

**Journal, Memorials and Letters of Cornelis Matelieff de Jonge: Security, Diplomacy and Commerce in 17th-century Southeast Asia. Edited by Peter Borschberg, NUS Press, 2015. ISBN: 978-9971-69-798-3, Paperback – ISBN: 978-9971-69-527-9.**

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Historians and scholars are well aware of how important the publication of sources is for producing accurate and reliable research. Those who have studied the Portuguese presence in Southeast Asia are especially sensitive to the difficult task of reaching beyond the scanty information provided by Portuguese sources, particularly in relation to local frameworks and Asian contexts. Therefore, new documentary materials are always welcomed when they serve to fill in the gaps in information and make it possible to compare data, especially after the arrival of the Dutch in the region in the early seventeenth century. Moreover, the publication of historical sources has become an outdated and old-fashioned tradition among scholars in recent times, due to the present focus on debating, reinterpreting or reframing facts and historical contexts. Fortunately, a handful of historians have persisted in this sometimes difficult and thankless task of collecting and sharing these key tools for the work of scholars and historians.

Peter Borschberg, Associate Professor at the National University of Singapore and the author of a large number of works, books and articles, combines his extensive and skilled historical research with a fruitful edition of clear, annotated and well-prepared sources translated into English. Having begun by focusing his attention on the works of Hugo Grotius, Borschberg has since extended the scope of his research to include the formation of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and its subsequent rivalry with the Portuguese in the region of the Malacca-Singapore Straits. The publication of *Journal, Memorials and Letters of Cornelis Matelieff de Jonge* is his most recent contribution to this field, following the publication of another important, contemporary source, *The Memoirs and Memorials of Jacques de Coutre* (Singapore, NUS Press, 2014).

This volume goes far beyond the simple edition of a historical source. It is a compilation of memorials, letters and other materials, carefully selected, translated from Dutch and published with abundant notes and critical comments, providing a broader

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perspective of the historical context of the Straits region in the early seventeenth century. The main focus is obviously on the works and plans of Cornelis Matelieff, one of the architects of the VOC's strategy in the early stages of this company, but Borschberg also gives readers an impressive set of additional information about the Dutch Admiral's actions, the conflict with the Portuguese rivals and the Asian context.

The book is divided into three parts: an introduction; the documents (Matelieff's journal, memorials and letters and additional sources); and a final section composed of appendices (glossary, bibliography and index). A set of 71 carefully chosen and very useful illustrations completes the volume. A large number of footnotes are also included, providing extra information and references.

In a long introduction, Peter Borschberg gives us a fresh and broad historical overview of the events that occurred over a specific time span, ranging from background information about the period prior to the Dutch voyages – the treaties of Tordesillas and Saragossa between Portugal and Spain, the sparking of the Eighty Years War and the changes that followed the 1581 election of Filipe II as King of Portugal – to Matelieff's arrival in Middelburg in 1608. A synopsis and description are also provided of the materials included in the book and the editorial criteria.

The central core of the work consists of two sets of documents, most of which have been translated, for the first time, from the original Dutch into English. Most of the documents were already available in old editions, but were hard to find for those not used to dealing with Dutch sources and the Dutch language. The editor provides extensive and accurate information about each one of them. For Portuguese scholars and anyone who may be interested in the history of the Portuguese presence in Southeast Asia but is unfamiliar with Dutch sources, these documents are particularly useful and add important data about the political and economic framework involving Portuguese Malacca and the neighboring Malay sultanates. They also provide a broader knowledge about how the VOC was able to emerge in the initial years of the seventeenth century as a tremendous and powerful challenge to the Portuguese naval presence and trade in Asia.

However, there are a few minor problems to be pointed out. Different criteria were used in the sections entitled "Documents" (Dutch originals translated into English) and "Supplementary Documents" (transcriptions of seventeenth-century English translations); it is unclear why, in the Documents section, the editor decided to correct the spelling of the names in the texts and yet continued to provide the original misspelled or corrupted forms in the footnotes, while he did the opposite in the Supplementary Documents section. This

surely confuses the reader. Similarly, it is not clear why the original Dutch captions from a map were included as “Supplementary Document X” (pp. 451-453), when the same map is reproduced twice in the book (pp. 173-174 and extra text pp. 440-441) with English translations. There are also some misspelled Portuguese names, such as “Martim Alfonso de Castro”, “Alfonso de Albuquerque”, “Álvaro Carvailho”, “Rodrigo d’Acosta”, “João Brovo” or “feijãos”, while many others are written correctly. A final revision by a Portuguese-speaking reader would have been useful in avoiding these mistakes.

The footnotes are scrupulous and provide complete – sometimes even excessive – information about every single aspect contained in the documents, but there are some inaccuracies that should be mentioned. Some explanations are repeated or are of little interest, while others contain errors, such as the definition of “pagans” as “Muslims, Buddhists and probably also Hindus and animists” (p. 265, n. 57), or the presentation of two editions of Morga’s *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas* as two separate and distinct works (p. 273, n. 100). Finally, extra care could have been taken in the transcription of manuscripts: the “Johor” mentioned on page 391 is an obvious error for “Solor”, for it is an island next to Timor which “produces sandalwood” and “it is suspected that the Portuguese have a fortress there”.

The final part of the book includes a glossary and a list of place names and geographic terms. As in the previous section, this part provides extensive information about each item, both in the text and in the footnotes. However, there are also some flaws that should be taken into consideration here. Firstly, a few missing Portuguese sources could shed some light on several issues. For instance, in *babar* (pp. 459-460), nothing is said about the basic distinction between the “big” and the “small” *babar* used in Asia and adopted by the Portuguese, useful information that could clarify the confusing text; the footnote points to several works, but just a single one – which is absent in the book – would suffice to elucidate this and other cases included in the glossary: the “Livro dos pesos da Índia, e assy medidas e mohedas” by António Nunes (ed. Rodrigo J. Lima Felner, in “Subsídios para a História da Índia Portuguesa”, *Monumentos Inéditos para a História das Conquistas dos Portugueses*, vol. V, 1st series, Lisbon, Academia Real de Ciências, 1868). Furthermore, some imperfect information about several terms or place names would be better explained if a wider knowledge of Portuguese sources was displayed; a good example is Fernão Mendes Pinto’s *Peregrinação*, which provides useful information about Aru (p. 529) and other places near Malacca.

Secondly, there is some inaccurate information. A few examples are given here: the Portuguese coin minted in Goa was not called “*xerafina*” (p. 468), but “*xerafim*” or “*xarafim*” – its origin was the Arabic *asbrafi* and it had nothing to do with an “angel”; there was no “Union of the Two Crowns” (p. 523) referring to Portugal and Spain in the period 1581-1640, because there was no “Crown of Spain”, but only of Castile and Aragon, aside from Burgundy and Milan; contrary to what is written (p. 531), Banda has never been under Portuguese rule; “captain” was not a “military rank” (p. 466), but a common ordinary name for someone who was in charge, whether of a ship, a fortress or a group of soldiers; and finally, the statement that the original name of the tower built in Malacca by Albuquerque was “Formosa” and not “Famosa” (p. 527) is not correct, as a closer reading of the very same letter mentioned in the text (from the Captain of Malacca to Albuquerque – also quoted wrongly and in a confused way in note 2) clearly shows.

Still in relation to minor details, there are a few remarks to be added regarding the bibliography and the footnotes. As far as the latter is concerned, it is perhaps fair to say that fewer footnotes would have been more helpful to the reader, since some of them do not add any useful information by referring to the secondary literature and not to the sources where the original data could be found. A significant example of this is to be found on page 475, where a letter from the Portuguese captain Dom Paulo de Lima Pereira is quoted. The footnote (30) on the following page refers to several books (some of them by Borschberg), but nothing is said about where the original document may be consulted (it is published in *Documentação Ultramarina Portuguesa*, Lisbon, Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, I, 1960, pp. 9-15, by the way).

Finally, in the case of the bibliography, it would have been advisable to separate the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sources (both the Portuguese ones, such as A. Bocarro, G. Correia, Faria e Sousa or F. Guerreiro and the Dutch ones, such as I. Commelin, H. Grotius or W. Lodewycksz) from the secondary literature and not mix them all together under the heading of “Books”. Furthermore, some important works by Portuguese authors are missing (namely Manuel Lobato’s *Política e Comércio dos Portugueses na Insulândia – Malaca e as Molucas de 1575 a 1605*, Jorge Alves’ *O Domínio do Norte de Samatra: A história dos sultanatos de Samudera-Pacém e de Achém, e das suas relações com os Portugueses (1500–1580)* and Luís Filipe Thomaz’s comprehensive studies), a fault that may be extended to the seminal articles by Ian MacGregor about the Portuguese in Malaya, the most important of these being ‘Johore Lama in the sixteenth century’ (*Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 28/2, 1955, pp. 48–125); if it had been used instead of Peter Borschberg’s own books and

Andaya's work (note 52), the factual errors in "Johore Lama" (p. 549) could have been prevented.

The mistakes and inaccuracies mentioned above do not compromise the work involved in the book as a whole, mostly because they relate to Portuguese materials and this *Journals, Memorials and Letters*...does not focus in particular on Portuguese materials or affairs. On the contrary, it displays a considerable work of compilation and the publication of very useful documents combined with appropriate explanatory information and Peter Borschberg deserves praise for another industrious publication of sources, which many people – both the general public and scholars – have a great deal to be thankful for.