



Dutch delegation at Amoy. Print by Jan van Aevele. In G. C. Molewijk, *'t Verreuerloosde Formosa* (Zurphen: Walburg Pers, 1991).

Voyage to the China Coast, 1607

Cornelis Matelief de Jonge

In May 1605, an armada of 11 ships sponsored by the VOC leaves the most noteworthy ports of Holland and Zeeland

bound for the East Indies. On board there are around 1400 men, including 200 professional soldiers. The command has been given to Admiral Cornelis Matelief de Jonge (the “Young”), who carries secret instructions to take Malacca from the Portuguese. After two naval defeats against the armada of Viceroy D. Martim Afonso de Castro on the Straits of Malacca in 1606, Cornelis Matelief regroups in Johore the ships that are left and abandons military operations: while sending part of his fleet to trade in Aceh, in Sumatra, he sails with the remaining ships to the Moluccas, there to build a fort on the island of Ternate. After ordering a new division of the Dutch fleet in June 1607 he sails on to China with four vessels. In the second half of July, the admiral reaches the vicinity of Fujian, where a Chinese coastal defence armada prevents him from landing. Forced to sail to Canton, he anchors off Macao at the end of August albeit not obtaining any answer from the Cantonese mandarins regarding his requests to establish trade relations. By the middle of September the admiral leaves Chinese waters pursued by six Portuguese ships led by Captain-General André Pessoa. Cornelis Matelief returns to Holland in September 1608, after visiting Bantam. The following passage –especially interesting in that it shows the difficulties felt by the Dutch in learning Chinese protocol– is taken from Cornelis Matelief’s log of his voyage to the East Indies. It is written in the third person although it seems to have been penned by the admiral himself. It was first published in Rotterdam in 1608 and was included in volume II of the collection *Begin ende Voortgang* of Isaac Commelin, published in Amsterdam in 1645.

Source: René-Auguste Constantin de Reneville, “Voiage de Corneille Matelief Le Jeune aux Indes Orientales en qualité d’Amiral d’onze vaisseaux, pendant les Années 1605. 1606. 1607. & 1608” [1608], in *Recueil des Voyages qui ont servi à l’établissement & aux progrès de la Compagnie des Indes Orientales* [Tome III, Part II, Amsterdam, Frederic Bernard, 1725, pp. 370-407 and 466-470]. The text was translated from French into English by Maria Manuela da Costa Silva.

Em Maio de 1605, sai de distintos portos da Holanda e da Zelândia com destino às Índias Orientais uma armada de

11 navios patrocinada pela VOC. Leva embarcados cerca de 1400 homens, incluindo 200 soldados profissionais. O seu comando foi atribuído ao almirante Cornelis Matelief de Jonge (o Novo), que é portador de instruções secretas para a conquista de Malaca aos portugueses. Depois de sair derrotado de um par de batalhas navais com a armada do vice-rei D. Martim Afonso de Castro no estreito de Malaca em 1606, Cornelis Matelief reagrupa em Johore as naus que lhe restam e abandona as operações militares: enquanto envia parte da sua frota a comerciar ao Achém, em Samatra, ele próprio segue com as restantes para as ilhas de Maluco, onde construirá um forte na ilha de Ternate. Depois de ordenar novo fraccionamento da frota holandesa, em Junho de 1607 continua viagem para a China com três naus e um patacho. Na segunda quinzena de Julho, chega às proximidades do Fujian, onde uma armada chinesa de defesa costeira o impede de desembarcar. Forçado a dirigir-se para Cantão, fundeia diante de Macau em finais de Agosto, mas não consegue qualquer resposta dos mandarins cantonenses aos pedidos que lhes endereça para o estabelecimento de relações comerciais. Em meados de Setembro afasta-se daquelas águas, perseguido por seis navios portugueses liderados pelo capitão-mor André Pessoa, deixando para trás o patacho, que entretanto encalhara. Cornelis Matelief regressou à Holanda em Setembro de 1608, depois de ter feito escala em Bantam. O extracto que se apresenta a seguir – particularmente interessante por expor as dificuldades que os holandeses sentiram na aprendizagem do protocolo chinês – é retirado do diário da viagem de Cornelis Matelief às Índias Orientais. Está escrito na terceira pessoa, mas, ao que tudo indica, é da autoria do próprio almirante holandês. Tendo sido publicado pela primeira vez em Roterdão em 1608, acabou por ser incluído no volume II da colectânea *Begin ende Voortgang* de Isaac Commelin, publicada em Amesterdão em 1645.

Fonte utilizada: René-Auguste Constantin de Reneville, “Voiage de Corneille Matelief Le Jeune aux Indes Orientales en qualité d’Amiral d’onze vaisseaux, pendant les Années 1605. 1606. 1607. & 1608” [1608], in *Recueil des Voyages qui ont servi à l’établissement & aux progrès de la Compagnie des Indes Orientales* [Tome III, Parte II, Amesterdão, Frederic Bernard, 1725, pp. 370-407 e 466-470]. O texto foi traduzido de francês para inglês por Maria Manuela da Costa Silva.

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The admiral told them that if the mandarin did not want them to bring them fish, he just had to be informed; that the admiral did not want to do anything against his will; that they would not call the fishermen anymore nor do anything they would not have done if they had been advised by the officers. The soldiers, having seen the signs being made from the junks, wanted to depart. The admiral begged them to wait still a while, but as they insisted with the signals, they did not want to agree.

The admiral had sent a man on board the junk to ask the mandarin what he wanted. The mandarin said that he only wanted to know whether they had received an answer from Canton. The interpreter said that, as yet, they had received nothing of the kind. The mandarin explained himself clearly, saying that until such answer arrived, he would not allow the fishermen to take fish to them, nor could the Dutch get water supplies, or inquire anything ashore, and that until then, the admiral would only be wasting his time calling the people passing by.

A few moments later, towards midday, six Portuguese vessels were sighted, which, favoured by a strong wind from the stern, were going straight towards the Dutch. The wind was from the southwest and blew directly into the bay. Besides, they had a neap tide, so there was no way of setting sail, and if the Portuguese had dared to attack their enemies, these would have found themselves in a lot of trouble.

The admiral informed the mandarin of the junks that they saw the Portuguese coming, which was against the Chinese's promise to him, and also declared that if that was being done with his consent, he should not disapprove if he opted to defend himself as best as he could; that if it was without his consent, the mandarin should go and forbid the Portuguese to approach, and in such case the Dutch would lie at anchor.

The mandarin replied that he did not believe it as he did not see anything from his junk; but that the admiral could remain tranquil and that the Portuguese would not dare come in without the Canton mandarin's consent. However, when he saw them, he sent a message to the admiral saying that he had to defend himself; that he would help him with twelve junks that were coming without delay, and continuing with a similar speech to divert, he hauled in his gun on board.

When Van der Broeck returned in the afternoon, he reported to the admiral what he had done in the city,

in front of which he had arrived the preceding afternoon, a bit late, to present his letters and clear his papers in the junk and to submit them to the mandarin in order to inform him in more detail on the matter of the Dutch and bring to his knowledge what sort of people the Dutch were and what they sought. There was also a small letter attached mentioning the gift the admiral was sending him, as this manoeuvre had to be addressed. The money was wrapped in a paper, and there were still seventy-four reals in different small papers for various secretaries. As soon as everything was ready and Van der Broeck intended to board a small boat to go to the city, a small pirogue came alongside on the other side of the junk. The skipper of this pirogue, having passed to the rear side with the captain of the junk, to whom twenty reals had already been given, told him something, and this man ran quickly towards Van der Broeck, showing fright, asking him to return promptly to his ship in a small pirogue and to take his money, shouting to him in haste, "hurry up, hurry up!" as if everything was about to perish, as if it was a matter of life and death.

Van der Broeck, surprised at such a sudden change, asked what was happening. They did not want to tell him, but anyway it was known that the mandarin was furious. Van der Broeck asked why it was so, to which they replied that a Chinese had made him understand that the Dutch were bad people, and another Chinese, who was drunk, said that there were a lot of Dutchmen in our junk bringing a trunk full of money to be offered to him. It was then that he felt strongly offended. In short, these people knew how to play their games and invent so many tricks as if they had studied Machiavelli.

They refused to take Van der Broeck on board; they wanted to take him to the place where provisions were obtained, from where it would have been necessary for him to travel by land, carrying his money, up to a place from where the vessels could notice him. However, as he did not want to do anything of the sort, they called for a small pirogue and put him inside, shouting, "Quick, quick, goodbye!" He almost believed that he was already dead.

Back on ship, he asked the fisherman who took him if he did not know what the Portuguese knew. The fisherman told him frankly that they had departed from Macao four days ago. However, the other Chinese in the junks said that they did not know the venture they had entered into.

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In the morning of 10th September 1607, seeing that their enemies had set sail, the Dutch also did so. Sailing towards the northern end of the island of Lentengwan [Neilingding], they cast anchor there in four fathoms of water. There it was decided that if the enemy came from the west, they would return to the place they had come from, and that if he came from the east, meaning between the island and Lamthau [Lantao], they would go round the cape on the east of the island. However, as the yacht could not follow the vessels as it would fall behind beyond the reach of a big gun, partly because it was heavy and partly due to the negligence of the master, it was decided to cut it up during the night so that no one would know what had happened to it.

After that the admiral urged the masters and the mate not to abandon each other, and proposed that if someone failed in their duties, he would be considered a traitor and a murderer and punished as such by the States General, his assets being seized to the profit of those who had been abandoned. All the officers submitted to this law and took an oath, after which the admiral left the room with them and ordered the crews to assemble and spoke to them as follows:

“Dear and generous companions, if I had not already had proof of your generosity and of your courage, I could believe that there was fear as a result of the danger surrounding us, but two things raise my hope: first the knowledge I have of you personally, and secondly the knowledge I have of our enemies, whom we have already faced twice. A third reason assures me further: our safety cannot be better than in our own hands, and we have an absolute need to work for it or we will perish. For in spite of the fact that we have been humane to this unworthy nation when some of them fell into our hands, she is so brutal, so cruel and so eager against us that if we experience the unhappiness of being defeated, there is no one among us who could hope that they would spare him his life. As these cowardly enemies are not used to fighting and to defeating the Whites, it must be assumed that they do not know how to use a victory with moderation.

You must, therefore, entrust your safety to the help and grace of God, who has so perceptibly provided you with protection during this voyage, and to the resistance you will make, which is the only

means you have to open the way for your fatherland. Besides, these people are not as well trained to fight as the people we have here. They were obliged to leave ashore some of the people they brought, as they were ill, and to take up some of their citizens in Macao and some Chinese by putting three taels in their hands. This is the picture of the majority of your enemies. They are only counting on the strength of their six big ships and on the number of their useless people and their embarrassing crews. I may well say, I know it from experience, and I am sure of it, that confusion and disorder reigns among them.

If the parts were equal and our vessels were not encumbered with their cargoes and were free and clear like theirs, I believe that you already understand that I would not wait a moment to go and attack them, although we are three against six. But the facts are quite different. As long as I can refrain from fighting, I will do it so that I will not expose to danger, without it being absolutely necessary, your lives and the assets of the directors [of the company]. If, however, we have to take that action, my dear companions, we will teach these traitors how brave the Dutch are.”

At the end of this speech all the sailors shouted at the same time, “Yes, our brave admiral, we want to fight, live and die with you.”

While the admiral was speaking, they saw the enemy coming from the east of the island with the tide, and immediately they set sail to run to the west of the same island, as the Portuguese could easily join the vessels at the place where they were. But as the tide was rising fast, they tied up the sails and cast anchor, fearing that the tide would take them below the Dutch, who had also cast anchor.

The *Orange*, which was the first ship established in her moorings, saw three shallops go towards the yacht, which was far behind. He ordered the *Erasmus*, which still had her sails set, to go and rescue it, which she did; the shallops seeing it approach turned back. A little later the water started to go down, and they weighed anchor to go still further west, but despite the admiral's orders, the yacht could not follow; the bowline of her topsail broke, falling quite far under the strength of the wind.

When they arrived near the *Erasmus*, which was placed the nearest, they shouted for them to retrieve the money and the cannon, and that they should make some holes to sink her. They made a

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hole and let her go adrift, with all her sails except for the topsail, the helm being tied upright in such a way that the rudder remained well in the middle, so well that she drifted with the wind behind in the direction of Canton, at least as long as she could be sighted during that day.

During this manoeuvre the vessels lost their wind, and the Portuguese remained windward in such a way that it appeared that there was no way of preventing the fight. The enemy, who wanted to remain near the coast, was in shallow waters and was constrained to stop, which appeared to cause them some confusion. The Dutch profited from this lapse of time to run towards the west of the river until they had six fathoms of water below them. Just then the wind had turned a little to the west; they went to the other side and ran to the top of the island. When this manoeuvre was concluded, darkness had arrived, the enemy had cast anchor and remained so all night. They believed they had seen at the top of their yardarm devices to burn the Dutch vessels.

In the morning of the 11th of that same month of September 1607, before daybreak, they weighed anchor and went past the last islands at the mouth of the Canton river. When they had set sail, they saw that the enemy had done the same and that he was turning to follow them. At mid-day they cast anchor on the coast of an island where they expected to get wood and some water, but they did not see any wood nor did any water appear to be there.

The admiral assembled the General Council, which was comprised of all the first mates and masters, and proposed to them that, should they have the wind in their favour and against the Portuguese, he believed it would be advisable to attack them. They all answered that they did not agree, considering the great advantage the enemy had over them, with six well-equipped ships against three very heavy and difficult to steer; that they would not dare to approach these vessels so well equipped for fear that they would grapple the ships and set the Dutch vessels on fire or even set fire to the vessels of both sides as the Portuguese would not be afraid of burning their own vessels as long as they also burnt the others, as they had fifteen or sixteen shallops ready to save their crews. Moreover, they considered that they had much more to lose than the Portuguese as on the Portuguese vessels they

had only the gun and the crew, while the others had rich cargoes. The Portuguese were fresh and somehow in their territory, at least in the territory of their friends, and the Dutch had neither of these advantages. They were in the middle of enemy country, and if their vessels were damaged or crippled as a result of a fight, they did not have any means of recovering, as in this country they were even refused water supplies; and it was even more worrying because they had reason to believe that all these things happened with the consent or with the complicity of the Canton and Lamthau [Lantao] mandarins, whose promised steps were, in fact, suspicious.

Notwithstanding the council's opposition, the admiral stood by his opinion and asked for it to be recorded. It was believed that he did so in order to gain a great reputation of courage. At last, he surrendered to the reasons of the other party and abandoned this purpose.

In the morning of the 12th they moved away from the island, and when putting to sea, they saw the enemies run among the islands with the wind behind. Some of them believed that they were coming after them, but the admiral was convinced that they were returning to Macao, satisfied of being able to tell their king that they had chased the Dutch. In fact, the Portuguese were surely not willing to fight as they could have attacked their enemies on the 9th during the afternoon and made them fight or else run the ships ashore, as they were in the bay as if trapped and not able to go out. However, it was God's will that this proud nation would not take any advantage of such a situation. **RC**

