ready supply of pepper for the current trading season.

With the intention of heading for the Banda Islands, whose inhabitants had suffered earlier that year at the hands of Admiral Furtado de Mendonça's might and arms, Heemskerk hoisted sail in Patani on 16 November 1602. He set course for Tioman, an island and navigational landmark along the eastern board of the Malay Peninsula.<sup>9</sup> This was at the beginning of the South China Sea's monsoon season, and it is during this period that Portuguese carracks outbound from Macao and Japan would skirt the coast of modern Vietnam, cross the Gulf of Siam between Pulau Condor and Tioman, and then continue their voyage through the Singapore Straits and on to Malacca. This location had been recommended to Heemskerk in Patani by Raja Hijau, the ruling Queen of Patani, and by a Johorean prince, commonly known from the sources as Raja Bongsu, the younger (half-) brother of Johor's ruling monarch, 'Alauddin Riayat Shah III.<sup>10</sup> Ittersum explains that an earlier intervention with the ruler of Demak to free Johorean captives and cargo endeared Heemskerk to the Johor royals, paving the way for a budding relationship that thrived in the opening decades of the seventeenth century on plundering Portuguese mercantile shipping.

Anchored off the coast of Tioman, Heemskerk convened his ship's council (*breede raad*), and, with the unanimous consent of his officers on December 4, 1602, resolved to attack the Portuguese China fleet.<sup>11</sup> After all, Portugal (together with Spain) was at war with the Dutch Republic, and obtaining cargo had so far proven extremely difficult. Time was now working against the Dutch admiral and his men.

The wait off Tioman lasted longer than the twenty days originally anticipated. Residents of the island informed the Dutch that a Portuguese carrack had passed as recently as February 18, 1603, but Heemskerk apparently ignored this news until receiving more concrete information from a passing Johorean *prahu*. The Malay sailors on board spoke of a carrack they had passed on the open sea only a few days earlier, and advised the admiral to await the arrival of the Portuguese China fleet in the Singapore Straits. Since it was necessary for the ships to sail very close to shore through the Straits, this location was infinitely better

suited to intercept and capture ships than the open waters around Tioman.

Heemskerk heeded this suggestion and arrived at the Johor River estuary to the East of Singapore Island on February 24, 1603, hoping perhaps to catch up with that earlier carrack. But here he was informed that the ship had passed through the treacherous Singapore Straits without incident just five days earlier. Coincidence or perhaps luck would have it that at dawn on the following morning, February 25, Heemskerk and his men spotted the *Santa Catarina* riding at anchor.<sup>12</sup> The 1,400-ton carrack, which, according to extant testimonies, was outside the protective company of other ships, was taken under fire in an exchange that began at sunrise and continued for many hours of daylight. The two Dutch ships, the *Witte Leeuw* (White Lion) and *Alkmaar*, shot through the sails of the carrack in a well-chosen strategy to immobilize the vessel and spare its cargo from damage. Portuguese documents that touch upon the incident explain that the soldiers aboard the *Santa Catarina* experienced serious difficulties in returning fire, not least because of all the commotion and confusion aboard the packed vessel involving women, possibly children, merchants and other non-military personnel. The early seventeenth-century historian Emanuel van Meteren further blamed the problems of the Portuguese on the crude weaponry the carrack carried, and on the superior design of the Dutch ships, which were more manoeuvrable and presented a much smaller profile as they sat lower in the water.<sup>13</sup>

Dutch sources emphasize the fact that throughout the course of the hostilities that day, a member of the Johor royal family was on board Heemskerk's flagship. De Bry's *Indiae Orientalis Pars Octava* [Part Eight of the Voyages to the East Indies], 1607, as well as François Valentijn in his *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën* [Old and New East India] identify specifically the presence of Raja Bongsu aboard Heemskerk's flagship, the *Witte Leeuw*, but a petition by the Admiral to the Netherlands' States-General as well as Hugo Grotius, claim that the occasion was graced by none other than King 'Alauddin himself, in the company of Johorean *orang kaya*.<sup>14</sup> Their presence was later used by Grotius, in his legal defence of the seizure, to argue that the *Santa Catarina* was despoiled under the direct auspices and express consent of the Johor monarch.



ENCONTROS E DESENCONTROS EUROPEUS NO MAR DO SUL DA CHINA I



VOC ships off Batavia.

## EUROPEAN ENCOUNTERS AND CLASHES IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA I

By the time evening fell, the carrack had suffered extensive damage from shots and fire, and was leaking dangerously. Unable to manoeuvre, the ship was drifting toward rocky shores. Given the strong tides in the Singapore Straits, as well as the shoals and reefs that dotted its waters, it is likely that the *Santa Catarina* was helplessly adrift off the eastern coast of the island of Singapore. There was a real threat that, if action were not taken promptly, both ship and cargo would be lost to the sea. The Portuguese captain of the carrack, one Sebastião Serrão, and the *soldados*, now counting seventy casualties, surrendered by showing a white flag. On spotting this, Heemskerk dispatched a sloop to the besieged carrack. It was agreed by negotiation that ship and cargo would be forfeited in return for sparing all the lives and granting unimpeded passage of the surviving crew and passengers to the Portuguese-held port of Malacca. Meanwhile the carrack's load was lightened and the most valuable portion of the ship's cargo brought to safety by transferring a substantial portion of the porcelain, sugar, silks and precious woods, such as *pao d'aquila* (eagle wood), to the two Dutch ships.<sup>15</sup>

## THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH

Extant documents from the Portuguese side reveal that Heemskerk did indeed live up to his end of the agreement, bringing all the survivors to Malacca. Anchored near one of the islands off the coast of the Portuguese-held fort (identified in one source as the *Ilha Grande*), Heemskerk kept Captain Serrão and a Catholic Priest, Friar António, as hostages on board, and exchanged a series of letters with the Lusitanian authorities on shore. In a letter drafted on March 9, 1603, by Paulo Mendes de Vasconcelos, and co-signed by members of Malacca's city council, the officials were evidently following protocol when they thanked the Dutch admiral, in a language atypically plain and unusually unpretending for its age, for keeping his word. No sooner had the magistrates fulfilled their unceremonious epistolary rendering of thanks, they intimated to the admiral that he was extremely fortunate to have encountered this richly laden carrack from China, and that it had fallen into their enemy hands through a "secret and unknown judgment of God."<sup>16</sup>

That very same day in March, the Captain-Major of Malacca, Fernão d'Albuquerque, a man of great

ancestry who would eventually assume the position of Viceroy of India, wrote a letter to Heemskerk, extending his gratitude and dwelling particularly on the question of why the Dutch admiral had had such good fortune when he attacked and later seized the *Santa Catarina*. The presence of so many non-military personnel, he said — such as women, merchants, and other "useless persons" (perhaps a reference to children, among others) — had seriously hampered the Portuguese ship's efforts to return fire. Their presence, Albuquerque openly admitted, had proven to be a serious impediment during the attack. Fortune was doubly on the side of Heemskerk, in that he had not happened to encounter any vessels of the Portuguese fleet; for had he, Albuquerque sternly assured, the vessels of his armada would have "made a difference."<sup>17</sup>

It would appear that Albuquerque was also aware of the longer-standing motives behind the attack, specifically the fate of those seventeen Dutch mates of van Neck's fleet who were executed by drowning in Macao. Albuquerque expressed his regret about the incident, especially the inadequate grounds upon which the atrocity was committed. He underscored that the person responsible had been apprehended and was awaiting execution. It is at this juncture that the Captain-Major proceeded to request a favour of Heemskerk that in many ways does not befit the tone of the letter and the occasion. He asked Heemskerk to intervene with Johor's King 'Alauddin and also with the Raja Bongsu to negotiate the release of hostages (who had been taken from an inbound junk from Macao) held in Johorean captivity, and to secure their safe passage to Malacca. Judging from a second letter written by Albuquerque to the Dutch admiral, dated March 26, 1603, it would appear that these "Christian" hostages taken by the Johoreans "under the pretext of peace" were still not free. Albuquerque reminded Heemskerk that he was making no demands for "restitution of the junk" and its cargo, only for the "Portuguese and Christian" hostages. To better pave the way for negotiations with the Johor royals, Albuquerque declared that he would entrust Heemskerk with two envoys, whom he named as Philip Lobo and Peter Mascarenhas.<sup>18</sup>

Certainly the most moving communication reproduced by De Bry in his *Indiae Orientalis Pars Octava* is a letter dated March, 24, 1603,<sup>19</sup> written by



## ENCONTROS E DESENCONTROS EUROPEUS NO MAR DO SUL DA CHINA I

Captain Sebastião Serrão and addressed to Admiral Heemskerk. It is through this testimony that the captain's humanity and the personal tragedy he suffered in the "*Santa Catarina* incident" are brought to light. Serrão expresses his profound regret that mere words were the only means at his disposal to thank Heemskerk for sparing his life—for, as one reads further, the captain had lost everything. Relieved of his cargo, in which he had doubtlessly invested a good chunk of his personal wealth, his only remaining possessions were the clothes he was wearing, and even these, the broken captain laments, were now torn to shreds after the assault on his ship. Serrão humbly beseeches Heemskerk to send him "a piece of felt" from which he could sew new clothes for himself. He would take this, the letter assures, as a token of friendship, as alms, and in memory of the pitiful state in which he had been captured and later set free.<sup>20</sup>

## MALACCA RETALIATES

With the seizure of the *Santa Catarina*, one of the "richest" cargos to leave China in many years, the merchant community of Macao is estimated by Charles Boxer to have suffered losses in the amount of one *conto de oro* (one million cruzados).<sup>21</sup> These were heavy losses that would take time to recoup, and involved a sum of money that most certainly could not be ignored. Security in the Singapore Straits and Malacca had long been an issue – and a costly one at that for the *Estado da Índia*. Much of the territory surrounding these two navigational lanes were controlled by Johor, a kingdom seen by many in the Malay world as the rightful and moral successor of the Malacca sultanate which had fallen to the Portuguese in 1511. Given this status, as well as its geographic proximity to Malacca, it can scarcely surprise that Luso-Johor relations were volatile, and, even in the "best" of times, seriously strained. In the aftermath of the *Santa Catarina* incident, it was clear that the Dutch presence in, and friendship with, Johor was not only undesirable, but a serious strategic and commercial threat indeed, one that must be stifled in its infancy.

In the early autumn of 1603 the seasoned admiral André Furtado de Mendonça assumed the reins of authority from Fernão d'Albuquerque as Captain-Major of Malacca and its dependencies. The change of Portuguese political leadership in the

aftermath of the *Santa Catarina* incident was used by Furtado de Mendonça to launch an "offensive" on the Kingdom of Johor: on the diplomatic front, the new Malacca leadership pressured the monarch and his younger brother to sever their friendly ties with the Dutch. These overtures were clearly rejected by the Johor court. Against the backdrop of Johor's determination not to yield to Malacca's pressure, toward the beginning of the monsoon season in the South China Sea, Furtado de Mendonça dispatched Estêvão Teixeira de Macedo and an armada of about forty vessels to impose a naval blockade on the Johor River.<sup>22</sup> The purpose of this move was essentially twofold: to punish the Johor monarch who hosted the Dutch and allied with them to plunder Portuguese mercantile vessels, and to provide enhanced protection for inbound shipping from Macao, Japan and Macassar. Officials in Malacca were on their toes and sought to avoid at all costs a repeat of the *Santa Catarina* incident during the new China trading season of 1603-1604.

It was in late September 1603 that the Dutch Vice-Admiral Jakob Pietersz van Enkhuysen arrived in the Singapore Straits and learned of the Portuguese riverine blockade. Responding to pleas by the Johor monarch and Raja Bongso for help, he engaged the armada of Teixeira de Macedo in an exchange of fire over the course of two days. The initial excitement expressed by the Johor royals over the expected end to the blockade quickly waned, as the remains of the Portuguese armada regrouped in the Singapore Straits once Pietersz and his three ships set sail for the port of Patani in mid-October, 1603.<sup>23</sup>

According to extant testimonies, the siege of Johor's upstream cities reached a new zenith in the opening weeks of 1604. Furtado de Mendonça had launched a major campaign that saw Johor Lama burned to the ground for the second time in less than two decades,<sup>24</sup> and vessels of the Portuguese armada coming within uncomfortably close reach of the upstream royal residence and capital Batu Sawar. As security issues were at the forefront of his concerns, Malacca's captain-major invited the Eurasian engineer and scientist Manoel Godinho de Erédia to accompany the campaign against Johor. It is on this occasion that Erédia inspected sites on which to build a fort or citadel, including at Johor Lama, and also penned several astonishingly detailed maps of the Singapore Straits

## EUROPEAN ENCOUNTERS AND CLASHES IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA I

and the Johor River estuary. The construction of the fort at Johor Lama was evidently not pursued any further, but Erédia, with Portuguese backing, ultimately built one at the mouth of the Muar River on the south-western coast of the Malay Peninsula. Its purpose was presumably to provide protection for passing vessels, and also to guard the entrance to the Muar River, which at the time still served as an important trans-peninsular trading artery. A drawing of this triangular-shaped fort, constructed not of stone but presumably of wooden palisades (like most Malay fortresses), is found among Erédia's papers, presently lodged with the Royal Library in Brussels.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the earlier setback of the *Santa Catarina* incident, Furtado de Mendonça's campaign against Johor and the founding of the fort at Muar in 1604 mark a revival in Portuguese Malacca's regional standing and prestige. But subsequent events—especially the confluence of further setbacks—stretched Malacca to its limits, financially, militarily and also in terms of morale. The Dutch stepped up their attacks on Portuguese posts in the Moluccas; the fort of *Nossa Senhora da Anunciada* on the island of Ambon fell to the Northern European “intruders” in February 1605.<sup>26</sup> The serious problems experienced in this part of the archipelago may explain, to some extent, why the first escort squadron arrived later than usual for the new trading season 1604-1605 in the waters around the Johor River estuary and the Singapore Straits.

Anticipating Dutch attacks in the Johor River estuary, Malacca mustered all available naval support in late February 1605 and dispatched an armada comprising seven galleons, thirty bantins, twenty

foists and ten Javanese champans through the Singapore Straits under the personal command of Furtado de Mendonça. It appears from documentary evidence that the captain-major of Malacca was very confident of his imminent victory over Johor and issued written threats to the king and Raja Bongsu. The seasoned commander boasted that should his military enterprise fail, he and the residents of Malacca would gladly pay tribute to the Johor king.

This was probably an act of hubris committed in the heat of confrontation. While one cannot possibly claim that the captain-major actually lost the campaign, neither did he succeed in his basic ambitions. After consuming much precious gunpowder and ammunition, and suffering many casualties, the Portuguese abandoned their siege of Batu Sawar. The Johor capital was well-provisioned and protected by thick palisades. The captain-major not only lost time, men and opportunities, he also lost credibility. This futile siege of Batu Sawar and the Portuguese presence in the Straits failed to

deter the vessels of Admiral Wijbrand van Warwijk from stepping up Dutch freebooting activities around the southern tip of the peninsula and the nearby Riau Archipelago. The crew of the *Vlissingen* succeeded in capturing a Portuguese-flagged vessel off nearby Pedra Branca that was inbound from Cochin-China with a cargo of rice, textiles, *palo d'aquila*, camphor, benzoin, and six pieces of artillery. Further prizes followed in these waters, including a junk loaded with provisions heading to Malacca and a craft inbound from the island of Solor (near Timor) that was loaded with about 16.7 metric tons of white sandalwood, as well as sea-turtle shells.<sup>27</sup>



Theodore de Bry, Johor.



ENCONTROS E DESENCONTOS EUROPEUS NO MAR DO SUL DA CHINA I



## EUROPEAN ENCOUNTERS AND CLASHES IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA I

THE “*SANTO ANTÓNIO* INCIDENT”

The greatest loss to the Portuguese merchant fleet in this trading season was doubtlessly the *Santo António*. This carrack was undertaking the voyage together with a second vessel, belonging to João Caiado de Gamboa, that had departed the Portuguese-controlled port of Hirado in November, 1604, and was reportedly “richly laden” with silver from Japan. This silver was in payment for the substantial cargo of silks sold in Japan that year, and this not only brought in “very fat profits” for 1604, it also wiped out much of the debt left behind from the earlier loss of the *Santa Catarina* to Jakob van Heemskerck two trading seasons earlier. For their voyage through the treacherous, hostile and pirate-infested waters of the South China Sea and the Singapore and Malacca Straits, the two merchant vessels were under armed escort of a galleon of the Portuguese crown.<sup>28</sup>

According to extant reports of both Portuguese and Dutch origin, the merchant fleet experienced stormy weather in the course of which the *Santo António* lost its helm off Pedra Branca. Given that the ship was now seriously damaged and almost impossible to manoeuvre, on February 17, 1605 she sailed into the port of Patani, in the Gulf of Siam. The other vessels of the merchant fleet, including Caiado de Gamboa’s silver ship and the Portuguese escort galleon continued their onward journey to Malacca, where they arrived safely. But the *Santo António* was left behind in the port of Patani for repairs. Raja Hijau of Patani and her royal councillors, whose favourable or at least indifferent disposition toward the Lusitanian merchants had been turning sour since 1602, consented to Admiral van Warwijk’s seizure of the distressed *Santo António* in the port of Patani. The crew of the ill-fated carrack was aware of its fate when on March 26, 1605, they first pledged to defend ship and cargo to the last drop of their blood. That very same evening the ship’s mates were ferried to shore, leaving the *Santo António* and its cargo (appraised at 80,000 cruzados at cost) in the hands of the enemy. The ship was taken without one casualty or a single shot fired!<sup>29</sup>

The fate of the *Santa Catarina*, the *Santo António* and other vessels of the Lusitanian merchant fleet between 1603 and 1605 in the waters around Singapore

and Tioman was symptomatic of the Dutch company’s objective to inflict the maximum possible damage on the Portuguese and Spanish possessions and their respective networks of trade. Freebooting and plunder – the attack and seizure of (preferably Lusitanian) merchant vessels whenever and wherever possible, sanctioned by the law of war – not only gave a boost to the VOC’s ailing bottom line, it was probably more widespread and significant than some modern historians of the Dutch company would venture to admit. The *Santa Catarina* and the *Santo António* incidents represent what in modern media jargon would be dubbed “headline news” — well-publicized events — but there were many other incidents that have long been forgotten. Victor Enthoven, in his seminal study *Zeeland and the Rise of the Republic*, estimates that in the first two decades of the VOC’s corporate life alone, anywhere between 150 and 200 vessels of all sizes and nationalities were attacked and taken in the East Indies in acts of freebooting.<sup>30</sup> That is a substantial number by any calculation!

*The change of Portuguese political leadership in the aftermath of the Santa Catarina incident was used by Furtado de Mendonça to launch an “offensive” on the Kingdom of Johor*

The year 1605 not only marked the loss of Ambon to the Dutch, it also registered what were at that point the most substantial losses to Lusitanian mercantile shipping on record. Furtado de Mendonça lamented that there was simply no end in sight to the intolerable conditions faced by the friendly merchant communities not only of Malacca, but also Macao. No doubt, the Portuguese had their own webs of informants to detect any suspicious developments in the region, and would have been alerted by their sympathizers at the court in Johor — among whom we find notably the leading officials such as the Bendahara

Fortress of Muar, in Manuel Godinho de Erédia’s *Declaração de Malaca*.



## ENCONTROS E DESENCONTROS EUROPEUS NO MAR DO SUL DA CHINA I

and Laksamanna – that the Johoreans were planning a joint offensive on Malacca together with the Dutch. They were expecting the worst, and by the closing weeks of 1605 efforts were already well under way to upgrade the fortifications in Malacca to withstand a future siege. This siege came in the following year with the arrival of Dutch Admiral Cornelis Matelieff de Jonghe.<sup>31</sup>

Extreme vigilance was also extended to Macao's and Malacca's networks of trade in the region. Paulo Pinto reports in his book *Portugueses e Malaaios* that from early 1606—that is, from the beginning of the new trading season with China following the *Santo António* incident—Malacca stepped up its patrols of the waters around the peninsula to protect inbound vessels from Macao.<sup>32</sup> These heightened security efforts focused on freebooting hotspots, such as the Singapore Straits and the sea between Pedra Branca and Tioman.

But despite these efforts at protecting inbound merchant shipping from China and Japan, business sentiment in Malacca reached alarming lows by the opening weeks of 1606. According to a letter of February that year, cited by Paul Anton Tiele, “a Malay merchant from Palembang who made a voyage to Malacca” reported that there were only “a few or no soldiers” stationed in the city, but that “more than two hundred of them” had been dispatched to the Johor River estuary. He further underscored that the *casados* of Malacca did not venture out to sea for fear of the freebooting *ingresen* (English). Perhaps he confused them with the Dutch or just simply could not keep the two straight. Still, the business mood in the Lusitanian-held city was reportedly so depressed that foreign merchants were leaving town and the *casados* of Malacca were not engaging in trade, but trying to eke out a meagre subsistence from farming.<sup>33</sup>

## EPILOGUE

After the unsuccessful 1606 Dutch assault on Malacca, many of the basic parameters that would characterize relations between the European and Asian powers in and around the Malay Peninsula, as well as the trading networks established with Macao, would endure for another three and a half decades. It was only around 1640 that new but meaningful shifts would alter the Portuguese trading world in Macao,

first with the loss of the Japan market in 1639, and in the following year with the fall of Malacca to the Dutch.

After the *Santa Catarina* incident, the Singapore Straits emerged as the prime location for the Dutch to prey on Portuguese-flagged mercantile vessels inbound from Japan and Macao, or to impose naval blockades in an attempt to sever all trading links between Malacca and Macao. The Portuguese responded swiftly to these challenges by opening up new trade routes, both on land and at sea. Erédia's fort at the Muar River estuary served not only to monitor maritime activity in the Straits of Malacca, but significantly also protected the important trans-peninsular trade route. This route followed the branches of the Muar and Pahang rivers, which are separated only by a relatively narrow land bridge far inland, known as the *Penarikan*, where smaller barges would be “dragged” (or more accurately “portaged”) across the land from one river to the other.<sup>34</sup> Whenever Dutch ships scoured the waters of the Singapore Straits, Portuguese agents stationed on the provisioning island of Tioman could give Lusitanian captains and merchants timely warning; in response, these latter could have their craft and cargo routed to the port of Pahang (*Pam*, *Pão*) for unloading and transshipment to Muar. Of course this arrangement required an effective engagement with Pahang court officials, whom the Portuguese generously cultivated with one eye cast at their two neighbours, the Johor-Riau Empire and Patani, both of whom Pahang (unusually) acknowledged as its “overlords” in the opening years of the seventeenth century.

To avoid the Singapore bottleneck, the Portuguese also succeeded in charting new maritime routes through the sprawling Riau Archipelago, thus enabling traders to evade periodic Dutch naval blockades imposed in and around the Straits. The most important of these new maritime routes can be found on some maps as the *Derrota de N. Senhora de Conceição*, the discovery of which is ascribed to one Pedro Bertolo in 1633.<sup>35</sup> This route skirts the southern shores of Bintan, Galang, Rempang and Batam that are all situated to the south of the traditional Singapore Strait. The following Dutch-language account extracted and translated from the *Daghregister Batavia* [Daily Record of Batavia], entry for April 17–22, 1633) gives a moving testimony to the courage

## EUROPEAN ENCOUNTERS AND CLASHES IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA I



and determination of the Macao traders, and the real dangers not only of being pursued by Dutch squadrons, but also the vital necessity of finding reliable pilots to guide ships through the treacherous waters of the Riau Archipelago:

“Item, our [people] have learnt from a Malay of [the island] of Bintan that four Portuguese navettes arriving from Macao took their passage through the islands and shoals of Bintan, for fear of encountering our cruising cutters. Our people being advised of this pursued these craft with the entire fleet through the aforementioned islands and shoals, and also used as their guide the aforementioned Malay not only because he possessed good knowledge of said islands and shoals, but also because his father (whom the Portuguese used as their pilot) promised to delay the aforementioned Portuguese navettes from getting through the islands and shoals until our ships arrive... When the Portuguese discovered that [our ships] were closing in on them, and realizing that they were too weak to withstand our might, they set fire to their navettes which were loaded with all sorts of flammable materials and fireworks, without being able to salvage anything in particular, except the ready gold. The ships burned so furiously that neither our men nor the natives of the aforementioned islands (who plundered the vessels

and walked away with great booty) were able to extinguish the flames.”<sup>36</sup>

On the diplomatic front, the Portuguese scored a series of successes with the Johor-Riau Empire. Luso-Dutch rivalry in Johor, where both European parties entertained their respective “cliente” among the *orang kaya*, effectively split the interests at the court down the middle, with the King and Raja Bongsu supporting the Dutch, and the Bendahara and Laksamana siding with the Portuguese. Temporary neglect of the Johorean cause by the Dutch was skilfully and successfully exploited by Malacca to strengthen their cause at the court, a strategy that bore the fruit of a Luso-Johor peace agreement signed in October 1610. Rumours, however, were rife in Dutch circles as early as 1606 that a Luso-Johor peace deal was in the offing.<sup>37</sup> Although that particular treaty met with the disapproval of the Viceroy in Goa, Rui Lourenço da Távora, and despite the Acehnese invasion that had as one of its main objectives the removal of Johor from the orbit of Portuguese interests, relations between the two neighbours were not as sour as many sources (especially Dutch ones) would have modern readers believe. Dutch Batavia in the 1620s had to caution its Johorean ally against trading extensively with Portuguese Malacca, and when, in 1620, the news made the rounds in the famed city of trade and spices that a large Dutch fleet was approaching, the city officials of Malacca offered the king of Johor the handsome fee of four *bahar* of gold (725 kilogrammes of unspecified purity) to buy or “lease” all of his cannons. This episode can be taken as clear evidence that Portuguese Malacca was sufficiently comfortable “doing business” with Johor; but, unfortunately for Malacca, this offer was turned down.<sup>38</sup>

Last but certainly not least, the persistent plundering by the Dutch in the Singapore Straits and adjacent waters virtually cut Macao off from the rest of the *Estado da Índia*. This, as Roderich Ptak has succinctly argued in his seminal article “Outline of Macao’s Economic Development, circa 1557-1640,” drove the merchants of the enclave by default into greater but dangerous dependency on their trade with Japan.<sup>39</sup> When the “Land of the Rising Sun” closed its doors to Portuguese traders in 1639, the merchant community of Macao faced the daunting prospect of reinventing itself. With the hindsight of history, we know that they rose to the challenge. **RC**



## ENCONTROS E DESENCONTROS EUROPEUS NO MAR DO SUL DA CHINA I

## NOTES

- 1 See the rare pamphlet entitled *Corte ende sekere Beschryvinghe*. Hard copy was consulted at the University Library, Amsterdam. The title page of this pamphlet depicts the three ships of Heemskerck attacking the *Santa Catarina*.
- 2 Cf., for example, Cruysse 1991: 57-60.
- 3 On the role of the *Santa Catarina* incident in formulating a "freebooting strategy" in the early VOC, cf. particularly the account in Veen 2000: 190-191.
- 4 Cf., in particular, Borschberg 2003b: 55-88; for the broader picture, see also Meilink-Roelofs 1962: 60-170.
- 5 Cf. specifically also the "Consulta" of February 7, 1607 in Luz 1952: 462; also Lobato 1999: 200. On the taking of Johor Lama, cf. in particular the extensive account provided by Diogo de Couto, in Couto 1903: 123 et seq.
- 6 Hugo Grotius, *Mare Liberum sive de iure quod Batavis competit ad Indicana commercia dissertatio*, or "The Freedom of the Seas or Dissertation on the Right which belongs to the Dutch to participate in the Indies Trade." This treatise, published anonymously in 1609, was attacked by Seraphim de Freitas in his *De Justo Imperio Lusitanorum Asiatico* (1625), or "On the Rightful Asian Empire of the Portuguese," a publication which Grotius himself thought to be learned and worthy of a reply. For a modern bilingual Latin-Portuguese edition of this important work, see Freitas 1983.
- 7 See Ittersum 2003.
- 8 For further background on this, see also Tiele 1882: 192-196.
- 9 Tiele 1882: 196.
- 10 Ittersum 2003: 518.
- 11 Ittersum 2003: 520.
- 12 Tiele 1882: 196.
- 13 Meteren n.d.: fol. 148 recto.
- 14 De Bry, 1607: 86; Hervey 1885: 128; Grotius 1964: 203.
- 15 See Ittersum 2002: 51 et seq.; also Tiele 1882: 196.
- 16 See Grotius 1964: 385.
- 17 Grotius 1964: 385.
- 18 Grotius 1964: 386.
- 19 A copy of this and the other letters is found in German translation among the appendices to Grotius' English translation of *De Jure Præde*.
- 20 Grotius 1964: 387.
- 21 Boxer 1948: 50.
- 22 Bry 1607: 78ff; see also "Historische Verhael Vande Reyse gedaen inde Oost-Indiën, met 15 Schepen voor Reeckeninghe vande Vereenichde Gheoctroyeerde Oost-Indische Compagnie" in Commelin 1646 Vol II: 23B; Tiele 1882: 217-220; Hervey 1885: 128-129; Sousa 1930 Vol. 1: 554; Coolhaas 1965: 506.
- 23 For a more detailed account of this incident and its historic background, cf. Borschberg 2003a: 157-175; Tiele 1882: 220.
- 24 Verken 1930: 58. Very similar observations are also found in Blaeu 1663: 202. Cf. also Cortesão & Mota 1960 Vol. 4: 41, where it is reported that Manoel Godinho de Erédia accompanied Furtado de Mendonça in 1604 "when he took Johor."
- 25 Cf. Erédia 1882: fol. 61 verso; Cortesão & Mota Vol. 4, plate 412, map D; Faro 1955: fol. 6 recto; Everaert 2001: 55; Lobato 1999: 352.
- 26 Jacobs 1985: 604; Lobato 1999: 349, 357.
- 27 Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos Vol. II, p. 255; "Historische Verhael" in Commelin 1646 Vol. II: 83.
- 28 Boxer & Vasconcelos 1989: 56; Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos Vol. II: 255; Lobato 1999: 353; Terpstra 1938: 24-26.
- 29 Jonge 1865 Vol. III: 25; Tiele 1882: 238-239; Hervey 1885: 130-131; Enthoven 1996: 201.
- 30 Enthoven 1996.
- 31 For the classic Dutch-language sources, see especially "Historische Verhael," in Commelin 1646: 15Bff.; Dam 1931 Bk 2, Part 1: 328 et seq; the translated account by François Valentijn in Hervey 1885: 132-138; and Tiele 1884: 59-68. For accounts of this attack in or based on Portuguese sources, cf. Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos. vol. II: 259; Pinto 1997b: 122.
- 32 Pinto 1997a: 122-123.
- 33 Tiele 1882: 229n2.
- 34 According to a map by Erédia dating from about 1602, entitled *Nova Tavoa Geographica da terra do sertam de Malaca.*, the Penarikan (Panarica) was located between the towns of Iompol and Sartin. Cf. Cortesão & Mota 1960 Vol. 4, plate 411 B.
- 35 Anonymous map, ca. 1650, in Cortesão & Mota 1960 Vol. 5, Plate 578, chart 15c. A second, similar map by André Pereira dos Reis presently forms part of the Dr. W. A. Engelbrecht collection at the Maritiem Museum Prins Hendrik in Rotterdam.
- 36 Colenbrander 1898: 162-163. This is my translation from the original Dutch.
- 37 Netscher 1870: 24, 27-29; Tiele 1886: 129 (a letter from Stevin van der Hagen to the Heren XVII, dated 10 March, 1616); Terpstra 1938: 38. Most unfortunately, the text of the 1610 treaty is missing; on this point see also Saldanha 1997: 371n10.
- 38 See the letter by Adriaen van der Dussen, dated December 27, 1620, in Coolhaas 1919-1954, Vol. 7A: 686.
- 39 Ptak 1988: 171-172.

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