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## **Spirited Transactions. The Morals and Materialities of Trade Contacts between the Dutch, the British, and the Malays (1596-1619)**

Romain Bertrand (CERI-Sciences Po, Paris)

1.

On June 22, 1596, a small Dutch fleet came to anchor in the bay of the city of Banten, on Java's north coast<sup>1</sup>. Placed under the command of Cornelis de Houtman and Gerrit van Beuningen, this privately-chartered commercial expedition comprised 4 vessels manned by some 249 crew members<sup>2</sup>. Thanks to critical nautical information leaked out of the Portuguese Asian dominions by Jan Huygen van Linschoten – whose *Itinerario* was not yet printed<sup>3</sup>, but nevertheless already circulating under manuscript form among Dutch cartographers at the time Houtman and Beuningen were busy completing the victualling of their ships –, the main pilot of this so-called “First Navigation” to the East Indies, Pieter Diercksz. Keyzer, easily found his way to the Cape of Good Hope, then on to Madagascar. After the untimely death of Keyzer<sup>4</sup>, the younger brother of Cornelis de Houtman – Frederick, a soon-to-be famous linguist and astronomer – acted as the main pilot of the fleet and managed to cross the Indian Ocean almost straightway so as to reach the southern tip of Sumatra, then proceeded to the nearby west coast of Java.

Hours only after their arrival on the shores of Banten, the Dutch – who could master neither Malay, nor Javanese, nor Arabic – were welcomed on behalf of the Regent of the city by “six Portuguese [traders] and their slaves”. Two days later, things took a more official turn: a Javanese high official bearing the title of *Tumenggung Angabaya* came on board Houtman's

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<sup>1</sup> For a standard account of the “First Navigation”, see Jarig C. Mollema, *De Eerste Schipvaart der Hollanders naar Oost-Indië, 1595-1597*, The Hague, M. Nijhoff, 1936.

<sup>2</sup> The “First Navigation” was chartered by the Compagnie van Verre, whose Board of directors included such powerful characters as Reinier Pauw and Hendrik Hudde – two of Amsterdam's most famous *Regenten* – and Jan Poppen and Gerrit Bicker, two rich traders. As all the other Voorcompagniën, the Compagnie van Verre was to melt into the VOC in March 1602. See Johannes G. van Dillen, *Het oudste aandeelhoudersregister van de kamer Amsterdam der Oost-Indische Compagnie*, The Hague, M. Nijhoff / Werken Nederlandsch Economisch-Historisch Archief 14, 1958.

<sup>3</sup> *Itinerario, voyage ofte schipvaart, van Jan Huygen van Linschoten naer Oost ofte Portugaels Indien...*, Amsterdam, Cornelis Claesz., 1596.

<sup>4</sup> Keyzer actually died a few days after the fleet's arrival in Madagascar, in September 1596.

flagship. He presented the Dutch with “a buffalo and fresh water<sup>5</sup>”. The first in a long series of blunders and *faux-pas*, the Dutch, who maybe feared to be poisoned, most impolitely refused these gifts. The latter actually were not just tokens of non-enmity, but also the main material ingredients of the opening sequence of a ritualized trade transaction. Everywhere along the Western Indian Ocean shores as in the Malay world, the official in charge of welcoming foreign traders and of inspecting their cargoes in order to collect custom duties – the Harbourmaster (Shahbandar) – would initiate a trade relationship by providing the newcomers with fresh meat and fresh water<sup>6</sup>.

The reason why court-sanctioned commercial relations always exhibited a highly ritualized character in the Malay world is that foreign merchants were expected to publicly acknowledge the power and “prestige (*mertabat*)” of the local *raja* if they wanted to be considered as relevant trading partners<sup>7</sup>. Once they had entered the ritual realm of political subservience, they were no more a threat to the *raja*-centered hierarchies that sustained a stable “dynastic domain (*negeri*)”. While sojourning in the Malay-speaking polity of Patani (Southern Thailand) in June-July 1612, Peter Floris – a former Dutch East India Company (VOC) factor who had taken service with the British East India Company (EIC) in 1610<sup>8</sup> – helped broker a trade agreement with the local queen. To this end, he convinced the captain of the Seventh Separate Voyage fleet to follow the local “customary rules and ceremonies (*adat-istiadat*)” the best he could. Having rightly performed the *sembah datang* (“reverential salute and delivery of gift upon arrival”) and the *sembah berniaga* (“reverential salute and

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<sup>5</sup> I use the standard edition of the travel account of Willem Lodewijcksz., first published in Amsterdam by Claesz. in 1598. See G. P. Rouffaer and J. W. IJzerman, *De Eerste Schipvaart der Nederlanders naar Oost-Indië onder Cornelis de Houtman, 1595-1597. Vol. I. D'Eerste Boeck, van Willem Lodewyckz., 's Gravenhage, M. Nijhoff / De Linschoten Vereeniging, 1915 [hereafter ES], p. 73-74. Lodewijcksz. translates the title *Tumenggung Angabaya* by that of “admiral”, whereas the official bearing it most probably was the police chief in charge of the harbor district. The military rank of admiral usually was rendered by the title of *laksamana* in Malay texts (for instance in the well-known 1740s *Hikayat Hang Tuah*).*

<sup>6</sup> Purnadi Purbacaraka, “Shahbandars in the Archipelago”, *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 1961, 2, p. 1-9.

<sup>7</sup> Malay compendiums of “customary rules and ceremonies (*adat-istiadat*)” from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries usually depict the ideal *raja* as a “gardener-king” who cultivates his *negara* as if it were a field of edible crops or a grove of fragrant flowers. In a late 16<sup>th</sup> century *adat* treaty from Pahang (east coast of the Malay Peninsula), one reads that “the *raja* is like a gardener who puts his groves into good order (*sa-orang utasan yang berbuat tanaman*); [...] he arranges them in accordance with his prestige (*mertabat*)” (John E. Kempe and Richard O. Winstedt (ed.), “A Malay Legal Digest Compiled for ‘Abd al-Ghafur Muhaiyu’d-din Shah, Sultan of Pahang (1592-1614 A. D.), with Undated Additions”, *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1948, 21 (1) [hereafter AP], p. 26).

<sup>8</sup> The Board of Directors of the EIC did not forbid the employment of Dutchmen in Asia before 1618.

delivery of gift required for obtaining a trading license<sup>9</sup>), the British were granted the permanent settlement privilege they were expecting.

That the Dutch could not understand the ritual-political dimension of Javanese amenities, as has sometimes been ascertained, is doubtful, since back in Holland, the “offering of presents (*vereering*)” was part and parcel of any trade transaction: as if to give a moral overtone to interest-oriented transactions, gifts were routinely exchanged between trade partners or political allies<sup>10</sup>. That the men of the “First Navigation” were fully aware of the codes regulating “interest-oriented friendship” is indeed evidenced by the fact that prior to his departure, Lambert Biesman, who had obtained his position of “second-class merchant (*onder-koopman*)” thanks to the twin reference of one of his cousins (Beuningen) and of one of his mother’s cousins, Jan Jacobsz. Bal, sent the latter, as a token of gratitude, a “sack full of [tulip] bulbs<sup>11</sup>”.

The Regent of the city also came on board Houtman’s flagship, accompanied by his interpreter – a man by the name of Quillin Panjan, born in Sao Tomé de Meliapor<sup>12</sup>. He explained to the newcomers that following the custom, they had to go to the palace to present the king with a ceremonial gift. Before disembarking to go to the palace, Houtman did something quite unexpected: in front of all the crew members, assembled on board the flagship, he solemnly bestowed the military title of *capteyns* on his merchants. He himself assumed that of *capiteyn-major (capitao-mor)* – the one usually worn by those high-ranking “noblemen (*fidalgos*)” in command of the Esquadra da India, the official return fleet making it twice yearly between Lisbon and Goa. Houtman then dressed as a grandee. Even more

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<sup>9</sup> W. H. Moreland (ed.), *Peter Floris. His Voyage to the East Indies in The Globe, 1611-1615. The Contemporary Translation of his Journal*, London, The Hakluyt Society, 1934, p. 37. On Floris’ sojourn in Patani, see Stuart Robson, “Peter Floris (alias Pieter Willemsz.), Merchant and... Student of Malay”, *Songklanakarin Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 2000, 6 (1), p. 90-95.

<sup>10</sup> Luuc Kooijmans, “Kwestbaarheid en koopluider vriendschap”, in Marijke Gisjwijt-Hofstra and Florike Egmond (dir.), *Of bidden helpt? Tegenslag en cultuur in Europa circa 1500-2000*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 1997, p. 61-70 ; Irma Thoen, *Strategic Affection? Gift Exchange in Seventeenth-Century Holland*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Lambert Biesman to his father, November 6, 1594, quoted in Fred Swart, “Lambert Biesman (1573-1601) of the Company of Trader-Adventurers, the Dutch route to the East Indies, and Olivier van Noort’s Circumnavigation of the Globe”, *The Journal of the Hakluyt Society*, 2007, p. 4-5.

<sup>12</sup> A settlement of the Portuguese in India, controlled not by the Crown but by a municipal council of *casados*. See Ines Zupanov, “Une ville-reliquaire : Sao Tomé de Meliapor. La politique et le sacré en Inde portugaise au XVI<sup>ème</sup> siècle”, in Philippe Boutry, Pierre-Antoine Favre et Dominique Julia (dir.), *Reliques modernes. Cultes et usages chrétiens des corps saints des Réformes aux Révolutions*, Paris, EHESS, 2009, vol. 2, p. 705-729.

intriguing by the social-behavioral standards of the time, he did put a duel sword at his waist<sup>13</sup>. That a trader would wear such a token of aristocratic dignity indeed would have come as a true scandal back in the United Provinces, where the Councils of Nobility (Ridderschappen) had no mercy whatsoever for such transgressive behavior<sup>14</sup>.

On those far-away shores of a still-unknown Malay world, Dutch merchants were playing social roles they could never have endorsed with impunity in their home countries. But trying the best of his ability, Houtman never managed to induce Javanese courtiers in the belief that he was of noble origins or that he was invested with diplomatic dignity. All along the stay of the Dutch in the city, the court of Banten interacted with them not on a diplomatic par, but through the Harbourmaster.

## 2.

That the Dutch were welcomed in Banten by Portuguese traders should come as no surprise, for the Portuguese had tried to establish commercial relations with the authorities of the city ever since the conquest of Malacca by Albuquerque in July-August 1511. By late 1511, Antonio de Abreu, who was heading towards the Moluccas, sailed along Java' north coast and made a stop in Tuban<sup>15</sup>. In 1522, a *fidalgo* by the name of Henrique de Leme reached the little port of Sunda Kelapa, close to Banten, and signed a most unequal treaty with a local lord bearing the title of *Sang Adipati*. Leme even had a *padrao* – a stone stele with the coat of arms of *Dom Manuel* – raised on the beach, as if he had taken possession of the place<sup>16</sup>. But past the seizure of Banten by the troops of *Sunan Gunung Jati* in 1526-27, and the subsequent conversion of the local elite to Islam, the Portuguese never managed to set

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<sup>13</sup> *ES*, p. 78. See the engraving in Isaac Commelin, *Begin ende voortgangh, van de Vereenighde Nederlantsche Geoctroyeerde Oost-Indische Compagnie...*, Amsterdam, Jan Jansz., 1646, I.37, p. 112.

<sup>14</sup> On the Ridderschappen and the renewed relevance, at the end of the XVI<sup>th</sup> century, of their role in ascertaining and defending aristocratic privileges, see Antheun Janse, *Ridderschap in Holland. Portret van een adellijke elite in de late Middeleeuwen*, Utrecht, Verloren, 2001, and Henk van Nierop, *The Nobility of Holland. From Knights to Regents, 1500-1650*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993.

<sup>15</sup> Visconde de Lagoa, *Grandes e Humildes na Epopeia Portuguesa do Oriente (Séculos XV, XVI e XVII)*, Lisbon, Rua da Rosa 238 / Instituto para a Alta Cultura, 1942, I, p. 73-83.

<sup>16</sup> Luis Filipe Thomaz, "O malogrado estabelecimento oficial dos Portugueses em Sunda e a Islamização de Java", in L. F. Thomaz (dir.), *Aquém e além da Taprobana. Estudos Luso-Orientais à memória de Jean Aubin e Denys Lombard*, Lisbon, Universidade Nova de Lisboa : Centro de Historia de Além-mar, 2002, p. 381-607 ; Jorge Manuel dos Santos Alves, "L'inscription du *padrao* de Banten (1522)", *Archipel*, 1994, 47, p. 22-23.

up a large-scale factory on Java's north coast. Since no formal peace treaty was ever signed between the Estado da India and Javanese polities, it was left to ordinary "settlers (*casados*)" to go and buy spices at their own risks in Banten.

Without these vagrant *casados* – who often acted as the unofficial agents of the Estado da India in places out of reach of the Malacca-based armada –, Houtman and his men would have been unable to master so quickly the basics of the political situation in Banten. For after having settled in a small wooden house in the Chinese district, outside city walls, the Dutch kept learning a lot from the Portuguese about the intricacies of local trade. Their main informant was a man named Pedro da Tayda: a trader, "born in Malacca", who had been living for a while in Banten. Tayda opportunely advised the Dutch to buy black pepper in large quantities as soon as they could, for the prices always rose upon the arrival – by mid-July – of the convoy of huge junks coming from imperial China. He also helped Lodewijcksz. drawing an accurate map of Java's north coast and narrated in details to the newcomers his "many voyages<sup>17</sup>" around the region. Alas, Tayda – who was considered as a traitor to be apprehended as soon as possible by the officials of the Estado da India<sup>18</sup> – was murdered in his sleep a few weeks after he had started telling his secrets<sup>19</sup>.

To be greeted and lent a helping hand by Portuguese upon their arrival in Java surely came as a most ironical turn of event to the Dutch, for the main purpose of the expedition was, as self-confidently stated in a letter sent before departure by Lambert Biesman – one of the merchants of the expedition – to his father, "to go farther East than the Portuguese<sup>20</sup>". Indeed, even if the "First Navigation" ended as a total economic and diplomatic failure<sup>21</sup>, it soon was considered in Dutch chronicles as a major step towards the end of the war with the Spaniards<sup>22</sup>. Even the clever ambassador of King Henri IV in The Hague, Monsieur de

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<sup>17</sup> *ES*, III, p. 199. Jan Jansz. Kaerel to the Bewindhebbers of the Compagnie van Verre, Banten, 4 August 1596.

<sup>18</sup> Joaquim H. da Cunha Rivara (ed.), *Archivo Portuguez-Oriental*, Nova Goa, Imprensa Nacional, 1861, III, p. 884-886 (Doc. n° 337). Royal secretary Diogo Velho to Viceroy Dom Francisco da Gama, Madrid, 5 April 1598.

<sup>19</sup> *Opkomst*, II, p. 327. *Journal gehouden op het schip Hollandia, door den adelborst Frank van der Does, 2 April 1595-13 Junij 1597*.

<sup>20</sup> Lambert Biesman to his father, November 6, 1594, quoted in Fred Swart, "Lambert Biesman (1573-1601) of the Company of Trader-Adventurers...", art. cit., p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> There were only 90 survivors to the "First Navigation", and the hundreds of kilograms of low-quality black pepper they brought back to Holland could barely cover the costs of the chartering of the expedition.

<sup>22</sup> The official Historiographer of Mauritz van Nassau, Emanuel van Meteren, duplicates the whole account of Lodewijckz. in his *Commentariën ofte Memoriën van den Nederlantsen Staet, Handel, Oorloghen ende*

Buzanval, wrote by August 1597, right after the return of the “First Navigation” fleet to the Texel Bay, that the Portuguese were “in great peril of not enjoying any longer the riches of the Orient, since all these countries [the Low Countries] full of ships and sailors will soon rush there as butterflies attracted by a candle fire (*car tous ces pays qui sont pleins de navires et de matelots y courront comme au feu*)<sup>23</sup>”.

Since 1580, the King of Spain, Philip II, also acted as the King of Portugal, hence whatever profit Lisbon made from its monopoly over the spices trade in the East Indies could be of help to the financing of the Army of Flanders – that tried since 1568 to curtail the Dutch “Great rebellion”. Actually, in order to mollify the Portuguese nobility, which was almost unanimously hostile to his ascent to the throne of the Aviz dynasty, Philip II had promised, long before the Cortes of Tomar, to reunite the East Indies’ and the West Indies’ trades: in 1579, the Archbishop of Badajoz had convinced the Spanish court that it was of critical importance, to win some support among leading Portuguese *fidalgos*, to “make them understand that fleets from both India and the West Indies would come to the port of Lisbon<sup>24</sup>” should the Catholic monarchy extends its benevolent tutelage over the whole of the Iberian Peninsula. Even if in practice the two empires were to be kept financially separate, the Dutch could legitimately fear, by the mid-1590s, that the treasure chests of the Hispanic monarchy would sooner than later welcome Asian bullion.

To disrupt Portuguese control over the “Spices Route” linking the Western Indian Ocean to the Malay world was akin, in the mind of many a sailor of the “First Navigation”, to striking a terrible blow to the Hispanic enemy on its Asian flank. Yet the Dutch knew nothing of this Malay world into which they had entered all of a sudden. Strategically located along the main maritime commercial lane linking the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea, and having already for decades established long-distance religious and literary connections with both Muslim South India and the Arabic Peninsula, Banten was a cosmopolitan sultanate where

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*Geschiedenissen van onsen tyden*, published in Gdansk in 1608. In his *Antiquity of the Batavian Republic* (1610), Grotius also turns the “First Navigations” into a major civic accomplishment giving evidence of the United Provinces’ independent political destiny.

<sup>23</sup> M. de Buzanval to M. du Plessis, The Hague, 27 August 1597, quoted in Jacobus A. van der Chijs, *Geschiedenis der stichting van de Vereenigde O. I. Compagnie...*, Leiden, Engels, 1856, p. 65.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Fernando Bouza, *Felipe II y el Portugal dos povos. Imagenes de esperanza y revuelta*, Valladolid, Universidad de Valladolid, Coleccion Sintesis XIV, 2010, p. 50.

many languages were spoken: Javanese, Arabic, Malay, Tamil, Persian, Chinese, etc. Yet the Dutch could master none of these languages.

Neither could they understand, in these early days of their trade contacts with Southeast Asia, any of the units of measurement used by locals. On the main day-market of Banten, the *pasar* of Karangantu, sellers made use of a kind of scales the Dutch had never seen. Willem Lodewijcksz., the author of the soon-to-be-published travel narrative of the “First Navigation”, describes this strange weighing device in the following terms: “It looks like the scales of a Weaver, which consists of a stick bearing [measurement] marks, to which is attached a sack to one end and a weight to the other<sup>25</sup>”. Called *daching*, these beam balances were of Chinese origins and were used all over the Malay Archipelago<sup>26</sup>. Upon their arrival in the Moluccas in January 1599, the merchants of the “Second Navigation” found that nobody there would use the scales that they had brought along from the United Provinces. They therefore bought a *daching* and set it right in front of the small wooden house they had just rented in order to attract nutmegs’ sellers<sup>27</sup>.

In Banten, Houtman’s merchants also were at a loss regarding the very units of each and every trade transaction. For instance, the most commonly used weighing unit, the *bahar*, could vary greatly depending on what kind of product was weighed: Lodewijcksz. came to the precarious conclusion that there existed a “great *bahar*” (276 kg) used for spices and brown (coconut) sugar and a “small *bahar*” (176 kg) used for iron or camphor. Yet a *bahar* usually meant not an intangible weight, but a given volume: it was what a yoke could contain. Even worse: other weighing units widely used throughout Java were product-specific, like the *gantang* (3,125 kg) and the *cupak* (1/4<sup>th</sup> of a *gantang*), that came into play only for weighing un-husked rice. As for the *tahil*, used to buy and sell gold, it was a kind of “analytical unit” whose volume varied greatly from one Javanese city-state to the other: its

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<sup>25</sup> *ES*, p. 110 and engraving in *Plaat 19*, p. 122.

<sup>26</sup> Marie-Sybille de Vienne, *Les Chinois en Insulinde. Échanges et sociétés marchandes au xvii<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, Les Indes Savantes, 2008, 39 p. 75. For a detailed and quite enthusiastic description of the *daching*, see Joseph Wicki, “Lista de moedas, pesos e embarcações do Oriente, composta por Nicolau Pereira S. J. por 1582”, *Studia*, 1971, 33, p. 143 / f° 150v.

<sup>27</sup> *Second Livre de l’histoire de la Navigation aux Indes Orientales. Journal ou Comptoir contenant le Vray Discours et narration historique du voyage faict par les huict Navires d’Amsterdam, au mois de Mars l’an 1598, sous la conduite de l’Admiral Jaques Corneille Neceq et du Vice-Admiral Vvibrant de Vvarvvicq...*, Amsterdam, Cornille Nicolas, 1601, f° 12v, 21r.

only permanent “value” was that it was worth 1/16<sup>th</sup> of a *kati*. Getting along with (mostly Indian) moneychangers also was a daunting task for the Dutch, since a host of means of payment circulated in Banten at the end of the XVI<sup>th</sup> century: Spanish *reales de ocho*, Chinese *pici* coins, curved Persian silver ingots, Siamese *pagodas*<sup>28</sup>. Even if relatively stable in the mid-run, conversion rates were barely decipherable for the newcomers. For instance, 200 *pici* were worth a Satac (a purely abstract book-keeping unit), and 5 Satac 1 000 Portuguese *caixas*<sup>29</sup>.

As chaotic as they may have appeared at first sight to still-inexperienced Europeans, these variations actually were kept under strict control by local public authorities. In any Malay-speaking port-polity, the supervision of weights and measures was placed under the careful watch of the Harbourmaster. As stated by the *Laws of Malacca*, partly compiled as early as the 1450s, “rules (*hukum*) regarding weights and measures such as *gantang*, *cupak*, *kati*, *tahil* and market regulations (*hukum pasar*) are all exclusively vested in the Harbourmaster<sup>30</sup>”. As admirably explained by Frederick de Houtman in his *Spraeck ende Woord-boeck* – a conversational guide to Malay published in 1603 –, in Aceh (Northern Sumatra) the weighing of pepper took place under the inquisitive glaze of a “public notary (*korkon*)” in the sole service of the king<sup>31</sup>. In a mid-XVII<sup>th</sup> century *adat* (“customary law”) compendium from Kedah (Malay Peninsula), one learns that weights and measures used by wholesalers were regularly inspected by specially appointed officials who would go from place to place to check whether they were in accordance with the “norms spelled out by the state (*sukatan negeri*)”. Those who were found guilty of having distorted measurement tools

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<sup>28</sup> By the late XVI<sup>th</sup> century, Safavid Persia imported ever-increasing quantities of silk from Southeast Asian countries, hence the diffusion, all around the region, of Iranian silver ingots. See Rudolph P. Matthee, *The Politics of Trade in Safavid Iran. Silk for Silver, 1600-1730*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

<sup>29</sup> *ES*, p. 212-214.

<sup>30</sup> Liaw Yock Fang (ed.), *Undang-Undang Melaka. The Laws of Melaka*, The Hague, M. Nijhoff / KITLV, Bibliotheca Indonesica, 1976 [hereafter *UUM*], XXIX, p. 134-135.

<sup>31</sup> Denys Lombard (ed.), *Le Spraeck ende Woord-boek de Frederick de Houtman, première méthode de malais parlé (fin du 16<sup>ème</sup> siècle)*, Paris, EFEO, 1970 [hereafter *SWB*], VIII, p. 91. Regarding the status of the *korkon*, see also Frederick de Houtman, *Cort Verhael vant gene wedervaren is Frederick de Houtman tot Atchein int eylandt Sumatra in den tijdt van ses ende twintich maenden, die hy aldaer gevanghen is gheweest*, in Willem S. Unger, *De Oudste Reizen van de Zeeuwen naar Oost-Indië, 1598-1604*, 's Gravenhage, M. Nijhoff, 1948 [hereafter *CVGW*], p. 110.



were sentenced to suffer the deepest humiliations: they were severely beaten, in the open, with their mischievous steelyards<sup>32</sup>.

The reasons for such a severe punishment are not difficult to be found. Most Malay-speaking polities made a living on the seasonal welcoming of “monsoon traders”. Yet the latter could easily switch from one haven to the next – for instance from Aceh to Banten, or from Johore Lama to Banjarmasin – if they felt dissatisfied with the way they could handle their business in a given locale. If a *raja* wished to attract and retain merchants, he had to judicially secure trade transactions – and the official guarantee of scales and weights was the very first step towards the building of such a secure environment. The *Laws of Kedah*, promulgated in the 1650s, made the point clear: “When the custom of a country (*adat*) does not change over time, many [foreign] traders come to this country; then it becomes bustling (*ramai*) [and] prosperous (*maamor*)<sup>33</sup>”. But there were also potent religious reasons behind this seemingly down-to-earth obsession of *adat* law-books with faulty scales: as repeatedly stated in the Quran, God Himself forbids “unfair weighing” and sends straight to Hell “those who cheat the measurement [of goods]” (VII.82, XXVI.181-183, LV.7-9, LXXXIII.1-5)<sup>34</sup>. In an early XX<sup>th</sup> century copy of an *adat* compendium coming from the Sungai Ujong region (Malay Peninsula), the link between “uncorrupted scales”, Quranic-based authority, and kingly power is made highly visible: “In case a *negeri* has no *raja*, the custom of the Malays has it that the scales have to be brought there by the people from Mecca<sup>35</sup>”.

Strict rules regulating trade had been devised and were enforced in Banten, but the Dutch were unaware of this. It is precisely because they were unable to master these already existing, locally-crafted devices of commensurability that the men of the “First Navigation”

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<sup>32</sup> Richard O. Winstedt (ed.), “Kedah Laws”, *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1928, 6 (2) [hereafter AK], I.28 and I.34, p. 23-24 ; II.10, p. 29-30. For similar statements in other *adat* books, see Daniel Perret, “Poids et mesures dans la littérature traditionnelle malaise”, in Pierre Le Roux, Bernard Sellato and Jacques Ivanoff (dir.), *Poids et mesures en Asie du Sud-Est*, vol. 1 : *L’Asie du Sud-Est austronésienne et ses marches*, Paris, EFEO : Institut de recherche sur le Sud-Est asiatique, 2004, p. 84-85.

<sup>33</sup> AK, I.34, p. 24.

<sup>34</sup> See AK, I.28, p. 23 for a reference to the “decree of Allah” regarding “accurate weighing”.

<sup>35</sup> Richard O. Winstedt and Patrick Edward de Josselin de Jong (ed.), “A Digest of Customary Law from Sungai Ujong”, *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1954, 17 (3) [hereafter ASU], VII, p. 41, and XVI, p. 45. The manuscript used in this edition is the Maxwell 118 A of the library of the Royal Asiatic Society: it was written in 1904. Another *jawi* version of that text was composed circa 1900.

quickly convinced themselves that they were being endlessly cheated by the locals<sup>36</sup>. Houtman had come for trade sake, and yet he found himself unable to understand any of the rules regulating trade transactions in Banten. Fearing that the Regent of the city would not deliver on time the large quantity of black pepper they had bought from him, the Dutch “preventively” tried to ransack two Portuguese junks anchored in the bay. The Regent at once had Houtman and some of his lieutenants arrested and sent to jail. They were freed only after a 2 000 *reales de ocho* “ransom” (the Javanese would rather have talked about a “fine” for illegal behavior) had been paid to local authorities. The Dutch then left Banten by firing their guns at its wooden walls<sup>37</sup>.

Even if described this way in Lodewijksz.’s account, this first failed trade contact never amounted to a “face-to-face encounter” between the Dutch and the Javanese, for Houtman and his merchants had to deal as much with Sino-Javanese wholesalers and Gujarati moneylenders as with Javanese courtiers. The “Chinese” played a critical role as middlemen on Banten’s black pepper market: they were the ones who went to the countryside to collect bit by bit the newly harvested spice in order to sell it in large quantities to foreign traders<sup>38</sup>. What the Dutch had to confront – and what they were, at first, unable to fully understand – was a well-structured local economic system, regulated in its minute details.

### 3.

Sticking too tightly to the institutional archive of the “First Navigation”, one could be left with the impression that if things went wrong in Banten, this is for the simple reason that information-sharing mechanisms – deemed so critical to the successful unfolding of any trade transaction – did not work well there. To put it bluntly, the “market” was there, but the Dutch were at a disadvantage in making use of it for, as any newcomers to an ongoing game, they were not provided quickly enough with relevant strategic information. They knew not local rules, yet local rules existed. This way of phrasing things may be analytically

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<sup>36</sup> *ES*, p.

<sup>37</sup> *ES*, p. 95-96.

<sup>38</sup> *ES*, p. 110-112.

soothing. The problem is that, by positing a vision of trade-oriented locales as a set of technically-ordered arenas, it brings into play a most anachronistic understanding of the “market” as a universal, hence morally neutral space. At the dawn of the Modern Era, trade – whether at home or in far-away places – was not just a question of rates and numbers: it also was a morally ambiguous business<sup>39</sup>.

Whether in Northern Europe or in the Malay world, seeking profit regardless of moral guidelines was deemed the surest way to eternal damnation. For instance, usury was strongly condemned both by the Reformed church and by classical Islamic theology. In the *Laws of Malacca*, “usury (*riba*)” is strictly forbidden, especially when it comes to trading “silver for silver or gold for gold” (since precious metals were traditionally regarded as *mal ribawi*, “goods that can be subjected to usury”)<sup>40</sup>. To be sure, we know, thanks to the testimony of Augustin de Beaulieu who visited Banten and Aceh by the late 1610s, that usury rates ranging from 12 % per year to 5 % per month were in force in these cities<sup>41</sup>. The practice of *riba* being forbidden only to Muslims, it nevertheless certainly was practiced in the open only by non-Muslim (mostly Chinese) moneylenders.

At the very same time, a harsh debate took place in the Low Countries regarding the lawfulness of usurious rates of interest. Since the 1570s, moneylenders – usually called Lombarden – were banned by Reformed church councils and municipal councils alike from attending Church meetings, and even from receiving sacraments. In his *Christian Instructions regarding Usury, Interest Rates, Rents-Trading, and other Profits coming from Money*, published in Amsterdam in 1637, the Franeker theologian Johannes Cloppenburg still envisioned the practice and the use of usury the way Thomas of Aquin did, that’s to say as a

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<sup>39</sup> On the strong moral dimension of “market transactions” in early modern Europe, where rules of reciprocity and requirements of honor-maintenance did put a strong check on profit-seeking, see the classical work by Edward P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the XVIII<sup>th</sup> Century”, in *Customs in Common. Studies in Traditional Popular Culture*, London, Merlin Press, 1991 [1971], p. 185-258.

<sup>40</sup> *UUM*, XXX, p. 134-139. See also John E. Kempe and Richard O. Winstedt (ed.), “A Malay Legal Digest Compiled for ‘Abd al-Ghafur Muhaiyu’d-din Shah, Sultan of Pahang (1592-1614 A. D.), with Undated Additions”, *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1948, 21 (1) [hereafter *AP*], XXIV, p. 40-41. Regarding the notion of *riba* in classical Islamic theology, see Joseph Schacht, “Riba”, in Peri Bearman *et al.* (dir.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Leiden, Brill, 2009, 2nd ed., vol. VIII, p. 491.

<sup>41</sup> Denys Lombard (ed.), *Augustin de Beaulieu. Mémoires d’un voyage aux Indes Orientales, 1619-1622 : un marchand normand à Sumatra*, Paris, EFEO-Maisonnieuve et Larose, 1996, p. 201.

“vice<sup>42</sup>”. But in his *De usuris liber* published in Leyden in 1638, Claudius Salmasius made a vibrant plea for the “welcoming back to the Table of Communion” of the moneylenders, considered as some of the main “architects of collective prosperity<sup>43</sup>”. That the dominant moral vision of trade changed fast in the Low Countries in the 1630s also is evidenced by the publishing, in 1632, of a most intriguing book: the *Mercator Sapiens* (“Wise Merchant”), written by Caspar Barlaeus – a Leiden University professor – on the occasion of the inauguration of Amsterdam’s Illustrious School. Barlaeus went farther than simply reminding traders that they had to handle business the “true Christian way”: he posited a strong moral analogy between religious devotion and the technical skills of the merchant – stating for instance that:

“when he contemplates attentively his coins, [the merchant] sees that on one of them piety is represented, on another one ingenuousness, on a third one faithfulness, on yet another one carefulness, on the last one generosity; on these objects that trigger so many evils, he sees but the images of honesty<sup>44</sup>.”

As convincingly demonstrated by Quentin Skinner for England under James 1<sup>st</sup>, equating commercial abilities with devotional gestures was a most efficient way to rhetorically turn upside down the ancient Christian disdain of trade<sup>45</sup>. Once considered the less fit for Heaven<sup>46</sup>, the hardworking and frugal trader suddenly became a model for the pious<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> Johannes Cloppenburg, *Christelijcke Onderwijsinge van Woecker, Interessen, Coop van Renten ende allerleye Winsten van Gelt met Gelt*, Amsterdam, Gedrukt by Theunis Jacobsz., 1637. On the traditional scholastic condemnation of usury, see John Noonan, *The Scholastic Analysis of Usury*, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 1957, and Jacques Le Goff, *Marchands et banquiers du Moyen Âge*, Paris, PUF, 1956, p. 75-79.

<sup>43</sup> Claudius Salmasius, *De Usuris liber*, Lugd. Batavor., Ex Officina Elseviriorum, 1638.

<sup>44</sup> We translate from the Latin text edited by Catherine Secretan, *Le « Marchand philosophe » de Caspar Barlaeus. Un éloge du commerce dans la Hollande du Siècle d'or. Étude, texte et traduction du Mercator Sapiens*, Paris, Honoré Champion, 2002, p. 139.

<sup>45</sup> Quentin Skinner, “Moral Principles and Social Change”, in Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, vol. 1: *Regarding Method*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 145-157.

<sup>46</sup> Remember Mark 10.25: “It's easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to get into the kingdom of God”.

<sup>47</sup> Even if the vision of traders gets far better all along the XVII<sup>th</sup> century, as evidenced by the transformation of the codes of their pictorial representation, bankers and moneylender keep being widely regarded as the arch-enemies of “common good”. See Annette de Vries, *Ingelijst werk. De verbeelding van arbeid en beroep in de Vroegmoderne Nederlanden*, Zwolle, Waanders, 2004.

Echoing the audacious doctrinal positions of both Salmasius and Barlaeus, the municipal councils of Leyden, Gouda, and Rotterdam lifted the ban on moneylenders in 1657<sup>48</sup>.

In both Reformed Northern Europe and Malay-Muslim Southeast Asia, usury hence was morally condemned yet practiced in the open by “religious minorities” (either Catholic Italian Lombarden or non-Muslim Chinese). But usury was just a given instance of a much broader moral dismissal of profit-seeking activities considered as highly detrimental to both individual salvation and the quietness and welfare of kingdoms. As acknowledged in many “mariners’ songs (*matrozenliederen*)” compiled in the first half of the XVII<sup>th</sup> century, the danger of contravening “natural law” and of forgetting the basic tenets of Christian faith loomed especially large whenever the “riches of the Indies” came into view<sup>49</sup>. In his *Spiritual Rudder of the Merchant Ship*, published in 1638 and dedicated to the Directors of the VOC and the WIC, a *predikant* from Zierikzee, Godefridus Udemans, compared the “honorable quest for profit” of the Dutch in Asia to the devastating greed of the Spaniards in the Americas. He then sententiously exhorted the salvation-minded merchant to abide by “this maxim: honor before money<sup>50</sup>”.

Because of the lure of exotic riches, those who were heading to the East were considered by the *predikanten* as being in dire need of strict moral guidance. Faith had to be constantly fostered on board the East-Indiamen. To this end, the VOC *artickel brief* ratified by Mauritz van Nassau before the departure of the “Second Navigation” made mandatory the praying of God “by dawn and dusk<sup>51</sup>”. In the instructions handed over in 1603 to the new Banten VOC chief-merchant, the latter was made responsible for the daily chanting of the Psalms right after “the hearing of the Sacred Word of the Lord<sup>52</sup>”. In 1604, the EIC also made mandatory

<sup>48</sup> Jelle Riemersma, *Religious Factors in Early Dutch Capitalism, 1550-1650*, The Hague, Mouton, 1967, p. 77-80.

<sup>49</sup> On the moral perils of the quest of the “riches of the Indies”, see “Goet-rijcke Asia is varende”, in Anon., *t Amsterdamse Rommel-Zootje, met verscheyde Minne-Deuntjens, Lief-lockende vrijagie, en treffelijcke Harders-Sangen*, Amsterdam, Jacob & Casparus Loots-Man, c. 1650, p. 38-40, and “Het Lof van Oost-Indiën”, in Anon., *De Vermakelijcke Buys-man*, Amsterdam, Casparus Loots-Man, 1694, p. 66-72.

<sup>50</sup> Godefridus Udemans, *t Geestelyck Roer van t Coopmans Schip*, Middelburgh, 1638, p. 4, 102, quoted in Benjamin Schmidt, *Innocence Abroad. The Dutch Imagination and the New World, 1570-1670*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 244-245.

<sup>51</sup> Johannes Keuning (ed.), *De Tweede Schipvaart der Nederlanders naar oost-Indië onder Jacob Cornelisz. van Neck en Wybrant Warwijck*, The Hague, M. Nijhoff-Linschoten Vereeniging, 1938 [hereafter *TS*], I, p. 153 (*Articulen en Ordonnantien...*, Delft, March 7, 1598, art. 2).

<sup>52</sup> Jan Karel de Jonge (ed.), *De Opkomst van het Nederlandsch gezag in Oost-Indië. Verzameling van onuitgegeven stukken uit het Oud-Koloniaal Archief*, The Hague, M. Nijhoff, 1862-1870 [hereafter *Opkomst*], III,

for the crewmembers of a fleet sailing to Java to “pray several times a day” and to refrain “under any circumstance to blaspheme the name of God<sup>53</sup>”. In 1622, the Holland Chamber of the VOC even ordered 25 books of pietist prescriptions to be bought and put in open access on board the ship *Amsterdam*. One of these was significantly titled *The Firm Foundation of the Faith (De Vaste Grond des Geloofs)*<sup>54</sup>.

In the first decades of the XVII<sup>th</sup> century, one even witnesses the birth and spread, in the Low Countries, of a “sailor-specific” literature of admonition. In the *Christian Art of Navigation* by Adam Westerman (Amsterdam, 1611) as in the *Spiritual Rudder* of Udemans (Dordrecht, 1617), “men of the sea (*varensmannen*)” are considered as weak spiritual beings whose frail faith is constantly put to the test by the lure of profit – whether on board high-sea vessels where games of chance lead to the ruin of many a mariner, or in the East Indies, where the cheating of both Christian brethren and the naturals always seems the quickest and most benign way to amass riches<sup>55</sup>. Even if one could find some spiritual attendants along the way – there usually were both chaplains and “comforters of the sick (*sieckentroosters*)” on board VOC ships<sup>56</sup> –, the voyage to the East Indies was full of deadly temptations, and most of

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p. 208 (*Ordonnantie en Instructie voor de Coopliden, Assistenten en andere personen, die van wege de Gen. OIC tot Bantam in Oost-Indie zullen blyven...*, December 1603, art. 28).

<sup>53</sup> Bolton Corney (ed.), *The Voyage of Sir Henry Middleton to Bantam and the Maluco Islands. Being the Second Voyage set forth by the Governor and Company of Merchants of London trading into the East Indies*, London, The Hakluyt Society, 1855, Ann. 9 (*A Commission of the Governor, the Deputy and the Committees of the East India Company, Being the Instructions for Master Henry Middleton and Others Employed in their Second Voyage to the East-Indies*, 1604).

<sup>54</sup> Jacobus Bruijn and Jan Lucassen (dir.), *Op de schepen der Oost-Indische Compagnie. Vijf artikelen van J. de Hullu*, Groningen, Wolters-Noordhoff, 1980, p. 131. That pietist books often found their way on board Dutch maritime expeditions is evidenced by the fact that amongst the remains of the 1596-97 Barentsz. expedition to New Zembla, one finds two pietist books: one in French by Jean Taffin, the chaplain of William the Silent in the 1570s (*Traicté de l'amendement de la vie*), and one in Flemish. See Gerrit de Veer and Willem Barentsz, *Prisonniers des glaces. Les expéditions de Willem Barentsz (1594-1597)*, Xavier de Castro éd., Paris, Chandeigne, 1995, p. 35. On the importance of faith-related literature (psalms-books, edification treatises, etc.) on board the East-Indiamen, see Herman Ketting, *Leven, werk, en rebellie aan boord van de Oost-Indiëvaarders (1595-1650)*, Amsterdam, Spinhuis, 2005, p. 147-151.

<sup>55</sup> Adamus Westermannus, *Christelycke Zee-vaert ende Wandel-Wegh, hoe een Schipper, Coopman, Zee ende Reysende-Man, inde vreesse Godes sijn ende uyt Reyse...*, Amsterdam, Marten Jansz. Brandt, 1630 [1611], and Godefridus Udemans, *Geestelick Compas, dat is Nut en nootwendigh bericht voor alle Zee-varende ende Reysende Luyden...*, Tot Dordrecht, Ghedruckt by Hendrick van Esch voor François Boels, 1637 [1617], quoted in August Th. Boone, ““Om een woesten hoop te brengen tot de kerck”. Een onderzoek naar zendingsgedachten in piëtistische zeemansvademecums”, in August Th. Boone and J. van Ekeris, *Zending tussen woord en daad. Twee hoofdstukken uit de geschiedenis van gereformeerd Piëtisme en zending*, Kampen, De Groot Goudriaan, 1991, p. 14-16, 23-25.

<sup>56</sup> Leendert Joesse, “De kerk onderweg: aan boord en in de verstrooing”, in Gerrit J. Schutte (ed.), *Het Indisch Sion. De Gereformeerde kerk onder de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, Hilversum, Verloren, 2002, p. 101-110.

those had to do with unregulated greed. In front of so many moral perils, God was the only “refuge and consolation (*troost en toevelaart*)” of the mariner<sup>57</sup>.

4.

Early modern Malay and Javanese court literatures seemingly posit a strong chiasm between the world of trade and that of palace-based politics. In most Malay epics – whether versified (*syair*) or in prose (*hikayat*) – as in all Javanese “mystical songs (*serat*)” and etiquette manuals, the greedy and coarse merchant – the *sudagar* who acts in a “rude / unrefined way (*kasar*)<sup>58</sup>” – is a strong polemical-comical character. A living antithesis of those princes and noblemen who blindly abide by courtly “rules of conduct (*aturan*)” and who try to fulfill to the best a requirement of unwavering “feudal loyalty (*kesetiaan*)” to the *raja*, the *sudagar* always are depicted as amoral beings who could not care less about personal virtue and the “common good”. For instance, one finds in the *Serat Pranacitra*, maybe written as early as the late 1620s, a story that tragically pits one against the other the worlds of trade and knighthood. To reward him for having conquered the city of Pati, the *sunan* of the Central Java-based kingdom of Mataram, Sultan Agung, gives a beautiful slave by the name of Roro Mendut to the aged general Wiraguna. Herself born in a traders’ family, Roro Mendut is obsessed with worldly pleasures. She soon takes a young rich merchant – Pranacitra – as her lover. They indulge together in luxury and laziness, throwing away both money and morals, until Wiraguna finds out he has been cheated all along. To restore his honor, the infuriated general stabs both lovers to death with a *kris*<sup>59</sup>.

In the *Suluk Mas Nganten*, written by the early XIX<sup>th</sup> century by one of the best “court-poets (*pujangga*)” of the day, Jayadiningrat 1<sup>st</sup>, a ludicrous “Mr. Merchant (Ki Sudagar)” tries to emulate the sophisticated behavior of an “adjutant at court (*jajar*)” who belongs to the lower-ranking “service nobility (*priyayi*)” of the kingdom. When the *sudagar* tells them that

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<sup>57</sup> “t Quaert-liedjen der Matroosen”, in Anon., *Matroosen vreught. Vol van de Nieuwste ende Hedendaaghsche Liedekens, Aldermeest gebruyckelijck onder de Zeevarende Luyden*, Amsterdam, Casparus Loots-Man, 1696, p. 80.

<sup>58</sup> On the *kasar-halus* notional system that was so central to *priyayi* self-imaginings all along the modern age, see Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1960, p. 232.

<sup>59</sup> Cornelis C. Berg and M. Prawiroatmodjo (ed.), *Pranacitra, een Javaansche liefde uit het Javaansch vertaald*, Santpoort, C. A. Mees, 1930, part. II.1, p. 33, VII.2-8 and VII.16-19, p. 87-89, 91-92.

he wants to marry his daughter “the way the *priyayi* do”, the courtier and his friends provide him with fake advice. Playing games of chance with his money to the last penny, the *priyayi* pitilessly make fun of the poor Mr. Merchant. Whereas it should have been a highly-codified ritual event, the wedding therefore ends in disarray:

“When the wedding was nigh,  
 None of the *priyayi* came:  
 In disarray the escort.  
 All of their promises had been empty;  
 The merchants were all jealous and broken,  
 And so their departure was not in unison.  
 Mr. Adjutant was constantly drunk. [...]  
 Typical of a merchant wedding,  
 All gold and silks,  
 The procession was on its way.  
 All shining in garments resplendent:  
 The groom rode a young horse.  
 Almost neglected was the horse, having received little care.  
 It was a bald roan horse,  
 Rather skinny and emaciated. [...]  
 This is the fault of one who makes a wedding  
 Not in keeping with his own ways (*dudu carane pribadi*).  
 If you’re a peasant, then do things like a peasant;  
 A *priyayi*, then do things like a *priyayi*.  
 Don’t try to follow the way of others. [...]  
 Don’t do what that old fool (*si kaki Pengung*) did:  
 A merchant who tried to do things like a *priyayi*.  
 He went south when he should have gone north:  
 It was not his own way<sup>60</sup>.”

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<sup>60</sup> I borrow this English translation to Suzanne Brenner, “Competing Hierarchies: Javanese Merchants and the *priyayi* Elite in Solo, Central Java”, *Indonesia*, 1991, 52, p. 74-75. Brenner uses a version of the text inserted into an early XIX<sup>th</sup> century manuscript of the *Serat Wulang*.



“A merchant who tried to do things like a nobleman” was a moral anomaly that could only be laughed at. The moral gap between the world of the *pasar* (marketplace) and that of the palace was deemed so impassable that when a nobleman dared marry a trader’s daughter, his peers mockingly said that he was “running after the butt (*golek bokong*)”, in the sense of “looking for money regardless of its origins<sup>61</sup>”. In the moral taxonomy spelled out in the *Serat Wulangreh* – a mystical treaty written by the *sunan* of Surakarta Paku Buwana IV (r. 1788-1820) –, the merchant dwells in the same category as opium-addicts and criminals, for they all exhibit the same “moral defect (*cacad*)”: they cannot refrain from running after worldly pleasures. Their soul is marred by the same hideous “attachment to the [mundane] world (*karem dunia*)<sup>62</sup>”. In his *Serat Nitiruti*, written by the closing decades of the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century, *Ki Mangunwijaya* also puts merchants alongside robbers and murderers, because they, too, are “always angry and greedy<sup>63</sup>”. The most famous *pujangga* ever, *Raden Ngabehi Ranggawarsita*, also tells in his *Serat Jayengbaya* (1830) the edifying story of a horse-trader who, after having stolen a *priyayi*’s money, murders him and joyfully buys himself a lot of “very nice, very expensive, and very strange things” in order to play the grandee<sup>64</sup>.

Contrary to the nobleman who excels in self-control and keeps the illusions of the mundane world at bay thanks to “ascetic practice (*tapa*)”, the *sudagar* indeed is driven by nothing but his beastly instincts – usually termed “bad desires (*hawa nepsu*)” in Javanese mystical parlance:

“The merchant with a restless heart,  
 Who so strongly cherishes his wealth,  
 His temper is so  
 That he keeps counting his fortune from dawn to dusk [...].  
 Even when he possesses  
 Seven bags full of money,  
 His heart is not wholly satisfied

<sup>61</sup> Marbangun Hardjowirogo, *Adat istiadat Jawa sedari seorang masih dalam kandungan hingga sesudah ia tiada lagi*, Bandung, Patma, 1979, p. 14.

<sup>62</sup> *Sunan Paku Buwana IV, Serat Wulangreh*, Semarang, Dahara Prize, 1994 [hereafter SW], VIII.10, p. 82-83.

<sup>63</sup> *Ki Mangunwijaya, Serat Nitiruti*, Semarang, Dahara Prize, 1994, II.13-14, p. 52-53.

<sup>64</sup> *R. Ng. Ranggawarsita, Serat Jayengbaya*, Semarang, Dahara Prize, 1994, VI, p. 10-11.

If he has not also hidden some coins somewhere. [...]

The merchant never is at peace with himself (*wong ati sudagar ugi  
sabarang prakara tamboh*).

His face shines only

When one comes to pay him interest rates

After the term of a pawning loan has expired<sup>65</sup>.”

Many early and late modern Malay epics handle the character of the profit-minded *sudagar* in the same satirical way as these Javanese texts do. For instance, in a *syair* written in 1861 by the daughter of the *raja* of Riau and significantly titled *Syair Saudagar Bodoh* (“Tale of the Stupid Merchant”), the orphan son of an immensely rich merchant of Damascus is but a good-for-nothing who squanders his father’s fortune at the inn. Always chasing after unrighteous women, he ends up marrying a woman of low origins who likes to play the lady. As soon as she settles in the merchant’s luxurious mansion, her behavior becomes “arrogant (*sombong*)” and “improper (*langgar*)”:

“Once she had become a merchant’s wife,  
She became arrogant and haughty in words and deeds,  
Ill-mannered in speech,  
And regarded herself as high and mighty.  
She spent all day trying on clothes  
Of satin and of silk with gold threads,  
While drinking and eating spring lamb.  
Her conceit and arrogance were indescribable. [...]  
Her feet, in sleepers chased with diamond glitter,  
Never deigned to touch the ground. [...]  
She sat in state on carpet<sup>66</sup>.”

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<sup>65</sup> SW, VIII.11-13, p. 84-85.

<sup>66</sup> Ian Proudfoot, *The Stupid Merchant*, Canberra, 2001, p. 5. Ian Proudfoot was kind enough to provide me with the transcript of the original Malay text – the Ms. Klinkert 164 of the Library of the University of Leiden, collected by the early 1860s in Riau by H. C. Klinkert. I stick to his most accurate and graceful translation.

The story ends tragically for the *parvenu* lady, who right from the start had taken a lover and started stealing money from her husband in order to entertain him. After they have become aware of her costly extra-marital affair, the young merchant and his uncle – who acts as his curator – appeal to the sultan of Damascus to have her punished: tied up to a stake under the burning sun, she agonizes for days on end. Written by a princess raised at court, the *Syair Saudagar Bodoh* exhibits an almost congenial aversion to the disorderly way of life of merchants, whose unrestrained “bad desires” lead to nothing but personal ruin and social chaos.

That a merchant cannot under any circumstance legitimately partake of the morally refined world of the palace also is made apparent in the *Hikayat Banjar*, written in 1825. This *hikayat* tells in detail the story of how Ampu Jatmaka, a *sudagar* of Indian origins, creates his own petty state in Borneo thanks to his private army. Having “proclaimed himself king”, Ampu Jatmaka tries his best to emulate Javanese courtly life, yet he fears falling prey to a “deadly curse (*katulahan*)” for he knows well that his ascent to power runs contrary to ancient custom: “According to stories from times long past, anyone not of royal descent who, on account of his riches, makes himself king (*daripada kajanja mandjadikan dirinja radja*) courts inexorable disaster and, together with him, those who accept him as king”. In order to ward off ritual danger, Ampu Jatmaka fabricates “two statues of yellow sandalwood” and have these placed in a shrine. Revered as a royal couple, the statues are “recognized as king and queen (*ia itulah jang kita radjakan pula, kita sambah*)<sup>67</sup>” and Ampu Jatmaka exercises kingly power on their behalf.

Yet not all early modern Malay texts discard any kind of profit-seeking activities as unredeemable moral mistakes. There also is a “right way” to get along well with mundane riches, and that is to redistribute part of one’s wealth through the payment of the *zakat* and the giving of “alms (*sedekah*)” to the needy. For instance, the *Hikayat Ibrahim ibn Adam*, written circa 1680, spells out an ethics of enrichment that involves making “pious deeds (*amal jariyah*)” in order to put one’s riches in the service of the “common good”. Sharif Hasan is a rich man, yet he knows that “this world is not permanent: it is but a day and a

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<sup>67</sup> Johannes Jacobus Ras (ed.), *Hikajat Bandjar. A Study in Malay Historiography*, The Hague, M. Nijhoff, 1968, I.3, p. 238-239.

night (*dunia ini tiada akan kekal / hanya sehari semalam juga adanya*)". One cannot but yearn for "returning to the eternal land, leaving this transient land (*kembali ke negeri yang baka, meninggalkan negeri yang fana*)<sup>68</sup>". Trade activities can be made compatible with communal welfare and political orderliness only if traders follow scrupulously the path of the pious. This is the kind of ideological background the Dutch – who themselves were looked upon as *sudagar* by local clerics and courtiers<sup>69</sup> – had to fit in when they arrived in Banten, for the latter was located right at the junction of Islamic-Malay and Javanese-mystical textual currents.

6.

In Banten as in many other Malay-speaking polities<sup>70</sup>, trade interests and court-based politics actually often clashed in a violent way. The sultanate's official chronicle – the *Sajarah Banten*, written in Javanese and completed around 1660-62 – makes it crystal-clear that all along the years 1596-1608, the city was plagued by factional wars. The conflict was heightened by an unexpected event: a month or so before the arrival of the "First Navigation" in the bay of the city, the acting king – the *Maulana* Muhamad – died on the battlefield in Southern Sumatra, where he had taken the lead of a military campaign aimed at crushing the rebellion of a vassal lord. The only male heir to the throne being still a baby, a Regent had to be chosen from among the princely elite, which led to venomous precedence quarrels. In order to maintain dynastic continuity in front of rising aristocratic dissent, the most senior religious official of the sultanate – the *qadi* – even had to "rush to the Great Mosque" in order to have Abdul Qadir publicly proclaimed successor to his father<sup>71</sup>.

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<sup>68</sup> Russell Jones (ed.), *Hikayat Sultan Ibrahim ibn Adham. An Edition of an Anonymous Malay Text with Translation and Notes*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985, IV, p. 102-105.

<sup>69</sup> In one of the first dialogues of his *Spraeck ende Woord-boeck*, Frederick de Houtman has Dutch merchants tell a local *raja*: "We are *sudagar* coming from a far-away country, thrown on these shores by a storm (*kita orang soudagar iang datan derri negry iauw karna tossaen goegor sini*)" (*SWB*, p. 12).

<sup>70</sup> For the broader picture, see Pierre-Yves Manguin, "The Merchant and the King: Political Myths of Southeast Asian Coastal Polities", *Indonesia*, 52, 1991, p. 41-54. For another instance of an open conflict between trade and palace-based interests in early modern Insulinde, see Jorge Manuel dos Santos Alves, "Princes contre marchands au crépuscule de Pasai (c. 1494-1521)", *Archipel*, 47, 1994, p. 125-145.

<sup>71</sup> Hoesein Djajadiningrat, *Critische beschouwing van de Sadjarah Banten. Bijdrage ter kenschetsing van de Javaansche Geshiedschrijving*, Haarlem, Joh. Enschedé en Zonen, 1913 [hereafter *SB Dja.*], XXII-XXV, p. 36-41. The *qadi* acted not only as the *sheikh al-Islam* of the sultanate, but also as the preceptor of the crown prince.

The intensity of this succession crisis may explain why the *Sajarah Banten* makes no mention at all of Houtman's arrival in Banten. Writing a few decades after the facts, when the son of Abdul Qadir had ascended the throne and was busy withstanding both Dutch and British diplomatic and commercial assaults<sup>72</sup>, palace scribes were first and foremost concerned with providing the ruling elite with a flawless narrative of the kingdom's past – a narrative that turned a troubled moment of intra-elite struggles into the opening sequence of a tale of ever-increasing dynastic might. Taking stock of a few unmannered foreigners, who ultimately acted more as sea-pilferers than as traders, may have been deemed unnecessary – if not indecent – by scribes bent on documenting the twists and turns of the almost sacred history of the *negara*. Yet the *Sajarah Banten* provides us with much more than the epic details of the succession crisis: it ascribes them a social rationale. It actually posits a strong and resilient antagonism between two competing groups among the ruling elite: the *nayaka* – who are members of the princely nobility – and the *pongawa*: high-level officials of “common stock”<sup>73</sup>.

The question of long-distance trade is critical to the ideological war into which these two groups are engaged. The *pongawa* hold key state-offices linked with the world of international trade: they act as Grand Treasurer, Harbourmaster, and even “Foreign minister (*Patih jaba*)”<sup>74</sup>. They often are of non-Javanese origins<sup>75</sup>, make a living by extracting custom duties from ships coming from far away, and therefore have an obvious interest in opening Banten as much as possible to foreign traders. On the other hand, the *nayaka* think of themselves as the defenders of Javanese royalty against what they perceive as a concerted

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On his growing religious and political role by the late XVI<sup>th</sup> century, see Martin van Bruinessen, “*Shari'a* Court, *tarekat* and *pesantren*: Religious Institutions in the Banten Sultanate”, *Archipel*, 1995, 50, p. 165-200.

<sup>72</sup> Claude Guillot, “La politique vivrière de Sultan Ageng (1651-1682)”, *Archipel*, 1995, 50, p. 83-118. In order to try to play the British against the Dutch, who were blockading the city's harbour for months, an embassy was sent to London by Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa in 1682. But to no avail since Banten was militarily defeated by the VOC a few months later. See Willemine Fruin-Mees, “Een Bantamsch gezantschap naar Engeland in 1682”, *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 1924, 64 (1), p. 207-226.

<sup>73</sup> The word *pongawa* comes from the root-word *gawai*, which means “to make things work, to set [things / the social order] in motion” (Denys Lombard, *Le Carrefour javanais. Essai d'histoire globale*, vol. III, Paris, EHESS, 1990, p. 67).

<sup>74</sup> C. Guillot, “Libre entreprise contre économie dirigée. Guerres civiles à Banten, 1580-1609”, *Archipel*, 43, 1992, p. 57-72. In all Javanese kingdoms, there were two high-ranking palace officials bearing the title of *patih* (“Prime minister”, “head of government affairs”): one was in charge of domestic matters such as the allocation of apanage lands (*patih jero*), the other one of international trade (*patih jaba*). See Gerret P. Rouffaer, “Vorstenlanden”, *Adatrechtbundel*, Serie D, 34 (81), 1931, p. 277-300.

<sup>75</sup> For instance, the Shahbandar of Banten in the years 1603-05 is a Tamil (Scott, f° 5r).

plot by “common folk” strangers to weaken it<sup>76</sup>. Broadly speaking, the *pongawa* live by a “technological” and almost “meritocratic” notion of power: they think that state-offices are to be given to experienced people who have learnt the basics of statecraft and served well in previous postings. On the contrary, the *nayaka* are convinced that high-ranking offices and palace titles can only be inherited by pure-blood Javanese of aristocratic descent.

Yet, the *pongawa-nayaka* antagonism is no mere moral discourse: it leads to bitter “real life” infighting. In 1602, *pangeran* (prince) Camara becomes Regent of the city. Boosted by his father’s newly acquired prestige, the son of Camara becomes excessively “arrogant”. During a “tournament (*sasapton*)” on the main palace square, he demands to be saluted by the *pongawa* the way a king would be: this “inflames the heart of the *pongawa* with jealousy<sup>77</sup>”. Running contrary to all rules of precedence, the haughty conduct of the young nobleman triggers deep resentment among high-ranking officials. In 1608, the “revolt of the Harbour (*Prang Pailir*)”, stirred up by the still-infuriated *pongawa*, leads to open civil war – and ultimately to the killing of *pangeran* Camara in an ambush<sup>78</sup>.

## 7.

Where did the Dutch – and a few years later the British – fit into this uneven moral and political landscape? After the relations with Banten had been brought back to normal in November 1598 thanks to a locally born “Chinese slave” acting as the newcomers’ interpreter<sup>79</sup>, the Dutch were granted in 1603 the right to rent a wooden house in the Chinese district (the Pacinan, located outside the fortified city) in order to store their goods<sup>80</sup>. So too had been the British in 1602<sup>81</sup>. From that date on, the Europeans turned into

<sup>76</sup> Regarding the ideas of the *nayaka*, termed the “party of the princes (*pangeranspartij*)” by H. Djajadiningrat, see *SB Dja.*, p. 155-157, 160.

<sup>77</sup> Titik Pudjiastuti, *Sajarah Banten, sebuah edisi kritik teks*, Leyde, Proyek S2 Filologi Jawa, 1991 [hereafter *SB Pud.*], XXVI.6-8, p. 195.

<sup>78</sup> *SB Dja.*, XXVIII, p. 42-43 ; *SB Pud.*, XXVIII.22-33, p. 200-203.

<sup>79</sup> Heert Terpstra, *Jacob van Neck. Amsterdams Admiraal en Regent*, Amsterdam, P. N. van Kampen & Zoon, 1950, p. 50-53. On the role of “Abdul”, see Romain Bertrand, *L’Histoire à parts égales. Récits d’une rencontre Orient-Occident (XVIe-XVIIe siècle)*, Paris, Seuil, 2012, p. 190-194.

<sup>80</sup> The Dutch-VOC factory in Banten was opened in August 1603 after an agreement had been negotiated with the Regent by Admiral Warwijck (see *Opkomst*, III, p. 206-208). As for the period under scrutiny, it was alternately placed under the authority of François Wittert (1603-1605), Jan Willemsz. Verschoor (1605-1607), Jacques L’Hermite de Jonge (1607-1611), and Jacob Breeckvelt (or Breeckvelt) (1611-1616?).

a permanent presence in Banten. Palace officials nevertheless seem not to have known exactly, at first, what kind of jurisdiction to exercise on these new city dwellers.

The journal of the first factor of the EIC in Banten, Edmund Scott (r. 1602-1605), provides us with some clues regarding that tricky question of the judicial status locally ascribed to European traders. After a fire had destroyed most of their factory building, Scott discovered that intruders had stolen several bags of silver cash that the British had stored in the basement. He quickly convinced himself that the robbers were the members of a family of Chinese brick-makers living close to the factory courtyard. Without waiting for the Regent's justice officers to start investigating the case, Scott and his men apprehended three of the Chinese suspects and started torturing them to make them confess. Since members of his family had come to establish his innocence, one of the Chinese was quickly released. The second one was submitted to an unbearable inhuman treatment by Scott, who tortured him for hours with an incandescent poker. Only the third man – who had “become Javanese”, that is to say: who had converted to Islam and therefore become a subject of the sultan – was handed over to Javanese authorities, who promised the British to sentence him to death if he was found guilty of arson<sup>82</sup>. EIC factors hence were granted a kind of “judicial autonomy” by the court of Banten: they could handle criminal justice matters by themselves *provided* these did not involve a Muslim subject of the sultanate.

This tragic example could leave the reader with the impression that the Europeans were left almost unchecked in Malay-speaking polities. This surely was not the case. We learn from a 1650s *adat* law-book from Kedah that the Shahbandar had the duty, with the help of his “agents / spies (*mata-mata*)”, to ceaselessly patrol the marketplace and the “foreigners’ district” in order to prevent street-brawls and to enforce the bans on games of chance and

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<sup>81</sup> When he left Banten in September 1602, Captain James Lancaster left behind him “8 men and 3 factors, the chief of which factors was Master William Starkey, whom he appointed to sell such commodities as were left there, and to provide lading for the shippes against the next returne” (William Foster (ed.), *The Voyages of Sir James Lancaster to Brazil and the East Indies, 1593-1601*, London, The Hakluyt Society, 1940, p. 101).

<sup>82</sup> Edmund Scott, *An Exact Discovrse of the Svbtillties, Fashions, Pollicies, Religion, and Ceremonies of the East Indians as well Chyneses as Iavans, there abiding and dwelling. Together with the manner of trading with those people, as by vs English, as by the Hollanders...*, London, W. W. for W. Burre, 1606 [Brit. Lib. 582.e.3.(4.)] [hereafter Scott], f° 23r. On Scott' stay in Banten, see C. Guillot, “Une saison en enfer. Scott à Banten (1603-1605)”, in Denys Lombard and Roderich Ptak (ed.), *Asia Maritima. Images et réalités / bilder und wirklichkeit, 1200-1800*, Wiesbaden, Hassarowitz, 1994, vol. I, p. 27-38.

on the consumption of alcohol and opium: anybody contravening these bans was to be at once apprehended and brought before the *raja*<sup>83</sup>.

Non-Muslim foreigners were also made the target of specific social restrictions, as shown by the *Taj us-Salatin*: a Malay treaty of “good government” written in 1603 in Aceh or Johore Lama. In a chapter of the text devoted to what can be morally expected (and fiscally extorted) from “non-muslim (*kafir*)” subjects having settled in an Islamic kingdom, we learn that the Europeans were subjected to a long list of do’s and don’t’s. They were forbidden not just to “build new worship places or to restore former idols”, but also to “wear clothes similar to those of Muslims”, to “ride a saddled horse”, to “keep weapons in their houses”, to “build houses close to those of the Muslims”, to “drink [alcoholic beverages] in front of Muslims”, to “burn or bury their dead close to Muslim cemeteries”, to “give one of their children a Muslim name”, to “buy a Muslim slave”, and to “wear rings inlaid with precious gemstones or bearing seals (*tera*) similar to those of the Muslims”. They also had to “accommodate for three days Muslim travelers” and to “always greet a Muslim, in case of a chance encounter, as a servant greets his lord (*memberi hormat kepada orang Islam seperti hamba memberi hormat kepada tuannya*)<sup>84</sup>”.

As a model for all these prescriptions, the *Taj us-Salatin* explicitly mentions the *A’hd nâmeḥ* (“Capitulations”) imposed in 636 by Caliph Omar, right after the conquest of both Palestine and Syria, to local non-Muslim (Jewish and Christian) populations. By referring to the Arabic-Ottoman tradition of the *A’hd nâmeḥ*, the *Taj us-Salatin* seems to assimilate all non-Muslim individuals living on the lands of a Muslim king to *dhimmi* people, that is to say to Infidels made subjects of a Muslim polity by way of conquest<sup>85</sup>. Obviously, European traders could not, by any classical theological standards, be regarded as *dhimmi* people. Yet they sometimes were subjected to segregationist policies clearly inspired by former *A’hd nâmeḥ* treaties: for instance, in Banten, they were forbidden to live inside city walls.

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<sup>83</sup> AK, I.27, p. 22.

<sup>84</sup> Bukhari al-Jauhari, *Taj us-Salatin. Diselenggarakan oleh Khalid M. Hussain*, Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 1992 [hereafter *TuS*], XX1.1-19, p. 195-197.

<sup>85</sup> Claude Cahen, “Ahl al-dhimma”, in Peri Bearman *et al.* (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, op. cit., II, p. 231.



Interesting as it may be for a political-intellectual history of ideal kingship in the early modern Malay world, the *Taj us-Salatin* nevertheless cannot tell us much about the way European traders were dealt with, practically speaking, by local polities. Even if it circulated widely across the Malay Archipelago and was translated into Javanese by the early XVIII<sup>th</sup> century<sup>86</sup>, there indeed is no evidence that the *Taj us-Salatin* was ever fully implemented. To correctly ascertain the way Javanese authorities handled the Dutch and the British once these had become regular trade partners, one therefore has to switch to another kind of more down-to-earth documents.

8.

The least to say is that employees of the VOC stationed in Banten exhibited a disorderly behavior. Peering through the many entries of the local “sentence register” where fines and punishments were scrupulously written down, one quickly gets a sense of the undisciplined behavior of soldiers, sailors, and servants of the Company. VOC people were quick with the knife. For instance, in October 1614, several crewmembers of an East-Indiaman got drunk in a “brothel” and engaged into a bitter fight that left several of them badly injured. In January 1615, the President of the factory, Jan Pietersz. Coen, had to preside over a justice trial after a Company slave by the name of Ramada had been murdered by a Company servant at the end of a drinking binge<sup>87</sup>.

This unruly behavior so infuriated Javanese officials that, on the occasion of the murder of a Chinese man by VOC servants, the Regent himself came to the headquarters of the Dutch in the Pacinan to ask them bluntly “whether, when they came to a Country to trade, they brought along their Own Laws, or if they were governed by the Laws of the Country where they were staying<sup>88</sup>”. If one keeps in mind the severe Quranic interdicts forbidding both the consumption of alcoholic beverages and intercourse with “unrighteous women”, one can

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<sup>86</sup> First in the 1720s, then in the 1810s under the title *Serat Tajulsalatin*. Regarding manuscripts of the *Serat Tajulsalatin* in the Mangkunegaran and Kasunanan libraries, see Nancy K. Florida, *Javanese Literature in Surakarta Manuscripts*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1993-2000, I, p. 193-196 (KS 339.4 / SMP 138-5 et KS 341 / SMP 138-6, c. 1726) and II, p. 189 (MN 294C.28 / SMP 190/2, inscribed c. 1816).

<sup>87</sup> Herman T. Colenbrander (ed.), *Jan Pieterszoon Coen. Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf in Indië*, The Hague, M. Nijhoff, 1919-1953 [hereafter *Besch. JPC*], IV, p. 107 (28.X.1615), 109-112 (3,5,9,15.I.1615).

<sup>88</sup> Scott, f° 8v.

easily imagine how shocked Banten clerics and officials were by the pranks of VOC servants. All these misconduct cases moreover had a direct impact on the granting or not of trade privileges to Company agents. In January 1608, the negotiations between the Regent and the VOC chief-merchant about an enlarged trade agreement came to a halt because Javanese authorities, alarmed by the growing number of deadly street-brawls involving Dutchmen, threatened to “forcefully disarm” all VOC employees<sup>89</sup>.

After they had moved their headquarters in February 1613 to Jakarta – a liege-city of Banten located some 80 km eastwards –, VOC people kept being a moral embarrassment to Javanese civil and religious authorities. Several sex cases and drunken brawls involving low-ranking Company employees actually marred the relations between VOC merchants and the local prince – a *pangeran* by the name of Kawis Adimarta. In February 1615, a cooper named Willem Huygen Bolckwanger was put on trial by Coen for having had “a carnal conversation” with a young slave inside the factory building, therefore “heaping shame on [the] whole [Dutch] Nation”. A few months later, mariner Adriaen Pietersz. van Hoorn was sentenced to the “keel punishment” for having threatened with a bamboo spear, while in a state of “great intoxication”, the Company chief-merchant. Till the end of the year, four more trials for quarrelsome drunkenness were carried on in Jakarta. In September 1616, the pilot of the *Cleen Hollandia*, Guillame Anthonisz., was removed from the payroll for having “sold white-rice alcohol (*arak*) in great quantity to Company soldiers<sup>90</sup>”.

The situation was deemed so critical that VOC Governor Gerard Reynst complained to the Heren XVII that “only incompetent people [were] sent to the Indies, who by their carelessness, drunkenness, and life of debauchery (*hoereren*) spoil the best [trade] opportunities<sup>91</sup>”. To try to remedy the worsening of relations with the Javanese, a “contract” was signed on October 9, 1616, between the VOC chief-merchant, Jacob Breeckvelt, and the *pangeran* of Jakarta. It listed all the interdicts that VOC employees had to strictly follow on pain of the cancellation of all the privileges hitherto granted to the Company. VOC people

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<sup>89</sup> *Opkomst*, III, p. 250-251. J. L’Hermite to the Bewindhebbers, Banten, 24 July 1608.

<sup>90</sup> *Besch. JPC*, IV, p. 113 (6.II.1615), 115 (17.VII.1615), 117 (28.VIII.1615), 120-121 (21.IX.1615), 127-128, 130 (21-24.IX.1615).

<sup>91</sup> Willem P. Coolhaas (ed.), *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Oostindische Compagnie*, The Hague, M. Nijhoff, 1960, I, p. 51. G. Reynst to the Heren XVII, 26 October 1615.

were forbidden “to bring *arak* inside their factory in order to get drunk” and to “entice Javanese women into coming inside the factory courtyard<sup>92</sup>”. This “contract” – signed in order to safeguard mutual trade interests – was first and foremost a *moral* one, since it was meant to keep in check Company drunkards prone to street-fighting and adultery.

In Malay-speaking Islamic polities, the moral accommodation of European traders always was a most difficult business. Contrary to Gujarati merchants, who followed the same rigorist creed as the people of Banten, Dutch and British traders were a source of almost permanent scandal. As aptly noted by Wouter Schouten in the late 1650s, in a conflict-ridden situation of contact, even different bodily habits could cause a moral uproar: urinating while standing up for instance was deemed an “abominable behavior” by the Javanese<sup>93</sup>.

9.

To fully understand both the technical details and the moral dimension of European trading activities in Malay-speaking polities, one has to keep moving both vertically and horizontally among available source-material. Vertically: by moving up and down the documentary ladder from highly prescriptive treaties written for the literate happy few by theologians and court-poets to seemingly “matter-of-fact” textual remnants such as merchants’ letters and trade agreements. Horizontally – or “laterally<sup>94</sup>”: by investigating as much extra-European (Malay and Javanese) source-material as European (Dutch and British) archives in order to try to get over the paper walls of Eurocentric visions of the “East Indies”. Documentary asymmetry is nevertheless not that easy to overcome. Whereas we know that there existed accounts-keeping registers and written trade contracts in Banten at the time of the arrival of the “First Navigation” fleet<sup>95</sup>, none of these documents have survived the ravages of time

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<sup>92</sup> Jacobus A. van der Chijs, *De Nederlanders te Jakarta*, Amsterdam, Frederik Muller, 1860, p. 209 (Ann. 4). *Contract gemaect tusschen den koninck van Jaccatra ter eenre, en Jacob Breekveld opperkoopman van de logie aldaer ter andere zijden*, 9 October 1616, Jakarta.

<sup>93</sup> Wouter Schouten, *Voyage de Gautier Schouten aux Indes Orientales, commencé l’an 1658 et fini l’an 1665. Traduit du Hollandois. Ou l’on voit plusieurs descriptions de Païs, Roïaumes, Isles et Villes...*, Paris, Estienne Roger, 1707, I, p. 340.

<sup>94</sup> Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Explorations in Connected History*, vol. 2: *Mughals and Franks*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 11.

<sup>95</sup> See for instance *ES*, p. 120, 141-142.

and the pillaging of Javanese royal libraries (either by Chinese rebels in the 1740s or by European colonial armies in the 1810s). This makes recovering the “lived world (*Lebenswelt*)” of Javanese and other Asian traders operating in Java a most difficult venture.

Yet we know, thanks to the pioneering works of J. C. van Leur and M. A. P. Meilink-Roelofs<sup>96</sup>, that even decades past the conquest of Jakarta (in May 1619) and its transformation into VOC Batavia, intra-Asian trade loomed larger in value and volume than bilateral Euro-Asian commercial exchanges in port-cities controlled by the Dutch. Until the early 1650s, Batavia kept being dependent, for its rice and meat supply, on Chinese wholesalers and Javanese city-states like Tuban and Jepara. All along the XVII<sup>th</sup> century, VOC authorities in Java made more money by selling Javanese rice surplus to impoverished Moluccan islanders than by trading spices on the European market – if only for the reason that the trading price of black pepper had been tumbling down as early as the 1610s due to overproduction<sup>97</sup>. Moreover, as far as the financing of long-distance trade was concerned, Batavia could be labeled a “Chinese city”, since local *towkays* were the ones who innovated most in terms of credit mechanisms<sup>98</sup>. One should therefore never over-estimate the part the Europeans played in Southeast Asian trading activities<sup>99</sup>.

When one nevertheless focuses on the little trade-oriented “contact zone<sup>100</sup>” between the Dutch, the British, the Malays, and the Javanese that emerged by the early XVII<sup>th</sup> century, one is struck by two things. The first one is how difficult it was, technically speaking, to establish common social exchange standards in a situation where, at first, even basic weighing units seemed untranslatable – which means that commensurability, far from being a prior common asset, was an achievement that came at high costs. The second one is that trade transactions were then deeply embedded into a set of relentlessly reiterated moral norms that turned profit-seeking activities into perilous ordeals as far as the salvation of

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<sup>96</sup> Jacobus C. van Leur, *Indonesian Trade and Society. Essays in Asian Social and Economic History*, The Hague, Van Hoeve, 1967 [1940], part. p. 265, 267, 270, and Marie A. P. Meilink-Roelofs, *Asian Trade and European Influence in the Indonesian Archipelago between 1500 and about 1630*, The Hague, M. Nijhoff, 1962.

<sup>97</sup> M. A. P. Meilink-Roelofs, *Asian Trade and European Influence...*, op. cit., p. 272, 286-287.

<sup>98</sup> Leonard Blussé, *Strange Company. Chinese Settlers, Mestizo Women, and the Dutch in VOC Batavia*, Dordrecht, KITLV, 1986 ; Marie-Sybille de Vienne, *Les Chinois en Insulinde...*, op. cit., part. p. 169-175.

<sup>99</sup> See the telling numbers in Gabriel Rantoandro, “Commerce et navigation dans les mers de l’Insulinde d’après les *Dagh-register* de Batavia (1624-1682)”, *Archipel*, 1988, 35, p. 51-87.

<sup>100</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone”, *Profession*, 1991, p. 33-40.

one's soul and the upkeep of one's reputation were concerned. Socially and *spiritually* speaking, trade was a high-stakes game: a game that, if kept unchecked, could lead both to individual damnation and political chaos.