

Chapter 7

Conclusion

The Spice Islands have presented a fascinating area of study, for their known role in the colonial activities of several European nations, but also for their internal development and functioning. This thesis has sought to illuminate the richness and diversity of the latter. The basic composition of the society of the islands has not been extensively researched before, and the evidence found in several seldom-used primary sources, notably François Valentyn, has enabled a fuller picture of this to be presented. More details concerning the development of the Moluccan political structure have also been made available from a scrutiny and comparison of these same primary sources. The evidence found in these sources concerning the structure of authority in the Spice Islands, particularly Ternate, make modifications in recent works on that structure advisable, if not necessary. The trade of the eastern archipelago, including the Spice Islands, has been shown to be based on two main types of commodities, staples and cultural goods. The staples were basically foodstuffs, especially sago, while the cultural items consisted of products from within the eastern archipelago network such as the feathers of the birds of paradise and shells for inlay work. Cultural items were imported into the archipelago in exchange for Moluccan and Bandanese spices, which had a significant role to play in the religious beliefs of the islanders. The pre-Islamic animist religion was still an intrinsic part of the culture and society of the Spice Islanders. Although many of the islands' inhabitants adopted one of the two world religions introduced into the region in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it is argued that this was essentially no more than a veneer, and that the majority of people still adhered to the pre-existing system of beliefs and paid lip-service to the tenets of the imposed religion.

Spice Island society has been shown to be dynamic and adaptable, but at the same time in the Moluccas was seen to be highly structured and still influenced by pre-Islamic traditions. An array of prohibitions and ceremonials surrounded the position of *kolano*, and although these originate in the years before the adoption of Islam, they still played a significant role in the post-Islamic society. The *kolano* took part in public functions which helped reinforce his superior status, such as the banquets and tournaments on the shores beside Gama Lamo. The sacrosanct nature of his person and taboos forbidding his death on the battlefield was kept intact until the death of the Ternatan sultan in war against the Portuguese. After the Ternatan ruler's death the Moluccans still observed this taboo, even though the Portuguese despatched the rulers at regular intervals until 1572 when they were driven out of the island.

Women in the Moluccas held symbolic positions of power; betel and sword carriers in the *kolano's* retinue, door-keepers within the palace and guardians of rank, marrying only those of equal status. Apart from this, however, they had little freedom or scope for self-expression. Generally, what is known of Moluccan women conforms to the picture of women throughout Southeast Asia. Although there were notable exceptions, they were predominantly regarded as possessions of their husbands or masters, economically significant by virtue of their work roles (processors of the spices in the Moluccas and Banda), and valuable as commodities for exchange in the marriage ritual.

An Islamic influence can be discerned in the application of justice in the Moluccas, although the system in the Banda islands still seems to reflect a heavy pre-Islamic influence. In the Moluccas the *hukum* were responsible for adjudication of cases, and in this they relied on their own judgement rather than a codified system of laws. The system aroused some admiration in Galvão, who remarks favourably on the swiftness of the proceedings.

In the forms of entertainment enjoyed by the Spice Islanders, several are recognisable from throughout the Southeast Asian region. Boat racing, chess, dice and *sepak raga* were uniform entertainments. These were enjoyed by all levels of society, as indicated by the comment in the *Sejarah Melayu* praising the prowess of the Ternatan *kolano* while he was in Malacca. The ceremonial dances of the *lego-lego* and *carracheo* were peculiar to the Spice Island culture, and date back into their pre-Islamic history. No evidence of wayang entertainment has been found in

the primary sources, nor cock-fighting, two favourite and well known past-times of the Javanese. This is despite ample evidence for a Javanese influence on the Spice Islands and other island within the eastern archipelago network with respect to other items which were of significance to the island culture, the gongs, cloths and porcelain, for example. Javanese influence is to be expected in view of the long trading and marriage links between the two regions, which date back to the fourteenth century.

The Javanese influence, manifested in the material goods of trade, did not represent the subsumption of the existing Spice Island culture under the mantle of Majapahit. Rather, these trappings of Javanese, and Chinese, culture were accepted by the islanders and then used in a fashion unique to the eastern archipelago islands. The gongs were not used for instrumentation, despite the extraordinary range of notes they reproduced, the textiles were not worn to enhance the regular wardrobe, and the porcelain was rarely used for food or liquor service - these things were all buried under the house or in the mountains. Thus items of foreign cultures were incorporated into the existing island culture and enhanced this, but they did not alter its fundamental nature.

The political structure of the north Moluccas underwent several changes in the course of its development. Its origins have not been determined with any certainty, but evidence found in both Valentyn and Galvão suggests that the development of a supreme chief, or *primus inter pares*, began as early as the mid thirteenth century. This probably grew out of an existing structure based on kin groupings and a government of elders. The impetus for the transformation of the structure from a group consensus to one acknowledged leader appears to have come from the immigration of a neighbouring population which had already developed into a society which recognised a 'big chief', a *kolano*. This population dominated the existing alfuro population in the islands; this indigenous population is referred to in the sources as the peasants of Moluccan society in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Despite the opinion held by some historians that the Moluccans did not develop a centralised authority structure until to advent of Islam in the late fifteenth century, Valentyn's work presents evidence that a structure had developed which recognised a pre-eminent authority figure. This emergence of this figure was not simply the result of establishing a

patrilineal lineage tracing its legitimacy back to a mythical or supernatural ancestor, as in the Guna tale. This system was abandoned in the rule of the *kolano* Komala, whose son, Abderama, was not popular and whose right to rule, therefore was not sanctioned by the elders. A succession of worthy male relatives of the *kolano* took the pre-eminent post until patrilineal succession was reinstated in the fourth decade of the fifteenth century.

Accompanying this was the development of an infrastructure created to administer the expanding sphere of Ternatan hegemony. The course of this and the time frame in which it developed is unknown, but a number of the customs recorded by both Valentyn and Galvão imply a continuous course of development from the early fourteenth century. It was at this time in Ternatan history that prolonged contact with merchants from the western archipelago was made, and it was also a time of territorial expansion. Ternate began by conquering villages on neighbouring islands and this process culminated in the expedition to the Sulu Islands during the rule of Molomat Cheya (1347-1357) and the establishment of permanent Ternatan representatives on those islands.

The Moluccan hierarchy had many components, ruler, territorial governors, palace administrators, tribute collectors and judges. This in itself implies a political progression from kin based groups to a more stratified society. It has been suggested that the authority and duties of these offices did not meet their demise during the period of the Sultanate, although their nature may have varied and at times overlapped. That the offices did not lose authority or respect under the Sultanate is witnessed by Henry Middleton's testimony and the examples found in Valentyn.

The main islands involved in the trade network of the eastern archipelago are identified, and it is shown that these did not necessarily focus on the Moluccas. One centre of particular interest is *Serdenha*. Unfortunately its precise location has not been identified, but Miguel Roxo de Brito's information concerning its trade, large merchant community and wealth, demands more research. No mention of this centre has been found in other sources relating to the trade of the eastern archipelago or regarding its connections with the Java ports. Nor is it mentioned in the lists of Ternatan dependencies. In effect, its identity and location remain a mystery.

The Banda Islands are seen to be a stapling point for goods from both the western archipelago and the islands east of its own position, such as Kai and Aru. The wide-ranging sea journeys of the Bandanese took them to ports in the western archipelago as well as those within its own network. In these places they exchanged their spices and other island produce for the culturally valued goods - textiles and gongs in particular. The Moluccas are the focal point for the trade in cloves which attracted dozens of foreign ships to call at its ports on Ternate and Makian each trading season. The longevity of this trade contributed to the wealth and power of the Moluccas, allowing it to develop as a pre-eminent source of political power in the region.

Both Banda and the Moluccas should be seen as important in the region for the attraction they had for western merchants. These merchants brought items into the eastern archipelago network that were prized for their high cultural value, and were an integral part of functioning of the society of a number of islands in the region. Essentially the chapter illustrates that nutmeg, mace and cloves were not major items of trade within the eastern archipelago region, but were important for the westward trade, and for the particular goods those merchants carried to the Spice Islands.

The impression left by examining each of the religions and their impact upon the islanders is that despite a conscious adoption of either of the world religions, Islam or Christianity, the unconscious adherence to the pre-existing animist religion prevailed in the daily lives of the islanders. This religion involved ancestor worship, the beliefs in the omni-presence of benevolent and malevolent spirits, and was characterised by a great deal of superstition. Such beliefs were so integral to the way of life of the islanders that evidence of their continued devotion to it was reported in the twentieth century, four centuries after the introduction, or imposition, of the major religions.

The origins of Moluccan Islam have strong connections with Java, and consequently with the ruling elite in Molucca and also in the Banda Islands. It was very much a nominal religion even for that group in its early years in the islands; several sources testify to the lack of knowledge of the precepts of the religion, and remark on the Moluccan predilection for the numerous types of alcoholic beverages brewed in the islands. This situation changed during the course of the sixteenth century, as Islam

became a focus for anti-Portuguese and anti-Christian sentiments, especially under the reigns of Sultan Hairun and his son, Baab Ullah when they threatened the existence of the Christian communities concentrated in the Moro region and on Amboina.

Physical manifestations of the religion are found in the presence of the mosque on Ternate and later on the other islands, and also in the ceremonial processions which surrounded the daily worship of the Sultan described by van Neck. The Moluccan mosque resembled those of other Southeast Asian mosques of the period, Demak and Gresik, for example, and draws a further connection between the Moluccas and Java as the source of influence. Although Banda was said to have become Islamic before the Moluccans, no written account of any mosque in these islands has been sighted, although there are several references to the community hall and ceremonies conducted therein, reflecting the strong animist influence still prevalent there.

The Christian religion gained followers among the islands principally due to the work of Galvão and his deputies in the first instance, and then to the ministrings of Francis Xavier. Christianity made a considerable number of converts among the common people of the islands, although it has been noted that in many cases these people were quick to apostatise when danger from their Muslim overlords was imminent. Conversions were made, too, among the nobility of the islands, village heads in the Moro region, the ruler of Bachian, and several from Muslim stronghold itself, Ternate. These included a prominent *casize*, and the mother of the deposed sultan, Tabarija.

While genuine conversions were made to both religions, a truer state of the religions in the islands is seen in the discussion on death. Regardless of the professed religion of the deceased, the overriding belief in the spirit of the ancestors necessitated the observance of the 'proper' ceremonies, without which the deceased could not join his ancestors. This belief is still held today in some eastern archipelago islands.

This study is a first attempt at presenting an overall view of the society, politics, trade and religion of the Spice Islands in the sixteenth century. Previous research carried out in the area has tended to focus on the individual subjects of politics, religion or trade. While this approach provides a detailed groundwork, the approach that this thesis uses makes it possible to move back from the detail and observe the integrated

functioning of the Spice Islands within the eastern archipelago. This approach allows the pattern of the socio-economic and political structure to be observed in its entirety, but at the same time gives new insights into specific areas, such as the early development of the Ternatan structure of authority. The approach taken here also enables a new assessment of the impact of Islam on the Spice Island society to be made, and clearly illustrates that several centres of trade operated within the eastern archipelago network, and that this structure itself was highly integrated. The use of this integrated approach in this thesis has seen three major themes gradually emerge: the dynamic nature of north Moluccan society; the resilience of the Moluccas, both in its intercourse with Javanese and Islamic influences, and its defiance in the face of the Portuguese occupation of the land; and the inherent differences between the Moluccan group and the Banda group.

From its traceable origins in the thirteenth century, the north Moluccan society had undergone a continuous process of experimentation and change. In the development of its authority structure the society experimented with a patrilineal style of succession, but also made a radical move away from this with the introduction of the rule by the male relative of the original authority figure deemed most worthy by the elders, the voice of the community. In their religious life the islanders accommodated the beliefs of the two major religions which were competing in the region, for both their immortal souls and control of the invaluable spice trade.

The dynamic nature of the society allowed it to accept and assimilate the cultural trappings of the region's extensive contact with Java. This reaches back into the eleventh century, with an intensification of contact and permanent Javanese settlement in the islands from the fourteenth century. The motive for the contact was trade, and for the spices of the islands the Javanese offered items such as gongs and textiles, as well as rice. Significantly, these first two items, and imports of Chinese porcelain, were taken up by the Spice Islanders as a part of their own culture. Islam, too, was a powerful influence on the islands. It gradually permeated all levels of society, beginning with the ruling elite. Although there remained only a superficial adherence to its teachings throughout the first three quarters of the sixteenth century, in the course of time it was accepted as the dominant religion of the entire archipelago. These foreign influences did not dominate or dilute the existing culture, but were

instead assimilated and made subservient to the original society and culture of the Spice Islands.

In this examination of the Spice Islands care has been taken not to make overly broad generalisations about the Moluccas and Banda. This has facilitated the identification of fundamental differences between the two groups, specifically relating to their political and social make-up. While the islands did share similar cultural experiences and economic benefits, and both bore the imposition of foreign occupation, the differences between the two are more striking than these similarities. The Bandanese social divisions into the Ulilima and Ulisawa factions present an obvious contrast to the stratified society of the Moluccans. The deeply embedded enmity arising from the Bandanese social division meant continual internal conflict, including ritual head-hunting. Although this also occurred in the Moluccas, the dynamism of that society allowed it to progress past this self-destructive social pattern and concentrate on matters of 'state' importance. The Moluccan islands, Ternate and Tidore in particular, extended their territories, increased their prestige and enriched their social elite. In the Moluccas, too, a web of marriage alliances between *kolanos* and between *kolanos* and *sengadjis* strengthened the fabric of that society. This underlying strength was not at all times apparent, but re-emerged in times of crisis, resulting in alliances or confederations of the Moluccan rulers being formed. In the face of this, the Portuguese were not often the victors. The Bandanese on the other hand, exhibited little social cohesion. The consequence of this social structure was fully realised in the early years of the seventeenth century with the decimation of that population by the Dutch.

The expansive picture of the Spice Islands in the sixteenth century which is presented in this thesis has given the opportunity for these islands to be observed both as an integrated unit and also as individual components of the larger system. This composite study of the society, politics, trade and religion of the islands also reveals the need for a modification of some of the assumptions held about the nature of the society. In particular, this thesis shows the assumption that the political system of the Spice Islands was static before the introduction of Islam is no longer tenable. Likewise, the influence of Java as a factor in the development of the society has not before been considered in any depth, nor has the integration of Javanese

culture into the culture of the islands in the region been examined in any detail.

The scope, and the need, for more intensive work to be carried out on the Spice Islands is considerable in view of the relative neglect of these islands in the main source books for Southeast Asian history. This thesis, by building a composite picture of the society, politics and trade of the Spice Islands, is not only a contribution to the growing knowledge of these islands, but also provides a degree of understanding of their role in both Asian and European colonial history.

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