Introduction

The Spice Islands have played a critical role in the early colonial history of Southeast Asia. Yet to date relatively little research has been carried out into the history of the Spice Islands themselves. In an effort to redress this, this thesis is a reconstruction of the general state of trade, politics and society in the Spice Islands. The islands designated as 'Spice Islands' in this work are the northern Moluccas; Ternate, Tidore, Motir, Makian and Bachian; neighbouring Halmahera; and the Banda Islands - Lonthor, Neira, Gunung Api, Pulo Ai, Pulo Run and Rosengain.[1] The primary focus of this thesis is on the north Moluccan islands in the years before the coming of the Portuguese, and an assessment of the impact of both Asian and European on the islanders. The research is based on primary sources of the period under study Portuguese, Spanish and Dutch. These sources were in either a published translated form, or have been translated for the purpose of this thesis,[2] and they have been supplemented by recent secondary sources, where necessary. A study of these diverse materials has the potential to make a significant contribution to a unified, detailed and evolving understanding of the eastern archipelago islands. The picture that emerges and is detailed in this thesis both reinforces and contradicts some assumptions held by other researchers about the Spice Island network.

Originally the intention was to concentrate on the relationship between the Spice Islanders and the Dutch trading Company, the Veerindighe Oost-Indische Compagnie, but the time focus of this relationship would necessarily have been in the seventeenth century, and through the course of research for that topic, it became obvious that the fundamental changes to the societies of those islands occurred in the preceding three centuries. Consequently, the thesis was reoriented to focus on the origins of the Moluccan population (primarily Ternate) and the development of the political and social structure in the years before the region's contact with Islam. The contact with Islam in the mid

---

1 Amboina is also one of the Spice Islands, but has not featured prominently in this work. Although parts of Celebes and western New Guinea came under Moluccan sway in the sixteenth century, I do not consider them to be part of the Spice Islands, as such, despite political and trade connections.

2 These sources will be discussed in the second part of this chapter.

fifteenth century has previously been seen by historians as the catalyst for the rapid development of Moluccan political and social institutions, but this thesis suggests the probability of an earlier development of these institutions. Chapter 3 examines the development of the Moluccan political system, both in the years before those islands' contact with Islam, and in the time following the establishment of a permanent Islamic presence. It argues that while a centralised government based on the Sultanate was the outcome of the adoption of Islam, the foundations for this were already present in the form of an indigenous structure founded on the concept of the *kolano* and his court. The chapter also describes the functioning of the court in the Moluccas, and its essential differences to the political structures of the other Spice Island of this study, Banda.

While some cultural adoptions were made from both Asian and European contacts, the Asian (for example, Malay clothing, Javanese gongs and aspects of Javanese court ritual) were assimilated into existing traditional structures and were primarily related to the Asian concept of prestige, status and the kingly exhibition of power. The European adoptions were limited to the introduction of a variety of new foods, more destructive weapons of war, and a religion which, for the most part, showed itself impatient with the pre-Islamic animist religion of the people and intolerant of the established Islamic creed.

The physical characteristics of the Spice Islands and the society of the Spice Islanders form the basis of two chapters. Impressions left by early travellers and naturalists of Ternate and Banda are presented, before focusing in to reconstruct the probable physical characteristics of the chief town of the Moluccas, Ternate, or Gama Lamo as it was called by the natives. The daily existence of the common people as well as that of the nobility is studied, and some suggestions are made as to why these two societies ended the sixteenth century with remarkably different social structures. Also in this chapter the question of cultural transfer will be addressed; that is, whether or not the islanders consciously or unconsciously adopted particular aspects of the culture of the countries with which they had most contact, and the use made of these. How should the 'culture' of the Spice Islands be defined; was it a synthesis of elements from the eastern archipelago and its immediate neighbours (including Celebes and western New Guinea), or was it merely a reflection of the glories of the Javanese empire at its height?

The thesis also seeks to highlight the existence of a complicated trade network operating in the eastern archipelago, but one which was not necessarily centred on the Moluccas as the focal point of authority in the region (although many of these were claimed at one stage or another by the main two Moluccan kingdoms, Ternate and Tidore). Many small entrepôts existed in the region and the main articles of their trade are examined in an effort to better understand the inter-relationship between the islands. These commodities are divided into two basic groups: staples, primarily foodstuffs, and cultural items originating from within the network and also those imported from the trade centres of the western archipelago.

Religion in the eastern archipelago region is the focus of another chapter. Of the two contending religions, Islam and Christianity, Islam was intimately linked to the extension of trade and the nature of the political structure in the area, notably in the Moluccas. Christianity was the partner to Portuguese assertions of empire, and was taken up by those islanders who were not comfortable under the Moluccan, mainly Ternatan, yoke. The adoption of Christianity, however, can rarely be accepted as a genuine spiritual conversion, although there were notable cases of the piety and devout faith of some islanders, particularly on Amboina. Again the connection between politics, power and religion became obvious, as many islanders, especially the Moros, saw Christianity as a way of securing Portuguese aid for their own cause.

The Spice Island societies, or more specifically, the Moluccan society, showed on the one hand its dynamic nature, grasping every opportunity to consolidate its power, wealth and prestige in the eastern archipelago region. On the other hand, it displayed its inability to cope with the onslaught on the aggressive European forces, represented by the empire-oriented Portuguese and the single-minded mercantilism of the Hollanders. That the Moluccan rulers ultimately failed to combat this was not a reflection on their inadequacy, but on the general state and nature of Asian and European relations in that age of commerce and conquest. This is another story and falls well outside the scope of the thesis.

Two main areas of difficulty in attempting a thesis of this nature can be identified. Firstly, some of the problems experienced in reconstructing Moluccan history are due to the nature of the sources consulted. Obviously these are European men writing for a European

audience, and their concerns necessarily concentrate on the intercourse between their countrymen and the native islanders. This intercourse was most common at the commercial level; indeed, it was the paramount reason for these men being in the east. The result of this type of contact is that very little real interest was taken by the Europeans in the nature and functioning of the societies with which they came in contact. There are some obvious exceptions to this, notably Antonio Pigafetta and António Galvão. These men showed a genuine interest in the nature of the Moluccan society and devoted considerable effort to recording it as they saw it. Valentyn's work is equally of value, both for its scope and, again, for the attention it pays to the much-neglected pre-European history of the islands.

From this the second difficulty arises, the lack of any indigenous records relating to the centuries before the arrival of the Europeans in the Spice Islands. While power centres further to the west left chronicles or *babads* recording the splendid history of their kingdoms, the Spice Islands left none of these. The absence of records equivalent to the Javanese *Negarakertagama* and the Malayan *Sejarah Melayu* leave the historian with very few avenues for piecing together the early culture, economy or political system of the islands. In the case of the Moluccas, letters from the Ternatan and Tidorese kings remain, but the contents of these naturally refer to the turbulent times during which these kings lived, and not to their distant past.

A note on the names used throughout this thesis should be made at this time. Rather than using the modern names for the areas discussed, I have chosen to use the names commonly in use throughout the sixteenth century. Therefore the modern province of Maluku is referred to throughout as the islands of the Moluccas. This title designates the northern Moluccas specifically. The central Moluccas - Amboina and its neighbours - are named Amboina, Ceram (rather than Seram) and so on. The sixteenth century name of the Banda Islands remains the same in the modern period. The area of modern Indonesia is divided, for the purpose of this thesis, into its eastern and western regions; the east bounded by Celebes (modern Sulawesi) to the west coast of New Guinea, and west referring to Java, the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra.

Names of islands, places, people, titles and even commodities found in the primary sources often appear under a variety of spellings. I have worked for consistency throughout the thesis with the exception of

direct quotations. In these, the orthography and grammar of the original have been reproduced.

Historiography

The prominent role that the Spice Islands played in the sixteenth and seventeenth century colonial history of at least four European nations is, both surprisingly and disappointingly, poorly reflected in the amount of research carried out in the area. While references to the Moluccas or 'Spice Islands' are found in the index of nearly every book published on Southeast Asia in the latter half of this century, there is no attempt to move past the ground already covered by the first Spice Islands observers and/or researchers. In this way the history of the Spice Islands and their significance in the history of both the eastern and western archipelago trade is seen as little more than an appendix to the 'real' history of Southeast Asia, and more specifically, Indonesia.

Intensive studies of the Moluccas can be divided into three phases; those produced in the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, that is, written in the first flush of 'discovery'; the ground-breaking research done in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, carried out primarily by Dutch scholars, comfortable residents in Holland's East Indies; and the few studies published since the 1950s, notably those of W.A. Hanna, John Villiers and more recently, Leonard Andaya. This last category is both enlightening and disappointing, enlightening due to the colourful and detailed picture they provide of Moluccan and Bandanese society, and disappointing because of the commitment to avoiding such "academic decor"[3] as footnotes. This style of writing obviously cut short many promising avenues of research.

The main focus of these individual areas of study can also be dealt with thematically. The contemporary or primary sources deal mainly with the efforts of the European nations to establish a strong presence at the source of the spice production. To this end, attempts were made to settle at Banda, Amboina and in the Moluccas, all with varying degrees of success, and at great cost to the indigenous populations. The sources from this period offer a justification of European aggression against the islanders, in terms of economics, racial superiority and pure militaristic

---

3 W.A. Hanna, *Indonesian Banda*, Philadelphia, 1978, p.2

superiority. They dwell upon the alleged duplicity of the native rulers, and use this as a further justification for their actions.

The second phase of Moluccan study is devoted, for the most part, to the study of the history of the islands and their later connection with the internal workings and policies of the VOC and its successor, the Netherlands government. The authors were administrators and bureaucrats. The works belonging to this section are primarily concerned with Company business and so have not been necessary for the purpose of this thesis.

The third phase involves the works of modern authors. Their combined works cover a variety of topics within the expanded area of Moluccan/Spice Island history. Most notable are the writings of John Villiers, Leonard Andaya and Willard A. Hanna, and they will be discussed later in this chapter. Other contemporary works deal with the Spice Islands in a limited fashion. General histories of Southeast Asia from D.G.E. Hall to M. Rickleffs reiterate the somewhat hackneyed version of Moluccan history which is familiar to all who seek nothing more than an overview of the history of the entire Southeast Asian region. This is, of course, sufficient for their purposes, when one considers that these authors concentrate their research on the western archipelago, specifically Java, and necessarily touch only briefly on the Spice Islands at well-worn crossroads.

In addition to the written sources, the extensive artistry of the late sixteenth century and later has been put to use in this thesis. The clear and detailed woodcuts, carved from descriptions found in the primary sources, are often used merely as illustrations by many authors without any discussion of what additional information the scenes in these sketches may actually reveal. Woodcuts based on van Neck's journey have been particularly useful in the reconstruction of certain aspects of Spice Island history. Those used in this context will be reproduced in the text of Chapter 2.

The Primary Sources

The pre-European history of the north Moluccas is scantly reproduced and has been reconstructed in this thesis from three particular primary sources, António Galvão, António Pigafetta and François

Valentyn, as well as several recent works. The main primary source used is that of António Galvão, who was the resident Portuguese governor in the Moluccas from 1536 to 1539. Galvão wrote his extensive account of the history of the Moluccas in response to a request from King D. João III to his governors and captains that "they should try to find out the way of life of the countries, their products, in which latitude and climate they are situated, and the customs, costumes, and languages of their inhabitants."[4] Galvão did superior work on these topics, and it is from his pen that we have one of the earliest accounts of the pre-Islamic culture of the Moluccas. He devotes thirty seven chapters from a total of sixty to a discussion of the natural and human history of the islands, including its early contacts with the China and the western archipelago, the social and cultural lives of the Moluccans and the coming of Islam.

As well as this indigenous history, Galvão gives an account of the Portuguese governorship of Ternate, including his own period in office. He begins with the first governor appointed, António de Brito (1522-1524), who was responsible for the construction of the fortress at Gama Lamo, Ternate's main town. De Brito's governorship was a period of continual war with Ternate's traditional enemy, neighbouring Tidore. The governorship of his successor, Dom Garcia Henriques (1524-1527), saw the arrival in the Moluccas of the Spaniards and the early exertion of Portuguese power over the Ternatans. The child-ruler and his brothers were given Portuguese 'protection', a euphemism for imprisonment. The Ternatan regency was undermined during the governorship of Dom Jorge de Meneses (1527-1530), as was the Portuguese administration with the murder of the next governor, Gonzalo Pereira ((1530-1531). Tristão de Ataíde (1533-1536) sent the Ternatan ruler to Goa in chains which incited the people against him. He was relieved by the arrival of Galvão in 1536. A stark contrast to his predecessors, Galvão's term in office is best expressed in his own words:

> Of the good he did to Tristão de Ataíde, and of the tears the latter shed before him. That he brought the vine to [Maluku], and also Portuguese women, without himself being interested in

---

4 A. Galvão, *A Treatise on the Moluccas, Probably the preliminary version of António Galvão's lost História das Molucas*, H. Jacobs, S.J. (trans. & ed.), p.33. In this rather self-effacing prologue Galvão claims that his work "contains a very small part of the matter because to treat the whole of it should be left to someone who has greater ability for it."

> them. That he performed many good works, leaving [Ternate] like a Venice ....[5]

Galvão writes in great detail about his intercourse with the Ternatan sultan Hairun, who later became a vehement opponent of the Portuguese. This is especially valuable for the information it gives concerning the authority of the Ternatan rulers, and the accompanying description of the court, its functionaries and their duties. The work is significant, too, for its detailed description of Islamic life in Ternate,[6] as well as its account of the ancient culture of the Moluccans. Galvão's work remains one of the most thorough compilations of the subject of the Moluccas, and an essential source for any study of this region in the pre-Dutch era.

Galvão was also the author of a second work, the *Tratado dos desconbrimentos,* translated and published in England in 1601 as *The Discoveries of the World,*[7] and which was essentially a summary of Spanish and Portuguese discoveries in the first half of the sixteenth century. The book appears not to have been published until after Galvão's death, but it was completed c.1555, that is, around fifteen years after his Moluccan governorship. In it he describes, as inhabitants of the Moluccas, "a kinde of men that have spurres on their ankles like unto cocks", and that in the islands of Batochina (Halmahera) he had been told by the King of Tidore, no less, that there "were people that had tailes, and a thing like unto a dug between their cods, out of which there came milke."[8] The book is a curious mixture of fact and misinformation relating to the Moluccas, possibly in an effort to appeal to readers with the exoticism and mystery of the East without straining the bounds of credulity too much. The second primary source used extensively in this thesis is the expansive work of François Valentyn, minister of the gospel at Amboina from 1685-1694 and 1705-1727. His massive work consisted of eight parts and filled five folio volumes, and was published at Dordrecht and Amsterdam between 1724 and 1726. Valentyn relied heavily on the works of earlier Portuguese historians, and native accounts when they were available to him. He mentions writings about the ancestors of the Ternatans which were supposedly extant in 1697, and while he does not state outright that he had access to this source, he does claim to have consulted a written

---

5 *Ibid.*, p.229

6 Jacobs, *ibid.*, p.24

7 António Galvão, *The Discoveries of the World,* London, 1601 (reprint, Amsterdam 1969)

8 *Ibid.*, p.46

document concerning the oldest traditions of the Moluccas, handed down by a *kimelaha* of the region.[9] Although a plagiarist on the grandest scale[10], his work, nonetheless, forms an almost complete history of the East Indies, including several detailed sections on the much neglected Spice Islands. This interest no doubt arises from his period of residence on Amboina, for which we should be thankful, for much of Valentyn's information does not appear in other sources of the period or the region.

Valentyn's chapters, *Molukse Zaaken* (Business of the Moluccas), *Beschryving der Moluccos* (Description of the Moluccas) and *Beschryving der Banda* (Description of Banda), found in Volumes I and II of his collection, provide valuable information on a range of subjects concerning these islands. His is the only account sighted which presents the early history of the Moluccans in any detailed and chronological manner. In Valentyn evidence is found of the development of early Moluccan political structures. His account is rooted in myth, but it seems clear that an indigenous form of ruler, a chief among chiefs, was the pre-eminent figure in that structure. This shows that Ternatan society was not still functioning as a kin-based society at the arrival of the Europeans, a suggestion which has been advanced by some modern historians. Valentyn also gives detailed (and at times confusing) information concerning the expansion of the Ternatan sphere of influence, a process which began in the early fourteenth century and culminated in the sixteenth, with the rule of the great Islamic propagator, Sultan Baab Ullah. Valentyn therefore presents a continuous picture of the intercourse between the islanders in the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, and then between the Ternatans and the Europeans upon their arrival in the Spice Islands in the sixteenth century.

Valentyn's research methods were not flawless. De Graaf notes that he "tremendously ransacked Rumphius's Amboynese history without mentioning the source", and that he used Portuguese, Dutch and, by his own admission, native sources "without preference, sometimes mentioning the authors in order to give his work more importance."[11]

---

9 F. Valentyn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indien, Amsterdam, Vol.I, Molukse Zaaken*, 1726, pp.127-128

10 He has incorporated Ridjali's work wholesale, and has also made extensive unacknowledged use of the work of the Dutch admiral, van Neck.

11 H.J. de Graaf, 'Aspects of Dutch Historical Writings on Colonial Activities in South East Asia with Special Reference to the Indigenous Peoples During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries' in D.G.E. Hall (ed.), *Historians of South East Asia*, London, 1961, pp.216-217

Despite these flaws, it remains that Valentyn's work on the Spice Islands has not been found in other sources, and for this reason alone it must be taken into account in an examination of Spice Island history.

The third work, that of Antonio Pigafetta, provides valuable information about Moluccan society in general. More specifically his discussion relates to the island of Tidore, the Spanish haven in the Moluccas. Pigafetta provides detail on some Moluccan customs surrounding the ruler, as well as basic information on the lifestyle of the general population. He discusses clothing, sago production, housing; he also makes a short digression into neighbouring Gilolo, illuminating some of the customs of that place. Pigafetta's presence and narration of events on Tidore provide a balance for the heavy emphasis placed on Ternate as the power centre of the Moluccas. This balance is extremely valuable in the context of the dynamism of Moluccan society, the social interactiveness of the two main islands and the political rivalry which was a constant factor in the history of the region.

Tomé Pires has also proved an invaluable source, more for matters of trade, but also for his reported observations on the Spice Island society. He provides information which is significant regarding the introduction of Islam to the islands. Pires' account of the trade into and out of the Spice Islands is detailed, and forms the basis of the trade chapter in this thesis. His comments on the rulers of the respective Moluccan islands gives the earliest European account of the relative strengths of the rulers, 2,000 able-bodied men on Ternate, 2,000 of the same on Tidore, and so on. Although his information and sometimes his trade figures are known to be incorrect in some instances,[12] his contribution to the knowledge of eastern trade is significant and enduring.

One other source which has proven very useful for this work is the account left by Jacob van Neck, a Dutch merchant who travelled with Wybrand van Warwick in 1598. Van Neck travelled to Banda and to the Moluccas, and his observations in both island groups have provided added detail concerning the politics, religion and customs of the Spice Islanders.

Other contemporary sources, including English accounts, appear in the bibliography.

---

12 See I.A. Macgregor, 'Some Aspects of Portuguese Historical Writing of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries on South East Asia' in D.G.E. Hall (ed.), *Historians of South East Asia*, London, 1961, pp.173-175

Secondary Sources

Few modern works have been devoted wholly to a study of the history of the Spice Islands, and even fewer have made a point of examining the society as a whole. As is the nature of much research today, work on the Spice Islands has tended to focus on one or two points of interest, and these are primarily connected with trade. Within the last five years, however, a small number of studies have been published that do attempt to present more than just a trade-oriented perspective of the islands. The authors of these works are John Villiers, Willard Hanna and Leonard Andaya. Additional publications by Paramita Abdurachman have also contributed towards a fuller knowledge of the history of the Spice Islands, although only a minority of these have been published in the English language.

John Villiers has published widely in this field, concentrating particularly on the Portuguese contact with and operations in the eastern archipelago. In his 1981 study of the trade and society of the Banda Islands,[13] Villiers presents a detailed examination of the only known source of nutmeg and mace in the sixteenth century. He has drawn heavily on the primary sources to reconstruct a picture of the islands, their inhabitants and the trade they engaged in, and I concur with the conclusions reached. His section III on the authority structure in the Banda Islands is, however, in need of revision. He makes no mention of the two major divisions in Bandanese society, the Ulilima and the Ulisawa, a social construct which made neighbouring villages mortal enemies. This is barely addressed in a later publication, *The Cash-crop Economy and State Formation in the Spice Islands in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries.*[14] A further work deals with the missionary activities of the Portuguese in the Moluccas and the connection between these and the Portuguese desire for security (and profit) in the clove trade.[15] In this article, the subject of religion is dealt with thoroughly, and the conclusions

---

13 J. Villiers, 'Trade and Society in the Banda Islands in the Sixteenth Century' in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol.15, Pt.4, 1981

14 J. Villiers, 'The Cash-crop Economy and State Formation in the Spice Islands in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries' in J. Kathirithamby-Wells & J. Villiers (eds.), *The Southeast Asian Port and Polity; Rise and Demise*, Singapore, 1990

15 J. Villiers, 'De um caminho ganhar almas e fazenda: Motives of Portuguese Expansion in Eastern Indonesia in the Sixteenth Century' in *Terra Incognitae*, 14, 1982

drawn in Chapter 6 of this thesis, while not based on Villiers' work, are similar.

Villiers is the author of numerous other articles dealing with different aspects of the eastern archipelago, but they had not served as part of the reading for this thesis as subject matter drew the connections to centres operating outside the geographical area covered in this thesis. They are of value for any comprehensive study which focuses on the trade of eastern Indonesia.[16] The contribution of John Villiers to an understanding of the history of the Spice Islands is therefore considerable, and his influence on this thesis is acknowledged.

Willard Hanna, too, has revealed the state of Bandanese society, concentrating on its last stages of independence from the European yoke and its subjugation by the Dutch, in his work *Indonesian Banda.*[17] The initial chapters provide some information concerning the pre-Portuguese period of Bandanese history, but the main focus of this book is on the later Dutch period, and so is not relevant to this thesis. Regardless of this, Hanna is guilty of concealing the paths of his research, and of assuming that the reader and would-be researcher would be satisfied with his work as the final word on early seventeenth century Bandanese society. This pattern is repeated in his recent publication, *Turbulent Times Past in Ternate and Tidore,*[18] where only a familiarity with the works of Valentyn enables the reader to deduce Hanna's main source.

The recent work of Leonard Andaya on the structure of Moluccan political authority has provided an interesting interpretation of the origins and development of this institution.[19] Andaya has argued the case for a rapid development of Moluccan political authority resulting from the introduction and acceptance of Islam. In Chapter 4, this assessment of the topic is examined and found unsatisfactory, in part due to inadequate citation of sources, but more to the information found in Valentyn concerning the development of the Moluccan political structure and also a

---

16 See, for example, J. Villiers, 'Manila and Maluku: Trade and Warfare in the Eastern Archipelago, 1580-1640' in *Philippine Studies,* 34, 1986 and 'The Sandalwood Trade and the First Portuguese Settlements in the Lesser Sunda Islands' in the *Proceedings of the II Seminar of Indo-Portuguese History.*

17 Hanna, *op.cit.*

18 W.A. Hanna & Des Alwi, *Turbulent Times Past in Ternate and Tidore,* Banda Naira, 1990

19 L. Andaya, '*The Structure of Authority in North Maluku in the Sixteenth Century*' Canberra, 1990

different interpretation of Galvão's evidence concerning the early political and social structure.

The historians noted above have made significant contributions to our knowledge of the Spice Islands, but their contributions have tended to focus on specific aspects of the islands' histories. This thesis draws together the various persectives provided by primary sources and secondary publications, and fuses them to present an overall view of the functioning of society in the Spice Islands. It shows the two Spice Island groups under study, the north Moluccas and the Banda group, to be varied in their political systems and in their social structure, but similar in their culture and their underlying religious beliefs, even after the introduction of Islam and Christianity in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, respectively. Above all, it shows the Moluccas, but not Banda, to be able to adapt to new situations and outside forces, and to utilise these for the benefit of its ruling elite.

Chapter 2

The Physical Environment

The Spice Island group consisted of a large number of small islands extending from the Banda Islands in the south reaching past the northern arms of Gilolo. These fell into two main divisions - the Moluccas, itself sub-divided into the Northern Moluccas (Ternate, Tidore, Makian, Motir and Bachian) and the Central Moluccas (Amboina and its immediate neighbours) and the Banda group. Both groups, although separate in their political systems and, for a time, in their religious beliefs, were "celebrated as the possessors of a fatal gift."[1] Until well into the eighteenth century, these tiny islands were the sole producers of three much sought-after spices: cloves from the former, and nutmeg and mace from the latter. Western Europe had become familiar with these spices as early as the eighth century, but it was only in the sixteenth century, with the arrival of the Portuguese in the eastern archipelago, that Europeans were able to secure these spices at their source of production. It was then that the 'gift' became a curse.

The Moluccas were made up of numerous small islands of which five - Ternate, Tidore, Motir, Makian and Bachian - were clove producing, although Pires noted that wild cloves grew on Gilolo, but were not of equal quality.[2] In contrast to the beauty of the Bandas, the Moluccas were seen by the early European visitors as unattractive and unhealthy. Galvão described them as "gloomy, somber, and depressing", while according to Barros, "the land of these islands is ill-favoured and ungracious to look at ... the coast, particularly in the case of Bachian, is unwholesome."[3] The islands were of volcanic origin and, with the exception of Bachian, they

---

1 H. St.John, *The Indian Archipelago*, Vol.I,London, 1853, p.116

2 Pires, *Suma Oriental, op.cit.*, p.221; nor, according to Milburne, *Oriental Commerce*, London, 1825, p.401, did they have any kind of spiciness.

3 Jacobs, op.cit., p.37; Barros, in J. Crawfurd, *A Descriptive Dictionary of the Indian Islands and Adjacent Countires*, London, 1856, p.283

have been described as "mere volcanic cones, springing from the sea."[4] Each island was small, measuring between four and eight leagues in circumference.[5] Bachian, although the largest in the Molucca group, was considered unhealthy because of its swamps. The islands were still active volcanoes in the Portuguese period; Galvão wrote that some of them "spit fire and have warm waters like hot springs."[6] It was the rich volcanic soil which was reported to support at least six clove crops per year.

According to Barros the ancient names of the islands were Gapé (Ternate), Duco (Tidore), Montal (Motir), Mara (Makian) and Sequé (Bachian).[7] Although this is not evidence of early settlement of the islands, it does show that they were known to people of the region, and it is probable that they were settled, if only by a transient trading population. The collective name for these islands, Maluka, is of unknown origin. Valentyn says that in the local language and orthography, 'Maloco' meant 'wide-spread', while according to Barros, it refers to a place and people of nearby Gilolo.[8] St. John relates what he describes as a traditional account of how Ternate came by its present name. It was originally called Leniagopie, but this was changed due to consequences arising from a violent storm experienced by Islamic *casizes*, the passengers on the first ship sailing from Malacca to the northern islands (but not, it seems, specifically the Moluccas). After experiencing several days of tempestuous weather, where life and limb were constantly at risk, the leader of the *casizes* called aloud "If thou art the chief of true believers, prove thyself by guiding us safely to shore." The following day land was sighted and was named Siedak Ternjate - "it is proved".[9] The origin of 'Leniagopie' cannot be traced, but broken into its two parts, the latter - gopie - can be rendered into the Gapé of Barros; Gapé itself it similar to the Javan word *api*, or fire - obviously a reference to Ternate's volcanic foundations. This particular name does not appear in any other primary source, and while it is a neat explanation of the name, associating Ternate and its rising

---

4 *Ibid.*, p.283

5 Galvão, *A Treatise, op.cit.*, p.37

6 *Loc.cit.*

7 Barros, cited in Crawfurd, *A Descriptive Dictionary, op.cit.*, p.283

8 Valentyn, *Molukse Zaaken, op.cit.*, p.128; Barros, cited in Crawfurd, *A Descriptive Dictionary, op.cit.*, p.283 Crawfurd notes that the name is well in use by the Javanese and Malays at the arrival of the Portuguese. Gilolo is an area of Halmahera on its west coast; the sources interchange the two names.

9 St. John, *op.cit.*, p.139

fortunes directly with Islam, this is an unlikely account of the real origin of the name.

As the focus for the European presence in the Spice Islands was on trade they, naturally enough, did not devote their attentions to the physical aspects of the towns and villages they saw or lived in. As such, it is a difficult task to attempt an accurate reconstruction of the principal towns on any of the islands. The best account available is that of Galvão, Portuguese governor in the Moluccas from 1536 to 1539, who, soon after settling the dispute between the Portuguese and the Moluccan kings, underwent an extensive restoration project in the Portuguese fortress and town at Ternate. Unfortunately his account contains minimal references to the native section, as he concentrates on his own handiwork. Other contemporary sources add little to Galvão's information, and the work of modern authors is confined to one piece by van Fraasen, which itself is limited to a conjectural reconstruction of the palace at Ternate in the late seventeenth century.[10] It should be noted here that the location of the town Ternate changed in the course of the European occupation. At the arrival of the Portuguese the main settlement was located on the southwest coast, and they gave this town the name Ternate. Its location moved, however, when the Dutch preferred the anchorage off Malayo, on the northeastern coast. Here they built their Castle Orange, and the town took the name Ternate. This is the location of the modern town of that name.

The dominating feature of the island (and of its neighbour, Tidore) was the volcano which rose to peak at 1715 metres above sea level. It is described as "wild and dangerous" by Valentyn, rising steeply and leaving only a small circumference of flat ground. The sides of the mountain were heavily forested and dotted with burned-out caves. These would seem to have been the natural dwelling places of the first inhabitants of the island. The landscape was streaked with "beautiful little rivers", although Barros, in his description, writes that "if a river comes from the mountains, its waters are absorbed before they reach the sea."[11] Galvão, however, notes that the inhabitants made particular use of "good and

---

10 Ch. F. van Fraasen, 'Court and City State in Ternatan Society' in *Halmahera Dan Raja Ampat Sebagai Kesatuan Majemuk*, Jakarta, 1983

11 Valentyn, *Beschryving der Moluccos, op.cit.*, ; Barros, cited in Crawfurd, *A Dictionary, op.cit.*, p.283

healthful wells" for their regular supply.[12] This landscape provided the inhabitants with the basic necessities for both food and shelter.

The origin of the city as a centre of Moluccan culture and authority appears not to have developed until, at least, the thirteenth century, but the lack of an indigenous account of the rise of the Moluccas presets the limits to which an investigation of this topic can extend.[13] Valentyn, however, does relate a descriptive chronology which illustrates the progression of the Ternatans from village clusters to port towns.[14] According to this author before 1250 Ternate was populated by very few people. As this is well before the first known contacts with the outer islands and those commercial centres further to the west, this sparse population was then comprised of the dark-skinned Alfuros, people of Melanesoid origin, mentioned by many of the contemporary sources, and the probable dwellers in the mountain caves mentioned above. It was not until the mid-thirteenth century that a town, as a social and political entity, is mentioned. This was Tabona, the oldest village known to the natives.[15] What the physical characteristics of this early Moluccan town were is highly conjectural, both in respect to lay-out and to constructions contained within it. No indication of either of these are given in the primary sources.

By the middle of the thirteenth century people from the neighbouring island of Gilolo had arrived in Ternate. The sources are not clear on this point, but there is no indication of an immediate integration of the two groups. Valentyn seems clear that it was these 'new' Ternatans who brought the village institution with a village head.[16] By c.1257 the Ternatans had moved down the mountain and had established themselves on the shores of the island. By this stage they had also adopted the title of *kolano*, or chief, for their village head, and so one would assume that structures befitting a person of this high rank had become a feature of the beach village. Again, the sources are silent on this point.

It is likely that the village pattern and building numbers and construction remained relatively simple in these early years of the beach

---

12 Galvão, *A Treatise, op.cit.*, p.39

13 Only has been sighted of the so-called 'Annals of the Spice Islands', in John Crawfurd's *History of the Indian Archipelago*, Vol.I, Edinburgh, 1820, but the reference was inadequate and all attempts to secure a copy of this manuscript have proved fruitless.

14 Valentyn, *Beschryving & Moluske Zaaken, op.cit., passim.*

15 Valentyn, *Beschryving, op.cit.*, p.10. See Chapter 3 for a fuller discussion of this.

16 Valentyn, *Molukse Zaaken, op.cit.*, p.134. See Chapter 3.

village. The inhabitants did not engage in trade, as was later to become their mainstay, and at this point confined their activities to fishing and sago production to satisfy their daily requirements.

Early contacts with the islands came first with the Chinese, then two decades later, with Malays and Javanese. From this point the Moluccas as a trading entity was founded. Traffic to the island increased thereafter, commensurate with the growing demand for its produce, the clove. By this time the main settlement of the Ternatans was located at *Sampaloe*, the village built on the southwest shore of the island. However, from this period nothing is known of the characteristics of the town itself.

It is pertinent to comment upon the characteristic features of some sixteenth century Southeast Asian towns, to offer a comparative analysis of western archipelago port towns and the main centre in the Moluccas. Physically, towns in Southeast Asia have been divided into two types, the maritime and the agrarian.[17] In the maritime region buildings were erected, naturally enough, near the primary economic source for the town (or, more properly, the port town) - the river mouth. This situation allowed the port to act as the 'middleman' between the oceanic traffic and the riverine traffic, and is well exemplified by the northern Javanese ports and those of the western archipelago, notably Malacca.

The basic structure of the Southeast Asian town was pre-determined, to a large degree, by the materials available in the immediate environs. Additionally, maritime towns often suffered from limited resources of both stone and corvée labour, both of which were available to agrarian cities.[18] The usual materials used in maritime locations were wood, reed or bamboo and a variety of roofing materials, including *atap*, *nipah*, and *gamuto*.[19] This did not mean that the constructions of maritime Southeast Asia were inferior, either structurally or aesthetically, to the more permanent stone and mortar structures of the inland agrarian kingdoms; in fact numerous European visitors commented on the beauty of these towns:

> Imagine a forest of coconut trees, bamboos, pineapples and bananas, through the midst of which passes a beautiful river all covered with boats; put in this forest an incredible number of

---

17 J. Kathirithamby-Wells, 'The Islamic City: Melaka to Jogjakarta, c.1500-1800' in *Modern Asian Studies*, 20, 2,, 1986, p.334. Characteristics of agrarian cities are not discussed here.

18 *Ibid.*, p.335

19 Palms or fibres.

> houses made of canes, reeds and bark ... divide these various quarters by meadows and woods ... and you will agree that a city of this style can give pleasure to passing strangers....[20]

The practical value in this beautiful aspect is the abundance of fruit trees, serving both immediate consumption and as saleable assets. Galvão notes that in Ternate "every house stands by itself, [provided] with vegetable gardens, orchards, and other things needed".[21]

Another feature common to Southeast Asian towns is the absence of a defensive wall around the perimeter. In the event of an attack on a town the inhabitants decamped to the interior rather than defending their homes, which were, after all, constructed from a plentiful and renewable resource. While it proved suitable for economic reasons, the exposed structure of the port city left it vulnerable to attack, particularly from the sea, but also from the hinterland. Despite the inter-island warfare apparent between the various Moluccan islands, no fortifications were erected before the advent of the Portuguese, and even the fortresses built by the Europeans initially had a purely commercial function. At that stage defence was considered as being of secondary importance. One of the central features of a Southeast Asian town was a fortified palace or citadel. This contained the residence of the king, his women and his dependents. It was always surrounded by a strong wall, and was "a place of cosmic power and centrality to the realm."[22] This was not the case in the Moluccas, where the *kolano* lived in his palace "along the sea or along the brooks or in them". The *kolano* did not actually reside freely (as opposed to residing as a prisoner) in a fortified residence until 1572. Much later, during the Dutch era (post 1608), the Ternatan sultans built themselves a more permanent structure which was completely surrounded by a wooden fence.[23]

The main town of sixteenth century Ternate was located on the southwest coast of the island. It was called by the natives *Gama Lamo*, meaning 'big' or 'great town'. This was obviously an indication of its prestige among the other Moluccan towns in relation to its economic role in the society of the Ternatans, as well as its comparative size to other

---

20 Pere de Premare, S.J. cited in A. Reid, 'The Structure of Cities in Southeast Asia' in *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol.XI, Pt.2, 1980, p.241

21 Galvão, *A Treatise, op.cit.*, p.295

22 A. Reid, 'Economic and Social Change, c.1400-1800' in N. Tarling (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, Vol.I, Cambridge, 1992, p.475

23 Valentyn, *Beschryving, op.cit.*, p.364

towns, although it was by no means expansive. The town had natural boundaries imposed by the sea and by the volcano rising behind it. Its growth, therefore, was always limited by its environment rather than its political and economic importance. The estimated extent of the town was less than two kilometres along the shore line, and this included the later addition of the Portuguese fort, which was begun in 1522 under the command of António de Brito. Physically, Gama Lamo fitted the general description of the maritime towns elsewhere in Southeast Asia, though this is by virtue of a common climate and available materials rather than a widespread cultural phenomena. Despite this, the town was not a little Malacca, a little Gresik, or even a small version of Bantam.

Gama Lamo was originally known to the Ternatans as *Sampaloe*. Valentyn names it as the first beachfront settlement of the Ternatans, but the existence of another settlement in close proximity to that village leads to some confusion regarding the identity of the town. It appears that at the same time or relatively soon after the establishment of *Sampaloe* a second settlement was established, either as part of the town or as a separate village. This settlement, *Baturadja*, later formed the native town when the Portuguese arrived and settled at what was *Sampaloe*. Whether the two villages were ever combined is not indicated, but the nearness of their boundaries makes this probable, and this combined settlement later carried the name Gama Lamo. The early history of these towns is obscure, and it may be that *Sampaloe* was the residence of the Ternatan *kolano* and the site of his court, and that this special village was serviced by the common people living in *Baturadja*. When the name was changed from *Sampaloe* to Gama Lamo is not recorded, Valentyn simply says that Gama Lamo was built on the site of this town.[24]

Apart from Gama Lamo being named as the first home to the *kolanos* after they moved from their mountain villages, there is no real indication as to why it was this town that developed as the pre-eminent centre on the island, or indeed in the entire Moluccas. Accounts left by trading visitors and historians all agree that Gama Lamo did not have an easy passage for anchorage, for this purpose most vessels made their way to Talangame, on the opposite side of the island. It is possible, therefore, that Gama Lamo may have originally been chosen for reasons of defence. The southwest coast faced away from Ternate's main antagonist in the region - Gilolo, and it also put Gama Lamo, as the authority centre, away

---

24 *Ibid.*, p.10

from its immediate neighbour and some-time rival, Tidore. Moreover, the island was partially surrounded by reefs, the most dangerous of these were concentrated off-shore at Gama Lamo. In this respect, defence must be seen as the likely motive for the chosen site, as these defences later proved a great obstacle to the vessels of trade. Also, the growing power of the *kolano* was centred on Gama Lamo from the early years of the fourteenth century when Javanese and Malayan traders were encouraged by the Ternatan royal family to visit the island, and the reasons for the town's pre-eminence could simply be this. As the centre of authority, as well as the island's trade, it was the natural point of attraction for the first European contacts, and for the first permanent settlement for the Portuguese. However, the town had changed its name before the arrival of the Portuguese, and so there was no direct connection between the strengthening of its defences and building of fortifications by the Portuguese, and the name change to 'big town'.[25] It seems plausible that the town had changed its name as its status changed, and that this happened before the coming of the Europeans.

As mentioned above, lying off the shore was a network of submerged reefs. The top of this reef was handmade from stone. It provided shelter for the Ternatan fleet, and subsequently the Portuguese fleet, and was constructed, according to the sources, so that no ship could pass through. This was a successful strategy, as it was noted by the Portuguese that the their ships could only enter the channel if they were in tow.[26] Access to the shoreline was limited by three shallow channels, "all of them very dangerous". No date is assigned to this construction, but it could easily be seen as an early attempt by the Ternatans to protect themselves from the constant harassment of the Giloloans, which dated from the late thirteenth century. As a system of defence it was an original and actually more sophisticated construction than the traditional wooden palisades. In Galvão's time two of the three channels were closed, the Barra da Liatahu, or channel of Limatahu, and the Barra da Arvore, or channel of the tree (so-named for the large tree which stood in front of it), "for the sake of security". This left the third channel, the Barra da nossa

---

25 Jacobs, *A Treatise, op.cit.*, p.344 fn.1, says that natives called the 'town by the fortress Gama Lamo'. A difficulty in determining the name and stages of the town's growth is that many modern sources refer to Gama Lamo as Ternate. This is further confused by the transfer of the centre of power to Malayu in 1608, which today is known as Ternate.

26 Valentyn,*Beschryving, op.cit.*, p.11. Galvão, *A Treatise, op.cit.*, p.289

Senhora, the channel of Our Lady, conveniently closer to the Portuguese fortress than the native town. This channel was obstructed by several large boulders, but these were cleared and the channel widened by Galvão.[27] A late sixteenth century woodcut from a description in van Neck's *Eerste Schipvaart* clearly shows that this single access point was still evident in 1599.[28] An early eighteenth century woodcut, from Valentyn, also shows this single channel lying just to the north of the river bed flowing through Gama Lamo fortress. Valentyn's woodcut also shows that by this period a long pier had been constructed, overreaching the reef; no doubt its purpose was to facilitate the loading of the larger Dutch ships with Moluccan spices, in the height of Dutch control over these islands.[29] From Galvão's account it seems that the earlier Moluccan ports did not have piers, as such, rather, within the harbour a pole, or *belo*, was put in the water and the boats were tied to this.[30]

The following description of the spread of the early town of Gama Lamo has been drawn from a combination of comments and maps from the sources. From Galvão it is known that all the Moluccan towns and villages were divided into quarters called *soas* (singular, *soa*). These may have been similar to the kampongs of Malacca, where the Javanese and the Chinese and other nationalities lived separately from each other. In Ternate only one group of people is mentioned in the sources as being clearly separate from the town in general, and this was the 'Moors'. The south end of their quarter lay opposite the Barra de Limatahu and the area itself was called Limatahu. This channel was the most accessible for native shipping, and this connection with the trading activities of the Muslim merchant population seems obvious. The settlement of Chinese in Ternate in the year 1278 mentioned by Valentyn[31] indicates the possibility of earlier Chinese contact with the islands, but there are no references in the sources to an established Chinese quarter in Gama Lamo, although Van Neck does mention that the king's interpreter was Chinese.[32] Valentyn mentions a group of some fifty Chinese living in

---

27 *Ibid.*, p.291

28 See Picture I and II at the end of this chapter.

29 A similar construction appears on the harbour front at Neira in the Banda Islands.

30 Valentyn,*Beschryving, op.cit.*, p.151

31 *Ibid.*, p.15

32 Galvão, *Discoveries, op.cit.*, p.45. Galvão noted the influence of the Chinese in the customs of the "governours among them [who] doe carrie in their hands red staves, whereby they seeme to have some affinities with the people of China."He further noted that there are "other Islands and people about this place, which are redde;

Malayo in 1606[33], but there is no evidence to indicate a long-term settlement in Gama Lamo. The Channel of the Tree designated the quarters of the native population of the town. The tree was a central feature in the political and social organisation of these islands and so formed a central landmark in the village. It was in this vicinity that the mosque was built and the *kolano's* palace was located. Further to the south was the location for the Portuguese fort. According to Valentyn, the Portuguese governor, António de Brito, made a special treaty with the regent of Ternate asking for the fortress to be built around the king's palace. This was not agreed to by the Ternatans and the Portuguese fortress was built close to Gama Lamo.[34] It did not form part of the town of that name.

Gama Lamo itself underwent at least two distinct building phases, the original constructions by the Ternatans and the building of the Portuguese fort. A description of Moluccan housing is given below, and these simple dwellings dotted the shoreline of Gama Lamo from the mid to late thirteenth century. The date of construction of the first *kolano's* palace, or other buildings of state, is not indicated in the sources, although it was noted that at Francis Xavier's arrival the palace of the king was "newly built". Schurhammer describes the palace as towering over the bamboo houses of the common people.[35] The mosque, a three-storied pyramidal structure, obviously can only have been constructed after Ternate's conversion to Islam, that is, in the second half of the fifteenth century. The palace and the mosque lay close to each other.

In the case of the Portuguese, the concentration was on restoration and/or strengthening of their own territory, the native part of the town was not their concern. The fortress itself was built between 1522 and 1524 by António de Brito, and underwent extensions and restoration under António Galvão. The original fortress was begun on the feast of Saint John (June 24), with de Brito laying the first stone in a small ceremony attended by his captains and the Ternatan men of note.[36] Galvão's description of this fortress is that:

---

and it is reported that they are of the people of China"; J.van Neck, *A Journall by Eight Shippes of Amsterdam, London, 1601*, p.49

33 Valentyn, *Molukse Zaaken, op.cit.*, p.220

34 *Ibid.*, pp.154-155

35 G.Schurhammer, S.J., *Francis Xavier, His Life, His Times*, Vol.III, p.146

36 M. de Sousa, *The Portuguese Asia*, Vol.I, London, 1695, p.247

> the outer wall encloses a space of 26 or 27 fathoms [square] ...the wall measuring one fathom; and the tower measures five fathoms or forty palms, and it has two floors.[37]

Restorations to the fortress and to the Portuguese settlement were carried out in 1537.[38] In the intervening fifteen years the fortress had been the target of Ternatan sieges and attacks, and Portuguese neglect. When Galvão arrived it was in such a state of disrepair that it became a priority after the conclusion of peace with the Moluccan kings. Galvão constructed mud walls, bulwarks and moats around the fortress and town. His attention was directed first at securing the property of the Portuguese king, hence the strengthened fortifications. As part of this he had a wall built around the royal storehouse and rebuilt the hardware and gunpowder store. For the Portuguese town, Galvão carried out a policy of beautification which included upgrading the housing, providing them with water via wells and water carried in bamboo pipes from a reservoir three leagues distant, and causing each householder to establish a garden and to build a barn for food storage. The town had streets laid out in a checkerboard fashion, giving it an open and ordered aspect. For the combined fortress/town security was a prime objective. Accordingly, Galvão had houses constructed of stone and clay. The gardens meant that the Portuguese were not dependent of the Ternatan markets for food, a matter of some significance when the occupants of the fortress were out of favour with the Ternatans. The secure water supply contributed to this independence.

In all of this Galvão had the good will and co-operation of the Ternatan people. He was able to persuade Hairun, the Ternatan *kolano*, not only to surrender to the Portuguese large tracts of fertile land lying around the town, but also dismantle the mosque and move it some distance from the fortress, "because this stood very near on a height dominating the fortress". Galvão argued that it was for the safety of the mosque's occupants, for "it would be sufficient to set fire to the mosque, the wind being favourable, to incinerate whoever was inside." Hairun was, understandably, reluctant to undertake this task, but after Galvão had spoken with the *menteris*, with the surrounding kings and with other influential persons, "soliciting them and giving them bribes", Hairun had little choice. The mosque was moved along the seashore, "far from the

---

37 Galvão, *A Treatise, op.cit.*, p.211

38 *Ibid.*, pp.285-299

fortress where it stands much lower, without causing any danger to the fortress."[39]

In contrast to the permanence of the stone and clay structures desired by the Portuguese, Moluccan housing was of simple construction for all levels of society. The focus of the housing was coastal, and the raised houses of the gentry were designed to take advantage of the pleasant sea breezes. They were generally not imposing buildings, although the residence of the king would have been constructed on a much grander scale than those of his courtiers. In their construction the houses did not use stone or mortar, but rather utilised the native flora, and so although functional, they were not entirely permanent. Jacob van Neck described the houses of Gama Lamo as being made of "thicke Reede or Cane, clouen and interlaced one in the other."[40] Even the houses of the kings and their courtiers were not lavish or complicated constructions, but simple in appearance.[41] The homes of the king and his "gentlemen" were constructed on four poles, and were entered by way of a ladder which could be drawn up at night. They had three rooms, one of which functioned as a reception room. The buildings used reeds and canes for the floor, and had two to four-sided roofs thatched with *ola* or *gamuta*, and they were surrounded by huge cane hedges with parapets. These raised houses, although hardly palatial, distinguished the gentry from the commoners (much like the English lord in his manor on the hill), and also offered more security for those inside; first with the presence of the parapeted hedge (or *pagar*), then the raised entrance and finally with the only passage of access able to be withdrawn in the event of any threatening situation. Although simple in construction, these houses must have been an attractive sight for the onlooker, and the interior must have been equally elegant, with their imported coverlets, carpets and leather cushions. In contrast, the houses of the common people were not elevated, nor were they elegant. They had cane-strip walls, earthen floors and simple furnishings. What distance separated the houses of the king and his court from the common people is unknown, but there can be little doubt that those of wealth and prestige were located away from the general population.

---

39 *Ibid.*, p.289; de Sousa, *op.cit.*, Vol.I, London, p.432 says that Hairun followed Galvão's policy of beautification.

40 J. van Neck, *A Journall, op.cit.*, p.15

41 Galvão, *A Treatise, op.cit.*, pp.105-07. He remarks that they look like bird cages.

To the south of the Moluccas lay the Banda Islands. The group was made up of a number of small islands, reported variously between six and ten islets, Lonthor, Neira, Pulo Ai, Pulo Run, and Rosengain as producers of nutmeg and mace, and Pulo Pisang, Pulo Swanggi and Pulo Kapal, bare and virtually uninhabited.[42] As with the Moluccas, their geological origin is volcanic, representing three distinct formations. Lonthor, Pulo Pisang and Pulo Kapal were formed by an old caldera wall shattered and inundated by the sea; Neira and Gunung Api represent a younger volcanic group; while the other smaller islands are actually elevated coral reefs.[43] The beauty of these islands provided a stark contrast to the gloomy descriptions of the Moluccas, and they were variously reported in the sources in lyrical terms. In the sixteenth century, the Portuguese historian Maffei called it a "paradise of beauty", while in the nineteenth century Wallace describes it as:

> A lovely little spot, its three islands enclosing a secure harbor from whence no outlet is visible, and with water so transparent that living corals and even the minutest objects are plainly seen on the volcanic sand at a depth of seven or eight fathoms.[44]

The chief island in the group was Lonthor, called by the Dutch Great Banda, measuring seven miles in length and averaging two miles in breadth.[45] The island was described by St. John thus:

> Teeming with rare fruits, and inhabited by strange beasts, its forests shaded at intervals the fertile plains that surrounded a magnificent hill in the centre of the island. On the summit, encircled and supported by a wall of living rock, extended a spacious tableland. In the middle of this stood a large grove, whose trees were covered with variously tinted leaves. The

---

42 Pires, Suma Oriental, *op.cit*, p.205, says there are six islands; W. Milburne, *Oriental Commerce*, London, 1825, p.396 records there being ten islands. Other accounts generally lie somewhere between these two. Pulo Kapal was a bare rock, and Pulo Pisang later housed a colony of lepers. Of Pulo Swangi nothing is said, although the meaning of its name, variously reported as 'sorcery island', as in J. Crawfurd, *A Descriptive Dictionary of the Indian Islands & Adjacent Countries*, Kuala Lumpur, 1971, p.33, or 'island of Spirits' from G.W. Earl, 'Trading Ports of the Indian Archipelago', *Journal of the Indian Archipelago and East Asia*, New Series,Vol.I, 1856,p.546

43 R.W. van Bemmelen, Geology of Indonesia, cited in H. Aveling, 'Seventeenth Century Bandanese Society in Fact and Fiction', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, Vol.123, 1967, p.331

44 Maffei, cited in St. John, *op.cit.*, p.134; A.R. Wallace, *The Malay Archipelago*, New York, 186, p.293

45 Earl, *op.cit.*, p.546

> soil supported natural plantations of spice-bearing shrubs, watered by a thousand pure springs which bubbled up abundantly and fed the numerous rivers irrigating the plains below.[46]

Such an idyllic picture belied the constant threat presented by Gunung Api which lay only half a mile northwest of Lonthor. Although an active volcano, Gunung Api was reported to produce limited amounts of cocoa and other fruits, and in the nineteenth century was even said to be home to a few emigrants from Timor.[47] There were slave settlements on the island in the sixteenth century, but these were abandoned after the eruptions in 1568 and 1598. This volcanic island and the island of Banda Neira; east of Gunung Api, one and a half miles long and one mile wide, formed a sheltered roadstead described above by Wallace. Neira was to be the location of the Dutch fort in the seventeenth century, and prior to the European settlement of the islands it was one of the principal towns of the island group.

During the course of the sixteenth century the town of Ortattan was the major centre in the Banda Islands. Valentyn notes that in the decades of the 1550s and 1560s it was one of the most important trading places with a resident trading population of 1,000 men. In times of war Ortattan always remained neutral, and it was to there that the parties journeyed to make peace and sign treaties.[48] The town was not the residence of any of the four kings of Banda, hence its newly developed prestige may have been derived from trade. By 1609-1610 its power and strength had declined, and he notes that its trading population was similarly reduced, now only seventy traders.[49]

Providing a physical description of Neira or of any of the Bandanese villages is virtually impossible, as none of the sixteenth or seventeenth century sources provide sufficient information to reconstruct a plausible picture. It is known from Pires that there were villages spread along the coast as well as villages in the mountains behind these "where they foregather when they feel they are in any danger in the villages along the

---

46 St.John, *op.cit.*, p.86

47 *Ibid.*, p.135. John Crawfurd, *Descriptive Dictionary, op.cit.*, whose manuscript was first published in 1856, recorded that the last eruption occurred in 1852. Wallace visited Banda in 1861 and then recorded that "Almost every year there is an earthquake here, and at intervals of a few years very severe ones', p.294.

48 Valentyn, *Beschryving, op.cit.*, p.5

49 *Loc.cit.*

sea coast".[50] The coastal villages were home not only to the Bandanese themselves but to a host of foreign traders, and, presumably, were divided into the characteristic quarters of typical Southeast Asian port towns. Lonthor itself had four harbours - Celamme (Selamon), Combir and Ortattan on the east coast and in descending order from the northern tip; and Lakoy, on the southern coast. Despite the greater number of ports on this island, it was the neighbouring island of Neira with the port of the same name which attracted the merchants in search of nutmeg and mace.

From scattered references in van Neck it is known that by the end of the sixteenth century Neira town, at least, had laid out streets, but the positioning of the important village structures such as the town meeting place and the mosque is unknown. The actual size of the town is also unknown, although it must have been of considerable extent if it housed a good proportion of the reputed 1,500 resident foreign traders, as would be expected, Neira being the main port of trade. According to Castenheda, the Bandanese lived in low houses with earthen floors and thatched palm roofs.[51] This type of dwelling appears similar to the houses of the common people of the Moluccas. There is no indication as to whether or not the houses of the *orang kaya* were elevated, as were the nobility Ternate, but it could be assumed that some mark of social differentiation would be evident in their construction. Remarkable for their paucity, these two slight pieces of information are the total of historical references available for any description of the villages.

While the physical characteristics of the Spice Islands were generally well documented in the sources, descriptions and detail concerning large population concentrations as authority centres and centres of trade are surprisingly scarce. Galvão has provided the most comprehensive account of the physical aspect of Gama Lamo on Ternate, but there is no complimentary source description for Neira or the other towns in the Bandas. Both island groups shared the common feature of volcanic origins, and a degree of similarity in their flora and fauna, and consequently in other aspects of their lives, such as their housing. Despite these similarities, the political and social history of the Moluccas and the Banda Islands diverged from these commonalities to develop in

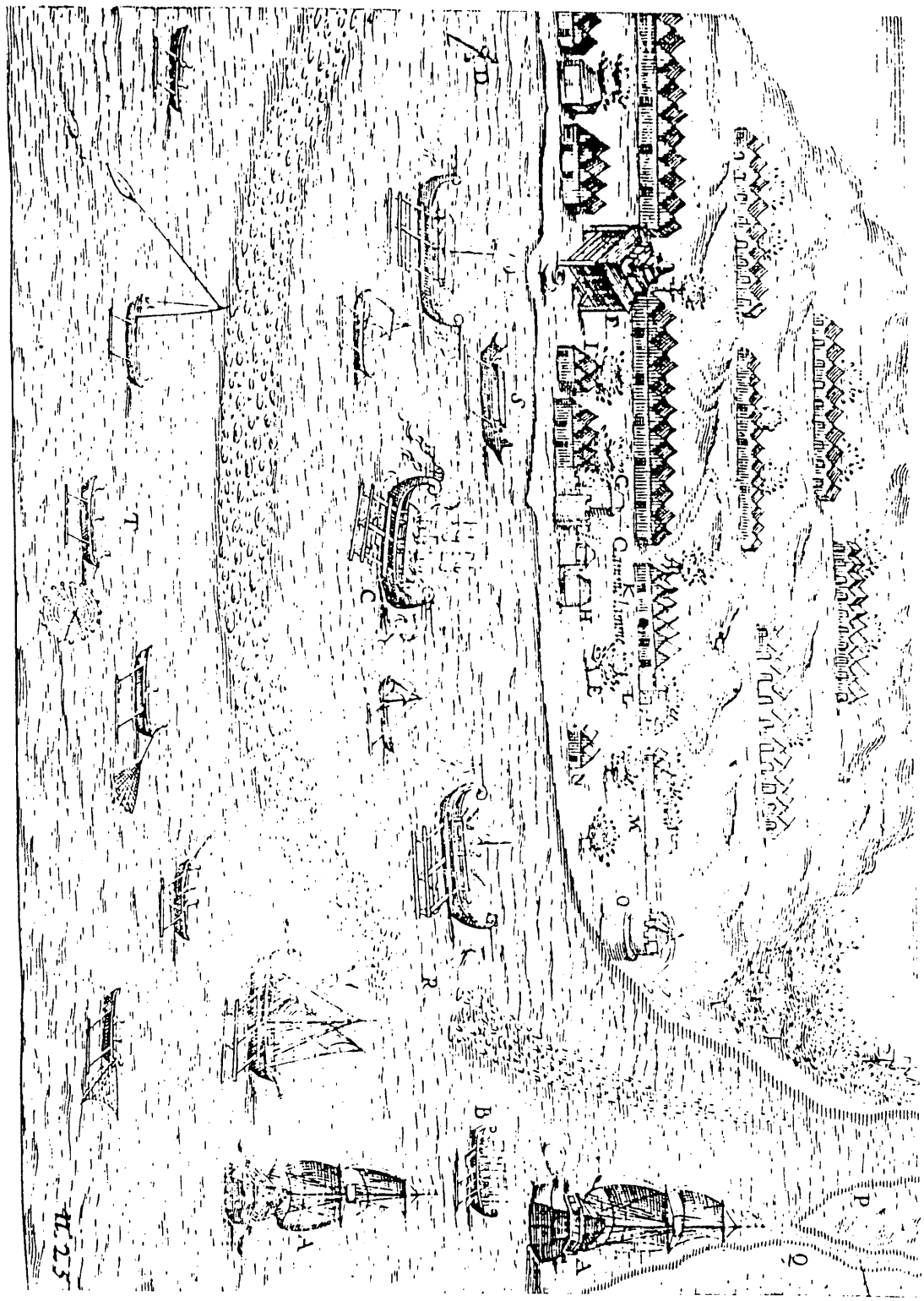
---

50 Pires, *Suma Oriental, op.cit.*, p.211

51 Castenheda cited in J. Villiers, 'The Banda Islands in the Sixteenth Century' in *Modern Asian Studies*, 15, 4, 1981, p.727

significantly different ways. These two aspects of Spice Island history are examined in the following chapters.

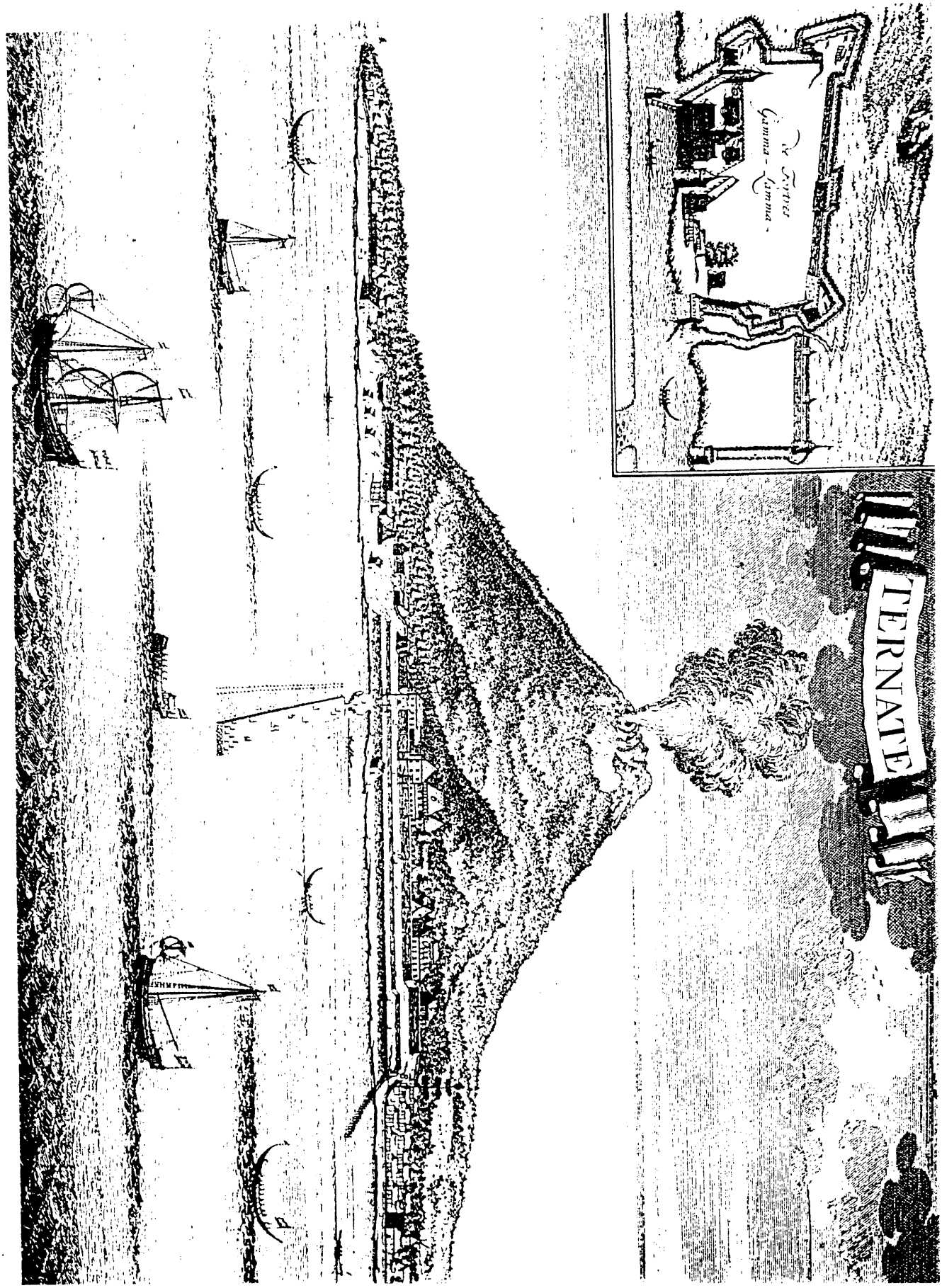
Picture 1
Gama Lamo



Jacob van Neck, A Journall by Eight Shippes, c.1599

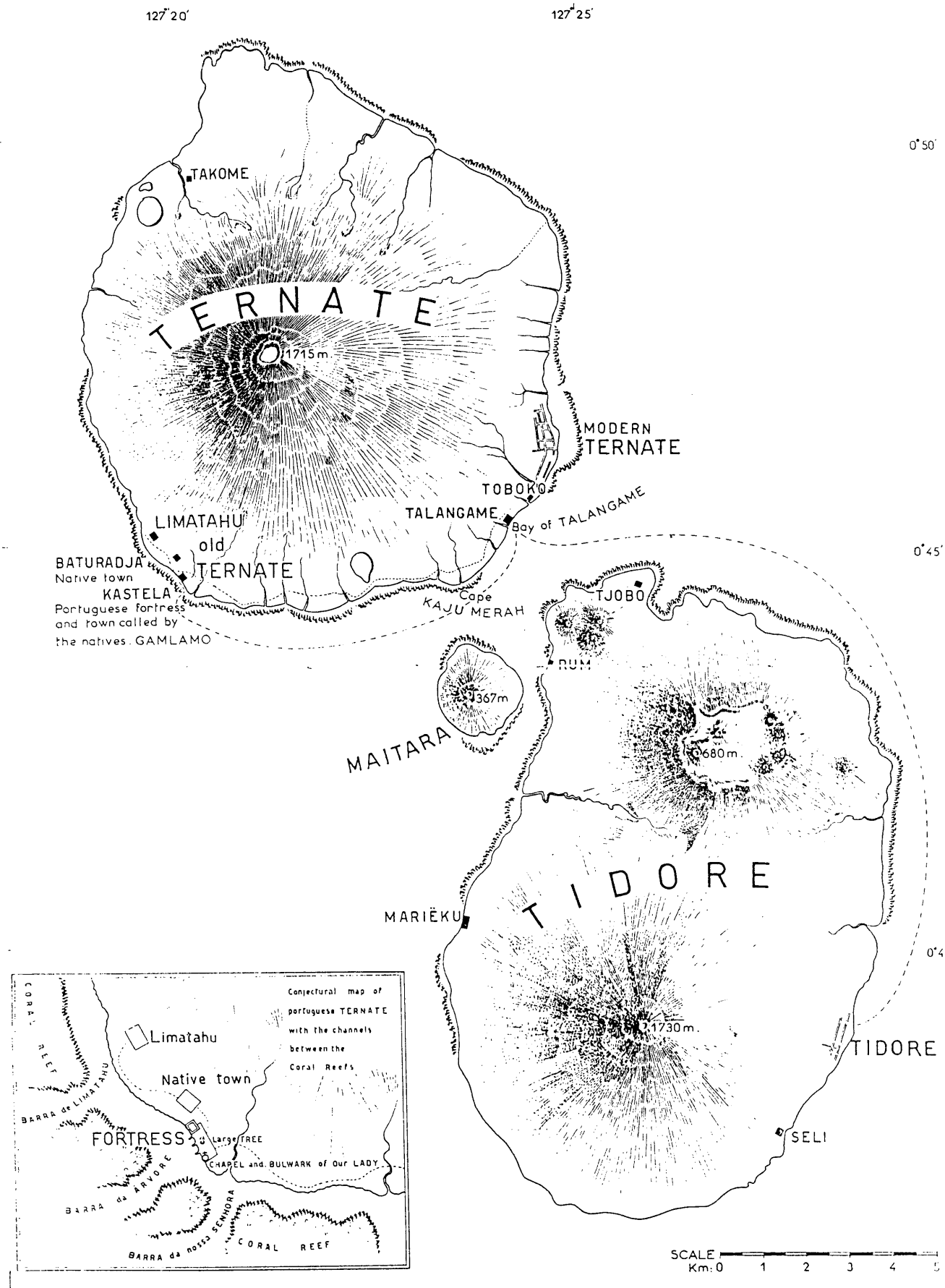
Picture 2

Gama Lamo



Valentyn, Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indiën, c.1724

Picture 3



Jacobs (trans.), A Treatise on the Moluccas, c.1544