

Voyages in the South China Sea, 1622

Élie Ripon

Élie Ripon was a Swiss mercenary who was at the service of the VOC for a few years in the Orient. He took part quite

actively in the famous Dutch assault on Macao in 1622. His travel account, found and published recently, offers a most interesting set of data not only concerning the Asian regions covered by his travels but also on the activities of the Dutch against Portuguese and Spanish interests in the region. While his description of the assault on Macao offers information unknown to date it simultaneously confirms other versions of the same event. Of special note is his account of the participation of Jesuit priests in the defence of Macao and the way the slaves of the Portuguese were led to battle. Equally important is the news of the attempts to establish a Dutch base in the Pescadores archipelago and on Formosa, which in his account is mentioned as Tauan. Ripon's account, originally written in French, was published for the first time in 1997.

Source: Élie Ripon, *Voyages et aventures aux Grandes Indes*, ed. Yves Giraud [Paris: Les Éditions de Paris, 1997, pp. 87-98]. The text was translated from French into English by Maria Manuela da Costa Silva.

Élie Ripon foi um mercenário suíço que durante alguns anos esteve ao serviço da VOC nas partes do Oriente. Participou

nomeadamente, e de forma bem activa, no célebre ataque holandês a Macau de 1622. O seu relato de viagens, descoberto e publicado há muito pouco tempo, fornece interessantíssimos dados não só sobre as regiões asiáticas que visitou, mas também sobre as actividades desenvolvidas pelos holandeses contra os interesses portugueses e espanhóis naquelas partes. Se a sua descrição do assalto a Macau fornece informações até agora desconhecidas, confirma ao mesmo tempo outras versões do mesmo evento. Especial destaque merecem as suas menções à participação dos padres jesuítas na defesa de Macau e à forma como os escravos dos portugueses foram incentivados a combater. Igualmente importantes são as notícias que fornece sobre as tentativas de estabelecimento de uma base holandesa no arquipélago dos Pescadores e na ilha Formosa, que no seu relato aparece designada como Tauan. O relato de Ripon, originalmente redigido em francês, foi publicado pela primeira vez em 1990.

Fonte utilizada: Élie Ripon, *Voyages et aventures aux Grandes Indes*, ed. Yves Giraud [Paris: Les Éditions de Paris, 1997, pp. 87-98]. O texto foi traduzido de francês para inglês por Maria Manuela da Costa Silva.

Anonymous, Macassar, c. 1660 (Nationalbibliothek, Vienna). In Kees Zandvliet (ed.), *The Dutch encounter with Asia, 1600-1950* (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum & Waanders Publishers, 2003).



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VOYAGE FROM BATAVIA TO MACAO

On April 10 we departed from Batavia with twelve vessels to go in the direction of Macao. We passed the straight of Balimban [Palembang], separating Sumatra from Balimban [Palembang] and went to the high sea in the direction of Jampa [Champa], arriving in front of the bay and harbour of Comorin [Cam Ranh], and we cast anchor there. We had heard that up the stream of the Comorin [Cam Ranh] river there were Spanish or Portuguese people who were building a ship. I went up the stream with one hundred soldiers and found a village they had built where they could stay while building the said ship, which was already built and about to be put in the water to be used. They all ran away leaving all their luggage behind. We took all the best things and set fire to the rest of it, and the ship that was ashore, we also set on fire, as it could be of no use to us. We examined everything around there and did not see anything remarkable except for a lake, which was between two high mountains, with a width of about one or two musket shots, and I do not know its length as I did not go as far as the other side. We saw no fruits, only thick trees very convenient to build ships. Afterwards, we went back on board our ships to return, going down the river. The Spanish, whom we had not seen while we were there, came firing their muskets from the bush and also the inhabitants firing arrows. Being on the alert, I was prepared with my people, and I had the muskets taken out and fired twelve of them at a time against the said bushes, as we had seen the smoke of our enemies' guns coming out there, but we saw no one, only heard the voice of the Portuguese shouting, "*Jesus! Virgem Maria!*" which made us calculate that there were still some of them ashore. They also stopped promptly, and we were not aware of any more shots. Thus, we continued to go down the river until we arrived near our fleet.

THE KINGDOM OF JAMPA [CHAMPA]

The inhabitants of the country named Jampa [Champa] are very brown and small in size, and they already show some beard, differently from the other Indians that do not have any, and their height is the same as those in the islands of Solor. Their clothes are shorts with a shirt following the fashion in Siam; the women, small in size, are dressed with a small chemise

coming just to the waist and a petticoat of different colours, the hair arranged neatly above their heads, a bonnet as in Cochinchina, which is a kingdom between Canton and Jampa [Champa], gold bracelets on their arms and many gold rings on their fingers, after the Indian fashion. The men are rather cowardly and not daring, unless they are in great number; their weapons are broad-blade knives and harquebus, round axes and pikes. Their trade is that of slaves and gold, and among other things a type of wood which is called calambac. This wood has such a good smell that when one puts just one small piece on the fire or over coal the rooms become sweet smelling, and it is also very good for dysentery. By scraping a bit to a spoon, drinking it with a little wine, it stops dysentery promptly. It is also quite expensive as it is worth twice its weight in gold. This wood is found in the bay of Comorin [Cam Ranh], where the inhabitants fish it from the bottom of the sea, and we tried to do it in the same way; I brought up some myself and had a lot of people smell it. This wood is brown, the colour of the wood of the walnut tree.

The life and upkeep of these people is rice and a sort of root as thick as the thigh of a man and quite long, which they boil and eat with meat. These peasants are like those of Siam, whom we were able to understand. This is what I was able to learn about this kingdom of Jampa [Champa]. And after this rest, we set sail and continued our way to Macao.

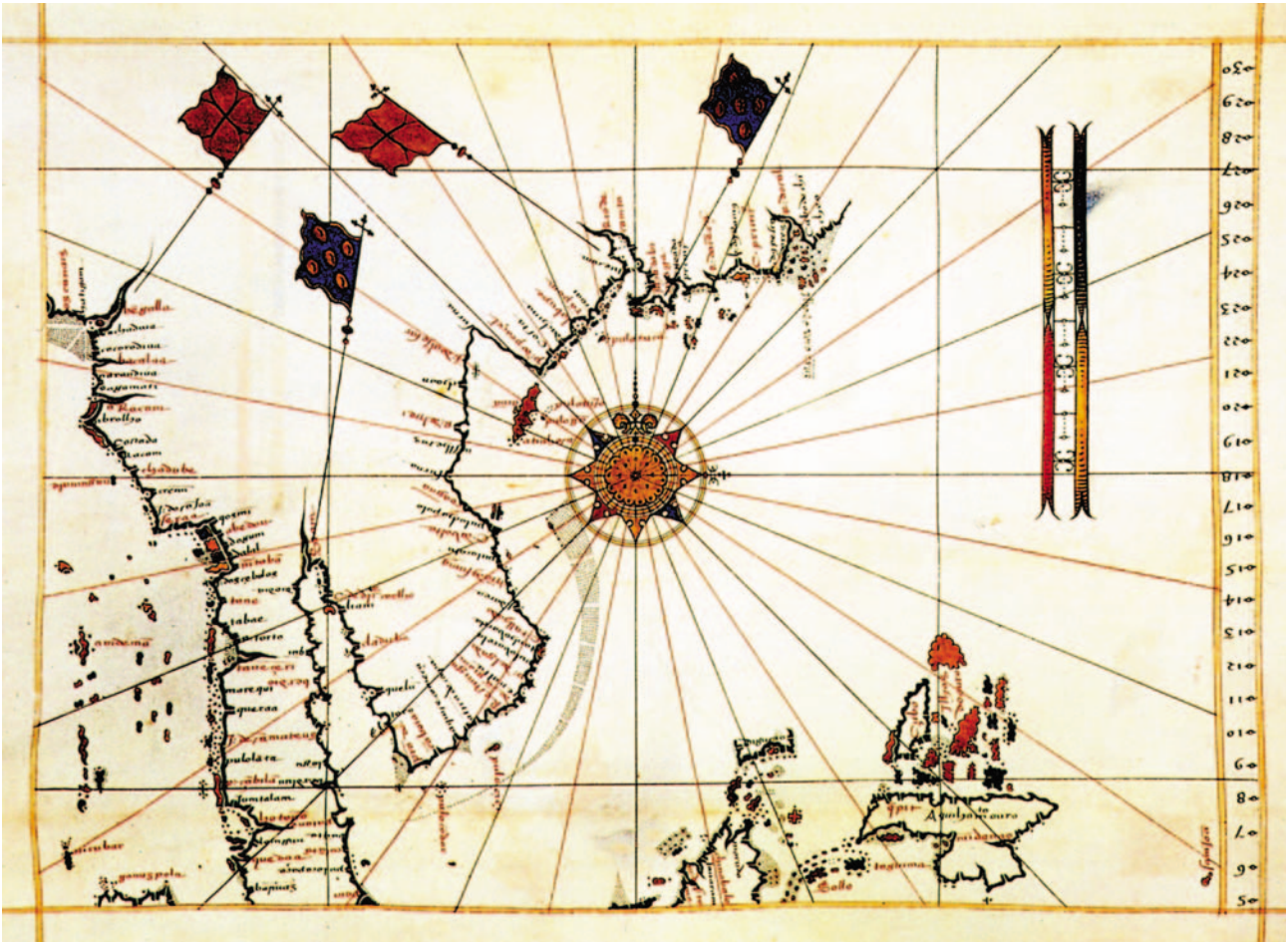
THE ISLAND OF HAINAN

On the 25th of the said month, we had passed the kingdom of Cochinchina and arrived afterwards at the island of Hainan, where they fish for pearls. The island's distance from the mainland is about two gun shots. They are all pearl divers in this island and go into the water with a net bag to put inside, quite deep in the sea, the shells in which the pearls grow. We have dived for some, and I got four or five shells, where I found nine beautiful pearls.... These shells have that nacre of pearls in the inside and close like oysters; its flesh is good, similar to that of the oyster.

THE ATTACK ON MACAO

On June 22 we arrived at the harbour of Macao and visited the place from the side where we could go ashore. The place we arrived at was nothing else but the

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Map of East and Southeast Asia, attributed to Gaspar Viegas, c. 1537. (Biblioteca Riccardiana, Florença). In Luís Filipe Barreto, *Fernão Mendes Pinto e os Mares da China* (Lisbon: Missão de Macau e Centro Científico e Cultural de Macau, 1998).

place where the Spanish and the Portuguese had the trench and the battery. During the night, everything was prepared and orders were given to all ships' captains to keep ready with all their people and soldiers in their vessels and launches, one hour before daybreak, for the assault.

On the 24th of that month, we made the assault and conquered the trench and battery, with great loss on the part of our people. It was by the sea; on arrival, Commander Cornelis Reyersz was hurt by a falconet shot through the front, was brought back on board the ship and was not speaking. Captain Refin, thinking that he had already won everything after having conquered the trench, seeing that the soldiers had already pulled out and slackened, instead of letting them rest a bit and give them proper war ammunitions, insisted in following the enemy quickly, who, meanwhile, was retreating to attract us. When the others

saw that, they chose to go back on board, and I, seeing this tragedy, recollected the words of the said Refin, pronounced the previous day to the soldiers of his company, "I will take you to the enemy, but the devil will bring you back!" I also ordered my sergeant to look for gunpowder and ammunition, and foreseeing what was about to happen, I asked the said Refin if he could get us war munitions, and why he was hastening so much. I took to the left, at the top of a mountain, near a large abbey, but while we were going to get gunpowder provisions, the enemy took position for defence, as if they were in their own country, and fought quite furiously for about three or four hours.

But the enemy, seeing that advantage was not on their side, brought their slaves, who were about two or three hundred and whom they had intoxicated. They then gave them sabres and pikes and all sorts of

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weapons. Afterwards, a chief on horseback, with a big sword in his hand, chased them from the rear in our direction to fight us, and they fought so furiously and in such great disorder that the earth trembled; they did not even see the muskets or any other weapons, flinging themselves desperately at us as if they were animals; a great number of them perished there. As the munitions arrived, the soldiers wanted to retake the fight. An imprudent Javanese set fire to the gunpowder and burst into the air. The enemy seeing that, believed that there was no more powder to supply the soldiers; they became even braver, practically throwing themselves on top of the company of the above referred Refin, which was completely dismembered, with the exception of eight or nine, including [a] sub-lieutenant... and I, at the top of the mountain, near an abbey, where the enemy believed would be able to cut our way.

Seeing all that was happening I said, "With the ammunition lost, we are all dead." I fought furiously against the enemy, whose dead bodies lay thick in front of us as they came without cover from a small plain near the abbey. They had no more ammunition, and the other companies had no hope of getting any, and all the others had already left and turned back to save themselves as best as they could. Seeing this, instead of loosing all my people, I told my lieutenant, "Try to get away," and to my soldiers, "Each one must run for his life as hope is lost, as you can see all the others are already going back." And we went down the mountain where the enemy was in great confusion among us, already killing each other. My soldiers, with their swords, struck at a lot of them, and when we were by the seaside and by the trench we had conquered, expecting to find the launches there, the enemy was so close that when my people thought of going on board, they got killed by the enemy as if they were chickens.

When I arrived at the beach, seeing that the boats were already far from the margin, and believing that I was on my way to the other world, I saw a big priest, or a Jesuit, who was on the beach encouraging his people to kill our men. I then chose to go behind the said priest and put my halberd through his body. At the same time, I jumped into the sea and swam to a distance of a musket shot, where I reached a launch. The muskets and harquebus shots aimed at me were like a hail of bullets, but I was not hurt, though I was worn out, as the water caught the blows. I was pulled

into the boat with my weapons, finding there very few of my soldiers. From the eight hundred they were, only two hundred and fifty were left, six captains, three lieutenants, nine sub-lieutenants, seven sergeants—all this due to the lack of war munitions and the wrong orders by the referred Refin. Still considering the words mentioned above and which he had uttered, when I mentioned to him that we had to pray to God, he answered me that prayers were no longer needed as we were all already rich. Laughingly, I then added, "Do not think so much of being rich. Each one must do his duty!" His wealth ended with more than twelve sabre cuts on his body, and as he was in front he was the first to get killed. The other captains were all merchants and masters of ships and assistant merchants whom we had put to the test. They went about as if they were in their shops, and they got killed while they were still apprentices. People should not go and do something that they cannot handle, but we have to consider that with patience as it was the way it was done. After we had looked after the wounded, we decided to weigh anchor and continue our route.

DETAILS ABOUT MACAO

I will say but a few words when passing by these islands of Macao. There are three or four islands, but the best is the one inhabited by the Portuguese, though nothing grows there, except for some gardening and some oranges. The others are uninhabitable, and there is only bush shaped like mountains where they have a lot of animals such as goats, cows, and we can see them from the harbour. These islands are situated quite near the city of Canton, the first among China's provinces. There is no more than a small inlet among them and quite a narrow one. They make their trade together every day, and they marry Chinese women, and most of them are also flat-nosed like the Chinese. All their provisions come from Canton, where there is plenty of everything, as we found out and as the two prisoners from Macao we had on board had told us, confirming that nothing grew on these islands with the exception of some fruits. A Jesuit convent exists there, and it is said that there are many of them, as many masters as men-servants, two hundred or more. We recognised many of them fighting against us with their weapons, and they were good soldiers, in the same way that we felt their experience to our great disfavour. They have

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a lot of black slaves whom they bring from Goa. Two of these Jesuits had grown their hair and wore it like the Chinese, speaking their language and writing like them. They had gone as far as Peking, where the king had his dwelling, with the purpose of spying on the Chinese and trying to make them believe that they were prophets so as to attract them to their faith, but their purposes were discovered; they were put away and encountered a cruel death, according to what the viceroy of Chincheo [Fujian] Province told me¹. The others from Macao also incurred great risk. The Chinese say that they are instigators and that they have to abstain from it and not go there any more, or else they will do to them what they did to the Jesuits already mentioned.

IN THE PESCADORES

On June 27, we set sail after appointing other officers to replace the dead, and we went to Péou [Penghu], meaning the Pescadores, to build there a fortress, so that we would have a shelter there, which we did.

On July 5, in the afternoon, we arrived in the Pescadores and went ashore to visit the islands and find out an appropriate place to build a fort. We found the place we were looking for in the island in front of the church. We marked the ground for the fort and we started working, and the materials were local ones, a layer of earth and a layer of grass as if it were a wall, and it was quite strong and durable to resist the rain tempests. And we also built four bulwarks, and on top of each we placed six guns, and we broke up the ship called *Le Diable*, from Delft, to build the lodgings and the sentry-boxes and the house for the munitions and for the provisions. We continued to work until December, and once the fort was completed we put the garrison inside.

Then, after everything was ready and in order, we went to Chincheo [Fujian], the second province of China, by sea, to find out whether they wanted to trade with us; but they did not pay us much attention, no more than if we had been chickens or children, making us understand that they would soon make us leave, sending us back to Holland, the place we had come from. However, I made them feel the “bill of the chickens,” as quite soon after the fort being in order, with Cornelis Reyersz as commander and Christian

Chelin as captain, I took back the fleet to the China coast and started to devastate it from one end to the other, setting fire and using the sword on all we could find along the coast, from the province of Canton to the province of Chincheo [Fujian], until we reached the coast of the islands of Chesan [Zhoushan], as they are called by the Chinese, off the province of Ochau [city of Hangzhou], on the sea as well as ashore. That lasted for two and a half years. We destroyed many villages and castles and a great many of their vessels, which they call junks.

TREACHERIES OF THE CHINESE

But when they saw that they had no advantage over us, they sought for peace, but that was treachery. They sent us a peace treaty, which if it had been a well-intentioned one, we would not have refused; and they sent a message saying that if we wanted to accept it we would have to go and have it signed. We entrusted a ship and a pinnace to three merchants, and they entered the river of Chincheo [Jiulong Jiang]. When the Chinese saw them come, they prepared everything in order to destroy the ships with all their people inside. They came on board with great pomp, with captains and gentlemen, whom they call mandarins, richly dressed to come and meet our people, bringing four men also richly dressed as governors, whom they had taken out of prison and condemned to death to stay as hostages for our people. Among other things, they wore a helmet as if it was a hat, a wide golden belt almost half a foot wide, but it was only copper. Our people who went ashore were received with great honours, having stayed until midnight, ignoring what was going on and the reason for such a long delay.

And noticing that the Chinese were running from one side to the other made me suspicious. We had kept a sharp look out and had prepared all the guns, and the anchor was ready to be weighed. But at about midnight, six to seven junks came down the river loaded with fireworks, though there was only one man in each junk to lead them straight at us; and when they were near our ships, they lit the fire and then they escaped ashore in a cask. And those that had been handed over to us as hostages, thinking that they would escape rapidly, were made into pieces. The fire was burning in these junks that were coming in great number, and we thought that we would all burn, as

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the ship *L'Ours* was already on fire and incurring great risk of being burnt down, but, thanks to God, the fire was extinguished and nothing worse happened. But all their trouble was not left without answer, as we retaliated blow for blow. We were never able to learn what happened to our people sent as ambassadors to sign and accept the peace contract, and never obtained an answer to the inquiries we made. Some said that they had been taken to the king, in Peking; others said that they had been killed as soon as they had arrived in Chincheo [Zhangzhou].

We started again our first series of devastations, and it was right there where we were and it lasted for the whole year, in the China coast as well as in the islands, looting and burning all we could find in order to learn who would get tired first, them or us.

In the year 1623 we returned to the Pescadores, where the Chinese had decided to come, which they did. We looked out for them and became aware of their objective and from which side they wanted to come with their vessels. Two of our ships were sent to Manila to keep an eye on the junks taking the merchandise to the Spanish, as they did every year. On the 6th April the ships *Xercès* and *L'Ours* left to go there and were on the lookout for three months and took three quite rich Chinese vessels loaded with silk and all sorts of goods.

On May 1 the pinnace *Hane*, meaning *Coq*, left to go to Taiwan, the island of Formosa, to see if trade was possible. On the sixth of that same month, the vessel *Orange* arrived at the harbour of the Pescadores with a junk, a Chinese vessel loaded with all sorts of goods, as much silk as materials, to take to Manila.

On May 12 a very strong wind started blowing—so strongly as I have never experienced². It carried away the people who did not throw themselves quickly on the floor, and even two slaves that were attached to each other with chains carrying a basket full of sand were thrown from the top of the bulwark where they were taking the sand, and one of them broke a leg. It also carried away all the ships that were in the bay even though they had three anchors cast; two were thrown to the margin well ahead, and it gave great trouble to put them back in the water, and fortunately there were no stones, and the others were carried away well out into the sea with their anchors. And we who were in the fortress never thought that we would see them again as there are many islands and the helms could not be handled due to this sudden phenomenon, but one hour

later the wind that had been blowing from the west ceased and afterwards started blowing from the east, bringing the ships back to the vicinity of the harbour, with a high mountain behind protecting them from the wind, and they remained there, with the exception of the two that were grounded. The junks (this being the name of the Chinese ship) were thrown ashore and cracked into pieces, but we were not very sorry for it; this was an occasion when we could have wood to burn in the fortress, and the Chinese could not blame us as that was something that had happened by accident. The ships were not affected, except for the loss of two or three anchors that were lost. The bulwarks and bastions of the fortress were all carried away by the said wind....

Once the wind ceased, the soldiers and the slaves ran along the sea and found such a lot of big fish that they had difficulty in carrying them. The Chinese also collected a large quantity of these fish, salting them, which were then taken to China in fully loaded junks.

And the Chinese, who were coming to the islands with an army of three hundred ships as it is their habit, arrived near the islands of the Pescadores, to the north, where it was their intention to go ashore, as they did, but afterwards about one hundred junks were lost with about fifty thousand people on board, and all of them perished, according to what was brought to our knowledge.

On June 8, the vessel called *Orange* and the pinnace called *Erasmus* and the *Faucon*, *Tertole* and *Wescappel* arrived at the Pescadores coming from Batavia with a great quantity of people to continue the fight. On the 14th of the said month, the vessel called *Xercès* and *L'Ours* arrived at the harbour, coming from Manila in the Philippines, and brought with them three Chinese vessels, which they call junks, loaded with all sorts of rich goods, silk as well as gold, porcelain and other silk materials. We were always pursuing the enemy and always caught quite a lot of junks, even more than we wanted, as we had to send them to keep company with the fish. **RC**

NOTES

- 1 Ripon is here alluding to the persecution set in motion by the Chinese authorities in 1617 against the Jesuits in Nanjing and Beijing.
- 2 The author is referring to a typhoon.