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The casados of Melaka, 1511-1641: Strategies of Adaptation and Survival

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Abstract
As in other cities of the Portuguese empire in Asia, the *casados* of Melaka played a major role, in politics and in diplomacy as well as from an economical and military point of view. It was the local elite formed by Portuguese family groups or of Portuguese origin who controlled the local commerce, often in conflict with the Portuguese authorities. Its evolution throughout the 16th and 17th centuries reveals an enormous capacity for resistance and adaptation to the surrounding environment, even in the face of a growing isolation and the emergence of the Dutch threat.

Keywords
Portuguese Empire; *Estado da Índia;* Melaka; *casados*.

Resumo
Tal como ocorreu noutras cidades do império português na Ásia, os *casados* de Malaca desempenharam um papel da maior importância, tanto do ponto de vista político e diplomático, como económico e militar. Tratava-se da elite local formada por núcleos familiares portugueses ou de origem portuguesa que controlava o comércio local, muitas vezes em conflito com as próprias autoridades portuguesas. A sua evolução ao longo dos séculos XVI e XVII revela uma enorme capacidade de resistência e de adaptação ao meio envolvente, mesmo perante o crescente isolamento e o surgimento da ameaça holandesa.

Palavras-chave
Império Português; Estado da Índia; Malaca; *casados*.

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Paulo Jorge de Sousa Pinto

Introduction

On 7 September 1641, in Batavia, the commissioner Joost Schouten presented a report to the Council of India of the *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (Dutch East Indies Company, henceforth VOC), describing the situation in Melaka after its recent seizure from the Portuguese, following a long and painful siege[2]. In the document, Schouten makes a full analysis of the city, describing the devastation caused by the war, and by the final military offensive. With a view to increasing the Company's profits, he also suggests adequate steps to fully recover trade activities and restore the trust of mercantile communities. His report depicts scenes of devastation: a city with most of its buildings in ruins or badly damaged, gardens and orchards destroyed, as well as a decimated and fleeing population. The loss of Melaka constituted a major defeat for the Portuguese *Estado da Índia*, yet the Dutch VOC did not reap the fruits they had hoped for when they conquered the city. Despite its success, the Dutch military campaign was very costly in terms of both human and material resources, and the spoils of the final plunder were much lower than expected. Instead, the capture of Melaka from the Portuguese was largely a moral victory that bore psychological and diplomatic results because the VOC's prestige among Malay sultanates and neighbouring powers grew substantially. However, more so than it being a success for the Dutch forces, the final outcome of the initiative was the victory of a "black trinity": war, hunger, and disease (Borschberg, 2010).

One of the most interesting questions regarding Schouten's report is the idyllic tone he adopted in describing the situation of Melaka *before* the siege. It is probable that the author, unfamiliar with the city before the Dutch conquest, was induced to rely excessively on local informants. His sources were residents of Melaka, who, as such, were clearly traumatized by the contrast between a vanished past, a painful present, and an uncertain future. Schouten claims that the city had previously been inhabited by more than 20,000 Christians, divided into what he called "blacks", "mestics" and "Portuguese", spread over the two suburbs of the citadel and living "happily under the shade of coconut trees and surrounded by beautiful gardens and pleasure grounds". Upriver also, beyond the suburbs, an area of pastoral tranquility extended across 8 to 10 miles

[2] Schouten's report of his visit to Melaka in Leupe, 1936, pp. 69-144.

"mostly covered with big fruit orchards, beautiful meadows or pasture grounds for cattle, and extensive rice fields under cultivation". In the direction of the chapel of Our Lady of Guadalupe, 4 miles outside of the city, the panorama painted was similarly idyllic (Leupe, 1936, p. 88).

However, the reality of the city was far more complex. It involved, on the part of the Portuguese, a long process of adaptation to the political and social realities of Southeast Asia, a region that was potentially hostile and far-removed from the centres of power of the *Estado da Índia*. The time span of Portuguese domination in Melaka reflected a process of survival, based on delicate balances, adaptations and adjustments, and where the local elite – composed of both Portuguese and the descendants of Portuguese, commonly known by the generic term of *casados* (literally "married men") – played a fundamental role.

The aim of this paper is to outline the main features of evolution of the *casados* of Melaka throughout the 130 years of Portuguese rule, focusing on their distinctive aspects regarding other cities of Portuguese Asia and underlining their internal dynamics.

1. The strategic decisions of Afonso de Albuquerque

Melaka was under Portuguese rule for 130 years, from 1511 to the final Dutch siege in 1641. The conquest of the city in 1511 was the result of a decision taken by the Portuguese Governor Afonso de Albuquerque to seize an opportune occasion – rescuing, from Melakan captivity, a group of Portuguese men who had belonged to Diogo Lopes de Sequeira's expedition – in order to establish a solid position in the sultanate, either by diplomatic or military means. The famous name of Melaka had spread all over Maritime Asia, as well as across Europe, and ever since the voyage of Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese fleets had brought back news and information about its wealth to Lisbon. King Manuel I longed to make contact with the city, as this would give the Portuguese access to China and the Spice Islands, as well as keep the Spanish from interfering in the region, as he had already reminded the Viceroy D. Francisco de Almeida as far back as 1506[3].

The importance of Melaka as a port city went far beyond local or regional significance. It was a veritable trade emporium with a global dimension, mostly

[3] Letter from the King to the Viceroy D. Francisco de Almeida, 1506, in Pato (ed.), 1884, III, pp. 269-270.

due to its exceptional position in the straits that controlled the main passage connecting two worlds: the Bay of Bengal, India, and the Middle East on one side, and the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago, China, and Japan on the other. The Portuguese had arrived in Asia only recently, and Melaka would therefore be an excellent base for the spice trade. As a truly global *share point*, Melaka controlled a fundamental hub of long-distance Asian trade; it also provided ideal access to a wide range of commodities (Pinto, 2015).

Afonso de Albuquerque's expedition to Melaka was the outcome of both his duty to follow royal orders on the one hand, and his own personal plan to establish strong and lasting foundations for the Portuguese presence in Asia on the other. Albuquerque was aware of his limited resources, which contrasted with the vastness of Maritime Asia and the power of his competitors and enemies; it was therefore important to concentrate forces in a few specific, strategic points. As the Portuguese were mostly interested in ports and maritime connections, the 1511 military move was, in essence, the conquest of a trade port that ensured access to routes and goods.

However, Melaka was not only a port city; it was also the head of a vast and complex body. Throughout the 15th century, the Malay sultans had managed to establish a network of political allegiances on both sides of the Straits that were anchored in Islamic solidarity, dynastic connections to several neighbouring kingdoms, and the ideological primacy of the Sultan's own lineage dating as far back as the Sri Vijaya empire (Taylor, 1999, p. 175). The sultans also counted on the ancestral obedience of the local population – known under the general name of *Orang Laut*, literally "Sea People" – who controlled the labyrinth of canals and connections between the tip of the Malay Peninsula and the Strait of Singapore (Andaya, 1975, pp. 45-47). It was a political, social, and ideological mix that counterbalanced the apparent vulnerability of the Sultanate of Melaka and vested the sovereign with territorial solidity, prestige, and economic force.

The Portuguese were unfamiliar with these features and showed no interest in the Sultan's territorial empire, which remained unaltered after his defeat and subsequent escape from Melaka (Thomaz, 1994, p. 215; 1994b, p. 568). This lack of interest was evident in the way Albuquerque dealt with the social complexity he inherited: He left the Sultan's territories and network of vassals intact, as well as the old social structure, i.e., the Sultan's slaves and servants, who passed over to the Portuguese authorities and were allowed to keep their status, at least for some time (Thomaz, 1994c, pp. 274-275).

Afonso de Albuquerque may have miscalculated the political consequences of conquering the city. His confidence in the power of the Portuguese ships and warfare, as well as the pressure to gain access to the Spice Islands and to China,

may have induced him to take the risky option of an aggressive approach rather than trying to reach an agreement with the Sultan, which would have been the usual practice elsewhere in Asia. Albuquerque did, however, consider the possibility of giving over the governance of the city to the King of Siam in exchange for his help in the conquest, a sign that he was aware of the risks and difficulties in maintaining Melaka over a long time[4]. Later sources suggest that King Manuel I might possibly have agreed to give back the city to the Sultan, as long as the Portuguese were allowed control of the port[5].

Once the Portuguese took Melaka, they had to ensure its survival. The measures taken by Albuquerque were mostly pragmatic and intended to maintain the status quo of the city. To that effect, he adopted a policy of low customs duties; he upheld the tradition of keeping jurisdictions and regencies separate; and he simplified the administrative processes of the different communities, turning two important political positions of the Malay sultanate, the *Bendahara* and the *Tumenggung*, into leaders of the main merchant groups of the city (Pinto, 2012, pp. 203-213). Albuquerque was also aware that Melaka was at risk of becoming isolated, and that it depended totally on the exterior, that is, food supplies imported from Java, Burma and other regions. He therefore tried to ensure the future of the new conquest not only by building a fortification, but also by ensuring geopolitical viability. To that effect, Albuquerque sent immediate diplomatic missions and messengers to different kingdoms and neighbouring sultanates in order to calm the spirits, establish trade contacts, attract merchants and capital, and safeguard the survival of the city (Lobato, 2000, pp. 25-27).

2. *Melaka and the* Estado da Índia

In Melaka, Albuquerque did not implement the customary policy of creating the social stratum known as *casados*, i.e., mixed marriages or relationships between resident Portuguese men and Asian women. This was an important difference to other port cities under Portuguese control on the west coast of India. In a letter to the King in 1512, Albuquerque mentions 200 *casados* in Goa, and 100 each in Cochin and Cannanore respectively[6], while leaving open the

4 Letter from Rui de Brito Patalim to the Governor Afonso de Albuquerque, 5 February 1514, in Sá, 1954, p. 43.

5 'O Tombo do Estado da Índia' by Simão Botelho in Felner, 1868, pp. 104-105.

6 Letter from the Governor Afonso de Albuquerque to the King, 1 April 1512, in Pato, 1884, I, p. 63. See slightly different figures to 1514 in Xavier, 2007, pp. 93-94.

question as to how exactly the *casados* of Melaka were to be established in the first place. This may have been due to a lack of opportunity or time, or simply because Albuquerque was busy trying to solve more urgent problems during his brief stay in Melaka; he therefore merely suggested the possibility of establishing such a stratum to King Manuel, having reserved a space next to the fortress for "peoples of those parts who would want to live here, and *casados*, they will settle there"[7]. The matter was therefore postponed, without a clear strategy as to what policy or model to adopt.

At that very time, the embryonic *Estado da Índia* was going through a period of instability, defined by oscillating and undefined policies, as well as by confrontations between parties and factions that degenerated into a near civil war. Not only did the Viceroy Lopo Soares de Albergaria substantially change Albuquerque's strategic lines, but the death of King Manuel I and the ascension to the throne of King John III in 1521 caused a new inflection in the directions and global options of the *Estado*. The anarchy lasted for some time, with the simultaneous presence of two Governors and two opposing fields. It only came to an end in 1529 with the arrival in India of the Viceroy Nuno da Cunha.

These political problems involved the whole *Estado da Índia*. Melaka was, however, distant from Goa and therefore from the epicentre of this turbulence, and it evolved towards solving its own, specific problems: ensuring economic prosperity and trade flows by attracting Asian merchant communities; strengthening diplomatic contacts and ties with neighbouring sultanates and kingdoms; keeping Melaka supplied with provisions; safeguarding the social order; providing for the smooth operation of the port; and, lastly, ensuring the safety of navigation and of the city in view of the incursions by the Malay Sultan who, after fleeing the city in 1511, remained a permanent threat. Until the mid-16th century, a broad pragmatic policy of adaptation to local conditions prevailed. It was especially up to the military authority of the city (the "Captain") to define the daily norms of conduct. Grievances were inevitable and complaints frequent, not only from the Asian merchants but also from the Portuguese settled in Melaka.

There is, unequivocally, something contradictory and paradoxical about Melaka in the 16th century that cannot be explained simply by calculations of material and human resources. It was, fundamentally, a story of adaptation and survival in a frequently hostile environment; of competition with rivalling port cities for the same trade, the same products, and the same merchant

7 *Ibi*, p. 53.

communities. Portuguese Melaka had no nearby bases of support, no reliable or lasting allies, nor military capacity to guarantee its safety in times of crisis. On the contrary, in an era of slow communications that were entirely subject to the pace of the monsoons, the city depended upon relief to arrive with fleets from India and, at times, from as far as Portugal.

The isolation and dependence of Melaka on the outside world; on maritime connections; and on supplies from neighbouring kingdoms on the one hand, as well as the city's structural weakness within the region on the other, made it necessary to resort to strategies of adaptation and adjustment. The first and most obvious was to seek a balance between its closest and fiercest rivals: the sultanates of Aceh to the west, and that of Johor to the east. It meant preventing, at all costs, an alliance between the two powers. This was done by promising alternating support for one and the other, and by fomenting and exploiting the mutual rifts and suspicions (Pinto, 1996, pp. 117-121). The Portuguese used this same strategy on other occasions against other powers and kingdoms, such as the Javanese sultanate of Japara. In 1551, they were able to undo the Johor-Japara alliance in a joint strike on Melaka. Equally, in the 1570s, the initial Japara support for one of the Acehnese offensives against Melaka was neutralized by the Portuguese (Couto, 1975, p. 236).

This strategy entailed the restricted use of warfare; it was limited to defensive and retaliatory actions and always in maritime or coastal contexts with the intention of re-acquiring the position and status prior to the crisis. Direct attacks and landings were rare, and always directed against the former sultan of Melaka and his descendants, as occurred in Bintang in 1526, and in Johor Lama in 1587. No expeditions of territorial conquest ever took place, nor any permanent occupation of territories, or attempts to repeat the events of 1511 in other cities. While plans to that effect were drawn up, and opinions voiced – and some even argued in favour of conquering Aceh, who, from the 1530s onwards, emerged as the most relentless enemy of the Portuguese – none of this was ever actually undertaken (Pinto, 2012, pp. 68-78). The Viceroy D. Martim Afonso de Castro's landing in Aceh in 1606 was an exception to this general rule and took place within extraordinary circumstances. Attacking the Sultanate's capital was not part of the initial plans, which aimed at expelling the Dutch from the region. His decision to strike was made on the spot and resulted in disaster (Queirós, 1699, pp. 334-337).

The Portuguese strategy involved skillful and attentive diplomacy. It prioritized the use of communication channels, as well as circulating information via formal and informal embassies and legations. It also involved various diplomatic agents, such as the Captain, the Bishop, the *Bendahara*, or the

Tumenggung. The offices of the *Bendahara*, being representatives of the Hindu *Keling*, as well as those of the *Tumenggung* as representatives of the Muslim merchant communities, gradually lost these functions that had initially been determined by Afonso de Albuquerque. They did, instead, go on to play an essentially diplomatic and intermediary role with the Sultanate of Johor, as well as the people from Minangkabau (Sumatra) who had settled in Melaka's hinterland[8].

Lastly, it is important to consider the priority given to trade and business ventures to the detriment of ideological prejudices. Attempts to obtain contacts and support from non-Muslim kingdoms and powers – a policy that had marked the early period of Portuguese presence in the region – soon dwindled as Islam permeated Sumatra, Java, and the Eastern Archipelago. The Portuguese in Melaka were soon forced to consider establishing partnerships and alliances with Muslim powers without incurring disruption or inconvenience. On the other hand, the precepts of the Catholic Reform did not affect the city, where, for instance, the Inquisition was never established. It was widely known that Melaka was a refuge for New Christians (who in fact worked as trade agents and middlemen at the Captains' service), and there were complaints against the Bishop for permitting public celebrations of Hindu ceremonies[9].

As a direct result of its isolation and the distance that separated it from India, Melaka was forced to adopt a flexible approach as well as adaptive abilities. Ironically, this turned out to be an advantage, since the situation of self-government that marked daily life in the city not only provided room for manoeuvre for the local elites and more freedom for private business ventures; it also allowed practical solutions to be adopted and managed, despite contravening royal guidelines. In many cases, these solutions were imposed by the Captains, who, during some periods, held discretionary and almost absolute power and used it to their own advantage. This meant taking decisions and making profitable agreements that were, however, harmful to Melaka's own interests and safety, often at the cost of the Royal Treasury, of the merchant communities that frequented the city, and of the residents themselves. While

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[8] Letter from the Governor Fernão de Albuquerque to the King, 18 February 1622, in Rego, 1974, p. 393; *Ibi*, 20 February 1622, in *Ibi*, p. 407.

[9] Letter from the Viceroy D. Francisco da Gama to the King, [1600], Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, *Reservados*, cod. 1976, fl. 131; letter from the *ouvidor* of Melaka to the King, 17 December 1588, Archivo General de Simancas, *Secretarias Provinciales*, liv. 1551, fl. 469v. See Pinto, 2012, pp. 8 and 182.

the wide margin for manoeuvre and the freedom of movement that the Captains enjoyed did allow them to solve the occasional conflict with neighbouring kingdoms, most of the time it led to abuse and extortion, followed by reprisals that put the safety of the city at a serious risk[10].

3. The casados *of Melaka*

Throughout the first decades of the 16th century, the Portuguese authorities were generally reluctant to adopt policies that clearly favoured the settlement of Portuguese in Melaka. It did not occur in other cities of *Estado da Índia*, as seen above, like Goa and Cochin, the former because of its emerging central role as capital of Portuguese Asia and the latter due to the early association between local *casados* and the King of Cochin in inter-regional trade, from imports of timber destined to shipbuilding or horses from Hormuz, to exports of Indian textiles to Southeast Asia (Malekandathil, 2000-2001, pp. 385-391).

In Melaka, however, it would have meant allowing soldiers to exchange their military life for commerce, and would thus have exacerbated the permanent lack of human resources in the far outpost of the Portuguese empire in Asia whose horizons were gradually extending. Whenever soldiers were granted freedoms, they tended to abscond in droves from the official jurisdiction of the *Estado da Índia*, resulting in a shortage of service in the fleets and fortresses. The disastrous "great release" promoted by the Viceroy Lopo Soares de Albergaria (1515-1518) left serious marks and resulted in measures to control and monitor the soldiers. Melaka, as must be understood, was at the core of an immensely vast area where such control mechanisms were scant or non-existent. From the Bay of Bengal to the South China Sea and the "Mediterranean" Malay-Indonesian Archipelago, the official institutions of the *Estado da Índia* were scarce and dispersed. They existed, with some complexity and size, in the city of Melaka only in the form of administrative, fiscal, and justice officials; permanent defence forces; a fortress; as well as ecclesiastical structures.

This initial reluctance by the Portuguese authorities to stimulate the settlement of soldiers in Melaka was visible, for example, in regulations that penalised commerce carried out by Portuguese by imposing on them higher customs duties than those imposed on Asian merchants. In 1538, one Captain of Melaka even proposed that all Portuguese who earned more than 2,000 *cruzados* should be expelled from Portuguese Asia (Thomaz, 1994b, p. 574). Regarding

[10] See Pinto, 2012, pp. 2-10, 187-191, and Lobato, 1999, pp. 180-197.

the *casados*, the first Captain of the city, Rui de Brito Patalim, reported to the King in 1514 that there were only seven or eight "honourable men" in Melaka (by which he meant men who had married Asian women), but added that there were many others ready to do the same: "If the clamp is loosened, all of them will marry here, because the land is auspicious for that". In the absence of clear instructions, the Captain withheld authorisation for more Portuguese to settle in Melaka and asked the King for "orders and how should I deal with them"[11].

In 1525, the *casados* of Melaka wrote to King John III asking for a series of benefits that would be vital for the prosperity of the small community. The petitioners claimed that the actual survival of the city under Portuguese control would depend upon the King granting them the privileges they asked for. Invoking the services rendered in previous years, i.e., the defence of Melaka and the conversion of the so-called "infidel" women whom they had married, the *casados* called on the monarch to grant them the same rights and privileges as the residents of Goa, "for here we are not less worthy, nor of fewer services, nor of less quality than them". The complaint, invoking comparison with Goa, culminated in a request for five major privileges: the right to organize themselves in a City Council; the right to choose, elect and control different administrative and port offices; the right to own the lands and gardens on the outskirts of Melaka that had belonged to the Malay Sultan; exclusivity of the commerce of supplies for the city; and finally, freedom to sail to any city or fortress of the *Estado da Índia*[12]. These five areas, present in the document, constituted a regular pattern of demands by the *casados* until the Dutch capture of Melaka over a century later. This confirms their role as local elite with a territorial base, attempting to safeguard their rights and freedoms in the face of the Captains' tentacular power which, by this point, tended to hinder their movements and interfere in all of the city's commerce. It also shows their attempts at maintaining a minimum set of privileges and control over port activity, and over the administration of daily life in Melaka.

The number of *casados* slowly increased over the 130 years that Melaka was part of the Portuguese empire in Asia: from less than ten in the 1530s, to 100 in 1580, and 124-600 in the 17th century[13]. While these numbers show a gradual increase, they also reflect some contradictions and confusion regarding

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11 Letter from Rui de Brito Patalim to the King, 6 January 1514, in Sá, 1954, p. 64.

12 Letter from the *casados* of Melaka to the King, 12 August 1525, in Thomaz, 1964, vol. II, pp. 170-173.

13 Data and sources in Thomaz, *Ibi*, vol. I, pp. 200-201; Macgregor, 1955, p. 12, note 37; Subrahmanyam, 1988, p. 72; Pinto, 2012, pp. 184-185.

demographic figures. In fact, as the "Portuguese" of Melaka gradually lost their defining characteristics and became diluted with the local and regional environment, it became increasingly difficult to trace a line of separation between different social groups: "Portuguese", "casados", "residents" or "Christians of the land" were now blurring notions describing mixed local elites. In 1606, when Johor joined a Dutch army led by Cornelis Matelieff on a joint attack on Melaka, an anonymous Dutch source (based on information provided by a captured Catholic clerk) estimated Melaka's population to be 11,400 souls, cautioning, however that "in this total, there were probably about 300 whites; the rest were half-breeds, natives and blacks, both slaves and free"[14].

The question of definition and exact numbers is exacerbated and rendered confused by the constant mobility of the communities of Melaka; this accounts for the fact that demographic figures presented by authors with some knowledge and permanence in the land – like the Portuguese-Malay Manuel Godinho de Erédia – are generally higher than those presented by visitors, or by those who obtained information from third parties (Pinto, 2012, pp. 184-185). The difficulty in globally evaluating Melaka's population, both before and after the Portuguese conquest, is a long-standing issue that continues to divide scholars and historians alike (Ptak, 2004).

The *casados* of Melaka, who, in 1640, endured the Dutch siege for several months, were a substantially different community from the first group of residents who wrote to King John III in 1525. In the intervening century, communities had adapted to local conditions, inter-married, and established deep roots in the Malay world. The Portuguese of the initial post-1511 years, by contrast, were newcomers to a strange world which, to them, looked both attractive and hostile, while the survivors of the fall of Melaka in 1641 had become perfectly adapted to their environment and thus rapidly adjusted to the new challenges placed by the hegemonic and triumphant Dutch VOC. Miscegenation as early as the first decades of the 16th century rose rapidly, especially extra-maritally. As several sources of the period reveal – causing outrage among the Catholic missionaries – the acquisition of large numbers of women slaves by the Portuguese of Melaka was common. In 1550, a Jesuit reported they used to buy "herds of slave men and women, as if they were sheep", and one of them "had 24 women of different casts, all his captives, and all of them he used"[15].

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14 'Description on the city of Melaka' in Borschberg, 2015, p. 214.

15 Letter from Nicolau Lanciloto, 5 December 1550, in Thomaz, 1964, vol. I, p. 209, note 1.

The gradual growth of a community of Portuguese *casados* settling in Melaka brought about a more rapid increase in family and patronage structures. These descendants of Portuguese men demanded official recognition of their status and privileges, just like other small elites of typical 'colonial' societies – both in Portuguese Asia and elsewhere, such as in South America, for instance – were also trying to achieve. The Crown's official endorsement of conversion to Catholicism – unlike in the early days – facilitated and accelerated this tendency of claiming rights and privileges from the Crown. The scenario described by Joost Schouten in 1641 (also evident in the descriptions of Manuel Godinho de Erédia and António Bocarro, among others), shows the merging of the Portuguese, not only from a demographic point of view, but also in terms of space occupation. This broader social environment included groups vaguely described as "Christians", "mestizos", or "vassals". In the absence of well-defined neighbourhoods or clear hierarchical power structures, such as in Spanish Manila in the Philippines, for example, there was no clear line of separation when it came to the organization and administration of the physical space of the city (Pinto, 2010, pp. 279-284).

However, indicators persisted as to a difference between two groups. On the one hand, a more restricted core of "Portuguese" families, commonly referred to as "white *casados*" who constituted the local elite of "neighbours" or "residents", with political influence, economic power and social prestige. A text from 1626 provides a list of their names, 124 in all, distributed among the various parishes of the city[16]. About the same time, the Flemish Jacques de Coutre pointed out the cohesion of this group and stated that "nothing is done to bring them to justice", for "they are all relatives and godparents [to each other's children]" (Borschberg, 2014, p. 266). On the other hand, there was a more fluid and undefined group of the "Christians of the land", with less economic power and influence. In the decade of the 1630s, while there was a less acute disparity between both strata than in earlier periods, the chronicler António Bocarro still distinguishes between "white *casados*" and "Christian *casados*" (Bocarro, 1990, p. 251).

A whole process of change, therefore, can be seen to occur across an entire century. The scenario that during the early times was so unfavourable to the growth of the community of *casados* of the land, as described above, gradually changed over the second half of the 16th century. In 1552, at last, the King authorized a City Council to be established, and he granted Melaka a set of

[16] Biblioteca Pública de Évora, codex cxvi/2-3, fls. 52v.-54v., in Subrahmanyam, 1988, pp. 76-79.

privileges and rights similar to those of the city of Évora in Portugal. Six years later, the Diocese of Melaka was created. The Catholic Reform movement – which strongly encouraged missionary activities across Asia in the ambit of the *Padroado Português do Oriente* (Portuguese Patronage of the East) – created an atmosphere of religious discrimination and pressure, propitious for conversions to the Catholic faith. Melaka became the main stopping place, as well as the point of intersection par excellence, of the missionary circuits of Indonesia and the Far East, resulting in the settlement of the various religious orders: Jesuits, Franciscans, Dominicans, and, later, Augustinians. The initial preference given to Asian merchant communities over commerce carried out by the Portuguese was inverted, and by the end of the century, the latter benefitted from a much lighter taxation regime (Pinto, 2012, p. 179, note 48). Melaka became more and more a "Portuguese" city, and conversions to the Catholic faith occurred ever more frequently, mainly among the lower social strata (Lobato, 1999, pp. 80-81).

In this way, Melaka gradually changed from an essentially mercantile and cosmopolitan city (following the legacy of the Malay sultanate) into a city with a pronounced 'colonial' character, with a firmly established local elite, as well as a strong component of religious discrimination, both in its social hierarchy and in its regular administration. However, the aspirations of this elite of *casados* and their dependants to participate more actively in the profitable Melaka trade were curtailed, as evidenced by successive complaints to the Portuguese authorities in Goa and Lisbon. These grievances were mostly directed at one target: the Captains and the pressure they exerted over all trade in the city. Not only did the Captains monopolise the most lucrative forms of commerce, they also controlled and levied taxes on small businesses, both local and regional[17].

Unable to confront the growing power of the Captains, who held the highest position of authority in a city far removed from Goa and the centres of Portuguese power in the Indian Ocean, the *casados* became increasingly ostracised from the most important trade of Melaka, i.e., the spice trade with the Moluccas and other regions of the Archipelago. In the end, they focused on another set of commodities, less lucrative in terms of absolute yields but essential nonetheless for the survival of the city, and one which gave them a considerable margin of autonomy and power: food provisions. In fact, not only did they operate the gardens in the suburbs and surroundings of the fortress, they also controlled the importation of supplies from distant places. This was mentioned by travellers and chroniclers who, mostly unfamiliar with the

[17] See the "Notes" issued by the city of Melaka, 1599, in Pinto, 2012, doc. 10, pp. 300-302, and letter from the Bishop of Melaka to the King, 31 December 1588, *Ibi*, doc. 6, p. 296.

delicate internal balance of Melaka and the distinctive characteristics of its social structure, blamed the cost of living, as well as the permanent shortage of provisions in the city, on the *casados*[18].

4. A military elite

At the turn of the 17th century, the *casados* of Melaka exerted a more or less concealed and disseminated control over the city. They often conflicted with the more prominent official authorities, such as the Captains, the Royal officials, and the Bishop [19]. Moreover, as local society began undergoing the transformations mentioned above, the *casados* started accruing influence and prestige due to the role they played in the defence of Melaka. In the wake of the escape of the Malay Sultan and his attempts to recover his former capital, the threats to the city's security remained throughout the years following the conquest by Albuquerque. Not only had the Sultan's successors established a new sultanate, Johor, in the near proximity of Melaka, which continued to threaten Portuguese navigation and the safety of the city; a new and formidable enemy emerged and became the most serious concern for the Portuguese in that region: the sultanate of Aceh. It had assumed the role of the Islamic vanguard and champion against the Portuguese and their trade structures, and, after 1538, attempted to conquer Melaka on several occasions.

Melaka was hampered by a permanent shortage of soldiers, as well as by scant military and naval resources in general, and thus could not fully guarantee defending the city against external threats. Furthermore, it relied on the assistance from Goa, which, in turn, was conditioned by the pendular pace of the monsoons, as well as by limited means of communication and transportation. Melaka's survival, therefore, increasingly depended on its internal resources, both military and diplomatic. In both these areas, the *casados* played a fundamental, if not exclusive role, and thus became preeminent protagonists of Melaka's defence[20]. Yet Melaka was not a unique case in the Portuguese *Estado da Índia*: in Bassein, Daman, and Goa, local *casados* acted as a

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[18] See Borschberg, 2014, pp. 264-266; Bocarro, 1876, p. 195; Relação do Estado da Índia, in Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, Lisbon, *Misc. Mss. do Convento da Graça*, cx. 16, t. 6 F, fl. 103.

[19] Of relevance here is the conflict between the *casados* and the Bishop D. João Ribeiro Gaio, as described in San Antonio, 1988, pp. 92-98.

[20] See the examples of António de Andria, António Fernandes de Ilher, and Fernão da Costa in Pinto, 2012, pp. 226-229.

second-line army, too (Rodrigues, 1998, p. 344), despite the traditional mistrust by the authorities, namely the viceroys, who considered them more concerned with their own business than with safeguarding the interests of the Crown (Xavier, 2007, pp. 95-96).

Given the specific characteristics of Melaka, however, their importance was of even greater significance there: During the siege and attack from Aceh in 1568, and those between 1573 and 1575, it was the *casados* who proved to be the decisive force in Melaka's fortunes as assistance from India was delayed and, when it did come, not conclusive to military success.

In the late 16th century, in addition to Melaka's position as trade emporium, the city increasingly became a foothold for Christianity in East Asia, an interface, as it were, for the missionary circuits in Asia, as well as an important military base. This was particularly relevant in times of war, amid mounting concerns for the city's defence. This military dimension, however, went far beyond fortifying and reinforcing the city's defensive structures; it also led to a kind of militarisation of local communities in addition to those of the *casados* and their network of dependants (the overwhelming number of slaves). The relevance of the latter in Melaka's military and defensive capabilities cannot be understated. In 1621, the Governor of India reported to the King that according to the Bishop of Melaka, the proportion of *casados* to slaves was around 1 to 25[21]. Shortly afterwards, the same Bishop wrote that there were no more than 75 professional soldiers in the fortress, meaning that the defence of the city was left to the *casados* (whom he distrusted) (Subrahmanyam, 1988, p. 72). The chronicler António Bocarro presented a proportion of *casados* to slaves at less than 1 to 10, but reiterated just how well prepared and suitably aggressive the "Portuguese", their dependants, and the "Christian *casados*" were (Bocarro, 1990, p. 251).

The pre-eminence and prestige of the *casados* in the social scene of Melaka went far beyond the growing military dimension of the community. They were also fundamental to the other pillar on which the safety of the city rested: diplomacy and a network of links with the neighbouring sultanates, ensuring access to updated information on their movements and plans; in other words, a veritable espionage network. It also left room for diplomatic negotiations through legations and ambassadors that sought alliances, made peace agreements, engaged in business ventures, and negotiated compensation claims. In most situations of great tension and hostility – mainly with the sultanates of

[21] Letter from the Governor Fernão de Albuquerque to the King, 20 February 1621 in Rego (ed.), 1974, p. 226.

Johor and Aceh – it was the diplomacy of the *casados* and their network of contacts that brought about conflict resolution, as well as other advantageous outcomes for Melaka.

The close relations that existed between the *casados* and the regents of the city's Asian communities, the *Tumenggung*, reveal the city's concern with its strategic balance and highlight the importance of diplomacy as vital for its continued survival. This office differed substantially from its earlier role in the first half of the 16th century, as seen above. Throughout the 17th century, the *Tumenggung* acted as intermediary between Melaka and Johor, and as administrator of neighbouring villages in Melaka's hinterland. From 1610 onwards, the position was held by a *casado* named João Lopes de Amoreira, who in 1626 was still resident within the walls of the city (Subrahmanyam, 1988, p. 76).

In this light, the continuous Dutch presence in the region can be seen to have undermined Melaka's importance, since in the eyes of its neighbouring powers it was no longer necessary to follow a policy of compromise with the Portuguese.

5. The fall of Melaka in 1641

As for 1511, the history of Melaka has a *before* and an *after* 1641. The city never recovered from the strain of the prolonged war fought by the *Estado da Índia* against the Dutch VOC. It was a long process *in crescendo* that started with the failed siege of Melaka in 1606, continued with incessant skirmishes and sporadic attacks on the Portuguese navy, and culminated in a policy of systematic blockades after 1636 at the hands of the Dutch Governor General, Anthony van Diemen. The Dutch takeover in 1640, therefore, was the logical and inevitable outcome of a strategy of eliminating Portuguese navigation in the region, and of incorporating Melaka into the political, diplomatic, and commercial network of the Company, which was already a hegemonic power in the Southeast Asian Archipelago.

The siege of Melaka in 1640 and its ensuing fall into the hands of the VOC can be seen as a demonstration of the city's inadequate conditions for survival. Throughout the second half of the 16th century, these were, successfully, based on the *casados* as guarantors of the city's defence and safety. Their capacity for resistance and military action was well suited to the threats that originated in neighbouring sultanates, whose hostility was widely known. Furthermore, their network of patronage, coupled with their contacts in the region, enabled them to carry out effective diplomatic actions, maintain the balance of power, and

diffuse tensions. And yet, all this expertise was rendered futile by the arrival of the Dutch, not only because the VOC's military and naval might was formidable and unprecedented, but also because the diplomatic strategies of the Dutch Company proved to be highly corrosive to the traditional network of complicities and connections which the *casados* had established.

After the systematic destruction carried out by the Dutch and their Malay allies from Johor during the siege of 1641, very little remained of the former glow of Melaka. The population was decimated to a few hundred by war, famine, and disease. In the opinion of Joost Schouten, the Portuguese were now a burden due to their "lazyness and conceit and inability to earn an honest livelihood" (Subrahmanyam, 1988, p. 76). A new Melaka would have to be built, so he argued, shaped according to the political and strategic plans of the VOC, whose heart was located in nearby Batavia. This would be done in accordance with the Company's commercial network, and built on the Dutch parameters of good social order.

The fall of Melaka to the Dutch is usually seen as the origin of a Portuguese diaspora in Southeast Asia. Generally speaking, one may consider that Melaka's residents split into four different groups. The first group, made up of the wealthier elements, was allowed to relocate with all their possessions to Nagapattinam, on the east coast of India. A second group moved to Batavia, the capital of the VOC in Asia, and eventually ended up serving the Company. Others moved to Makassar, where they rebuilt their trade networks and prospered for about two decades until they were expelled by the Dutch in 1667. Lastly, an unidentified number of Portuguese stayed in the city after the Dutch conquest (Pinto, 2017, pp. 139-141). It seems that by the 1670s, this local community of about 4,000, living inside the walls of Melaka as well as in surrounding villages, had regained once more a certain level of prominence (Bort, 1927, p. 40; Fernández-Navarrete, 1676, p. 371).

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