

Southeast Asia

Journal, memorials and letters of Cornelis Matelieff de Jonge: Security, diplomacy and commerce in 17th-century Southeast Asia

Edited by PETER BORSCHBERG

Singapore: NUS Press, 2015. Pp. 688. Illustrations, Maps, Glossary, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

doi:10.1017/S0022463417000352

Peter Borschberg has put together a very helpful volume of documents translated into English relating to the voyages of Admiral Cornelis Matelieff de Jonge to Asia between 1605 and 1608 for the Dutch East India Company (VOC) during the formative years of the company's strategic development. Borschberg brings to bear his extensive knowledge of the Dutch archives for the first decades of the VOC in assembling Matelieff's letters from the Javanese port of Banten (1608), his five 'memorials' to the VOC about strategic planning (1608–1609), and his five letters to Grotius (1610–1616) that proved influential in shaping the latter's understanding of the state of ocean trade in East Asia. In addition Borschberg includes a translation from the *Historische Verhael* (1645–1646) of Matelieff's journal, which describes his failed attempt to seize Malacca, as well as ten other supplementary documents, including letters from Johor's rulers to the Stadtholder Prince Maurice sent in 1609. All of these are amply supported with footnotes in what is overall an excellent piece of scholarly editing. Together, they depict how the region around Java, Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula fundamentally shaped not only the development of mercantile capitalism but also understandings of maritime international law.

Borschberg's formidable reading and profound understanding of the secondary literature on European exploration is on display in his lengthy introduction to the documents. The early pages probably go too deep into the broader context for what is largely a specialist volume. By page 13 we know more about the Spanish efforts to suppress Protestantism in the Low Countries than about Matelieff himself, who only really emerges on page 44. But Borschberg puts forward a very important thesis, coming at the very end of the Introduction (p. 138). He argues that Matelieff laid out a programme that would establish the general direction of the VOC in East Asia. This included heavy investment in military and commercial infrastructure, shifting from an 'admiral' system to a political governor system, creating a central and fortified entrepôt (Jakarta, or as the Dutch called it, Batavia) to optimise markets and supply ships, and finally cornering the market in spices (nutmeg, mace and cloves) while essentially dumping pepper on the European market and wrecking the commercial efforts of the English, Portuguese and Spanish. This argument has been put forward by others before, and there is a long quote from Femme Gaastra to this effect (p. 47), but Borschberg's formulation is probably the most comprehensive that has been articulated thus far by historians.

There are two very helpful glossaries, which elucidate many of Borschberg's translation choices. At times this can lead to an ambiguous term acquiring more

precision than it possibly should and some parts as a result require attentive reading. So, for example, *Chincheo* becomes the Fujianese city of Zhangzhou, but as Borschberg explains in the glossary the reference could be to Quanzhou, the Amoy (Xiamen) coast or bay, Fujian more generally, or one of the rivers emptying into the bay. To his credit, Borschberg is well aware of this problem and offers an editorial note (pp. 129–31) to explain his choices. To supplement all of this, Borschberg also includes a huge number of illustrations (71 in total), some of which are in colour and many of which are maps or city views from the archives such as The Hague, Leiden or the Royal Library in Brussels that have not been published before.

In terms of textual analysis, Borschberg approaches his subject with a light hand. There is a sense in the documents that we are looking through the eyes of a soldier — one who sees skin color as an indication of both skill in modern warfare and in willingness to labour, one who watches with despair as his men are often constantly drunk on *arak*, and one who offers the occasional ‘manly battle-speech’ (p. 143) to shore up such subjectivities. The brutal practices of city sieges known from war in Europe are brought to bear on Malacca, where the aged, women, children and slaves are dying in large numbers due to starvation, disease and bombardment along with those doing the fighting. The contempt for territorial acquisition and the importance of ports is everywhere in evidence, and the King of Johor tells Matlieff that the land around Malacca is useless to him as he already ‘had 20 times more land than he could fill with subjects’ (p. 156). Likewise particular forms of looting by Malay forces — burning down houses to retrieve nails because of iron shortages and the taking of slaves as war booty — the enduring importance of various kinds of oared galleys in an era of supposed galleon warfare, as well as the consistent need to find sources of food through overseas trade of rice and sago give a sense of the unique historical economies of the region. All in all, this is an exciting new set of translations, which will provide a valuable reference for historians of both Southeast Asian and world history for years to come.

ROBERT BATCHELOR

Georgia Southern University

Sarong kebaya: Peranakan fashion in an interconnected world, 1500–1950

By PETER LEE

Singapore: Asian Civilisations Museum, 2014. Pp. 352. Maps, Plates, Notes, Bibliography, Index.

doi:10.1017/S0022463417000364

The subject of ‘oriental textiles’ or textiles of the ‘oriental trade’ have been discussed from the perspective of trade impetus and consumption originating from, or at least stimulated by, the European maritime trade (e.g. Carl Crossman, *The decorative arts of the China trade: Paintings, furnishings and exotic curiosities*, Antique Collectors Club, 1991; Anna Jackson and Amin Jaffer, *Encounters: The meeting of Asia and Europe, 1500–1800*, London: V&A, 2004; Rosemary Crill, *Chintz: Indian*