

## Alexander Dalrymple and Thomas Forrest: Two British empire builders at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century

Dr. Chris G.F. de Jong

*After the Ambon debacle (1623), which led to the withdrawal of the East India Company (EIC) from the Big East, the trade activities of the English were concentrated, as far as the East Indies are concerned, on the western part of the archipelago. It was far into the 18<sup>th</sup> century before the English once again ventured into the archipelago to the south of the Philippines. Two names stand out: Alexander Dalrymple and Thomas Forrest. Not only did they report in detail about their experiences, but they also made proposals to the Court of Directors to expand the trade activities of the EIC in this region. Besides, in the work of the former a hint of the new spirit of the age which was prevalent in Scotland is noticeable.*

*NB: In this essay 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century geographical names have been used, viz. not Halmahera but Gilolo, not Mindanao but Magindano. Insofar as necessary, modern equivalents have been added when these are mentioned for the first time. However, the spelling has been modernised, and thus Sooloo becomes Sulu, and Mysol becomes Misool. The Moluccas are interpreted in the original meaning of the five islands of cloves off the west coast of Gilolo. The name Brunei was used in different ways. Sometimes it indicated the sultanate, which at other instances was called Borneo Proper and the State of Borneo, with Brunei as its capital. In this essay the name Brunei is used for the sultanate, its capital city is Borneo town, at present Brunei Darussalam with Bandar Seri Begawan as its capital.*

### Alexander Dalrymple\*

#### *Champion of freedom*

After the British had opened a trading post in Canton in 1699, navigation to China rapidly increased in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in the second half.<sup>1</sup> This stimulated the demand for new sea maps of the Far East, because the existing Spanish and Portuguese maps were obsolete and often, whether or not deliberately, inaccurate. Many maps were made by Alexander Dalrymple (1737-1808), a hydrographer in the employment of the EIC and later of the Admiralty, who for this purpose stayed in British India and the Far East for a number of years.

Dalrymple, a Scotsman who was a member of a prominent family – he was a younger brother of the jurist, judge and historian David Dalrymple, Lord Hailes –, was more than just a hydrographer. He

---

\* Translated into English by Truus Daalder.

<sup>1</sup> The number of British ships in the port of Canton increased from 50 in 1720-1730 and 1730-1740, to 56 in 1740-1750, to 96 in 1750-1760 and to 113 in 1760-1770, while also the tonnage that was shipped grew rapidly, Pritchard, “The Struggle”, 286. Cf. Jackson, *The First British Trade Expedition to China, 1637*.

was also a fervent polemicist, a prolific writer about maritime matters,<sup>2</sup> educated by the Scottish Enlightenment and showed himself a fervent adherent of his countryman Adam Smith. In his own words he had inherited from his ancestors a “mens inimica tyrannis” and he dedicated himself to completely free trade. This supported the “Common rights of All Mankind; instead of the Lives and Property of the People being sported away, at the caprice of a Fool! or a Tyrant.”<sup>3</sup> He hoped to live to see the day that all oppressed people were reinstated in their old rights and liberties – without adding to this how he envisaged this or what these rights and liberties meant precisely. In a frontal attack on the policy of the EIC on the subcontinent of India – and by implication also on that of the Spanish in the Philippines and the Dutch in the East Indies and perhaps even on that of the English towards their impoverished neighbours to the north he formulated his point of view as follows:

Europeans, visiting Countries *already inhabited*, can acquire no *right* in *such* Countries but from the *good will* of the *Friendly Inhabitants*, or by *Conquest* of *Those* who are *Aggressors in Acts of Injury*, nor can the right of *Conquest* be *justly* extended, when *Acts of Injury*, in the *Natives*, can be construed to proceed from *fear* of the *Strangers*, or from *mistake*: In either case, Both Parties being equally culpable, though no criminality in Either; the European in not sufficiently explaining his peaceable intentions, and the native in not readily apprehending those intentions.<sup>4</sup>

This was said to a nation which since the late Middle Ages was known to friend and foe alike as one large den of pirates and where generations of English aristocrats and entrepreneurs owed their wealth and position in society to piracy and slave trade. But he castigated not only his compatriots and other Europeans. As far as Southeast Asia was concerned he pointed out the despicable attitude of the Islamic coastal elites towards the indigenous inhabitants of the interior.<sup>5</sup> The indigenous people of Southeast Asia were accused of headhunting, cannibalism and other cruelties, but, according to him, they were not inherently bad, but had developed their barbaric customs in response to the oppression by the coastal elites and slave hunters. In the spirit of Smith’s “invisible hand”, which had not only economic implications but also moral ones, he was of the opinion that breaking through the isolation of the interiors and the enabling of direct contact of the indigenous people with his civilised (British) fellow human being had an educational influence and a liberating effect. Perhaps free trade did not mean the end of the existing feudal relationships, but was an assault on them. On the Indian subcontinent and elsewhere in Asia however, the British had to be careful not to move in the opposite direction and start behaving like the coastal citizens of Southeast Asia.

### *Dalrymple and the Regulating Act of 1773*

In this vein he criticised his employer, the EIC. This developed from an association of traders with

<sup>2</sup> Cook, “Alexander Dalrymple’s ‘A Collection of Plans of Ports in the East Indies’ (1774-1775): A Preliminary Examination”; a summary of his extensive work in Anderson, *The Scottish Nation*, II, 13-14; Pickett, *Bibliography*.

<sup>3</sup> Dalrymple, *The Spanish Pretensions*, 6

<sup>4</sup> Dalrymple, *The Spanish Pretensions*, 7-8. Italic is original

<sup>5</sup> For more on the earliest inhabitants of Southeast Asia, see Glover and Bellwood’s work; O’Connor, *The Archaeology of Sulawesi*.

a limited purpose to an important political and military power. Until that time the EIC trading posts in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras existed independently from each other and were subject only to the Court of Directors in London. After the Government in London had given the EIC privileges and diplomatic and legal assistance from as early as the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Regulating Act of 1773, by means of centralisation of governance, the administration of justice and the financial management of the EIC, had to put an end to the vulnerability and the loose connections of its overseas establishments and adapt the organisation to its increasingly powerful position.<sup>6</sup>

The new legislation, which tied the EIC in many spheres to the Government in London, went much too far according to Dalrymple. He objected in various pieces of writing, however with little success. He feared that British India and other, yet to be established settlements, would be flooded by arrogant administrators and useless and corrupt job hunters who wanted to get rich quickly and who by their behaviour would only damage the trade, profitability and reputation of the EIC. His view was that London should restrict itself to matters such as the formalisation and guarding of treaties which the EIC as a trading organisation entered into with foreign powers and kings and set general rules and conditions. For “*The Commerce to India can be carried on only by a Company*”,<sup>7</sup> and not by the unwieldy, bureaucratic and costly monster which the Act brought into being.<sup>8</sup>

Dalrymple showed in calculations that the free EIC had in the past earned much money for Great Britain and argued that the financial crisis confronting the association at present – and for which the proposed Act of 1773 was in part to provide a solution – would only get worse if the wishes of a handful of selfish major shareholders, financiers and industrialists were given in to. He combated these people in the spirit of Adam Smith<sup>9</sup> and argued that, in order to enhance the profitability of the EIC, their demands of stricter regulation, restriction of the trade in EIC shares and constantly increasing dividends had to be rejected. Referring to the impoverished and exhausted Spain, he warned that the money earned in Asia, insofar as this was sent to England and not re-invested in trade and industry, only contributed to inflation and poverty. Free trade, investments and expansion were the panacea for all the financial ailments of the EIC, and were the best way to serve the public interests of Great Britain, without alienating other nations by violence, occupation and high taxes – he was writing his treatises with fresh memories of various wars on the Indian subcontinent.

“*Extension of Dominion is an irresistible desire*”<sup>10</sup>

The EIC should not just be left alone, its trade should also be expanded, in his opinion. The two components were inseparable, since only free investors and traders, attracted by the potential for great profits, were prepared to make the necessary investments and to defy the many lurking dangers – something that was demonstrably untrue according to the Court of Directors: the costs associated with the expansion of trade were beyond the financial capacity of individual traders. Dalrymple pointed out that the EIC had no trading posts of significance east of Bencoolen on west Sumatra. To improve its position and expand the trade with China – which was already not insignificant

<sup>6</sup> Grant, *A Sketch of the History of the East-India Company*, 333-345; Marshall, *Bengal*, ch. 4

<sup>7</sup> Dalrymple, *A General View*, 2. Italic is original.

<sup>8</sup> Dalrymple, *A Retrospective View*.

<sup>9</sup> Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 396-397.

<sup>10</sup> Dalrymple, *A General View*, vi.

anyway – in his opinion the EIC should get direct access to the natural riches and raw materials of the Indonesian archipelago, for which there was a virtually insatiable demand in China. Because only Canton was open to the British and all other Chinese ports were closed for them, he advised the EIC to follow the example of the Dutch, and penetrate the trade networks already in existence which were controlled by the Chinese. Chinese traders could be found all over Southeast Asia, and through them it was possible to get access to Amoy (nowadays Xiamen in Fujian province), Shanghai, Ningpo (Ningbo) and other northern ports in China. That way one could not only steer clear of the very expensive Canton, because of its taxes, port duties and all sorts of additional costs, but also of the Chinese country traders, who controlled the coastal trade and in his view made an unnecessarily large profit from this. Moreover, up there, because of the cold climate, there would be an excellent market for the more expensive English woollen cloths.

### *Sulu*

For the realisation of his proposals Dalrymple pointed to the Sulu archipelago, a colonial no-man's land situated between the Dutch possessions in the East Indies and the Spanish ones in the Philippines.<sup>11</sup> He visited the main island of Sulu for the first time in January 1761, after which he returned several times. Apart from there buying a load of cinnamon, which, when sold in Madras, yielded a net profit of 400%, he devoted a detailed study to the Sulu archipelago, in which he described various aspects of the region, such as language, climate, religion, customs and habits of the population, ports, coasts and the form of government, on the basis of Spanish writers, a local informer and his own observations.<sup>12</sup>

The Sulu archipelago comprises several hundreds of islands which extend from northeast Borneo to the Philippines. The largest were Sulu (called Jolo by the Spanish), the main island and the residence of the sultan, Basilan, off the southwest coast of Magindano, and Tawi-Tawi, off the northeast coast of Borneo. The first of these with an estimated 60,000 inhabitants was the most populous. The entire Sulu archipelago had an estimated 130,000 inhabitants.<sup>13</sup> Not counting a relatively large class of slaves of divergent descent and a handful of Chinese and their descendants, the population, represented schematically, consisted of two parts, the indigenous people, called “the Indian” by Dalrymple (who belonged to the Dayaks), who also occurred on Borneo and both there and in the Sulu archipelago formed the majority of the population, and the Malay-speaking, Muslim section of the population which, although in the minority, held the economic and political power. The sultanate was larger than merely the actual Sulu archipelago and also comprised territory in

<sup>11</sup> The Dutch East India Company, and since 1800 the Dutch East Indies never claimed the Sulu archipelago. They claimed about 80% of the Indian Archipelago, including 75% of Borneo, i.e. entire Borneo minus the northern tip and a strip along the northwest coast up to Tanjung Datu, west of Kuching, a region that, except for Brunei Darussalam, belongs to Malaysia nowadays.

<sup>12</sup> Dalrymple, “An Essay”; of which a summary was reprinted several times, see Dalrymple, “Geographical Description of the Sooloo Islands”, and Dalrymple, “Essay towards an account of Sulu”. About Sulu, also see Hunt, “Some Particulars Relating to Sulo”.

<sup>13</sup> These numbers are only meant as a rough estimate. Sometimes a smallpox epidemic or another disease broke out, killing more than half of the population. This happened, for example, in the early 1760s and again in 1808. Blair, *The Philippine Islands*, pt. 43, 67; Wilkes, *Narrative*, 335; Hunt, “Some Particulars Relating to Sulo”, 35-36.

north Borneo and part of the island of Palawan (Paragua, Paragoa). Governance of the sultanate was oligarchic; it was held by the sultan and a number of *datu*, who had different functions. The eight districts into which the sultanate was divided each had their own functionaries and governors. At the time of Dalrymple's visit many positions were vacant, and the sultan virtually ruled alone. This does not alter the fact that for matters of importance, such as entering a contract with a foreign power, declaring war, or the appointment of a new sultan, all echelons of the inhabitants of the sultanate were involved by means of their representatives, which meant that the taking of decisions was at times very time-consuming.

Dalrymple described the islands and their governance in more or less neutral terms, but he judged the "civil society" very harshly. This suffered badly from a faulty moral, which the English needed to take into account: murder and manslaughter were part of daily life and were not, or hardly, punished:

Every Man, not indeed by the Law, but by Custom, is in these Countries his own Avenger, by which the Sallies of Passion often occasion the most enormous Crimes, and entail Inveteracy and Bloodshed from Father to Son, for Generations.

While the Malay-speaking coast dwellers had an acceptable stage of civilisation, Dalrymple is of the opinion that for the non-Muslim Indian one could only feel pity because of their limited mental world and questionable religious and moral views, although he did not see any reason to write them off as human beings. Their religious ideas contained elements of barbarism and cruelty, but, although they collected the skulls of their defeated enemies, he did not think they were cannibals. For them in particular close contact with Europeans would be beneficial. Their masters, the Malay-speaking rulers of the sultanate, were nominally Muslims, but judging from the poor mosques, their lack of respect for their spiritual leaders, and the poor knowledge they as a rule had of Islam, religion was of low consequence with them.

### *The treaty*

#### *Negotiations*

For the sultanate the arrival of the British must have been a gift from Heaven. Great Britain was an emerging world power and during these years impressed with warlike deeds which appealed to the imagination, among which (as part of the seven-year war, 1756-1763) were the occupation of Havana (1762-1763) and Manila (1762-1764), both Spanish possessions. In Manila Dalrymple had met the previous sultan of Sulu, Mahomud Alimodin (r. 1734/5-1748; also called Mohammad Azim ud-Din I and Mohammad Alimuddin<sup>14</sup>) and his son Mohammad Israel (r. 1773-1778), who were kept prisoners there by the Spanish (1748-1763). With the permission of the EIC in Madras, Dalrymple offered to free them from Spanish imprisonment in exchange for a treaty. This offer was accepted and in 1763 both were returned to Sulu by Dalrymple, where Mahomud Allimodin I was once again installed as sultan (1764 – 1773).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> The names of the sultans are quoted from Dalrymple en Forrest, the modern version is given in addition.

<sup>15</sup> In Manilla sultan Israel and his cousin (or sister?) Potely Diamelen learned to dance the menuet quite well according to Forrest, Forrest, *A Voyage*, 351.

His predecessor, Marahom Mahomud Mo-i-Jodin, (or: Bantilan Muizzud-Din, r. 1748-1763), the sultan with whom Dalrymple concluded a treaty on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 1761, was an enterprising man, who had sent envoys to the court in China in order to bring gifts to the Emperor. According to a Chinese source from 1730 quoted by Veth the first time this happened was in 1728.<sup>16</sup> The Emperor saw this as homage from a faithful vassal and sent him gifts in return., which sultan Marahom interpreted as an invitation to trade. When Dalrymple, who had just returned from a trip to China, put his proposals for a trade treaty to the sultan, the latter was well aware therefore what a treaty with the British could mean for Sulu. With regard to political matters too, he knew where he stood vis-à-vis Dalrymple and the EIC. Unlike for instance the Spanish in the Philippines, Dalrymple only had an eye for trade in the Sulu archipelago, and was not the vanguard for an occupying force. While the Spanish conducted a sort of Christian jihad against Islam and allocated a central role to missionaries in the subjection of the Philippines, without whose labour a stable colony was considered an impossibility,<sup>17</sup> religion played no part in the mind of Dalrymple; with him there was no trace of proselytising in a traditional Christian sense.

Apart from the bringing back of Mahomud Allimodin I (who signed the treaty of 28 January 1761 in Manila on 20 November 1761) and his son to Sulu, the agreement which Dalrymple, on behalf of the EIC, concluded with the sultanate consisted of two parts: one concerned the trade between both parties and the opening of a trading post on Sulu, the other arranged the ceding of a part of North Borneo to the EIC, with permission to establish there a second trading post in a location still to be agreed on.

### *Trade*

The trade treaty meant that the British would place a resident with staff on Sulu, and once every year would send a ship from British India to Sulu with a load which the sultanate would buy at double the overseas price of purchase. The goods bought by the EIC in the Sulu archipelago in the place of these, were to be subsequently sold in China for at least double the purchase price. The potential loss of these transactions would be at the expense of the sultanate; but the profit which was made would also, after deduction of costs, benefit the sultanate and could be used to pay off the account of the EIC.

In his description of the Sulu archipelago Dalrymple emphasised particularly trade and the opportunities he saw for the EIC. Annually, in March and April, a few junks came from Amoy to Sulu; they primarily brought coarse cotton cloth and iron pots and pans. Their return freights consisted of pearls, mother of pearl, bird nests, sea cucumber (trepane) oysters, wood and seaweed. The profit the Chinese made from this barter trade varied from 50% to 300% or more, with pearls providing the biggest profit.

Categorised according to availability and the value of the trade Dalrymple gave a detailed list of the products the island kingdom could offer in additions to these. The sultanate's export, which would be entirely in the hands of the EIC, could be expanded exponentially, and could include, in addition to the articles mentioned, gold, diamonds, amber, saltpetre, wax, honey, oysters, bezoar (used as medicine), civet (used as perfume) turtle shells, clove bark, copal, pepper, cinnamon and other

<sup>16</sup> Veth, *Borneo's Wester-Afdeeling*, I, 287.

<sup>17</sup> De Zuñiga, *An historical view of the Philippine Islands*, I, 158.

spices, camphor, first quality sago, shark fins, cane sugar, damar, rice, various rare kinds of wood, rattan and fibres (for ropes and cables), vegetable oil, colouring dyes, ginger, cocoa, coffee and shells. The success of the arrangement did not depend in the first place on what both contracting parties, the sultanate and the EIC, charged each other, but on the proceeds of these in the port(s) of destination.

### *North Borneo*

Not to be completely at the mercy of the whims of the sultanate's government, the British bought the northern point of Borneo from the sultanate ("cede[d] -----by way of sale"). The sale comprised the region north of the line between the Bay of Towsan Abia in the northeast and the Bay of Kimanis, which formed the border with Brunei,<sup>18</sup> in the west, as well as all islands off the coast up to the Spanish possessions on and around Palawan. The Bay of Malludu was excluded because of its rich pearl beds along the eastern bank. The transfer was put into effect in stages during the years of 1762-1764. Sultan Mahomud Allimodin I's wish that the EIC would charge his son Sarafuddin with the rule of the transferred territories, was granted. One of the islands, the uninhabited Balambangan (or Bero Bangan), was left out of this arrangement; this was granted by a separate contract on 12 September 1762, after which Dalrymple formally took possession of it on behalf of the EIC on 23 January 1763 and raised the British flag on it.<sup>19</sup>

Among sailors the population of Borneo and Sulu was greatly feared because of its "rapacious and treacherous" nature.<sup>20</sup> The wish of the British to have good relations with the heads in their vicinity, who nearly all had a personal interest in piracy, prevented forceful action against this scourge of the sea, unless it concerned their own ships.<sup>21</sup> They hoped because of the agreement with the sultanate to be protected from raids and hijackings, but these hopes were not fulfilled.

### *Balambangan*

To implement the trade treaty a British merchant and staff were stationed on the principal island of Sulu. His position was not without its problems. The Sultan's will was law, also for the British. There were differences of opinion about all sorts of matters, such as the exact value of the goods delivered and of those purchased, and the question to what extent the trade rules which the elite applied to its subordinate indigenous people – these were not permitted to sell directly to foreign buyers – also applied to the British. Another problem was that the British at times were supplied with spices which, it was suspected, came from territory over which the VOC claimed supreme authority. The Sultan did not object to this, nor did the British merchants on Sulu, but London, which wanted to avoid any conflict with The Hague, declared such infringement of the VOC spice

<sup>18</sup> There was no consistency in the use of the name Brunei. Occasionally the sultanate was indicated, sometimes; at other occasions the sultanate was called Borneo Proper and the State of Borneo genoemd, with as capital Brunei, cf. "Report by Consul-General Bulwer", 679. In this essay the name Brunei is used for the sultanate, its capital city is Borneo town, at present Brunei Darussalam with Bandar Seri Begawan as its capital.

<sup>19</sup> Dalrymple, *A full and clear proof*, 31-33; Dalrymple, "An Essay", 535. There were no precise boundaries between the possessions. Half a century after Dalrymple Balambangan and neighboring islands were considered as belonging to Brunei.

<sup>20</sup> *Zeemans-gids*, 1048.

<sup>21</sup> This British reticence also pertained to indigenous slavery.

monopoly undesirable, and not only because it contravened the mutual treaties concerning the sealing off of the Asian possessions, but it was also contrary to the national honour and dignity of Albion. Because of this, and because EIC ships were sometimes unable to find Sulu, Dalrymple proposed the establishment of a second trading post on Balambangan. In a detailed description he pointed to the favourable location of the island on the route between the Indian Ocean and the Far East, and to the proximity of Borneo and other islands rich in resources and forest products, an archipelago which he called the "Oriental Polynesia". The advantages for trade were obvious:

— — — it is to be observed, the two great gulphs into which all the branches of the Indian trade at last disembogue, are China and Indostan: From these two countries, if we except the spices, not only the investment for Europe, but the Indian trade also, are almost entirely derived, so that the influence of such an establishment as here proposed at Balambangan, must be inexpressible, if considered as the source from whence Indostan will be supplied with spices, &c. and China with these and the various other productions of the Oriental Polynesia, which are in great demand there, though in little estimation elsewhere, as birds-nest, &c. and as the productions of Indostan yield a great profit in the Polynesia, the returns are made with accumulated gain; and hence not only the commodities purchased for Europe from the Chinese, with these returns from the Polynesia, come much cheaper than if purchased with bullion, but the exportation of our home manufactures is increased, by being enabled to dispose of them at lower rates, in consequence of the profits arising from this circulating commerce. Indeed, other countries in the neighbourhood of Balambangan, besides China, will take off woollens and other manufactures from England, in very considerable quantities.<sup>22</sup>

A supporting factor was that the trade vessels from China could save themselves the long voyage to Batavia and Makassar, where the Dutch imposed high levies and taxes, by selling their tea, porcelain, silk and other goods on Balambangan, or to exchange them for products of British or British-Indian manufacture, which was expected to lower the price of the Chinese goods. For there was no doubt that the Chinese would come to Balambangan, he had been assured by Chinese traders; it was also certain that the indigenous traders would be able to find Balambangan, in particular the Buginese, who controlled a significant part of the commercial trade by prahu in Southeast Asia.<sup>23</sup>

as great part of the Bugguese traffick is, in the eyes of the Dutch, clandestine, and carried on to countries where they are very jealous of intruders, there is an evident necessity for some neutral port.<sup>24</sup>

An emporium on Balambangan could take advantage of the fact that the Spanish authorities had banned virtually all non-Roman Catholic Chinese in the Philippines because of their support of the British during the siege of Manila. Because this had cut off an important channel of trade, Spanish, Chinese and Philippines traders were all looking for new ports and new markets. In addition

<sup>22</sup> Dalrymple, *A plan*, 98-99; cf. Barton, "Report".

<sup>23</sup> Warren, *The Sulu Zone 1768-1898*, 10.

<sup>24</sup> Dalrymple, *A plan*, 83.



Balambangan had the advantage of having two excellent natural harbours, which offered protection from the north-easterly and north-westerly monsoon, and that it was suitable for the cultivation of spices and other crops of commercial interest, because of its climate, sources of fresh water and soil condition. The Big East might officially be closed to the EIC, but what the Dutch Company did on the spice islands and on Ceylon, the British EIC could do at Balambangan, it was thought.

### *Spanish claims*

It could be a problem for the EIC that the Spanish had not yet relinquished their claims to the Sulu archipelago and North Borneo with islands, which they called the Felicia archipelago. That became clear almost immediately. Alarmed by the message that the British were nearby, and in order (for the umpteenth time) to do something against the piracy which the Sulunese undertook far into the Philippines (in 1842 a writer estimated that their war fleet consisted of 200 to 250 large, fast and well-armed prahu with a crew of 10,000 men<sup>25</sup>), the Spanish attempted in 1760, and again in 1762, to occupy Sulu. The first attack was repelled; during the second Tanjong Maronda on Sulu was occupied. There the Spanish established a post as well as a church and a fortress. This post did not exist for long; it was soon destroyed and the Spanish occupation driven off or murdered.

The Spanish involvement with Sulu and Borneo dated back to the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. They then got a foothold on North Borneo without much trouble. Drake's 1579 visit to the Moluccas, which, according to a Spanish historian, was less peaceful than Drake had himself alleged,<sup>26</sup> was for Manila reason to respond to an offer by a pretender to the throne in Brunei, Sirela (Pangerang Seri Lela), that, if the Spanish helped him to become Sultan instead of his brother, his island would become a vassal state of the King of Spain. Attaching little importance to the question of the legitimacy of Sirela's claim, in the eyes of Manila a Spanish presence on Borneo was not just a deterrence for other Europeans in the archipelago, but it also formed a step on the road to the capture of the Moluccas, where the Portuguese had just been driven out of Ternate. To protect the route between Manila and Borneo the Spanish built a fortress on Unsang, the large peninsula of northeast Borneo opposite the island of Tawi-Tawi.<sup>27</sup>

After Sirela had been placed on the throne (an intervention which had to be repeated in 1580), the Spanish launched an expedition against Magindano and Sulu and imposed an amount of tribute on both nations. But the raids – presented by some local historians as a struggle against the Roman Catholicism of the Spanish, which might have been one of the motives were it not that mostly the non-Christian part of the population became the victim of them – kept on occurring. These were reciprocated by punitive expeditions, which caused great damage and sometimes yielded prisoners, but accomplished nothing in the longer term. After a brief description of two raids by Sulunese in 1589 and 1590, an early 19<sup>th</sup> century Spanish historian was almost desperate:

[f]rom that time to the present, the Moors [of Jolo (i.e. Sulu)] have not ceased to infest our colonies. It is incredible what a number of Indians they have made prisoners, what towns

<sup>25</sup> Blair, *The Philippine Islands*, pt. 43, 69.

<sup>26</sup> De Zuñiga, *An historical view of the Philippine Islands*, I, 159. De Zuñiga probably erred or exaggerated, as he was ill informed about several parts of Drake's travels.

<sup>27</sup> "Dr. Leyden's sketch of Borneo", 95.

they have plundered, what villages they have annihilated, and what ships they have taken. I am inclined to think, that Providence permits this as a punishment on the Spaniards, for delaying the conquest for no less a period than two hundred years, notwithstanding the expeditions and fleets, that have almost annually been sent to attempt it.<sup>28</sup>

Spurred on by the renewed Spanish thirst for action in 1760 and 1762 and so as not to embarrass his employer, Dalrymple undertook to refute the Spanish claims to the sultanate and North Borneo, in order to pave the way for the EIC legally. For if the Spanish claim was legitimate, the Paris Treaty of 10 February 1763, which put an end to the seven-years war in Europe (1756-1763) and provided for the return of Manila (and Havana) to Spain, might block the way to the Sulu archipelago for the British.

The core of his argument was that although the Spanish had once subdued Sulu – the last time this had happened was in 1637, when Sulu and a part of Magindano were subjected to Spanish rule<sup>29</sup> – but less than ten years later they had (partly because of quarrels between the mission and the army, partly under Dutch military pressure) to sign a shameful peace treaty with Sulu (14 April 1646), on the basis of which they had withdrawn, and had only been allowed to keep four small islands (Pangutaran, Tapul, Siasi, Balanguisan), partly because the mission had made converts there. They had recognised the sultanate as a sovereign state; that hereby certain rights and duties had been agreed between Sulu and Manila and that in 1737, after a series of hostilities after a new Sultan had taken office, both had once again concluded a peace treaty, did, according to Dalrymple, in contrast to assertions by Manila, not take anything away from the sovereignty of the sultanate and its freedom to conclude treaties with whoever it wanted to.

Subsequently Dalrymple pointed to the provisions of the Peace of Westphalia, and more particularly to the peace treaty of 30 January 1648 between Spain and the Republic, which prohibited any Spanish urge for expansion in Southeast Asia. (The British were at that time not a party in this – this peace was concluded between France and the Holy Roman Empire – but they had later joined the Peace of Westphalia). For London it was therefore a determining factor which territories in Southeast Asia in 1648 were, and which were not, *de facto* Spanish possessions. The treaty of the Republic with Spain had not settled all questions and territorial matters, among which was the status of Balambangan. Because this island, together with the northern point of Borneo and the southern half of Palawan had only been given to Sulu by cession, according to the Spanish Governor of Manila, it was not covered by the treaty of 1646; the rights and privileges which Manila had preserved with regard to the Sulu archipelago therefore also applied to Balambangan. By producing some more arguments Manila considered it had the right to deny the British access to Balambangan and to prohibit it from conducting trade with Sulu and its dependencies. With the argument note well even derived from a Spanish historian, which stated that the islands between Palawan and North Borneo, of which Balambangan was one, had never been a Spanish possession, or were only occupied or claimed by Spain after 1648 – something that would be a violation of the treaties of 1646 and 1648 (that was indeed the case, for the Spanish only built a fortress in Labo on Palawan in 1717; this ,

<sup>28</sup> De Zuñiga, *An historical view of the Philippine Islands*, I, 209-211; cf. *Ibidem*, 258-261 (1628, 1629).

<sup>29</sup> De Zuñiga, *An historical view of the Philippine Islands*, I, 269-272.

however, was soon relinquished<sup>30</sup>) – Dalrymple rejected all Spanish claims and presumptions. Setting apart the question whether Dalrymple was right on all points, the EIC accepted his advice and ignored all Spanish protests and claims.

---

<sup>30</sup> De Zuñiga, *An historical view of the Philippine Islands*, II, 21-22, 45.

## Thomas Forrest's exploits (1774-1776)

### *Commission*

On Balambangan houses, sheds and a small wooden fortress equipped with some cannons were built in the early 1770s and a few merchants were settled there, among whom was John Herbert, the head of the trading post, who had lived in Batavia before, and Edward Coles, John Jesse and Thomas Palmer. The merchants were instructed to buy only spices and other goods and products which originated from regions which were beyond the reach of the Dutch Company or which were not, or not exclusively, claimed by it.

One of these regions was Brunei, to which until 1841 belonged the large and rich district of Sarawak. After successful correspondence with the Sultan, John Jesse was stationed in Brunei from Balambangan, in August 1774. On behalf of the EIC he there concluded a trade treaty, which was very similar to the treaty Dalrymple had concluded with Sulu. In it it was agreed that the British obtained the exclusive right to export pepper (more about this below). Apart from Brunei the British targeted New Guinea and a number of islands off its coast, such as Waigeo, Misool, Batanta and Salawati, where spices occurred.

### *Travels to Bacan, Gilolo and New Guinea*

Thomas Forrest, a "Senior Captain" employed by the EIC, stationed at Fort Marlborough in Bencoolen, who was very familiar with the waters of the East Indies, received the assignment to launch an investigation to establish what New Guinea had to offer. In the years 1774-1776 he made a voyage through the archipelago to the east of Celebes which took him as far as Geelvink Bay (New Guinea, nowadays West Papua). On the return voyage he called in at Magindano and Balambangan, and visited Jesse in Brunei.

In a heavily armed 10 ton prahu, the *Tartar*, with a fully indigenous crew except for two Englishmen, and a Buginese *nakoda* (captain), who came along as guide, Forrest penetrated deeply into VOC territory. The first part of his voyage took him from Balambangan to Sulu. There he was the guest of the British resident, Corbet, who briefed him about the difficulties he experienced in his trade with the sultanate. Apart from an EIC ship Forrest there came across a prahu from the Moluccas carrying cloves. He continued his voyage through the Sangir-Talaud group of islands north of Celebes, skirting the sultanates of Ternate and Tidore via the south coast of Bacan and the southern point of Gilolo to New Guinea. Of all the islands he passed, but also of some islands and waters he only knew from hearsay, he noted the coordinates and other details; he described coasts, coral reefs, sand banks, distances, sea currents, fishing grounds, places with access to fresh water, winds, indigenous types of ships, bays, ports and anchoring grounds, the weapons of the population, existing crops, fortresses and fortifications of the Company and their garrisons, the mutual power relations between the sultans and heads, and many other things.<sup>31</sup>

### *The Hold of the VOC*

During his voyage he attempted to discover how strong the hold of the Company was on the eco-

---

<sup>31</sup> Forrest, *A Voyage*.

conomic activities of the indigenous population, how they arranged the control of shipping traffic and in particular what precisely was Company territory and what was not. He learned that at set times an "orembaai" (a type of boat used by heads to travel along coasts), kora-kora or pancallang belonging to, or on behalf of, the Company (the Ambon government itself had two longboats and seven pancallangs), recognisable by a Dutch flag and a few small guns, made a voyage of inspection, among other things to check the freight and licences of the trade prahu. But this expansive archipelago was very difficult to keep guard over. Thus, on Gilolo, in the midst of VOC territory, there was abundant growth of spices and other useful plants, among which were cotton plants, which provided the material for a significant cottage industry. The Dutch either did not know or left them alone. If necessary the Buginese supplied cotton thread to the Gilolo weavers, which originated in Bali and South Celebes, which had a flourishing cotton industry. The French had been aware for some considerable time of the things islands like Gilolo, Ceram, Gebe and Obi had to offer, and whenever they had the chance they not only conducted a profitable barter trade there, but also obtained young clove and nutmeg trees there, which they took to their possessions in the Indian Ocean and the West Indies.

#### *Meeting with the Sultan of Bacan*

Although Bacan was too far into VOC territory for the British to trade there legally and undisturbed, Forrest received a cordial welcome from Sultan Muhammad Sahadin (1741-80). The Sultan, who not only ruled over Bacan, but who also appointed the heads on Obi, parts of eastern Ceram and in the Goram archipelago east of Ceram, had bad experiences with the Company. As a consequence of a long drawn-out conflict, he had been assigned as residence a house very close to the fort Barneveldt in Labuhan on Bacan, where he was under military supervision. The meeting between the two took place on a distant small island, out of sight of the Dutch.<sup>32</sup> Whatever may have been the Sultan's expectations, Forrest implored him to stay on good terms with the Company. He did not want to give the impression that he, or Great Britain, were in any way involved in the power struggle which raged within the sultanate of Tidore in the 1770s, or that he supported the Sultan in his conflict with the Dutch. Whether Forrest's account is a totally accurate and complete description of what was discussed by the two is unclear, because we lack independent sources; but the Englishman's advice to the Sultan, as reported, in any case matched London's publicly professed policy with regard to the Dutch possessions. It is doubtful whether the Sultan of Bacan took much notice of Forrest's words; a few years later he and a few others were arrested and sent to Batavia.

On his departure the Sultan gave Forrest two kora-koras as an armed escort to accompany him. Initially this seemed a courteous gesture, intended to make a success of his continued voyage, and to protect him and his crew against pirates and headhunters. But it soon became obvious that this was no gesture of goodwill to Forrest and the EIC, as it has at times been interpreted,<sup>33</sup> but had the purpose to prevent Forrest from reaching New Guinea. The Sultan also ruled over a series of villages on the west coast of the Vogelkop (Bird's Head) and wanted to prevent Forrest from discovering that slave trade was conducted there. Not only did Moluccans, among whom the Sultan himself, kidnap and sell Buginese and other Papuans, but the Papuans themselves also went hunting for slaves, as

<sup>32</sup> Hierover Widjojo, *Nuku*, hfdst. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Widjojo, *Nuku*, 61.

far as the Moluccas, the Ambonese islands, the Banda archipelago, the Aru and Kei islands and Timor. On Ayu Baba, an island north of Waigeo, Forrest met a prince who had two sad-looking wives, who had been kidnapped from Amblau, a small island Southeast of Buru in the Ambon archipelago, around 1765.

The question has been asked if, and if so, to what extent, Forrest was involved in the actions of the rebellious prince Nuku, which took place in the Big East in these years.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps Nuku had hoped to get the support of the British for his struggle against the Company. But, taking into account the new breeze which blew through the offices of the EIC, and which can be found back in Forrest's instructions, his offering British support for resistance against the Company can be excluded.

#### *New Guinea*

New Guinea was the really intended destination of Forrest's voyage. But his intention to conduct an investigation there, was obstructed by his Buginese guide. Assisted by some crew members from Bacan, he urged Forrest to avoid the mainland and to restrict his visit to a few small islands off the north coast of Waigeo. He felt safe on islands of the Ayu Baba archipelago, which, together with Waigeo and Misore, were subject to Tidore, because his trading partners lived there. For like his brother-in-law, the Sultan of Bacan, the Buginese was a slave hunter on a grand scale, and he did not dare set foot on land in much of New Guinea without an armed escort for fear of revenge by the population. The Governor of Ternate did try to counteract the slave-hunting, but was unsuccessful. Even when an occasional patrol was sent to New Guinea, an old, half-blind slave was tarted up as the supreme boss of the slave hunters and handed over to the Company and subsequently taken to Ternate. This appeared to work well.

Further east the Buginese felt safe, and on 27 January 1775 Forrest sailed into the Bay of Dore (now Manokwari in West Papua), the easternmost spot in New Guinea he was to reach. Initially the Dore population showed itself suspicious, but the air was soon cleared. They were prepared to help him with the maintenance of his ship and sold him dried fish, sago, pigs, coconuts and other provisions, or exchanged them for cotton cloths and pieces of iron, which he had brought with him for this purpose. During his three weeks' stay he prepared a short description of the country and its people. On a nearby small island, Manaswary, he found a large number of nutmeg trees, of which he took with him more than a hundred young ones with balls of earth.

#### *Forrest and the Dutch Company*

Just as the Dutch were kept out of Bengal, conquered by the British in 1757, Batavia was of the opinion that all trade of the British in the East Indies archipelago must be prevented, and even that any contact between them and the population was undesirable. If British ships were allowed to enter ports in the East Indies – which was by no means always the case -, they often only succeeded in provisioning themselves with food, water, cattle, firewood and other necessities after difficult negotiations. When the right of the British to transit through the East Indies was expanded in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Batavia's vigilance increased proportionately.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Widjojo, *Nuku*, 140.

<sup>35</sup> Since the end of the 1750's British merchantmen were allowed to use a sea passage between the Indian Ocean (Benkulen) in the west and China. This passage took them past the north coast of Ceram and through the coastal waters of Birds Head. By the Peace Treaty of Paris of 20<sup>th</sup> May 1784 the British were given the right of free

Initially Forrest, who did not have the required documentation for his voyage or a permit from the Company, had no trouble avoiding the Dutch and gather information everywhere. During his stay in Dore he encountered a kora-kora from Tidore with a crew of fifty men armed with bows and arrows, which was looking for him. This meeting consisted chiefly of the exchange of civilities, but it also meant that the presence of a British vessel was becoming known. This presence probably first came to the attention of the Company when Forrest had his meeting with the Sultan of Bacan (December 1774).<sup>36</sup> The result was that the company increased its patrols in order to catch him; in the sea east of Gilolo it launched an armed longboat with a crew composed entirely of Europeans, which indicated that it took the matter seriously. On Forrest's return voyage from New Guinea this led to a sort of cat and mouse game, which meant that he sometimes had to sail at night and could not just enter any bay. Although this caused problems with obtaining provisions, Forrest managed to stay out of the hands of the Company. His preference was to call in at islands the inhabitants of which were not fond of the Company, such as Salawati, whose prince had recently been exiled to the Cape of Good Hope,<sup>37</sup> and Misool, where the Company was hated because of "many severities, and even robberies committed by their cruising panchallangs and corocoros",<sup>38</sup> which probably refers to governmental punitive expeditions which had got out of hand.

### *Visit to Magindano*

At the time when Forrest arrived at the big island of Magindano (also Maguindanao; at present Mindanao) the power in the eponymous sultanate was formally in the hands of Sultan Paharadine (ruled from around 1755 to 1780). With his close family he lived in the double city of Selangan-Magindano, on both sides of the Pelangi River (the "Rio Grande of Magindano", according to Spanish historians), a few kilometres upstream from the mouth; members of the large extended family of the Sultan, the *datu*, ruled over the islands and districts into which the sultanate was divided. The power and influence of the sultanate were restricted to the coast, and only reached "as far inland as a horn can be heard from the beach".<sup>39</sup>

The Spanish, who had arrived in Southeast Asia at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in 1579 made an attempt to subject the whole of Magindano, or at the very least force it to make tribute payments. This attempt had failed, and later too they never succeeded in subjecting the whole island permanently and effectively to Spain; just as Dalrymple before him had done, Forrest observed that the island's population did not consider Magindano part of the Spanish Philippines.<sup>40</sup>

The Spanish had their power base and governmental centres in the provinces of Misamis and Caraga along the west and north coasts of Magindano, although they were not safe even there, judging by the pillaging, arson, and massacres of which several missionaries as well as the local population

---

passage through the entire archipelago. Crowhurst, "The voyage of the Pitt"; *The Annual Register*, (1789) 95; Forrest, *A Voyage*, 182-183; Andaya, *Maluku*, 229; Dalrymple, *Memoir concerning the passages to and from China*; cf. NA, Col. Dept., Maps and drawings, Inv. nr. 222; Fry, *Alexander Dalrymple*, 35.

<sup>36</sup> Knaap, *Memories*, 460. Whether or not the vessel ("een groot Engels vaartuig of galley") mentioned here was Forrest's vessel is not certain, probably not. But by this time his presence was certainly known to the Dutch.

<sup>37</sup> Forrest, *A Voyage*, 156.

<sup>38</sup> Forrest, *A Voyage*, 153-154.

<sup>39</sup> Forrest, *A Voyage*, 264.

<sup>40</sup> Lorlertratna, *A Quest for Insularity*, 62.

were the victims.<sup>41</sup> In the northern part of Magindano the Spanish had also established settlements of Christians from elsewhere in the Philippines. Forrest learned that several dozens of kidnapped Christians were kept as slaves in the Magindano sultanate, where they served as soldiers, body guards and servants of the elite and as ships' crew during trade expeditions and raids. The Spanish fortress on the island was (since 1630) in Zamboanga, in the south west, opposite the island of Basilan. However, it was not able to put a stop to the raids from Magindano and Sulu, and at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the garrison was abolished. Finally, a number of peoples and clans lived in the interior, of which some were Islamised and others practised a traditional religion and which each had their own sultan, prince and dialect.

Forrest's visit to the sultanate, which began on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May 1775, was much more extensive and less restricted, and it provided many more data about county, people, form of government, trade and legislation than his travels through the Big East, when in fact he was constantly on the run from the Dutch. Particularly crown prince Kibad Sahriyal, the *rajah moodo* (literally: young king, compare Indonesian *rajah muda*), a nephew of the Sultan, and Fakymolano (Pakir Maulana Kamsa), his father and an older brother of the Sultan, who wielded the real power, were favourably disposed towards Forrest.

The Sultan had the character of a weak man; and Rajah Moodo, being in possession of the crown lands, which his father Molano had made over to him, when he resigned the Sultanship to his brother, held the sinews of power. Paharadine's own lands not being so considerable. - - - Rajah Moodo, to whom I luckily attached myself at first, lodged me very well in his own fort, and hauled up my vessel on the dry land. He, on all occasions, showed me civility, and gave me assistance. Besides, his court (if I may so call it) was crowded, in comparison of the Sultan's; which demonstrated to me his superior power.<sup>42</sup>

During his stay Forrest became very well acquainted with the etiquette and intrigues of the court, as well as the international political and economic relations of Magindano. Through marriages the Sultan's family was related to sultan's families in the environment, among them that of Sulu. Although the elite had access to desirable articles such as opium from Bengal, slaves, jewellery, cloth from Britain and British India, weapons, iron and copper utensils, porcelain and earthenware, Magindano as a whole was not prosperous. The most important reason was the fact that the Spanish kept the sultanate in an economic stranglehold and prevented Chinese junks from coming directly to Magindano, exactly as the Company prohibited junks from China from sailing directly to the Moluccas. Just as the Chinese imports for the Moluccas went via Batavia and Makassar, goods intended for Magindano perforce made a detour via Manila, Sulu or North Borneo; in both cases this trade was the domain of local Chinese and indigenous traders and prahu sailors. In Magindano they exchanged their wares against wood, rattan, damar (resin), clove bark, sea cucumber (trepang), turtle shells, bird nests, venison, wax, rice, edible tubers and other forest products, gold dust, and locally produced cloth, as well as slaves of whom the smartest and strongest were intended for Batavia and Manila. In addition the neighbouring islands, Dutch and Spanish possessions and passing European

<sup>41</sup> De Zuñiga, *An historical view of the Philippine Islands*, I, 6, 260-261.

<sup>42</sup> Forrest, *A Voyage*, 222-224.



ships and indigenous prahu formed a rewarding target for raids, kidnapping and slave hunts. On the whole such raids were economic activities, which formed part of the local economy and in that sense barter trade and raids flowed seamlessly into each other. Islands and people in the vicinity were at times friends and allies, at times enemies and potential targets. A large part of the loot, among which were slaves, was exported through special ports or exchanged for imports, in transactions where no one enquired about the origin of the goods. Raids were conducted at the command of, or at least with the approval of, the elite, which received a fixed percentage of the proceeds. Sometimes princes sought refuge in piracy to compensate for the losses they incurred because of the strict regulation of trade by the Spanish and the Company, which had a devastating effect on indigenous prahu shipping and thereby on the standard of living of the population. On the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 1774 Forrest encountered in the roadstead of Kegayan, an island in the Sulu archipelago, a heavily armed prahu, which was the property of the prince of the island, a *datu* of Sulu, which was used for trade expeditions and raids in the northern Philippines and which was in the process of unloading its cargo.<sup>43</sup> But it at times also happened that raids were part of political sparring. In May 1775 word spread on Magindano that a short time before Balambangan had been raided by Datu Teting, a nephew of the Sultan of Sulu. The trading post's buildings had been destroyed, goods to the value of a million Spanish dollars had been stolen and the British merchants who were present, Buginese and Chinese labourers and servants and Indian sepoys had either been killed or had sought refuge on Labuan, an island situated opposite the mouth of the Borneo River (Bay of Brunei) which had been ceded to them by the Sultan of Brunei. When Forrest made it known that he wanted to raise the British flag in Balambangan, the Sultan of Magindano forbade him to do this, using the argument that an armed conflict could harm the family and trade relations with Sulu, which were of vital importance to Magindano.

The British press at once pointed to the Spanish as the ones behind the surprise attack on Balambangan; others saw Batavia's hand in it; yet others pointed to the treacherous nature of the population<sup>44</sup> or saw the attack as revenge by the Sulu Sultanate on the British, because since 1774 they had also conducted trade with Brunei. Almost certainly the Sultan of Magindano and his close family members (also) had a hand in it. They saw an opportunity to get a British trading post on their territory, which was to provide a counterbalance to the Spanish. At once the Sultan of Magindano ceded Bunwoot to the EIC as a replacement for Balambangan. This was an uninhabited but fertile island northwest of the capital. The agreement was dated 12 September 1775. Forrest built huts, constructed gardens and fields and planted the nutmeg trees which he had brought from New Guinea on this island.

---

<sup>43</sup> Forrest, *A Voyage*, 14-15.

<sup>44</sup> "Report by Consul-General Bulwer", 681; Blair, *The Philippine Islands*, dl 43, 67-68; Hunt, "Some Particulars Relating to Sulo", 35; Dalrymple, *An account*, 2-4.

## Brunei and North Borneo

### *Population*

After an eight months' stay Forrest left Magindano in January 1776 with in his possession, apart from the Bunwoot contract, two protestations of friendship from the *rajah moodo*, one intended for the British King George III (\*1738; r. 1760-1820), the other one for the Board of the EIC. He found Balambangan deserted and devastated and continued on along the northwest coast of Borneo to Borneo-city, which was located a few kilometres upstream from the mouth of the eponymous river. In the roadstead he encountered a British ship, but heard from Jesse, the British Resident, that his trading post led a moribund existence. The reason was that both parties did not adhere to the contract which Jesse had concluded with the Sultan.

The population of North Borneo roughly consisted of three main groups, which were equally important for the British plans, albeit for different reasons: apart from the usual Malay-speaking coast dwellers, a people of pirates, prahu sailors and traders, and the non-Islamic Indaan and Marut, who belonged to the Dayaks, and who lived in some spots along the coast, but generally in the interior, from which they supplied the coast dwellers with all kinds of forest products and minerals, there were the Chinese. This latter group consisted on the one hand of families who had lived there for generations, and on the other of sailors, plantation labourers, coolies, ship builders and other tradesmen, who only stayed there for sort periods and were brought from China as the need arose.<sup>45</sup>

### *The Chinese in Brunei*

Sources are not uniform in their accounts of the Brunei form of government in the 1770s. According to Jesse, who stayed there for a considerable period and therefore probably has the greatest authority in the matter, the country was governed by a Sultan and a number of officials: a *bendahara*, who was in charge of the daily governance of the sultanate, a *de gadong*, the head of the Sultan's household, a *tomongong*, the leader of warriors in the case of war, a *pa-mancha*, who arbitrated in disputes, and a *shabandar*, the harbour master. In addition there was a number of lower-ranking heads, the *pangaran*, "who often tyrannise over the people", according to Forrest.<sup>46</sup> These heads formed a sort of Council of State, which was called together for special occasions.<sup>47</sup>

The Chinese component of the Sultanate's government – and of the society as a whole – was considerable. Passing over the fact that in prehistoric times migrants from southeast China and Taiwan had gone to maritime Southeast Asia, one region of which was North Borneo,<sup>48</sup> the information here can suffice that the first Chinese visits to the Indonesian archipelago in historical times, in all probability also to Borneo, took place in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. From the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century Borneo was included in a trading network that reached from the Indian Ocean to the Far East. Chinese silk and porcelain were exchanged there for land and sea products. In Brunei at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century

<sup>45</sup> Building a ship in Brunei was much cheaper than in China. A junk of 600 tons took 4.250 Spanish dollars and took less than three month to be built. The labourers and iron works were brought in from China. Jesse, "Substance", 24-25.

<sup>46</sup> Forrest, *A Voyage*, 408.

<sup>47</sup> Jesse, "Substance", 24; "Dr. Leyden's sketch of Borneo", 94.

<sup>48</sup> Bellwood, "The origins", 25-38.

annually five to seven big Chinese junks (of 500 tons or more) arrived, most of which had Amoy as home port. Apart from Brunei they called in at ports such as Manila, Makassar, Sulu, Aceh, and Batavia, after which, after a round trip of a year and a half to two years, they returned to China. The export from Brunei was, however, only a fraction of what it had been when the Chinese had a large colony there, which, apart from Brunei, also included present-day Kinibalu,<sup>49</sup> possibly even the whole of Borneo.<sup>50</sup> Then dozens of big and small Chinese vessels arrived annually. This heyday in the relations between China and Borneo had started during the reign of Emperor Chu Yuan-chang (Zhu Yuanchang), the founder of the Ming dynasty (r. 1367/1398). This maritime trading empire also encompassed parts of the Sulu archipelago and the Philippines.<sup>51</sup> This period lived on in the following story, which belongs in the twilight between history and myth

[t]hat the emperor of China sent a great fleet for the stone of a snake which had its residence at Keeney-Baloo; that the number of people landed was so great as to form a continued chain from the sea, and when the snake's stone was stole it was handed from one to the other till it reached the boat, which immediately put off from the shore and carried the prize to the junks; they, immediately sailing, left all those who were ashore behind, though their dispatch was not enough to prevent the snake's pursuit, who came up with the junks and regained his treasure.<sup>52</sup>

After the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century contacts with the Middle Kingdom appear to have diminished, after which the number of Chinese inhabitants of Borneo also declined. They were replaced by traders from the Philippines, Java, Sumatra, the Strait of Malacca, and various places on the Malayan Peninsula. In 1530 Brunei concluded a treaty with the Portuguese, on the basis of which trade contacts with Malacca and later Macao were entered into. However, surprise attacks on European ships in the roadsteads of Brunei were not a thing of the past, something which Olivier van Noort also experienced. During his visit to Borneo-city at the end of December 1600 and the beginning of 1601 he there encountered Chinese traders from China, Johore and Patani. Van Noort spent a lot of money on a cargo of pepper. Raids by pirates were a constant threat, and he could only prevent them by increased watchfulness.<sup>53</sup>

Two centuries later the Chinese inhabitants of Brunei were still an economic force to be reckoned with. With the exception of the Buginese the local prahu sailors and traders could not keep up with them. They were glad if they did not incur a loss, while the Buginese and the Chinese made big profits. In part this was attributed to the fact that they had accurate knowledge of the value of all kinds of goods on the international market. In addition the indigenous people lacked legal instrumentalities to settle commercial disputes and collect debts, whereas the Buginese and Chinese had their own laws and codes of honour and trade.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Veth, *Borneo's Wester-Afdeeling*, Boek III, hfdst. i en ii.

<sup>50</sup> As suggested by Beeckman, *Voyage*, 46. He mentions "the Raja of Borneo, who was a Supreme King over the whole Island". With "Borneo" he probably meant Brunei.

<sup>51</sup> Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 197; Veth, *Borneo's Wester-Afdeeling*, Book III, ch. i.

<sup>52</sup> Dalrymple, *A plan*, 41. Keeney-Baloo (Kini Balu) is the name of both a lake and a mountain in north Borneo.

<sup>53</sup> *Wonderlijk Voyagie*, 48-49.

<sup>54</sup> On the Buginese Book of Law, cf., Mattulada, *Latoa*; "Niemann over de Latowa (1884)".

*The contract with Brunei*

Exactly as at the time of Van Noort's visit, at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century all pepper plantations in North Borneo were in Chinese hands. These plantations annually produced 4000 pikol of pepper, which was sold to Chinese junks for 172 Spanish dollars per pikol.<sup>55</sup> The contract which Jesse concluded with Brunei in 1774 stipulated that the yield of the pepper plantations came in British hands and that the export would take place from the trading post on Balambangan. It was expected that the Chinese buyers who had been cut out of the market would come there and then would not only buy pepper, but also all sorts of goods from Europe and British India, which lay in storage in the warehouses. In addition the population of Brunei was put under the obligation to construct new pepper plantations to increase production. On the one hand this would lower the price, but on the other hand the increased export would enhance prosperity. In all probability some Dayaks would follow this example, which would lead them not to damage the interests of the EIC, and to give up their barbaric customs such as headhunting and the arbitrary killing of slaves. Because the growing prosperity of Brunei would undoubtedly attract pirates, it was agreed that the British would protect the transports of pepper to Balambangan against attacks.

Although the British were convinced that their trading partners were reliable and pepper from Brunei was initially delivered to Balambangan in line with the agreement, this contract did not bring the advantages they had expected from it. For an important part this was due to themselves. The enforced pepper cultivation led to resistance. The Chinese plantation owners soon stopped sending pepper to Balambangan and again sold this to passing Chinese junks, because the two British war ships which had been sent from Bombay to ward off pirates, were employed for another purpose. In less than six months pirates had seized pepper from Brunei to the value of 20,000 Spanish dollars. In combination with the downfall of Balambangan the British became convinced that the trade post in Borneo-city did not have a flourishing future.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Jesse, "Substance", 21.

<sup>56</sup> Raffles, *Memoir*, 60.

### Afterword: Balambangan, Dore, Bunwoot, Brunei and Labuan

The work done by Dalrymple and Forrest has not remained completely fruitless. Although their initiatives contributed only to a limited extent to the expansion of the EIC in maritime Southeast Asia, the accounts and reports of their travels significantly enlarged the knowledge of the region in Great Britain. They recommended viewing Chinese merchants as trading partners, and not just as competitors, and focusing attention not only on Canton, but also on ports in the north of China. The Court of Directors considered this advice, although it was not new, because the same had been said, putting forward the same arguments, at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when British merchant shipping to China had only just begun.<sup>57</sup> But they could not appreciate Dalrymple's criticism of the government's policy. They reproached him for meddling in things that did not concern him and for the fact that other European nations could take advantage of his work, part of which, which contained sensitive information, he had had printed without permission to do so. This latter reproach, which was also directed at Forrest, was not entirely without foundation, since the Dutch, the French, the Danish, and the Swedes, each with their own Company, provided formidable competition for the British in Asia. Some even attributed the raid on Balambangan in 1775 to Dalrymple's lack of discretion.<sup>58</sup>

In 1803, almost 30 years after its destruction, the Balambangan trading post was re-opened. In October of that year the first convoy arrived, with provisions, labourers and soldiers, but within a year this enterprise was abandoned because the costs were higher than the profit. British ships foundered on the sandbanks and coral reefs off the coast and others became victims of raids, during which the crew was murdered or kidnapped, and the cargo pillaged.<sup>59</sup>

The British trading post on Sulu continued to exist for some time after the destruction of Balambangan, but it led a miserable existence, not least because of the internal disturbances which sometimes plagued the sultanate. In 1812 Sir Th.S. Raffles, Lt. Governor of Java and Dependencies (1811-1816) appointed a Resident in Sulu, who remained there for two years. In 1814 Datu Adanan, a pretender to the throne, in vain sought the support of the British to realise his ambition to become Sultan of Sulu.<sup>60</sup>

Little more can be said about Bunwoot apart from the fact that the British did not accept the invitation of Magindano and after Forrest's departure made no further use of the offered facilities.

It took almost 20 years before the EIC reacted to Forrest's recommendation with respect to Dore. After a British expedition to New Guinea in 1791 had only yielded a few new maritime maps, the EIC in 1793 set up a fortified settlement in Dore. The population appeared to be reasonably peaceful, at least that was the impression Forrest had had, but this turned out not to be the case. After a Papuan raid on the fortification (probably) instigated by the Sultan of Tidore, the British withdrew from New Guinea in 1795.

The failed attempt to reopen the trading post on Balambangan, for the time being also sealed the fate of the British settlement in Brunei. After Jesse's departure this led a lingering existence. Chinese junks stayed away and on several occasions European ships were attacked off the coast and their

<sup>57</sup> Beeckman, *Voyage*, 144.

<sup>58</sup> Dalrymple, *An account*, 2-4.

<sup>59</sup> Horsburgh, *India Directory*, II, 393, 402.

<sup>60</sup> Hunt, "Some Particulars Relating to Sulo", 36.

crews and the inhabitants of the trading post murdered, after which the British also retreated from this settlement. Soon after 1800 a visitor only found the remnants of the trading post in this spot; most of the Chinese inhabitants had left and the pepper gardens had fallen into decay.<sup>61</sup> The British did not lose their interest in Borneo, however, and in time the large Chinese junks also returned (thirteen in 1831). In 1818 Charles C. Assey (1780-1821), previously chief government secretary on Java under Raffles, as one of the first again pointed out the opportunities and advantages offered by a settlement on North Borneo, and in December 1846 Labuan, which turned out to have reserves of coal, was handed over to the British (for the second time). This happened through the first person in the nineteenth century who took concrete initiatives in this field: James Brooke (1803-1868). In 1839 he had arrived in Sarawak from Singapore, where a short time later he assumed power. But his story and that of the British involvement in North Borneo in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries has already been described elsewhere.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> Veth, *Borneo's Wester-Afdeeling*, boek III, 297.

<sup>62</sup> *A Selection from Papers Relating to Borneo*, 19; Keppel, *Expedition*, II, hfdst. 10; Runciman, *The White Rajah*; Low, *Sarawak*.

## Abbreviations

EIC	East India Company
NA	National Archive, Den Haag
r.	reign
UI	Universitas Indonesia, Jakarta
VOC	Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie

## Literature

Anderson, Wm., *The Scottish Nation; or the Surnames, Families, Literature, Honours and Biographical History of the People of Scotland*. Deel II. Edinburg: A. Fullarton & Co., 1867

*The Annual Register or a View of the History, Politics, and Literature, For the Year 1760*. 7<sup>de</sup> ed., Londen: J. Dodsley, 1789

Barton, J., “Report made to the Chief and Council of Balambangan, made by Lieut. James Barton, of his several Surveys”, in: *Miscellaneous Papers Relating to Indo-China*, Trübner’s Oriental Series, Vol. I. (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co Ltd., 1886; repr. Routledge, 2000, 2001) 4-20

Beeckman, D., *A Voyage To and From the Island of Borneo, in the East-Indies etc*. Londen: T. Warner, 1718

Bellwood, P., “The origins and dispersals of agricultural communities in Southeast Asia”, in: I. Glover, P. Bellwood, eds., *Southeast Asia. From prehistory to history*, (Londen, New York: Routledge, 2004) 21-40

Blair, E.H. e.a., ed., *The Philippine Islands, 1493-1898: explorations by early navigators, descriptions of the islands and their peoples, their history and records of the catholic missions, as related in contemporaneous books and manuscripts, showing the political, economic, commercial and religious conditions of those islands from their earliest relations with European nations to the close of the nineteenth century*. Deel 43, 1670-1700, Cleveland, Ohio: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1906

Cook, A.S., “Alexander Dalrymple’s ‘A Collection of Plans of Ports in the East Indies’ (1774-1775): A Preliminary Examination”, in: *Imago Mundi*, 33 (1981) 46-64

Crowhurst, R.P., “The voyage of the Pitt – a turning point in the East India navigation”, *Mariner's Mirror*, vol. 55 (1969) 43–56

Dalrymple, A., “An Essay, towards an account of Sooloo”, in: *Oriental Repertory*. Deel I (1782) 499-578.

Dalrymple, A. “Essay towards an account of Sulu”, in: *The Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia*. (januari 1849) 512-531

Dalrymple, A., *A Plan for Extending the Commerce of this Kingdom, and of the East-India-Company*. Londen: J. Nourse e.a., 1769

Dalrymple, A., *A General View of the East India Company, written in January, 1769*. Londen: J. Nourse e.a., 1772

Dalrymple, A. *A full and clear proof, that the Spaniards can have no claim to Balambangan*. Londen: J. Nourse e.a., 1774

Dalrymple, A., *The Spanish Pretensions Fairly Discussed*. Londen: G. Bigg, 1790

Dalrymple, A., *Memoir concerning the passages to and From China, by Dalrymple. June 1782*. Derde editie. Londen: G. Bigg, 1787.

Dalrymple, A., *An account of what has passed between the India directors and Alexander Dalrymple: intended as an introduction to a plan for extending the commerce of this kingdom, and of the Company, in the East-Indies by an establishment at Balambangan*. Londen: J. Nourse e.a., 1769

Dalrymple, A., “Geographical Description of the Sooloo Islands”, in: “Miscellaneous Tracts”, 44-59, in: L.D. Campbell, *The Asiatic Annual Register, or, View of the History of Hindustan, and of the Politics, Commerce, and Literature of Asia*. [deel VI]. For the Year 1804. Londen: T. Cadell e.a., 1806

Dalrymple, A., *A Retrospective View of The antient System of the East-India-Company, with a Plan of Regulation*. Londen: John Sewell, 1784

Forrest, Th., *A Voyage to New Guinea, and the Moluccas, from Balambangan: including an Account of Magindano, Sooloo, and other Islands – – – During the Years, 1774, 1775, and 1776*. Dublin: Price e.a., 1779

Fry, H.T., *Alexander Dalrymple (1737-1898) and the Expansion of British Trade*. Fr. Cass and Comp ltd, 1970; herdr. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013

Grant, R., *A Sketch of the History of the East-India Company, from its first formation to the passing of the Regulating Act of 1773; with a summary view of the changes which have taken place since that period in the internal administration of British India*. Londen: Black, Parry and Co, 1813

Horsburgh, J., *India Directory, or Directions for sailing to and from the East Indies, China, New Holland, Cape of Good Hope, Brazil, and the interjacent ports*. 3<sup>de</sup> dr., deel II, Londen: Parbury e.a.,



1827

Hunt, J., “Some Particulars Relating to Sulo, in the Archipelago of Felicia, by J. Hunt Esq”, in: J.H. Moor, *Notices of the Indian Archipelago, and adjacent countries*. Deel I, “Appendix”, 31-60  
Jackson, N.D., *The First British Trade Expedition to China, 1637: Captain Weddell and the Courteen Fleet in Asia and Late Ming Canton*. 2018

Jesse, J., “Substance of a Letter tot the Court of Directors from Mr. John Jesse, dated July 20, 1775, at Borneo Proper”, in: *Miscellaneous Papers Relating to Indo-China*, Trübner’s Oriental Series, Vol. I. (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co Ltd., 1886; repr. Routledge, 2000, 2001) 20-26

Keppel, H., *The Expedition to Borneo of H.M.S. Dido for the Suppression of Piracy*. 2 delen. Londen: Chapman & Hall, 1846

Knaap, G.J., bew., *Memories van overgave van gouverneurs van Ambon in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw*. Den Haag: M. Nijhoff, 1987

“Dr. Leyden’s sketch of Borneo”, in: J.H. Moor, *Notices of the Indian Archipelago, and adjacent countries*. Deel I, “Appendix”, 93-109

Levathes, L., *When China Ruled the Seas. The treasure fleet of the Dragon throne, 1405-1433*. New York, Oxford: OUP, 1994

Lorlertratna, P., *A Quest for Insularity: Thomas Forrest’s Voyage to New Guinea, and the Moluccas*. Diss., University of California Riverside, 2012

Low, H., *Sarawak; its inhabitants and productions: being notes during a residence in that country with his Excellency Mr. Brooke*. Londen: R. Bentley, 1848

Marshall, P.J., *Bengal: The British Bridgehead. Eastern India 1740-1828*. Cambridge: CUP, 1988

Mattulada, *Latoa* . Diss. UI, Jakarta, 1975

[Niemann, G.K.], “Niemann over de Latowa (1884)”, in: *Adatrechtbundels bezorgd door de Commissie voor het Adatrecht en uitgegeven door het Koninklijk Instituut voor de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië*, XXXI: Selebes (Den Haag, 1929) 220-245

O’Connor, S.; D. Bulbeck; J. Meyer, eds., *The Archaeology of Sulawesi. Current Research on the Pleistocene Period*. ANU Press, Bacan 2018

Pickett, C., *Bibliography of the East India Company. Books, Pamphlets and Other Materials Printed Between 1600 and 1785*. Londen: The British Library. 2011

Pritchard, E.H., "The Struggle for Control of the China Trade during the Eighteenth Century", *Pacific Historical Review*. Dl 3, nr 3 (sept. 1934) 280-295

Raffles, S., *Memoir of the Life and Public Services of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles, F.R.S. &c.* Londen: John Murray, 1830

"Report by Consul-General Bulwer on the Trade and Commerce of Borneo for the Year 1873", in: *Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, Accounts and Papers. Commercial Reports - continued. Session 5 March - 7 August 1874.* Vol. 67. s.l., s.a.

Runciman, S., *The White Rajah. A History of Sarawak from 1841-1946.* Cambridge, CUP, 2011

*A Selection from Papers Relating to Borneo and the Proceedings at Sarāwak of James Brooke, Esq. now Agent for the British Government in Borneo.* Londen: Robson e.a., 1846

Smith, A., *The Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, in: *The Works of Adam Smith*. 5 Delen, deel II. Londen: T. Cadell e.a., 1812

Veth, P.J., *Borneo's Wester-Afdeeling, geografisch, statistisch, historisch, voorafgegaan door eene algemeene schets des ganschen eilands.* Twee delen. Zaltbommel: Joh. Noman en Zoon, 1854, 1856

Warren, J.F., *The Sulu Zone 1768-1898. The dynamics of External Trade, Slavery, and Ethnicity in the Transformation of a Southeast Asian Maritime State.* 2<sup>de</sup> ed. Singapore: NUS Press, 2007

Wilkes, C., *Narrative of the United States' Exploring Expedition, during the years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842.* Condensed and abridged. Londen: Wittaker and Co., 1845

*Wonderlijck Voyagie, By de Hollanders ghedaen, Door de Strate Magalanes, Ende voorts den gantschen klood des Aertbodems om, met vier Schepen: onder den Admirael Olivier van Noort, uytghevaren Anno 1598. Hier achter is by-gevoeght De tweede Voyagie van Iacob van Neck, naer Oost-Indien.* Amsterdam: Ioost Hartgers, 1648

*Zeemans-gids naar, in en uit Oost-Indië, China, Japan, Australië, de Kaap de Goede Hoop, Braziliën en tussenliggende havens, volgens de vierde Engelsche uitgave van James Horsburgh.* Vert. en uitgebreid door G. Kuyper Hz.. Amsterdam: C.F. Stemler, 1841

Zuñiga, M. de, *An historical view of the Philippine Islands: exhibiting their discovery, population, language, government, manners, customs, production and commerce.* Vert. d. John Maver. Londen: J. Asperne e.a., 1814Bacan