

# *Negeri*

## The Culture of Malay-Speaking City-States of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries

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### The City-State and Asian Geography

Since the Persian wars, Greek and later European thought has associated “Asian” political forms with the despotism of empires, not the free citizenship of city-states. Orlando Patterson recently argued effectively, if not wholly persuasively, that “freedom was a peculiarly Western value and ideal”, arising out of the Greek city-states.<sup>1</sup> City-states play a central role in John Hicks’ influential formulation of the stages of economic growth, but Asia again misses out. “The fact that European civilization has passed through the city-state phase is the principal key to the divergence between the history of Europe and the history of Asia” (Hicks [1969] 68). The first comparative treatment of the subject, by Griffeth & Thomas,<sup>2</sup> as well as the first formulation of the Copenhagen Polis Centre’s research program (Hansen [1994] 10-11), left Asia almost unrepresented.

One does not have to be an environmental determinist to acknowledge that vast steppes and extensive river-valleys are not the most conducive situation for a system of city-states to arise. The early establishment and enduring strength of imperial structures in the large valleys and plains of China, Central Asia and northern India (as of Mesopotamia) push the quest for a system of interrelated city-states in much of Asia back to a time when records are scarce, more than two thousand years ago. These very early city-states were typically what I would call “first-step states”, pioneering the concept of a state as government over a defined territory and a complex population. A second type of city-state, self-conscious about defending its rights and autonomy against the domination of an imperial system, appears to arise later in Asia than in the Mediterranean, and in particular geographical contexts.

In those parts of the Asian fringe divided by mountain and water the conditions for the second type of

city-state appear more promising. In southern India, the Arabian Sea and especially Southeast Asia such networks can be identified at considerably later periods. Here some of the conditions which appear to have encouraged a multiplicity of small trade-dependent city-states in the Mediterranean also apply – readier communication by water than by land, agriculturally unpromising hinterlands and a great complexity of coastlines and mountains. There are some city-state features in the (southern) Chinese commercial colonies of the period 1750-1830 in the Gulf of Thailand – Thonburi-Bangkok, Songkhla, Ha Tien and Saigon – though political independence is not one of them. Some different explanation must be sought for the diffusion of power amongst a great diversity of Thai-speaking states in the central part of Mainland Southeast Asia between the thirteenth century and the fifteenth (O’Connor, *infra* 431-43).

Although the urban life of Southeast Asia has attracted interest throughout this century, it is only recently and hesitantly that the comparative concept of city-states has been applied in this region. Jacob van Leur in the 1930s was fascinated by the Mediterranean city-state phenomenon, and could see the same phenomenon of coastal city-states juxtaposed against interior “civilizations of the great rivers” extending to the Middle East (van Leur [1955/1934] 63-4). His anti-colonial iconoclasm did not, however, break through a Weberian polarity of east and west. While at one point labelling the sixteenth-century pepper port of Calicut a city-state, he was happier with the notion of port-states or harbour principalities for Asian cities of this type. He remained convinced that “Oriental trade” differed from European or Mediterranean in being unchanging and traditional, dominated by urban patriciates who were economically passive and a host of travelling peddlers who conducted the trade (van Leur [1955/1934] 63-79).

My own work in the 1980s, on the other hand, made plenty of implicit analogies with Italian city-states of a roughly similar period, or to earlier Greek ones in relation to slavery.<sup>3</sup> A similar openness to this comparative dimension was followed by Denys Lombard and Luis-Filipe Thomaz, while J. Kathirithamby-Wells was more inclined to see what she called the “port-polities” of Southeast Asia as a distinct phenomenon.<sup>4</sup> No systematic exploration of the relevance of the city-state concept has yet been undertaken.<sup>5</sup>

This book provides a welcome opportunity to explore the idea in the sub-region at the communications centre of Southeast Asia, where I am most confident in locating a *system* of city-states at a particular stage of early modern history. These city-states are the *negeri* which shared a Malay *lingua franca*, Islamic culture and Chinese technology between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries.

### The “Empty Centre” of Southeast Asia

The Malayan Peninsula, eastern Sumatra, western Borneo and western Java form the physical and communications centre of the Southeast Asian region. The busy maritime trade routes between China and Japan on the one side and the rest of the Old World on the other all had to pass through the Straits of Malacca or of Sunda, or across the portages of the Peninsula. Throughout the last two millennia there were reports in Chinese (and later Arab and other) sources of maritime emporia in this region where traders and pilgrims congregated.

It is, however, a region of relatively poor soils and year-round heavy rainfall, where agriculture was slow to develop except in some highland valleys and plateaux far from the entrepôts in question. The coastal lowlands were malarial, prone to flooding, and so densely forested that even game for hunting was relatively scarce. Population was therefore low in the hinterlands of the great entrepôts, which tended to import a high proportion of their food either by sea or down the rivers from the more productive highlands.<sup>6</sup> The geographical conditions in which a system of city-states flourished, therefore, were more comparable to those of the eastern Mediterranean than to irrigation-based early civilisations in Mesopotamia, the Indus or east Asia.

### The “Age of Commerce”

The temple-building civilisations which dominated Southeast Asia between the tenth and thirteenth cen-

turies were in eclipse by 1300. Mongol invasions in the 1290s, the southward migration of Thai-speakers in the thirteenth century, climatic changes, and a rise in seaborne east-west trade, all had a role in the emergence of a different type of political formation in the fourteenth, but more particularly the fifteenth century. Most of the new states began as cosmopolitan ports linked loosely if at all to the remaining interior power centres. Many of them grew in power to become substantial maritime city-states in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Reid [1988-93] II: 203-14).

What I call the “age of commerce” in Southeast Asia was made possible by a marked rise in the intensity of inter-Asian maritime trade. Muslim traders began to appear in Southeast Asian and Chinese ports from the eighth century and became much more numerous in the fourteenth. Arabic-speakers no doubt dominated among them in the early centuries of Islam, but by 1500 (when we have fuller Portuguese accounts) South Asians – Gujaratis, Malabaris, Bengalis and “Klings” (from the Coromandel coast of Southeast India) – were in the great majority in Southeast Asian ports. These visitors from the west were primarily responsible for establishing the earliest of the Islamic city-states I want to consider, Samudra or Pasai in northeastern Sumatra, which had a Muslim king by 1297.

Further east it was the interaction of Chinese mercantile colonists with those from South Asia and with local populations that gave rise to the port-states which flourished after 1400. Many of these colonists arrived with the vast naval missions sent out by the Ming Emperor Yung-le (1403-24), or else were mercantile refugees against the stern policy of this ruler and his predecessor against private trade by their subjects. Ma Huan, the Chinese Muslim chronicler of the Ming expeditions, describes a series of flourishing ports in which Cantonese merchants were the dominant force, and in some cases the founders. Tuban, Gresik and Surabaya on the northern coast of east Java were settlements he described favourably, whereas of Palembang, in South Sumatra, he reports that the dominant element were disloyal Cantonese who fled China during the reign of the first Ming ruler, Hung-wu (1368-98). One of them “set himself up as a chief; he was very wealthy and tyrannical” and preyed on passing shipping.<sup>7</sup> Chinese Muslims were prominent among these colonists, and became more so as they intermarried with the other merchant communities of the ports.

The China connection was also crucial for two Malay-speaking city-states which became prominent

in the early 1400s, Melaka and Brunei, and the leading Thai port-state, Ayutthaya, although we have no direct evidence how much of their population was of Chinese descent. These were the three states which most actively played the Ming game by becoming enthusiastic imperial tributaries in order to position themselves as *entrepôts* with the sole legal access to the Chinese market through state-trading, or tribute missions. Brunei's king was the first of the southern kings to go in person to the Chinese capital to render his tribute, in 1408, and this example was followed by Melaka on five occasions between 1411 and 1434. The Brunei king died while undertaking this arduous journey, but the Imperial court was so impressed at his "loyalty" that they gave him a splendid burial and sent his infant son home with a substantial Chinese force including a commissioner who appears to have governed Brunei for a time. Ayutthaya and Melaka sent tribute missions as often as they were allowed in the early fifteenth century, since these were commercially very lucrative, and the Chinese names of many of their envoys make clear that there was a substantial Chinese or Sino-Southeast Asian minority in these ports.<sup>8</sup>

In some senses we might see the Southeast Asian maritime city-states of the period 1400-1600 as all part of a single system, whether expressed in Malay, Thai, Javanese or Makassarese idiom. All these polities interacted with each other and with Chinese and South Asian traders; almost all were monarchies with a cosmopolitan ruling class heavily dependent on foreign trade; all shared some political and geographical features. But since I accept as central to a *system* of city-states a shared culture and language, I am restricting this paper to cities for which Malay was the principal written language, and Islam the official religion. This largely restricts my focus to the "empty centre" of Southeast Asia described above, although some eastern trade centres such as Banda, Ternate, Tidore (all in Maluku, the spice islands) and Manila<sup>9</sup> might be conceived to be frontier colonies of this cultural complex.

We may divide the period of the Malay city-states in 1511, the year when the most flourishing of them, Melaka (Malacca), fell to the Portuguese. In the century before this, the principal city-states we must consider are Melaka on the Peninsula; Pasai, Aru, Kampar and Inderagiri in Sumatra; and Brunei and Manila further east.

Melaka at its height had come almost to define Malay identity; the Malay word-list compiled by the Magellan expedition in 1521 defined *cara Melayu*

(literally "Malay style") as "the ways of Melaka". With Melaka's fall Malayness became preeminently a diaspora civilisation, and the former commercial elite of the city dispersed to give life to a number of new city-states, particularly Patani, Terengganu, Pahang, Johor, Perak and Kedah on the Peninsula, and Banda, Ternate and Tidore in Maluku. Brunei and Manila became more fully part of the Malayo-Muslim cultural complex after 1511, until Manila was conquered and Brunei devastated by Spain (1571 and 1578 respectively). On the other hand, Pasai and the other small states along the northern coast of Sumatra were conquered in 1515-20 by Aceh, a power that gradually transformed itself from a city-state to a more substantial monarchy.

The period when city-states were the dominant form came to an end with this process of stronger state-formation that began in the sixteenth century but peaked in the first half of the seventeenth. Aceh in Sumatra, Banten and Mataram in Java, Pegu (Burma) and Ayutthaya (Siam) on the Mainland, became more than city-states by using the new firearms, often wielded by foreign (Muslim, European, Japanese) mercenaries, to conquer larger territories. Whereas Portuguese Melaka for most of the sixteenth century was functionally rather like a city-state itself, European military pressure for monopolies of pepper, tin and spices became far more intense with the arrival of the Spanish (1565), Dutch (1596) and English (1600). Only stronger states could compete effectively in this world, and the remaining city-states *strictu sensu* went under by 1625.

### Size, Population and Hinterland

The largest of these Malay city-states was Melaka at its height between 1470 and 1511. The major Malay narrative of the city offers two claims about the city's large population on successive pages – nine *laksa* (90,000) or nineteen *laksa* (190,000).<sup>10</sup> Portuguese estimates are more numerous, varying from 65,000 to 200,000, the latter referring to the peak of the trading season when many temporary residents were in town. Having weighted these estimates with the scale of rice imports into the city, about 7,000 tons a year or enough to feed 50,000 people, I have accepted a probable peak population close to 100,000 (Reid [1988-93] II: 70-7). Although the Magellan expedition estimated a similar population (based on 20,000 to 25,000 households) in Brunei around 1520, I estimate that the next tier of Malay cities of the period, Brunei, Patani,

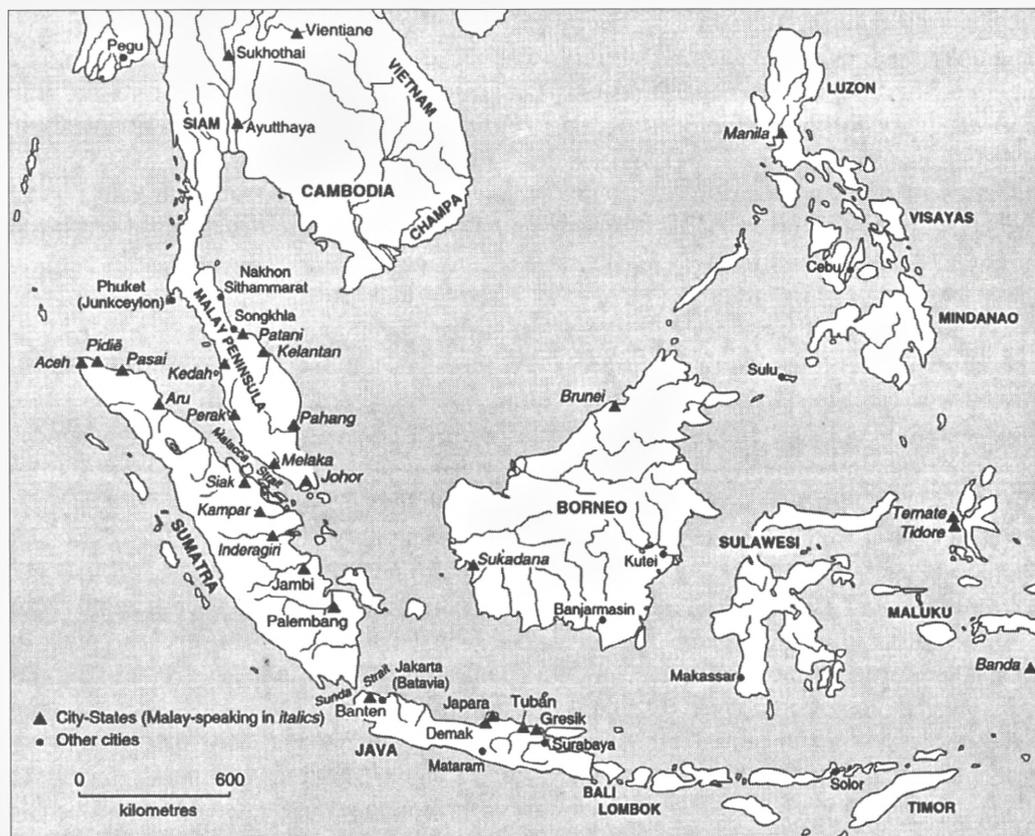


Fig. 1. Southeast Asia, 15th/16th centuries.

Johor and Pasai, would have been only around 20,000 inhabitants at their height, and sometimes dropped to much less than this through misfortunes of war and commerce. Smaller ports like Kampar, Siak, Kedah and Perak may have fluctuated between 500 and 5,000. A recent estimate of the population of Manila before the Spanish conquest is 8,000 (Scott [1994] 281).

There are no population figures for the hinterlands these cities dominated, or even a clear sense of what that hinterland constituted. Those of the city-states which dominated the mouth of an important river (Pahang, Perak, Kampar, Siak, Inderagiri) felt that the rustic forest-dwellers or agriculturalists of the up river areas should render them respect and tribute along with their trade goods, but they never ascended the river to enforce this. Cities like Melaka, Pasai and Brunei were really maritime enclaves surrounded by jungle, the few inhabitants of which were hostile rather than tributary. Marco Polo (1292) and Ibn Battuta (1345) give the impression that Pasai was surrounded by barbarous cannibal infidels, with whom the city was in a state of war or uneasy peace.<sup>11</sup> It was noted of Melaka that "the fields are infertile ... the people seldom practise agriculture", whereas

elephants were readily available from its surrounding jungle.<sup>12</sup>

It can be confidently said that a high proportion of the population by any pre-industrial standard lived in the cities which formed the heart of the system. In the whole Malayan Peninsula (south of Phuket/Songkhla) there cannot have been more than 500,000 inhabitants in total in the sixteenth century, nor fewer than 130,000 in cities such as Melaka, Pahang and Patani, making at least a quarter of the population urban and largely dependent on imported grain. Since populations tended to string out along coasts and rivers adjacent to the cities, the semi-urban population within easy reach of city by boat would have been even larger. In this whole region we cannot identify any major centre of intensive rice-growing before about 1600, and such agriculture as there was revolved around fruits, tubers, and hill rice in swidden fields. Even in its early days when Melaka had only two thousand inhabitants, it obtained rice by sea from Siam – the fertile flood-plain of the Chaophraya river. In its heyday Siam, Burma, Java and southeastern India all shipped rice in large amounts to the city.<sup>13</sup> Its Portuguese conquerors noted that "Melaka has nothing of its own, and has everything of the world".<sup>14</sup>

## Open Cities

Despite the high degree of urbanism in this region, it was a different kind of urbanism from that of temperate zones. In the Malay city-states almost all buildings were lightly-built of wood, matting and split-bamboo, and raised above the ground on poles between one and four metres high. In this way they were airy, comfortable and clean – all the refuse fell down below where it might be eaten by goats and chickens. They also provided some security against flooding and wild animals. Houses of this type were not built to last more than ten years or so and represented a smaller proportion of family capital than boats, textiles or jewellery. Their great disadvantage in an urban setting was susceptibility to fire, but when devastating fires did occur in the more crowded areas foreign observers were astonished to see whole quarters of the city rebuilt in three or four days.

Even the palaces of the ruler and principal court officials were built in this fashion but in a grander style. The palace of Melaka was said to have 90 massive wooden pillars supporting it above the ground, and the palace of Ternate 46. The only buildings in stone or brick were sacred ones – the foundations and walls of major mosques, and the tombs of celebrated kings and saints (Reid [1988-93] I: 62-73).

Since all buildings were surrounded by coconut and fruit trees, visitors from the crowded, walled cities of Europe and China tended to think the Malay variant were not real cities at all, but rather “an aggregate of villages” (Crawford [1820] I: 168). Apart from the local preference for light house-styles, the key difference was the absence of a constraining wall in the Malay city. Although the royal compound was often fortified, the city itself never was, except insofar as temporary stockades were erected when an attack was expected. A chronicler of Aceh explained this peculiarity of his city in comparison with those of Muslims further west by the fact that “God had given them stout hearts and strong character and sound judgement in fighting all their enemies”, not to mention their abundant fighting elephants.<sup>15</sup> A foreign (Jesuit) observer echoed the common perception of Malays as “the most valiant in war that there are in these parts, and they also have this opinion themselves, saying that their city not being surrounded with walls, like the Lacedemonians their bodies would serve as wall and rampart.”<sup>16</sup>

A more fundamental explanation may be the South-east Asian view that manpower rather than fixed capital was the principal asset of a king, a powerful leader, or a city. In an extremity, the inhabitants of a

city under attack would flee with their jewellery to the surrounding jungle, returning to rebuild their burned or ransacked houses once the attackers had departed. When the Portuguese attacked Melaka in 1511 the Malay elite put up a strenuous resistance, but as this began to fail the Sultan “drew himself off from the city, a day’s journey, taking with him some of the Malay merchants and captains and governors of the land ... being of the opinion that Afonso Dalboquerque simply meant to rob the city and then leave it and sail away with the spoil.”<sup>17</sup>

A century later the flourishing port-city of Inderagiri could not be found by an English party returning to trade there some years after an Acehnese attack. The whole population had fled the Acehnese three days journey further up the river, and eventually rebuilt the city there (Reid [1988-93] II: 85-90). Johor’s capital suffered a similar series of displacements after Portuguese or Aceh attacks.

The central features of the Malay city were the palace, the major mosque, usually both giving on to a large unpaved public space, and the central market. One major market would always be alongside the mosque in the central area, but sometimes a larger one for wholesale exchanges was located adjacent to the port. Prices of major trade goods were constantly adjusted by bargaining in these markets, just as locally-grown fruits, vegetables and betel prices were fixed in small local markets or street stalls run by women. A small river or stream suitable for washing and the provision of drinking water usually flowed through or by the central palace area. In Melaka the major bridge over this small river was lined with small shops.

Beyond its royal centre, a city was essentially an agglomeration of “compounds” (the English word deriving from Malay *kampung*)<sup>18</sup> of important people surrounded by their retainers and clients. These merchant-aristocrats (*orangkaya*) usually had some recognition from the court as officials, military leaders, or intermediaries through whom people were controlled and taxes levied. In Melaka, for example, the taxes on women’s street-stalls passed to the court through different *orangkaya*, each supervising the quarter in which he lived or had his clients.<sup>19</sup> The law code of Melaka has extensive provisions for the sale or disposal by the king of such compounds, always paying particular attention to the fruit trees growing within them.<sup>20</sup> Houses could be rebuilt quickly or moved, but trees took years of nurturing and were regarded as of greater value by the law.

## The Political System

The city and the state were almost impossible to separate in Malay texts of the period. Both were expressed as *negeri*, a word which had its origins in a Sanskrit word for city, but which had eventually to be pressed into service as the modern term for a nation-state (more often in the formal-sounding *negara*). In modern Indonesian and Malay a city is distinguished as *kota*, but that word clearly meant a fort or citadel in the early modern period. Texts of the early modern period describe as *negeri* every polity from China (the unquestioned world power) to small riverine settlements of a few hundred people. The *Malay Annals* writes *negeri Melaka* when it wants to distinguish the city from its hinterland population – “at that time there were nineteen laksa of people in the *negeri* Melaka itself, apart from the inhabitants of all the coastal [or riverine] districts (*teluk rantau*) and all the tributaries (*jajahan*)”.<sup>21</sup> The *Bustan as-Salatin* written in seventeenth-century Aceh uses *negeri* both for the city-state and for its urban core as opposed to its dependent rural hinterland (*dusun*). Beyond the orchards, fields and districts which comprised this hinterland were other *negeri*, some being regarded as tributary and others not. But there was none of the modern sense of a territorially bounded state of which the city was capital. Sovereignty was inherent in the city itself.

Almost every *negeri* had an hereditary ruler (*raja*). The most influential Melaka-derived Malay texts make much of the loyalty of the Malay to the *raja*, even in a situation of profound provocation. There were sumptuary laws and elaborate ceremonial designed to ensure that the king was elevated far above his subjects and honoured by all. Nevertheless this emphasis on loyalty should be read as a novel attempt to build up the institution of monarchy where it had shallow and fragile roots and was constantly under threat. The social fabric of the “empty Southeast Asian centre” was held together less by states than by elaborate kin and patronage networks. The Malay *negeri* which arose there were essentially built by merchants, and their monarchs ruled either in a conciliar fashion which incorporated a diversity of interests, or they ruled rather briefly.<sup>22</sup>

When the Spanish arrived in Manila in 1570 the city-state was still at an early stage of formation, and Raja Soliman, though treated as a king by Legazpi, insisted to him that “there is no king and no sole authority in this land; but everyone holds his own view and opinion, and does as he prefers” (Blair & Robertson [1903-09] III: 235). Foreign reports on

Melaka show the ruler presiding over a range of powerful merchant-aristocrats of foreign origin, many controlling thousands of “slaves” or retainers. Pasai, the oldest of the Malayo-Muslim city-states, appears to have become notorious for the frequency with which its kings were discarded. The Portuguese witnessed three kings in succession being assassinated during 1516, the mob proclaiming each time a kind of refrain that if God permitted him to be killed it was proof that he was not worthy of ruling (Bouchon [1979] 149). An earlier report alleged:

... the grandees of Pase have ... agreed that whoever kills the king becomes king; and they say that in one day there were seven kings in Pase, because one killed the other and another the other; and ... they say that that is God’s command, so that the kings do not last long in their estate.<sup>23</sup>

Only in one of the city-states was the monarchic principle dispensed with altogether. This was at Banda Neira, the central settlement of a group of the seven tiny volcanic islands of Banda, between Timor and Seram in the eastern Indonesian spice islands. The Banda archipelago prospered in the “long” sixteenth century not just because it was the sole source of the world’s nutmeg and mace, but because “the Bandanese had many junks in which they took their merchandise to Java and Melaka”.<sup>24</sup> Presumably developed by Sino-Javanese and Malay spice-merchants who found it a useful base, it became the principal entrepôt of Maluku, the Spice Islands. It was ruled by an oligarchy of *orangkaya*, merchant-aristocrats who owned ships, controlled large households of “slaves”, and arranged their dealings with foreigners through collegial meetings. They proved particularly difficult for Europeans to deal with. The Portuguese steered clear of Banda and concentrated their spice-gathering efforts further north at Ternate, and despite its small population Banda remained defiantly independent until 1621. The Dutch commander Coen, weary of trying to negotiate with so many, then deployed a powerful fleet to massacre, exile or enslave all its 15,000 inhabitants and turn Banda into a Company-owned nutmeg estate worked by slaves (Villiers [1981]; Hanna [1978]).

A more frequent device to maintain a quasi-oligarchic system giving security to the *orangkaya* was to place a woman on the throne. The Malay-speaking city-states in fact mark a period exceptionally favourable to female rule, even by the standards of Austronesians, probably the ethno-linguistic family

historically most prepared to grant political leadership to women. Despite its “age of commerce” in the fifteenth-seventeenth centuries being also marked by a rise of centralising states and of world religions generally hostile to female leadership, Southeast Asia produced a plethora of queens at that time. Women were on the thrones of Pasai in 1405-34; Majapahit (Java) in 1427-47; Palembang (Sumatra) c.1430-40; Vietnam in 1442-53; Pegu (Burma) in 1453-72; Ternate in 1521-35; Japara (Java) c.1550-75;<sup>25</sup> Patani in 1584-c.1700; Banten (Java) in 1600-05; Sukadana (Borneo) in 1608-22; Jambi (Sumatra) in 1630-55; Kelantan (Malaya) in 1610-71; Aceh (Sumatra) in 1641-99 and Solor (Lesser Sundas) c.1650-70. In most cases (particularly Java, Burma and Patani/Kelantan), these periods of female rule coincided with cosmopolitan trade-friendly regimes and with the most active period for these states in international commerce. In the cases of Pasai, Palembang, Patani, Kelantan, Aceh and Solor successive women were placed on the throne in a pattern which had to be deliberate. Most of these states and traditions never subsequently favoured female rulers.<sup>26</sup>

Of these interesting examples, Pasai, Ternate, Patani, Kelantan and Sukadana were part of the world of Malay-speaking city-states which is my subject, while Jambi, Palembang and Aceh interacted closely with it. We know relatively little about some of the queens. The story of Pasai, as told by Chinese visitors, was similar to that of Japara – a widowed queen demanding vengeance for her murdered husband-king, and in this case promising to marry anyone who did the job.<sup>27</sup> It is plausible to see Pasai and Palembang sharing with Japara the pattern of an indigenous princess marrying a rich foreign merchant (probably Chinese in these cases) and ruling somewhat in his interests.

The queens of Patani and Aceh are, however, the best known, and in these cases there is no doubt that an *orangkaya* oligarchy deliberately decided that a succession of female rulers was the best guarantee against arbitrary tyranny and vainglorious warfare. These two city-states were important entrepôts, Patani being one of the major bases for Chinese traders and Aceh for South and West Asian traders in Southeast Asia. Patani was particularly complex ethnically, with Malay the dominant language and court culture, but Chinese, Thais and Javanese each almost as important as Malay-speakers in the life of the city. In the 1560s there was an important influx of over 2,000 Chinese traders, dismissed as “pirates” by the Ming court, disapproving of unfilial Chinese who settled perma-

nently in Southeast Asia. They greatly increased Patani’s population and trade, and no doubt contributed to the reaction against male rule altogether, after an uneasy period (1564-84) when one tyrannical Sultan was killed in campaigning against Siam and two of his successors met violent deaths at their subjects’ hands (Reid [1988-93] I: 170-1; II: 211-12). Foreign accounts suggest that the leading *orangkaya* then deliberately put the daughter of an earlier ruler on the throne:

It is said that its people were weary of obeying kings who maltreated them, and shook off their yoke. Having forced him who was reigning to descend from the throne, they put in his place a princess, to whom they gave the title of Queen without giving her its authority.<sup>28</sup>

That report was written towards the end of the long period of female rule; the initial motivation may have been rather as the Patani chronicle had it: “there were no sons left [after much blood-letting] – there remained only daughters. Raja Ijau was then installed, and she was the first to become queen here in this country of Patani.”<sup>29</sup> But an early Dutch visitor found that this first queen “has reigned very peaceably with her councillors ... so that all the subjects consider her government better than that of the dead king. For all the necessities are very cheap here now, whereas in the King’s time (so they say) they were dearer by half, because of the great exactions which then occurred.”<sup>30</sup>

The early accounts of this first queen’s rule certainly do not show a figurehead, but rather an Elizabethan kind of referee among the aristocracy, playing them effectively against one another and ensuring that all paid her ultimate deference. The chronicle and the foreign visitors both acknowledged the prominence of great *orangkaya* such as the Bendahara, Datu Besar, Datu Laksamana, Orangkaya Seri Maharaja and Orangkaya Serinara, including at least one rich female *orangkaya*. The Dutch report indicates that the palace continued to be filled with women as was the pattern under male sultans, but they were considerably freer. They were forbidden to marry, “but sleep with whom they please” until or unless they were given in marriage by the Queen (*Ibidem*). In 1616, as she lay on her deathbed, the English factor noted that “the poorer sort stand in great fear of the great men”,<sup>31</sup> suggesting that the oligarchs had developed a regime to their liking, where property laws were strictly enforced and foreign trade flourished. With each subsequent replacement of one queen with another, in 1616, 1624,

1636 and subsequent occasions increasingly difficult to track, the queen did become weaker and more of a figurehead. By 1694, when both European and Malay sources have ceased to be very helpful about a declining Patani, a Chinese captain could report as if the queenship had been transformed into a spiritual symbol of the monarchy.

Since olden days only a woman can become the ruler of Patani. Unlike other countries, however, the queenship is not hereditary. It is possible for a future queen to be born not only among noble families but even in the house of a commoner. Once it becomes known that a future queen has been conceived and born with the auspicious signs of an extraordinary nature which eventually will prove to be the indubitable indication of royalty, then all the population will welcome her as their queen ... The Queen of Patani is expected to strictly maintain her virginity throughout her life.<sup>32</sup>

### Commercial Organisation

Like the medieval and early modern Italian city-states described by Epstein (*supra* 277-93), the Malay *negeri* made possible some crucial commercial innovations because they provided homes to interlocked networks of merchants. We know most about Melaka at its height around 1500, because of careful Portuguese descriptions as well as surviving Malay commercial codes. There was a developed form of commenda, whereby goods or capital were entrusted to travelling merchants and shippers by financiers who remained at home:

“If I am a merchant in Melaka and give you, the owner of a junk, a hundred cruzados of merchandise at the price then ruling in Melaka, assuming the risk myself, on the return [from Java] they give me a hundred and forty and nothing else, and the payment is made, according to the Melaka ordinance, forty-four days after the arrival of the junk in port.”<sup>33</sup>

Other types of contract were also defined in the codes, including one where the merchant or his agent travelled with the ship and paid the shipowner a percentage of the value of his merchandise.

The most financially sophisticated networks of the sixteenth century were Hindu merchant castes such as the South Indian Chettiers and the Gujarati Sharafs, whose activities were noted by Portuguese and Malay sources in both Pasai and Melaka. Castanheda thought them the richest traders in the world.<sup>34</sup> The trust between these mercantile networks made possible a

system of letters of credit (*hundi*), which could be exchanged throughout the Indian Ocean ports where such merchants were settled. Gujarati Muslims were more numerous and widespread in the *negeri*, and were indispensable financial brokers for any who did business there. An able Florentine merchant visited Melaka with one of the first Portuguese fleets, and noted that the Gujarati brokers he found there were “astute and clever merchants, as good as us in all business matters, their cargo ledgers with their lists of bales taken and discharged are all in perfection”.<sup>35</sup>

That these techniques spread to other mercantile communities is clear from the Malay commercial or maritime code itself, and from early European descriptions of the interdependence of Malay and Javanese shippers with Indian and local financiers.<sup>36</sup> Commercial contracts were being carefully written on palm-leaf and paper in Malay and Javanese, because they had to bind members of these various communities together. Although it is difficult to find impersonal banking institutions, there was an established system of credit, whereby Indian financiers and local rulers and officials offered loans at two percent interest a month to the most favoured clients (Reid [1988-93] II: 109-10).

### Slave and Free; Insider and Outsider

It is safe to say that all the Malay-speaking city-states relied on a captive labour force of slaves, for the most part recruited from outside through purchase or conquest. In the dichotomy I find useful for Southeast Asian slavery, the city-states were firmly in the camp of the “open” slave systems, for which slavery was a means of incorporating labour into an expanding system, and manumission was frequent. Barros reported that “You will not find a native Malay, however poor he be, who will lift on his own back his own goods or those of another, however much he be paid for it. All their work is done by slaves.” Where land was abundant, fixed assets vulnerable, and labour in relatively short supply, it was seen as common sense to invest primarily in slaves. A Chinese report noted of Melaka that “they say that it is better to have slaves than to have land, because slaves are a protection to their masters” (Cited in Reid [1988-93] I: 129-30).

The majority of the slaves of Melaka, Pasai, Patani and Brunei appear to have been imported rather than seized in battle. Though all engaged in some raiding on the hunter-gatherers of their immediate hinterland, these city-states grew rich by trade rather than conquest. To Melaka slaves were traded from eastern

Sumatra, Palembang, Sunda (west Java), Madura and Balambangan (east Java), west Borneo, Bali and the eastern Indonesian islands.<sup>37</sup> The largest community of slaves in Melaka, Patani and Brunei in the sixteenth century appear to have been Javanese, not only purchased but also brought to these cities in the retinue of the great merchants who made their base there. The leading Javanese trader of pre-Portuguese Melaka, Utama Diraja (Utumutiraja of the Portuguese), was said to have control of thousands of Javanese slaves, who provided much of the city's skilled workforce.<sup>38</sup>

When the Portuguese took over Melaka, they attempted to replicate the indigenous slave system by taking over the royal slaves for state building projects, and also buying or hiring slaves in the market. They were however surprised by the relative indulgence and autonomy the slaves expected. One Portuguese captain complained: "Melaka is a place like no other ... One has to take care of everything: of the slave, to rear his son; to provide him with clothing for his wife and for himself; one has to pamper him so that he does not run away from Your Majesty" (Cited in Manguin [1983] 209). The costs of labour recorded by European observers were surprisingly high, around ten times a subsistence wage calculated in the amount of rice it could buy (Manguin [1983] 209-15; Reid [1988-93] I: 129-31). The labour market of these cities was in fact a slave market, and the high costs were those of hiring slaves from their owner. But state control was limited over oligarchs who might entice each other's slaves away, while both the jungle and the harbour offered opportunities for runaways. The code of Melaka specified that slaves who escaped by sea to another *negeri* could not be reclaimed, while the only way to recover slaves who fled by land was to pay a ransom to the person who found them, a larger amount for those who had fled further away.<sup>39</sup> Hence the slave owners could not afford to be harsh:

in my opinion slavery is more tolerable in this place [Aceh], than in any other place of my knowledge, for they are not burdened with chains, unless they have given the impression that they wish to escape, or to rebel against those who have them in charge; in eight days he [the king] leaves them four to work for their own profit, in whatever work they favour; so they owe the other four days to the service of the king in such work as he wishes to employ them on.<sup>40</sup>

Two further points need to be made which distinguish this kind of *negeri* slavery from the pattern more

familiar in Europe. Firstly the legal and philosophical boundary dividing slave from free was less well developed than in Greece, let alone the modern Americas. The largest city-states such as Melaka, driven by the example of Islamic law and the needs of property management, were beginning to develop law codes about slaves, but they continued to be called by a variety of names indicating a wide variety of forms of bondage. I have argued that Melaka and some of its urban successors began to generate the creative contrast slave versus free, quite independently of any western influence.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless this distinction marked a brief pinnacle of urban life, and never escaped from the wide variation in types of personal bondage within which it was embedded.

Secondly, slaves tended to be processed from outsiders to insiders through incorporation into the dominant religion and ethos. Insiders too could enter a state of debt-bondage which was conceptually not distinguished from slavery, but these were probably a minority in relatively privileged service of the large households. The Malay-speaking Islamic civilisation of the *negeri* was an expansive one which readily incorporated outsiders of any ethnicity, chiefly through the devices of Islamization and the *lingua franca* of Malay. Manumission must frequently have been part of this process of incorporation, since the Melaka law code gives abundant examples of the status of a freedman and the manner of resolving conflicts about manumission.<sup>42</sup> Although Malay sources never refer to the slave origins of elite figures, Europeans occasionally did so. From Pires we learn that the grandfather of Melaka's *laksamana* (admiral) had been a heathen slave from Palembang who served an earlier Melaka ruler, but eventually "turned Moor".<sup>43</sup> Alexander Hamilton tells of a man aged about 40 whom he met in Aceh in 1694, born in the Andaman ("cannibal") islands, but captured and enslaved by Nicobar islanders when he had participated in a raiding expedition aged about 10. "After he had continued so three or four years, he was carried to Atcheen [Aceh] to be sold for cloth, knives and tobacco, which are the commodities most wanting on the Nicobars. The Atcheeners being Mahometans, this boy's patron bred him up in that religion, and some years after his master dying, gave him his freedom". The boy then became a prosperous trader between Aceh and his homeland, though markedly unsuccessful in his attempts to spread Islam in the Andamans.<sup>44</sup>

The slaves who were distinct enough to be noticed by foreign visitors were those who had not lost their

outsider status. As a Persian visitor noted of Aceh, "These slaves are drawn from every nation and race".<sup>45</sup> This diversity, together with the hope of eventual advancement and emancipation from their patron, stood in the way of any self-consciousness as a distinct oppressed class. But in Melaka in the years before its fall in 1511, and Patani in the early 1600s, there do seem to have been a large enough number of Javanese slaves and dependents to have this effect. A slave revolt developed in Patani in 1613 when one of the Malay-ized oligarchs (*orangkaya*) killed the leader of his Javanese slaves after interrogating him about a reported conspiracy to kill the slave-owning *orangkaya*. The Javanese slaves burned virtually the whole town and then made their escape towards the north.<sup>46</sup>

The "insider" group in Patani at this point was a particularly fragile minority, given the importance of Chinese, Javanese, Japanese and Siamese mercantile groups. The Malay city-states under discussion were markedly plural, with the Malay-speaking Muslim elite identified with the ruling group probably a minority in all cases. But to read the Malay chronicles one might hardly be aware of the "outsiders" except as transient traders. Only by consulting Portuguese sources do we discover that several of the key figures in the *Sejarah Melayu* ("Malay annals") were of Javanese, Sino-Javanese or Indian background, assimilating upward into the ruling group as they gained in influence in the port. The strong Javanese presence in Melaka is also implicitly confirmed by extensive passages of Javanese quoted in the *Sejarah Melayu* as if readers were expected to understand them. One of the other important Melaka texts, the *Undang-undang Laut* (Maritime Code) appears to have been drawn up in Malay by a Javanese-dominated committee of prominent merchants (Reid [1992] 199-200).

The picture given by the Portuguese is that *negeri* such as Melaka suffered militarily from their pluralism, since loyalties were fragmented and only the minority *malayos* (Malays) could be counted on to fight with the king. On the other hand, this pluralism was essential to the functioning of the city-state; foreign merchants were free to trade and accumulate wealth, and only if they "entered Malayness" (*masuk Melayu*) could they constitute a threat to the king in danger of his jealous wrath. The porousness of the Malay insider category was another source of strength. People of every origin were coopted into the category, becoming Muslim and speaking Malay, but the price of this was involvement in the affairs of the court and loyalty to its often fickle raja.

Between the insider court cultures of the various *negeri* there was an acceptance of common culture, within which texts, poets and Islamic scholars circulated. Relations between their rajas were often tense precisely because they competed in the same world. Within the constant theatre of their own courts, each wanted to be seen receiving tribute or homage from other *negeri*, not giving it. The Melaka chronicle contains a revealing example of the games that were played, when Melaka sent an envoy to the older but weaker *negeri* of Pasai. It was usual for the royal letter to be given more honour than its carrier, and to be ushered into the palace where it would be read aloud by an official of the court. But having experienced too often the comforting fiction whereby court officials exaggerated the flowery terms and read greetings from an equal or superior as homage from a younger brother, Melaka decided to send no letter but only an envoy who had learned by heart its contents. When asked "where is the letter? let us take it in procession," he replied "I am the letter; take me in procession".<sup>47</sup>

### The End of the City-States

As suggested above, the particular prominence of the city-state form in Southeast Asia had a beginning and an end. Its end was associated with the rise of European power, though not always in a direct fashion. Melaka (1511), Manila (1571) and Banda (1621) were indeed conquered and occupied by Europeans, while Pasai, Brunei and Ternate were directly affected by them. But the more fundamental new elements which entered Southeast Asia in the sixteenth century and peaked in the seventeenth were the assets which guns and trade wealth brought to centralising kings, and the heightened military competition for trade monopolies which the Europeans introduced.

Aceh, at the tip of northwest Sumatra, was symptomatic of this process though I have treated it as an ambivalent part of the city-state world. It expanded from being a minor *negeri* around 1500 to conquer its rival *negeri* of the northern Sumatran coast – Pidië (Portuguese Pedir), Pasai, Perlak and Daya – between 1520 and 1524. It was enabled to do so because the Portuguese had conquered Melaka and severely disrupted Pidië and Pasai. A host of disgruntled Muslim shippers were alienated enough to throw their money and arms behind any power which could protect them against the Portuguese. For most of the sixteenth century Aceh could be considered still to be a forced confederation of city-states, as Pasai and Pidië retained some of their autonomous *negeri* character under

Aceh control. The long struggle against Portuguese Melaka, and then against other more effective monopolists in the form of the Dutch, nevertheless led Aceh in a more absolutist direction. Two ruthless rulers in the period 1589-1636 produced a centralised state powerful enough to conquer a variety of other *negeri* on the Peninsula, to seek to monopolise pepper-sales, and to dominate its hinterland in a manner radically different from the city-states. A similar process on the part of Siam led to the conquest and demise of Patani. One of the Java city-states, Jakarta, was conquered by the Dutch in 1619, but the majority were absorbed by an expansive Mataram in the period 1615-25.

For the two centuries when the city-state was the dominant form of Southeast Asia's "empty centre", however, a distinctly urban culture was developed in the Malay idiom. This culture was innovative and dynamic in the manner of trade-oriented city-states in the Mediterranean or northwestern Europe. It was held together by a tense kind of "peer polity interaction",<sup>48</sup> whereby each *negeri* needed others as trading partners but competed with them fiercely for status and for trade. The *negeri* were not militarily strong enough to withstand the pressures of European naval power and more absolutist indigenous state forms. These city-states represented a crucial stage in Southeast Asian history, though by reason of the nature of their passing, their heritage proved more profound in the area of religion, literature and culture than in that of commercial and political structures.

## Notes

- Patterson (1991) 20 and *passim*. For a more complex examination of the question in relation to Asia, see Kelly & Reid (1998).
- Griffith & Thomas (1981). The five there represented were Sumerian, Greek, Italian, Swiss/German and Hausa.
- Reid (1980) 235-50; Reid (1983) 13-14; Reid (1988-93) II: 62-131.
- Lombard (1970) and Lombard (1990) esp. II: 135-76; Thomaz (1993); Kathirithamby-Wells (1993); Kathirithamby-Wells (1990) 1-16.
- Subrahmanyam (1990) 7-13 perhaps came closest, conceding that the phenomenon is more a feature of Southeast Asia than of his main concern in India.
- These environmental considerations are spelt out further in Reid (1997) 61-89.
- Ma Huan, *Ying-yai Sheng-lan*: "The overall survey of the ocean's shores", trans. J.V.G. Mills (London: Hakluyt Society, 1970. Reprinted White Lotus 1997) 89-90, 98-9.
- Reid (1988-93) II: 205-7; Reid (1996b) 21-30.
- Scott (1994) 191 hypothesises that Manila may have been founded as a Brunei colony around 1500. I take the view that around 1400 there was a more important infusion of Chinese direct trade and settlement, similar to that in Brunei but on a smaller scale, and that the orientation through Brunei to Melaka came later in the fifteenth century as direct contacts with China ceased: Reid (1996a) 34-5.
- R.O. Winstedt (ed.), "The Malay Annals or Sejarah Melayu," [romanised Malay edition], *JMBRAS* 16, Pt.III (1938) 180, 181.
- The Travels of Marco Polo*, trans. Ronald Latham (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958) 226-8; *Ibn Battuta: Travels in Asia and Africa 1325-1354*, trans. H.A.R. Gibb (London: Routledge, 1929) 273-76.
- Ma Huan, *Ying-yai Sheng-lan* (*supra* n. 7) 109; *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires*, trans. Armando Cortesão (London: Hakluyt Society, 1944) 250, 260.
- Tomé Pires (*supra* n. 12) 238, 98, 107. Reid (1988-93) II: 77.
- Cited in Thomaz (1993) 86.
- De Hikajat Atjeh*, ed. Teuku Iskandar (The Hague: KITLV, 1958) 165-6.
- Pierre du Jarric, *Histoire des choses plus memorable advenues tant ez Indes Orientales, que autres pais de la descouverte des Portugais*, 3 vols (Bordeaux: Millanges, 1608-14), I: 630. I cannot speak (especially in this company) for the Lacedaimonians (Spartans), but there is no concrete evidence that Malays were ever foolish enough to fight in this way.
- The Commentaries of the Great Afonso Dalboquerque*, ed. W. de Gray Birch, vol. 3, (London: Hakluyt Society, 1880) 129.
- Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* I: 385. The interesting history of this word from Malay into local English and Dutch, thence into Anglo-Indian as the enclosed yard of a house, and finally into standard English, is traced in *Hobson-Jobson*, 3rd ed. (London: John Murray, 1903) 240-3. In modern Indonesian *kampung* retains much of its original meaning as an urban quarter, whereas in Malaysia it has shifted to a rural connotation as village.
- Tomé Pires (*supra* n. 12) 274.
- Undang-undang Melaka: The Laws of Melaka*, ed. Liaw Yock Fang (The Hague: Nijhoff for KITLV, 1976) 106-09.
- "The Malay Annals" (*supra* n. 10) 180-81.
- This point, not shared by all my colleagues, is argued more fully in Reid (1988-93) II: 251-3; Reid (1993b) 86-95; and Reid (1998a) 23-38.
- Tomé Pires (*supra* n. 12) I: 143.
- A 1529 Portuguese source cited by Villiers (1981) 733.
- According to the colourful Javanese chronicle tradition this woman, Ratu Kali Nyamat, was a daughter of Sultan Trenggana of Demak, who married a Chinese convert to Islam who dominated the new port of Japara. When her Chinese husband was killed by the ruler of Jipang she vowed to remain naked until the murder was avenged. Jaka-Tingkir of the rising state of Pajang performed the deed, and subsequently became a useful ally guarding her hinterland defence while she concentrated on building Japara into the strongest naval power of Java; de Graaf & Pigeaud (1974) 104-6.
- Reid (1988-93) I: 169-72; II: 265-6. Abdurachman (1988) 571-92.
- Ma Huan, *Ying-yai Sheng-lan* (*supra* n. 7) 116-17; Cowan (1938) 209-11.
- Nicholas Gervaise 1690, cited in A. Teeuw, & D.K. Wyatt (eds.), *Hikayat Patani* (The Hague 1970) I: 11-12.
- Teeuw & Wyatt (1970) II: 173.
- "Journals van Jacob van Neck," in *De vierde schipvaart der Nederlanders naar Oost-Indie onder Jacob Wilkens en Jacob van Neck (1599-1604)*, ed. H.A. van Foreest and A. de Booy, vol. I (The Hague: Linschoten-Vereniging, 1980) 226.

31. *Letters Received from the East India Company from its Servants in the East*, ed. F.C. Danvers and W. Foster, 6 vols. (London: Samson, Low & Marston, 1896-1901) IV: 115.
  32. Ship 66 of 1694, in *The Junk Trade from Southeast Asia: Translations from the Tōsen Fusetsu-gaki, 1674-1723*, ed. Yoneo Ishii (Singapore: ISEAS for ECHOSEA, 1998) 122.
  33. Tomé Pires (*supra* n. 12) 284. Identical arrangements were described in Banten by Dutch observers at the end of the sixteenth century; see Reid (1988-93) II: 50-3.
  34. F. Lopes de Castanheda (ed.), *História do Descobrimento e Conquista da Índia pelos Portugueses* (Coimbra 1924-34) II: 458.
  35. 'Lettera ... scripta in Lisbona e mandata a fra Zuambatista in Firenze', 31 January 1513, in *Storia dei viaggiatori nelle Indie Orientali* (Livorno: Franc. Vigo, 1875) 375-7. Also Reid (1988-93) II: 108-14.
  36. See especially "The Maritime Laws of Malacca", ed. Sir Richard Winstedt, in *Journal of the Malayan Branch, Royal Asiatic Society* 29, iii (1956) 22-59; Thomaz (1966).
  37. Tomé Pires (*supra* n. 12) 145, 148-49, 156, 169, 180, 198, 203, 224, 227, 284.
  38. *Lettera di Giovanni da Empoli*, ed. A. Bausani (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1970) 139-40. João de Barros, *Da Asia* (Lisbon: Regia Officina, 1777; reprinted 1973), Dec. II, pt. 2 livro 6, 52.
  39. Liaw, *Undang-undang Melaka* (*supra* n. 20) 84-87.
  40. Augustin de Beaulieu, "Memoires du voyage aux Indes orientales du Général de Beaulieu," in *Relations de divers voyages curieux*, ed. Melchisedech Thévenot, Vol. II (Paris: Cramoisy, 1666) 108. See also Dampier (1931) 98. The relatively "mild" variant of slavery encountered in Aceh (as elsewhere in Southeast Asia) was used as important comparative evidence as early as Baron de Montesquieu – *The Spirit of the Laws*, trans. T. Nugent (New York: Hafner, 1949) 239.
  41. Reid (1998b) 143-6; Reid (1983) 21-2.
  42. Liaw, *Undang-undang Melaka* (*supra* n. 20) 74-77, 154-55.
  43. Tomé Pires (*supra* n. 12) 249.
  44. W. Foster (ed.), *A. Hamilton: A New Account of the East Indies*, (London 1930) II: 36-7.
  45. *The Ship of Sulaiman*, trans. J. O'Kane (London: Routledge, 1972) 178.
  46. *Peter Floris, His Voyage to the East Indies in the "Globe", 1611-1615*, ed. W.H. Moreland (London: Hakluyt Society, 1934) 94-5.
  47. "The Malay Annals," (*supra* n. 10) 179.
  48. This concept, not to my knowledge yet applied in Asia, is that of Renfrew & Cherry (1986).
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