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An unknown Portuguese text on Sumatra from 1582


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At the end of the 16th century there existed a precarious balance of power between the Portuguese in Malacca on the one hand and the two Muslim sultanates of Johore and Aceh on the other. The more formidable of these two enemies for the Portuguese were the Acehnese, who repeatedly received military support from the Turks in exchange for large consignments of pepper, which were traded and retraded via the Red Sea as far as Venice. The Portuguese devised quite a number of schemes for breaking the power and disrupting the trade of Aceh, varying in method from a general blockade to conquest, but lacked the material means to implement these. There is a detailed plan for the conquest of Aceh, Derotero y relación que Don Joan Ribero Gayo, obispo de Malaca, hizo de las cosas de Achén, written by the Bishop of Malacca, dating from 1584. This text, which remains as yet to be edited and published, forms part of a larger manuscript which has since 1947 been in the possession of Dr. C.R. Boxer (see Boxer 1950). Almost equally rare is a booklet by Jorge de Lemos dating from 1585 (see De Lemos 1982). This author, too, urges the Portuguese conquest of the North Sumatran sultanate.

The project of the conquest of Aceh was especially popular among the Portuguese at the end of the 16th century. This is evident yet again from a hitherto unknown Portuguese text on Sumatra dating from 1582, of which I managed to get hold of a copy recently through the kind offices of Dr. L.C. Fabião in Lisbon. The work in question is a 19th-century copy from the Biblioteca Nacional in Lisbon, running to nine pages and marked

1 The author is grateful to Drs. M.J.L. van Yperen, associate editor of BKI, for her accurate and elegant English translation of this article. Some relevant background studies to the article are: Boxer 1969a and 1969b, Teensma 1980, and Dunn 1984.
'Caixa 205, no. 23'. It is anonymous and undated, but the year 1582 can be inferred as the date of its first writing from a casually mentioned historical detail.

The text is that of an advisory report addressed to a particular Majesty who was the grandson of King Emanuel of Portugal. This would apply to King Philip II of Spain, who lived from 1527 to 1598. He was crowned King of Spain in 1556, and was proclaimed King of Portugal as well in 1581. The text mentions one Leoniz Pereira, son of the Count of Feira, who had died in Ceuta the previous summer. According to the article about the person by that name on p. 155 of vol. 21 of the Grande Enciclopédia Portuguesa e Brasileira, this person in fact died in Ceuta on 6 April 1581, which allows of the conclusion that 1582 was the year in which our text was written. The Lisbon copy contains the note 'ms. da bibliotheca de S. Lourenço T. 4 f.375' at the end. The name S. Lourenço in all probability refers to Philip II's palace of San Lorenzo del Escorial, lying to the north of Madrid.

Beyond any doubt the text was written in Spain or Portugal, and not in Asia, as the author appears to be informed of recent events in Ceuta and Spain, but to be ignorant of the most recent developments in Malacca. For he mentions four Acehnese attacks on Malacca, referring to the fourth one, in 1568, as the last, in his text of 1582, while actually these had been followed by two more, in 1573 and 1575. Although the author had been in Malacca personally, as he had obtained details of gold-mining in Sumatra from Sumatran merchants there, one does not get the impression that he was present in that city at the time of the Acehnese siege of 1568. A detailed description of this fourth siege is to be found in chapter 22 of Diogo do Couto's eighth Década, which gives the following account of the death of the Sultan of Aceh's eldest son, without, unfortunately, mentioning the latter's name: 'Aquí foi ferido de huma espingardada o filho mais velho de ElRey, da qual depois morreo, o qual se intitulava por Rey de Arue'. [Here the king's eldest son, who bore the title of King of Aru, was wounded by a gunshot, of which he later died.] The name of this prince is mentioned in the anonymous text of 1582, but in such a corrupt form that one can only guess at its correct form. For it is rendered here as 'Marey-seredim', which one might, with a little effort, reconstruct as Xamscudin.

In the following pages I shall reproduce the anonymous text of 1582, as well as a few relevant passages from Jorge de Lemos, along with an English translation. Here the curious spelling of the original text of 1582 has been carefully preserved; I have divided the text into paragraphs and provided punctuation in accordance with present-day norms, however. The authors of both may be classified under the heading arbitrista, for which term the English language unfortunately lacks a satisfactory equivalent, the word 'advisor' being but a poor approximation. The term is defined in the Diccionario as follows: 'Persona que inventa planes o
proyectos disparatados o empíricos, para aliviar la hacienda pública o remediar males políticos'. [Person who devises senseless or empirical plans or projects for relieving the public finances or remediating political problems.] In 16th- and 17th-century Spain and Portugal there were innumerable individuals of this kind, who filled the government offices to overflowing with their scribblings. Numerous of these writings are still to be found in the archives in manuscript form — that is, unless their authors had them printed at their own expense.

Both authors show themselves to have been terrified of Aceh’s political, economic and military power, so that they would have gladly welcomed any attempt at breaking it. They realized that this power flowed from the country’s great mineral wealth and its extensive pepper plantations, which enabled it to secure Turkish military assistance. They were also aware that Portuguese Malacca was providing an obstacle to Aceh’s trade to East Asia, so that this Sumatran state would not rest until it had brought Malacca under its sway. Their remedy against this involved the simple reverse: if Portugal (and Spain) should succeed in conquering Aceh, they would be able to control the whole of the trade of the region. The profits would then flow to their coffers. To provide all this with a moralistic veneer, it was impressed upon King Philip II that this way it would be possible for him to realize his Catholic political aims in Europe, Africa and Asia.

As there were rumours that Aceh was in the middle of a political crisis, the time was propitious for an attack. In the opinion of both authors a force of 3,000 soldiers would suffice to have the nova e santa empresa carried out successfully. The 1582 text gives an exact indication of the time of year in which the expedition should take place. The September monsoon seemed the most appropriate to this author, in contrast to Bishop Ribeiro Gaio, who in 1584 pleaded in favour of the March monsoon. To Jorge de Lemos the conquest of Aceh also seemed highly desirable in order to avert the danger of that country’s blockading the Straits of Singapore with its fleet and obstructing Portuguese shipping to China and Japan, with their rich markets and flourishing Christian communities. Neither of these two authors had an eye for the excesses of his own religion, whereas both stressed the Muslim fanaticism of the Acehnese.

The 1582 text adds no new details to the general picture delineated by the 16th-century Portuguese documents concerning Sumatra. The few brief comments on the Pangerang of Pati, Emperor of Java, Bali and Madura, reflect the ignorance about indigenous political relations in the majority of the islands of Indonesia that was still prevalent in those times. The account is written in a lively style, and contains some interesting

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2 The 1582 text assesses Aceh’s annual pepper production at 20,000 bahar of 4½ quintal each = 90,000 quintal. Jorge de Lemos arrives at the much lower estimate of 30,000 to 40,000 quintal. Godinho states (Godinho 1982:358) that a bahar in Malacca was roughly equivalent to 210 kilogrammes, and a quintal to 51.5 kg.
passages concerning contemporary Sumatran customs. At the same time, these descriptions are marked by the usual distortions that stemmed from general ignorance. Large parts of the island were inaccessible to the Portuguese. The area nevertheless enjoyed their warm attention, which led them to uncritically credit and eagerly note down every rumour about it that reached them. This was how they came to describe the Sumatrans as lazy good-for-nothings who buried their treasures and whose beaches smelt of rotten fish.

*Text A:* Anonymous text of 1582, of which a 19th-century copy is kept at the Biblioteca Nacional in Lisbon (caixa 205, no. 23). Portuguese text, modernized as regards division into paragraphs and punctuation.

Ho que agora pareze ser na Índia mays nesesario ao servçio de Vosa Majestade hee mãodar hao seu Vizorey que — não avemdo nella hopresão importãote — emtemda em tomallo dAchem, porque segundo ho joyzo dos que ho emtemdem e o que cllumemente se ve pello que este imiguu ateeguora tem feytio, e os meos que tem prequirados de se valler de reys estrãoeiros para ser senhor de Malluquo [= Malaca], temo que — se niso houver desquido — que custe depoys muito a Vosa Majestade sostemtallo, e que per via de sua perdieçao — o que Deus não premita — se perqua todo quomersyo daquelle Oriente, como hee Bãoda, Malluquo, Somda, Timor, Chyna, Japãe e houtras muitas mays teras e reynos e hylhas e jemtes a estas, homde, Senhor, vosos vasallos tem ho mays importãote remedio de vyda e vosas allfãodeguas o mor remdimento que de todas has houtras que teeguora são desquobertas; em tãoto que tée na Índia ha da cydade de Guoa — que he ha mor e mays riqua de todas — hos dous terços de seu remdimento comysyte nas naos que lhe vem destas partes.

E como ho intemto deste imiguu dAchem foy fumdado sempre em se fazer senhor deste trato, e aver per seus feytores toda ha drogua de Bãoda e Malluquo, pera que a muita soma de pimenta que tem em seu reyno hefeitue que possaa do Quayro — com quem se quadanno quartea — ter em Judaa feytoria — de que tãobem ao Turquo lhe vem muito proveyto —, hemtemdeo e vyo que por ninhum quazo podya ser sem se primeiro fazer senhor de Mallaqua, por ser a prymcipall porta que fecha toda a naveguaçao deste quomersõo. Pello que jaa per quatro vezes temtou mãodar sobrella, como mãodou; e desta aguora deradeyra veo em pesoa com mays de trezemtas vellas de remo, he outra grão soma de jumqos dallto bordo em que vinhão mãotimentos e monisões pera o mister, sendo aquelle tempo quapitão da fortalleza Dom Leoniz Pereyra, filho do Comde da Feyra, que este verao pasado falleseo em Seyta. Do quall cerqo aprouve a Noso Senhor que se retirou com morte de muitos dos seus, no comto dos quays emtrou ho primsepe Mareyseredim, seu filho mays velho, ha que jaa tinha dado o reino dOoru [= Aru].

Pello nojo e morte do quall fes voto pubrigo em huma mesquita de
numqua ter pazes com jemte cristãa nem dar vida ha homem que profesase tall nome, e de prequirar todollos meos quãotos lhe fosem posyveys pera arrazar ha terra homde a seu filho tirarão a vyda e sãogoe do corpo tão sem piadade, haimda que niso haventurase perder todo seu reyno. Ho que sempre fez emmemtes viveo, de que se seguiu muita opresao ao Estado da Imdia, como Vosa Majestade teraa sabzyo. E segundo ho muito qua-bedall que este imiguo jaa tinha metido e hos meos que pera hefeyto desta vymguãosa comtino busquava, pode bem ser que, se não morera tão cedo, que dera muito trabalho ha Imdia. Pella morte do quall haprouve ha Noso Senhor que tudo sesou, e por não deyxar sosesor no reyno ha aguora amtrre elles muita devização, por allgums mays chegados ao parentesqo hou mays poderosos na tera querer qada um per sua via pretemder o reino. Pello que parese, medeamte Noso Senhor, ser este ho tempo mays propio ao preposito de Vosa Majestade, se nelle quizer entendemder, que todo ho pasado, e com menos poder e custo pera a tomar do que damtes avia mister.

E quãoto ha toda mays tera desta ilha Somatra — ha que Tollomeu e os mays que antigamente della fallavam nomearam per Trapobana, que dysta per graduação de sua alltura em compnymento de quaze trezentas lleuguoas — fastyllmente se senhoriava com doux mill espanhores e quissa que com muito menos, por estalla sojeisão della devedida em muitos senhores de fraquo poder, e sem fortalleza nenhuma no mar nem na tera que posa registir a quinhentos solldados. De modo que todo ho custo e trabalho desta nova e saota impreza não comsyste em mais que soo na tomada deste dAchem, pera o quall parese — segund ho susesos do tempo de sy forao daodo — que bastarão tres mill homens ate tres mil e quinhentos, mediamte hajuda de Deos. E quãoto ao proveyto que a Vosa Majestade se lhe daqui pode seguir com destrohyr este imiguo e fazer fortalleza em sua tera hou em Pasém — que não hee muito distaote deste rio dAchem, homde ha jaa ellRey Dom Manuell voso avo que esta em glória, teve — he o seguinte:

Primeiramente, como jaa hatras tenho dyto, ter Mallaqua segura e sem reseo de houtro nenhum ha poder afromtar em nenhum tempo, por não aver em todas aquellas partes mouta domde o lobo posa sayr, que he huma grão quietação pera ha Imdia e proveytozo remedio de vosos vasalos. — Ha segunda, com ela segura e este imiguo destroyo, ficar fechado da mão de Vosa Majestade todo haquelle horiemtall arzepelleguo dihas que distão — per graduação de suas allturas conforme ao clima do rumo em que jazem llãosas hem mar distaote — de mays de mill lleuguoas, como hee desta de Somatra ate o Japão. E daqui não paso, por ser proseso imfenito tratar do muito mays e mays que pera lla vey, como por emformação disse na sydade do Mioqoomesaquém [= Nagasaki] sytuadas nos comfins do Japão, homde os naturays destas partes afirmão aver imfenidade de minas de prata. — Ha treseyra — que parese ser imda muito mays importaote que estas asyma hapomtadas — hee, com ter fortalleza neste dAchem,
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Fiquar vedado aos Gouzarates e mouros de Mequa levarem a pimenta deste reyno — que hee muita em grão quãolidade — hao estreito do Mar Roxo domde, pella vya homde dizem Boca de Suhees, vay ter ao Cayro, e dahi Alexãodria, Gusya [= Ragusa] e Veneza e outras muias provim-syas desta nosa Heuropa, que causa desfraudo e habatimemto na que da India vem a este Reyno, em que Vosa Majestade perde hum bom pedaso de sua fazemda.

E temdo, como jaa por vezes tenho dito, este Achem senhoreado, fiqua toda esta copia de pimenta na mão de Vosa Majestade, domde seus quapitaems lha podem mãoadar a este reino, e seus feytores a vemderem por preços muito mays altos do que tee qui se vemdeo, que montava huma boa soma de proveyto em vosa fazemda. E não queremdo Vosa Majestade per esta via que diguo mãoadalla vir ao reino, muito mays fasyll lhe figua e com menos custo, mãoadalla ha Chyna, homde — temdo feytoria em Qãotão — se pode a troquo douro e prata vemder qãota for, e a que mais vosos feytores quizerem vemder, a troquo de seda com toda outra mays merquadoria que qomunemente se lleva do Japão, como haguora hos Portu- tugezes fazem. Quem dovyda guaynharse muito e muito e muito, e daqui não pasarey por me temer dizerem praguemtos que hallvitero cousas em seu prejuyso.

E quãoto ha quãotidade de pimenta que quomunmemte haa neste reino dAchem e Pasem, segundo Pedro de Faria, qapitao que foy de Mallaqua, soube dos naturaes daquellas partes que nella tratavão, afirma-damente lhe diziaõ que de vimte mill bares ariba de quimtays e meo ho bar, pello que parese aver ha esta comta novemta mill quimtaes; afora no reyno de Quedoa nos rios de Poillemes [= Patani?] e Pemdão — que distará desta Achem pera ha tera firme da costa do Mallaylho setemta ou houtemta lleuguoas — quatro, symqo mill bares; e em Jáobe — que hee outro rio na ilha Somatra comtra ho Estreyto de Palinbão — dous mill bares; afora em outros rios menos frequentados de merqaosya dozentos, trezemtos, quinhemtos, nums mays e noutros menos. De modo que ho que parese produzir segundo o dito dos naturays esta ilha qadanno hee de sem mill quimtays ariba, e toda muias milhor e muito mays grada que ha do Mallabar. E em Sumda não fallo por ser na ilha da Jonha [= Java], posto que nella se posa haver houtra táota quãotidade, mas será per haprasyto de merquãosya, mas não per conquista como estoutra da ilha Samatra, por sello rey della vasallo do Pâoqueyrão [= Pangeran] de Pate, empera-dor de toda Jonha [= Java], Balle [= Bali] e Madura, que sao estados de reynos muy gráodes, e elle em jemte e harmada muito poderoso, que ho não comsymtiraa per via d’afromta.

Preduze mays esta ilha Samatra em frutos de novidades comtino qadanno, hallém da pimenta de que tenho fallado, muito beyjoym de boni-nas, que hee o milhor de todas haquellas partes no reyno de Baros, e quãofra que amtre hos mouros hee fazemda de muito preso, aguilla máosa e brava, tamarinho, jemgivre, qanafistalla e quanella, posto que não tão
boa como ha de Seyllão; estanho, chumbo, sallitre, emxofre que Turqos e mouros llevão ao Cayro; hoiro em partes muito e muito bom em pou, hum mays meudo e houtro mays groso, que fundido figua em ley de vinte e tres quillates a vinte e tres e meio, que ja mor quãotidade do que se delle tira — segundo temos sabydo dos merquadores que a Mallaqua o trazem — hee de Menâoquabo, Syaqua, Amdraguire, Jáobe, Qampar, Pedir e Llãopom. E se hos abitadores desta ilha Samatra não fosem por natureza tão pozillanimes e pouquo dados hao trabalho, se prezume e cre per dito delles mesmos que se tiraria muito mor quãotidade do que se tira, pella proprio tera estar em clíma de produzir Jerallmemte em muitos quãtios haquillo que tee guora em pouquos hee disqueberto.

E quãoto haa tera em sy hee per toda muito viçoza por lhe chover a mor parte do anno. Não hee muito abastada de máoitimentos pelos naturaes della serem pouquo dados haagriculltura, porque qomunemente não benefesya quada hum mays que soo ho de que pode ter nesesydade. E isto cauza tomarlhes o rey per sua morte quãoto lhe achão, por serem per lley do reyno todos hos vasallos quativos do rey. E recceosos hos ríus desto jogo de tirania tão grãode e sojeição tão afromtoza, emterão todos ho houro e pedraria e movell de preço em llguares de pouqua sospeyta por lho nao acharem, temdo tãobem por fée que aquelle que alli emterão, hâode pesuir em des vezes o dobro na outra vyda; de que contimo se desqobrem allgums em teras que omens benefesya pera suas llavouras, hou couza asy seme-lhãote.

Ho quemum das armas com que pellejão são frechas e azaguayihas e paos tostados com que fazem seus remesos, e allgums com zaravatanas de frechas hervadas de pesonha; e por espadas, crizes de dous pallmos ate duos e meo no corte. Armas defensyveys não tem ninhumas pellas não costumarem, somente huns hesqudos ha modo de xadrez que chamão sollavagos, forados de cascas de tartarugua. Has roupas de que se contino provém são panos dallguodão pimtados e bramqos, que de fora lhe trazem de veniaguia de muitas partes da Indía: Choramâodel e Ma-sullepatao e Bemgualla e Syão; e outros muitos merquadores has vem busquar a Mallaqua ha troqo douro. Seu quomer jerallmemte hee arôs, e ovas de savems [= síaveis], por aver imfenidade delles em todos hos rios em tão grãode habastãosa que, por serem tãotos, lhes não aproveytão mays que soo has ovas das fêmes; e todo mays tornao ha llãosar no mar, de que todas has prayihas em partes contimo amdão tão cheas, que muitas vezes o fedor desta mumdisa lhes quauza muitas doenças. Na tera guado vaqum há muito pouço por averem por mais proveytoso serviremse de búfarios. Ha rellezião de sua cremsa antiguamente hera em idólos de diversas abuzõems, mas depoy de tiverão qomoniqausão qos mouros de Mequa se tornarão a mor parte delles mouros, figuâodo — por preseyto desta sua

\footnote{Dalgado (1921:312) and Jacobs (1971:370) define the word sollavago as 'a kind of buckler' or 'shield.' Salawaku = shield is still current in the Moluccas.}
malldita seyta — hynemisyysymos de nosa sãota fee, e muy dezejosos de prequarem comtnio, per treysôys que quada dia qometem, nosa totall destrocsao, e Mallaqua fora de noso poder.

E quâoto ao tempo em que Vosa Majestade pode mâodar ao seu Visorei que emtemda nesta ida, se o asy houver por seu serviço, pode ser milhor na momsão de setembro que na dabrill, asy por ser mays breve, como por poder tomar ha emvernar na Imdia, e poderse aproveytar da jemte que aquelle anno for deste reino, que qomummente chegaa ha seys, sete, outo de setembro. E elle pode partir attee quinze, dezaseys e vimte, com tall avizo de segredo que não no prezumao has naos que ho abrill dãotes forem a Mallaqua porque se não dê aviso ao imiguo, por ser muyto milhor tomallo desquidado que não aprecevido; e por tão bem no fim de setembro haté dez, doze, quinze doutubro que o Visorey llaa pode ser neste mesmo tempo chegåuhas naos do Estreyto ha costa do dAchem, na preza das quaes — segundo qomummente costumao vir riquas — se pode forar hum bom pedaso do guasto quarmada fizer.

E das mays pratiqollaridades que acerqua desta emformacao podera dar a Vosa Magestadade, em que tão bem fora o bem do quaso e prepozito de seu imtemto, o não faco por me temer tacharem-me de prollixo e emfa-donho na llargua lleytura deste proseso.

Ms. da bibliotheca de S. Lourenço T. 4 f. 375.

**English Translation**

Now what seems to be a matter of the greatest importance for Your Majesty's interests in India is that you should instruct your Viceroy — if there are no other tensions there — to try and take Aceh. For in the opinion of the experts it is as clear as daylight from all of the enemy's actions that he is bent on conquering Malacca with the assistance of foreign rulers. And if one is insufficiently prepared for this, Your Majesty will have a great deal of trouble keeping him in check later. The fall of Malacca — which God forbid — will cause the collapse of the whole of our trade to the East, such as Banda, the Moluccas, Sunda, Timor, China, Japan, and all those other countries, realms, islands and peoples, where your vassals at present make their largest profits and whence your customs officers derive more revenues than from all the other areas discovered so far. For Goa in India, the largest and wealthiest city in those regions, draws two thirds of its profits from the trade to the East.

The king of Aceh's efforts have been aimed consistently at gaining control of that trade, and at diverting all the spices from Banda and the Moluccas to himself, in order to try with his enormous pepper production to get the Sultan of Turkey — with whom he keeps up an annual correspondence — to give him permission to open a factory in Jeddah, which would be extremely lucrative for Cairo as well. But since he has realized that he will only be likely to succeed in this through the subjection of
Malacca, as that city controls all of the trade to those regions, he has sent four expeditions there, the last of which he joined personally with over three hundred galleys provided with sails and a large number of seaworthy junks laden with provisions and ammunition. At that time Leoniz Pereira, son of the Count of Feira, who died in Ceuta last year, was commander of the fort of Malacca. But it pleased Our Lord to drive the Acehnese away, leaving behind many dead, including his eldest son, to whom he had meanwhile assigned the kingdom of Aru.

From distress at the latter's death, the sultan of Aceh publicly swore an oath in a mosque never to make peace with any Christian and never to give quarter to anyone of that faith. He further swore that he would try with all the means at his disposal to devastate the country where his son had been so cruelly slayed, even if it meant the end of his own realm. And that has in fact been his constant aim during his lifetime, to the considerable detriment of the state of India, as Your Majesty will no doubt have heard. And judging by all the capital and all the resources which the enemy has constantly expended on these retaliatory actions, one might say that he would have caused India a great many difficulties if he had not died so soon. But it has pleased Our Lord to put an end to all this with his death. And because he has left no successor, this realm is now torn by enormous conflict, because a few close consanguineal relatives and other potentates are each trying to secure the reign for themselves. And that is why the present moment seems more favourable for the realization of all Your Majesty's interests, if so desired with the help of Our Lord, than any moment in the past, as the conquest of that country may now be effected with fewer troops and at less expense.

As regards the remainder of the island of Sumatra — which was called Taprobana by Ptolemy and other authors of antiquity, and which extends across a length of almost three hundred degrees — it might easily be subdued with the aid of 2,000 Spaniards, and possibly a great many fewer, as the dominion over it is divided among a multitude of weak rulers lacking any castle capable of withstanding 500 soldiers either on the coast or in the interior. As a result, all the effort and expenditure of this new, sacred venture will come to no more than the conquest of Aceh, for which, according to the most recent information, and with the help of God, 3,000 to 3,500 men will suffice. And the advantages to be derived by Your Majesty from the annihilation of this enemy and from a fort in Aceh or Passei — which is not far from the Aceh River, and where your late grandfather King Emanuel also possessed a fort — will be discussed in what follows.

In the first place, as I have argued above, Malacca will be made secure and without risk of attack by anyone, as there is no further competition to be feared in those regions, which will be a great relief to India and a piece of good fortune for your vassals. — In the second place, once Malacca has been made secure and the enemy annihilated, Your Majesty
will have dominion over the whole of the Eastern archipelago, which stretches over a distance of more than a thousand miles, for such is the distance between Sumatra and Japan. And, as it would be an enormous task to expatiate upon all the particulars of those parts, that is all I shall say on that subject, except that the inhabitants of Nagasaki, in distant Japan, claim there to be an infinite number of silver mines in the region.

— Thirdly, and much more importantly than the above-mentioned factors, if you have a fort in Aceh it will be impossible for the Gujeratis and the Muslims from Mecca to transport pepper any longer from this rich production area to the Red Sea, whence it lands up via the isthmus of Suez in Cairo, and subsequently in Alexandria, Ragusa, Venice and many other European areas, at the expense of the quantities conveyed from India to Spain and Portugal, thus causing Your Majesty the loss of a considerable amount in revenues.

As soon as you will have conquered Aceh, as I have repeatedly argued in the foregoing, all that pepper will accrue to Your Majesty, and your captains will be able to consign it to Spain or Portugal, where your agents will be able to sell it at a much better price than they have up to now, which will signify quite a large profit for your coffers. But if Your Majesty should prefer not to export it to Europe, it would be much simpler and cheaper to send it to China, where it will be possible for your agents to exchange the entire crop for gold and silver, or whatever other commodity, such as silk and all kinds of goods from Japan, through the offices of a factory in Canton, as the Portuguese are doing at present. No one doubts that they are making a fortune, but I shall say no more on the subject, lest it be alleged by evil tongues that I am trying to stir up trouble against them.

As regards the quantity of pepper that is usually available in the kingdoms of Aceh and Passei, Pedro de Faria, the former commander of Malacca, has heard most definitely from inhabitants of those parts who came to trade there that this comes to 20,000 bahar of over 4½ quintal each, making a total amount of 90,000 quintal. In addition the kingdom of Kedah, lying on the rivers YYY and ZZZ in mainland Malacca, at some 70 to 80 miles’ distance from Aceh, produces another 4,000 to 5,000 bahar, and Jambi, another river in Sumatra near the Straits of Palembang, yet another 2,000 bahar, not to mention the 200, 300, 500 bahar along a number of smaller rivers that are less significant for trade. Hence this information from the inhabitants allows one to infer that the island annually produces over 100,000 quintal of pepper, of a much superior quality to that from Malabar. And I am not even mentioning Sunda, as it lies in Java, although one might procure an equally large quantity there, though by way of trade rather than conquest as in Sumatra, since the king of Sunda is a vassal of the Pangeran of Pati, Emperor of all Java, Bali and Madura. These are areas with powerful kingdoms and extremely strong armies, whose Emperor will brook no attack.

In addition to pepper, the island of Sumatra produces the following
commodities annually: in the kingdom of Barus, large quantities of white benzoin of the best quality to be had in those parts; and camphor, an article that is highly prized by Muslims; cultivated and wild aloe; tamarind; ginger; cassia; cinnamon, although of a lesser quality than from Ceylon; tin; lead; saltpetre; sulphur, which is transported to Cairo by the Turks and Muslims; and excellent-quality gold-dust in particles of different sizes, which when melted down have a gold content of as high as 23 to 23½ carats, which the traders bringing it to Malacca assure us hails principally from Menangkabau, Siak, Indragiri, Jambi, Kampar, Pedir and the Lampung district. And if the Sumatrans did not have so lazy and faint-hearted a disposition, the area might produce much more still, as they themselves assert, as it lies in such a climate as to generally produce in large quantities all that which up until now is found in small amounts.

It is for the most part an extremely luxuriant country, as it rains there most of the year. It is not over-abundantly supplied with victuals, as the inhabitants concern themselves little with agriculture; people as a rule grow no more than they need for themselves. The consequence of this is that when they die, the king confiscates all their possessions, for all vassals are by law captives of the king. Out of fear for this oppressive, improper form of tyranny, all well-to-do persons hide their gold, gems and movable valuables in inconspicuous places in the ground, for they also believe that in the life to come they will possess ten times as much as they bury there. Consequently one is likely to come across commodities on land used for agriculture, or something of that nature, all the time.

The weapons which they mostly fight with are arrows, spears and fire-hardened sticks. They attack with these, and sometimes also with blow-pipes and poisoned darts, or with swords and creeses having a blade of 2 to 2½ palms. They have no defensive weapons, as they do not use these, except for a lozenge-shaped shield inlaid with tortoise shell, which they call sollavago. They always buy garments of dyed or plain white cotton imported from all parts of India, such as Coromandel, Masulipatnam, Bengal and Siam; and many other traders come to Malacca to exchange these for gold. Their food consists more especially of rice and shad roe, because this fish is found in such immeasurable quantities in all of their rivers that they only use its roe and throw the rest back in the sea. Their beaches, consequently, are constantly strewn with rotting heaps which by their smell cause all kinds of diseases. There is very little cattle in the country, as they deem it more profitable to put their buffaloes to work. In former times they used to worship idols of a variety of false religions, but since they have been in contact with Muslims from Mecca, the majority of the inhabitants have become Muslim. This cursed religion enjoins them to be exceedingly hostile to our sacred faith, so that they concentrate on our total destruction and the recapture of Malacca with daily repeated acts of treachery.

The best point of time for Your Majesty to instruct the Viceroy to
organize this expedition, if so desired, will be in the September monsoon rather than that of April. In the first place the September monsoon is of shorter duration, so that it will be possible for him to return to India before the winter season, and moreover to use the men coming from Portugal that particular year, who usually arrive there around the 7th of September, in that period. He is to set out between 15 and 20 September, and to do so under such great secrecy that none of those aboard the ships sailing to Malacca in the month of April preceding this will have any idea of it and the enemy will not be informed. For it will be much better to attack him unexpectedly than in a state of alarm. Furthermore, because the ships from the Red Sea will be arriving off Aceh between the end of September and 15 October. These are usually richly laden, and if the Viceroy should succeed in capturing them, it will be possible to pay a large part of the expenses of our expedition with the proceeds.

I shall not go into further details with which I might supply Your Majesty about the returns and the objective of this project, for fear lest the reading of such a lengthy document lead one to find me tedious and dull.

Manuscript from the library of St. Lourenço, T. 4, f. 375.

sedas como a persiana, e enxofre, e hé em si muyto sadia, e abastada de gados mansos e bravios. Nesta paragem dizem os mouros que está a Ilha do Ouro, de que o Achém recolhe todos os annos huma grandissima quantidade no pego do su tesouro, afofra três ou quatro milhões de ouro que lhe vão de Mecca, em retorno de trinta e quarenta mil quintaes de pimenta e outras drogas e fazendas que pera lá faz navegar nas suas nasos.

Hé tamaña cousa Samatra, e há nella tantas riquezas, que ouso afirmar ... que se pode bem paragonar com Inglaterra, de que as escripturas tanto falam. E se Sua Magestade for senhor desta tão rendosa ilha, annexará e accrescentará às rendas della os tributos e páreas que os Reis todos do Sul hão de pagar — pollos não ultrajarem nem afrontarem nossas armadas, ou por se valerem do favor dellas em suas contendações e controvérsias particulares duns contra os outros — e rogar com a paga em ouro, prata, estanho, chumbo, salitre, enxofre e breu: porque destas cousas, e de rubís e diamantes e especiaria há infinidade em seus reynos.

Na cidade metropolitana do Achém há certeza de ser innumerável o dinheyro amoedado que os Reys passados enthesourarao. O qual imagino que está depositado polla providência divina pera Sua Magestade o mandar tomar, pera com elle destruyr os Heresiarcas e seus secaces: refazer e reformar os reynos patrimoniaes e hereditários: sostentar em paz os ganhados, recobrar os perdidos dos outros Reys e Príncipes Christãos; desbaratar, exterminar e desterrar o Turco dos que tem usurpado e tyrannizado; conquistar a Casa Sancta de Hierusalem e África pera o nome de Christo se manifestar pollo seu venturoso braço e de seus magnânicos capitães e fortíssimos soldados: porque thesouro tem Samatra pera se facilitarem todas estas conquistas, mediante o favor de Deos e a invencível estrela de Sua Magestade.

[... mas deve-se não deixar passar esta occasião ... de não aver agora Rey no Achém.] E tal estava o Reyno, que sospeitando alguns capitães que avia entre os mais poderosos pensamentos de rebeliam e alevantamento, trabalharam pollo aquieter, e chamaram o Régulo de Péra para governar o Reino: o qual hé mal obedecido: e por essa rezão está a conquista mais disposta pera se fazer com três mil soldados, como se entendeo em tempo delRei Dom Sebastião⁴, que erão necessários pera elle. E fazendo-se, além de se conseguirem tantas utilidades quanta brevemente expressei epilogo e resumindo este tractado, como fim e remate delle, assegurar-se-hão esses estados do Sul — donde se derivão e manão todas as com que os de Norte se ennobrem — e principalmente a permanência dessa florescente Christianidade da China e Iapam, que por ventura ou sem ventura a não poderá aver ou ao menos nam será possível ampliar-se e augmentar-se, que hé o thesouro que Sua Magestade como Catholico Monarca do mundo mais estima e pretende que todos os outros que nelle

⁴ Sebastião (1554-1578), king of Portugal since 1568. Philip II took advantage of his death on the battlefield in Morocco to impose Spanish rule on Portugal and become king of that country.
An Unknown Portuguese Text on Sumatra from 1582

English Translation

All the many times the Sultan of Aceh has come to besiege the fort of Malacca plainly testify to his fervent desire to drive the Portuguese out of the place, so as to make it easier for him to dominate the Southern seas and to subjugate the rulers of the area. So that there is nothing he thinks about so frequently and so intensely as about the means he must use to achieve that end. This desire, so well-known to one and all, is more than plainly apparent from the sieges under which he has recently and also previously laid Malacca, as well as from the princely gifts of gold, gems, spices, and perfumes and incense which he sends annually to the Sultan of Turkey via the Red Sea in order to induce the latter to dispatch metal cannon to Aceh. This way he has managed to secure quartaos [cannon-royal], basilisks, leões [lit. ‘lions’], salvagens [lit. ‘brutes’], cannon-balls, gunfounders, ship’s captains, helmsmen, galley officers, fortification engineers and siege experts.

This alone is reason enough to energetically strive for and carefully prepare his annihilation; for it takes but a click of his fingers to launch a fleet of 60, 70 or 80 galleys and innumerable other vessels. And if he is not stopped, he will have 200 to 300 at his disposal before the turn of the century, on account of the large timber reserves he commands, the shipwrights he has trained, and the support he receives from the Turks. There are, for that matter, thousands of other reasons for effectuating his total destruction with appropriate force, as the island produces considerable quantities of gold, camphor, white benzoin, cinnamon, better-quality ginger than Malabar, sandalwood, silk that compares with that from Persia, and sulphur. It has a salutary climate and is richly endowed with domesticated and wild cattle. According to the Muslims, Gold Island — whence the Sultan of Aceh annually derives a huge quantity for his coffers, in addition to the three to four million pieces of gold he receives from Mecca for the thirty to forty thousand quintal of pepper and other spices and commodities which he ships thither each year — is also located in that region.

Sumatra is so important and has so much natural wealth, that I make so bold as to assert that it may well be compared to England, which is so
highly praised in the written reports. And when Your Majesty is sovereign of that lucrative island, the dues and taxes payable by all the rulers in the South in order to safeguard themselves against the aggression of our fleets or to make use of their services in their mutual wars and quarrels, will also accrue to you, in addition to all these profits. These they pay in gold, silver, tin, lead, saltpetre, sulphur and pitch, because these goods abound in their countries, as do rubies, diamonds and spices.

It is a certain fact that the earlier Sultans of Aceh had an enormous quantity of gold specie minted, which is now stored in the capital. It would seem to me that Divine Providence has placed it there for Your Majesty to have removed in order thus to annihilate the arch-heretics and their followers; to reform and modernize the countries which are your legal heritage; to develop your conquests peacefully; to reconquer the areas lost by the other Christian rulers; to defeat and destroy the Turk and drive him out of the countries which he has illegally seized and tyrannized; and to conquer the Sacred House of Jerusalem and Africa, so that Christ’s name may become manifest in your blessed arm, your magnanimous military leaders, and your glorious soldiers. For Sumatra has the necessary riches to make all these conquests possible, with the help of God and Your Majesty’s invincible stars.

Aceh at the present moment lacks a Sultan, and that is why one should not let the opportunity offered go by. The situation in the country was so critical, that some leaders suspected that the embers of rebellion and revolution were smouldering among the highest functionaries. In an attempt to extinguish them, they invited the Sultan of Perak to rule the realm, but he commands little authority. And that is why the time is ripe for the conquest of the country with the 3,000 soldiers who, according to calculations from the time of King Sebastian, are needed for a task of this kind. And this way we will gain not only all the profits which I have briefly enumerated at the end of the present treatise, but also the dominion of all the regions in the South whence flow the riches from which the countries in the North derive their prestige. And first and foremost the stabilization of all the flourishing Christian communities in China and Japan, that treasure which Your Majesty as Catholic King cherishes and fosters more than any other king. For indeed it will be impossible for the latter to survive or expand either in prosperity or in adversity, for if Aceh takes off its blinkers and uses its common sense, it will post itself with its fleet at the entrance to the Straits of Singapore to stop the trade to those countries. All ships sailing to or from China and Japan must needs pass through these straits, which are so narrow that the tips of the yards graze both shores. A blockade of this kind will be within his means on account of his friendship with the Raja of Johore, who has his base four to five miles past these straits. Malacca is an indispensable port for shipping to every area in the South, but if human resources are available, we must not as a matter of course pin our hopes on the miracles with which God has constantly
defended and protected that city in the past. For He may one day come to the conviction, in His infinite justice, that He has too generously bestowed His benevolence and mercy.

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