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# Global Border Making and Securitisation in the Early Modern World

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# Global border making and securitisation in the early modern world: introduction

*Lisa Hellman and Edmond Smith*

*Abstract:* In the early modern period, borders could be mutable, imprecise, and represent far more than the lines on a map or delineation between sovereign states. In this essay, as well as introducing the eight articles that form the body of the special edition, we set out the key ideas that serve as a common theme and thread across this collected body of work. First, the idea of ‘securitisation’ is examined, and consideration given to how it has been used by both scholars in International Relations and more recently in historical studies. Second, we consider the concept of ‘border making’ and explore how re-examining our preconceptions about the idea of borders can change the way we examine important questions related to state and imperial formation, identity, and the meaning of community. Finally, the possibilities for using borders and security as entry points into asking new questions about ‘emotional global history’ are discussed, and how this could be useful for thinking more carefully about the tensions, frictions and entanglements, as much as connection and exchange, that are at the core of globalising processes that have done so much to shape the world as we know it today.

*Keywords:* Global history, borders, securitisation, migration, empire

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Borders are more than lines on a map, they can be defined by laws, by customs, by language and by emotions, and they can be as hard to pin down as they are prone to change. In recent times, we have witnessed plenty of instances that have shown how borders are not inviolable or fixed: whether in the actions of Brexiters in the United Kingdom to resurrect and strengthen barriers within Europe; efforts of the African Union to break down long-imposed barriers to better battle climate change; or the imposition of COVID-19-induced controls that banned entry overnight between regions that had seen free movement for decades. In each case, shifting priorities and conceptions of what borders are for and how they can be used to serve one community or another, have resulted in changes to the way borders function, even if the lines on maps that represent them have remained unmoved.

In the early modern period, borders were similarly mutable, and as well as coming to define sovereign territories or delineate space on maps or surveys, they were also used as a means by which communities could secure themselves from perceived threats. During periods of uncertainty, such as during this period of increasing globalisation and imperial expansion, borders could be activated, and put into use, by people who sought to control or mitigate against the increased mobility and intercultural interaction that such processes brought about. In this special issue, each article sets out to understand how such border making practices came about as a response to these historical shifts, and to reflect on how individuals living within newly bordered communities, or crossing over borders, understood these changes and the impact of borders on their lives.

This special issue is focused on the period between 1500 and 1850, and presents eight articles that each engage with the idea of ‘securitisation’ to ask new questions about how borders were constructed and managed in the early modern world. During this time, the connections tying the world together changed: broadly speaking, the contacts became increasingly influential, common, direct and personal. This process of globalisation was by no means a smooth coming together, however. Rather the opposite, the entanglements of the premodern world disrupted existing trade routes, brought about vast colonial settlement and migration, and brought in its wake military, economic as well as epidemiological threats.<sup>1</sup> As well as increased connectivity globally, this period also witnessed the spread of mapping and surveying as a means of constructing national and imperial borders across the world; in this special issue, we see those developments not as contradictory, but as resulting from one another.<sup>2</sup> Across these articles, each author brings attention to the fact that this period of globalisation was not one in which borders ceased to exist, but in contrast was a period in which borders gained new importance and became connected to other scientific

<sup>1</sup> Bayly (2004); Belich *et al.* (2016).

<sup>2</sup> Akerman (2009); Branch (2014).

and political practices. Together, these eight studies, with wide geographical and chronological spread, represent an effort to contribute to the discussion of what borders have been, became, and why, and thereby further our understanding not only of borders, but also how they can shed light on broader histories of trade, empire and globalisation.

In global history, the questioning of the nation state as a primary analytical framework is an important theoretical foundation, as are spatial analyses and, as a field, it seeks to move beyond an understanding of historical process that are defined by such borders and instead seeks to trace developments that cross them.<sup>3</sup> Despite, or perhaps because of this aim, the making of borders remains under-theorised within global history scholarship, and to some degree also empirically understudied.<sup>4</sup> In response to this challenge, this special issue will thus draw on interdisciplinary scholarship related to both border making and political theory—especially the concept of ‘securitisation’. In doing so, each article combines insights on border making from the field of geography with theories of perceived security and insecurity, and the resulting control of borders from the field of international relations, and makes use of the intersections between these fields to explore early modern practices of border making. These studies will take us on a journey across the globe, from the Baltic states to colonial Brazil, to the Sultanates of Sumatra and the Qing empire, and back to Europe and the Italian city states.

The articles in this special issue demonstrate the fruitfulness of considering border making as a response to uncertainties and a changing world. The authors’ findings also, however, illustrate that neither the perceived uncertainties nor the response to them can be easily disentangled. While the cross-border mobility of some types of actors, commodities or knowledge were quickly restricted, others were not, nor did all political shifts follow the same pattern of threat and restriction. Rather than a natural response to any and all external pressure, the closing, changing or creation of borders was one of many potential strategies employed, and each were defined by the specific contexts in which they took place. What these studies do suggest is that attention to border making in global history might not so much require an update of the political history of empire as much as it necessitates the integration of the last decade’s developments of the history of emotions. What sparks a shift in border policy is not so much a particular event, as the emotional reaction to it.<sup>5</sup> By shifting our perception towards an understanding that borders can be constructed emotionally, culturally and communally, as much as by states or empires, we can begin to ask new questions about how they function and how they shape our globalising world.

<sup>3</sup> Middel & Naumann (2010).

<sup>4</sup> Wang (2017); van der Vleuten & Feys (2016).

<sup>5</sup> This goes back to works such as Robin (2006).

## **On securitisation**

By recognising how border making was a broad social and political process, we can more effectively use analyses of it to reconsider periods and interactions when the enforcement of existing border policies, or their adaption to meet changing circumstances, was deemed of paramount importance. In this collection, each article focuses on moments of increased interregional encounter, whether in the form of cross-cultural diplomacy, trade, colonisation, international work migration or captivity. Resulting borders that occurred as a consequence of these events can thus also be considered as a response to the concomitant uncertainty of a changing world, which makes efforts to create certain borders a process of ‘security thinking’ on the part of individuals and communities as much as by states.

To explain this process, the authors across this collection have applied the theory of ‘securitisation’ to their analysis of these moments of early modern encounter and what they reveal about border making. Securitisation is a theory that was developed within the field of International Relations that seeks to explain how the construction and labelling of ‘threats’ on a social and emotional level can be used to generate support for stronger ‘security’ measures, such as border making. It thereby shows how security concerns within a state or polity are not a natural given, but something carefully designated by so-called ‘securitising actors’ who have the social or institutional influence to engage wider communities in responding to perceived threats. That makes issues of security not a matter of fact, necessarily, but an effect of the persuasive articulation of a ‘threat’ by a certain actor. Indeed, a central aspect of securitisation theory is how political actors employ rhetorical structures when framing ‘security’ issues, and shows how words do not merely describe reality, but can constitute reality, triggering political responses.<sup>6</sup> Contemporary and commonly studied examples include the securitisation—that is, the presentation of something as a threat—of immigrants, globalisation or religious difference, as a means of obtaining public support for ‘securitising’ policies. Dorothee Goetze’s article in this issue exemplifies the use of similar discourse in an early modern context, showing how Lithuanian nobles in the Swedish Baltic empire attempted to rhetorically frame and reframe their understanding of perceived threats to the order of the empire in order to obtain political favour—a strategy that was, in that case, ultimately unsuccessful.<sup>7</sup> For the study of early modern borders, then, this approach provides a useful tool for examining how the unwieldy process of border making could be both a top-down development imposed by states, empires, or corporations, but also a personal, even emotional affair, which was influenced by the communities affected.

<sup>6</sup> This goes back to [Buzan \(1983\)](#); [Buzan et al. \(1998\)](#); see also [Buzan & Hansen \(2009\)](#).

<sup>7</sup> [Goetze \(2021\)](#).

This approach, of connecting ideas related to securitisation with the analysis of historical border making, was the focus of an international conference held at the University of Bonn's Centre for Dependency and Slavery Studies in February 2020, where the articles here were first presented, discussed and developed. Building on these deliberations, the articles in this special issue challenge traditional interpretations of border making by carefully reconstructing how a range of different actors participated in border making, how they felt about and understood these changes, and how borders could be shaped by communal and social forces as much as political power. In doing so, we are indebted to the work of international relations scholar Christoph Daase, who presented a discussion of several historical analyses, particularly of the medieval period, in which the concept of securitisation was applied to a period long before the modern state existed. His conclusion was that the concept is useful for historical analysis in multiple ways—but that it has yet to find very much traction.<sup>8</sup> Sari Nauman's article opens up this special issue with a detailed analysis of the concept of securitisation and its potential historical use, also exploring the possible problem that arise when applying a theory from International Relations—a field which already in its very name clearly assumes the existence of modern nation states—on a world in which such centralised states did not yet exist.<sup>9</sup> As Nauman shows, the application of this theory can indeed help historians to explain the complex creation of threat and border within and between empires and polities, but it also requires a careful consideration of what constitutes a state.

What is more, the theory of securitisation helps us ask questions about power relations inherent in the making of borders, and the perceptions of threat. Some actors administer security, others receive security, and yet others are created as targets of securitisation—that is to say, they are presented as a danger. Thereby, security concerns produce uneven power relations.<sup>10</sup> Such hierarchies could be racialised, but as shown in the article by Rolla, they could equally well be defined by class.<sup>11</sup> The power relations similarly affected the referent object, that is, the thing that is presented as being threatened and as in need of protection. In these examples, that referent object could be a colonial regime, such as in the case of Veevers's article on the British colonial enterprise on Sumatra, but also a societal system, as the Lithuanian nobles in Goetze's article argued, or even the stability of the Chinese empire, shown to be the referent object in Barend Noordam's article.<sup>12</sup> In each article in this collection, securitisation provides a focus that encourages the re-evaluation of border making

<sup>8</sup> Daase (2012).

<sup>9</sup> Nauman (2021).

<sup>10</sup> For this critical approach, see Williams (2003); Floyd (2011).

<sup>11</sup> Rolla (2021).

<sup>12</sup> Veevers (2021); Goetze (2021); Noordam (2021).

that integrates communal and social perspectives with political determinations and state-defined borders.

In this respect, engagement with securitisation also presents a useful opportunity for each author to intersect with recent work on the history of emotion. In the past two decades, this field has shown how emotions not just influence politics, but constitute them.<sup>13</sup> While many studies, especially those that link fear and political state policies, concern themselves with the modern period (the Cold War and the post-Soviet era feature prominently), there are also studies showing the potential of a much longer time perspective. In his study of 13th-century Livonia, for example, the historian Wojtek Jezierski uses the concept of emotional landscapes and ‘empathy walls’ to describe the making of the polity of Livonia, and the relationship between settlers, crusaders, missionaries and the native population.<sup>14</sup> Emotions have also been linked to the making of the British empire during the early modern period, and used to explain ideas of home, threat, and economic and cultural dominance.<sup>15</sup> By considering the emotional politics of border making, the authors here are contributing to the intersection between history and political theory—one that is based on the experience of creating borders, and perceiving a need for them. This need is not a simple top-down affair based on a ‘rational’ evaluation of future needs. Instead, the key to understanding the social side of borderlands history, we argue, is to take seriously the feelings of concern that drive practices of border making, and how those feelings were affected by processes of globalisation in the early modern world.

### **On border making**

Rather than presuppositions for a polity to exist or as natural effects of the closer commercial ties between regions in the early modern period, borders here act as the objects of study. As recent research has shown, global histories of the early modern period have much to gain from seriously considering border making as a process: such a view highlights not only what was perceived as a pressure—or even a threat—by communities and states, but also the resources called upon to counter this.<sup>16</sup> Focusing our attention to this process has the potential to break up any monolithic view of the state, and highlight the multiplicity of actors presenting parallel or competing claims to what a border should be and how it should function. Indeed, as Tamar Herzog argues: ‘rather than being determined by treaties or military confrontations’ borders

<sup>13</sup> See [Laffan & Weiss \(2012\)](#).

<sup>14</sup> [Jezierski \(2020\)](#).

<sup>15</sup> [Lydon \(2019\)](#).

<sup>16</sup> Historical discussions of this theory include [Adelman & Aron \(1999\)](#); [Ludden \(2011\)](#).



represent ‘the end result of multiple activities by a plethora of agents’ whose actions ‘defined the territories of their communities and state’.<sup>17</sup> We can observe that process, especially, during moments of rapidly increasing global interaction—whether through trade, migration or conquest. In the modern era, the experience of globalisation ‘actually created a *demand* for the use of modern tools of spatial abstraction’ as a means for delineating borders.<sup>18</sup> That process developed gradually, and in step with the process of globalisation itself: scientific mapping and world making is increasingly tied to the very idea of empire, in the way that it was conceptualised during the early modern period. While both this process of empire and the intertwined development of scientific mapping has been much studied for Europe, it was certainly not unique to it.<sup>19</sup>

For a long time, border studies within history, geography or international relations have focused on the making of ‘hard’ borders, that is political territorial boundaries, and their delineation in maps and in law. As the field has evolved, more and more attention has been paid also to ‘soft’ borders: fluid, porous, lived and imagined contact zones and delineations. In recent years, the division between hard and soft borders has been questioned, and they are now commonly stressed as parallel aspects of the processes of border making—indeed, that is the view applied in this special issue.<sup>20</sup> This combined approach allows for a complex view of borders, the actors who created them, as well as and the communities affected by them. Contemporary researchers now ask questions such as who acts as a ‘carrier of a political border’ in their everyday life, maybe even involuntarily, but stress that such everyday bordering does not represent a weak, or ‘soft’ border, and highlight that such a process can generate borders as absolute and functional as that of state-imposed regimes.<sup>21</sup> This broadening of the understanding of borders actually goes hand in hand with the logic behind the development of the theory of securitisation. By end of the Cold War, some scholars in International Relations were dissatisfied with a narrow focus on the political stability of states. Feminist scholars, especially, played a key role in challenging the idea that the state was the sole provider of security; on the contrary, the state was often the cause of insecurities for women, and these scholars demonstrated how gender, war, foreign policy and issues of security were intertwined.<sup>22</sup> This nuanced understanding of power relations relative to different groups’ experiences of the same

<sup>17</sup> Herzog (2015).

<sup>18</sup> Branch (2014: 105); see also Massey (2005).

<sup>19</sup> For a broad overview, see Heffernan (2014); for a non-European example, see Yee (1994); or Aksan & Goffman (2007).

<sup>20</sup> The combining of these two seemingly contradictory visions has led to novel re-interpretations of often sidelined regions in global history. See, for example, Shao (2011).

<sup>21</sup> Brambilla (2015).

<sup>22</sup> See for example Muehlenbeck (2017).

processes, also facilitates the analyses of historical examples: religious, political and economic borders were created simultaneously in the early modern period, but—as the authors of this volume demonstrate—they had different porosity and meaning for different actors.

As this special issue serves to illustrate, borders represent complex ecosystems, acting both as barriers and crossings, points of contact and conflict, and places of exchange and enforcement. As such, borders would be porous and solid simultaneously, and act as spheres of forced and voluntary integration parallel with processes of conscious exclusion.<sup>23</sup> Who or what could pass these boundaries, and what was perceived as the relevant border at any given moment, reveals much about the organisation of specific communities and the hierarchies within them. For example, in her study of 18th-century Turin included in this issue, Nicoletta Rolla shows how any group that could be considered ‘vagrant’ was perceived as a unwanted, and were often presented as threatening the stability of the city.<sup>24</sup> In contrast, Laura Di Fiore’s article details how migrant workers and artisans in southern Italy in the 19th century could be seen as a sought-after and crucial workforce even while their movements were considered suspect.<sup>25</sup> It was thus not cross-regional migration *per se* that was targeted, but borders were set up to reach particular groups, with a particular kind of mobility. In global, colonial contexts, too, we see similar patterns and challenges in border making. Veevers, for instance, shows how the English East India Company sought to employ strictly delineated ideas of border making in 17th- and 18th-century Sumatra, but struggled to implement these in the face of the island’s highly mobile workforce and complex political landscape.<sup>26</sup> In Mariana Boscariol’s article, in contrast, we see how Portuguese efforts to penetrate into trading networks in West Africa and China were stymied by local efforts to impose and maintain strict border regimes.<sup>27</sup> In each case, and across the articles in this collection, we see how early modern borders represented complex systems that had to be negotiated, adapted and enforced in light of changing local and international pressures.

### **Borders and security: towards an emotional global history**

By applying the lens of securitisation to understand border making in the early modern world, in a number of different contexts, the articles in this special issue

<sup>23</sup> For more on these parallel processes, see [Ahmed \(2000\)](#).

<sup>24</sup> [Rolla \(2021\)](#).

<sup>25</sup> [Di Fiore \(2021\)](#).

<sup>26</sup> [Veevers \(2021\)](#).

<sup>27</sup> [Boscariol \(2021\)](#).

also intersect with a number of themes common in debates on early modern global history.

A classic example is how borders affected migration, and how their recreation or application became an effect of flows of migration.<sup>28</sup> As we can see in Nauman's article,<sup>29</sup> the experience of Baltic refugees in the 18th-century Swedish empire show how this group was at times perceived as a danger to the stability of the state, leading to new security measures. This can be compared to the study presented by Rolla, in which groups classified as vagrants in Turin were also singled out as disruptive, and their access to the city restricted.<sup>30</sup> As the article by Joachim Östlund shows, however, attention to migration does not only shed light on those attempting to move or gain access, or efforts to restrict them, but also those subject to forced migration.<sup>31</sup> He provides a dramatic example in the North African captivity and ransom of Swedish sailors in the 18th-century Mediterranean, arguing that the payment of this ransom eventually became not only a community issue, but also a state concern: while the threat affected individuals, and private commercial ventures, to free this group eventually became a matter that concerned the state as a whole. Just as the theory of securitisation has developed to pay more and more attention to non-state actors also in the shifting of state policies, state and non-state actors work in parallel to interpret the outside world; to apply a strict analytical division between them might obscure more than it reveals.

Another way in which border making might help explain early modern global connections is the circulation of knowledge. In Noordam's article, we are presented with a view of how contacts between the Ottoman and the Qing empire developed between and through different official embassies, and he uses the example of military technology to see the limits of that exchange.<sup>32</sup> However, Noordam also shows how the presentation of the foreign as a threat, even in relation to useful knowledge that might be obtained through such links, should be understood as part of national political concerns, as much as part of foreign policy. This helps raise the issue of how borders differed between types of flows, for example that certain types of knowledge could travel easier than others.<sup>33</sup> A similar example related to this theme is that of Boscarior's case study in West Africa, in which trade is clearly both encouraged and delineated at the same time.<sup>34</sup> This control shows clearly how the flow of goods could

<sup>28</sup> For an overview, see [Manning & Trimmer \(2020\)](#).

<sup>29</sup> [Nauman \(2021\)](#).

<sup>30</sup> [Rolla \(2021\)](#).

<sup>31</sup> [Östlund \(2021\)](#); and see [Eltis \(2002\)](#).

<sup>32</sup> [Noordam \(2021\)](#).

<sup>33</sup> This point has been raised by [Proctor \(2008\)](#); [Finn \(2010\)](#).

<sup>34</sup> [Boscarior \(2021\)](#).

be perceived as less threatening than the presence of those perceived as outsiders, and how early modern states balanced profit versus the seriousness of potential dangers, just as modern states do.

Across these articles, the authors clearly show how the making of borders and the globalisation of the early modern world were not contradictory, but in fact intertwined processes. Despite this fact, many insights from geographers and International Relations scholars about how border making functions, and how it intertwines economic, cultural, social and political concerns, are not really put to work in global history. While a classic approach to global history is to try to move beyond the nation as a framework, one way to do that might be to focus on the complex making of borders themselves. To use a simile: gender history has demonstrated that the questioning of the male norm might require attention to the construction of masculinity itself, not only to examples of femininity breaking that norm. Much in the same way, questioning the nation state and national borders might mean that we need to pay it more attention, not less. Doing so might allow us to connect to the field of global history's increasing focus on the losers of globalisation, its frictions and entanglements, and the disconnections that can be identified within this process. Thereby, global history might represent one of the fields that has the most to win by the focus on border and security that this special issue proposes, as it can help not only identify the existence of friction and disconnections, but explain why they arise, and consider them as response to an insecurity that is also emotional.

## **Conclusion**

Taken together, the authors demonstrate how attention to the making of borders can illuminate many key issues not only of how the early modern world changed, but also of the reactions that change sparked. Connections led to exclusions based on class, profession, religion and ethnicity—and they did so by presenting certain groups as a menace, and sparking fear. Thereby, this issue shows the value of paying attention to diverse practices of border making, especially for global history. What is more, it highlights the analytical potential for historians to draw upon theories from International Relations when approaching global border making, and points to the necessity to also consider emotional concerns in that process.

Theories such as that of securitisation certainly stem from a particular historical context, and it is not uncomplicated to apply ideas based on a world of modern nation states and inspired by the end of the Cold War to a world where the nation states had not yet formed, and the political system looked different altogether. The key takeaway from combining such a theory with historical examples spanning the early modern world is to consider security concerns, regardless of

the form they take, as a basis for the making of borders—which, in turn, paves the way to explore an emotional world making. People’s worries, hopes and dreams might be explored as a reaction, and as something that in turn helped shape the global connections in the early modern era; this is a venue that deserves to be explored more in the future.

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# Securitisation of space and time

*Sari Nauman*

*Abstract:* This article introduces the concept of securitisation for early modern studies. It identifies security studies' implicit state-centric approach as one of the main culprits for early modern scholars' hesitance to use the concept and argues that, for historians, there is a twofold problem with placing the state at the centre of research. The problem pertains to how scholars have dealt with the interactions between time and space when approaching the state. First, the definition of state is space- and time-centred; it is built to accommodate the system of 19th- and 20th-century Europe, with the idea of the sovereign state at its centre. To fit the early modern period, we need to acknowledge the role of other entities and varieties in securitisation processes. Second, the concept of the state needs to be problematised by acknowledging the changing nature of its space—that is, by temporalising its spatiality.

The second part of the text focuses on two interconnected areas especially prone to securitisation, where historians have much to offer those studying securitisation processes: migration and border making. Questions of how to control the future and how to secure it are most often translated into a spatial problem: as long as the border is secure, change will not enter. By focusing on local responses to perceived security threats and studying the effects that measures taken had on local communities, historians can seek not only to understand the underlying assumptions made about the future by our objects of investigation, but also to gain considerable insight into de-securitisation processes.

*Keywords:* securitisation, migration, border making, temporality, spatiality, early modern history, threats, state formation, sovereignty, security studies, de-securitisation.

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## Introduction

Whenever we feel threatened, we react. We try to deal with the threat by either minimising it, eliminating it or escaping from it. Without going into detail of the physiological responses—the activation of the autonomic system, the release of hormones—the fight-or-flight mechanism helps us shorten the deliberation process, saving us precious seconds and allowing us to react instantly.<sup>1</sup> Neither response, that is neither fight nor flight, rests on an understanding of what it is that is actually threatening us—they are, rather, emotional and physiological responses. We identify something as a threat without questioning that classification and we react immediately. Only at a later stage does the information that we gathered while reacting come to inform our rational thinking.<sup>2</sup>

A basic feature of threats is that they, by being articulated, demand a response. To the Copenhagen school of securitisation, this is a key insight: that to present something as a threat—or to present something as threatening—is to provoke a response. Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and others developed the concept of securitisation in the 1980s, working within the field of International Relations (IR). They started from the concept of security as a basic human need, and applied this concept to the level of states—states strive for security. But what constitutes security, and what constitutes a threat? The idea of securitisation is that when something is called a threat, or is presented as threatening, something happens to how we treat that object (or, for that matter, subject). The object is *securitised*, i.e. made into a security issue that prompts certain responses. Phrasing a phenomenon as a security issue forces decision-makers to allocate resources to deal with the perceived threat, and the question may dominate public and political debate and set the agenda for authorities and opposition groups alike.<sup>3</sup>

Since its formulation, the concept of securitisation have not only proven its place in security studies, but have also influenced several other research fields. Historians, especially of early modernity, have, however, hesitated to take inspiration, and perhaps with good cause. When historical researchers do engage with securitisation, it is primarily in studies of the territorial states of the 19th and 20th centuries, for which the concept have proven well adapted. Premodern societies, during which states was still in formation, seem to present more of a challenge.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For those interested, the classic studies include Cannon (1915); Selye (1976); Chrousos & Gold (1992).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Uvnäs-Moberg *et al.* (2005); Damasio (1994: *passim*).

<sup>3</sup> Buzan *et al.* (1998); Williams (2003).

<sup>4</sup> Investigations into early forms of security have nevertheless shown great promise, see, for example, Cressy (2011); Kampmann *et al.* (2018). See also the excellent work done at the research centre ‘Dynamics of Security: Types of Securitization from a Historical Perspective’, at the universities of Marburg and Gießen.



A few excellent suggestions of how to use security studies and securitisation in research on premodern societies have been made by, mostly, German scholars. Eckhart Conze, for example, encourages historians to historicise security itself, to see how the notion has changed over time.<sup>5</sup> Others have shown how prominent specialists of risk and security tend to make broad and generalising remarks about the historical evolution of central concepts, and argue that historians need to investigate such claims empirically.<sup>6</sup> In line with these scholars, I argue that state-centrism is a key shortcoming of the concept of securitisation which complicates its usage for historians. Premodern historians, with our dealings with pre-, early or non-state societies, are particularly apt to provide such a critique, and to show another way forward. With examples taken from my empirical studies of border making and migration, I demonstrate the spatial but also temporal preconceptions at the base of securitisation processes. Instead of presupposing the state, studies of historical securitisation processes can show how these preconceptions were instrumental in creating borders and political entities.

Before going into the historical case for securitisation research, I will briefly address the concept itself. Securitisation is a speech act, as formulated by J.L. Austin. Once spoken, such a statement changes the world in significant aspects: it changes how we think about it, how we feel about it and what we do about it. Once spoken, a speech act cannot be taken back, since the change happens immediately at the moment it is spoken aloud. Moreover, the speech act does not only change the object and how we look at it, it also changes us—the ones listening to, talking about or in other ways performing the speech act (which is not necessarily verbal).<sup>7</sup>

In defining a threat—in defining something as a security issue—implicitly or explicitly, we also define one additional thing: a referent object, i.e. that which is being threatened. In public discourse, this referent object is often recognised as a certain group of people who are supposedly in need of protection, but are unable to secure it for themselves: most often, women, children or ‘us’. The act presupposes an identification with the object under threat, either because we constitute it or because it is something that we are responsible for, something that should be under our protection. The securitisation of an issue thus distinguishes something as threatening, who or what is being threatened, prompts a response to that threat, and identifies those who should be the ones to respond.

It is easy to see how the opportunity to securitise an issue may be abused by those in power, or those who strive to be. However, in itself, securitisation is not a normative concept—securitising an issue is not necessarily an act of good or bad. It is a way to cope with the fact that our future is uncertain and that we want to prevent future

<sup>5</sup> Conze (2012).

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Daase (2012); Zwierlein (2012).

<sup>7</sup> Austin (1976: *passim*).

harm. By articulating that which we perceive to be threatening, we compel others to become aware of this threat and try to create the conditions necessary to deal with it. Nevertheless, securitisation often has negative effects, and I will briefly mention four of these. First, when an issue is securitised, other issues tend to take a step back. Resources are allocated to deal with the perceived threat, whereas other matters are deprived of those same resources. It is therefore imperative that those who are responsible for allocating resources consider not only how best to deal with the perceived threat, but also what consequences the allocation of resources to deal with that threat may have for other vital concerns.

Second, securitisation is sticky. If one issue is securitised, other issues that are associated with the securitised issue may also become securitised. These other issues are not necessarily threatful, they are not even necessarily connected to the threat in any tangible way—the stickiness of securitisation means that it can adhere to related issues, as well as to human subjects who are simply walking by or who look like someone who was once in the vicinity of a securitised subject.<sup>8</sup>

This leads us to the third and fourth risks of securitisation: discrimination and auto-immunisation. Securitisation discriminates; some subjects—be they persons, groups, peoples or institutions—are more frequently securitised than are others. This means that they are subject to a disproportionate number of security measures because they are associated with perceived threats. Discriminatory measures easily lead to auto-immunisation, meaning that the security measures taken may end up attacking the very community or the fragile order that they were supposed to protect. Such is the case when border crossings are turned into military zones, and when refugees arriving by boats are prevented from disembarking in an effort to save lives by stopping dangerous boat journeys. Another example of both discrimination and auto-immunisation can be found in the problem that the Black Lives Matter movement has drawn global attention to: with the explicit aim of providing security, police forces around the world have targeted black citizens, thereby undermining the very security that they were meant to provide.<sup>9</sup>

Not every attempt at securitising an issue is successful. As with all speech acts, securitisation may be infelicitous if spoken by the wrong individual, at the wrong moment, to the wrong crowd, or if the wrong intentions of the speaker are plain for others to see. The success of securitising an issue is dependent on the authority of the individual identifying the threat, the context of the issue in question, on the timing with which the issue is presented, on the plausibility of the claim of danger, and on the willingness of the audience to accept the issue as a threatening one.<sup>10</sup> Altogether,

<sup>8</sup> On sticky concepts, see [Ahmed \(2012: 89–92\)](#).

<sup>9</sup> On auto-immunisation, see [Derrida \(2005: 34–5\)](#). For examples on discrimination and auto-immunisation, see [Mavelli \(2017\)](#); [Burke \(2013\)](#).

<sup>10</sup> On felicitous and infelicitous speech acts, see [Austin \(1976: 14–15, 119–20, 138–9\)](#); [Derrida \(1988: 15\)](#).

this implies that in order to securitise an issue successfully, a person needs to be in a position to allocate resources and to effect changes in policy, behaviour or the like. It needs to be someone to whom others listen, and who has some degree of influence. The state, and key figures within the state, are generally the ones to manage this, although other actors may of course also participate, such as the media, institutions, organisations and members of the economic or cultural elite.<sup>11</sup>

### **Migration, borders and the hovering state**

Migration is one of the most frequently securitised issues in modern politics. It is one of those areas that Jef Huysmans has termed the ‘domains of insecurity’—areas particularly prone to generate insecurity, and in which actors often address that insecurity and define it as a problem. Considerable resources are channelled into the securitisation process, trying to make migration ‘secure’—or rather, to make ‘us’ feel secure about migration—thus turning it into a highly politicised issue.<sup>12</sup> From a historical perspective, the issue of migration stands out as well. A primary concern for most states and societies across time and space, as well as for families and individuals, has been that of creating borders to separate relatives from strangers, friends from foes, citizens or subjects from foreigners.<sup>13</sup> Border making gives us an illusion that it is possible to demarcate clearly the inside from the outside, but the separation between inside and outside depends on your perspective. Although political border patrols may follow a drawn line on the landscape, animals and plants seldom recognise these boundaries, and humans may cross it without detection as well. Countless exceptions and crossings are made every day and everywhere.

Even though borders are permeable, or perhaps because of it, threats are typically imagined as coming from the outside, be it from outside of the family (think of the evil step-mother in fairy-tales), or outside of the state (rogue states, or terrorists). Whereas what is inside is generally thought of as benign—or, if not directly benign, then at any rate part of ‘us’ and therefore known, identified and recognised—what is outside is defined as unknown, uncertain and, potentially at least, dangerous. In securitisation processes, certain outsiders are identified as especially dangerous, inducing security measures, whereas others are defined as more friendly.<sup>14</sup> The language invoking these aspects is often gendered and racialised, the state being described as a masculine force both impenetrable and protective, whereas migrants are categorised

<sup>11</sup> On the interplay between actor and audience when it comes to securitisation, see Balzacq (2005).

<sup>12</sup> Huysmans (2006: 2–6).

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Scott (2017).

<sup>14</sup> Huysmans (2006: 47–51).

as either ‘innocent’ or ‘deceptive’.<sup>15</sup> Crossing from the outside to the inside is therefore an act that is frequently classified as threatening to those already within, shrouding other possible aspects of the migratory movement (which may be a security measure itself that is taken to avoid danger, or it may be work-related, or due to love relations, wanderlust or simply curiosity). States impose security measures to make sure that this potential uncertainty is handled correctly and that the threat is minimised by subjecting the migrant to various controlling measures.

Defining migration as a security issue localises the threat to the border area—this is where the entrance, the incursion or the intrusion happens. That said, the act of defining the border is itself an act of securitisation, leading to auto-immunisation. It not only creates a border, it also creates something beyond the border, an outside. Moreover, the border presupposes—and simultaneously creates—an entity inside its borders, which is what the migrant must not reach unless it is made secure, unless the citizens’ security can be guaranteed. In fact—and this is one of the aspects that makes the concept of securitisation somewhat tricky to use as an historian—securitisation generally presuppose that there is an entity that is capable of such definite border making and able to enforce its order within those borders. It assumes the state.

The assumption of a state, often understood to be the primary actor in global politics, is problematic for present-day studies—for example, it neglects and conceals the presence of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), indigenous as well as stateless peoples, and other groups—but even more so for historical investigations.<sup>16</sup> According to the influential definition of the state by Max Weber, a state is ‘a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory’.<sup>17</sup> The definition implies a clearly defined state territory as well as a central administration able to exercise power, control and violence legitimately. These factors were still in the making, and accompanied by other efforts, during the early modern period, prompting researchers to emphasise the processual nature of early modern states. Thus, state-formation research focuses to a large degree on how the administrative and organisational apparatuses of the modern state came to be.<sup>18</sup> This brings certain themes into direct focus for the researcher: war machinery, tax collection, the development of parliaments, and the like. Mostly, it means placing the centre of the state and actors of official power positions (kings, council members and prominent members of state) in focus, while groups without access to official power (such

<sup>15</sup> [Nayak \(2019\)](#). See also other contributions in [Gentry et al. \(2019\)](#).

<sup>16</sup> On the problems of a state-based theory for present-day studies, see [Fierke \(2015: 89–127\)](#), and references therein. According to Emma Rothschild, the idea that states are primary in matters of security appeared first in the modern age ([1995: 60–5](#)).

<sup>17</sup> [Weber \(1946: 78\)](#).

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, [Glete \(2002\)](#); [Tilly \(1992\)](#); [Anderson \(1974\)](#).

as peasants, women, low-status officials) have generally received less attention. This has changed somewhat over the last 20 years, with more research published on these latter actors' influence.<sup>19</sup>

Weber's definition has gained as many critics as it has adherents, if not more.<sup>20</sup> For a historian interested in securitisation, the definition conceals more than it reveals. First, it suffers from Eurocentrism and presentism, starting from what the European state system increasingly looked like during the 19th and 20th centuries, but failing to see other possible solutions to state-like ventures in history and space. The Westphalian sovereign state system was codified in 1648, but it is generally understood to have been implemented only gradually in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries. Other conceptions of authority and borders were in play. The Westphalian peace did not codify an already existing practice—not in Europe, and certainly not elsewhere in the world—although it was instrumental in shaping a particular vision of order over the *longue durée*. Scholars have highlighted this problem for quite some time now, yet Weber's definition prevails. Perhaps its resilience rests not primarily on its ability to capture how states actually function, but on how it has managed to guide our way of thinking about what a state is and—at least in theory—does. Nevertheless, this problem means that both the post-Westphalian and the Weberian concept of a state sometimes steer us wrong and lead us to expect certain features that simply are not there, as well as to miss others.

A second problem, perhaps not as widely recognised, with this and other similar definitions of the state is that it conceives of the state as a fixed entity. Sovereignty is often treated as a spatial concept. A sovereign state is one that is in control of a certain territory: it extends, spatially. But even more so—and this part is absent in Weber's definition—sovereignty is a temporal concept. State is a temporal concept. A sovereign state worthy of the name needs to be maintained and protected through time; it needs to endure—it needs temporal control. Furthermore, sovereignty is grounded on certain promises about the future, namely that the future will be better and safer.<sup>21</sup> Sovereignty will provide this future by creating and maintaining a secure, controlled stability within a bounded space. This is not an easy thing to do, for time is not on the sovereign's side. Instead, as noted by IR scholar R.B.J. Walker when discussing Thomas Hobbes's idea of the sovereign, 'time and change constitute a problem to be overcome'.<sup>22</sup> In contrast to the sovereign state's desire for stability, the autonomy of a state is, and always has been, temporary at best. States are in flux.<sup>23</sup> They consistently

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Dørum *et al.* (2021); Te Brake (1998); Wood (2002).

<sup>20</sup> See Lottholz & Lemay-Hébert (2016), and citations therein.

<sup>21</sup> Stockdale (2016: 18–24).

<sup>22</sup> Walker (1987: 74). See also Walker (1991).

<sup>23</sup> Krasner (2001: 17–19).

challenge each other's sovereignty, in wars, disputes, settlements and words—and they are challenged both from the outside and the inside. One might even say that the state's ever-changing qualities is one of its most defining characteristics, and borders are one of its most obvious time-dependent structures.

To simplify, there is a twofold problem with placing the state at the centre of securitisation that pertains to how scholars have dealt with the interactions between time and space when approaching the state. First, the definition of a state is time- and space-centred; it accommodates the system of 19th- and 20th-century Europe, with the idea of sovereign states at its core. Second, the state needs to be problematised by acknowledging the changing nature of its space—that is, by temporalising its spatiality. Whereas states find it hard to function without a space, how a state relates to the fact that it is spatial has changed over the years. The state's claim to endure, its claim to lasting eternally, is a relatively new feature.<sup>24</sup> This means that we need to investigate the spatiality and temporality of security measures, and study the effects of securitisation on both central and local polities, while keeping in mind other possible agents in the securitisation processes.

### **Space: border making and local securitisation**

In defining the sovereign state, borders take centre stage. They not only include certain territories and inhabitants, but they also exclude others. Where to draw borders, and whom to include or exclude, are questions of securing and of securitising both space and people: and the sharper the border, the sharper the questions. In many locations, borders are not fixed or even imagined as a clear line. Instead, there are border territories, or frontiers, that have an either/or status, or a neither/nor status. Historical examples include nomadic societies and remote and inaccessible areas with low population density in diverse localities, such as areas in early 16th-century northern Europe, late 18th-century Central America, and 20th-century North Africa and the Middle East.<sup>25</sup> In this section, I demonstrate how acknowledging the potential vagueness of borders may help us to better understand securitisation processes in the early modern world, and simultaneously enable us to step away from the state and highlight local actions. Examples are primarily taken from my own research on early modern Sweden.

As James C. Scott has shown, defining borders was often a state initiative. People living in border territories could certainly be susceptible to xenophobia, but at other times, they were more prone to ignore the border, trading and migrating freely across it.<sup>26</sup> For example, several sources from early modern Sweden testify to peasants

<sup>24</sup> See Jeziarski *et al.* (2022, forthcoming).

<sup>25</sup> Hoonhout (2020); Azuma (2019); Fur (2006); Chatty (2006).

<sup>26</sup> Scott (2009: *passim*); Scott (2017).

ignoring express prohibitions against transborder trade, and instead negotiating so-called ‘peasants’ peace treaties’ with their fellow peasants across the border, in order to facilitate border traffic.<sup>27</sup> Another example that highlights the uncertainty of borders comes from a small area comprising the hundreds of Särna and Idre, situated close to present-day Sweden’s Norwegian border. In 1645, Sweden and Denmark-Norway signed a peace treaty according to which Denmark-Norway was forced to cede the region surrounding Särna and Idre to Sweden. However, no mention was made of this specific area. Neither state seems to have noticed the omission, nor did the peasants remark upon it. The Swedish authorities did not detect it until a few years later when they tried, and ultimately succeeded, to incorporate it. During this interim period, neither authority claimed any taxes and other duties from the inhabitants, who seem to have enjoyed the peace and quiet.<sup>28</sup>

The example shows that it was not always in the peasants’ interest to be included in a specific state, nor to be explicitly excluded from another. Demarcated and vague borders or border territories often existed side by side. A territory could have clearly marked and well defended borders against one territory, while neglecting to pay attention to a border that faced another; some borders were exact, some were not. Furthermore, some borders were exact sometimes, and at other times were not. Some could even be exact and vague at the same time, depending on from whose perspective we look at them, that of a state or that of the peasants living near or on it. Another example may help to make this point clearer. During a rebellion in 1719, peasants living in a central area in Sweden claimed that as the royal power had failed to protect them during the ongoing war against Russia, they were free to seek protection from the Russian tsar instead. This decision effectively challenged Swedish control over their territory, as the peasants’ actions—had they been successful, which they were not—would have created a Russian enclave in central Sweden. Instead, the peasants were convicted of treason, and the Swedish royal power re-established its territorial authority. The rebellion reveals markedly different opinions on the nature of borders, in particular regarding the question of who had the right to define a border, who could make decisions regarding a territory, and who was ultimately responsible for solving security threats. In this instance, the border was vague and possible to change according to the peasants, who took it upon themselves to secure their situation, whereas the Swedish authorities strove to uphold what they argued was an exact and lasting border and claimed the right to define and neutralise security threats.<sup>29</sup>

Borders are not static entities. Rather, on many occasions, borders are what we might call temporary fictions: fictions, as they are imaginary creations before their

<sup>27</sup> Österberg (1971: 117–21).

<sup>28</sup> Lorents (1916: 30–7); Nauman (2017: 131).

<sup>29</sup> On this rebellion, see Nauman (2021a).



actual manifestations; and temporary, because they are constantly susceptible to change, even though they seem to demarcate something absolute and unchanging. As such, they should be placed within the framework of thresholds, signalling elements that separate but also connect what is beyond them. Thresholds, as Aleida Assman and Jan Assman have argued, are mental images that evoke memories of movement, of crossing, and may indeed even inspire such actions—as may borders.<sup>30</sup> This wider understanding of what a border is and does needs to be taken into account when studying borders from a securitisation perspective, especially (but not only) when doing so for a time period that does not coincide with the existence of sovereign states and fixed borders. In fact, the act of securitisation may be instrumental in creating borders. While the actions of the peasants above temporarily blurred the border between Sweden and Russia, the actions of the Swedish authorities, when seizing the rebels and putting them to trial, effectively re-established it. As such, the assumption of the state as the primary actor in securitisation can be turned on its head, as securitisation was also instrumental in the state formation processes. We should ask how securitisation affected the polities in which it took place. These polities may have been states as we would recognise them today, but they may also have been local communities, peripheral zones or other centralised entities. Depending on the potentially negative effects of securitisation mentioned in the introduction to this article, attempts at border making might have worked to stabilise or de-stabilise these polities.

During the same war that had the peasants above turn to the Russian tsar, Russian troops occupied Finland, then part of the Swedish realm. Encouraged by the Swedish king to flee to Sweden, thousands of Finnish refugees reached the Swedish east coast in the years between 1710 and 1715. At first, the Swedish royal power employed security measures towards the protection of these refugees, establishing them as Swedish subjects entitled to help: a refugee committee was formed, responsible for a fund which would provide the refugees with housing and sustenance, and the refugees were exempted from military service and allowed to perform their trades. Several sources testify to the benevolence of the local communities, who received and provided for individual refugees. Yet, local attitudes towards the refugees changed as their numbers increased. In 1715, complaints were voiced in the city of Stockholm that the refugees were dangerous elements that needed to be controlled. Rather than being treated purely as referent objects in need of protection, the refugees themselves were gradually subjected to security measures, asked to prove themselves worthy of support by providing testimonies of their status. The authorities justified the demand by claiming that it would ensure that the funds sufficed for those entitled to help. Nevertheless, the decision posed considerable difficulties for those refugees who had been separated from families and friends and who did not know anyone who could testify to their

<sup>30</sup> Assman & Assman (1997: 8). See also Simmel (1994); Bawden (2014: 10–12); Jütte (2015: 4–13).



status and conduct. The refugees' struggles to gain access to the refugee fund was in turn followed by further animosity between the refugees and the recipient communities, as the refugees were identified—and indeed identified themselves—as strangers.<sup>31</sup>

The security measures separated the refugees from the rest of the Swedish subjects. The refugees were demarcated as strangers, as different, and as a possible security threat. Experiencing this hostility first hand, several refugees tried to go home even before the war was over. They seem to have preferred returning to war-ridden Finland rather than to keep their uncertain status in Sweden. Their supplications to this effect were, however, rejected by King Charles XII. The king did not give any reasons for his decision, but it was likely taken to prevent the refugees from contributing to the Russian war effort, as they would have been forced to pay taxes to the Russian army upon their return. Only after the war's conclusion in 1721 did the Swedish royal power help the refugees to return home.<sup>32</sup>

Besides illustrating how security measures created borders between peoples, forming and separating two distinct groups—outsiders and insiders—the example of the Finnish refugees points to the benefits of studying the practice of security measures locally. From a state perspective, the security measures taken in protection of but also against the Finnish refugees were successful; the refugees were free from enemy attacks. Only at the local level has it been possible to observe the negative effects these measures had on the refugees and local communities alike.

The usage of passports in early modern Europe further illustrates my point. Originally a Chinese invention, passports were in sporadic use in different parts of the world before they became widespread in Europe during the early modern period.<sup>33</sup> Not all groups received passports; travelling safely and legally was a privilege reserved for those who could afford it and for those who had connections, through either family or trade. In his book on identification practices in early modern Europe, Valentin Groebner shows how historical actors used names, clothes, distinguishing marks and more to identify travellers. As bureaucratic control expanded, states mandated the use of passports, which gained ground as important instruments of that control. According to Groebner, this control was fictive: all inventions meant to enhance the states' security concerns regarding migration also led to counterfeit innovations, thus simultaneously increasing its insecurity. As the usage of passports became more widespread, forged passports also emerged. This, in turn, forced local authorities to invent new ways of distinguishing valid documents from forged ones.<sup>34</sup> Security measures taken at state level thus had unintended effects at the local level, prompting further security measures.

<sup>31</sup> Nauman (forthcoming).

<sup>32</sup> Nauman (forthcoming).

<sup>33</sup> On the world history of passports and other identification practices, see the contributions in Caplan & Torpey (2001); About *et al.* (2013); Torpey (2000).

<sup>34</sup> Groebner (2007).

Spatialising and localising securitisation mean focusing on the local responses to perceived security threats and studying the effects that the measures taken had on politics and border making. Here, the four dangers of securitisation may be particularly prudent for the historian to study: which issues were singled out as acute, and which were neglected? Are there traces of securitisation ‘sticking’ to other issues as well? What about discrimination and auto-immunisation? This change in perspective allows the researcher to circumvent the hovering state, enabling comparative investigations across time and space, and may help us to uncover securitisation processes instrumental in forming and destabilising both states and other entities.

### **Time: securing the future, remembering the past**

As security measures and securitisation are actions directed towards the future, time and temporality are key. Securitisation deals with threats, what we fear will happen. To be precise, it deals with *potential* threats—it pertains to our uncertainty about the future. The realisation that the future is uncertain may inspire two different strategies. On the one hand, it can caution us against taking action, since we do not know what will happen; it might be better, then, to wait and see. On the other hand, it can cause us to act, to try to prevent even the possibility of a threat. In the latter strategy, the future is securitised. This type of pre-emption refers to, in the words of Marieke de Goede, Stephanie Simon and Marijn Hoijsink, ‘security practices that aim to act on threats that are unknown and recognized to be unknowable, yet deemed potentially catastrophic, requiring security intervention at the earliest possible stage’.<sup>35</sup> In modern days, the strategy of pre-emption justifies the employment of anti-terrorism measures, states of exception and listening practices worldwide. In premodern societies, networking with foreign powers, the use of subsidies or the privatisation of tax collecting or revenues to ensure a steady income to the state may be identified as actions to the same aim, albeit to a different degree.<sup>36</sup>

According to de Goede, Simon and Hoijsink, instead of trying to predict the future, those responsible for deploying security measures today are engaging in a form of speculation. Instead of securing the most probable future, they act on multiple potential futures.<sup>37</sup> So far, this perceived shift in security measures has only been detected by scholars of the present world. It remains to be seen if it can stand historical scrutiny.

<sup>35</sup> De Goede *et al.* (2014: 412).

<sup>36</sup> These specific strategies have, for the Swedish realm, been dealt with by Norrhem (2019), Linnarsson (2018) and Hallenberg (2008), although these scholars do not discuss them as pre-emptive measures. See also the contributions in Kampmann *et al.* (2018); Karonen (2009).

<sup>37</sup> De Goede *et al.* (2014: 413).

Still, the proposed shift in the security debate shows how security can be commodified, revealing securitisation's roots in finance. Generally, the sovereign state's entry into the financial securitisation business has been pinpointed to the beginning of the early modern period. In the early 17th century, the Dutch and English East India Companies started to insure their financial assets by selling stocks and shares. During roughly the same period, insurance companies surfaced, and some time afterwards, European states began to issue bonds to finance wars and overseas colonisation.<sup>38</sup> State security has thus been tied together with finances since the advent of the Westphalian state system. In fact, securitisation as a concept first emerged within the sphere of finance, denoting the process through which financial assets, such as loans or bonds, are traded in financial markets.<sup>39</sup> Actions of security and securitisation are based on speculations regarding the future, where even unlikely—although not impossible—outcomes need to be taken into account.

To increase our understanding of securitisation's relation to the future, I propose that we combine it with two other central concepts: trust and control. Both these concepts respond to the uncertainty of the future, which urges us to act in order to avoid risks and threats, but from two diametrically opposed positions. In research literature, trust is an essentially contested concept.<sup>40</sup> It refers to an attitude towards another party, but depending on which school you adhere to, and where your research interests lie, it may be defined in a multitude of ways. Whereas Russel Hardin, for example, argues that trust is always specific—you trust someone in certain matters, not in others—Eric Uslaner claims that it is inherently general—you either trust someone, or you do not.<sup>41</sup> Another differentiation exists between interpersonal trust and institutional trust. While some people score highly on the former, they might score low on the latter, and vice versa. When it comes to future uncertainties, one aspect stands out. To trust someone is to refrain from further means of convincing ourselves of that person's (or institution's) future behaviour. Trust is, or should be, sufficient to deal with the uncertainty of the future. When we try to control someone or something, on the other hand, there is no limit to the amount of extra measures we might take

<sup>38</sup> On the financing of the Dutch and English East India Company, as well as other early trading companies, see [Harris \(2020: 251–330\)](#); [Ewen \(2019\)](#); [Gelderblom & Jonker \(2004\)](#), and references therein. On financing the early modern state, see [Jeziarski et al. \(2022, forthcoming\)](#); [Nilsson \(2017\)](#); [Froide \(2017\)](#); [Neal \(2000\)](#), and references therein.

<sup>39</sup> On links between finance and securitisation, see, for example, [De Goede \(2010\)](#); [De Goede \(2012\)](#); [Boy \(2015\)](#), and references therein.

<sup>40</sup> On essentially contested concepts, see [Gallie \(1956\)](#).

<sup>41</sup> The most influential definitions include [Luhmann \(1979\)](#); [Hardin \(2002\)](#); [De Goede \(2012\)](#); [Uslaner \(2002\)](#). Many other definitions deserve to be mentioned, but for this text I limit myself to three more: [Baier \(1986\)](#); [Jones \(1996\)](#); [Holton \(1994\)](#).

to make sure that our control is in fact satisfactory and effective. Control demands further actions.<sup>42</sup>

The difference between the two concepts suggests that trust and control are not readily combined. If we try to instil a trusting relationship, we have to refrain from inserting certain security measures that aim for control, since such measures signal a lack of trust. They may destroy our trust, making the situation more insecure than it had been to begin with. If we, on the other hand, aim for control, a trusting relationship may be detrimental to our goal since it forces us to renounce the need for certain instruments of control. Furthermore, several researchers have pointed to the difficulties in moving from one to the other: any measures taken to further trust in a controlling relationship will promptly be interpreted as further attempts to enhance control.<sup>43</sup> The effectiveness of certain security measures may therefore depend on the relationship into which they are introduced.

A historical example of how trust and control relate to each other is the use of political oaths—a fundamental historical security bond. My research on political oaths in early modern Sweden shows how mutual oaths were used to establish reciprocal trust regarding future actions between kings and subjects during the 16th century. This was a period during which the Swedish kings' authority was built on their presence, in lack of sufficient means of control in their absence. As means for control—such as a more effective administrative system, means of retributory justice—became available during the 17th century onwards, the use of oaths slowly declined and they were replaced by other security measures more apt for instilling control. Intriguingly, calls for the reinstatement of oaths are surfacing today across the world, often with reference to their ability to help establish trust. However, these new oaths are not mutual and are generally required only from groups singled out as uncertain elements: migrants and new citizens. Critics of these oaths astutely remark that they are deployed to instil control rather than trust. It seems that the ability of oaths to help establish trust has been negated by a control-oriented approach.<sup>44</sup>

Seeing securitisation as a temporal concept means seeking to understand the underlying assumptions made about the future by our objects of investigation while acknowledging the influence of past encounters. In trying to secure spatial and temporal sovereignty, states often resort to controlling efforts against its population and migrants. Border making is indeed one such effort. Trust, in some ways, seems to counter such security measures, as it urges us to accept uncertainty as non-threatening. Yet, once measures towards control have been deployed, trust is hard to achieve. Efforts to increase trust are instead perceived as efforts to control, counteracting trust.

<sup>42</sup> Bijlsma-Frankema & Costa (2005); Cofta (2007: 28).

<sup>43</sup> Cook *et al.* (2005: 140–1); Bijlsma-Frankema & Costa (2005); Cofta (2007: 28); Luhmann (1979: 36).

<sup>44</sup> Nauman (2017), Nauman (2021b). On the king's authority as built on presence, see Orning (2008: 5–10).

The concepts of trust and control emphasise the pre-existing relationship between the ones securitising and the ones being securitised, and highlights how their previous interactions and past experiences of the security measures proposed influence their decisions and reactions. The concepts can help us understand not only the approaches taken to secure potential future threats, but also why de-escalation of a securitised situation—de-securitisation—may be hard to achieve.

## **Conclusion**

This article has argued that the use of the concept of securitisation for early modern studies is thwarted by the concept's strong links to ideas about sovereign states. As we have seen, it is only through securitisation that sovereignty can make its claim to exist. The sovereign state endeavours to control the future in order to uphold safety and security within its borders. Time itself is securitised in the state's drive for control and stability, and in its aversion to uncertainty. This seems to lock studies of securitisation within the framework of the present-day European state system, and has exposed the research field to critiques of both Eurocentrism and presentism alike. In this article, I have added state-centrism to its faults, arguing that by allowing the sovereign state to take centre stage, the field of securitisation studies has turned its back on history and on the multitude of other state-like entities who have been operating locally and internationally.

The remedy for early modern historians lies in turning the argument around and investigating how security measures have been instrumental in the creation and de-stabilisation of political polities throughout history, of which the sovereign state is but one example. To do so, the spatial and temporal aspects of securitisation need to be part of our theoretical toolbox. Many responses to security threats have been performed locally, and have had effects on local communities and securitised subjects first. Moreover, localised responses towards perceived security threats are not dependent upon a prior state or a state system at all, but are discernible across time and space. Securitisation processes thus need to be investigated spatially and temporally, and their local and temporal aspects need to be acknowledged.

In this article, issues of borders and migration have stood at the fore. I have grounded my argument in empirical studies of wars, rebellions and border-making processes from the Swedish early modern realm, showing how peasants, refugees, local communities, kings and authorities all were affected by and themselves influenced security measures. The examples demonstrate how securitisation was not a top-down process, but rather enmeshed into processes of border making and local decisions on whom to trust and whom to fear. With securitisation, a future, abstract security threat is turned into a present, tangible one. What it boils down to, what

securitisation actually accomplishes, is turning questions of future threats into issues of present security. To study it historically, however, we cannot stop there. We must also investigate the effects of securitisation, long-term and short-term, locally and centrally, spatially and temporally, to consider change and continuity in different security regimes. To make such comparisons feasible, the state must give ground to other political entities.

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# São Jorge da Mina and Macao: a comparative reappraisal of European encounters

*Mariana Boscariol*

*Abstract:* The early modern Portuguese empire presents a variety of case studies to explore the process of border making experienced in direct response to European activity and imperialism. Considering its scale and dispersion, the Portuguese empire shows both fluidity and rigidity of borders and the strategies of control and security taken in response to or within their establishments. The Portuguese factory of São Jorge da Mina, that was built in 1482, and Macao, one of the most important European harbours in Asia in the 1550s, offer valuable insights into early Portuguese/non-European relations. Both cases constitute a concession of a limited and well-defined land where the Portuguese could stay, with full control, resulting from agreement with the terms stipulated by the local authorities. Considering the asymmetries of historiography when treating the two cases, rather than a direct comparison, this article aims to bring some reflections on these experiences as paradigms of the limit of action of the early modern Portuguese empire.

*Keywords:* Portuguese empire, governance, port cities, early modern history, sovereignty.

*Note on the author:* Mariana Boscariol is currently a researcher at CHAM, Centre for the Humanities of the NOVA University of Lisbon (Portugal). Having concluded her PhD from the same university in 2018, for the past years her work has focused on the early modern missions with emphasis on the Jesuit activity in Brazil and Japan during the 16th century. This research has led to a few articles, among which are ‘From the Ineptitude to a Higher Capability: The Jesuits and the Formation of a Christian Community in Brazil and Japan (16th-Century)’ (2019) and ‘New Winds, Distinct Times of the Church: The Activity of Bishop Sardinha and the Provincial Nóbrega in Brazil (16th-Century)’ (2018). Following her experience as a research associate within the ‘Living on the Edge’ project at the University of Manchester (2019–2020), her research interests have turned to other aspects of the global history of the Portuguese empire in the early modern and modern period, mainly relating to cross-cultural and economic history and exploring categories such as governance, commerce, borders and circulation in Brazil and East Asia.

## From inside-out and from outside-in

The experience of the Portuguese empire during the early modern period presents a variety of case studies to explore the theme of 'securitisation'.<sup>1</sup> More precisely, this article will consider this topic in relation to the process of border making experienced in many regions of the world in direct response to European activity, and subsequent effort to evolve, sustain and protect their settlements on the part of the Europeans.<sup>2</sup> It will consider how flexible or rigid these borders were, and, consequently, which strategies of control and security were taken within these spaces: from both directions, inside-out, in the sense of the Portuguese community settled in a given space to control those who could have access to their settlement, and from outside-in, in the sense of the impediment of their circulation beyond their establishment. To discuss these matters, this article will focus on two of the most prominent Portuguese territories in the early modern period: the Portuguese factory of São Jorge da Mina, built in 1482, and Macao, one of the main European port cities in Asia during the 16th and 17th centuries.

These two cases offer valuable insights into early Portuguese/non-European relations, both regarding the experience of participants in concomitant encounters themselves and how they have been explored by historiography. After all, it is widely known how the Chinese were capable of controlling the Portuguese (and wider European) presence in their territory,<sup>3</sup> but the experience in West Africa has received much less attention<sup>4</sup>—as if the limited Portuguese establishment was a consequence of a lack of interest or competition with other Europeans rather than a result of local resistance.

Taking distance from the literature that considered the Portuguese empire as a homogeneous enterprise that responded to the same motivations and challenges in the different parts of the world, the study of the specifics of two cases in which the Portuguese were in many ways dependent on the non-European locals might be helpful to enrich both colonial and postcolonial studies.

After all, what the two cases here presented illustrate is that more than the Portuguese dependence on permission from local rulers to move forward at this stage there was no possibility of doing so. Their business and sphere of action in both territories were clearly and rigidly delimited, not being flexible or reshaped during the Portuguese administration. Therefore, the purpose of such analysis, more than

<sup>1</sup> For a global view of the Portuguese expansion and economy, see [Godinho \(1963/1965\)](#). Securitisation was first presented by [Wæver \(1995\)](#), the theory was later developed in [Buzan et al. \(1998\)](#).

<sup>2</sup> See [Herzog \(2015\)](#).

<sup>3</sup> See [Souza \(1986\)](#).

<sup>4</sup> As criticised by Toby Green, historiography has been failing in addressing African history in the analysis of the cultural and economic networks in the early modern world ([Green 2011: 17](#)).

anything, is to confront a perception of predominance or control from the part of the Europeans over the extra-European territories under their interference during the early modern period. It is in this sense that the combined study of Mina and Macao shows us that much like the Europeans with whom they were in contact, 15th- and 16th-century Africans and Asians were working on a complex and regulated social and commercial system.

From considering asymmetries in historiography, this kind of analysis might help to give voice and bring new light to the historical understanding of the relationship between the different parts of the world. More than anything, it intends to show how both West African and Southern China populations held the protagonist role in what concerns their relationship with the Europeans, in this case, Portuguese imperial and commercial agents, having demonstrated a coordinated and strong political strategy to protect and secure their territory and interests.

Not intending to discuss the concept itself but rather its broader pertinence for the study of the two examples here selected, it is worth noting how ‘securitisation’ offers an interesting filter for the analysis of the definition of social risks and threats, and of how these categories shaped the protection and control over imperial territories. The theory has been criticised for being too state-centric and focused on the ‘speech act’,<sup>5</sup> making it unsuitable for the analysis of more practical events.<sup>6</sup> This criticism seems to be even more pertinent when considering the study of cross-cultural encounters in the early modern world between Europeans and non-European societies,<sup>7</sup> as the notion of a strictly defined, territorial state was far from the reality in many of the territories involved. Instead, in this article, the concept of security will be used to consider the practices that surrounded the day-to-day activities of individuals who operated in border spaces and to interrogate the ways in which border making could simultaneously limit their movement and provide the necessary infrastructure for communication and exchange.

The effort in connecting, communicating, interacting, circulating, protecting and, in some sense, securitising, were common struggles for participants in early modern European empires. But not only, since, as can be identified in the two cases here selected, the extra-European populations also took more coercive and protective measures to defend their people and territory.

<sup>5</sup> ‘... through which an intersubjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object, and to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat’ (Buzan & Wæver 2003: 491).

<sup>6</sup> See Balzacq (2005).

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the application of the concept in early modern and modern history studies, see the journal *Historical Social Research* on ‘Security and Conspiracy in History, 16th to 21st Century’, especially the following articles: Zwielerlein & De Graaf (2013a); Zwielerlein & De Graaf (2013b); Zwielerlein (2013).

Security was, in all its facets, a means of dictating the relationship with local populations, conducting, conditioning and facilitating the establishment of cross-cultural exchanges—both sides needed to feel secure if they were to do business with the other. Although the challenge seems to be simple and consistent, in practice it was much more complex. In both cases explored here, the concession of a restricted and precise territory where the Portuguese could stay, but with limited power beyond their small enclosure, meant that they had to act in accordance with the terms and customs stipulated by the local groups, including receiving local merchants, organising embassies, enforcing standards and the payments of taxes. Taking these limitations into account, my intention here is to use conceptions of security as a lens to examine the constraints imposed on the Portuguese empire in two of its most emblematic historical settings. This exercise will start from the assumption that the measures of security and control that limited and conditioned these establishments were also what made them even possible, constituting a clear example of the process of border making in the early modern world.

In Polanyi's idea about the 'port of trade', competition was determined more by the administration of a given port than by the economic activity itself.<sup>8</sup> For example, in the early modern period, the exchange of gifts and ceremonial meetings with local representatives, as seen in São Jorge da Mina and Macao, was a practical initiative to mitigate any conflicts—serving not only commercial but also security purposes. In an unfavourable and uncertain environment, the port of trade often represented a neutral venue where a unique form of trade and interaction could take place.<sup>9</sup> Following this logic, both São Jorge da Mina and Macao were built to strictly serve commercial purposes, having remained like this without developing any further imperialistic goals.

The central argument is that, in what concerns the relationship between non-European authorities and an European power, the Portuguese achieved some level of 'security' and a reasonably stable establishment by interacting with local authorities, commercial agents and networks in place—not by force or imposition. Which is to say, far from a forceful presence, the Portuguese were dependent on being attractive enough to grant concessions by local authorities in both Mina and Macao.

The comparison between the Portuguese enterprise in São Jorge da Mina and Macao will therefore unveil several levels of security within the Portuguese empire (targeting both the continent and the arrival of other Europeans by sea), an approach which is crucial to understand the central role of individual actors as negotiators between imperial and local interests. If in Portuguese India and America a more structured and militarised presence is perceived from the first decades of their relationship

<sup>8</sup> Polanyi (1963: 30). As defined by Luis Felipe de Alencastro, Polanyi's idea about the 'port of trade' is the most appropriate for understanding most of the Portuguese empire before the Restoration (1640), as it was formed by a network of enclaves and factories (1998: 195).

<sup>9</sup> Polanyi (1963, 36).

with the local populations,<sup>10</sup> in West Africa and Southeast Asia the reality was totally distinct—and even more peculiar in these two small and well-delimited peninsulas. Therefore, the analysis of this phenomenon under the light of the process of border making might help us to understand better the interactions that the new global dynamic facilitated, followed by the consequences and mechanisms to regulate and restrict these same interactions.

## Mina

Portuguese activity in West Africa was recognised as one of the most attractive and promising in the empire in the first half of the 16th century. Even so, it has received a secondary attention within historiography of the early modern/modern period<sup>11</sup>—at least when considering other territories in Africa such as São Tomé, Cabo Verde and Angola, and even more so in comparison to Asia and Brazil. The fact is that, by the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th century, Mina was one of the most profitable but territorially limited establishments of the Portuguese empire. However, the minimal territorial expanse of the Portuguese presence at São Jorge da Mina should not be presumed to reflect a lack of interest or capacity for investing in the region, but also because of the restrictions and measures of control implemented by the local groups.

The factory of São Jorge da Mina (*Feitoria da Mina*) was the first European trading post built on the Gulf of Guinea and one of the most important centres of the gold and transatlantic slave trade in the 16th and 17th centuries. Showing its prominence in the period, an illustration of the building was highlighted in a 1563 map of West Africa made by the Portuguese cartographer Lázaro Luís ([Figure 1](#)). From this image, the building seems to dominate a significant part of the region known as the Costa da Mina, having a lion holding the Portuguese flag on the top of a hill in front of the castle—a clear symbol of the power from Portugal.

Even if considerably disproportionate, this map illustrates the importance of the territory for the Portuguese empire and their eagerness in keeping and promoting the factory during a period when European competition in the region was growing. The castle, represented in Luis's map as a massive building that covers a major part of the territory, was actually a fairly small fortification at the end of a narrow peninsula—it was naturally limited by the terrain's geography. São Jorge da Mina, therefore, despite its importance or illustrated grandeur, was a quite restricted establishment, one in

<sup>10</sup> For the Portuguese conquests in India see [Bouchon \(2000\)](#). For the Portuguese colonial enterprise in Brazil see [Hemming \(1978\)](#) and [Bethell \(1991\)](#). For a recent publication on a broader view of the Portuguese empire's military sphere see [Carvalho \*et al.\* \(2021\)](#).

<sup>11</sup> [Elbl \(1992: 106\)](#).





**Figure 1.** Map of West Africa in a nautical chart of the cartographer Lázaro Luis (1563), held at the Academia das Ciências de Lisboa.

which the Portuguese were never able to go much further than the limits of their building.<sup>12</sup> Yet, as well as geography, this limitation was, more than anything, the fruit of local people's resistance in letting the Portuguese have free access to their lands.

As defined by Filipa Ribeiro da Silva, West Africa is commonly taken as part of the periphery of the empire, but it was only 'peripheral in the sense that Western African local economies did not depend on the trade with Europe or the Americas for their survival'.<sup>13</sup> This is a critical point for understanding Portuguese activity in the Costa da Mina, as their trade was heavily dependent on local commercial networks and merchants, and their settlement on the local approval—yet maintaining these relationships was by no means plain sailing.

More than anything, it was the study of the complexities of this relationship that mined the 'civilising mission' discourse widespread in the 19th century and even more

<sup>12</sup> Vogt (1979: 86).

<sup>13</sup> Ribeiro da Silva (2011: 5). About the position of West Africa in the creation of the Atlantic World, see Curtin (1975); Thornton (1992).



projected during the Salazar dictatorship in Portugal.<sup>14</sup> At the time, Africans were considered by nature inferior to Europeans, being therefore colonised almost as the Portuguese wished. The regime mentality reinforced an image of the Africans' lack of civility and capacity to resist European power.

As Isabel Henriques pointed out throughout her remarkable work,<sup>15</sup> the Portuguese historiography before the end of the Estado Novo regime was characterised by the refusal of giving any autonomy to the history of the colonised. As such, even when considering territories that were not colonised or a period before when proper colonisation took place, the Africans were never considered as complex societies or agents and holders of a history of their own. During this period, only few historians, among which the more dedicated was probably Vitorino Magalhães Godinho, tried to surpass the rhetoric of glorifying the great Portuguese conquests<sup>16</sup>—even if foreign historians such as Charles Boxer and David Birmingham already were contradicting this view.<sup>17</sup>

What the analysis of São Jorge da Mina shows is that local merchants followed commercial strategies based on technical skills, diplomacy, innovation and creativity as much as the Europeans even if there was some imbalance in what concerns technology. The indigenous were far from being passive or resilient, in the sense of only receiving and adapting to the foreigners' demands in their territory.

Recognising this situation, Duarte Pacheco Pereira,<sup>18</sup> a Portuguese sea captain, soldier, explorer and cartographer, described the unfavourable Portuguese position during the foundation of the Factory of São Jorge da Mina:

*Since between the people of this land and our people there were many differences about the construction of this fortress because they did not want to consent the construction, for their sorrow it was built where with much service and diligence it was finished, what was then necessary to the establishment and defence of us all.*<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Caetano (1951).

<sup>15</sup> See Henriques (2004; 2019; 2020).

<sup>16</sup> 'The economic, social and cultural processes of the oceanic expansion were hidden. There was no interest in History as search for the truth, it was reduced to a rhetoric of commemoration and justification of imperial "grandeur"' (Godinho 1990: 13–14).

<sup>17</sup> Boxer (1963) and Birmingham (1965).

<sup>18</sup> Pereira was the captain of São Jorge da Mina from 1519 to 1522. The captain was the ruler of the city, being followed in the hierarchy by the *Feitor* (Factor).

<sup>19</sup> 'E posto que entre os negros desta terra e ha nosa gente ouve muita deferensa sobre o fazer desta fortaleza por a nom quererem consentir enfim a seu pesar se fez honde com muito serviso e diligencia se acabou o que entom foi necessario pera recolhimento e defensa de nos todos e posto que entre os negros desta terra e ha nosa gente ouve muita deferensa sobre o fazer desta fortaleza por a nom quererem consentir engim a seu pesar se fez honde com muito serviso e diligencia se acabou o que entom foi necessario pera recolhimento e defensa de nos todos' (Brásio 1952: 4).

From this fragment we can identify some of the major obstacles and apprehensions the Portuguese faced in their attempt to establish their presence in the region. First, the construction of a fortress was not well received by the locals, who were in general resistant in letting the Portuguese to move forward with their plan.<sup>20</sup> Second, Pereira mentioned that the fortification was expected to serve not only as an accommodation or for trade but also for their defence. This meant their own physical protection but also of their goods (*fazendas*), and not only in relation to the locals but also in the imminent possibility of other Europeans to reach the territory.

During their first encounter with a local leader in 1482, the Portuguese faced hesitation and opposition to their proposed fortress.<sup>21</sup> Recounting this meeting, the Portuguese chronicler Rui de Pina described that the Portuguese ‘begged them [the local people] to give them a place and permission, and also help to build an entrance to the river’.<sup>22</sup> As this suggests, the power dynamic that developed around São Jorge da Mina was complex, and even as some local people complained about the Portuguese presence, the Portuguese depended on permission from local rulers to move forward. Rather than a militarised or forceful imposition—such as those taking place in Brazil and India, where were respectively founded a general-government and the State of India, a proper regional administration delegate by the Portuguese crown to each territory—in this part of West Africa the Portuguese had to convince local African people to concede a piece of land where they could place their trading factory, as this would not be successful without their authorisation. There was no complex administrative structure from the part of Portugal to give any support in the region nor an opening to expand their settlement any further into the hinterland.

Despite limited local support, Duarte Pacheco Pereira described how the establishment of the Portuguese settlement quickly altered local relationships, claiming that ‘these people were gentile and some of them were already made Christians, this

<sup>20</sup> As described by Alberto da Costa e Silva, the benefits of having an European trading post were diminishing when the territory was militarised with the construction of a fortress, in the time that the local chiefs had no control over the goods brought to Mina. Besides that, the circulation inside the walls was controlled, measures of security, including weapons, were placed, which, even if not targeting the locals, was a matter of apprehension (2002: 151).

<sup>21</sup> Commonly called by the Portuguese *Caramansa*: ‘pera nelle receber per concerto ho Senhor do lugar, que se dezia Caramansa, a que os negros chamavam Rey’ (Brásio 1952: 10).

<sup>22</sup> ‘E porquanto por aver razam de as mercadorias qe agora traziam, e ao diante viessem, estarem aly sempre continoas, limpas, e seguras, era necessarea hua casa, lhes rogava que dessem lugar, e licença, e ainda ajuda pera na boca do rio se fazer, porque della, e dos Christãos que nella estevessem sempre achariam, e receberiam emparo, proveito e favor’ Brásio (1952: 11–12).

I say for the inhabitants of the land in the same place where the castle is, because the merchants come from far away and do not have many conversations with us as those who are our neighbours'.<sup>23</sup> This was a decisive point in the creation and maintenance of the factory. The Portuguese were able to sustain a direct relationship with the neighbouring village outside the limits of São Jorge da Mina but had almost no contact with the hinterland. The trade with other regions was made through merchants coming from the interior to the fortress, and this dynamic remained the same during their whole time in the region. More importantly, the trading post was created and fed by the economic system already in place, working to be as attractive and suitable as possible for the locals—not the other way around.<sup>24</sup>

That being said, concurrent to the establishment of the official Portuguese position at São Jorge da Mina, there were also the so-called *lançados* (meaning those who throw themselves into the region) who functioned as free agents outside the Portuguese empire's orbit.<sup>25</sup> Although they were not that common in the Costa da Mina, the *lançados* were, no doubt, an important element of the Portuguese and later European presence in Africa. But in reference to the situation at the fortress, as an official trading post that belonged and responded to the Portuguese crown, the significance of the *lançados* is most notable in its central responsibility to control illegal trade in the region, and this depended on a more careful and reconciliatory dynamic with local groups. Knowing how to keep local interest and sustaining good relationships with individuals from further inland was not only determinant for the commercial success of the factory, but also for its very survival once European competitors became an imminent menace.

Returning to Rui de Pina's narrative of the initial Portuguese settlement at São Jorge da Mina, he recorded that, after the exchange of gifts, 'all the evil from the locals soon became good, and their narrow defence in double consent'. Considering where the castle was located, Pina described that when it was erected, soon the process of compensation and gift giving began, for when it 'was necessary to break

<sup>23</sup> 'Esta gente atee guora forom gentios e já alguns delles som feitos christãos isto diguo pellos moradores da terra do mesmo luguar honde esta ho castello por que os mercadores som de longe e nom teem tanta conversasom com nos outros como estes que som vesinhos' (Brásio 1952: 5).

<sup>24</sup> One of the most important goods in the Gold Coast during this period was salt, which was exchanged for products brought by the Akan traders. The circulation was made not only by foot but also using canoes, making the proximity to any river ideal—even though the Portuguese could never take control over these routes, fully depending on the Africans. From this understanding, Daaku indicated that the Portuguese worked following the same precepts of the African economic system, exploring the Akan merchants coming from the interior and adapting their trade to the local demands and interests (1972: 237).

<sup>25</sup> See Silva (1970a; 1970b).

down some houses of the locals, in which they, and their wives, for the great satisfactions and gifts that were given to them, lightly, and without scandal, consented'.<sup>26</sup> Thus, despite limitations on their actions in the region, this was one of their main strategies to gain local attention and consent. Giving gifts to the merchants, representatives, local authorities and their relatives became a common strategy during the Portuguese rule in Mina (being common in other regions as well)—as demonstrated by dozens of receipts preserved at the Torre do Tombo archive in Lisbon.<sup>27</sup> These gift-giving ceremonies could take place when representatives visited the castle itself,<sup>28</sup> or, whenever possible, when the Portuguese sent embassies to visit one of the local 'kings'.<sup>29</sup>

These practices were essential for securing the Portuguese presence on the Costa da Mina. Having only a small settlement on the coast, surrounded by the sea from one side and the African village from the other, it was important not only to keep the 'good peace and friendship' between the Africans and the Portuguese, but also between the different local groups—those near or far. Efforts made towards pacifying relationships between neighbouring kings and cultivating a positive image were clear examples of how the Portuguese establishment was reliant on the locals to promote the trade, and how it was vulnerable to any winds of change. This was very important because, as shown in [Figure 2](#), the castle was positioned in the intersection between the kingdoms of Eguafó (including Comane or Acomane) and of Futo (also Fetu, Futu). But, through the merchants coming more from the interior, those in the factory were also exchanging with other groups, including the Wassa

<sup>26</sup> 'Polo que mandou que o presente nom tardasse, em que pola maior necessidade que avia de favor enadio mais algumas cousas, com que todo o mal dos negros se tornou logo em bem, e sua estreita defesa em dobrado consentimento. Polo qual atee que a Torre foy acima do sobrado, nom se assynou, nem fundou outra casa, nem assento algu. E como foy emcima da, logo se começou o cerco do castello, pera que foy necessario derribar algumas casas de negros, em que lles, e sua smolheres per grandes satisfações, e dadivas que lhes deram, levemente, e sem escandalo consentiram' (Brásio 1952: 13–14).

<sup>27</sup> These receipts are part of the collection of documents '*Núcleo Antigo*'. A few were published in the *Monumenta Missionária Africana* (1952–6). Some of these gifts were expected to help to open the ways to the merchants, being given to those kings who were on their route to the castle; others were given to those who were visiting the fortress—being merchants, kings, sons or other relatives of some of the 'kings'. Among the most common gifts were animals, cloth and *manilhas* (bracelets). For an analysis of the gifts offered by the Portuguese at Mina in the first half of the 16th century, see Ballong-Wen-Mewuda (1993).

<sup>28</sup> As shown, for example, in an order of Fernando Lopes Correia, Captain and Governor of the City of S. Jorge, from 1518, in which he said to be given 'two pesos of gold to buy a goat to give to two black merchants who opened the way to the Assas'. In Torre do Tombo, Corpo Cronológico, Parte II, mç. 77, n. 31.

<sup>29</sup> As shown in another order of Fernando Lopes Correa, from 1519, the captain asked to be bought 'a pope blanket for nine pesos that he order to give to the King of Futo that he order to be visited to make peace with those of Acomane'. In Torre do Tombo, Corpo Cronológico, Parte II, mç. 85, n. 9.

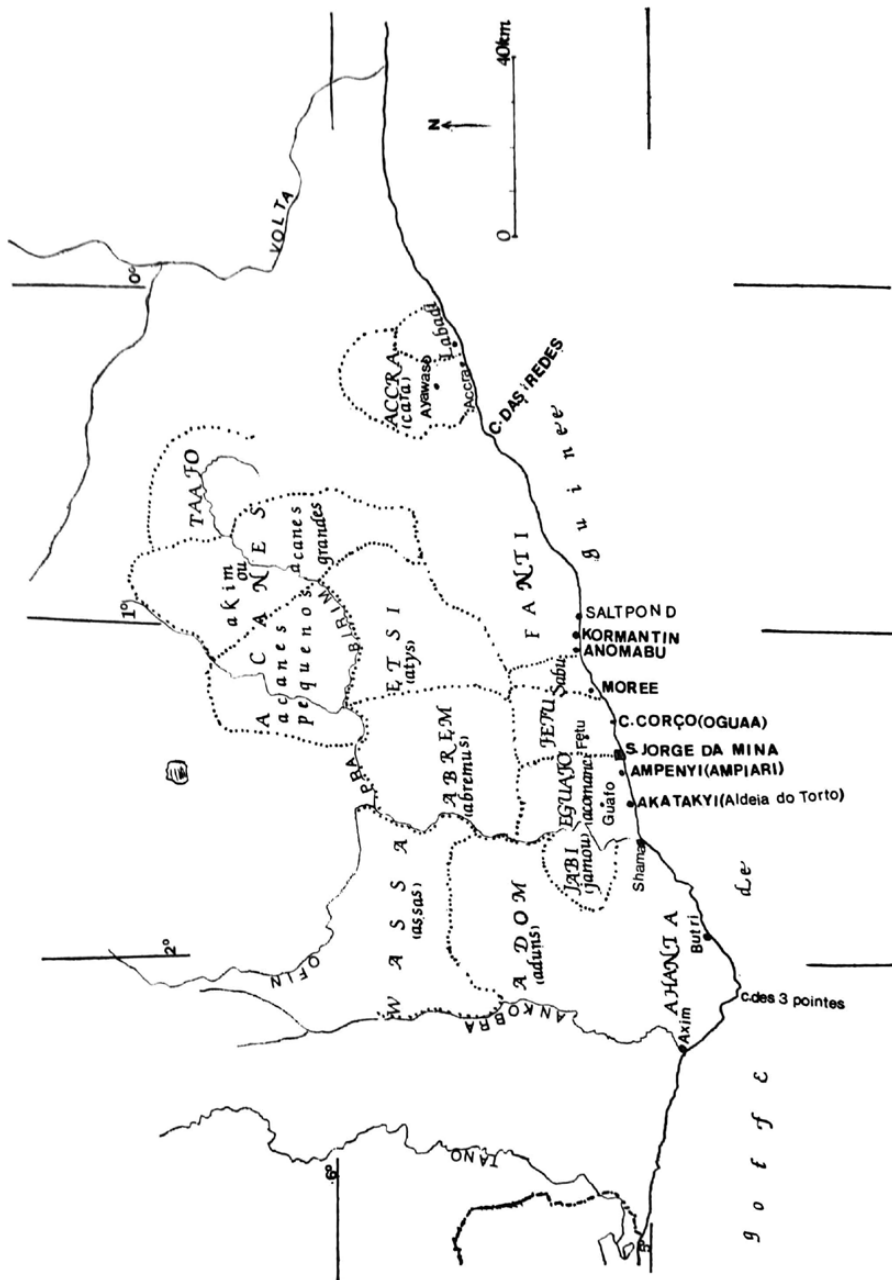


Figure 2. Map of the local groups in the Gold Coast, in Ballong-Wen-Mewuda (1993: 80).

(Assa), Acanes (Akim, Acan), Etsi (Antys, Atys), Abrem (Abremus), Sabu (Sebu) and Fanti (Fante).<sup>30</sup>

The success of the Portuguese position depended on integrating itself effectively into this environment. As it was described in 1529 in a '*Regimento*', or list of orders, directed to the captain of São Jorge da Mina,<sup>31</sup> the only way to guarantee the maintenance of the castle was to encourage local people to see the personal economic benefits of peaceful coexistence.<sup>32</sup> With this purpose, from one side, as their contact with other territories and villages beyond Eguafó and Futo was restricted, the *Regimento* reinforced the idea that the Portuguese should be capable of favouring any important indigenous chiefs, merchants or other representatives who would eventually come to the city. However, when considering the complications that conflict and competition between the local groups could produce, the settlement in Mina could be understood as a means for the ruler of Eguafó to reinforce or increase his own position in the region by limiting or facilitating access across his territory to and from the Portuguese market.<sup>33</sup> By regularly sending his representatives to visit the fortress, the ruler of Eguafó was able to maintain some control over the Portuguese establishment by demanding from them the kind of goods he desired. From the Portuguese perspective, maintaining positive relations with Eguafó and Futo would result in the free flow of traffic across borders and to their market, while from the local perspective these borders could be maintained or strengthened as a means of demonstrating each kingdom's relative authority across the region. For both, the influx of the gold merchants on their way from the interior to the Mina fortress represented an opportunity that needed to be carefully managed.

Of course, because Portuguese economic activity in this region was not about the production of any goods but rather the exchange of products from Europe or other territories—as, for example, Asia—for products from the region—mostly gold—that were brought to São Jorge da Mina by African merchants from the hinterland, working to make and keep the peace with and between the local authorities was not for kindness, but more for the impracticability of any imposition. Thus, without the option of using military force to impose whatsoever they wanted, the Portuguese settlement was dependent on African merchants. This meant that the option of making São Jorge da Mina suffer some decline in traffic was easy for rulers who

<sup>30</sup> 'se resguatom e compra aos negros que de longas terras este ouro aly trasem, os quaes som mercadores de diversas Nasções. S. Bremus, atis, hacanys, boroës, madiguas, cacres, andeses, ou souzos e outros muitos' (Brásio 1952: 4).

<sup>31</sup> Regimento do Capitão da Mina, Lisboa, 8 de fevereiro de 1529, published in Faro (1957). For a translation to English, see Birmingham (1979).

<sup>32</sup> VI, chap. 39.

<sup>33</sup> Elbl (1992: 177).

might consider cutting the ways that led to the factory.<sup>34</sup> This was a strategy that served to send a message whenever the Portuguese were not corresponding to what the locals expected, regarding their behaviour or even an unsatisfactory trade. As this suggests, there was no way the Portuguese could control the trade and circulation of the Africans outside their fortress, much less to impose any sort of behaviour or response.

This situation resulted in limitations and difficulties for the Portuguese administration at São Jorge da Mina which did not drastically change over time. Indeed, rather than functioning to serve as a means of territorially securing the Portuguese position, being in reality nothing more than a fortress that served to uphold an economic agenda, we can see in the *Regimento* policies that aimed to achieve a secure position through the maintenance of imperial governance that protected the Portuguese position by protecting local African people. In this vein, it was determined that the captain should serve God and the king and treat with all rights both the African authorities and merchants who eventually would come to the factory.<sup>35</sup> That is to say, even if it was a Christian territory that belonged to the king of Portugal, for the maintenance of São Jorge da Mina it was central to respect and keep a good relationship with the locals—something recognised from the Costa da Mina to Lisbon.

The Portuguese had no control over the region, this was clear. The only way for the factory of São Jorge da Mina to prosper was to play by the local authorities' rules, understanding, respecting and following the local dynamics, and later on, to secure it against other Europeans—mostly the Dutch—in part through close military collaboration with local African people.<sup>36</sup> In the end, being recognised as one of the Portuguese empire's most profitable regions, it was a matter of not only making sure the Africans who would get access to the factory would be well treated, but also that the Portuguese there would follow the limits imposed, not trading directly in the village outside the fortress and respecting the restrictions stipulated from Portugal for the protection of the interests of the Crown. These efforts represented strategies designed primarily to obtain a great amount of gold through trade at the coastal fortress, as their circulation outside the fortress was no option and their territory was so limited. Not being in control over these relations, in order to sustain their presence

<sup>34</sup> Costa e Silva (2002: 154).

<sup>35</sup> 'O capitão que mandar a dita cidade, pera me nella haver de servir, deve ser pessoa de tal sorte e conciencia, saber e bondade, qual convem pera regimento de tanta importancia e que com resão se deva esperar, que assim vintamente fará o que deve, como seja sirviço de Deus e meu, e a dita cidade e moradores della governados e tratados com todo o direito, e assim os nregros e peçoas que a ella vierem' (Faro 1957: 407).

<sup>36</sup> Emmer (2003).



and their own factory, it was important that they understood what goods the merchants and the inhabitants of those lands desired most, and what prices they would give for them. After all, it became clear that the Africans would not accept whatever the Portuguese brought to them, and there would be no purpose for the fortress on the coast if local people had no interest.

## **Macao**

In a small peninsula in the South of China, the ‘Island of Macao’, as it was called in the 16th and 17th centuries, was located on the estuary of the Pearl River with easy access to the commercially dynamic region of Guangzhou (Canton). More than anything, it was a port city formed by Portuguese merchants and consolidated by the establishment of a Luso-Asian community and the activity of Catholic missionaries—mainly Jesuits.<sup>37</sup> We do not find many records about Macao’s existence previous to its foundation and consolidation as one of the most important harbours in East Asia. Still, it seems likely that the region, by virtue of its location and privileged geography, served regional commercial purposes from at least the 15th century.<sup>38</sup>

Besides the written sources, one of the only representations of the peninsula of Macao during the early Portuguese establishment is a drawing made by the Luso-Malay cartographer Manuel Godinho de Erédia, from the first decades of the 17th century (Figure 3).<sup>39</sup> This image, even if simple and disproportionate, illustrates some of the most important features of Macao’s foundation. First, the small dimension of its landscape and the connection of the ‘island’ to the continent; second, the Mandarin and the Portuguese neighbourhoods’ coexistence; third, the religious presence, identified by the existence of churches; and finally, the classification that this was a city that belonged to China (SIDADE DE CHINA).

This is how Macao was conceived and sustained, as a Chinese territory under Portuguese administration. During this period, it was by no means a Portuguese-only domain, and in reality, the government of the city was always reporting to the Chinese government.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> As shown by Elsa Penalva’s work, a major part of the Jesuits from Macao had the same surnames as the most prominent merchants from that port, what illustrates how these two groups were imbricated. See Penalva (2015).

<sup>38</sup> See Boxer (1991).

<sup>39</sup> Born in Malacca, Erédia studied in the College of the Society of Jesus in Goa, having written an early account about the Malay Peninsula and its region.

<sup>40</sup> See Fok (1991).



**Figure 3.** Manuel Godinho de Erédia, *Planta de Macau*, ca. 1615-c.1622, In Cortesão & Mota (1960: 4: 421).

Macao rose as a port of interest to the Portuguese in the first decades of the 16th century.<sup>41</sup> The evolution of the city was such that by 1557 it had become one of the most important trading ports in Asia, and a central establishment for the Portuguese empire's economy.<sup>42</sup> From 1586, the territory started to be identified as '*Cidade do Nome de Deus na China*' (City of the Name of God in China). A definition that, once again, emphasised Macao's condition as a Portuguese (Christian) city situated in Chinese territory.

This arrangement was only possible because of China's own imperial structure and interests. The centralised and dominant government based in Beijing, in the

<sup>41</sup> Arrival by the 1530s at the latest, at least following what was registered in the Annals of the Ming dynasty. See Southeast Asia in Ming Shi-lu, an open access resource, accessible at <http://epress.nus.edu.sg/msl/>

<sup>42</sup> Having first settled in Macao in the 1550s, only in 1557 the territory was conceded by the Chinese government to Portuguese merchants. See Barreto (2006).

northeast, invested in maintaining and protecting a strong national unity. This goal not only included the control over foreigners' presence in China, but also on controlling the maritime activity on the Chinese coastline. Still, as the trade at Macao was not only contributing but determinant for the provision of some goods, especially silver,<sup>43</sup> the authorisation and control over a Portuguese port city located in a small peninsula in the south (far from the capital), with easy access to an important river and to the China Sea, was deemed to serve Chinese objectives.

One of the most significant descriptions about Macao was registered in the anonymous book *Livro das Cidades e Fortalezas* (Book of the Cities and Fortresses), from around 1582.<sup>44</sup> This book was probably written by an individual with a large experience in the Portuguese empire with the purpose of informing Filipe I (Felipe II of Spain), king of Portugal from 1580,<sup>45</sup> about the condition of the Portuguese establishments then annexed to the Spanish empire. Macao does not appear in much detail, but the description about the territory makes the characteristics of the city and its relationship with China clear:

*And it was shortly that this village grew, so that today it has passed of two thousand neighbours, having less than twenty years that it began to be populated by the Portuguese, as before the Chinese did not consent it, nor to other foreigners. And it will always grow over time, because this island is a general scale of all goods that from India go to China, and from Japan and other parts of that East, and from them come to India.*<sup>46</sup>

This fragment shows that the city grew fast, reaching the number of 2,000 residents at the time the book was written. A significant number for such a small area, consisting not only of Portuguese merchants and European missionaries but also a Chinese and a Luso-Asian community. As described, this was only possible after the Chinese consented their permission for the Portuguese establishment—the same term used in the description from Mina, where the construction of a proper trading post was only facilitated after its endorsement by the local authorities. More important, the author

<sup>43</sup> About the central role of China in the new dynamic of a world economy in the early modern world and the circulation of silver, see Flynn & Giraldez (1995), Frank (1998) and Atwell (2005).

<sup>44</sup> *Livro das cidades e fortalezas* ... (c. 1601), [Manuscrito], Biblioteca Nacional de España (c. 1601).

<sup>45</sup> The Iberian Union lasted from 1580 until 1640. For a study of Portugal in the Spanish monarchy, see Schaub (2001). For the Iberian commercial activities in Asia during the Spanish rule, see Boyajian (1993) and Valladares (2001).

<sup>46</sup> 'E foy em breve tempo crescendo esta povoação de maneira que tem hoje passante de dous mil vezinhos avendo menos de vinte annos que se começou a povoar dos Portugueses, por dantes os não consentirem os Chys na terra, nem a outros estrangeiros alguns, e irá sempre pollo discurso do tempo augmentandosse cada vez mais, por ser esta Ilha hua escala geral de todas as mercadorias, que da India vão para a China, e Iapão e outras partes daquelle Oriente, e dellas vem para a India.' In *Livro das Cidades e Fortalezas* (c. 1601: 74v).

understood that the settlement's growth rested on the commercial activity that was connecting China to India, Japan and other territories in Asia, making of Macao 'a general scale of all goods' from the region.

The Chinese government was concerned that Macao's existence could cause an attrition between the continent and the neighbouring coastal region of Canton,<sup>47</sup> but it seems likely that the Cantonese authorities had an important role in helping the Portuguese establishment in Macao. The internal conditions of China contributed for this opening, as until the 1560s, the Ming authorities had no forceful attitude in the sense of trying to cease the European presence. Instead of widespread resistance, a few specific matters were driving the government's attention: piracy, smuggling and the maritime commerce with foreigners. The Chinese had, historically, faced significant problems stemming from the activity of pirates, and when they first arrived in Chinese waters, the Portuguese were taken as such.<sup>48</sup> Macao and the neighbouring areas were indeed a common point of illegal activity of private merchants (foreigners and Chinese), making the Ming dynasty vigorously interfere in economic matters from the region, conditioning and directing the maritime trade at both regional and transnational levels.

In this context, as contact with foreigners was identified as harmful to China, the Chinese government needed an intermediary for the regional trade in Asia, and the Portuguese trading port in Macao filled this gap well, as more than to facilitate the trade with Europe it functioned in a network linked to other Asian markets.<sup>49</sup> The most important goods traded were Chinese silk, Japanese and American silver, and porcelain, and the most important routes were the one connecting Macao to Japan (Nagasaki), the Philippines (Manila, and from there to Spanish America and other places in Southeast Asia) and India (Goa).<sup>50</sup>

Thus, with the interest of taking part of this trade while protecting China's internal security and unity, it was convenient for the Chinese to keep an agent who was a good intermediary without presenting a political and military risk. The Portuguese

<sup>47</sup> 'Porque todos os navios estrangeiros, que vão a esta provincia de Cantam, hão de ir surgir ao porto desta Ilha de Machao, e daly fazem seus commercios com os da terra firma, por os não consentirem passar mais adiante, e por razão deste concurso de estrangeiros, que aqui há, concorrem das outras provincias de dentro do sertão da China, muitas mercadorias de toda sorte; Do que todo resulta ser esta povoação de Machao muy celebre en tracto, e aver nella grandissimo concurso de varias mercadorias de todo Oriente.' In *Livro das Cidades e Fortalezas* (c. 1601: 74v-75).

<sup>48</sup> See Souza (1986).

<sup>49</sup> More than the commerce with Europe, made via Malacca-Goa, the main source of profit for Macao was the Asian trade. See Lourido (2000), Flynn & Giraldez (1996) and Tremml-Werner (2015).

<sup>50</sup> Ptak (2003).

were exactly that. They had the power and means to sustain the trade among the Asian routes without representing any real hazard to the Ming authority.

After the Portuguese were effectively focused on Macao and trying to improve and expand their activities, the Chinese government started to become more vigilant in the sense of controlling Portuguese movements. This control resulted in a more military presence in the region—a clear message of China's resolution. The regional conditions that at first helped the creation and evolvement of Macao as a Portuguese trading settlement culminated into a more assertive posture from the Chinese government, triggering a strategy of co-administration of the city that Fok Kai Cheong called 'Macao's Formula'.<sup>51</sup> Yet, despite concerns about a foreign presence on Chinese soil, the foreign maritime commercial activity in the China Sea was crucial for China's commercial interests and for the security of their coastline. In practice, this meant that the Portuguese would be allowed to settle and promote the trade in Macao by responding to China's administration through the payment of taxes; that the government was committed to end possible collaborations between the Chinese and the Europeans; and that the Portuguese would be restricted to the limits of the city.

In this way, then, with immediate and practical implications, Macao was made possible and shaped by Ming China's plan of ensuring internal security and sovereignty through the guidelines established to regulate, limit and control their international relations even as they seemed to hand them to a foreign power. As recorded in the *Livro das Cidades e Fortalezas*, 'notwithstanding that the land belonged to the king of China, who had his officials there who received rights that are paid there, they are governed by the Portuguese Kingdom's laws'.<sup>52</sup> This was one of the most important strategies. The Chinese government managed to keep its authority in respect to Macao not only from controlling the Portuguese presence within the peninsula—making sure they understood that the land belonged to China—but also through the implementation of a customhouse and a taxation system. As we saw in Mina, the European presence could be used by a local ruler to strengthen and enrich their own position.

In this respect, we can see how local conditions and political interests were factors that made the Portuguese establishment so controlled and limited, but, at the same time, were what at first made it possible. That is to say, security barred and restricted international relations and circulation in China, while it simultaneously allowed

<sup>51</sup> See Fok (1978).

<sup>52</sup> 'posto que a terra seja d'el-rei da China, que nela tem seus oficiais que recebem os direitos que se ali pagam, são governados pelas leis e ordenações deste reino de Portugal'. In *Livro das Cidades e Fortalezas* (c. 1601: 75).

Macao to exist as a port city exclusively dedicated to keep the Portuguese community and serving as one of the most important trading harbours in Asia.

From the Chinese point of view, Macao was a strategic establishment. It was naturally limited by its geography, making it easily controlled. The distance from Beijing was also significant, not being easily accessible for the Europeans. From the Portuguese side, too, this small peninsula was in a perfect location. It was close to Malacca and Nagasaki, having an easy connection to Manila, besides the entrance to the Canton province through the Pearl River. After all, Macao was created and sustained as an international harbour for the benefits it brought for both the Chinese and the Portuguese.<sup>53</sup>

As mentioned before, another aspect to be considered when examining not only what made Macao possible, but also how the establishment survived for such a long time, is the fact that, from the end of the 16th to the 17th century, the Portuguese community in East Asia was mainly formed of a cosmopolitan Luso-Asian community. As registered in the *Livro das Cidades e Fortalezas*, ‘the residents are almost all Portuguese, and others are mixed Christian (*Cristãos mestiços*) and natural from China’.<sup>54</sup> This characteristic made the city more acceptable in a local context, and by consequence more competitive in relation to other Europeans—mostly Dutch and English. Still, this did not mean that they had an easier access to China, but that Macao could be more tolerated, holding these same proportions and activities for a long time.

Control over Macao was an example of how the Chinese government managed to take advantage of international commerce while stressing and fortifying China’s sovereignty. They received Europeans, interacted with them only as much as necessary, with the clear purpose of supplying China with the commodities that it desired. Showing that these characteristics did not change over time, in the last decade of Spanish rule over Portugal, in 1635, Antonio Bocarro,<sup>55</sup> the Chronicler-in-Chief and Inspector-General of the State of India in Goa, wrote his *Livro das Plantas de todas as Fortalezas, cidades e povoações do Estado da Índia Oriental* (Book of the Plans of All the Fortresses, Cities and Towns of the State of East India).<sup>56</sup> This collection intended to inform King Filipe III (Felipe IV of Spain) about the situation of the Portuguese

<sup>53</sup> See Yangwen (2011).

<sup>54</sup> ‘Os moradores da qual são quasi todos Portugueses, e outros Christãos mestiços e naturaes da China, que nella tem seus officiaes que recebem os direitos que aly pagão, são governados pellas leis, e ordenações deste Reyno de Portugal’. In *Livro das Cidades e Fortalezas* (c. 1601: 75).

<sup>55</sup> See Boxer (1956).

<sup>56</sup> Bocarro [Manuscrito] (1635); for a version in English, the description of Macao was published in Boxer (1942).



establishments in Asia, in which was included a rich description of the ‘City of the Name of God in China’:

*This city is not well provided with supplies, having many cheap and fine goods in the hinterland, because, as we expect them from the hand of the Chinese, if they have any feeling about us, they take it from us, and those who are inhabitants there have no way to get them in other places.<sup>57</sup>*

Considering the structure of the Portuguese *Estado da Índia*,<sup>58</sup> Macao was a quite singular case, not only in its geographic, political and economic condition, but also to its vulnerable position in relation to China. As identified before in the case of São Jorge da Mina, the Chinese only needed to close the gate<sup>59</sup> that connected Macao to China to make the city unviable as a commercial centre. This disruption would cause chaos to its trading activities and also the supply of food and other basic necessities into the city. As such, with the territory dependent on local trade and supply, similar to what we have already discussed in relation to West Africa, the cessation of the trade with the port would alone be a strong message of any disagreement or discontentment:

*Your Majesty has no other income in this city than that from the voyages, because the King of China, in whose land the city is, collects from there all the rights of everything else, is convenient to know: from the entrance of every kind of vessel that comes there with goods, they pay the measurement of it according to the size of the vessel.<sup>60</sup>*

Thus, with Macao so reliant on the trade with China, the visiting merchants performed a protagonist role in everything related to its administration and politics. Any intention of imposing an imperialistic attitude from the Portuguese perspective would collide with the Chinese government. Again, as seen before in the case of Mina, pragmatism played here a crucial role. For the survival of the Portuguese establishment, collaboration with the Chinese forces was necessary for sustaining Macao as a Portuguese city.<sup>61</sup> From East Asia to Lisbon, the situation of Macao was held in this

<sup>57</sup> ‘De mantimentos não he tão provida esta cidade com aver na terra dentro muitos e bons e baratos, porq como os esperamos da mão dos Chinas em tendo qualquer sentimento de nos logo nos los tolhem sem terê aquelles moradores modo pera os irê buscar a outra parte avendoos em CochimChina que esta de Machao cem legoas ao sudueste, e tambem algum nas muitas Ilhas q sercão a pensinsula onde esta a Cidade de q os mais são abitadas’ (Bocarro 1635: 406).

<sup>58</sup> Term that designates the government of the group of Portuguese establishments and possessions from the eastern coast of Africa and Asia, formed in 1505. See Subrahmanyam (1993) and Thomaz (1994).

<sup>59</sup> Known as Border or Barrier Gate.

<sup>60</sup> ‘Não tem Sua Mage. outra Renda algua nesta Cidade mais que a das ditas viagens porq el Rey da China en cuja terra esta lhe arrecada os direitos de tudo o mais convem a saber da entrada de todo o genero de embarcação que aly venha com fazendas pagão a medição della conforme o tamanho da embarcação’ (Bocarro 1635: 408).

<sup>61</sup> Lourido (2000: 236).



clear and objective way. The territory was, no doubts, Chinese, but its administration and government were under Portuguese authority. It was, by no means, a Portuguese colony, and it did not engage in any military intervention but rather depended on security negotiated with the government of China under a strict and well-regulated relationship. By playing the role as intermediary between China and other Asian markets and enjoying the porous border through the Luso-Asian community Macao proved a successful experiment in globalised securitisation. Even after the definite interruption of the Portuguese presence in Japan in 1640,<sup>62</sup> Macao was consolidated as one of the most important international hubs connecting European and Asian powers through trade.

With time, the evolution of the settlement, and the necessity to fix better the limits of Portuguese control, Macao needed to be somehow restructured. One of the major motives was, rather than to defend it from the Chinese, to secure it against other Europeans. Indeed, the Portuguese concluded the construction of Macao's main fortifications (1622–38) following the Dutch attacks of 1603–22. This change was captured in a map drawn by Pedro Barreto de Resende, employee of the General Registry of Goa and personal secretary of the viceroy Miguel de Noronha, that was published in Bocarro's *Livro das plantas e fortalezas* (Figure 4).<sup>63</sup>

Here, we have a clear example of how places were moulded with the purpose of making it more defensible. The threat from the arrival of other Europeans had long been a concern for the Portuguese authorities in Macao, as well as at other sites across the Portuguese empire. The importance of Macao to commerce in the China Sea, its limitation in terms of territory and support from other parts of the Portuguese empire, and the growing competition with the Dutch and English in East Asia, made the construction of fortresses and walls a matter of turning the city more protected and secure.

*The walls that this city has were almost finished by Dom Francisco Mascarenhas, the first captain-general who she had and who made the most of these works. However, the Chinese, as they are so suspicious, made us to demolish a large part of them, of those that to the side of the land, that were running from the so-called fort of São Paulo, seeming to them that they were being made against them.*<sup>64</sup>

<sup>62</sup> In 1640, the Tokugawa Shogunate (running since 1603) struck the last blow to Japan's international relations, starting the isolationist foreign policy period known as *Sakoku* (closed country), that lasted more than 200 years.

<sup>63</sup> Bocarro (1635: 402).

<sup>64</sup> 'Os muros que tem esta Cidade estavam quasy acabados por Dom Francisco Mascarenhas o primeiro Capitão geral que teve e que lhe fez as mais destas obras porê os Chinas como são tão desconfiados fizeram derrubar grão parte delles dos que estão pera a banda da terra que hião correndo do dito forte de Sam Paullo pareçendolhes que contra elles he que se fazião' (Bocarro 1635: 407).

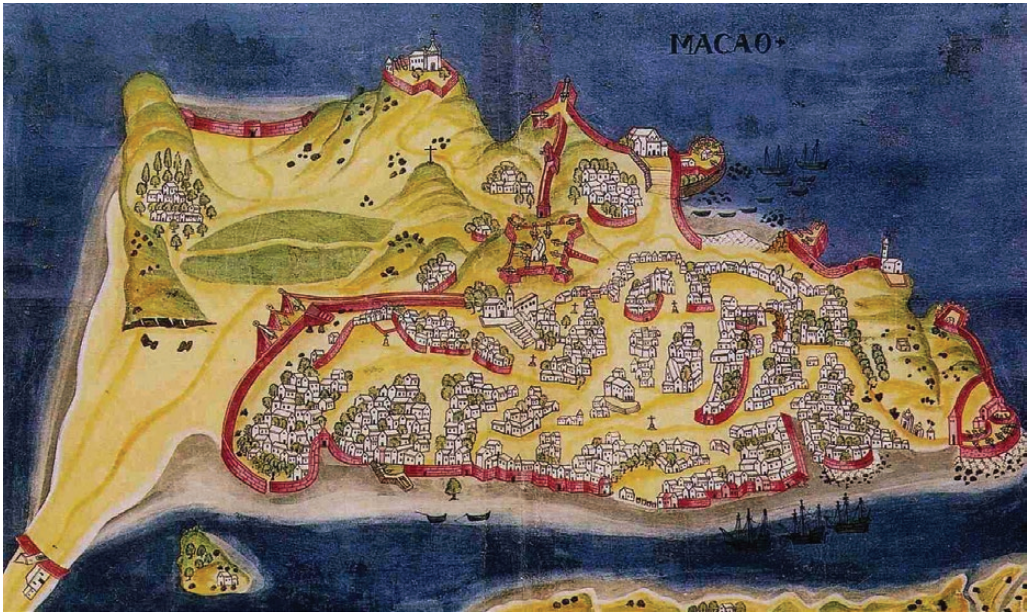


Figure 4. Map of Macao by Pedro Barreto de Resende (157–1651), in Bocarro (1635: 402).

However, from the Chinese perspective, these fortifications were a cause for suspicion and concern. From Bocarro's narrative, we learn how the Chinese made the Portuguese destroy a significant part of the walls, from the side that faced the continent, to demonstrate that it was not designed to deter the Chinese. As such, the Portuguese were left with fortifications against maritime threats, accepting that their security was more easily ensured by maintaining a good relationship with the Chinese than trying to defend against them militarily.

As Bocarro affirmed, considering their vulnerability in terms of numbers and military power, as well as their dependence on the Chinese supplies, the 'peace that we have with the King of China is as he wants it, because, as he ... has such a great power much bigger than the one the Portuguese could gather there, never, no matter how many scandals we may have from them, was there any thought of breaking our relationship'.<sup>65</sup> This was a pragmatic and clear description, as the Portuguese settlement in Macao responded to the Chinese authority, following their demands and rules—after all, the power was disproportionate—and no matter how many 'scandals' they faced, cutting their relationship was never seriously considered.

<sup>65</sup> 'A pas que temos com o Rey da China he conforme elle quer porque como esta tão desviado da India, e tem hum poder tão aventejado a todo o mayor que os Portuguezes puderão la ajuntar em nº de gente, unca por mais escandolos que tivessesmos delles ouve nem pençamento de chegarmos a rompimento porq so com nos tolher o mantimento consumira a nossa Cidade por não aver parte nê com que os hir buscar' (Bocarro 1635: 410).

## Conclusion

In both Macao and São Jorge da Mina, Europeans' presence was authorised or tolerated by the locals in the meantime they were beneficial to them and do not harm their position. Considering their fragile establishment, the Portuguese activity was not then guided by a grand discourse of civilising the 'other'<sup>66</sup> but rather by creating mechanisms and factories to facilitate a profitable enterprise from exploring a good relationship with locals and consequently their existing commercial networks.

In both West Africa and China, then, the Portuguese presence was made possible and secured through the concession of a limited settlement by the local populations, and in order to survive and prosper the Portuguese had to operate within the parameters of the mutually beneficial relationships that had first allowed them to stay: commercial relations based on providing commodities demanded by local people. By proving themselves a useful asset in a globalising environment, the Portuguese were secured against actors in each region that otherwise may have chosen to reject and resist their presence. A key point in analysing the two cases is precisely to understand how both territories were built and how they were formed around and within local communities. It was clear where the limits of Portuguese authority ended, and their success or failure depended on who would access the areas designated to them and who might refuse to do business. In this way, we can see processes where African, Chinese and Portuguese actors in these sites constructed borders and boundaries that protected their respective positions from inside out. Most importantly, the establishment of borders can be understood as measures designed to regulate, control and limit the movement of people and commodities from the outside as much as about demonstrating territorial authority. Trade was the main element of Portuguese activity in both São Jorge da Mina and Macao, neither of which underpinned serious efforts at further imperialistic expansion. The two territories were connected to other routes, being served with the trade of goods from distinct regions. Besides that, the commercial activity relied on a series of political-administrative measures that made the Portuguese establishment acceptable by the local authorities, as well as recognised by its competitors. A negotiation that was significantly influenced by the idea of security.

A comparison between these two experiences show how the Chinese case was not completely exceptional within the Portuguese empire, even if the precise details of the settlement were unique. Like Macao, the factory in São Jorge da Mina was also considered one of the most important territories for the empire in the first half of the 16th century. But, as in Macao, it was one in which the Portuguese establishment was dependent on local authority and engagement. This idea confronts the discourse of

<sup>66</sup> Fed by a distorted image from the West towards the East denounced by Edward Said in his study on Orientalism (1978).

inferiority and passivity on the part of African populations in globalisation during the early modern period. After all, São Jorge da Mina was recognised as being in a region where the Portuguese had little power beyond their small, peninsular-bound fortification and they had to follow the rules imposed on them, adapting their presence to serve and sustain their establishment in similar ways to Macao.

As these case studies have shown, even though security studies and securitisation theory are rarely utilised to study non-state-centric conditions, they present an interesting filter to think how the trading posts and limited establishments considered here were formed through processes that sought to facilitate exchange despite definitions of rigid borders and well-demarcated groups. The two territories were not fully Portuguese in terms of their organisation or authority, having also served as a strategic trade ports for commercial intermediation with the local markets from West Africa and China. Their interdependence with local actors sustained their security as much as it did their success, not only for Portugal but also for local authorities and peoples.

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# Building borders in a borderless land: English colonialism and the *alam Minangkabau* of Sumatra, 1680–1730

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*Abstract:* This article adopts the concept of securitisation to understand the failure of the English East India Company's attempt to build a territorial empire on the island of Sumatra in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Securitisation formed a key component of European colonialism, involving the creation of fortified and militarised borders both to exclude groups from entering newly defined territorial spaces, but also as a way to control goods, labour and resources within those spaces. Ultimately, this form of imperialism failed on the west coast of Sumatra, where a highly mobile society participated in a shared political culture that made any formal boundary or border between Malay states too difficult to enforce. Trading networks, religious affiliations, transregional kinship ties, and migratory circuits all worked to undermine the Company's attempt to establish its authority over delineated territory and the people and goods within it.

*Keywords:* securitisation, borders, empire, East India Company, colonialism, imperialism, Sumatra, Malay.

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In 1716, servants of the Dutch Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC) deposed Raja Massau from the Sultanate of Inderapura on the west coast of Sumatra. They had charged him with maladministration, but in reality his failure to fulfill VOC pepper quotas had sealed his fate.<sup>1</sup> Raja Massau had no intention of abdicating his position, however, and instead left Inderapura and headed southward, crossing into the country of Manduta. This region had once formed part of the Inderapura realm but had broken away in 1695 after a period of civil war. Through the efforts of the English East India Company, which had thrown its weight behind the cause of the rebel Sultan Gulemat, Manduta was divided into two independent states. The southern region was placed under the rule of the company's candidate, who established it as the Sultanate of Anak Sungai.<sup>2</sup> In exchange for English support, Sultan Gulemat awarded the company a monopoly over the country's abundant pepper crop. This was cemented in an agreement in which the sultan also promised to enforce coercive pepper quotas and conceded to finance a chain of *paggars* or forts on his northern border, to be garrisoned by company troops, as a check to Dutch-Malay threats to English interests in the region.<sup>3</sup>

However, despite the independence of Anak Sungai after 1695, and the efforts of the company to control Manduta by erecting a formalised and fortified border to protect its pepper plantations and control its labour force, Raja Massau was not considered a foreign interloper by the Malay when he set himself up in the border town of Ooray in 1716. Instead, he was welcomed by the *dupati* [Malay chief], with whom he set about fortifying Ooray. Exasperated, the English authorities observed how 'his subjects resorting to him', Raja Massau attracted followers to the town from across Inderapura and Manduta and set about forming a new centre of royal power within Anak Sungai's borders.<sup>4</sup> Over a period of several months, Raja Massau began to exert his authority over the surrounding *dupatis* and village headmen, levying fines and attacking the villages of those who rejected his authority. While this newly emerging framework of Inderapura power overlapped with the Anak Sungai Sultanate, it was not considered a threat and elicited no response from Sultan Gulemat. On the other hand, the company, concerned that Raja Massau 'design'd to have got the Power of those parts', dispatched their own force of English and Bugis soldiers to oust the 'interloper'. After a week-long siege of Ooray, the company's expedition 'took the Town by storm', killing both Raja Massau and the *dupati*.<sup>5</sup>

The presence of the company on the west coast of Sumatra in the late 17th and early 18th centuries was one of repeated attempts at delineating, building and

<sup>1</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/7, Bengkulu to court of committees, 7 July 1716.

<sup>2</sup> Kathirithamby-Wells (1976: 81).

<sup>3</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/21/7, Bengkulu to Madras, 29 October 1695.

<sup>4</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/7, Bengkulu to court of committees, 7 July 1716.

<sup>5</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/7, Bengkulu to court of committees, 7 July 1716.

fortifying clear territorial borders in a largely borderless land of shifting boundaries and fluid allegiances. Although the west coast was a crowded political landscape of dozens of independent polities, they nonetheless participated in a shared political and economic culture which rendered formal and fortified territorial borders porous and, in some cases, obsolete. Individual states shared joint sources of sovereignty and even co-governed the same regions. Raja Massau might have been the ruler of a northern sultanate, for instance, but that position also made him a key figure of Islamic legitimacy throughout the west coast, allowing him to rebuild Inderapura power amongst the sovereign spaces of the southern sultanates without being ejected as an aggressor. As the English observed nervously, Raja Massau ‘usurp’d the sovereignty w<sup>ch</sup> was very likely to extend into the dominions’ of other Malay vassals without resistance.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the company may have garrisoned a chain of forts around Anak Sungai in order to control who or what might enter or leave the region, but as the pepper trade relied on the movement of people and goods around multiple overlapping geographic and social sites—from female highland pepper cultivators to their male merchant kin in the lowlands who transported and sold their goods downriver—the economic growth which the English sought to exploit relied on a high degree of uninhibited mobility and exchange across regions.

This article uses—and challenges—the concept of securitisation to shed light on the failure of the East India Company to build a territorial presence on the west coast of Sumatra at the turn of the 18th century. By studying securitisation within the context of the company’s colonial expansion, it will challenge the conceptual understanding of ‘security’ and its subsequent process of ‘border making’ as being one of survival, to argue instead that in the early modern period, Europeans regularly invoked security and pursued the project of border making as a form of imperialism. In doing so, it challenges traditional Eurocentric conceptualisations of securitisation studies which too often portray Europe as the ‘apex of civilized “desecuritization”’, an argument which contributes to ‘sanitizing its violent (settler-) colonial projects and the racial violence of normal liberal politics’.<sup>7</sup> On the contrary, the free movement of people and goods across different polities in the Malay world of western Sumatra was rarely invoked as a security issue and as a result rendered exclusive militarised borderlands between states as largely redundant. The English, on the other hand, regularly employed securitisation as a strategy to territorialise its power, control key commodities, regulate and police labour, and disenfranchise those groups which refused to conform to its expectations of subservience. As such, the process of securitisation was a European construct, one that caused the sort of anarchy and destruction which scholars of securitisation often assign to the non-European world.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/57, Bantal to Bencoolen, 13 June 1716.

<sup>7</sup> Howell and Richter-Montpetit (2020: 3–22).

<sup>8</sup> Howell and Richter-Montpetit (2020: 3–22).

Securitisation Studies has largely remained the preserve of International Relations scholars. Since the 1990s, the Copenhagen School has provided an analytical framework for understanding the construction of ‘security’ in modern international politics, one which reveals a discursive construction of key issues as potential security threats.<sup>9</sup> Born during the later Cold War at the intersection of Strategic and Peace Studies, Securitisation Studies has formed a crucial theoretical framework within which to understand the domestic and foreign policies of the conflict’s antagonists, especially the Soviet Union. The ‘securitisation of politics’ in this period provided the context for the state’s propagation of an existential threat to its being—the idea of an external challenge that would help consolidate political authority internally. Confined to the understanding of securitisation as a ‘speech act’, subsequent post-Copenhagen scholarship has however broadened the concept significantly to include other forms of representation such as material practices, as well as to trace securitisation over time instead of more narrowly as an act of specific intervention. More importantly for scholars of colonialism and empire—with its vast geographical, cultural and political manifestations—new research has conceptualised securitisation not just as a process invoked by threat, but one that developed within a variety of different contexts.<sup>10</sup>

As influential as studies in securitisation have been in other fields, historians have been slower to adopt the concept. Yet, as since ideas and perceptions of security change over time, it seems obvious that studies in securitisation should be a major concern of historians, and perhaps even more appropriately, historians should be a major concern for scholars of securitisation.<sup>11</sup> As early as 1984, the German historian Werner Conze historicised security studies in a broad—but largely Eurocentric—historical survey, arguing that ‘securitas’ only became more important than ‘pax’ as a key concept of political life after the Wars of Religion, and that by the later 18th century society was largely the object of security policy.<sup>12</sup> More recently, Christopher Daase has suggested the possibilities securitisation studies pose to historians attempting to reconstruct the different ways early modern decision makers and societies dealt with danger and uncertainty.<sup>13</sup> In most cases, historians have rightly confined themselves to using securitisation ‘not as a mandatory framework, but as a useful conceptual “tool kit”’.<sup>14</sup> The field of history which naturally lends itself to this ‘tool kit’ the most is undoubtedly that of studies in colonialism and its associated border-making practices. Over the last two decades, such scholarship has transformed our understanding

<sup>9</sup> Stritzel (2014: 13–14).

<sup>10</sup> McDonald (2008: 1–2).

<sup>11</sup> Conze (2012: 453).

<sup>12</sup> De Graaf and Zwierlein (2013: 48).

<sup>13</sup> Daase (2012).

<sup>14</sup> De Graaf & Zwierlein (2013: 51).

of what constitutes a border. Securitisation studies has largely predicated itself on the conceptualisation of borders as clearly delineated territorial spaces, regulated and controlled by the nation state.<sup>15</sup> But new historical definitions of borders and borderlands has instead discovered ‘ambiguous and often-unstable realms where boundaries are also crossroads, peripheries are also central places, homelands are also passing-through places, and the end points of empire are also forks in the road’.<sup>16</sup> Such revisionism forces us to reconsider why and how decision makers and their public audiences securitise such porous and shifting borders, and in doing so emphasises the inherent failure of European colonialism as a border-making exercise.

By adopting the conceptual tool kit of Securitisation Studies to understand the failed border making of English colonialism on the west coast of Sumatra at the turn of the 18th century, this article exposes both the role English emotional responses to their Malay surroundings played in creating a colonial mindset which demanded heavily fortified borders and the control and regulation of territory through a feeling of vulnerability, as well as the more practical imperial concerns of company servants which sought to monopolise goods and labour within certain territories, largely by excluding other actors—whether foreign or indigenous—from doing so. But far from a world of well controlled and clearly delineated territorial borders, by the early 18th century this process of border making had all but collapsed, shipwrecked on the shore of the *alam Minangkabau*—a Minangkabau world which was all but desecuritized by the time the English East India Company arrived in the 1680s. Through an understanding and practice of sovereignty which was based on people and not territory, while living within a landscape which promoted highly fluid and mobile social and economic systems, and sharing in a wider transregional political culture which rendered natural or fortified borders all but obsolete, the Malay of the west coast were able to dismantle the company’s colonial framework by the early 18th century.

### **A world beyond borders and boundaries**

Servants of the company first arrived on the west coast of Sumatra in 1684, where they established a string of small factories across a 200-mile strip, from Inderapura in the north to Silebar and Bengkulu in the south. The company’s presence on the Indonesian archipelago had been much longer than this, however. Successful factories in the sultanates of Jambi in eastern Sumatra and Bantam on Java had helped the company capture a large share of the pepper trade which had formed the most important component of its early investments. But in 1679 the factory at Jambi was

<sup>15</sup> Deleixhe *et al.* (2019): 639–47).

<sup>16</sup> Hamalainen & Truett (2011: 338).

destroyed when a neighbouring power invaded the sultanate, while at Bantam the company was expelled in 1681 following a palace coup in which the new sultan had been supported by its rival, the Dutch VOC.<sup>17</sup> Without a new base in the region, the English Company was in danger of being squeezed out of the pepper trade altogether. Reconnaissance of the west coast of Sumatra revealed a region even more promising for pepper than either Jambi or Bantam—unlike those entrepôts, the west coast was a direct source of production. More importantly, it appeared neatly carved up into separate, independent riverine districts that made monopolisation by the company an easier prospect.

These early observations of the west coast were not necessarily wrong. Across the 200-mile stretch of the west coast of Sumatra, at least 20 major rivers cascade down from the Bukit Barisan mountain range. Not only did these small riverine worlds host their own extensive pepper plantations, but they acted as highways for the transportation of even more abundant pepper vines which were cultivated in the Minangkabau Highlands, nestled far up in the valleys of the Bukit Barisan range. Every year, migrating Minangkabau men rowed downstream to transport the pepper which their female family members had laboriously cultivated.<sup>18</sup> When they arrived at the coastal ports or towns, they joined a throng of *orang kayas* (literally ‘rich men’), *nachados* (Malay merchants), and Javanese and Chinese merchants and brokers. Pepper would be exchanged for commodities such as textiles, rice and especially silver—prized by highland women as a sign of status, and therefore the preferred mechanism of exchange on the coast.<sup>19</sup> In most cases, these watery highways tied disparate family clans together, with some kin leaving the highlands to operate in the coastal ports on behalf of their highland families. Interconnected routes of the west coast therefore allowed the same tribe or clan to operate simultaneously in the mountains and on the coast. This great movement and interaction of people and goods kept the region in a constant state of flux and motion, one in which the riverine districts facilitated and shaped cultural and commercial life.

This economic ecosystem, which connected the coast and the rivers with the highlands, relied on nebulous borders through which different political and cultural groups could move freely. This is not to suggest that obstacles and even borderlands did not exist on the west coast of Sumatra. Narrow mountain routes into the highlands—especially the Subang Pass—could become subject to levies as a form of control by local rulers. Nearer the coast, tolls could be enforced on certain rivers as a way for a ruler to encourage people to use other waterways, steering traffic to benefit themselves and undermine their competitors.<sup>20</sup> Conflict could also close

<sup>17</sup> Reid (2015: 155).

<sup>18</sup> Andaya (1995b: 551).

<sup>19</sup> Andaya (1995a: 174).

<sup>20</sup> Colombjin (2005: 17).

off certain regions between different tribes or chieftainships. For instance, in 1719, disputes over access to the salt trade led to war between the Kerenci foothill tribes—often known as the *orang gunung* or ‘mountain people’—and the people of Sungai Lemau. The Kerenci had usually acted as middlemen in the trade between the coast and the highlands, but the private trade in salt of the *pengeran* or chief of Sungai Lemau threatened their participation. The dispute turned violent, ‘some being kill’d, the resentment continued’, until full blown war broke out. The conflict strangled the routes between coast and mountains, and subsequently the movement of goods and people between the two came to a standstill. But it was a temporary disruption, and soon the Kerenci once again agreed ‘to send down people’ from the foothills ‘to trade in the produce of their Country’.<sup>21</sup> Yet these were essentially conflicts over access to trade and revenue rather than security or territory. Furthermore, even these instances indicate the connective nature of the west coast’s supposed barriers. Rather than acting as impenetrable borders, highland gorges, raging rivers and upland-lowland routes instead served to connect the people of the west coast into a highly mobile circuit.

If Sumatra’s natural borders were rarely used to inhibit social and economic mobility, its political borders similarly proved highly porous. There was a clear relationship between the two, of course. The mobility of west coast society and its geography together prevented the emergence of centralised political structures. Multiple routes between the coast and mountains, and across the coast itself, made control of trade, resources or people difficult. Attempts to monopolise these in a particular territory only led people and their trades to shift to a different route, river or district.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, the region boasted few hegemonic powers in the 17th century. Yet, the political landscape of the west coast was not determined by geography alone. Indeed, Sumatran political authority and claims to sovereignty were rarely articulated through control of territory alone. Rather, kinship ties, political bonds through gift-giving and rewards, and the subordination of people actualised a state or ruler’s control on the west coast. This was certainly how several faraway sultanates managed—albeit inconsistently and loosely—to maintain their claims to suzerainty over the west coast. These had been more directly enforced by the Sultanate of Aceh, which extended its rule down the west coast by 1628. The sultan installed governors within each riverine district to collect tributes of pepper, as opposed to exercising territorial rule.<sup>23</sup> In the course of their three-year tenure, Acehnese governors forged significant local links through marriage, patronage and monopolies.<sup>24</sup> Acehnese control did not

<sup>21</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/7, Bengkulu to court of committees, 10 January 1719.

<sup>22</sup> Colombjin (2003: 499–500).

<sup>23</sup> Khan (2015: 8).

<sup>24</sup> Kathirithamby-Wells (1969: 460).



last long, however, and barely ten years later the sultanate had abandoned its claims to the region when it transferred its rights over the pepper tribute to the VOC, who had only mixed success in exercising its authority outside of the far northern region of the west coast.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, much of the southern part of the west coast by the mid-17th century had fallen under the suzerainty of the Sultanate of Bantam, which, like Aceh, also actualised its sovereignty partly through a tributary relationship based on pepper, and partly through important marriage alliances—the most crucial being with the Rajas of Inderapura.<sup>26</sup> In exchange for annual quotas shipped to Bantam, the sultanate left the individual Malay districts alone and accorded them virtual independence in their affairs, while maintaining strong kinship links to the region's elite. It was control of people, and not territory, through which distant suzerains articulated their sovereignty over the west coast. As the sultan of Bantam's ambassador informed servants of the company shortly after their arrival at Bengkulu, the Malay in those districts 'are and have allways been ye Slaves of ye King of Bantam'.<sup>27</sup> Social and geographical mobility, alongside the largely non-territorial suzerainty claimed by distant powers, thus ensured that no major political borders divided the west coast of Sumatra.

Perhaps a more important product of the region's geographic and commercial mobility was the shared political culture enjoyed by the region's polities and tribes. On the east coast of Sumatra, a number of culturally and even ethnically distinct powers engaged in an armed struggle for territorial dominance. The sultanate of Jambi, for instance, was a Javanese state, whereas its rivals Johore and Palembang were Malay kingdoms, each with different political traditions and customs. By 1679 Jambi was on the losing end of a long war with its neighbours, and the capital was sacked, destroying the company's factory there in the process and killing its servants.<sup>28</sup> The struggle for economic and territorial dominance on the east coast of Sumatra stood in stark contrast to its counterpart in the west. Here, Minangkabau migrants from the highlands comprised the majority of the population. Sheltered in the wide plateaus of the mountains and nourished by the rich volcanic alluvial soil, the Minangkabau Highlands was the most densely populated region of Sumatra—with roughly a quarter of the island's entire population crammed onto the highland plateaus. The capital at Pagaruyung alone was estimated to have numbered 8,000 people.<sup>29</sup> For several centuries, migrants had periodically spilled out of the plateaus and descended down onto the west coast to form new Minangkabau communities and establish trading

<sup>25</sup> Kathirithamby-Wells (1969: 465).

<sup>26</sup> Kathirithamby-Wells (1987: 29).

<sup>27</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/1, Suttra Getra to Bengkulu, [?] January 1686.

<sup>28</sup> Andaya (1993: 128).

<sup>29</sup> Andaya (1995b: 540).

towns and ports to export the benzoin, gold, elephant's teeth and, of course, pepper, which was desperately sought after by Chinese, Javanese and European merchants. Almost every polity the English encountered on the west coast could trace its origins back to the Minangkabau. Sungai Lemau, within whose jurisdiction the company's settlement of Bengkulu lay, celebrated its descent from the Minangkabau during special occasions, and its people flocked to Bengkulu in 1687 to pay their respects to a visiting prince of the Minangkabau royal house.<sup>30</sup> And despite being the principal sultanate on the west coast, even Inderapura had to have the succession of its rulers rubber-stamped by the Minangkabau kings in order to gain legitimacy.<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, the Minangkabau Highlands were ruled by kings—plural. In the 14th and 15th centuries, Minangkabau had been an expansive territorial power whose wealth was derived from control of the gold trade.<sup>32</sup> During this period, Islam became adopted as a state religion, and Minangkabau transformed into a centre of Islamic culture and learning, quickly overtaking the Sultanate of Aceh as the font of all religious legitimacy in Sumatra. For reasons that are not well recorded, by the time the English and Dutch had arrived on the west coast, the Minangkabau polity had transformed from a territorial empire into a loose federation of highland communities, ruled not by a single sultan, but rather by three kings whose own powers were 'scarcely superior to those of a common raja', according to the company servant-turned-historian William Marsden.<sup>33</sup> Instead, individual Minangkabau communities became highly autonomous, rejecting the old patrilineal order in favour of new matrilineal traditions which placed significant emphasis on collective government. As the system evolved, the three kings transitioned into figureheads: symbols of Minangkabau Islamic authority which saw their political power replaced by significant cultural and spiritual influence over Minangkabau society. As migrants descended from the highlands and set up new communities on the coastal plains, the matrilineal tradition created a more egalitarian political system, in which individual riverine districts elected their sultans and tribal chiefs. So when the Sultan of Inderapura attempted to impose a patrilineal succession on his southern district of Manduta by installing his son as deputy there in place of his sister's son, Raja Adil, who had been elected by the *menteri* or councilors in Manduta on the basis of his matrilineal claims, the *menteri* of both Manduta and even of Inderapura itself rose up in defence of the Minangkabau tradition and forced the sultan to recognise Raja Adil as deputy.<sup>34</sup> Up and down the west coast, councils of *menteri* and federations of *peroatins* or riverine chiefs controlled the *adat* and upheld

<sup>30</sup> Kathirithamby-Wells (1970: 57).

<sup>31</sup> Kathirithamby-Wells (1976: 66).

<sup>32</sup> Marsden (1783: 275).

<sup>33</sup> Marsden (1783: 267).

<sup>34</sup> Kathirithamby-Wells (1976: 74).

Minangkabau customs, creating a political culture that transcended the boundaries of individual states. Borders—whether rivers, mountains or militarised barriers—did little to stop the participation of west coast communities in this broader framework.

By the time the company arrived in the 1680s, the west coast of Sumatra had transformed into an *alam Minangkabau*—a Minangkabau world, in which its various polities and tribes adhered to matrilineal social and political traditions, based their governments on *adat* or highland laws, professed a fundamentalist form of Islamic worship, and wrapped themselves in Minangkabau legitimacy by, for instance, using a shared set of royal seals in diplomatic correspondence and seeking the approval of the ‘three kings’ during times of succession. Despite being shorn of its political power, the Minangkabau royal house ‘was held in a sacred light’ by all of the migrant communities on the west coast who, though forming independent states, remained part of the same *alam Minangkabau* which plugged them into a shared cultural, political and religious tradition.<sup>35</sup> The result was a land largely unburdened by militarised or conflict-ridden borders, and instead home to overlapping jurisdictions, joint-rule and intensive transregional exchange and movement between states who enjoyed a shared political culture. Bengkulu, for instance, which would become the headquarters of the company from 1685, was governed by four *dupatis* or chiefs, jointly appointed by the *pengerans* or rulers of the neighbouring states of Sungai Itam and Sungai Lemau. In that sense, Bengkulu’s government was the product of a shared sovereignty. When the English arrived and negotiated for possession of Bengkulu, the two independent *pengerans* acted in such complete concert, that the English mistakenly referred to Raja Muda of Sungai Lemau as the ‘Young King’ and Kalipa Raja of Sungai Itam as the ‘Old King’, believing them to be co-rulers of the same state.<sup>36</sup> The English can be forgiven in their confusion. Although the territories of Sungai Lemau and Sungai Itam lay predominantly on either side of the Bengkulu River, each one also established villages on the opposite side, and the *dupati* of Bengkulu were drawn from both states.<sup>37</sup> Much of the west coast proved a patchwork of intermingled and overlapping communities, often sitting on top or alongside one another without significant displacement or conflict.

The lack of major territorial friction between overlapping states owed much to the deterritorial nature of sovereignty on the west coast. Like those faraway suzerains at Aceh or Bantam who claimed to rule the people of the west coast, and not the coast itself, local Malay rulers also exercised authority over the people, and not the land. When the Minangkabau prince Ahmad Shah ibn Iskandar entered into an alliance with the English company at Bengkulu in 1687, he settled in the port and hoped to

<sup>35</sup> Marsden (1783: 267).

<sup>36</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/1, Bengkulu to Madras, 28 October 1685.

<sup>37</sup> Bastin (1965: 2).

turn it into a new centre of Minangkabau kingship. Not only did he order the opening of a new market and the establishment of a royal mint at Bengkulu, but he also relocated thousands of Malay to the port, including 1,000 of his own followers as well as bringing ‘the People from the other side of the River to them’.<sup>38</sup> Rather than expand Bengkulu’s borders across the river, by force or otherwise, Ahmad Shah ibn Iskandar instead sought to bring the people to him and his new capital.

Yet if sovereignty was exercised not over land but over people, it was also articulated by local rulers as residing *in* the people as well. Popular sovereignty was another Minangkabau tradition which developed with the Highland kingdom’s transition from a centralised monarchy, into a loose federation of communities by the 17th century. The custom was captured in the Minangkabau proverb *dilahir urang majambah, dibatin kito manjambah*—‘externally the ruler is to be respected by his subjects, but actually it is the ruler who has to respect his subjects’.<sup>39</sup> Shortly after their arrival in 1685, the English were puzzled to find that ‘ye kings have noe command over their People’, who they discovered possessed a range of powerful rights which the English could not reconcile with monarchical states.<sup>40</sup> The egalitarian political system put power largely in the hands of the *menteri*, *peroatins*, *dupatis* and even individual village heads, all of whom came together to elect or sanction those rulers that abided by Minangkabau traditions, and worked to reject and expel those who did not. When Sultan Gulemat was deposed by the company as ruler of Anak Sungai in 1716, Raja Kecil Besar was installed as his replacement. However, his appointment was not sanctioned by the 20 *menteri* of Inderapura, who acted as the custodians of the Minangkabau *adat* on the coast. Worse still, when Raja Kecil appointed his own son as heir to Anak Sungai, breaking with matrilineal tradition, the *menteri* threw their weight behind a rival claimant, Merah Bangun, a Minangkabau prince from Inderapura. In 1728 the *menteri* had Raja Kecil assassinated, and Merah Bangun ascended to the throne as Sultan Gundam Mersah.<sup>41</sup>

To foreign observers at the time, and historians since, the popular sovereignty which shaped west coast political systems suggested an inherent instability, as polities appeared to be in a ‘constant state of flux’.<sup>42</sup> The ascension of a new ruler in the southern state of Sungai Itam in 1686 demonstrated this dynamic in a ceremony designed to display the new ruler’s election through the support of the people, rather than their hereditary succession. As the state’s *peroatins*, *dupatis* and ‘Hill Chiefs’ came together to confirm Raja Kalippa as the new ruler, he was led by two chiefs and the royal

<sup>38</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/21/7, Bengkulu to Madras, 20 July 1688.

<sup>39</sup> Cited in Kathirithamby-Wells (1976: 73).

<sup>40</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/1, Bengkulu to Inderapura, 5 October 1685.

<sup>41</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/8, Bengkulu to Madras, 30 September 1728.

<sup>42</sup> Colombjin (2003).

ambassador on a procession through throngs of lancers, musketeers and archers who began ‘firing of ye pieces’ and ‘proclameing him King’—confirming that his new rule relied on their willingness to fight for him. Later in the procession, the Raja was led to the steps of the *ballay* or palace. At the top of these, a man appeared ‘on the behalfe of all ye People’, and ‘Demanded severall questions of his ability, whether he was fitt or capable of a Kingly office’. Even now Raja Kapilla had to remain silent, and instead the royal ambassador answered ‘yes’ on his behalf. Once this was completed, Raja Kapilla ‘ascended ye ballay after his feet was washed & ye having presented all ye hill Rajas’, was finally confirmed as the new ruler of Sungai Itam.<sup>43</sup> The English deputy-governor observing the ritual dismissed the whole affair as rambunctious and chaotic. There was, he noted, ‘noe difference to be found between king & subjects’.<sup>44</sup> The English perceived this to be weakness, of course, but it was a political system particularly suited to the fluidity and mobility of west coast society, one which drew its traditions from a highland culture which emphasised political federation rather than monarchical or territorial centralisation. The day-long ceremony played an important role at the beginning of a new ruler’s reign in confirming the federated and decentralised nature of the Sungai Itam state.

The political autonomy of most villages and riverine districts on the west coast made any attempt to concentrate power in a particular territorial space virtually impossible, whether a court, capital or fort. Political power was linked to mobility, not hierarchy, and the most successful rulers were those who moved according to the concerns and interests of their people. This was chiefly expressed in the frequency with which a ruler would transfer or even abandon their capital without hesitation. Before Raja Massau had removed his court from Inderapura to Manduta in 1716, his father and predecessor as sultan, Muhammad Shah, had taken the exact same course of action in 1690. When the VOC threatened to increase its intervention in the sultanate’s affairs after the establishment of an English factory in the city of Inderapura, Muhammad Shah simply packed up and transferred the royal court to the southern province of Manduta, beyond the reach of VOC threats.<sup>45</sup> More importantly perhaps, in the past two decades the Manduta region had overtaken the north for pepper production by a significant margin. Muhammad Shah recognised that his vassals in the south had now become more valuable and more deserving of royal attention and patronage. The English, however, were left perplexed, having incurred ‘very great and extravagant expences’ establishing themselves at Inderapura and even building a fort—a major capital commitment and still a rare occurrence at this point in the company’s development.<sup>46</sup> But for the west coast’s rulers, whose powerbase was derived

<sup>43</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/2, consultation at Bengkulu, 9 November 1686.

<sup>44</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/1, Bengkulu to Inderapura, 5 October 1685.

<sup>45</sup> Consultation at Madras, 30 June 1690, in Records of Fort St. George (1917a, 16: 48).

<sup>46</sup> Consultation at Madras, 30 June 1690, in Records of Fort St. George (1917a, 16: 48).

from the people who sanctioned their rule and not control of the territory around which they constantly moved, attachment to certain towns or territories would have left them isolated and vulnerable. After the company's arrival at Bengkulu in 1685, English servants found it impossible to pin down and ratify certain agreements with Raja Muda, ruler of neighbouring Sungai Lemau, whose constant movement around the west coast took him far inland to his 'country dwelling' to interact with the tribal foothills, or to the southern port of Silebar to attend a Bantamese assembly, all within the space of two months.<sup>47</sup>

English encounters with 'borderless lands' was not unique to Sumatra, of course. In many parts of the early modern world, English colonists encountered foreign systems of sovereignty over which they attempted to impose their control. Early 17<sup>th</sup>-century North America, for instance, shared many similarities with the west coast of Sumatra, especially along the north-east of the Atlantic coast. Here, a riverine world formed physically, socially and commercially fluid boundaries between different tribes and polities, with waterways acting more as vehicles of exchange and movement than formal borders. Estuaries and creeks were crowded with Native American communities linked by expansive kinship networks, shared cultural practices and participation in the same commercial systems.<sup>48</sup> While kinship networks frequently broke and conflict regularly erupted over controlling stakes in the wampum market supply, the control of territory was rarely the focus of such bloodshed. So, whereas the English arrivals in the 1620s understood and mapped Narragansett Bay as a single territorial and cartographic feature, in actuality it was settled by various different Wampanoag and Narragansett communities who lived within its many different riverine branches.<sup>49</sup> As on Sumatra, sovereignty was rarely articulated or practiced over territory. Instead, a *sachem's* authority was actualised through tributary relationships over other *sachems* and their people, creating client–patron networks that often led to wider tribal confederations, but rarely the control of their territory itself. Indeed, when the English first arrived, despite laying claim to and settling specific 'plantations', the tribes they encountered successfully incorporated the colonists into their porous patron and tributary networks, cementing their authority over the colonists through ceremony, gift exchange and cultural intimacy, a dynamic which English weakness forced them to accept.<sup>50</sup>

To the foreign observer then, the west cost of Sumatra—like many places encountered by the English in the early modern world—looked like a land of territorial borders. At first sight, the coastal plain appeared severed from the highlands by a

<sup>47</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/1, Bengkulu to Inderapura, 18 December 1685; Bengkulu to Madras, 8 May 1686.

<sup>48</sup> Lipman (2015: 22–5).

<sup>49</sup> Lipman (2015: 16).

<sup>50</sup> Pulsipher (2005: ch1).



seemingly impenetrable mountain range. From these jagged peaks, raging torrents descended down to carve the coast up into dozens of strips of territory, each one with its own port or capital. From the Sultanate of Inderapura in the far north to the *Pengeran* of Silebar 200 miles to the south, independent polities and tribes inhabited these separate riverine districts. Yet, in practice, many powerful factors conspired to render this land free of securitised or militarised borders. For one, it was an *alam Minangkabau*: participating in a shared highland culture which had diffused itself across the west coast and bound the various political communities together—many of whom had developed from successive waves of Minangkabau migration. From upholding *adat* and adhering to matrilineal custom, to deriving their authority from Islamic kingship and placing sovereignty within the people, the polities of the west coast were shaped by a wider Minangkabau framework of power which negated the need for clearly defined or highly contested territorial borders. Just as important, what Europeans perceived as daunting physical boundaries in fact served to connect the region's communities together. Rivers acted as highways of movement and exchange, bringing goods such as pepper and gold down from the highlands in annual migrations to the ports. The mountains, meanwhile, developed a network of passes and trails which allowed for substantial movement and migration between upland and lowland, serving to tie disparate kinship networks more firmly together. West coast society was constantly on the move, creating highly mobile circuits of commercial, religious, familial and cultural exchange. In the 17th century, the *alam Minangkabau* thrived as a borderless land. With the arrival of the company, that dynamic came under significant threat.

### Securitisation as colonialism

From the moment servants of the company weighed anchor in the Bengkulu road in 1685, it was clear that their articulation and practice of political authority was rooted in territory. Plans for clearly delineated borders, fortified spaces and territorial sovereignty pervaded the English presence on the west coast of Sumatra. In India, the company—while often entering into submissive relationships with the subcontinent's major powers, such as the Mughal Empire—had nonetheless worked hard to acquire written charters and agreements which carved out for them slices of territorial jurisdictions from which the company derived a stream of revenue, a pool of manpower and sometimes control over the production of certain key commercial goods, such as textiles or silk.<sup>51</sup> In contrast, when they arrived on the west coast of Sumatra after 1685, the company discovered a region which they believed existed within a power

<sup>51</sup> Stern (2011:20).

vacuum, free from hegemony. At first, they had perceived the Sultan of Inderapura to have been a great ‘Emperour’ and tried to acquire sweeping agreements from him for commercial concessions and trading monopolies.<sup>52</sup> It wasn’t long before they realised that not only was his authority limited to the north, but it was also, in keeping with Minangkabau tradition, limited in terms of centralised state power. In the south, meanwhile, the company tried to negotiate with the Sultan of Bantam, before realising too that his control over the west coast districts was tenuous at best. It wasn’t long before company servants realised that there was in fact no Mughal equivalent to constrain their commercial and political ambitions, and they set about monopolising the pepper trade and securing control over both the plantations where they were produced and the significant labour required to tend the vines, with the aim of exporting 2,000 *bahar* of pepper a year, or approximately 500 tons.<sup>53</sup> Here was a patchwork of small regional powers inhabiting a pepper-rich territory over which they themselves might be able to establish some kind of hegemony.

The company’s territorial aspirations became clear even as they negotiated with the Malay for rights over Bengkulu in 1685. The *pengerans* of Sungai Itam and Sungai Lemau, whose *dupatis* jointly governed the port, welcomed the company’s settlement there as a deterrent to potential VOC encroachment, and as a new alternative to the traditional Bantamese export market, which came with suzerain-strings attached.<sup>54</sup> But what they did not expect was the English demand not only for a plot of land to build a fort, but also for possession of the territory surrounding it within ‘Random of a A cannon shott every way’—which turned out to be over a mile. And this wasn’t to be leased like the settlements in India, either. Rather, the company’s servants insisted that they ‘must be the only Lords & sole proprietors’ of the territory. Raja Muda of Sungai Itam, clearly surprised by the request, observed that if he agreed to such a proposition, he would be ‘giving away his Countrey to strangers’. His counterpart of Sungai Lemau agreed and ‘begunn to Boggle att this’ as it would ‘in soe great A measure ... lessen his sovereignty’. Agreement was finally made only after long negotiations when the company agreed to pay much higher prices for the pepper crop, as well as to pay substantial sums of customs to each ruler for all pepper brought down their rivers. Even then the *pengerans* hesitated, and it took the ‘Hill Tribes’ coming down to the coast—who stood to benefit as middlemen to the highland pepper farmers—to ‘make the Young King comply’, before agreement was finally made.<sup>55</sup> But even as the first palisade was erected by the company around Bengkulu, both *pengerans*

<sup>52</sup> Inderapura to Batavia, 17 February 1685 in Records of Fort St. George (1917b: 209).

<sup>53</sup> A *bahar* was the equivalent of approximately 500lb. BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/2, Inderapura to Bengkulu, 24 April 1687.

<sup>54</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/1, Bengkulu to Madras, 28 October 1685.

<sup>55</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/1, Bengkulu to Madras, 28 October 1685.

worked to sabotage the agreement. In 1686, they not only depopulated Bengkulu by ordering their people to abandon the port, but also declared an embargo to starve the company of material for building and foodstuffs for sustenance.<sup>56</sup> Only once the company were able to gain the alliance of Ahmad Shah ibn Iskandar, a Minangkabau prince who had been driven out of south Sumatra by the VOC and came to Bengkulu to establish a new seat of Minangkabau power, were the *pengerans* of Sungai Itam and Sungai Lemau reconciled to the company's acquisition of Bengkulu and its surrounding territory.<sup>57</sup>

Once in control of the Bengkulu region, an emerging colonial mentality—formed largely through the vulnerability of the English on the coast—demanded the securitisation of its new territory. The Company's fiscal-military weakness made its presence precarious at best, and its vulnerability was apparent in its inability to complete the fortifications at Bengkulu. York Fort and its successor Fort Marlborough were in a constant state of partial completion and disrepair. After the Sultan of Bantam sent a Dutch-Javanese force of 4,000 soldiers to Silebar to threaten the new English presence up the coast in 1686, the deputy-governor despaired that if they 'must defend ye place wth our own small strength' they would be easily ran off the coast. He gathered the soldiers nonetheless, and when he asked them if they would stand with him, they 'unanimously declar'd that they were incapable to encounter such a number', as there were barely eleven healthy soldiers standing—disease and the climate having decimated the company's albeit small ranks.<sup>58</sup> But just as the deputy-governor made plans to surrender to the Bantamese army, the Dutch-Javanese force had itself fallen apart through disease and desertion. After this close encounter with destruction, the colonial authorities became obsessed with separating themselves from the surrounding Malay behind impregnable fortifications. 'Wee doubt not', the deputy-governor reported to his counterpart at Inderapura, 'but that when wee are upon this hill & have finish'd the worke wee intend wee need not feare all ye Javas that come agatt us'.<sup>59</sup> And despite no provocation, the Malay were soon conflated with the Javanese as a threat in English minds. One company servant reasons that Bengkulu would remain vulnerable to the surrounding Malay 'untill that we are of our selves strong enough to oppose any enemy'.<sup>60</sup> But the company's establishment at Bengkulu was chronically short of funds and material, and York Fort remained more of a wooded palisade than the stone-bastioned fort servants envisioned. The same went for Fort

<sup>56</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/2, Bengkulu to Madras, 26 January 1686.

<sup>57</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/21/7, Bengkulu to court of committees, 26 June 1688.

<sup>58</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/2, Bengkulu to Inderapura, 18 January 1686

<sup>59</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/1, Bengkulu to court of directors, 7 January 1686.

<sup>60</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/2, Bengkulu to Inderapura, 18 January 1686.

<sup>61</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/8, Bengkulu to court of directors, 27 February 1713.

Marlborough, which was established in 1713 when York Fort was deemed too poorly built and quite indefensible.<sup>61</sup> Within a year several stone bastions had been erected, but a severe storm and several earthquakes caused it to ‘tumble down being crackt in severall places’.<sup>62</sup> Five years later, Fort Marlborough was still a building site, so that when a Malay uprising threatened the port in 1719, company servants had to throw up a temporary turf wall and ditch to protect themselves.<sup>63</sup> In that sense, the company’s securitisation was driven as much by an emotional response to their vulnerability, than it was by actual material threats to their position. This was a common dynamic within the English empire. In New England in the 1620s before the Great Migration of the following decades, English vulnerability meant that they rarely left their plantations or ships, and if so, it was usually along waterways or as part of heavily armoured and heavily armed columns.<sup>64</sup> On the west coast of Sumatra, the more vulnerable the company felt, the more it sought to securitise its presence, and yet it was this exact dynamic that undermined the colony’s success even further.

The company’s securitisation of the Bengkulu territory rested on a combination of establishing a clearly defined border around the port, and by regulating the movement of people to and from the region. For starters, Orumkay Lila, the company’s broker and one of the west coast’s principal *orang kaya* or ‘rich men’ who exercised considerable political influence and commercial interest, was brought in to govern the Bengkulu jurisdiction outside of York Fort’s walls.<sup>65</sup> As the company would ‘never be able to bring ye people under government’ as they perceived the Malay to be ‘alwaies troublesome’, they employed Orumkay Lila as he was ‘much feared by all’ and was considered ‘ready to quell such growing insolence as wee dayly mett wth’.<sup>66</sup> Orumkay Lila fulfilled his brief effectively, and kept the Malay inhabitants under a rather severe government. When William Dampier was employed at Bengkulu in 1690 as a gunner in the fort, he found two of the *dupatis* clamped in stocks ‘for no other Reason but because they had not brought down to the Forts such a quantity of Pepper as the Governour had sent for’.<sup>67</sup> But Orumkay Lila’s repressive government over the port soon caused a backlash amongst the Malay, whose discontent threatened to spill into a general uprising. Rather than acknowledge their role in facilitating the repression, company servants instead ‘Cutt off Orankei Lilos head for Severall crimes’, after which they claimed they ‘lived in peace wth the Mallayes’.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Cited in Veevers (2013: 691).

<sup>63</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/8, James Morris to court of directors, aboard the Queen, 6 February 1719.

<sup>64</sup> Lipman (2015: 86).

<sup>65</sup> Kathirithamby-Wells (1986: 260).

<sup>66</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/2, consultation at Bengkulu, 11 November 1686.

<sup>67</sup> Dampier (1707, repr. 1931: 125).

<sup>68</sup> Consultation at Madras, 5 August 1692 in Records of Fort St. George (1917a: 35).

Orumkay Lila's removal did not end the company's harsh government over Bengkulu, however. Far from it. Successive deputy-governors transformed Bengkulu into a highly regulated colonial space in which the Malay inhabitants and those who crossed into the Bengkulu territory were monitored and controlled. The free-flow of commerce became heavily regulated, and the *nochados* had to apply to York Fort for a passport to operate on the Bengkulu River.<sup>69</sup> The *dupatis* of Sungai Lemau and Sungai Itam were removed from the government of the port, and the *pengerans* were 'deprived of their antient Privileges of being judges of the Country', a territory they were now excluded from with the exception of official diplomatic business. Instead, the deputy-governors exercised absolute authority, and one, Robert Skingle, had the brother of the *peroatin* or district chief of the Bengkulu River 'butchered' for crossing the border without authority and carrying off a 'slave wench'.<sup>70</sup> From 1708, those entering the company's territorial bounds were disarmed and forced to surrender their weapons to the English garrison, a humiliating proposition in a culture where weapons possessed great ceremonial significance and social standing.<sup>71</sup> Soon the territory was 'in a flame' and the 'consequences must have been fatall' had not a fleet of English ships arrived and deterred a general uprising.<sup>72</sup>

Further unrest was created by a series of strict regulations which were brought in on what the Malay could cultivate within Bengkulu's borders. For instance, limits were enforced on how much cotton could be exported. Although cotton proved more profitable to the Malay than pepper, the company feared that its cultivation would lead to a decline in pepper production.<sup>73</sup> Finally, the salt trade became a monopoly: not officially, but every successive deputy-governor established a *de facto* private monopoly over the commodity. This practice was devastating to the Malay. For those living in Bengkulu's borders, the monopoly drove prices up and threatened the consumption of salt as a fundamental foodstuff and preservative, causing distress and often hunger. For those beyond the Bengkulu territory, especially the *orang gunung* or foothill tribes, whose main source of income was as middlemen salt traders to the Minangkabau Highlands, the monopoly threatened their entire commerce. The practice, noted a report by Madras in 1719, 'bred a great deal of discontent & uneasiness among the People'.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>69</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/2, consultation at Bengkulu, 10 December 1686.

<sup>70</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/6, Bengkulu to court of committees, 4 July 1710.

<sup>71</sup> Colombjin (2003: 512–513).

<sup>72</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/6, Bengkulu to court of committees, 4 July 1710.

<sup>73</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/21/7, Bengkulu to Madras, 14 April 1701.

<sup>74</sup> A Charge Exhibited by the President & Council of Fort St. George against Mr Richard Farmer of Breach of Orders and Severall Other Misdemeanours Committed by Him, Madras, 2 July 1719, Records of Fort St. George (1917a: 1010).

Controlling the flow of people into the Bengkulu territory and regulating the behaviour of those who inhabited it effectively severed the port from the coastal plain which had previously enmeshed it within wider agricultural, commercial, cultural and migratory networks with the foothills and highlands. This development had severe consequences for the English presence. For one, it ensured Bengkulu remained chronically on the verge of starvation, as most of its rice and grain came from the highlands.<sup>75</sup> The company was therefore forced to place the demand for provisions into most of its treaties with west coast powers, essentially placing its survival in the hands of newly subjugated vassals.<sup>76</sup> It also ensured Bengkulu remained consistently underpopulated, as the Malay chose either to migrate to escape the scarcity of food and the harsh demands of the colonial authorities, or were themselves forcefully displaced from the territory by the company. For instance, when the neighbouring territory of Jangallo was annexed to the south in 1711, the *dupati* and ‘all the Inhabitants [were] expell’d and oblig’d to settle in a remote part of the Country’. Displaced from their homeland, the people of Jangallo were ‘reduc’d to great necessity’s, having been stripped of all their substance and are now plac’d in a country unfit for the plantation of Pepper’ and far removed from the rivers they had lived on for centuries.<sup>77</sup>

Once depopulated, Jangallo—famous for its abundant wildlife and agricultural produce—was systematically pillaged and stripped of all its resources for the benefit of Bengkulu. The moment the Malay were expelled, company servants swooped in to ‘take an acct of what goods, grain, Cattle &c.’ were to be found there, and then began to ship them back to Bengkulu on barges.<sup>78</sup> As great flotillas of grain and paddy made their way downriver to Silebar, the deputy-governor sent upriver a horde of licensed buffalo hunters to track down Jangallo’s vast herds—the largest concentration of water buffalo on the west coast.<sup>79</sup> The territory was also carved up in substantial detail. ‘The whole country’ was declared ‘by rt & Conquest invested in’ the company, including the entire north side of the Silebar River stretching ten miles to Bengkulu in the north, as well as the port of Silebar itself. The country south of the river was divided into an upland and a coastal territory and awarded to Jangallo’s neighbours, whom the company had recruited as allies in the conquest—a large *carrang* or hill marking the boundary between them.<sup>80</sup> The ancient homeland of

<sup>75</sup> Colombjin (2003: 520).

<sup>76</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/3, Articles of Agreement between the Company and Sultan Gulemat and Raja Adill, 26 September 1695.

<sup>77</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/57, *Dupati* Jangallo to Bengkulu, December 1712.

<sup>78</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/57, consultation at Bengkulu, 11 May 1711.

<sup>79</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/57, consultation at Bengkulu, 18 May 1711.

<sup>80</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/7, Articles of Agreement between the Company and Pengeran Jantinolli and *Dupati* Allum, 2 June 1711.



the Jangallo people, then, was carved up into three new territorial units with clearly defined borders, upheld by written treaty. For the role of treatise in European colonialism, see [Ittersum \(2018: 160\)](#). Having expanded the Bengkulu territory ten miles south, the Silebar River became a new securitised border, and the company decreed that no one on the opposite side was to build or settle within 100 foot of the new river-border.<sup>81</sup>

While rapine and pillaging partly alleviated the resource-starved Bengkulu territory, company servants also pursued strategies to tackle the region's depopulation. Their first recourse was to attract Chinese immigrants, whom servants deemed 'the only people proper to improve this settlement'.<sup>82</sup> This was partly on account of the success of Dutch Batavia as a colonial city, in which almost 40 per cent of the population were Chinese migrants.<sup>83</sup> As in Batavia, so at Bengkulu it was hoped that the Chinese would establish domestic industries and services such as brick making, carpentry, tavern-keeping, and act as traders.<sup>84</sup> Immigration was slow, however, as Bengkulu had established an unenviable reputation in the archipelago, with only 20 Chinese residents in 1700. With gradual incentives and concessions offered by the company, this increased to a community of perhaps 1,000 across the Bengkulu territory by 1730.<sup>85</sup> Unfortunately their successful commercial and industrial enterprises fell prey to the competition of private English traders, which led to their periodical expulsion from Bengkulu, as in 1709.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, Chinese attempts to set up extensive sugar and arrack plantations outside of the port caused intense backlash from the Malay. See Gib, the Captain of the Chinese community, was granted land from the company six miles from the port along the border with Sungai Lemau in 1715.<sup>87</sup> *Dupati* Bentering, a district chief in the neighbouring territory, complained to the company's deputy-governor that the conversion of the land to sugar and arrack farming disrupted the traditional Malay buffalo grazing grounds along the border. When the company ignored these complaints, *Dupati* Bentering gathered 500 men and stormed and torched the Chinese plantations in 1719.<sup>88</sup>

The challenges posed to Chinese migration was partly resolved by the company's development of a large enslaved African population. As early as 1686, with the Malay-imposed embargo against Bengkulu, the deputy-governor informed the court

<sup>81</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/7, Articles of Agreement between the Company and Pengeran Jantinolli and Dupati Allum, 2 June 1711.

<sup>82</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/21/7, Bengkulu to Madras, 17 February 1700.

<sup>83</sup> Farrington (2003: 113).

<sup>84</sup> Farrington (2003: 114).

<sup>85</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/21/7, Bengkulu to Madras, 17 February 1700; Farrington (2002: 115).

<sup>86</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/6, Bengkulu to court of directors, 4 July 1710.

<sup>87</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/7, Bengkulu to court of directors, 17 July 1716.

<sup>88</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/58, consultation at Bengkulu, 24 March 1719.

of directors ‘how absolutely necessary it is, that 50 or 60 slaves be sent here to serve in ye ffactorie’. Due to the scarcity of labour in Bengkulu, those Malay who remained in the territory were able to charge the significant sum of ¼ dollar per day for their services, a price the company’s servants were unwilling to pay for such ‘rascals’.<sup>89</sup> The first significant cargo of 200 enslaved Africans from Madagascar arrived in 1690, and by 1700 a large slave village had grown up two miles from Bengkulu.<sup>90</sup> Slaves were mainly used as forced labour in building and maintaining York Fort and, after 1714, the new and larger Fort Marlborough, but enslaved African were also armed and used as guards to patrol or garrison the border.<sup>91</sup> The deputy-governor argued that enslaved Africans would provide ‘some kind of balance in case of need against an enemy, they being as much strangers to the Sumatreans as they are to us’.<sup>92</sup> Fortunately many of the enslaved Africans were able to find freedom by fleeing beyond English territory. Incidents of mass-escapes were common, as in 1695 when 30 slaves managed to break out of their quarters at Silebar and disappear into the jungle, finding refuge with the *pengeran* of Jangallo, whose country—before its annexation—company servants described as a ‘refuge’ for runaway slaves.<sup>93</sup>

### The failure of European border making

The company’s problematic border making on the west coast of Sumatra was not just confined to the Bengkulu region, however. In 1695 civil war broke out in Manduta between the Inderapura Sultan on the one hand, and several chiefs on the other whose popularity with the *menteri* and *peroatins* provided them with legitimate claims to the throne. Naturally, the company seized the opportunity to secure a monopoly over by far the biggest pepper-producing region of the west coast. By providing mediation in the civil war and then providing troops to support the rebel rajas, by the terms of the Treaty of Tryamong, the company was able to secure the pepper plantations. The Treaty not only divided Manduta into two new territorial jurisdictions with clearly defined borders—the northern portion going to Raja Adill, and the southern to Sultan Gulemat—but it also laid the foundation for a massive expansion of the company’s colonial authority into the north. For instance, the company was granted ‘the sovereign power and Dominion’ over fortified settlements at every port in the new Sultanate of Anak Sungai that they created in the south. Every Malay family within

<sup>89</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/1, Bengkulu to court of directors, 6 January 1686.

<sup>90</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/E/3/92, court of directors to Bengkulu, 19 December 1690.

<sup>91</sup> Logan (1956: 346).

<sup>92</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/E/3/91, court of directors to Priaman, 21 October 1685.

<sup>93</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/57, instructions to Henry Griffith, Bengkulu, 24 April 1711.

Anak Sungai were compelled to plant 2,000 pepper trees every year, to provide the company's settlements with quotas of food and material, and to pay customs on any cotton exports, which were now limited to 50 tons annually so as not to undermine the company's pepper demands. And to counter what the English found was the frustrating propensity of Malay rulers to move around their country, the company bound Raja Adill in the north, Sultan Gulemat in the south, and all of their chiefs, to certain residencies or capitals, their removal or transfer from which could only be authorised by the company.<sup>94</sup>

If the Treaty of Tryamong territorialised the political structures of the new sultanates created by the company in the north, it also paid special attention to the securitisation of those new territories. Now that it was in possession of abundant pepper producing countries, the Company, like at Bengkulu, sought to regulate the economic and political life of the new sultanates by detaching them from their regional networks with neighbouring Malay powers and the polities of the foothills and highlands. Perhaps the most ambitious article in the Treaty then was the commitment of Raja Adill and Sultan Gulemat to finance and build a chain of *paggars* around their new borders, 'for our Protection and ye Peace of ye Countrey', explained the English chief of Tryamong.<sup>95</sup> Once built, the company garrisoned each *paggarr* with five or ten soldiers. The new territorial borders drawn up by the company now became actual fortified boundaries bristling with soldiers and guns, stretching some hundred miles from Inderapura in the north all the way down to Seblat in the south on the border with Bengkulu. The region's ports and towns were becoming increasingly important for their strategic value, and not necessarily for the commercial benefits the company had originally moved into the area for. Tryamong, which had been the company's original headquarters in the north, had declined as a port and as a pepper producing region by the early 18th century. Nonetheless when pushed to abandon it by the directors in London in 1713, the Deputy-Governor insisted on keeping Tryamong as 'being the most northern settlement your honrs have on this Coast, it seems necessary to maintain it ... To prevent any persons from making any incroachment within Our bounds'.<sup>96</sup>

The company's willingness to defend its new colonial borders in the north with force was not just about the exclusion from the region of what they perceived to be external threats. Just as important to the company's border making was the policing of those trapped within its borders. For instance, it wasn't long before the 14 *menteri*

<sup>94</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/3, Articles of Agreement between the Company and Sultan Gulemat and Raja Adill, 26 September 1695.

<sup>95</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/3, Articles of Agreement between the Company and Sultan Gulemat and Raja Adill, 26 September 1695.

<sup>96</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/8, Bengkulu to court of directors, 27 February 1713.

of Manduta became dissatisfied with the company's settlement over the region. They had been working towards a more blended arrangement before the company's intervention in 1695, shaped by Minangkabau *adat* or laws. The *menteri* sought to elect Raja Adill based on his right to rule through the matrilineal line, with Raja Massau, the Inderapura Sultan's heir, as deputy, providing the new regime with a strong connection to the legitimising kingship of the Inderapura throne.<sup>97</sup> But as Sultan Gulemat was more willing to concede to the company's sweeping economic and political demands, the company insisted on the division of Manduta, with their puppet sultan in control of the most productive territory in the south. But the arbitrary territorial divisions in a region thoroughly shaped by the *alam Minangnakabu* was problematic, at best. The company were well aware that the Treaty of Tryamong would need to be imposed at the point of a gun, declaring that only 'a strong' *paggar* or fort in the town of Manduta itself with 50 soldiers would be enough to 'over awe' the *menteri* and force their cooperation.<sup>98</sup> Similarly, following Raja Massau's defeat in 1716 after his transfer of the Inderapura court to Ooray on the Manduta border—as recounted in the introduction—the English deputy-governor made clear that his violent removal 'will terrify the Mallays being somuch blood shed'. As the bodies of the sultan and *dupati* were recovered from the rubble of Ooray, Anak Sungai's *peroatins* or district chiefs were summoned and 'told this was don for their sake and it was expected they should plant pepper which they promise'd [on] account of the kill'd & wounded'.<sup>99</sup>

As at Bengkulu in the south, the company's securitisation of its northern borders was clearly about exerting control over those people and commodities living within the new territories of Manduta and Anak Sungai. This sprung mainly from a need to control the labour of the west coast, which, as far as the English were concerned, was almost as precious a commodity as the pepper itself. Indeed, the cultivation of pepper was a labour intensive process. The thousands of vines which made up the average plantation required constant management, pruning and harvesting.<sup>100</sup> And while the region boasted millions of pepper trees, it often struggled to match this volume with the required labour. 'Tho' the soil be very rich', observed one company servant in 1704, 'yet is so thinly peopled that one may travell twenty miles together without seeing either house or plantation'.<sup>101</sup> At Bengkulu, the scarcity of labour—the result of the depopulation of the region in response to the company's harsh policies—was partly made up by Chinese migrants and enslaved Africans. In contrast, the vast extent of the northern territories led the company to anticipate such a scarcity by securing

<sup>97</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/3, consultation at Tryamong, 7 October 1695.

<sup>98</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/3, consultation at Tryamong, 7 October 1695.

<sup>99</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/7, Bengkulu to Madras, 17 July 1716.

<sup>100</sup> Andaya (1995a: 173).

<sup>101</sup> Bengkulu to Madras, 7 February 1704 in Records of Fort St. George (1931, 9: 22).

the key population centres themselves, before any flight to the foothills or mountains could take place. By the turn of the 18th century, Moco Moco, Manduta, Bantal, Ippue and Tryamong were all fortified with major paggars with their own network of satellite forts and garrisons in the surrounding countryside. ‘Moco Moco when strengthen’d will secure the Peace of the Countrey that & Ippue being the Keys of the Countrey will prevent any coming in or escaping’, observed the deputy-governor of Bengkulu.<sup>102</sup> The *paggars* not only prevented the free movement of the Malay, but also policed their labour. When the Rajas of Seblat and Cattow—two key river districts in Anak Sungai which produced almost 600 *bahar* of pepper between them—began destroying their peppers plantations in 1690 in protest at the company’s coercive policies, the company responded by building several new *paggars* up and down the rivers to enforce pepper cultivation. ‘Now all is quiet’, observed one company servant when the paggars were completed in 1698, ‘& the whole pepper trade from Indrapoora to Sillebar is secured to the Company’.<sup>103</sup>

The financial and human cost of maintaining a fortified border some 100 miles long was enormous, however, and exposed the significant limitations of securitisation as a colonial strategy rooted firmly in territorial control. Following the completion of the Cattow and Seblat *paggars* chains, the governor of Madras complained to his counterpart at Bengkulu in 1698 that ‘the charge of defending a Paggars with a great Company of Souldiers would so much over ballance the Profit of buying of Pepper and selling of goods’.<sup>104</sup> The situation on the west coast was a classic cyclical dynamic of securitisation, in which the ever increasing burden of militarising and maintaining hard borders far outweighed the economic advantage to controlling the territories being secured. As one pamphlet observed of England’s contemporary occupation of Tangier in North Africa, in which Charles II lavished millions on the territory to secure it against potential Moroccan attack, ‘Whilst we keep onely the Walls of Tangier, we shall onely spend Monday; it will never bring any profit to our King’.<sup>105</sup> In 1684 the Crown abandoned Tangier as the cost of securing the colony had rendered it unprofitable as a free port.<sup>106</sup> Likewise, the expenses of the west coast for the month of July 1716 alone exceeded the amount spent on purchasing pepper over the entire preceding 17 months.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, when the company transferred its northern headquarters from Tryamong to Moco Moco, its fortification had cost 10,000 dollars by 1719, and its completion required another 5,000 more—money the deputy-governor

<sup>102</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/7, Bengkulu to Madras, 17 July 1716.

<sup>103</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/21/7, Bengkulu to Madras, 8 October 1698.

<sup>104</sup> Madras to Bengkulu, 17 May 1698, in Records of Fort St. George (1920, 8: 60).

<sup>105</sup> Cited in Bejjit (2015: 152).

<sup>106</sup> Stein (2011: 1007).

<sup>107</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/3/99, court of directors to Bengkulu, 14 March 1717.

at Bengkulu simply could not find.<sup>108</sup> The company's financial weakness meant that most of the *paggars* were more impressive on paper than they were on the ground. Rarely built of stone, the majority of *paggars*—especially inland—were turf or timber structures hastily erected, with on average a garrison of one or two Bugis or Malay soldiers fit for duty due to sickness or desertion. In 1700, for instance, one of the upriver *paggars* at Cattow was robbed of its pepper as it was poorly secured and garrisoned by a single soldier.<sup>109</sup>

The company's transformation of Bengkulu, Anak Sungai and Manduta into highly regulated and militarised territories proved too disruptive to the interconnected *alam Minangkabau* which had been formed over centuries through open borders, shared customs and the fluid movement and exchange of people and goods. Almost from the moment the company began to throw up borders, the Malay sought to undermine and resist them. One popular tactic was for upstream and highland polities to abandon the Bengkulu River and travel down or trade along neighbouring rivers. When the company first acquired Bengkulu in 1685, Nagarakiddal, 'a great Man' of the foothills where the Bengkulu River spilled out from the mountains, stopped all shipments of pepper downstream in protest at the English acquisition of the port, preventing the company from shipping any pepper at all in its first few months there.<sup>110</sup> Similarly, as all pepper coming to Bengkulu from the southward had to cross the Silebar River in Jangallo, its *pengeran* began diverting the pepper downriver to his own port—an act which largely contributed to the company's invasion of the country in 1711.<sup>111</sup> Below the great chiefs, individual Malay families almost all the way through this period resisted the coercive pepper quotas expected of them by the colonial government. Sungai Itam, which had become an English vassal by the early 18th century, failed to provide Bengkulu with more than 18 *bahar* of pepper in 1716, a catastrophic drop from its usual yield of 200 *bahar*. The company, suspecting disobedience, forced the *pengeran* to accept *Dupati Bentering* as 'Prime Minister' of Sungai Itam, who, with a small force of company soldiers, toured the state to enforce the cultivation of pepper. But it wasn't long before he reported back that the Malay were refusing to plant pepper 'as they could not get salt' due to the company's monopoly. Instead, they had allowed the pepper vines of Sungai Itam to rot in favour of paddy farming.<sup>112</sup>

Less common, though ultimately far more effective, was the use of force by Malay states and communities against the company's securitisation of the

<sup>108</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/7, Bengkulu to Madras, 10 January 1719.

<sup>109</sup> Bengkulu to Madras, 22 July 1700 in Records of Fort St. George (1921, 7: 127).

<sup>110</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/1, Bengkulu to Madras, 29 September 1685.

<sup>111</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/6, Bengkulu to court of directors, 14 November 1710.

<sup>112</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/57, consultation at Bengkulu, 30 July 1716.



Bengkulu region. This came in two forms: the invitation of outside actors to help contest the company's presence, or the armed uprising of those living within and around Bengkulu. The former tended to be less successful. The plurality of west coast sovereignty, in which states drew on a variety of simultaneous, overlapping sources of authority to sustain their political structures—Minangkabau legitimacy, Inderapura kingship, Bantamese suzerainty—allowed threatened communities to call upon several external forces. After the *pengerans* of Sungai Itam and Sungai Lemaу conceded to the company far more than they had intended in the Bengkulu grant of 1685, they invoked the loose suzerainty of the Sultan of Bantam, who sent an army of 4,000 Dutch and Javanese troops to Silebar to dislodge the English. At first, this overwhelming force scared the company into preparing to abandon Bengkulu and withdraw to Inderapura in the north. But when the Sultan's ambassador summoned the *pengerans* to Silebar and ordered them to return with him to Bantam to pay obedience to the Sultan, they worried that the Bantamese cure might be worse than the English disease, and fled back to Bengkulu. 'Being quite forsaken and ye forces bro't over much impaired by sickness', observed the deputy-governor, the Dutch-Javanese army returned to Bantam.<sup>113</sup> Having narrowly avoided destruction at the hands of the Sultan of Bantam, just a few years later the company faced tougher odds as it miraculously suppressed a coup in 1689 by a visiting Minangkabau prince, Ahmad Shah ibn Iskandar. The prince had settled in Bengkulu following an alliance with the English after being driven out of south Sumatra by the Dutch. For the suffering Malay, the arrival of Minangkabau royalty was universally welcomed as a powerful alternative to the increasingly oppressive company: 'he is admitted as Sovereign who laid claim to all the Countrey as heir to Minangcabou', the deputy-governor reported to Madras.<sup>114</sup> Once ensconced in the port, ibn Iskandar had 1,000 of his retinue launch a surprise attack on York Fort in an attempt to seize power, in which 'much blood he spiltt thereby'. Although they succeeded in repulsing the Minangkabau forces, the English garrison was decimated in the 'rising' of 'bloody designe', with barely ten soldiers of an entirely new batch of reinforcements left alive.<sup>115</sup>

The more successful use of force in response to the company's securitisation of the west coast was that exercised by the Malay themselves, and especially those who now found themselves displaced or economically and politically disenfranchised by the English settlement of the country. Sultan Gulemat's popularity amongst the people of Anak Sungai had plummeted by the beginning of the 18th century because of too readily conceding to all of the company's sweeping and oppressive demands. Had his

<sup>113</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/1, Bengkulu to Madras, 26 January 1686.

<sup>114</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/21/7, Bengkulu to Madras, 20 July 1688.

<sup>115</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/21/7, Bengkulu to Madras, 11 April 1689.

rule not been upheld by the company, Minangkabau *adat* or customary law would have almost certainly have meant his removal by then and the election or appointment of a new ruler in his place. ‘The Natives have been injuriously treated’, noted one company servant, ‘and consequently discouraged from improving their pepper plantations’.<sup>116</sup> As a result, several contenders with immense popularity amongst the people began to actively undermine Sultan Gulemat’s rule, including his step-father Raja Macoota, and his own son Raja Suleman. In 1711, the rajas crossed the border with four hundred men and peacefully took possession of the key port of Moco Moco and most of the region upriver from both Ippue and Bantal, largely with the support of the *dupatis* and people. But Manduta, garrisoned by a large company force, was taken after a siege in which the company’s chief surrendered once his Malay and Bugis force abandoned him in favour of Raja Suleman.<sup>117</sup> By 1713 their position was so strong that the rajas, along with the 14 *menteri* of Manduta, were able to elect Raja Mansore as the new Sultan—a figure with a strong claim to the throne who enjoyed a high level of popularity across the country.<sup>118</sup>

The company’s crippling financial situation and lack of manpower had prevented it from intervening, confined to defending the few *paggars* left under their control. In fact the burden of supporting Sultan Gulemat’s rule with force had become so burdensome that the deputy-governor forced Gulemat to agree not to wage war against the rebels, as the cost had become too great.<sup>119</sup> The destruction of the company’s entire presence in the north was only saved when an attack on its headquarters at Bantal in 1713 was narrowly defeated.<sup>120</sup> ‘It has been our Unhappyness hitherto not to have a sufficient force to back our admonitions’, lamented the deputy-governor, and as a consequence ‘the Pepper trade in those parts [are] in danger of being utterly lost’.<sup>121</sup> Later that year a small expeditionary force did succeeded in restoring Sultan Gulemat to Manduta and in coercing the *menteri* there to declare for him again.<sup>122</sup> But while Raja Suleman was caught and beheaded in 1715 by Sultan Gulemat, Raja Macoota remained elusive. His popularity was such that in 1716 Sultan Gulemat himself threw in his lot with the raja and joined his coalition in driving the British out of Anak Sungai. Although they succeeded in bringing the rest of the sultanate under Malay control for the first time in decades, a further siege of Bantal in 1717 similarly failed to dislodge the company entirely.<sup>123</sup> Nonetheless the uprising did succeed in dismantling

<sup>116</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/8, Bengkulu to court of directors, 27 February 1713.

<sup>117</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/57, Daniel Evans to Bengkulu, 11 September 1711.

<sup>118</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/8, Bengkulu to court of directors, 27 February 1713.

<sup>119</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/57, Sultan Gulemat’s obligation to the Company, April 1711.

<sup>120</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/57, consultation at Bengkulu, 22 October 1713.

<sup>121</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/57, consultation at Bengkulu, 22 October 1713.

<sup>122</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/57, consultation at Bengkulu, 10 November 1713.

<sup>123</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/7, Bengkulu to Madras, 10 January 1719.

the company's securitisation of Anak Sungai. A newly arrived company servant in 1718 was shocked to find 'all in Confusion and all the Settlements near destruction and in trouble'.<sup>124</sup> The *paggars* had been destroyed, Ippue and Tryamong burnt to the ground, Manduta was lost forever, 250,000 pepper trees had been torn up, and a majority of the Malay fled upriver to the foothills away from British interference. 'The country has been almost Depopulated', noted the company's chief of Bantal, discovering just four families left plying their wares in the market there.<sup>125</sup>

In the Bengkulu territory to the south, the Malay managed to not only deliver a knockout blow to the company's border making, but they also succeeded in decisively destroying the company's presence there altogether. Raja Cutcheel, the *dupati* of Jangallo, had been displaced from his homeland after the country was annexed by the Company in 1711. Expelled with the remnants of his people beyond the Silebar River which comprised the company's new border, Raja Cutchell eventually petitioned a new deputy-governor about the hardships his people had since faced, and succeeded in gaining permission to resettle along the company's border by the river. But the company's conditions of resettlement were harsh, including confinement to a small reservation and the imposition of unrealistically high pepper quotas.<sup>126</sup> The disenfranchisement inflicted on the dispossessed people of Jangallo by the company's arbitrary border making was too much to bear, and the *dupati* seized an opportunity to build a coalition of disaffected Malay in an effort to run the company out of Bengkulu entirely.

This opportunity came in 1717, when the *orang gunung* or Kerenci tribes of the foothills descended on the Bengkulu border with 400 men in protest at having their access to the salt trade severed. At first, the company succeeded in driving them off with 'a glorious victory', bringing 'twenty of the Enemy's heads' back to Bengkulu as trophies.<sup>127</sup> But rather than securing the border, this punitive action merely exposed the shallow foundations of the company's borderland, uniting the Malay within and without the border in a concerted effort to expel the English. After their defeat, the *orang gunung* were sheltered by the *pengerans* of Sungai Itam and Sungai Lemau, where they were joined by Raja Cutcheel and 80 of his followers.<sup>128</sup> The *dupati* of Jangallo's arrival created a swell of popular support for the uprising, and even the company's puppet 'prime minister' *Dupati* Bentering threw in his lot with the insurrection. Over the next two years, this coalition turned the company's border making in on itself, constructing a chain of *dusans* or fortified compounds along Sungai Itam's and Sungai Lemau's borders with Bengkulu, strangling all land routes into the

<sup>124</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/7, Bengkulu to Madras, 10 January 1719.

<sup>125</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/57, consultation at Bengkulu, 10 November 1713.

<sup>126</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/57, Dupati Jangallo to Bengkulu, December 1712.

<sup>127</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/58, consultation at Bengkulu, 3 December 1717.

<sup>128</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/58, consultation at Bengkulu, 2 December 1717.

port.<sup>129</sup> In the meantime, the *dupatis* of Bentering and Jangallo gradually succeeded in coordinating with the Malay in the port itself, even those living immediately outside of Fort Marlborough's walls. In 1719 'a General combination of Malays' crossed the border and set up camp five miles from the port, setting fire to all of the region's major pepper plantations and detaching the company's remaining Malay and Bugis supporters from them, one by one. Weak and isolated, the 600 or so English, Chinese and enslaved Africans crowded in Fort Marlborough tried to flee to a company ship anchored offshore. But as they made their way to the beach, almost 300 were killed by the forces of Raja Cutcheel and Bentering, who then set fire to Fort Marlborough and expelled the remaining English presence from Bengkulu.<sup>130</sup>

## Conclusion

The story of the company on the west coast of Sumatra is one of the failure to securitise the territory it sought to control in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Unlike on the subcontinent, where the balance of power was so heavily tilted towards India's major powers that the company's success lay in subordinating itself politically and pursuing its commercial and jurisdictional ambitions diplomatically, on the west coast of Sumatra the absence of a hegemonic power provided an opportunity for the Company to extend its authority over what it perceived to be a collection of geographically divided and politically weak polities. Through the lens of Securitisation Studies, we are able to understand the resultant colonial expansion—easily enough achieved through the establishment of the Bengkulu territory in 1685 and the puppet sultanate of Anak Sungai in 1695—as the result of the company's need to control the production of pepper and regulate sources of labour. This desire was in many respects an emotional one, driven by an emerging colonial mentality based on English fear and vulnerability of more powerful neighbours, than a specific security threat. But it also emerged through preconceptions of West Sumatra as a land of geographic and political borders, easily divided and dominated by external actors. By 1700, the resultant securitisation meant that the company was not only in control of most of the 200-mile territorial strip which comprised the west coast of Sumatra, but it had developed a heavily militarised and fortified border that sought to exclude several key interlocutors—Inderapura, Bantam, the VOC—while maintaining control of others, namely suppliant Malay rulers and the pools of labour they commanded.

Yet in establishing its political dominance through an articulation of its authority as essentially territorial, the company failed to accommodate or reconcile its border

<sup>129</sup> BL, APAC, IOR/G/35/58, consultation at Bengkulu, 4 January 1718.

<sup>130</sup> For a narrative of the English expulsion from Bengkulu, see [Veevers \(2020: 239–240\)](#).

making with the *alam Minangkabau* which determined the political, cultural and economic structures of Malay life on the west coast. Here, where the conceptualisation and practice of political authority was essentially deterritorialised, borders were politically porous and served as much to connect different polities as to delineate territorial boundaries. A shared political culture and intense circuits of migration, exchange, and trade between highland and coast and along rivers and over mountain passes, created a world of constant movement and shared borderlands. When the company severed coastal plains from their upriver and foothill networks, and discarded Minangkabau *adat* or customary laws in favour of colonial policies of extraction, regulation, and exploitation, the entire edifice of colonial rule became unstable and locked in a perpetual cycle of securitisation which the perennially cash strapped and militarily weak company struggled to maintain. Ultimately the English were unable to suppress the ability of the Malay to undermine the company's arbitrary border making by either isolating company territory and rendering it depopulated or commercially unviable, or indeed through the use of force to destroy fortifications and overthrow Company settlements. In that sense, the British imposed a chaotic and violent system of securitisation on a land that was, by and large, desecuritized and borderless.

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# Managing legal pluralism: the negotiations on the re-acquisition of crown land in the Livonian Diet (1681) as a matter of securitisation and imperial integration

Dorothee Goetze

*Abstract:* The emergence of empires during the early modern period led to a shift of territorial borders and social as well as economic and political boundaries. This is also true for early modern Sweden and especially for Livonia, being one of the eastern border provinces of the Swedish empire. The plans for withdrawing alienated possessions of the Swedish Crown there, i.e. a *reduktion*, make this particularly clear. This article examines the discussion of the year 1681 between the Swedish Crown and the Livonian knighthood and nobility in the Livonian Diet on the retake of crown lands as an example of how early modern empires dealt with legal pluralism. Combining the concepts of securitisation and integration will show that these deliberations should be understood less as a struggle for or against re-acquisitions of crown lands than as negotiations about Swedish rule in Livonia, and its normative foundations and functions, and thus about the Swedish empire.

*Keywords:* border, boundary, early modern period, empire, integration, Livonia, *reduktion*, securitisation, Sweden.

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## Introduction

The emergence of the Swedish empire in the Baltic Sea region in the course of the 16th and 17th centuries was not only characterised by its territorial expansion, but also by extensive awarding of the newly acquired lands to deserving officials and military officers. As the result of this practice the resource base of the Swedish Crown decreased, while simultaneously its financial needs increased. In the second half of the 17th century, Swedish kings attempted to consolidate the crown's finances through *reduktion*, i.e. the re-acquisition of alienated crown possessions. Taking as an example the discussions on the retake of crown properties in the Livonian Diet (*Landtag*) in 1681, I will argue, using securitisation as an analytical concept, that these deliberations should be understood less as a struggle for or against withdrawals of land as in previous research, but rather as negotiations about Swedish rule in the borderland of Livonia, and about its normative foundations and functions, as the differing security concepts used by Swedish king Charles XI (1655–97) and his representative respectively on the one hand and the Livonian knighthood and the nobility on the other reveal. Thus tracing security discourses provides deeper insights into how the Swedish king and the Livonian nobility perceived rule and its foundation. What is more, through the comparison to the negotiations with the Swedish Diet, this case provides an excellent example of imperial practice and of how empires managed legal difference.<sup>1</sup> Thus the study ties in with recent research on early modern empires and, using Sweden as a case study, adds an example that has been largely overlooked in the history of empire, which with regard to Europe mostly focuses on Spain, France, Great Britain and Russia.<sup>2</sup>

The concept of securitisation has been developed since the 1980s by three schools (Copenhagen, Paris and Aberystwyth) as a 'critical interventio[n] into realist and neo-realist theories of international relations' and is well-established in research, especially in political science.<sup>3</sup> Historians also deal with questions of security and, in recent years, have been increasingly interested in securitisation. The Collaborative Research Centre SFB/Transregio 138 *Dynamics of security: Forms of securitization from a historical perspective* at the universities of Marburg and Gießen, funded by

<sup>1</sup> See Kumar (2017: xii).

<sup>2</sup> See selected Dandelet (2014), Wendehorst (2015); Kumar (2017). For a concise overview over recent research on early modern empires see Tölle (2018). Recently, Ricarda Vulpius published her seminal study on the emergence of the Russian empire. See Vulpius (2020). Burbank & Cooper (2012: 253) at least acknowledge Sweden's imperial ambitions. In his still seminal study, Michael Roberts speaks of Sweden's imperial experience. See Roberts (reprint 1992). On the discussion of the imperial character of early modern Sweden see Olesen (2014), Eng (2015).

<sup>3</sup> Langenohl (2019: 26).

the German Research Foundation (DFG) since 2014, provides a prominent example of this.<sup>4</sup>

From a historical perspective, security is of special interest not only because it is a central value concept, but also because of its connection to power and rule.<sup>5</sup> Although security is a social key concept, it is never a given, but is ‘the outcome of processes termed securitization’. Hence security and its perception are ‘politically, socially and culturally constituted’<sup>6</sup>, thus also varying in history between different societies or various groups within a society.<sup>7</sup> The term *security* therefore always brings with it socio-cultural, i.e. moral, ideological and normative ideas of value and order.<sup>8</sup> That is why the perception and the discussion of security or insecurity are always interpretations of the respective reality.<sup>9</sup> Studies on security can thus provide information on the thinking about values and order specific to the period under scrutiny.

This is also the connection to power and rule. ‘Security not only establishes state sovereignty and security or a promise of security not only legitimises the state, but security is ultimately the reason and goal of state and statehood’, according to Eckart Conze.<sup>10</sup> This finding does not limit the validity of the argument to modernity, as it does not presuppose a centralised state. In the early modern period, in which rule was not organised in the form of nation states, sovereigns or political decision makers took the place of the state and carried out its task of ensuring the security of their subjects. Therefore, security not only determines the relationship between ruler and individual,<sup>11</sup> but ‘as a resource of legitimacy for political actors, the promise of future security and the corresponding action with regard to security policy aim at creating or stabilising binding structures and normative concepts of order’.<sup>12</sup> Besides legitimacy, security is about power: Whoever declares something to be a security issue, creates it by successfully doing so.<sup>13</sup> Securitisation can then be described as a communicative process for interpreting reality. Thus, analysing securitisation processes can reveal the attempts of various actors to assert their goals through security-related arguments.<sup>14</sup> This is evident in Charles XI’s proposition to the Swedish Diet in 1680

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.sfb138.de/en/> (accessed on 25 September 2020, 15:23). For an overview over historical security studies see Zwierlein (2012).

<sup>5</sup> See Daase (2012: 389).

<sup>6</sup> Langenohl (2019: 27).

<sup>7</sup> Conze (2012: 456).

<sup>8</sup> See Conze (2012: 456).

<sup>9</sup> See Conze (2012: 456).

<sup>10</sup> Conze (2012: 460)—from German by the author.

<sup>11</sup> See Conze (2012: 455).

<sup>12</sup> Henne *et al.* (2018: 10)—from German by the author.

<sup>13</sup> See Henne *et al.* (2018: 11).

<sup>14</sup> See Conze (2012: 457, 459).

and the Livonian estates in 1681, in which, by the means of a re-acquisition of alienated crown lands, he linked the restoration of the Swedish Crown's finances to the security of the realm and the province of Livonia respectively.

### The Swedish retakes of crown lands of 1655 and 1680

The term *reduktion* addresses the resumption of alienated land by the Swedish Crown. These alienations were connected with intensive shifts of borders and boundaries that accompanied the formation of the Swedish empire, which followed when medieval orders ceased to function in the Baltic Sea region at the beginning of the early modern period: the decline of the Hanseatic League, the break-up of the Kalmar Union, the dissolution of the states of the Teutonic and Livonian Orders as well as the process of the Reformation were symptoms for changing orders in that area.<sup>15</sup>

This is especially true from the perspective of territorial borders as seen in the expansion of the Swedish empire to the north of the Scandinavian peninsula, but above all to the east into the Baltic (Estonia 1560, Livonia 1628, the islands of Gotland and Saaremaa 1645) and to the south of the Scandinavian peninsula (Scania, Halland and Blekinge 1658) as well as to the opposite side of the Baltic Sea and into the Holy Roman Empire (West Pomerania, Bremen and Verden 1648). This gave the Baltic more and more the character of a Swedish inland sea over a period of no more than 100 years.<sup>16</sup> Historiography describes this process as the attempt to establish a so-called *dominium maris baltici*.<sup>17</sup> These shifts challenged existing borders and boundaries, not only on a territorial but also on a normative or social level, all of which are closely intertwined. For instance, as deserving officers, civil servants, diplomats and political decision makers were rewarded with gifts or fiefs in the newly acquired territories due to the lack of economic resources of the Swedish Crown, especially under Queen Christina's rule from 1644 to 1654. Thus, the territorial expansion of the Swedish dominion was accompanied by social shifts.<sup>18</sup>

With the inclusion of the newly acquired provinces into the Swedish domains, the social elites in the Baltic states as well as in the provinces of the Swedish Crown, which the crown gained through the Peace of Westphalia (1648) expanded. Although it has to be mentioned that the latter remained legally part of the Holy Roman Empire. The practice by which the Swedish Crown awarded grants of land led to the social elites

<sup>15</sup> On the history of the Baltic Sea region in general see most recently North (2015); Boggis-Rolfe (2019).

<sup>16</sup> Selected on the expansion of the Swedish dominion: Roberts (reprint 1992: 1–42); Rystad (2003: 61–68); Olesen (2016).

<sup>17</sup> See still Ahnlund (1956).

<sup>18</sup> On the awarding policy of the Swedish Crown see for example Gjerstad (1995).

becoming more permeable and diverse in the new provinces. Before this point, the social elites in these territories consisted of German noble families, who were also the largest land and property owners in the regions and who organised themselves in the so-called knighthoods (*Ritterschaften*). Due to their social and economic capital, these groups formed the political leadership in the respective region and enjoyed numerous privileges and freedoms. In addition to the German-Baltic and the Bremen and the Pomeranian aristocracy, the Swedish high nobility and so-called *homines novi*, were now also included. On the one hand, established members of the Swedish high nobility were able to expand their property and thus their economic capital, such as the Chancellor Axel Oxenstierna (1583–1654), who became the largest landowner in Estonia and Livonia alongside Jakob De la Gardie (1583–1652), but on the other hand also military careerists like the latter's father, Pontus De la Gardie (1520–85), and Hans Christoph von Königsmarck (1600–63), the first Swedish governor in the duchy of Bremen, were able to consolidate the economic and social rise of their families in this way.<sup>19</sup> From the 1630s onwards, the Swedish high nobility owned about 45 per cent of the estates in the Baltic provinces.

In the second half of the 17th century, the Swedish monarchs made several efforts to consolidate the crown's finances through withdrawals of alienated crown properties. This phenomenon is well known in Swedish historiography on the early modern period, although only a few works have focused exclusively on it.<sup>20</sup> The re-acquisition of crown land of 1655 has received even less attention than that of 1680.<sup>21</sup> In the Swedish Diet of 1655 King Charles X Gustav (1622–60) succeeded in his plans to retake alienated crown lands. Referring to the work of Arne Munthe, Mats Höglund summarises the king's programme, which consisted of a total of four issues: a reform of the granting of fiefs; verification of ownership of all former crown estates; restitution of alienated crown possessions in so-called forbidden places which were once reserved to support the crown; and the resumption of a quarter of all property donated by the crown after King Gustavus Adolphus's death in 1632. Scholars still disagree on whether the decision on the retake of crown land also applied to the provinces of the Swedish Crown within the Holy Roman Empire or the Baltic provinces.<sup>22</sup> However, the implementation of the re-acquisition proceeded hesitantly and slowly. Only three years after Charles X Gustav's death in 1660, the regency council acting on behalf of his successor, Charles XI, who was still under age, decided to moderate the resolution on the retake of crown land.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>19</sup> See selected Fiedler (2017); Seppel (2017); Dunsdorfs (1981).

<sup>20</sup> Selected: Vasar (1931); Isberg (1953); Dahlgren (1964), Ågren (1973); Loit (1975); Rystad (2001: 165–177 and 181–203), more recently Jonsson (2013) and Kepsu (2014).

<sup>21</sup> See Höglund (2017: 32).

<sup>22</sup> See Kepsu (2009: 390–1).

<sup>23</sup> See Höglund (2017: 63).



The resumption of alienated crown possessions, which was agreed upon at the Swedish Diet of 1680, has received more attention from scholars. By playing off different groups among the estates against each other, Charles XI succeeded in getting his wish for a further re-acquisition of land accepted. The estates assembled at the Swedish Diet agreed to retake all donated crown property, which had an annual income of more than 600 silver thalers. According to Martin Gjerstad, this amount corresponded to the revenues of 25 farms.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, all earldoms and baronies were to be returned to the crown, regardless of when they had been alienated. With regard to properties which the crown had sold, leased or exchanged, the Diet decided to audit all private owners to see whether they had acquired that land in accordance with the regulations for the resumption of 1655. The resolution of 1680 did not only apply to the Swedish realm, but also to the goods of Swedish aristocrats in the provinces ruled by the Swedish Crown in the Baltic and the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>25</sup> In 1682, the regulations were sharpened. Regardless of the way in which crown possessions were acquired, the decision to withdraw them was henceforth the sole responsibility of the sovereign. In addition, the limit of 600 silver thalers for the resumptions of land was abolished.<sup>26</sup>

### **Charles XI's proposal for land withdrawals: a matter of security**

The debates that preceded the re-acquisition of crown land framed it from the very beginning as a security matter, both in the Swedish Diet of 1680 and the Livonian assembly of estates the following year.

The Swedish Diet was opened by the king's proposition. After extensively describing the threats and burdens of the past war (1675–9) and the fortunate peace achieved in Nijmegen in 1679, Charles XI presented four issues on which the estates were to decide: they were called on to consider 'how the king's and the realm's security and peace could be sufficiently observed and all future risks could be met in the best possible way'. The estates were also required to deliberate on appropriate equipment of the fleet as well as maintenance and supply of the fortresses. Reminding them that 'all attempts for the realm's security and prosperity would be in vain, if sufficient resources were lacking', the king linked those issues with the demand to the estates to grant new financial resources.<sup>27</sup> By directly connecting questions of defence and its financing with the threats of the immediate past war, which, contrary to its course,

<sup>24</sup> See Gjerstad (1998).

<sup>25</sup> See Sveriges ridderskaps och adels riksdags-protokoll (1896: 305–6).

<sup>26</sup> See Gjerstad (1998: 9–10); Rystad (2001: 187–8).

<sup>27</sup> See Sveriges ridderskaps och adels riksdags-protokoll (1896: 256–7)—from Swedish by the author.

ended very mildly for Sweden,<sup>28</sup> Charles XI exerted strong moral pressure on the estates. He further emphasised this moral component by postulating it as crucial for the security and thus the continued existence of the Swedish realm.

That this was not only a well-founded concern of the monarch, but a political communication and legitimisation strategy is clearly evident, when comparing the monarch's address to the Swedish estates with his proposition to the Livonian estates, whose deliberations preceded the retake of crown land in Livonia.

After the conclusion of the Swedish Diet in December 1680, Charles XI appointed Robert Lichton (1631–92) on 4 January 1681 as head of the newly established commission to organise and guarantee the withdrawal of the properties of the Swedish nobility in Livonia. The question of the re-acquisition of alienated land from the Livonian nobility was to be discussed at a Diet, in which every estate owner listed in the Livonian register of nobility had the right to participate.<sup>29</sup> There, the members of the knighthood and the representatives of the city of Riga debated all issues concerning the welfare of the province. On 12 July 1681, Robert Lichton opened such a Diet in Riga.<sup>30</sup>

As in the case of the Swedish Diet, at the opening of the assembly of the Livonian estates a proposition by the sovereign presenting the planned points for consultation were read out. Charles XI's proposition was introduced by recapitulating how the retake of crown land was decided upon at the Swedish Diet in 1680. Moreover, it was emphasised, as was already the case in the king's proposition to the Diet, that it was in particular the king's responsibility and concern for the security and protection of his dominion that had led him to call on the Swedish estates to decide on appropriate measures. The argument of security, here in connection with the sovereign's duty to protect his subjects, is clearly at the centre of the reasoning. On the one hand, it is stated as the sole motivation for the actions of Charles XI, on the other hand, this motivation is placed at the beginning of the text and thus takes precedence over the outcome of the Swedish estates' deliberations. This gives the security argument particular weight. At the same time, this aspect is given a defining character when Charles XI declares that the Swedish estates put the fundamental interests of the crown and the realm above their private concerns and thus unanimously agreed to return properties owned by them in the Swedish realm or in the provinces to the crown, properties which were indispensable for the public welfare. Due to the composition of the

<sup>28</sup> On the so-called Scanian War and the parallel Swedish-Brandenburgian War (both 1675–9), which were part of Franco-Dutch War (1674–9), and its outcomes see [Frost \(2000: 208–16\)](#); [Mittenzwei & Herzfeld \(1988: 112–14\)](#); [Rystad \(2001: 40–119\)](#), [Köhler \(2011: 94–158\)](#), and most recently [Van Gelder \(2021\)](#).

<sup>29</sup> All dates are given according to the Gregorian calendar.

<sup>30</sup> See [Vasar \(1931: 126–7\)](#).

argument, the expression ‘fundamental interests’ could mean nothing other than security. In order to implement this decision of the Swedish Diet with regard to the properties of Swedish nobles in Livonia, the king had set up a commission.<sup>31</sup> It appears from this proposition that the monarch continued with his strategy of securitisation, already chosen in 1680, in the context of the Livonian nobility.

The introductory passage of Charles XI’s proposition to the Livonian estates, which summarised the decision of the Swedish Diet of 1680 and its background, was followed by the issues on which he wished the Livonian knighthood to make a decision: the withdrawal of property owned by the Livonian nobility, land mapping and the production of a cadastral land register of Livonia as well as the abolition of serfdom.<sup>32</sup> These were highly sensitive subjects which, if approved, would result in a fundamental change in social, economic and political orders.

To legitimise his request for a retake of properties owned by the Livonian nobility Charles XI once again used the security argument. He began by emphasising that the security of a state could not be guaranteed without sufficient financial resources. Immediately thereafter, he pointed out that patrimonial and private property in Livonia had always been kept separate for security reasons. In so doing, he implicitly declared the landownership structure to be relevant to the province’s security. This was all the more important, according to him, for Livonia, as a border region, was more exposed to external threats than the internal regions of the Swedish empire. Its defence required more resources, which should be covered by the crown’s possessions. Therefore, he formulated the expectation that the Livonian knighthood would follow the example of the Swedish estates and also decide on a resumption of alienated properties, which should include the former clerical possessions from the time of the rule of the Livonian Order.<sup>33</sup>

The sovereign’s strategy and argumentation followed the same line as towards the Swedish estates the year before, when linking financial issues to defence and thus security matters and asking them to decide on such a highly important subject as the security and welfare of the realm and the province respectively. But in contrast to the Swedish Diet of 1680, Charles XI prescribed for the Livonian estates the solution to the security problem right from the start: a re-acquisition of property. The decision of the Swedish Diet of 1680 served him as a reference, defining the scope of what was reasonable and acceptable. In addition, he was able to use the example of the Swedish estates to increase the moral pressure on the Livonian knighthood in not only referring to the knighthood’s sense of duty and loyalty, but also to express his expectation that the knighthood and the aristocracy would be no less willing

<sup>31</sup> See [Schirren \(1865: 16–17\)](#).

<sup>32</sup> See [Schirren \(1865: 18–19\)](#).

<sup>33</sup> See [Schirren \(1865: 18\)](#).

than the Swedish nobility to agree to resumptions of possessions for the welfare of their own fatherland.<sup>34</sup>

### **The Livonian nobility's rejection of land withdrawals: also a matter of security**

On 26 July 1681, the knighthood responded to Charles XI in a declaration in which it commented on each point of his proposition. This reply opened with an expression of gratitude for Charles XI's efforts for the welfare and security of his dominion and his subjects. In so doing, the Livonian estates accepted both the security argument and the strategy of securitisation. Nevertheless, they rejected land withdrawals. Like the sovereign, the estates turned to a strategy of securitisation themselves to justify their opposition to Charles XI's plans. Their argumentation reveals a completely different understanding of security than that of the ruler. The estates articulated their concept of security implicitly and *ex negativo* by depicting the threats that would arise from a resumption of crown property: according to them, the nobility was in danger of impoverishment in the event of a retake of crown possessions, as a result of which they would no longer be able to fulfil their duties to the sovereign, especially since the knighthood was already heavily burdened by past threats. By listing concrete events such as the defence against the Russian attack during the Livonian War (1558–62), the contributions to the Swedish Crown in 1643, which were considered to be very high, or the fires in Riga (1547/1677), these burdens were not only exemplified, but the commitment of the members of the knighthood to the province was historicised. Their anticipated future incapacity to fulfil their obligations was the nobility's main argument against withdrawals of land and framed the further reasoning for the rejection of the retake of crown property by being placed at the beginning and end of the argumentation.

This argument aimed precisely at the core of early modern rule. The fulfilment of the subject's obligations, e.g. the raising of taxes, the observance of the legal and the ecclesiastic orders and the maintenance of public order determined by (ecclesiastical) law, as well as participation in the defence of the country, were crucial for the implementation of the rule of a sovereign. In this context, the property acquired by the nobility was partly classified as recognition of their performance of their duties and their commitment to the preservation, and thus the security, of the country and implicitly of Swedish rule. Both the nobility and their possessions were thus given a particularly high level of moral integrity.

<sup>34</sup> See [Schirren \(1865: 18\)](#).

The estates linked their support for the Swedish Crown with the demand for the continued security of their privileges and property, which had been confirmed and thus guaranteed by every ruler since Sigismund II Augustus of Poland (1520–72), including Charles XI himself.<sup>35</sup> This interpretation also left room for the suspicion that Charles XI was endangering the legal security of his subjects by the retake of crown possessions. Such a suggestion not only contradicted the self-image expressed in the proposition, but also insinuated that he was violating his sovereign obligation to protect his subjects.<sup>36</sup>

The planned abolition of serfdom was also linked to security aspects and considered a particular risk. The knighthood expected that the liberated peasants would drown the province in ‘murder and bloodshed’ and seek to eliminate their former employers or at least that they would not respect the constitution and therefore would always live in conflict with their lords, causing only quarrelling, unrest and unhappiness. The nobility moreover assumed that the liberated peasants would even leave the country and make it desolate. In the opinion of the Livonian estates, the abolition of serfdom would not bring any advantages for the province, but would only pose an ‘extreme and irreversible danger to the lives’ of the members of the nobility—and, the thought can be continued, endanger their security and thus that of the province.<sup>37</sup>

These statements reveal a broader and less clearly defined understanding of security than is evident in the propositions of Charles XI. The Livonian estates did not relate security exclusively to defence measures and their financing and thus to physical aspects, but above all to (constitutional) legal and economic questions. Moreover, in contrast to Charles XI’s proposition, the response of the estates described the consequences of a resumption of land: the shifting of social, economic and legal boundaries, and thus the social, economic and legal orders, which was perceived as a security problem. This enormous impact of the re-acquisition of crown property has been highlighted by Aleksander Loit, who discussed the Baltic land withdrawals in the context of the abolition of serfdom and the liberation of peasants in the Baltic region which accompanied these measures.<sup>38</sup> Loit notes that the retake of possessions meant nothing less than a change in the system of basic social relations.<sup>39</sup> According to him it was the most important and extraordinary event during the Swedish rule in the Baltic. Loit concludes that the resumption of crown land received its importance not least because it affected all spheres of society: the political and the public financial,

<sup>35</sup> For the privileges of the Livonian nobility and their confirmations see [Müller \(1841\)](#).

<sup>36</sup> See [Schirren \(1865: 25–9\)](#).

<sup>37</sup> See [Schirren \(1865: 30–1\)](#)—from German by the author.

<sup>38</sup> On the perception of serfdom in the Swedish composite state see [Seppel \(2019\)](#); for further information on agricultural structures in the Baltic Sea region see [Schmidt \(1997\)](#).

<sup>39</sup> See [Loit \(2000: 176\)](#).

as well as the private economic and the social realm.<sup>40</sup> This judgement confirmed that the re-acquisition of crown property shifted existing political, economic and social boundaries—an aspect which has been largely overlooked by scholars. Loit mentions this desideratum explicitly.<sup>41</sup> In doing so, however, he missed the fact that Baltic German historiography derives its negative perception of Swedish rule, and especially of Charles XI, from precisely this experience of changing economic, social and political boundaries caused by the extensive loss of the nobility's property.<sup>42</sup>

### Retake of crown lands, security and imperial (dis-)integration

An agreement between the nobility and the sovereign in the question of land withdrawals could not be reached. On 15 August 1681, the knighthood decided to send a deputation to Charles XI.<sup>43</sup> In the end, the Livonian estates could not avert the re-acquisition of crown property. As a result, five-sixths of the total possessions of the nobility in Livonia were taken back by the crown. In total, the income from these measures in the Swedish provinces in the Baltic region accounted for about one-third of all income generated by the resumption of alienated crown possessions in the Swedish dominion.<sup>44</sup> The discussion of the Livonian estates reveals not only Charles XI's and the Livonian nobility's attempts to enforce or prevent a withdrawal of property, but something else: the disintegration of Livonia.

The connection between integration issues and the retake of crown land has already been discussed by scholars. While Baltic German historiography sees the re-acquisition of crown possessions of 1681 as the main reason for the failure to integrate Livonia into the Swedish empire,<sup>45</sup> Swedish research links it with the debate

<sup>40</sup> Loit (1985: 42).

<sup>41</sup> Loit (2013: 36).

<sup>42</sup> Schoulz von Aschenraden (1843: 83), for example, explains the re-acquisition of crown land with Charles XI's 'inherited greed for conquests' and judges that these withdrawals ruined and almost annihilated the Swedish and Livonian nobility; for further examples see Bunge (1849: 51) and Körber (reprint 1977: 295). Buxhöwden (1838: 111) describes the retake of crown land as a predatory system ('*Raub-System*') and in claiming that only the Russian rule following the Swedish government in 1721 could 'guarantee the security of the [Livonian] constitution permanently', he traditionalised the understanding of security of the Livonian knighthood. He contrasts Charles XI, whom he calls a 'poisonous plant', with Peter I, 'the medical plant' (Buxhöwden 1838: 81). Shortly after the conquest of Livonia in 1710 Peter I of Russia confirmed the privileges of the knighthood and the nobility (Brüggemann *et al.* 2014). All quotes from German by the author.

<sup>43</sup> See Schirren (1865: 51). On the history and the effect of that deputation see Vasar (1931: 252–85).

<sup>44</sup> See Loit (2013: 36).

<sup>45</sup> See for example Arbusov (1890: 169–70).



about Swedish absolutism (*envælde*) that was introduced by Charles XI since the 1680s and accompanied by a restructuring of the administration, especially in the provinces of the Swedish Crown.<sup>46</sup> Sven Lundkvist argues that ‘uniformity in administration was going to make the *reduktion* easier to carry out’.<sup>47</sup> Interestingly, the majority of researchers take exactly the opposite view: from this perspective the withdrawal of land is understood as an instrument that created the economic and social preconditions for Swedish absolutism by reducing the power of the nobility, which was based on its landownership, as the most influential political group and strengthening the peasants as a counterweight to the aristocracy and allies to the Swedish Crown.

According to Stellan Dahlgren, Swedish absolutism resulted in a higher degree of political integration as it reduced the power of such traditional political institutions as the Diet, the Council of the Realm or the estates.<sup>48</sup> With regard to Sweden’s provinces in the Baltic, Dahlgren emphasises the economic integration deriving from Swedish absolutism and sees the resumption of crown property of 1680 as a measure to promote it.<sup>49</sup> Other researchers understood these measures as the first step of an extensive programme of the Swedish Crown with respect to its peripheral provinces, which aimed at (legal) unification or even integration, thus, reducing the composite character of the Swedish dominion.<sup>50</sup>

The understanding of integration inherent in such interpretations implicitly refers to the idea of a uniform and centralised nation state as it has developed since the 19th century. Since a concept of integration that equates it with administrative unification or greater participation in public finances and ignores the character of early modern states and empires is unsuitable for drawing conclusions about the integrative character of the withdrawal of alienated crown land in Livonia, I will introduce an alternative concept of integration: in general, integration is defined as ‘certain qualitatively determinable forms of order and structuredness’.<sup>51</sup> In so doing, integration is described more precisely on a very general level as relations, on the one hand. On the other hand, the order or structuredness resulting from these relations is of a certain and determinable quality. Thus, integration as an analytical term makes it possible to describe order, both the process and the state of order.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Tuchtenhagen (2014: 54–5) denies that the land withdrawals were a centralist measure in the sense of absolutism. On Charles XI’s absolutism see selected Dahlgren (1993a; 1993b); Upton (1998). On Swedish administration in the Baltics see Tuchtenhagen (2008).

<sup>47</sup> Lundkvist (1973: 44).

<sup>48</sup> See Dahlgren (1993b: 17).

<sup>49</sup> See Dahlgren (1993b: 19–20).

<sup>50</sup> See for example Loit (1993: 67); Kepsu (2014: 92–102).

<sup>51</sup> Peters (1993: 7)—from German by the author.

<sup>52</sup> This indicates a terminological as well as a methodological problem of integration research. The term ‘integration’ refers to both the process of integration and its outcome.

Integration ‘contains a psychological component, since it is ultimately carried out by social subjects through their actions and is lived by people’.<sup>53</sup> Integration therefore means qualitatively determinable forms of order and structuredness as interactions and relations of historical actors. These can be either individuals or collectives. Moreover, integration is not an objective in itself, but fulfils certain functions for the parties involved. Since human action is value- and norm-based, this also applies to the order resulting from interactions and relations between actors. From this concept of integration, I argue that the differing understanding of security, as revealed in the discussions between the king and the Livonian estates in 1681, can be seen as a symptom of a disintegration of the Livonian knighthood and the Swedish Crown.

As Kumar points out, ‘empires provided stability, security, and legal order for their subjects’.<sup>54</sup> Since the sovereign and his subjects shared no common understanding of security, a core element of early modern rule, the existing (ruling) order could no longer fulfil this function. The existing (ruling) order became dysfunctional in this respect. Thus, a central characteristic of an integrative order was no longer met and, therefore, the deliberations of the Livonian Diet are, in my view, less to be interpreted as an actual decision on a withdrawal of land. Rather, the relationship between sovereign and subjects and thus the ruling order was renegotiated. Jürgen Heyde hints at this in his study on the policies of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Sweden towards the nobility in Livonia, but without elaborating on the idea.<sup>55</sup>

This becomes evident in the further course of the negotiations of the Livonian Diet in 1681. After the proposition of Charles XI and the response of the nobility had revealed a state of disintegration, the ruling order had to be renegotiated and thus the foundations of Swedish rule in Livonia had to be discussed. This is what the Livonian Diet began in its response to the governor, in which its members explained their understanding of the constitutional basis of Swedish rule in Livonia in detail. The key argument of their argumentation was the composite character of the Swedish empire.

Although it is necessary to be cautious about regarding early modern empires and composite states as identical, since not every composite state was an empire and not every empire had a composite character. However, despite all attempts by scholars, a binding definition of what constitutes an empire is still lacking. So that it must be stated as a kind of truism that ‘empires have come in many shapes and forms, at many places and in many times’.<sup>56</sup> But the Swedish empire in particular shares numerous

<sup>53</sup> Köppel (1987: 248–9)—from German by the author.

<sup>54</sup> Kumar (2017: 4).

<sup>55</sup> See Heyde (1998: 566).

<sup>56</sup> Kumar (2017: 7). Summarising the state of research, Tölle (2018: 16) lists nine characteristics of early modern empires, which, however, are not fulfilled by all empires or at least the same extent: (1) expansion and the idea of a large population and/or territory, (2) distinction between centre and periphery,

similarities with early modern composite states, as Dorothee Goetze and Michael Rohrschneider show in their attempt to bring together research on early modern composite states and empires by comparing early modern Spain and early modern Sweden in terms of their imperial and composite characteristics.<sup>57</sup>

Through its expansion in the Baltic Sea region, early modern Sweden was increasingly transformed into an empire and a composite state in the course of the 16th and 17th centuries. The concept of composite state was developed by Helmut G. Koenigsberger and John H. Elliot.<sup>58</sup> Building on their influential studies early modern historians have over the last decades analysed this specific form of rule and its defining characteristics.<sup>59</sup> Composite states are composed of at least two territories which were united under a single sovereign, but very heterogeneous when it came to politics, law, economics and culture, despite the fact that their ruler was one and the same person. Moreover, ‘each territory—or rather the social élite of each territory—had its distinctive relation to the ruler, its privileges, its own law code, its administrative system staffed by that same local élite, and often its own estate assembly. In questions like taxation or conscription, the ruler had to negotiate with each territory separately’.<sup>60</sup> It becomes evident that composite states as well as early modern empires had to manage difference and legal pluralism.

This becomes obvious, when Charles XI separately convoked the Swedish and the Livonian Diets to decide on the approval of a withdrawal of land in the Swedish realm and the province of Livonia respectively. Contrary to what Juhan Vasar suggests in his monograph on the retake of crown property in Livonia in the years 1678 to 1684, which still provides the most detailed information on the course of the resumption of crown possessions during this period, the convocation of the Livonian Diet was not only a tactical move by Charles XI to ease the implementation of the planned measures,<sup>61</sup> but it reflects the political reality of the composite empire and its political order as well as forming part of the constitutional basis of Swedish rule in Livonia. Therefore, it should be seen as an example of imperial practice, because ‘empires were made and unmade by words as well as deeds’.<sup>62</sup>

Already in his seminal study on governance and provincial politics during the so-called Swedish Age of Greatness (1560–1721), Jerker Rosén outlined the composite

(3) highly selective, vertical integration of certain groups, (4) strong loyalties between elites and marginalised groups, (5) integration through charismatic persons, (6) lack of participation, (7) confessional unification, (8) imperial mission and tradition, (9) diversity.

<sup>57</sup> Goetze & Rohrschneider (forthcoming).

<sup>58</sup> See Koenigsberger (1991); Elliot (1992).

<sup>59</sup> See selected: Gustafsson (1998); Bosbach (2005).

<sup>60</sup> Gustafsson (1994: 47).

<sup>61</sup> See Vasar (1931: 128, 143 and 148).

<sup>62</sup> Tölle (2018: 30).

character of the Swedish empire, although the research concept of the composite state had not yet been developed, when he wrote that ‘the different degree of uniformity with Sweden in law and privileges, which during that period separated the newly conquered territories not only from the old part of the Swedish dominion but also from each other, had its origins in the differing structures, when they came under Swedish rule’.<sup>63</sup> Over the last 20 years early modern Sweden’s composite character has been intensively analysed.<sup>64</sup> The territories which Sweden acquired in the Baltic Sea region ‘were provinces of the Swedish Crown, but not part of the kingdom proper. To a large extent they retained their old administration, laws and courts’.<sup>65</sup> The crown’s power was restricted by the privileges of the estates and their self-government, which was the exclusive domain of the nobility in the rural areas of Livonia. This applies also to absolutist sovereigns. They too depended on consensus, commitment and cooperation with their subjects or at least with the elites.<sup>66</sup> In Livonia, for instance, the crown used the self-government of the nobility to implement its rule down to the local level.<sup>67</sup> In that way, composite states and early modern empires were fundamentally different from the modern nation state, which is described by the triad of the people of the nation, its territory and its sovereignty. The composite state formed the prerequisite for enabling the ruler to confirm the privileges and constitution of each part of the dominion, or as the Livonian knighthood put it with regard to the status of Livonia: ‘as long as it had been under Swedish rule, it had never been bound in its homeland by the statutes of the Swedish realm, but had had its own laws and statutes’.<sup>68</sup> Accordingly, they argued that the Swedish Diet’s decision was not valid for Livonia, as it contradicted not only the Livonian privileges but also the sovereign’s assurances of 1678 and 1681, which ‘protected [the knighthood] against all land withdrawals’. In concluding their argument, the nobility linked the future fulfilment of their obligation as subjects, i.e. ‘loyalty to the king and to the country’s welfare’, which they had shown in the past, to ‘an assurance from the ruler affirmed by hand and seal and his vested promise that its privileges would not be violated in any way’, and thus to a confirmation of the composite ruling order which had been in effect until then.<sup>69</sup>

It becomes obvious, that the retake of crown property and its implementation following the example of the Swedish realm was perceived by the Livonian nobility

<sup>63</sup> Rosén (1946: 228)—from Swedish by the author.

<sup>64</sup> See selected Gustafsson (1994); Nordin (2000: 42–143); Eng (2001); Tuchtenhagen (2008: especially 440–2); Eng (2015); Goetze & Rohrschneider (forthcoming).

<sup>65</sup> Gustafsson (1994: 50). On Livonia see Tuchtenhagen (2008: 48–54).

<sup>66</sup> See Lindström (2013: 245). For the discussion on the controversial concept of absolutism see selected Duchhardt (1989); Asch & Duchhardt (1996); Freist (2008); Schilling (2008); Faber (2017).

<sup>67</sup> See Tuchtenhagen (2008: 42–9).

<sup>68</sup> Schirren (1865: 34)—from German by the author.

<sup>69</sup> Schirren (1865: 35)—from German by the author.

as a violation of Livonia's constitutional status and thus of the composite character of Sweden. In their presentation, the nobility not only described the normative basis of Swedish rule, the composite state as manifested, specifically, in the privileges of the Livonia nobility, but continued with the securitisation strategy of Charles XI's proposition and their rejection of it. They did so by repeating the knighthood's need for legal security, thus, defining the function of the order they were renegotiating.

In his reply of 5 August 1681, the governor commented in detail on the declaration of the Livonian estates. First he assured the nobility that 'the re-acquisition of crown possessions was not intended to restrict privileges'.<sup>70</sup> In support of his argument, he referred to the legal security enjoyed by the knighthood under Swedish rule until now, since the privileges dating from Polish times had been confirmed. The governor also emphasised that by convening the Livonian Diet to discuss the withdrawal of land with the nobility, the constitution of Livonia as documented in the privileges was respected.<sup>71</sup> However, it was a prerogative of the sovereign to revoke voluntary acts of favour, such as donations and enfeoffments, if it was 'indispensable for the security and the welfare of the dominion'.<sup>72</sup> Consequently, the withdrawals concerned only those possessions, donated out of an act of favour.<sup>73</sup> In this case, too, Livonian privileges were preserved, the governor continued, since the donations to the Livonian nobility had been made under Swedish law.<sup>74</sup>

Since the governor was the representative of the Swedish Crown, his explanation can be read as an official interpretation of the Livonian constitution. The special characteristics of the composite state are clearly evident in this interpretation: unlike the Livonian knighthood, the crown apparently not only distinguished between different legal and constitutional spaces in the various parts of the empire, but also differentiated legal systems with varying scope within particular territories. With regard to the resumption of alienated crown land in Livonia, a legal system protected by the privileges of the knighthood and a legal sphere defined by personal bestowal of sovereign favours thus becomes apparent. The way in which the landowners had acquired their possessions defined their membership of the respective system. It was quite possible for a landowner to belong to both of these areas, which led to a competition of norms as regards of ownership.<sup>75</sup> These remarks show the insufficiency of traditional views, such as that of Vasar, that governor Lichten's argumentation only

<sup>70</sup> Schirren (1865: 36)—from German by the author.

<sup>71</sup> See Schirren (1865: 37).

<sup>72</sup> Schirren (1865: 36)—from German by the author.

<sup>73</sup> See Schirren (1865: 36).

<sup>74</sup> See Schirren (1865: 37).

<sup>75</sup> On the concept of competing norms see Karsten & Thiessen (2015).

served to enable a withdrawal of land in Livonia at the ruler's disposal and without the consent of the estates.<sup>76</sup> It was rather a question of explaining the foundations of the political order, as understood by the Swedish rule and made them the basis of its actions. Moreover, this example shows that the security argument had its limits: it was not possible to disregard legal orders that existed under the pretence of security needs, such as the privileges of the Livonian nobility. Here it becomes evident what Gehler and Rollinger stress, namely that, due to their size and diversity, empires required more effort and energy to fulfil their obligations with regard to integration.<sup>77</sup> Lichten's argumentation did not have the desired effect on the members of the Livonian Diet. In their response of 11 August 1681, the nobility refused to recognise two separate legal areas, as described by the governor, by emphasising, the privileges they had enjoyed under Polish rule and which had been confirmed by Swedish sovereigns since the reign of Charles IX.<sup>78</sup> Consequently, they argued, the Swedish rulers had succeeded the Polish sovereigns and had thus taken over the law applicable to them in Livonia. Additionally, the donations the nobles had received from the crown were not exclusively acts of favour, but compensation for the fulfilment of their duties as subjects, for which their privileges had also been confirmed. Therefore the decision of the Swedish Diet did not apply to them.<sup>79</sup> By emphasising the central importance of knighthood and nobility for Livonia's security and the nobles' will to contribute with their blood to the province's welfare and safety, the estates derived the expectation that Charles XI would refrain from withdrawing property (even if Livonia should be more exposed to risks due to its status as a border region) in order not to endanger Livonia's security by weakening its most important pillars.<sup>80</sup> That would inevitably 'lead to the downfall, if not the ruin of the province', according to them.<sup>81</sup>

Once again, security becomes the leitmotif of the argumentation. This is evident from the fact that the members of the Livonian Diet introduce and conclude their declaration by referring to their willingness to contribute to the security of Livonia. Thus, the knighthood and nobility presented themselves as the guarantors of the province's security and underlined the dependence of the ruler on them for the safety of Livonia. Consequently, as the sovereign could not ensure security on his own, his rule could not function in a one-sided way, but only in cooperation and agreement with his subjects.

<sup>76</sup> See Vasar (1931: 170–1).

<sup>77</sup> Gehler & Rollinger (2014: 10).

<sup>78</sup> See Schirren (1865: 40–1).

<sup>79</sup> See Schirren (1865: 40–2).

<sup>80</sup> See Schirren (1865: 39–40).

<sup>81</sup> Schirren (1865: 39)—from German by the author.



## Conclusion

The expansion of the Swedish empire and the maintenance of Swedish rule in the territories the crown acquired were accompanied by shifting borders and boundaries. Livonia as a border region and the re-acquisitions of alienated crown lands of 1655 and 1680, which resulted from the policy of the Swedish Crown of awarding land, provide excellent examples of this. Since research on these events focuses on its course and outcomes, it discusses mainly economic aspects as well as constitutional aspects by linking it with the introduction of Swedish absolutism and the crown's attempts to abolish serfdom in the Baltic provinces. With regard to the retake of land of the 1680s in Livonia, the resulting conflict between the Swedish Crown, in the person of Charles XI, and the local nobility is emphasised. However, more in-depth analyses of this particular conflict, which take into account the findings of research on state-building and rule over the past 20 years and thus allow a more accurate understanding of the developments under scrutiny, are still lacking. The study presented here addresses this issue using the example of the discussions in the Livonian Diet of 1681.

The Livonian Diet served not only to make political decisions such as approving taxes, but also to establish a relationship between the ruler and his subjects.<sup>82</sup> This is obvious in the debates of the estates about the withdrawal of property. Both Charles XI and the Livonian knighthood and nobility adopted strategies of securitisation to justify their respective positions, a need for taking back crown possessions and its rejection. An examination of their particular understanding of security reveals a state of disintegration: the actors involved in the political order could not agree on its function. Thus, from a perspective of securitisation, the deliberations of the Livonian Diet were a discussion of the normative foundations of Swedish rule in Livonia. Juhan Vasar's judgement that this was not a struggle for a fundamental interpretation of the constitution must therefore be strongly contradicted.<sup>83</sup> Hence, the approach to securitisation not only enables an extension of the research horizon to the withdrawal of land in Livonia, but, in combination with the concept of integration, also contributes to a more in-depth understanding of the integration of the early modern Swedish empire.

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<sup>82</sup> On the necessity of legitimising and strengthening *Herrschaft* in the provinces of the Swedish Crown by building diverse relationships between sovereign and subjects, see [Stadin \(2007\)](#).

<sup>83</sup> See [Vasar \(1931: 178\)](#).

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# Securing the emperor, securitising the guns: the strangely delayed dissemination of Ottoman military technology in the late Ming empire

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*Abstract:* This article analyses the reasons behind the delayed appropriation and adoption of Ottoman harquebuses by the Ming army. Although these weapons had reached the empire by the mid-16th century, their existence was only acknowledged at the end of the century. Through the lens of securitisation, I will argue that this delay was a result of the context of Luso-Ottoman geopolitical rivalries in which these weapons were possibly leveraged as an incentive to form a Sino-Ottoman alliance against the Portuguese. I will argue that a civil bureaucracy averse to assertive activist rulership could have prevented the emperor from participating in the resulting military diplomacy. By comparing this event with a later Dutch East India Company embassy with similar geopolitical intentions, I will argue that the Ming civil officials achieved their goal by controlling the emperor's perception of Ottoman intentions. In terms of securitisation, this meant that the emperor himself was the main audience and his officials the securitising agents in matters of foreign relations.

*Keywords:* cross-cultural negotiation, military technology transfer, diplomacy, Ottoman empire, Portugal, Dutch East India Company, Ming and Qing China, gift giving, Imjin War (1592–8), muskets, harquebuses.

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## Introduction

During the Imjin War (1592–8), a destructive conflict that encompassed all of East Asia, Zhao Shizhen (1553–c. 1611), a civil official who knew many men serving in the Ming military, was involved in an archery contest with two brothers. He found out that their father, Babuli, had been part of a purported Ottoman embassy to the Ming court, and had brought a lion and weapons from the Ottoman empire, including a type of harquebus that had been unknown to Zhao Shizhen.<sup>1</sup> Their adoptive father Duosima, moreover, had been an officer and firearms expert in the Ottoman army and had been a member of the same embassy. After the embassy had been received, Babuli and Duosima apparently chose to stay in the Ming empire and became members of the Brocade Guard, a prestigious military unit often enlisting non-Chinese personnel, which was under the direct command of the emperor and tasked with the security of the imperial court. Babuli and Duosima entered the Ming empire by way of an embassy in 1564, almost 30 years before the Imjin War.<sup>2</sup> Zhao Shizhen became an enthusiastic advocate of the Ottoman harquebus they brought, and as we shall see later, thanks to his efforts this weapon was eventually adopted in the early 17th century.

This timing raises a number of interesting questions. First of all, why were Ottoman envoys visiting the Ming court at this juncture, and why were they bringing weapons? Second, why did it take almost half a century before these weapons reached any degree of widespread adoption within the empire? This second question is especially interesting in light of the fact that the Portuguese-derived harquebus was quickly copied from captured Sino-Japanese *Wokou* pirates in the 1540s by Ming officials and pressed into service. Moreover, there is some evidence that the Ottoman muskets might have already reached China in the wake of a late 15th-century border conflict with the city state of Turfan on the Silk Road.<sup>3</sup> The 1550s and 1560s, around the time the Ottoman embassy reached China, also witnessed the culmination of the aforementioned *Wokou* raiding activities along the south-eastern maritime zone of the empire.<sup>4</sup> So, given their superiority vis-à-vis the lighter Portuguese-derived *Wokou* muskets, why were these weapons only strongly advocated for more general use at the end of the 16th century?

One of the biggest problems in interpreting this military transfer between the Ming and Ottoman empires is the scant nature of the sources available describing the nature of the Ottoman embassies. Chinese sources are relatively terse in their description

<sup>1</sup> Needham et al. (1986: 440–55).

<sup>2</sup> Watanabe (1975: 313).

<sup>3</sup> Andrade (2016: 171–2); Sun (2018: 121–4).

<sup>4</sup> Ma Jianchun 马建春 (2007: 73); Robinson (2017: 316); Tsai (1996: 98–100).

and cast doubt on the official nature of the embassy and do not list the Ottoman harquebus as part of the gifts. Up to now, no Ottoman archival documents have been unearthed which could throw light on this episode either.<sup>5</sup> To ameliorate this shortcoming, I will juxtapose and compare the Ottoman embassy with a later and more extensively documented diplomatic effort by the Dutch East India Company in 1655 to leverage military aid to the Chinese Qing dynasty as a means of establishing a military alliance against a geopolitical competitor. By utilising this comparison, I will first cast the Ottoman embassy as an instance of military diplomacy comparable to the Dutch effort a century later. By military diplomacy I mean the leveraging of military aid in the shape of technology and personnel transfers, or loaned coercive capabilities, by one state or actor with a military for the benefit of achieving diplomatic goals with another state or actor. Furthermore, the comparison will allow me to tentatively reconstruct the internal and geopolitical dynamics at play determining the outcome and discursive representation of the Ottoman embassy in the Chinese sources.

By viewing these political dynamics through the lens of securitisation, this article will then shed new light on the conditions under which firearms could or could not circulate through the empire against a backdrop of geopolitical military diplomacy and explain the delayed adoption of the Ottoman harquebus. Securitisation, which is predicated on the power of speech-acts by securitising agents to intersubjectively create threats for a specific audience in favourable contexts, can fruitfully be applied to analyse the 1564 Ming and 1655 Qing attitudes towards foreign military aid and technology. I will advance the argument that to properly understand Ming military securitisation in a military diplomatic context, civil officials can be understood as the securitising agent, the emperor as the audience, and military diplomacy as the subject of securitisation. This methodological intervention will allow us to see the result of military diplomacy, including the delayed adoption of the Ottoman harquebus, as largely an outcome of an ongoing process of renegotiation of the emic understanding of rulership vis-à-vis the role of the civil bureaucratic governance, in which civil officials tried to dissuade the emperor from embracing a model of activist rulership running contrary to their political and economic interests.

### **Diverging interests of the court and the coastal officials and elites**

Sino-Ottoman diplomacy of the 16th century was conducted against the backdrop of the contrasting interests of the court and the regional officials governing the coastal provinces, who also often represented the interests of the local elites. The court conducted its official foreign relations through the so-called tribute system, but recent

<sup>5</sup> Ma Yi 马一 (2018: 42).

scholarship has criticised the notion of the ‘tribute system’ as a fixture of late imperial international relations by pointing out the changes it underwent in terms of frequency of utilisation, participants and semiotic content.<sup>6</sup> One scholar has gone so far as to denounce it as ‘an English term, created by Western scholars, to describe a mystical, ineffable Oriental reality which is claimed to be inaccessible to Western or Eastern minds—except the mind of the Oriental scholar himself’.<sup>7</sup> I would argue the latter classification goes a bit too far, and should probably be understood as an aversion to the frequent invocation of the concept as a bedrock of describing a supposedly Chinese way of organising a peaceful system of international relations, based on a hierarchical world order with China at the top. I posit the concept can still be used to describe a persistent tendency during much of the early-to-mid Ming (up to c. 1570) and early Qing dynasties (up to 1683) to control international interactions. Two persistent characteristics of this system were the framing of international relations in unequal terms and ritually expressing these relations with the exchange of gifts.<sup>8</sup>

The system could partially be interpreted as a security measure aimed at controlling the dynamic maritime economy of the south-eastern coastal provinces, although it regulated foreign (trade) relations with non-maritime entities as well. The founding emperor of the Ming, Zhu Yuanzhang (1328–1398), envisioned his empire as an autarkic polity with an agrarian base, and any potential usurpation of imperial priorities unleashed by a growth in economic and political importance of the provinces bordering the maritime frontier was strictly controlled. Furthermore, any possible collusion between the coastal elites and foreign interests had to be pre-empted, to prevent centrifugal tendencies within the empire. Therefore, no private foreign trade was allowed outside of the tribute system, which led to a conflation of foreign diplomacy and economic activities. The envoys would be rewarded with gifts of superior value by the Chinese emperor and the embassy members would be allowed to engage in normal trading activities. Embassy parties would be received at the frontiers by the regional bureaucracy, who sent the request for an audience to the court in the capital. After approval, the embassies would be escorted across the empire to the court.<sup>9</sup>

During the early Qing, any diplomatic negotiations were generally forwarded in advance by letter, or through consultation with regional officials. Once the embassy was approved and underway, not much scope for negotiation remained. Concerns about espionage activities kept the embassy personnel confined under guard in their lodgings. As the early Qing tribute system was based on a simplified version of its Ming precedents and largely shaped by the same political considerations, the same

<sup>6</sup> Biedermann et al. (2018: 21).

<sup>7</sup> Perdue (2015: 1002–14).

<sup>8</sup> Park (2017: 53–5); Swope (2002: 757–8); Wills (1984: 3).

<sup>9</sup> Higgins (1980: 31); Wilson (2009: 45); Zurndorfer (2016: 63–6).

probably held true in the 16th century. Any direct contact with the emperor during the audience was completely up to his whims, including his propensity for viewing the foreign gifts meant for him.<sup>10</sup> Yet, in theory, the emperor was an autocrat with unlimited power and had the last word, which meant that direct access to him could change the reception of the diplomatic matters brought forward by an embassy-in-progress, as we shall see later.<sup>11</sup>

However, there was also an alternative informal channel for diplomacy open via cross-frontier contacts during the Ming and Qing periods based on reaching understandings with the regional provincial officials. Despite the Ming dynasty founder's preoccupation with curbing the dynamism of the maritime frontier provinces, in the course of the dynasty the political centre tended to focus on threats along the northern steppe frontier, leaving southern officials a certain leeway in policy making. At different points during the 16th century the provincial leadership of Guangdong was able to convince the court in Beijing that allowing trade outside of the tribute system would make it easier to control the population. By 1557 the Portuguese, after bribing the governor of Guangdong, were able to exploit this situation to secure a lease for a settlement, Macao, facilitating stable trading arrangements. For a while, probably as a result of deliberate misinformation, the Ming court was apparently even under the impression that Macao was inhabited by Southeast Asians, not Europeans. Perhaps the Portuguese had even employed their brand of military diplomacy to achieve this fortuitous result, as they claimed they had helped the Ming suppress Sino-Japanese *Wokou* pirates in exchange for the settlement.<sup>12</sup>

There was thus a divergence between the interests of the political centre and the maritime provinces. Most of the empire's civil officialdom was recruited from among the elites of the southern half of the empire, which included the south-eastern coastal provinces. This was the wealthiest and most populated half of the realm and formed its cultural and economic heart. The civil officials who originated there were drawn from the same elites who often had economic interests in the illegal foreign trade. It was therefore in their interest to prevent strong state interventions in the maritime affairs. A famous example was Lin Xiyuan (1482–1567), a former civil official who, while back in his native coastal Fujian, advocated for an alliance with the Portuguese against the disruptive *Wokou* without destroying the international maritime commerce his home province profited from.<sup>13</sup>

Ming officials did express an awareness of this collusion and the Janus-faced characteristics of the southern civil elites. One of them was Zhu Wan (1494–1550), who

<sup>10</sup> Park (2017: 53–5); Wills (1984: 5, 13–16, 23–35).

<sup>11</sup> Pines (2012: 44–45, 53).

<sup>12</sup> Lim (2013: 16); Wills (2011: 35–40).

<sup>13</sup> Fu (2017: 163–70).

was tasked with suppressing the disturbances caused by the *Wokou*, including their Portuguese collaborators, in the mid-16th century. He made some military headway against the pirate gangs, but he was unable to undertake any punitive measures against the powerful local families who provided them with tacit political backing, profiting as they did from *Wokou* trading and raiding activities. Eventually these families and their influential connections in the officialdom—rumours implicated Lin Xiyuan in this plot—led to the political fall of Zhu Wan and his suicide. This incident makes clear that the civil bureaucracy was not a monolithic bloc, and that with the right political savviness and connections, it was possible to conduct shadow-diplomacy with regional officials who had vested interests in the maritime trade. This could lead to successful outcomes, if these regional officials were able to make their case to the court in Beijing and were well-disposed towards the foreign trade interests of the local population and their elites. However, it is impossible to find any official communication stating this frankly as evidence; regional officials had to clothe their arguments against state intervention in neo-Confucian garb, which generally disapproved of heavy-handed state-led activism on ideological grounds.<sup>14</sup> These internal political fragmentations facilitating additional channels for negotiation played an important role during the conduct of military diplomacy by foreign political entities vis-à-vis China, as we shall see below.

### **The tribute system as a channel for military diplomacy?**

Despite the various hurdles that the system put into place preventing the reaching of easy diplomatic understandings, it was not impossible to achieve success through participating in it. Consider, for example, the 1655–7 Dutch East India Company embassy to the court of the Qing emperor. Early Qing tribute missions like this have the advantage of being described in detail by a multiplicity of involved European actors, including Dutch, Portuguese and Jesuits.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, it had all the trappings of a military diplomatic mission and its eventual fate bore witness to a panoply of domestic and foreign political forces at work. The events surrounding the Dutch diplomatic mission were a product of a geopolitical power struggle reaching the shores of China, as well as internal power struggles, a pattern I will argue was also in evidence during the earlier Ottoman embassy.<sup>16</sup>

To a large extent, these diplomatic efforts closely paralleled Dutch practices elsewhere in Asia. Where the Dutch had no qualms about using coercion to meet their trade objectives vis-à-vis weak Asian polities, against larger and more powerful political

<sup>14</sup> Bol (2008: 141–4); Fu (2017: 160–3); Higgins (1980); Wilson (2009: 240–1).

<sup>15</sup> Wills (1984: 36–7).

<sup>16</sup> Rahusen-de Bruyn Kops (2002: 535–78).

entities and empires a resort was more often made to diplomacy.<sup>17</sup> However, even here, military power could be a useful leverage. The Dutch attempted an exchange: military support against domestic and foreign opponents in exchange for trade opportunities. The company in a way served as a protection seller, whereby Asian potentates were drawn into a dependent relationship in which they depended on the company for military support in return for trade monopolies. This was already in evidence during the first Dutch expeditions to Java in 1596, when they communicated the fact that they were merchants and significant politico-military actors as well. The performance was rewarded, in that the ruler of Banten asked the Dutch to take part in a military expedition against one of his rivals.<sup>18</sup>

The Dutch East India Company was a strange early modern hybrid of a commercial trading company and a state. The company had received the rights from the Republic to wage war and make treaties with Asian rulers, and thus it availed of its own armed forces and coercive capabilities. The two identities of merchant and ruler normally did not clash, but when it came to military diplomacy it could sometimes lead to tensions. Military diplomatic leveraging could broadly take two forms: the offering of military assistance with assets that remained in the company's hand, or the bartering of weapons as gifts or products, especially advanced European guns and cannons that were much appreciated in Asia. For instance, the East India Company leveraged military aid against the domestic opponents of the ruler of Japan in the first half of the 17th century, and cannons were also often utilised as diplomatic gifts. The king of Siam desired of the Dutch to upgrade his naval power during the 17th century as well. In both instances the company's internal tension between its merchant and ruler identities manifested itself as reservations about outright technological transfer of weaponry. Instead, temporarily dispatching military units in order to maintain long-term coercive superiority vis-à-vis Asian polities was preferred. However, the king of Siam then chose to rely on Chinese and Portuguese expertise instead, testifying to the fact that there were serious incentives to share military technology for the company, even if it potentially compromised one's own position. Not doing so could surrender geopolitical influence to competitors.<sup>19</sup>

During the first Dutch embassy to the Qing court, in 1655, these patterns of military diplomacy were in evidence as well. In 1653 the Manchu had just conquered Guangzhou, and some officials were extending feelers to the Dutch to see if they would be willing to send a tribute embassy in order to gain access to Chinese markets.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Knaap & Teitler (2002: 2–3).

<sup>18</sup> Goor (2004: 49–50).

<sup>19</sup> Boxer (1950: 26–37); Clulow (2018: 206–7); Clulow & Mostert (2020: 28–30, 34); Kraan (1998: 42, 74); Rahusen-de Bruyn Kops (2002: 546).

<sup>20</sup> Blussé & Falkenburg (1987: 14).



This would have a twofold advantage: local officials could profit from the resulting trade, and it would undermine a shared enemy, a maritime entrepreneur-cum-warlord called Zheng Chenggong (1624–62). Called Koxinga in Dutch sources, Zheng Chenggong was in control of some coastal areas in south-eastern China in what is now Fujian province. He was both a commercial competitor to the Dutch and a military threat to the Qing.<sup>21</sup> The company sent an embassy of about 20 persons, led by Pieter de Goyer and Jacob de Keyser which consisted amongst others of two interpreters, but also six soldiers, a drummer and a trumpeter. In various sources it is hinted that the Qing court was indeed interested in Dutch military aid, and that the Dutch were able to generate the interest of various officials. The governor of the province of Fujian for example, showed interest in the weapons the Dutch soldiers carried, and in the trumpeter. On the way back from Beijing, some of the Chinese officials present there were also very much impressed by the Dutch warships moored in the harbour of Guangzhou.<sup>22</sup> All in all, the East India Company seems to have been able to communicate its status as a politico-military power. The interest this aroused was certainly not restricted to the local officials, but according to Jesuit sources, the emperor himself was interested in trumpeters and, perhaps more importantly, would liked to have had Dutch officers and engineers to train his military forces.<sup>23</sup>

However, the envoys were deliberately shielded from knowing what was going on behind the scenes and also prevented from establishing any direct contact with the emperor during the audience, making any on-site negotiations an impossibility.<sup>24</sup> According to the Dutch report, the embassy had tried to communicate to the emperor, through his officials, that they were willing to supply naval aid against Zheng Chenggong's forces, but this offer was apparently ignored.<sup>25</sup> In the emperor's decree, which was promulgated in response to the Dutch written proposals, they were asked to only bring tribute every eight years, on account of the long distance they had to travel.<sup>26</sup>

At first sight, this chain of events seems to confirm there was a tribute system for the management of foreign relations, with its emphasis on the ritual confirmation of the status of tributary vis-à-vis suzerain precluding any meaningful exchange, or transfer in the military field. But there was one further avenue through which exchange

<sup>21</sup> Rahusen-de Bruyn Kops (2002: 539–42); Wills (2011: 67–70).

<sup>22</sup> Blussé & Falkenburg (1987: 38, 58).

<sup>23</sup> Rahusen-de Bruyn Kops (2002: 568–70).

<sup>24</sup> Anonymous (late 18th century: 75–77); Blussé (2013: 24).

<sup>25</sup> Henriette Rahusen-de Bruyn Kops apparently did not consult this original version of Johan Nieuhof's (1618–72) report, which does narrate this Dutch offer. This proves her suspicions that the East India Company intended to offer military support against Zheng Chenggong, and that this passage was edited out in the published version of Nieuhof's account, perhaps for reasons of secrecy.

<sup>26</sup> Blussé & Falkenburg (1987: 49, 54–55); Rahusen-de Bruyn Kops (2002: 570–71).

could happen, namely the exchange of gifts. In Eurasian diplomatic practices, gifts normally functioned as tokens of friendship, courtesy and generosity. But in this case I would argue that they could also be interpreted as a sampling of available trade products, capitalising on the custom of offering gifts to the emperor originating from an embassy's place of origin.<sup>27</sup> For the emperor, these kinds of presents, like exotic animals, displayed the universal sway of his rulership.<sup>28</sup>

According to a Jesuit source, weapons were well-represented as gifts as the Dutch brought 'a suit of armour embossed with gold. Twenty three guns of several sorts and sizes, all richly and curiously wrought. Six broad swords. Six other swords hatched with gold ... Two guns. Two lances. One sword with a silver hilt and rich scabbard'.<sup>29</sup> At this time the Dutch Republic was one of the biggest European weapon producers, and it is by no means farfetched that the company was trying to attract the Qing emperor's interest in Dutch weaponry through these trade samples.<sup>30</sup> There were also precedents for using the tribute system as a channel for the transfer of military aid, since both the Koreans and Mongols had sent the Ming dynasty horses for military use under the guise of tribute gifts.<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, this tactic was probably on the verge of gaining the emperor's favour, as can be surmised by the distraught reaction of the Jesuit Adam Schall von Bell (1591–1666), when he reviewed the presents the Dutch brought.<sup>32</sup> The Jesuits enjoyed a privileged position at the court in Beijing, and they had acquired this status in part due to their knowledge of weapon manufacture.<sup>33</sup> In this context, we should not view it as surprising that Adam Schall von Bell felt threatened by the Dutch diplomatic overtures. If the Qing managed to secure, amongst other things, an alternative supply of European weapons from the Dutch East India Company, it would undermine the Jesuit monopoly in this field and threaten their indispensability, and perhaps threaten the *raison d'être* of Portuguese Macao as well.<sup>34</sup> Probably for this reason Adam Schall von Bell tried to undermine the diplomatic effort by claiming that not one in 10 of the gifts was Dutch, thereby also discrediting their ability to provide the weapons.<sup>35</sup> In the context of intra-European rivalries, the Jesuits who were entangled with the Chinese court could keep out potential competitors with

<sup>27</sup> Blussé (2013: 23).

<sup>28</sup> Robinson (2013: 278).

<sup>29</sup> Anonymous (late 18th century: 72–94).

<sup>30</sup> Vogel (1993: 13, 18).

<sup>31</sup> Fairbank (1968: 3–4); Fairbank & Têng (1941: 137–41, 153); Kang (2012: 146); Robinson (2017: 94–5).

<sup>32</sup> Blussé & Falkenburg (1987: 28–9).

<sup>33</sup> Rahusen-de Bruyn Kops (2002: 558–9).

<sup>34</sup> Rahusen-de Bruyn Kops (2002: 554).

<sup>35</sup> Anonymous (late 18th century: 92).

their more intimate knowledge of the inner workings of the bureaucracy and their access to the emperor.

Internal political dynamics thus partly undermined the Dutch military diplomacy, but not only the Jesuits were to blame. Jesuit sources mentioned the Dutch might have succeeded if they had they explicitly sought a military alliance against Zheng Chenggong and offered military instructors to the emperor. However, as can be read in the original report by Johan Nieuhof that was discovered in the 1980s, the Dutch embassy did indeed raise this possibility of an alliance with Chinese officials. So what went wrong? According to Rahusen-de Bruyn Kops, this alliance proposal was deliberately not forwarded to Beijing by the regional officials who first welcomed the Dutch at Guangzhou. The reason being that they were probably profiting from the trade with Zheng Chenggong as well, and did not desire a Qing alliance with the Dutch interfering with this source of wealth. In other respects, the Dutch were quite successful in bribing Chinese officials, as concerned Jesuit and Portuguese reports indicate. By the time De Goyer and De Keyser reached Beijing, a faction had formed at court in favour of granting Dutch trading access. But even this fortuitous development was sabotaged by the Jesuits with Portuguese financial support, who started a bribing campaign of their own.<sup>36</sup>

The most decisive bribe, however, seems to have been a substantial financial gift delivered by Adam Schall von Bell to the emperor himself, which he was able to deliver thanks to his personal access to the ruler. The bribe was accompanied by warnings about the nature of the Dutch: in Europe they were known as mere pirates who had rebelled against their sovereign. Moreover, Schall von Bell warned the emperor that once the Dutch were allowed access to the empire for trading purposes, they would build a fort, install cannons, and become difficult to dislodge.<sup>37</sup> Schall von Bell was clearly trying to persuade the Chinese ruler to regard the Dutch as a threat. In terms of securitisation, the emperor was the audience, and the Jesuit, an official serving him, was the securitising agent. The ostensible subject of securitisation was the empire itself, but this was also a convenient façade hiding the more parochial interests of the Jesuits and Portuguese. The fate of the 1655 embassy highlights the crucial importance direct access to the emperor could play. He was, after all, the final arbiter and therefore direct access to him was such a valuable commodity. Internal political dynamics, consisting of competing political and economic interest groups which had the opportunity to control processes of securitisation, thus seem to have defeated the military diplomacy of the Dutch. A relatively similar geopolitical power constellation in interaction with internal political dynamics can be seen at work during the Ottoman embassy of the 16th century as well.

<sup>36</sup> [Rahusen-de Bruyn Kops \(2002: 553–8\).](#)

<sup>37</sup> [Rahusen-de Bruyn Kops \(2002: 563–4\).](#)

## **Ottoman-Portuguese rivalries in the 16th century**

The Ottoman embassy of 1564 was, like that of the Dutch a century later, part of a larger geopolitical conflict in the region. The 16th century is often seen by historians as the start of the early modern period, a period characterised by the expansion of Europe and the creation of global maritime networks of trade. Because of this focus on Europeans as the most important agents in the creation of an early modern globalised world, the role of other regions and polities in this process is often neglected. However, the 16th century was also the century in which the Ottoman empire reached its height of power and influence, and this translated into geopolitical influence in as far away as the Southeast Asian state Aceh.<sup>38</sup> Historian Giancarlo Casale has even claimed the 16th century to be an Ottoman Age of Exploration comparable to its European counterpart.<sup>39</sup> If Babuli and Duosima really were members of an Ottoman embassy to China, we can perhaps add China to that list of explorations as well. But what drove the Ottomans so far east?

According to Casale, during the 16th century a so-called Indian Ocean faction of the Ottoman elite tried to defeat the expanding Portuguese empire in Asia by establishing their own pan-Muslim empire in Asia. The Portuguese bypassed by sea the Ottoman blockade of the land trade route between Europe and Asia and threatened Muslim trade interests and pilgrimage routes further east. This resulted in Ottoman naval forces deployed all the way to India and the creation of alliances as far away as Aceh in Southeast Asia.<sup>40</sup> One charge that has been levelled against Casale is that he did not really prove that an Indian Ocean faction existed as a cohesive group of people within the Ottoman elite.<sup>41</sup> However, when we look at the 16th century it is hard to deny that people designated as Ottomans or Rumis (after Rum, or the Byzantine 'Roman' empire the Ottomans had succeeded) show up all over South, Southeast and East Asia, often as either envoys offering military alliances, merchants or military specialists aiding in the casting of cannon and the production of firearms. For example, Babur (1483–1530), the founder of the Mughal empire, deployed an Ottoman firearm specialist in his service in battle in 1526.<sup>42</sup>

Both the Ottomans and the Portuguese were important vectors for the dissemination of firearms in India, and this process seems to have been entangled with geopolitical competition. The Indian sultan of Gujarat, for example, was in an alliance with the Mamluks and the Ottomans against the Portuguese, but relied on the military

<sup>38</sup> Ma (2018: 42).

<sup>39</sup> Casale (2010).

<sup>40</sup> Casale (2010: 201–3).

<sup>41</sup> Gürkan (2014: 998–1000).

<sup>42</sup> Streusand (2011: 255).

support of the latter when facing the Mughals in turn. This was after the Ottoman head of the Gujarati artillery had switched sides and joined the Mughals in 1535.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, the king of Siam employed Ottoman officers commanding his soldiers. In addition, in Malayan literature the importance of Ottoman gun founders is often stressed, for example for their help establishing the state of Patani.<sup>44</sup> In Aceh the Ottomans blatantly intervened and supplied cannons to the Acehnese to thwart the Portuguese.<sup>45</sup>

Giray Fidan has argued that the diffusion of Ottoman weapons and military experts was a deliberate imperial policy to maintain supremacy vis-à-vis the Portuguese.<sup>46</sup> However, the exact nature of the relation of all these experts with the Ottoman empire is not always clear; sometimes they seem to be acting as official representatives of the Ottoman empire, sometimes they seem to be mercenaries without claiming an official tie with the Ottoman empire, and sometimes they seem to be merchants or mercenaries pretending to be official representatives. The same held true for the Portuguese empire in Asia, which was much less cohesive than the later Dutch presence.<sup>47</sup> Ottoman and Portuguese mercenaries operated in South and Southeast Asia, and sometimes found themselves on the same side.<sup>48</sup> Relations between the Ottoman empire and Rumi mercenaries were also known to be often tense.<sup>49</sup> There does appear to be a pattern in the diffusion of Ottoman weapons as they often seem to be disseminating in areas where the Portuguese are also trying to establish political and commercial footholds. Yet whether this was the result of a conscious imperial policy, local mercenary activities or merchant initiatives is not always clear. Just like the Dutch East India Company represented a sometimes-awkward fusion of merchant and state identities, it is perhaps equally fallacious to try to see the Ottoman engagement with Asia too much as a result of separate political and commercial imperatives.

Chinese records mention around 20 tribute embassies identifying themselves as Rumi reaching the Ming empire during its existence. Between three to five arrived in the first half of the 15th century, and a further eight then appeared during the long reign of the Jiajing emperor (r. 1521–67). A final three arrived in 1576, 1581 and 1618 respectively.<sup>50</sup> According to David Robinson, the reason the Ottomans might have sent official embassies to the Chinese emperor was forming an alliance against Turfan,

<sup>43</sup> Casale (2010: 55–6); Gommans (2002: 148).

<sup>44</sup> Kadi (2016: 14–17).

<sup>45</sup> Reid (2014: 82–7).

<sup>46</sup> Fidan (2011: 17–26).

<sup>47</sup> Winius (2002: 105–8).

<sup>48</sup> Kadi (2016: 16–17).

<sup>49</sup> Gürkan (2014: 999).

<sup>50</sup> Ma (2007: 72); Nakajima (2018: 141); Watanabe (1975: 312–13, 316).

the abovementioned adversarial city state.<sup>51</sup> In the late 15th century, Turfan's rulers had conquered Hami, another city state on the Silk Road, multiple times. Hami was strategically important for the Ming empire, because it acted as the gathering point where overland tribute embassies from Central Asian and Middle Eastern rulers were received and vetted, before being allowed to continue into China. Turfan's annexation of Hami had them gain control over this important aspect of the tribute system.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, during the late 1520s the Chinese still considered waging a campaign to reconquer Hami and the three Ottoman embassies that arrived in that decade might have been sent to discuss this matter.<sup>53</sup>

However, by the time Babuli and Duosima arrived in China, the Turfan issue had been shelved indefinitely and the barriers against trade had been removed for the time being.<sup>54</sup> This argues against his embassy being part of an anti-Turfan effort on the part of the Ottoman emperor to restore uninterrupted trade with the Ming empire, which brings us to other possible motives behind the next wave of five 'Rumi' embassies arriving between 1543 and 1564, when the conflict with Turfan was already decades in the past. These arrived just as the Portuguese were making significant inroads in East Asia. Around this time, Portuguese mercenaries serving a Chinese pirate were blown off course to the Japanese island of Tanegashima, and famously introduced their hosts to the Portuguese harquebus, which in Japanese service would make such an impact during their civil war and the invasions of Korea at the end of the century.<sup>55</sup> After 1543 the Portuguese became middlemen in the trade with China, after the Japanese had been banned from the tribute system because of a number of violent incidents in which the latter had been involved in Chinese port cities.<sup>56</sup> As mentioned above, by 1557 the Portuguese had successfully established themselves on the Chinese coast after bribing regional officials and perhaps leveraging their naval strength against pirates. The 1550s and 1560s had also witnessed the highpoint of Sino-Japanese *Wokou* piracy raids, in which some Portuguese also participated. In these circumstances, it would not be unreasonable to think that official Ottoman envoys tried to counter these Portuguese inroads in East Asia by leveraging military aid. After all, similar policies were pursued by the Ottomans in South and Southeast Asia. Conversely, the 'Rumi' embassies might have been opportunistic merchants and mercenaries simply trying to follow the Portuguese example. Whatever the case might have been, the end result was the same as elsewhere in Asia: Ottoman and Portuguese arms disseminated, although the former

<sup>51</sup> Robinson (2013: 333–4).

<sup>52</sup> Fairbank & Têng (1941: 163); Rossabi (1972: 215–25).

<sup>53</sup> Dardess (2020: 389–404).

<sup>54</sup> Dardess (2020: 404); Rossabi (1972: 225).

<sup>55</sup> Andrade (2016: 166–71).

<sup>56</sup> Wills (2011: 32–4).



took three decades longer to escape obscurity. What can explain this time lag in China? This turns me to the last part of my argument, which analyses the process of securitisation and its outcomes that might have undermined Ottoman military diplomacy and the dissemination of their weapons.

### **Ottoman embassies between the emperor and his officials**

When ‘Rumi’ envoys started arriving in the 1520s, Ming officials tried to persuade Jiajing to refuse them an audience. At this point in time, Portuguese diplomatic overtures had just been rebuffed and they played a marginal role in maritime trade.<sup>57</sup> Hence, the bureaucratic obstruction against accepting Ottoman embassies was probably not only inspired by tacit pro-Portuguese sympathies. The officials’ attitude can perhaps better be explained as a result of a shifting mood about the content and type of rulership the Chinese emperor should embody.

Initially, some Ming officials voiced the thought that the first ‘Rumi’ embassy was in fact originating from Turfan and sent to spy, using the cover of gift giving to bribe Ming officials.<sup>58</sup> This was not an unreasonable suspicion, seeing as bribing was a common occurrence surrounding the conduct of tribute embassies, but it apparently failed to deter Jiajing. The officials then shifted their discourse towards criticising the inappropriateness of the gifts, securitising them by presenting them to the emperor as a moral threat. The official Ming history mentions that Ottoman envoys on different occasions presented lions, rhinoceroses, horses, camels and precious stones as tribute gifts to the emperor. The dismissive reaction of the civil officials towards the tribute gifts is very telling in this regard. In addition to voicing doubts about the authenticity of the embassies, the nature of the gifts themselves were criticised in moral terms: how were precious stones useful for feeding the hungry? The keeping of lions in imperial menageries was similarly dismissed as an extravagance.<sup>59</sup> The civil officials cloaked their arguments against accepting these gifts in very edifying Confucian moral discourse: a virtuous emperor should not have a wasteful menagerie with exotic animals and accept precious stones, but attend to the needs of his subjects. This seems like a somewhat baffling reaction, considering the fact that the act of giving exotic animals and precious objects as gifts were part and parcel of diplomatic exchanges between rulers in much of Eurasia.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Wills (2011: 25–32).

<sup>58</sup> Robinson (2013: 329, 333–4).

<sup>59</sup> Robinson (2013: 329).

<sup>60</sup> Biedermann et al. (2018: 1, 18).

The background to this Confucian moral posturing, as so often in life, was a naked political power struggle about the nature of imperial rulership in Ming China. By Ming times there were two competing notions: the first being the Chinese Confucian ideal of rulership. In this model, the ruler ought to attract through this virtue other virtuous and talented men whom the ruler then recognises as such and appoints as his ministers to govern the realm on his behalf. They also help to rectify the emperor's vices. The implicit contradiction that an emperor can only attract virtuous men if he has already somehow been morally rectified, was never solved in Confucian political theory. But no matter, it was an entirely self-serving fiction that legitimated the political dominance of civil officials and those sections of the population they were mostly drawn from: wealthy landowners, and later also wealthy merchants. In this system, the emperor's authority was in theory absolute, but in practice hamstrung by bureaucratic rules, customs and precedents. The emperor most beloved by the civil officials functioned like a rubber-stamp institute, outwardly maintaining the fiction of being a paragon of Confucian moral virtue. Once in a while, however, this notion of rulership was threatened by a competing activist model that was derived from Central Asian political traditions. As China was every few centuries conquered by a fully or partially Central Asian conquest elite, the Confucian model temporarily also periodically gave way to the Central Asian model. This model emphasised personal leadership, even exercised directly on the battlefield. It required the ruler to have a menagerie, for it displayed the reach of his universal authority. It required the ruler to go on extensive hunting campaigns, for this is how he built a personal relationship with his closest military commanders and it allowed him the opportunity to conduct foreign relations with envoys accompanying him on the trip.<sup>61</sup> This kind of rulership side-lined the civil officials as mere suppliers of the resources to support the active ruler's whims and all the warfare that usually came with it—resources that would be extracted from exactly the social strata the civil officials were recruited from.

By the 1520s, the civil officials were discouraging this kind of rulership from reasserting itself. Things had been going well for them up until the beginning of the 16th century. The first few Ming emperors had been activist rulers, continuing the Mongol legacy of the preceding dynasty. However, later emperors were increasingly brought up within the confines of the Forbidden City, tutored and inculcated by civil officials, and kept away from the battlefield. Moreover, a Ming emperor who led an army in the field suffered a catastrophic defeat and was captured by Mongols in 1449, provided a frightful demonstration of the dangers of activist rulership. Slowly the status quo favouring the civil officials was returning. One emperor had temporarily broken with this development, the Zhengde emperor, who ruled from 1505 to 1521. He tried to revive the ruling style of his ancestors, and was mercilessly reviled and mocked for

<sup>61</sup> Brook (2010: 79–81, 86–105); Pines (2012: 50–3, 68–75); Robinson (2013: 10, 13–18, 358–80).

it in the records left behind by the civil officials. After he died having contracted an illness after drunkenly falling off a boat in the Yellow River, the civil officialdom must have heaved a collective sigh of relief.<sup>62</sup> His successor, the Jiajing emperor, a very wilful man himself, at least had to be kept away from embracing the same notion of rulership as his predecessor.

This internal struggle could be one reason why the Ottoman embassies in 1564 and their gifts were so poorly received. The Jiajing emperor had to be prevented from getting interested in the manifestation of activist rulership displayed by his Ottoman colleague's gifts. As we shall see, Jiajing probably never even knew about the Ottoman weapons that had been brought—gifts or not. Moreover, pro-Portuguese officials with interests in the coastal maritime trade, whom we know existed, might have worked behind the scenes against the Ottoman embassy as well.

If Babuli and Duosima indeed came as part of an official embassy to China with the aim of enticing the emperor into a kind of geopolitical anti-Portuguese alliance with exotic animals, precious stones and guns, the post-Zhengde civil officialdom would have had every incentive to prevent this from succeeding. But Jiajing disregarded the opinions of his officialdom and received the Ottoman envoys. Robinson speculates that Jiajing knew he had to pay lip service to the concerns of his officials, but that he also had to conform to the unwritten diplomatic rules his contemporary activist Eurasian peers like the Ottoman Sultan Süleyman I (1494–1566) abided to. Rejecting an official embassy could have dire consequences. Thus, the exotic animals were accepted and the menagerie flourished, even under Jiajing.<sup>63</sup> But what happened to Duosima and his weapon? When we consider their fate, interesting parallels with the Dutch embassy of 1655 become more apparent.

When Zhao Shizhen, the civil official fascinated by the Ottoman muskets, interviewed Duosima during the Imjin War, the latter narrated that the officials of the Jiajing emperor did not let him leave after they had handed over a lion as a tribute gift. It is unclear whether any Ottoman weapons, or perhaps Duosima himself as a military expert, were even meant as a gift, or whether they were simply meant for protection of the envoys.<sup>64</sup> The official Ming records do not mention weapons being presented as a gift. On the other hand, Duosima's specialist military knowledge and any impressions he might have gathered about the empire's disposition perhaps made him simultaneously too valuable and too dangerous to be let go wandering off again. The way back to the Ottoman empire went through Central Asian lands containing many political power centres antithetical to Chinese interests, but capable of offering attractive career opportunities, like Turfan. Again, seen through the lens of state

<sup>62</sup> Robinson (2013: 214–41).

<sup>63</sup> Robinson (2013: 334–40).

<sup>64</sup> Sun (2018: 122).

security, the Chinese civil officialdom had every incentive to try to keep him in China and seduce him into military service. The Brocade Guard he was assigned to was a special unit which predominantly included foreigners of Central Asian origin, that were tasked with internal security. The exact reason why foreigners performed this exact function is not known, but a possible reason is their lack of vested interests and ties with other power elites in the empire. They also possibly formed a convenient pool of compartmentalised knowledge about the outside world.<sup>65</sup>

As part of the army, Duosima was probably obliged to keep the knowledge about firearms restricted to certain circles, as part of state security measures instituted by early Ming rulers.<sup>66</sup> So, in the end he ironically contributed to the lack of circulation of knowledge about his weapons. Within the context of military service, their knowledge of superior Ottoman weapons could be controlled by the state.

According to Zhao Shizhen, Duosima's knowledge of Ottoman firearms did not really diffuse in the Ming empire, and by the 1590s, Zhao is advocating these weapons as still a very new phenomenon. A reason Zhao advances for this time-lapse is the reluctance of officials to inform the emperor about this technology: 'Even when the ministers investigated and acquired knowledge about these weapons, they seemingly did not report it clearly to the throne, the model did not obtain dissemination, the skill was not ventured to be exercised, and it was indeed caused to fall into oblivion; this has proven to be deeply unfortunate'.<sup>67</sup>

From Zhao's testimony it appears as if the knowledge of the technology's existence was deliberately kept from the emperor. A passage in the imperial dynastic chronicle seems to confirm this act of *agnogenesis*, the actively constructed ignorance of the emperor by civil officials.<sup>68</sup> It describes how the civil official-staffed Ministry of War requested Babuli and Duosima be enrolled in the Brocade Guard following 15th-century precedents set for envoys from Hami. 'In the Brocade Guard they will receive salary and afterwards they will not be allowed to come again and memorialise the emperor and cause trouble'.<sup>69</sup> So close, yet so far. The Ottomans served the court in the physical vicinity of the emperor, but they were apparently barred from ever communicating with him again. This, incidentally, also testifies to an apparent rift that had grown by the late Ming between the emperor and inner court institutions like the Brocade Guard, which had originally been set up during the early Ming to centralise the emperor's personal control over gunpowder weapons.<sup>70</sup>

A final level of security concerns that might have hindered the diffusion of the Ottoman muskets was constituted by an anxiety about foreign perceptions of the

<sup>65</sup> Serruys (1961: 59–83).

<sup>66</sup> Duan (2018: 24–8).

<sup>67</sup> Zhao Shizhen 赵士楨 (2006: 378).

<sup>68</sup> Proctor (2008: 8–11).

<sup>69</sup> *Ming shilu* 明實錄 (1966); *Ming Shenzong shilu* 明神宗實錄 22:582.

<sup>70</sup> Duan (2018: 26).

empire's strength. Chinese officials were wary of accepting military aid if it simultaneously constituted a security threat itself, or if it threatened to undermine the perception of Chinese military superiority vis-à-vis foreigners. That this recognition of superiority was important for the Chinese civil officials and was entangled with security concerns, can be seen if we look at the reactions to the military assistance offered to the Ming by the Macao Portuguese in the 17th century against the rising Manchu threat. Despite the clear advantages that Portuguese military skills and advanced artillery held against the Manchu, their military assistance kept being sabotaged by civil officials for two reasons related to state security. One was that it would give the Portuguese critical insights into the military strength of the Ming empire. Second was the fear that a reliance on foreign military personnel would undermine the claim to superiority of Chinese civilisation and diminish the sense of awe the Chinese tried to stimulate in their opponents.<sup>71</sup>

In the end, it took a new war and a new Chinese emperor actively interested in military affairs to rescue the Ottoman muskets from obscurity. In 1592 Japanese warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–98), who had recently politically unified the islands, invaded Korea with the intention of using it as a launching pad for his conquest of China. The campaign was initially a great success: the Japanese army advanced far northwards and eventually even captured Pyongyang. With Japanese forces edging ever closer, the Ming empire decided to intervene on behalf of the Koreans. The resulting confrontation would last until 1598 and involved hundreds of thousands of troops on all sides of the conflict, a mobilisation of manpower and resources that dwarfed anything going on in contemporaneous Europe.<sup>72</sup>

While this conflict was going on, a lively debate on how best to pursue China's war aims arose among Chinese officials, which was fortunately recorded in statecraft compilations and military treatises for later generations to peruse. Among these writings was a compilation of memorials to the emperor on military matters, which appeared sometime in the early 17th century, and was partially written during the war. The author was Zhao Shizhen, who at the time of the war had a relatively low position as a palace secretary in Beijing. It was not, in fact, his job to comment on military affairs, but he did so anyway. He felt entitled to do so because, a few decades earlier, he had witnessed the conflict between the Ming empire and the so-called 'Japanese' *Wokou* pirates along the south-eastern maritime frontier of China. Zhao himself was born in one of the coastal provinces affected by this struggle, Zhejiang.<sup>73</sup> *Wokou* as a term had a derogative connotation, referring to the Japanese as 'dwarf bandits'. However, many of the *Wokou* were not Japanese at all; it is more accurate to understand the *Wokou*

<sup>71</sup> Swope (2014: 87–88).

<sup>72</sup> Swope (2009: 5–6).

<sup>73</sup> Craig (2016: 157–64).

as groups of loosely organised multi-ethnic merchants-cum-raiders. They were people who depended on maritime trade for their livelihoods but had been disenfranchised from pursuing this lifestyle by a strictly enforced maritime trade prohibition issued by the Ming court. There were many Japanese among them, but the majority probably consisted of Chinese, with a few Ryukyuan, Southeast Asians and probably even some Portuguese mixed in.<sup>74</sup>

Because of his experience with the ‘Japanese’ *Wokou* in his youth, Zhao Shizhen arrogated to himself the authority to advise the emperor, Wanli (r. 1573–1620) on the conduct of military operations against the far larger regular Japanese armies invading Korea. The Japanese formations were especially feared for their use of harquebuses in well-drilled formations capable of continuous fire in volleys. These had made a devastating impact on Korean armies, and they proved daunting for Ming forces as well. The harquebus had only recently in the mid-16th century been introduced to East Asia, probably by the Portuguese, and the Japanese had developed effective battlefield tactics making full use of the gun’s possibilities.<sup>75</sup> To counter this threat, Zhao Shizhen proposed Ming forces should adopt the Ottoman musket, which was more powerful, accurate, and had a longer range than the Japanese harquebus.<sup>76</sup>

After the war, Zhao Shizhen’s proposals were accepted and the Ottoman muskets were finally put in production for the Ming army. The weapons were fielded against the Mongols at the northern frontier. What had changed to facilitate their introduction? First of all, by the 1590s the Ottoman embassies were becoming a distant memory and it was presumably possible to solicit Duosima’s help in adopting his weapons without it entailing a geopolitical entanglement with Ottoman interests. After 1589, the Ottoman interest in maritime Asia declined and their presence waned.<sup>77</sup> When Hideyoshi invaded Korea in 1592, there was no sign of Rumi interest in the proceedings. Neither did the Portuguese intervene, although there are a few hints in sources that Portuguese soldiers, probably mercenaries, fought on behalf of the Ming against Hideyoshi’s army. Conversely, the Japanese ruler tried to arrange with a Portuguese Jesuit for two carracks to fight in his navy, but the anti-Christianity stance he had adopted by 1587 presumably derailed this proposal.<sup>78</sup> With both the Ottomans and the Portuguese uninterested in taking sides during and after the war, the issue of accepting military aid from a sole former Ottoman envoy long since in Ming military service presumably was no longer seen as such a security risk by the officials.

<sup>74</sup> Antony (2003: 22).

<sup>75</sup> Swope (2009: 75–7).

<sup>76</sup> That Ottoman muskets were more powerful and had a longer range than their European counterparts was also admitted by contemporary European observers. Ágoston (2014: 106).

<sup>77</sup> Casale (2010: 182).

<sup>78</sup> Correia (2018: 107–11); Neves (1994: 20–4).



A second facilitating factor was the emperor himself. The reigning Wanli emperor (r. 1573–1620) was conducive to accepting Zhao Shizhen's proposals for adopting the Ottoman muskets after the Imjin War. The emperor was often at loggerheads with his civil officials, but he was keenly interested in the conduct of military operations and cultivated close ties with military personnel.<sup>79</sup> A factor in this success was thus possibly Wanli's great personal interest in military affairs.

## Conclusion

Unfortunately, we lack the same kind of detailed behind-the-scenes documentation for the Ottoman embassies which clarified the fate of the Dutch embassy of 1655 and its military diplomacy. In the case of the Ottoman embassies and the fate of Duosima's possible attempt at leveraging military aid, we can only speculate about the background forces at work behind its obscurity at the emperor's expense. Perhaps a faction of pro-Portuguese officials was indeed actively preventing the Ming emperor from becoming cognisant of the possible military dimensions of the Ottoman diplomatic overtures, like regional coastal officials had kept the similar Dutch proposals silent in 1655.

Nevertheless, despite its heavily ritualised and bureaucratised nature, the tributary audience at court could be a potent opportunity for foreign and domestic actors to play out their geopolitical conflicts with military aid and technologies as leverage. As the early modern period dawned in East Asia, the court in Beijing became a place where representatives from far-flung polities like the Dutch Republic and the Ottoman empire increasingly asserted themselves and their interests. There they found themselves immediately in conflict with the already established interests of the Portuguese, the international missionary order of the Jesuits, and domestic political factions with interests in foreign maritime trade. Conversely, for the Chinese court this was a confrontation with geopolitical struggles between European powers which transcended the East Asian context of the tributary system.

Unless new documentation is discovered, especially from the point of view of the Ottomans or the Portuguese, the background and intentions of the embassies will remain subject of speculation. But when we consider the fate of the Ottoman military expert Duosima and his technology and compare it with similar diplomatic transactions close in time, a certain pattern of securitisation becomes clear, casting the officialdom in the role of the securitising agent and the emperor as audience.

At the basis of this role division was a somewhat contradictory and contentious notion of rulership professed by the civil bureaucracy, which theoretically recognised

<sup>79</sup> Ma (2007: 75–6); Swope (2008: 61–115).

the emperor's omnipotence, but in practice preferred for him to function like a rubber-stamp institute. The securitising agents were almost always members of the civilian elite and their securitisation strategies usually indirectly reveal their class interests. The same held true when a foreigner found himself in a rare similar position: Adam Schall von Bell was clearly defending the interests of the Jesuits and the Portuguese at Macao when he painted the Dutch as a potential threat to imperial security. In terms of securitisation strategies, the crux was controlling the audience's perceptions: it was often more important what the emperor could not see than what he could see. Thus, successful securitisation depended on controlling the emperor's perceptions, his access to knowledge, in this case about the weaponry, and the access of others to his person. But the emperor was not the only audience of import during instances of military diplomacy. A second important audience concerned potential adversaries, and Chinese officials were keenly aware that the acceptance of military diplomatic initiatives by the empire could have a deleterious effect on its military deterrence. At the same time military cooperation posed a security risk through the opportunities for intelligence gathering it presented. As such, the theory of securitisation, developed to explain the discursive creation of threats in modern nation-states, is also a useful heuristic tool to shed light on similar processes that took place in early modern empires.

While one of the main points of this article is stressing the importance of the tribute system as a channel for military transfer, it must also be noted that many technological appropriations were accidental, or occurred outside of any official agency and institutions. Asia in the 16th century seemed to be awash with Ottoman and Portuguese mercenaries and merchants, who had no qualms about selling their skills and weapons to the highest bidder. From the perspective of imperial security this was a double-edged sword. It meant that officials operating on the coast were able to gain access to new gunpowder weapons—like the Portuguese *harquebus*—on their own terms, thereby bypassing the restricted access to this technology imposed by the centralising efforts of early Ming emperors, which had also limited access to the Ottoman military technology and expertise. The more positive side of the equation was that this kind of transfer came without any geopolitical strings attached. Freedom from political consequences therefore meant freedom of transfer, which possibly explains the 30-year delay in adopting Duosima's Ottoman musket and the successful securitising strategy that might have been behind it. Moreover, the fact that Duosima was instrumental in the transfer of a potent new weapon to Ming China also nuances the idea, still commonly held by modern historians, that Europeans possessed a unique military superiority over the rest of the world and therefore only their military technology was disseminated. Not only Europeans drove military innovation and changes across the world. The case of Duosima proves that non-Europeans could play a role in processes of military changes as well. Nevertheless, after all this time the original political goals behind his embassy, for which the weapons might have been intended

as leverage, had lost their relevance: by now Duosima was the Ming emperor's man, and no longer the Ottoman sultan's subject.

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# Security and border making in 19th-century southern Italy

*Laura Di Fiore*

*Abstract:* The article focuses on the border region between two states in pre-unification Italy, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and the Papal States. Although negotiations to define the border precisely started only following the cholera epidemic of 1836–7, the early 19th century already saw the start of greater control of the territory and of the borders by the ‘administrative monarchies’. Analysed through the lens of securitisation, movement control processes reveal a variable geography of ‘security spaces’ and freedom of movement for different social groups, where state security and collective security needs overlapped.

*Keywords:* 19th century, southern Italy, Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, state security; collective security, mobility control.

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## Security history at the border

Before Italian unification in 1861, the boundaries that criss-crossed the peninsula were inter-state borders and, therefore, political borders. These borders delimited a sovereign territory, conceiving territory as a ‘political space’, as defined by Charles Maier.<sup>1</sup> Such borders were signs that distinguished ‘space’ from ‘territory’, as Daniel Nordman, author of a seminal study on France’s borders, has recently stated.<sup>2</sup> The actual border-making processes in the Italian peninsula, as in most of Europe, started around the second half of the 18th century.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, only in the second half of the 19th century is it possible to talk of truly defined state borders on the continent.<sup>4</sup>

This article focuses on one specific border in pre-unification Italy, that lay between the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and the Papal States, horizontally crossing the peninsula, roughly from Gaeta to Civitella del Tronto. This can be considered a significant case study, on the one hand for geographical reasons, as it was the only land border of the largest state in pre-unification Italy, connecting the whole southern part of the peninsula with the centre; and on the other hand, because it linked a socially and economically integrated trans-state region, and was therefore particularly involved in the movement of people. Some of these individuals crossing the border, such as the poor, vagrants or political suspects, were considered a threat to state or collective security.

The inter-state negotiations for a precise definition of the border started only following the cholera epidemic of 1836–7, after which guard huts were arranged along the border in order to create a sanitary cordon. The positioning of these huts resulted in numerous points of uncertain attribution along the border, and served to reignite territorial disputes that had been going on for centuries, leading to protests from the border communities who were worried that the established positions of the huts, endowed with institutional recognition, could have long-term repercussions on the attribution of certain lands to one state or the other.<sup>5</sup>

The law defining this border, being the result of the negotiations begun in the late 1830s shortly after the cholera epidemic, only came into force in 1852. Nevertheless, despite this latter formalisation of the border, it was from the beginning of the 19th century that the two Italian ‘administrative monarchies’ had deployed greater control of their territory and of their borders. In the wake of the French domination, both states introduced, as has been highlighted by several studies in recent years, innovative

<sup>1</sup> Maier (2016).

<sup>2</sup> Nordman (2015).

<sup>3</sup> Balani (2007); Meriggi (2016).

<sup>4</sup> See the Spanish, Portuguese and French cases: Sahlin (1989); García Álvarez (2015); García Álvarez & Puente Lozano (2017); Puyo (2018); Capdevila i Subirana (2012).

<sup>5</sup> Di Fiore (2013).

tools for identifying people and controlling their movements,<sup>6</sup> as well as the new ‘modern’ police force, which has also been the focus of a renewed historiography.<sup>7</sup>

In previous works, I have analysed this border-making and consolidation process, historicising the border through the category of production. Here, I argued that the definition of borders has to be read in terms of a construction process to which actors other than the state contributed, rather than as an institutional action from above through a state-centred approach—the border was a sort of plural enterprise. In this framework of the de-naturalisation of political borders, which reconfigures them in terms of human, political, social and then historical product, I moreover showed how it is not convincing to rigidly distinguish the lines of a border as a product of the action of state institutions and the borderlands as regions designed just by economic, familial and social networks indifferent to the border. Both, in fact, are the result of multiple interactions between institutions and society.<sup>8</sup>

Based on this insight into the construction of borders, the present article aims to analyse this border through the lens of security, showing how securitisation policies impacted on border making, tending to shape the border space in different ways, sometimes making it more rigid, sometimes more porous, depending on security needs and objects and also on their interlacement with other social dynamics. It is therefore a question of focusing not on the construction of the border through diplomatic negotiations, but on the way it is modelling by passing through administrative circulars and police measures developed to guarantee the safety of the border against what was considered a threat. The space of the border is pivotal in this analysis. It is inspired by the insights of the ‘spatial turn’,<sup>9</sup> which proposes the centrality of space as an analytical category, no longer viewing it as immobile or in the background, but analysing it as a social, political and cultural product. Intertwining these principles with the ‘dynamic’ and procedural dimension recognised by border studies,<sup>10</sup> borders can be framed as the product of a historical construction, to which, as will emerge, issues related to its security crucially contributed. Moreover, if the space is produced, it is at the same time itself a producer.<sup>11</sup> As we will see, if securitisation policies contributed to shape the border space, the latter came to strengthen and embody security practices and narratives.

<sup>6</sup> About & Denis (2010); Breckenridge & Szreter (2012); Antonielli (2014).

<sup>7</sup> Napoli (2003); Emsley (2007); Milliot (2007).

<sup>8</sup> Di Fiore (2013; 2017; 2020); Di Fiore & Rolla (2018).

<sup>9</sup> Warf & Arias (2009).

<sup>10</sup> Wastl-Walter (2011); Donnan & Wilson (2012). On the relation between border studies and spatial turn in global history, see Di Fiore (2016).

<sup>11</sup> Lefebvre (1974).

In order to apply the lens of security to the study of borders from a historical perspective, it is necessary to turn to the analytical categories developed in the field of security studies. Particularly, but not exclusively, interesting for a historical analysis are the constructivist approaches that emerged in the field in the aftermath of the Cold War. These approaches distanced themselves from the positivist epistemology of the traditional ‘realist’ approach—inclined to an ontological and static conception of security—favouring an interpretation of the latter in terms of construction by social actors and politicians, produced in different forms according to specific moments and contexts. The even more radical position of Critical Security Studies was developed in the mid-1990s around the Copenhagen School and the theory of securitisation, which ‘captures the performative power politics of the concept “security” and has shown how issues acquire the status of security through intersubjective socio-political processes’.<sup>12</sup> Currently, even from a very different position, open-minded and interdisciplinary perspectives share an interpretation of security in terms not of ‘a fixed attribute or a dispositional quality, but a dynamic and complex process’.<sup>13</sup>

This emphasis on the procedural nature of the formation of security policies and discourses offers a particularly fruitful perspective for historians, since it recognises their evolution and the different forms they have assumed in their historical dimension. Security history is still an embryonic research field, one of the last to be developed within security studies.<sup>14</sup> Security history focused on borders would be worthy of investigation, as the border is undoubtedly a pivotal space for security issues, conceived as security of the state territory. One of the main means deployed for this territorial security was actually the control on people’s movements. Since the period of French domination, people’s mobility in the Italian peninsula had become subject to an unprecedented degree of surveillance. With the introduction of compulsory travel documents aimed at a generalised control of the population, some categories of subjects required particular attention from the authorities, as they were considered particularly dangerous for security. What kind of security? And which subjects were considered security objects at the border from the perspective of the state?

### **Poor people and vagabonds: a threat to collective security**

First of all, security measures targeted the poor. In similar ways to what had happened in many other European contexts since the mid-18th century,<sup>15</sup> in the Kingdom

<sup>12</sup> Vuori (2016: 64); Buzan *et al.* (1998); Balzacq *et al.* (2016).

<sup>13</sup> Bourbeau (2015: 8);

<sup>14</sup> De Graaf *et al.* (2019); De Graaf & Zwierlein (2013); Conze (1984); Di Fiore (2019).

<sup>15</sup> Chevalier (1958); Benigno (2014).

of the Two Sicilies, too, the poor were also subject to particular surveillance. This especially related to their mobility, as their category overlapped with those of ‘vagabonds’ and ‘the idle’, from which, according to the police interpretation in the city of Naples, ‘the class of troublemakers of all kinds originates’.<sup>16</sup> The very category of ‘vagabond’ was actually remarkably broad, including all those without ‘possessions, industry, art, or any occupation, fixed or daily assignment or other secure means of subsistence of this nature’.<sup>17</sup>

In the Kingdom, as early as 1818, a ban on issuing passports for travel to foreign countries to subjects without livelihoods had been prescribed. Most of these subjects continued travelling without documents until the 1850s, as they did in all the countries of Europe. Precisely because of the difficulty in obtaining documents, besides being *sans aveu*, they also became *sans papiers*, and for this reason their stories often became entangled in the police archives. The main reason why the government wanted to prevent their movement outside the Kingdom was the fact that, once abroad, they had not only to be assisted at the expense of the local diplomatic representatives, but they also had to be repatriated. Therefore, the prohibition on authorising the poor to travel was repeated periodically. For example, in 1847 when the royal consul in France raised the problem of ‘the shepherds of our mountains, bagpipe players’,<sup>18</sup> who frequented the streets of Paris. These Neapolitan migrants had initially been welcomed by the queen herself who had been ‘moved by the memory of her first homeland’, and had granted them a subsidy,<sup>19</sup> but they had since multiplied to the point of making the situation unmanageable. In fact, the consul reported, if the Parisian police at first granted them the authorisation to perform on the street, they began later to deny it, due to the increasing number of complaints about the noise produced. They submitted the bagpipe players to repressive measures relating to wandering and begging, with the result that it placed a burden on the Neapolitan authorities in the city. Similarly, the Neapolitan consul in London, requiring a ban on the movement of the destitute, referred to the story of six bagpipers coming from France who, ‘thrown into this immense city where they understand nothing and where they cannot do anything, without any means of sustenance covered with poor and bizarre clothes and lacking in nourishment for about two days, their presence has become immediately the object of pity and laughter’.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> *Istruzioni per reprimere gli oziosi e i vagabondi nella città di Napoli*, 2 February 1828 (Petitti 1852: 262–4).

<sup>17</sup> *Istruzioni per reprimere gli oziosi e i vagabondi nella città di Napoli*, 2 February 1828 (Petitti 1852: 262–4).

<sup>18</sup> Naples State Archive (ASNa), Ministero degli Affari Esteri, fs. 6214, 27 April 1847.

<sup>19</sup> She was the wife of Louis Philippe D’Orléans, Maria Amelia of Bourbon, daughter of Ferdinand I of Bourbon, king of the Two Sicilies.

<sup>20</sup> ASNa, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, fs. 6214, 29 April 1847.

The greatest number of poor people poured into the nearby Papal States. In 1816 alone, about 50 vagabonds were sent back to Naples, eight to ten at a time. Their names were communicated to the Neapolitan police so that they could keep a record of these individuals. In a phase in which the management of the masses of poor people who crowded the urban scene was a major issue for European governments, the first imperative was that each country should keep its beggars for itself.

A particularly significant exceptional event occurred on the occasion of the Catholic jubilee in 1825. On the occasion of this Holy Year, it was feared that Rome would see the arrival of ‘a prodigious quantity’ of pilgrims, including ‘many poor people to maintain’, based on what had happened during the previous jubilee in 1775.<sup>21</sup> An extremely alarming factor in this regard consisted of the fact that most of the faithful would present themselves ‘dressed in the style of pilgrims’.<sup>22</sup> The cause of the concern is to be found in the impossibility of deducing the socio-economic status of travellers from the way in which they were dressed. This is interesting evidence that identification was still partially entrusted to the appearance of a person, and in particular to their clothing, which had constituted one of the main categories of identification in the late medieval and early modern eras.<sup>23</sup> To overcome this challenge, it was decided that only those pilgrims who had been provided with a special passport would be allowed to go to the Papal States, bearing the indication ‘he goes to Rome in pilgrim’s dress on occasion of the jubilee’.<sup>24</sup> In fact, the prerequisite for the issuing of this type of document was that the applicants proved to the competent authorities, ‘in the most valid form, that they had the necessary money for travel and a stay in Rome’.<sup>25</sup> As for the potential poor who could have entered the Kingdom from the border with the Papal States on the same occasion, it was simply decided not to admit any foreigner in pilgrim’s clothing who did not carry a passport.<sup>26</sup> More generally, this strengthened regulations that since 1816 had forbidden poor and vagrants entry to the Kingdom, especially from this land border.

Another category of people subject to particular mobility restrictions was made up of individuals we could generically call ‘itinerants’, namely those who exercised itinerant crafts and who, because mobility was a constitutive factor of their condition, were particularly elusive to the eyes of the police. This was also because their kind of work did not always guarantee them a livelihood. Since 1823, in this regard,

<sup>21</sup> ASNa, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, fs. 6212, Letter of the Neapolitan consul in Rome, Filippo Accarisi, to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 11 September 1824.

<sup>22</sup> ASNa, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, fs. 6212, Letter of the Neapolitan consul in Rome, Filippo Accarisi, to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 11 September 1824.

<sup>23</sup> Groebner (2008: 71–80).

<sup>24</sup> ASNa, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, fs. 6212, 25 October 1824.

<sup>25</sup> ASNa, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, fs. 6212, 25 October 1824.

<sup>26</sup> ASNa, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, fs. 6212, 25 October 1824.



access to the Kingdom had been restricted for artisans who came in large numbers from abroad ‘with the hope of finding an establishment proportionate to their circumstances’, but, who, ‘most of them being disappointed, increase the number of idlers and vagabonds with risks for public order’.<sup>27</sup> Public order was the main concern used to justify restricting the incoming movement of people. In the following years, for the same reasons, ‘jugglers and dangerous animal carriers’ were barred from entering the Kingdom as well as ‘wanderers, buskers, drivers of wild beasts or petty curiosities’.<sup>28</sup> In short, police provisions contributed to build a regulatory framework that dispensed different degrees of freedom of movement, so that some classes, the poor in particular, were subject to considerable mobility limitations. Freedom of movement was not for all, or not for all in the same measure.

This point is also evident if we turn to another securitisation concern, the political enemy. In 1823, shortly after the Neapolitan uprising of 1820, which was part of the wider liberal and constitutional revolution spreading in the Mediterranean area, passports were again employed by the state as a means of security. The uprising, led by the liberal movement, had forced King Ferdinand I to grant a constitution and allow the election of a parliament. However, the constitutional experiment had quickly ended with the repression at the hands of the Austrian troops, who rushed to support the Bourbon king. However, in response to the continuing threat of unrest, in April 1823 the Minister for the General Police forwarded to the Royal Minister in Rome, the Marquis of Fuscaldo, the request to issue passports for Naples from the Papal State worded so as to allow travellers to go to the Kingdom exclusively the Via Terracina, namely along the Appian Way that led from Rome to Naples. Choosing to follow the itinerary to Naples through another point of the border, along the provinces of Abruzzo, was considered ‘very suspicious’,<sup>29</sup> as it made it difficult to guarantee surveillance, given the width of the border and the multiplicity of hard-to-control passages in the region. The Marquis was therefore invited to issue passports directly with the words ‘Good for Naples on the via di Terracina’ while, if someone asked to take a different route, they would forfeit the visa. Additionally, the Marquis was further requested to draw up reports related to any such requests to be sent to Naples, ‘with observations on the conduct and personal qualities of the individuals themselves, in order to get sovereign resolutions’.<sup>30</sup> Not only was the political conduct of the aspiring guests of the Kingdom to be recorded, but also details of their social context were submitted for the king’s evaluation. A few months later, a resolution by the king in the Council of State that responded to complaints about the long wait for a visa

<sup>27</sup> ASNa, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, fs. 6215, 29 October 1823.

<sup>28</sup> Ivi, 22 March 1829.

<sup>29</sup> ASNa, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, fs. 6212, 14 April 1823.

<sup>30</sup> ASNa, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, fs. 6212, 3 June 1823.

by travellers served to ratify the discrimination represented by the social status of individuals upon entrance. Despite authorising the minister in Rome to issue valid passports to travel the Abruzzi road, the royal instructions strictly limited the issue of these cards to ‘persons of known probity or distinguished by birth who did not fall under suspicion’.<sup>31</sup> To all those who could not boast a personal acquaintance with government officials or prove noble origins, the possibility to travel along alternative itineraries to the Via Terracina was denied. In this way, a different degree of freedom of movement was practically granted to different social categories. Security spaces assumed variable contours, in light of the social status of people who were on the move. The securitisation policies thus designed a space with variable geometry along the border. But they not only do this. It was the very shaping of the border, regulated on the basis of the social status of the person to be controlled, which represented a spatial dimension of the process of identifying a threat particularly in the poor or in vagabonds. As recently stated by Philippe Le Billon, ‘space is at the same time the way security is performed and the way securitized space becomes performative in relation to security-related actors and objects’.<sup>32</sup>

### **The political enemy and the security of the state**

Political subversion represented a further threat to security that had to be taken into consideration by the state. In the light of this very object of securitisation, the privileges accorded to certain categories of subjects in relation to freedom of movement were rethought. An emblematic case is represented by the mobility of ecclesiastics.

Religious actors had a greater ability to move in space, and a cassock could still act as a pass in the 1850s. The provincial police authority of L’Aquila, a border province, communicated in May 1852 to the Police Director that, in the border municipalities of the District of Cittaducale, some friars of different orders, coming from the Papal State, crossed the border for religious purposes but were not provided with documents. ‘In order to prevent any fraud that could go unnoticed under ... that dress’,<sup>33</sup> the provincial authority reported that he had ordered the rejection of all those belonging to mendicant orders who travelled without valid documents. This report shows that, at least until this point, the undocumented movement of members of the clergy had been tolerated out of deference to their status. It is undeniable that until the 1850s there persisted in southern Italy a profound legacy of ‘ecclesiastical citizenship’, as identified by Marco Meriggi in the context of the Kingdom of Naples in the 18th as

<sup>31</sup> ASNa, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, fs. 6212, 9 December 1823.

<sup>32</sup> Le Billon (2015: 66).

<sup>33</sup> ASN, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, fs. 6214, 22 May 1852.

well as in the early 19th century, which allowed the religious to move around, relying on their dress to document their status.<sup>34</sup> Along with a progressive secularising trend in terms of identification aimed at subjecting clergymen to norms valid for lay subjects, the political threat tended to be perceived more strongly in the aftermath of 1848–9, just as in previous politically turbulent conjunctures, such as the start of the Restoration or the years following the 1820–1 revolution. Both on the Sicilian isle and in the continental part of the Kingdom were protagonists of the 1848 revolution in Italy, forcing King Ferdinand II, as had happened to his grandfather, to grant a constitution. On this occasion, however, a similar fate had befallen the nearby Papal States, where in 1849, following revolution, a republic had been established and Pope Pius IX had been forced to take refuge in Gaeta, a site within the Bourbon kingdom.

In particular, the post-1848–9 period marked a turning point in control for political purposes and, therefore, in practices in defence of state security.<sup>35</sup> For instance, the closure of the Kingdom's borders to liberals and democrats as political enemies was swiftly deployed. Thus, when the Roman Republic ended in July 1849, fearing that several fleeing revolutionaries could seek asylum in the neighbouring Kingdom, specific police provisions were issued aimed at prohibiting entry into the Neapolitan domains 'to all those who have taken service in the fallen revolutionary government in Rome, both by carrying weapons and by any other way in which he has worked for it'.<sup>36</sup> Passports for Naples were thus endorsed only to those who in Rome presented a certificate issued by the local Police Prefecture where it was made clear that the individual in question 'did not belong to any political circle and during the past republican regime [had] not taken part in the last war'.<sup>37</sup>

The revolutionaries of the Roman Republic were not the only political enemies to which the Neapolitan kingdom closed its borders. Throughout the 1850s, the surveillance threshold was very high for foreigners entering the Kingdom. Moreover, a sort of inner border was created with Sicily. Following the surrender of Palermo in May 1849 and the fall of the constitutional government in Sicily that had been established as a result of the uprisings that occurred on the island in the first months of the previous year, in July 1849 royal representatives abroad were prohibited from issuing passports to Sicilians to enter the Neapolitan provinces. Neapolitans themselves who intended to return to their homeland were also subjected to an extremely rigid and distinctly political control: at the request for a passport to return to Neapolitan territory, consuls abroad were required to inform the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who asked the police for a certificate of political reliability.<sup>38</sup> Although in this way the 'political'

<sup>34</sup> Meriggi (2007).

<sup>35</sup> Liang (1992); Deflem (2002); Di Fiore & Lucrezio Monticelli (2017).

<sup>36</sup> ASN, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, fs. 6214, 18 July 1849.

<sup>37</sup> Ivi, October 1849.

<sup>38</sup> Di Fiore (2013).

boundary for Bourbon subjects was displaced to the consular network abroad, attention still remained high on the physical boundary of the Kingdom, where lists of foreigners who were forbidden to enter the Kingdom, because they had been involved in the revolutionary events of various Italian and European states, were maintained and monitored as they had been since the 1830s and 1840s.

Nevertheless, despite this focus, security was not the only factor in managing the border space. Security issues were complex to handle in the light of a border which, as in many borderlands, was also a contact zone. The trans-state border region represented an integrated economic system and was perceived as such by the border population, having had a good level of structuring and consolidation from a centuries-old tradition. The Roman Campagna in the Papal States was a vast, sparsely populated area, where the huge latifundia relied chiefly on seasonal labour for cultivating and harvesting wheat and for grazing livestock. A great flow of workers from the Abruzzi mountains or the Terra di Lavoro countryside, in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, had travelled along seasonal migratory routes to work in these sites throughout the whole of the modern period. This was the result of a complementary economy having fostered and consolidated interdependency between two portions of territory located within two different states and regarded throughout the modern period as a single 'transhumance area'. However, during the French domination this has changed, and seasonal workers had become obliged to hold a specific travel document—a passport—to circulate within this physical space that had hitherto been experienced as unitary. In turn, this cross-state territorial entity found itself up against the Napoleonic administrative organisation, which placed greater emphasis on the state border's power to divide than on its capacity to connect.

On a more strictly material level, the obligation to hold travel documents represented a significant problem for all those who had to cross over the border for work-related needs, given that the procedure entailed applying to the papal representative resident in Naples for a visa. This meant that the labourers of the border provinces had to undertake an arduous journey to the capital which, in many cases, was longer than the journey that would have brought them to their destination across the border. Agricultural workers, in particular, were quick to inform the authorities of the difficulties caused by the new regulations regarding documents. These objections were accepted and codified at a legislative level in the form of a law promulgated in 1821 and based on agreements with the papal government.<sup>39</sup> The law absolved the shepherds and day labourers of the Neapolitan provinces bordering the Papal States from the obligation to hold a passport in order to travel abroad, granting said individuals the right to cross the border with a less 'formal'

<sup>39</sup> *Regolamento sulle così dette carte di sicurezza, di permanenza, di passo e su de' passaporti, sanzionato da S. M. pe' suoi Reali dominii al di qua del Faro*, 30 November 1821 (Petitti 1852: 237–9).

document, in other words a simple pass card. This was the same document used for internal mobility and issued by the mayor of local municipalities free of charge and was valid for a period of one year (and not just for one journey). Thus, the card holder was exempt from the preliminary police check required for the issuing of a passport.

This represented a significant exception, one that increased the porosity of a state border which, otherwise, was in the process of being strengthened, as we have seen, for political reasons. Nevertheless, state institutions regarded cross-border mobility needs as a priority and hence created, in this instance, a special area along the border.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, up to the end of the Kingdom, a series of administrative circulars and ad hoc regulations were issued to foster a gradual extension of movement-related concessions granted to various categories of labourers leading a cross-border existence. In this way, institutions recognised and helped to structure the character of a connected trans-state region. The privileges for the inhabitants of the border and for peasants and shepherds were maintained even during the most turbulent political moment, despite the probability that the feared revolutionaries were concealed under their shepherd's costume. Infiltration of bandits into the ranks of shepherds was anything but rare, as they were also attracted by the privileges granted to the shepherds, namely the right to bear weapons. In these cases, people who were the object of security measures could cross the border not without documents or by trying to escape police control, but by showing the very official documents provided by the state, taking advantage of the interstices left open in the security spaces.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, by intertwining the suggestions of the spatial turn with the border studies approach, the border can be considered as the result of a socio-political construction, and we can see how security issues contributed to shaping its space. Looking at the border through the lens of security allows two types of security to emerge with respect to those being defended: a state security, defending the throne against subversives, and a collective security, defending the population through public order from what were considered dangerous classes.

Nonetheless, despite the tendency to tighten the border in the light of security needs by regulating freedom of movement in a different way for different social groups, multiple cracks were left open in the border security space until Italian unification, in order to meet other social and economic dynamics than security. The security net

<sup>40</sup> Di Fiore & Rolla (2018).

narrowed and expanded on the basis of different needs, delineating a border space with a changing profile. Not infrequently, social actors insinuated themselves into the folds of these variable geometries, exploiting them to evade border security. Nonetheless, if security issues contributed to shaping the border space, the latter offered a spatial representation of narratives and practices of securitisation. Borrowing again the words of Le Billon, ‘space is thus itself a political object constituted by, and constitutive of, security discourses and praxis’.<sup>41</sup> By keeping away vagabonds, on the one hand, and political enemies, on the other, preventing them from entering the kingdom or, in the case of vagabonds, even limiting their movement outwards, the demarcation of the border materialised the line of exclusion from the social body, as well as from that of the Kingdom, of those whom the securitisation policies identified as enemies.

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<sup>41</sup> Le Billon (2015: 66).



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# Swedish reciprocal ransoms and multinational solutions to insecurity in the Mediterranean, c. 1720–1740

*Joachim Östlund*

*Abstract:* This article compares the Swedish government's legal practices to secure protection for its trade and shipping with the legal strategies for protection which circulated among sailors and consuls along the Swedish trade route to the Mediterranean in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. One major threat to Swedish commercial interests at the time were the 'Barbary corsairs', and the challenges when they captured ships and seized crews, whether Swedish sailors (many of them from Sweden's Baltic and German provinces) on foreign-flagged ships or foreign sailors on Swedish ships. Consuls and traders knew of the problems caused when sailors crossed legal borders and challenged the rules of state protection. To counter this a more international model of maritime security was tested by attempting to strengthen the presence of the state in ransoms affairs in northern Africa. This model was developed when the Swedish Levant Company was founded. The main idea was shared responsibility between nations to ransom sailors serving under foreign flags, culminating in 'reciprocal ransom agreements' in 1742. Even though reciprocal ransom agreements were short-lived, it shows two different modes to counter insecurity in the Mediterranean, one based on local customs and regional elite networks and the other on multinational agreements and the discourse of international law.

*Keywords:* Swedish Levant Company, Barbary captivity, ransom, diplomatic consul, international law.

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## Introduction

In 1661, Johan Arvidsson sent a begging letter from Algiers to the Admiralty in Sweden, describing himself as a galley slave in desperate straits and in need of help. The Admiralty forwarded the message to the Church authorities, asking whether they could organise alms for a ransom. Arvidsson was one of many Swedes at the time who made similar appeals, and a sort of ad hoc ransom infrastructure was already on hand to protect Swedish sailors. In the end, Arvidsson's case was taken up by the Lord High Admiral Carl Gustaf Wrangel, and the same year the Admiralty agreed to pay a ransom.<sup>1</sup> With increasing numbers of seized ships and crews lost to captivity in the regencies of Algiers and Tunis in northern Africa, the Board of Trade argued in 1688 that Sweden badly needed peace treaties 'so that our subjects can trade under secure conditions'. That year alms were collected across Sweden for the ransoming of captives.<sup>2</sup>

The new Swedish presence in the Mediterranean in the 17th century was driven by the need for cheap salt for preserving food for the winter, and the hunt for markets for Swedish staple commodities, especially iron and timber.<sup>3</sup> The authorities knew of the dangers in the Mediterranean, especially of the raids on shipping by 'Barbary corsairs', and by mid-century the letters from captured Swedes in Algiers, telling of enslavement and suffering.<sup>4</sup> However, attempts to negotiate peace with the most powerful Ottoman regency, Algiers, failed. In light of the threat, Swedish merchants turned to Amsterdam for insurance, but financial security, welcome as it was, did not diminish the threat to their ships and sailors.<sup>5</sup> In the 1690s, increasing numbers of Swedish merchants traded with the Mediterranean, so in 1693 the first Swedish consul was appointed in Lisbon and then in Cadiz in 1694.<sup>6</sup> In 1729, a trade and peace treaty was finally concluded with Algiers, followed by similar treaties with Tunis in 1736, Tripoli in 1741 and finally Morocco in 1763.<sup>7</sup>

Between Arvidsson's plea for help in 1661 and Sweden's peace treaty with Morocco in 1763 there was a century of strategies designed to protect Swedish ships and sailors in the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean was a region where competing powers struggled to control irregular and undefined borders. Empires, states, trading companies

<sup>1</sup> Ekman (1962: 70).

<sup>2</sup> Riksarkivet (Swedish National Archives), Stockholm (RA), Skrivelse från Kommerskollegium till K.M.t, 25 Apr. 1668.

<sup>3</sup> Olán (1921); Ekegård (1924); Müller (2004); Östlund (2010; 2014). See also Veluwenkamp & Scheltjens (2018).

<sup>4</sup> RA Turcica Diplomatica, Bihang Algerica, vol. 15, 1662.

<sup>5</sup> Söderberg (1935: 140).

<sup>6</sup> Müller (2004: 55).

<sup>7</sup> Almquist (1912); Müller (2004: 142, 232); Högborg (1969, 294–7).

and private interests (including pirates) laid claim to stretches of territory—often narrow coastal strips—and enclaves of various sizes. With the merchants, sailors and captives went their various legal systems and political jurisdictions, travelling with them across boundaries, and leading to impressively complex clashes of legal culture. Sweden, for example, faced the very specific problem of protecting its subjects from its Baltic and German dominions, which included many who sailed under the flags of Hamburg or the Dutch Republic.

There was a long tradition of slavery in the Mediterranean region. Ottoman ideas and practices had their antecedents in both Islamic history and the Christian Byzantine Empire, and before that in ancient Greece, Rome and the Near East.<sup>8</sup> Both Muslims and Christians in the Mediterranean were vulnerable to capture and various forms of unfreedom in the early modern era.<sup>9</sup> For captives in North Africa, slavery encompassed a variety of experiences, meanings and functions. Some slaves did menial labour or were attached to households, while others did skilled work. Between the mid 17th century and the late 18th century the total number of Swedish captives in North Africa was somewhere between 500 and 1,000, and the price for ransoms ranged from 500 to 1,500 Swedish riksdaler depending on the captive's social status, age and skills.<sup>10</sup>

This article will investigate where legal praxis as defined by states intersected with the legal strategies as practised by sailors and consuls in the Mediterranean in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. As Wolfgang Kaiser and Guillaume Calafat have argued, ransoms and captive exchanges in the early modern Mediterranean had considerable military, political and economic ramifications.<sup>11</sup> Ransoming changed over time according to power relations in the Mediterranean. A general shift that many scholars agree on was that while high-ranking captives were prioritised by states in the 17th century, the 18th century saw greater protection for ordinary sailors.<sup>12</sup> However, when comparing countries such as Sweden to the likes of Italy, Spain or France, which lost far more of their citizens to Barbary captivity, it is evident that their strategies and possibilities of ransoming differed. By examining how ransoming changed over time, it is possible to uncover related changes in Sweden's conception of security, and especially the extent to which it revolved around citizenship. The necessity for Sweden to import salt from southern Europe to secure food supplies for

<sup>8</sup> See for example, [Sobers-Khan \(2020\)](#); [Zilfi \(2010\)](#); [Toledano \(1998\)](#).

<sup>9</sup> Research on Barbary captivity has become a vibrant field with numerous titles, for example: [Friedman \(1983\)](#); [Bono \(1993\)](#); [Gozalo \(2000\)](#); [Colley \(2002\)](#); [Torres \(2004\)](#); [Matar \(2005\)](#); [Weiss \(2011\)](#); [Ressel \(2012\)](#); [Östlund \(2014\)](#).

<sup>10</sup> [Östlund \(2014: 94–9\)](#).

<sup>11</sup> [Kaiser & Calafat \(2014: 125\)](#).

<sup>12</sup> [Weiss \(2011\)](#); [Matar \(2005\)](#); [Colley \(2002\)](#); [Östlund \(2014\)](#).

winter meant its trade in the Mediterranean was important, and therefore even more vulnerable to war, interruption or sailors' fear or unwillingness to join the merchant fleet. Sweden needed to secure sufficient numbers of experienced sailors against the day the next war broke out, and long-distance trade guaranteed that. The process of securing Sweden's position, in the Mediterranean context, must therefore be understood in multiple perspectives, as it spanned salt imports, maritime competence and the legitimacy of the long-distance trade. For fear of captivity and Barbary slavery was a threat to this important and expanding state enterprise.

The Swedish presence in the Mediterranean and the policy of ransoming of its own subjects from Barbary captivity have interested scholars in recent years.<sup>13</sup> One of the most discussed cases was when the Swedish authorities challenged the Hamburg *Sklavenkasse* (lit. slave fund, a ransom insurance scheme) in 1732, demanding they pay to ransom Swedish sailors taken captive in North Africa while serving on ships from Hamburg. The conflict ground on from 1732 to 1747. When Ernst Baasch later wrote about it in 1897, he claimed the Swedish government was the first in Europe to challenge a *Sklavenkasse*.<sup>14</sup> In recent years, Magnus Ressel and the author have revisited the case to consider the protection of the individual, but with slightly different interpretations of the factors behind the change.<sup>15</sup> Other examples have not been studied in much detail in the literature, an example being when Sweden proposed reciprocal ransom agreements in 1742, an episode investigated here as one way of securing Sweden's position.

### Ad hoc ransoms

To understand Sweden's proposal in 1742 for a reciprocal ransom agreement, one has to look at earlier challenges to its ransom policy. In the 17th century, that had evolved as an ad hoc response to information received about enslaved subjects, whether from family members or captives seeking aid or in travellers' reports of large numbers of captives in cities such as Algiers and Tunis. The authorities expressed a variety of opinions about whom to ransom and how much to pay, making it somewhat difficult to generalise, but the majority of the captives were ordinary sailors, while there are only two known examples of burgher or gentry captives and they were in the 18th century.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Müller (2004); Östlund (2010); Östlund (2014).

<sup>14</sup> Baasch (1896: 221–4).

<sup>15</sup> Ressel (2010; 2012).

<sup>16</sup> RA, Sammansatta kollegier till Kungl. Maj:t 5 Feb. 1740; RA, Skrivelser till Kungl. Maj:t Ang. den i algeriska slaveriet varande fältskiären Hiedenreichs.



The strategy to counter the threat from corsair raids in the 17th century was similarly ad hoc. For example, in the conflict between Algiers and Britain in the late 1660s, the Swedish regency government communicated with both sides in the hopes of concluding a peace treaty with Algiers and ransoming all the Swedish captives and slaves. Even though this ended in failure, doomed by unrealistic ambitions and a lack of money, it is evident that the government operated on the principle that all Swedes should be ransomed, even the ones caught by the British while serving on 'Turkish ships' owned by the Dey of Algiers in the conflict.<sup>17</sup> Apparently, Swedes serving in the Algerian fleet were not excluded from any ransom or the right to freedom. This should be compared with the arguments made in the course of a later case in 1694, when a Swedish ransom agent recommended ransoming 'the best, the most functional, the youngest and purest Swedes' while old, injured and 'un-Swedish' bodies (referring to loyalty to the king and Church in Sweden) should not be liberated.<sup>18</sup> The agent also reported that many had been there over ten years, and most had been captured on ships from Holland, but because of their Swedish citizenship they had been left in captivity when Dutch sailors from the same crew had been ransomed.<sup>19</sup> These were indeed the ransoming practices among other European states. In the Netherlands, for example, it was explicitly decided in 1663 to ransom only Netherlanders, and not Scandinavians or Germans captured when crewing Dutch ships.<sup>20</sup>

By the early 18th century, several important steps had been taken in developing a more regular Swedish system of maritime security. The impact of European expansion in the Mediterranean was gradually felt in the Ottoman provinces, and there were conflicts between the Ottoman Empire and its Venetian, Habsburg and Russian neighbours, and between the British and the French. The behaviour of British privateers, for example, was the cause of numerous disputes between the Ottoman government and British representatives in the Levant. For centuries, maritime piracy, particularly along the coast of North Africa, had functioned as an unorganised method of collecting revenue from maritime commerce.<sup>21</sup> This system was put on a more systematic footing and came under the control of the European powers because of their stronger maritime presence in the Mediterranean. The Swedish strategy was to seek peace treaties with Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli and Morocco, and, once they were secured, to develop collaborations in trade and maritime transport with local elites. Compared to other European states, though, Sweden never tried gunboat diplomacy to 'renegotiate' its treaties and tributes.

<sup>17</sup> RA, *Diplomatica Turcica*, Bihang Algerica, vol. 15, memorial, n.d.

<sup>18</sup> RA, *Diplomatica Turcica*, Bihang Tripolitana, vol. 7, 1694.

<sup>19</sup> RA, *Diplomatica Turcica*, Bihang Tripolitana, vol. 7, 1694.

<sup>20</sup> Van Krieken (2002: 62).

<sup>21</sup> Firges et al. (2014: 59–62).

## Maritime security policies

With the end of the Great Northern War (1700–21), secure trade and a strong economy were imperative for the bankrupt Swedish state. This can be seen in its decisions about Swedish shipping in the Mediterranean. In 1724, a Swedish Convoy Office (*Konvojkommisariatet*) was founded to organise and secure convoys, to finance peace treaties and consular services in North Africa, and to ransom captured Swedes.<sup>22</sup> The question of a Swedish insurance system was also raised because many shipowners were disappointed with the convoys.<sup>23</sup> However, these problems were less pressing once peace treaties with Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli and Morocco were completed and new practices were adopted to help secure the Swedish presence in the Mediterranean.

The changes were intended to strengthen protection for trade and sailors. The 1730 instructions for the sea-passes Sweden issued for ships bound for 'Algeria' were strict, with clearly specified fines if they were not followed. If a ship that did not have a sea-pass were captured, the skipper—if he ever returned to Sweden—would be punished by a month in prison.<sup>24</sup> In 1739 a Swedish insurance company was started specifically to break the dependence on foreign insurers. In the mid-18th century, the first of several shipping offices (*sjömanshus*) was set up in Stockholm to help seamen's families.<sup>25</sup> The sea-passes, locally available insurance and the shipping offices were all factors in the Swedish policy in the Mediterranean, which had two aims to secure its shipping: to obtain the release of Swedish crew and ships; and to conclude treaties which would halt the capture of ships.

When peace treaties were concluded, the consular service followed, and captivity and ransoming were formalised with clear sets of rules. It should be noted, however, that the treaties did not automatically protect Swedes who were taken captive after the agreement. Under Article 11 of the treaty with Algiers, for example, slaves who escaped 'aboard any of the said warships' had to be returned to Algiers, and under Article 12 it was the slave owner who decided whether a slave was for sale or not. Consent was required from both parties and a relative to the slave was neither forced to ransom. In that sense, the 1729 peace treaty did nothing for Swedes captured on board non-Swedish ships.

<sup>22</sup> Kreüger (1856: 25–7).

<sup>23</sup> Olán (1921: 49–52); Ekegård (1924: 468–72).

<sup>24</sup> Sandklef (1973: 369–71); Arne (1952: 88–9).

<sup>25</sup> Stockholms Stadsarkiv, Sjömanshuset, Gratiansökningar 1749–1775 E IVa/3; *ibid.*, 1750–1756 E IVa/1.

## **Balancing vulnerabilities**

Neither peace treaties nor consuls nor insurance were enough, given the realities of shipping in the Mediterranean. The sailors who were furthering the economic interests of their country and merchant houses were in effect the victims. Many of the problems regarding their social welfare and security were not only defined by the dangers of being taken captive by Barbary corsairs, but by the harsh working conditions of the Mediterranean shipping industry. Several Swedish consuls, recognising this issue, reported how important it was to improve working conditions and security for Swedish sailors in the merchant fleet. In Tripoli, the consul Jöns Wijnberg explained that conditions forced Swedish sailors to flee Swedish service and serve under foreign flags. To rectify this, the Swedish consul in Smyrna, Andreas Rydelius, argued for government funding to support Swedish sailors in the Mediterranean who needed hospital.<sup>26</sup> Olof Rönling in Tunis explained the dilemmas of long-distance trade, both for the sailors and for their families at home, and argued for the need to take better care of Swedish sailors so they did not 'escape from their ships, to get home to their wife and children'. The reasons for these problems were also said to be the long time spent in the Mediterranean, three to four years, but also the harsh discipline and poor conditions on the ships. Rönling argued that 'other nations take better care of their sailors' than Sweden.<sup>27</sup>

Besides these difficulties, the consuls also recognised the ongoing challenges facing Swedish captives taken while serving on foreign ships, often under the Dutch or Hamburg flag. Information about them is scattered in the consular correspondence, but provides an important insight into their and all sailors' lives in the period. In 1735, for instance, Logie heard there were Swedish captives in Meknes in Morocco, who ten months later turned out to have been captured on a Dutch ship.<sup>28</sup> More information was gathered about the case when the consular secretary George Giädda in Algiers wrote to the Board of Trade on 27 May 1736 to report that four of the Swedish captives in Tétouan in Morocco had been taken captive when serving under the Dutch flag.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> RA, Konsulatet i Tripoli, vol. 5, Wijnberg; RA, Kommerskollegium, Huvudarkivet [vols. 8, 438, 467, 468] EVI aa, Skrivelser fr sv konsuler, vol. 438, Andreas Rydelius, Smyrna 19/30 Oct. 1747.

<sup>27</sup> RA, Kommerskollegium, Huvudarkivet, EVI aa, Skrivelser fr sv konsuler, vol. 8, Logie till Kommerskollegium, Algiers 8 June 1743.

<sup>28</sup> RA, Kommerskollegium, Huvudarkivet, EVI aa, Skrivelser fr sv konsuler, vol. 8, Logies skrivelse till Kommerskollegium, Algiers 13 Jan. 1735; RA, Kommerskollegium, Huvudarkivet, EVI aa, Skrivelser fr sv konsuler, vol. 8, Logies skrivelse till Kommerskollegium, Algiers 10 Sept. 1735.

<sup>29</sup> RA, Kommerskollegium, Huvudarkivet, EVI aa, Skrivelser fr sv konsuler, vol. 8, Giäddas skrivelse till Kommerskollegium, Algiers 27 May 1736.

It is possible to reconstruct events concerning some of the Swedish subjects captured while serving under a foreign flag from the correspondence between North Africa and Sweden, but other cases have left no trace in the Swedish consuls' and government officials' correspondence. The documentation left by the Dutch consul, Ludvig Hammeken, consisting of detailed information about captives in Algiers taken from a total of 66 Dutch ships in the period 1690–1726 is a case in point.<sup>30</sup> The list shows that on almost half of the ships (27), Swedes were listed as crewmembers. Swedes and Danes, with 45 individuals apiece, formed the largest groups of non-Dutch crew, meaning that approximately two Swedes served on each Dutch ship. This figure also corresponded with estimates by the historian Robert Bohn that of the foreign crews on Hamburg ships between 1700 and 1710 around 16 per cent were Swedish.<sup>31</sup> Inevitably, captured Swedes in North Africa came not only from Swedish ships. If nothing else, it shows why the protection afforded by treaties, sea-passes, insurance and other security measures was not enough.

### **Swedish sailors under foreign flags**

Parallel with the institutionalisation of Mediterranean shipping, new security strategies were tested when Swedish government officials ran up against other states' legal practices. The old security regime that applied to Swedish ships and their Swedish crews was transferred to strengthen the security of Swedish crews even when sailing under a foreign flag. Since many Swedes from the Baltic provinces served under the Hamburg flag, Swedish state representatives put pressure on the Magistrate in Hamburg, who were criticised for not ransoming Swedes taken captive while serving on Hamburg ships. Since the Convoy Office was struggling to finance the protection of Sweden's Mediterranean commerce, some in Stockholm argued that it was only reasonable to force the Hamburg Sklavenkasse to pay the ransoms.

By the end of the 16th century, the city-republic of Hamburg had developed strong trade connections with Atlantic Iberia and the Mediterranean. Hamburg was one of the most active ports in all of Europe, but was almost wholly reliant on sailors from nearby rural regions to maintain its seaborne commerce. Since Hamburg owned few warships to defend its interests, ships from the city were vulnerable to attack from Barbary corsairs. To ensure their safety, the city government became involved by

<sup>30</sup> Nationaal Archief (National Archives of the Netherlands), The Hague (NA), Staten Generaal, 1550–1796, Inv. nr. 6939, Hammekens rapport, 'Lijst en rolle van alle de Slaven von Neederlandse Natie, ofte diem et sheepen in den Staat der Verlenigde Nederlander t huys horende, tzeedert het Jaar 1690 tot 1712, en vant Jaar 1715 tot 1726 incluyt doec de Algierse Caapers genomen ende tot Algeirs obgebragt Zyn'.

<sup>31</sup> Bohn (1999: 120).

establishing the Hamburger Sklavenkasse or Slave Fund in 1624, an initiative that was copied by Lübeck in 1627. They were funded by the sailors themselves, by ship-owners, and by regular church collections. Hamburg's Sklavenkasse was wound up in 1810, Lübeck's in 1861.<sup>32</sup> Hamburg viewed Sweden and Britain, Denmark–Norway, and the Dutch Republic as its trade competitors. When Sweden concluded a peace treaty with Algiers in 1729, the merchant elites in Hamburg and Copenhagen saw how Sweden had profited by it and began their own efforts to conclude peace treaties. Denmark approached the Algerians in 1736 and succeeded in 1746.<sup>33</sup> Hamburg had unsuccessfully tried to be included in a peace with the Algerians with either the British or the Dutch, from 1661 to 1715. Later they tried using convoys for protection, but their inflexibility in negotiations with Algiers between 1741 and 1744 left them without treaty of their own.<sup>34</sup> A breakthrough was finally reached on 22 February 1751 when the Algerians accepted a peace treaty with Hamburg. The many nationalities of sailors on Hamburg ships and Hamburg's difficulties in concluding a peace treaty with Algiers are important for understanding the conflict with Sweden over the Sklavenkasse.

The Swedish attempt on the Hamburg Sklavenkasse began in 1731, following a request from the Swedish resident in Hamburg, Carl Christoph Strahlenheim, to the responsible authorities in the city. Strahlenheim had been instructed to secure the ransom of 10 or 12 enslaved Swedes left in Algiers, who had been taken captive on Hamburg ships.<sup>35</sup> The conflict unfolded in three periods: 1730–2, 1734–40 and 1742–7, and can be followed in a number of documents to the end of 1747.<sup>36</sup> The row gives a detailed insight in the arguments used by Swedish officials to convince the Hamburg Sklavenkasse to pay the Swedes' ransoms, even though the sailors had not been insured. Sweden's efforts were in vain, and the only outcome was the introduction of a new Swedish regulation that Swedes taking service under the Hamburg flag could not expect Sweden's protection if they did not insure themselves with the Sklavenkasse.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Ressel (2010: 129–32; 2011: 3).

<sup>33</sup> For the negotiations, see Wandel (1919: 5–12); Andersen (2000: 37–54).

<sup>34</sup> Baasch (1896: 13–18); Ressel (2012: 258–75, 496–506).

<sup>35</sup> Staatsarchiv Hamburg (Hamburg State Archives), Hamburg (StAHH), 111-1 Senat C1. VII Lit. Ca Nr.2 Vol.3 Fasc.5 a, Document 1.

<sup>36</sup> RA, Topografiska registret, Medelhavet ang. tryggandet av sjöfarten i Medelhavet samt ang. den s.k. slavkassan i Hamburg m.m.; RA, Kanslikollegium till Kungl. Majt, vol. 23, 30 Jan. 1735; RA, Sammansatta kollegier till Kongl Majt, vol. 13, ang. svenska slavars utlösande i A., 12 Apr. 1738; RA, Sammansatta kollegier, vol. 14, ang. den i algeriska slaveriet varande fältskiären Hiedenreichs, 5 Feb. 1740; RA, Sammansatta kollegier, vol. 15., ang. säkerhet för svenska sjöfaranden mot algeriska kryssare, 6 Sept. 1743; RA, Kanslikollegium, vol. 37, ang. några svenska slavars i A. utlösande genom kollekter, 6 Dec. 1746.

<sup>37</sup> Publication, *Angående The Swenske Siömäns utlösen* 1748.

There was an interesting shift in tone on the discursive level, as Sweden switched from moral to judicial concepts to argue that the Sklavenkasse was responsible for foreign sailors. For instance, when the Swedish agent Strahlenheim argued in 1732 that ransoming was a question of reciprocity according to the rules of international law ('ein reciprocirliches Völcker Recht'), it introduced a new perspective on the protection of sailors, and recognised the realities of sailors' working conditions and movements across state borders in the Mediterranean.<sup>38</sup> 'Völcker Recht' literally means 'people's right', a concept referring to contemporary discourse on natural law and international law. At this date the term was widely discussed among jurists, and prompted new questions about the relationship between the state and the individual. The discussion of the concept was characterised by openness and sprawl rather than doctrinal thinking.<sup>39</sup> When Strahlenheim set out to make responsibility for the ransom of Swedish captives a point of international law, he was using it in the broadest current sense of the term. Rather than explain the sailors' ransom in terms of its morality, it was formulated as a question of relations between states.

Strahlenheim's arguments had no effect on the Magistrate in Hamburg. And, simultaneously, the Swedish authorities voiced their suspicions of their own consuls in another drawn-out ransom discussed in May 1739, as reported to the King in Council. According to the report the consuls were not effective as negotiators, and instead it was proposed that several Stockholm merchants take over arranging the ransom. The reason given for choosing private individuals was that they demanded less than the professional ransom agents or consuls charged for such services:

*When the ransom is arranged through private hands, then the same can be achieved for a smaller sum than when countries' agents or consuls arrange the same, and, moreover, Consul Logie is now so far away that he cannot take care of arrangements.*<sup>40</sup>

The question was raised whether ransoms were more expensive when arranged through 'ministers, agents, consuls, or other public persons' than by 'private actions always able to obtain better prices', and the report concluded with the hope the King in Council would allow the ransom fund reserve at the Convoy Office's disposal to be used to ransom the men, and that cheaper and faster ways be found that would spare the victims unnecessary suffering.

<sup>38</sup> StAHH, 111-1 Senat Cl.VII Lit.C a Nr.2 Vol.3 Fasc.5 a. Pro Memoria [8].

<sup>39</sup> Grotke (2008: 156).

<sup>40</sup> RA, Skrivelser till Kungl. Maj:t, vol. 14, Sammansatta kollegier till Kungl. Maj:t., Ang. 2ne i Tangervarande svenska fångars utlösen, 2 May 1739.



### **A new ransom regime**

Until the beginning of the 18th century, then, the protection of trade and the ransoming of Swedish subjects operated within a national framework: the protection of individuals was the business of the king with the administrative support of the Church. Often, the payment of ransoms depended on the initiative of the captives, who wrote to ask for help, hoping for the goodwill of relatives, county governors, the Church, the Admiralty, the King in Council or the Board of Trade.<sup>41</sup> The government's dispute with the Hamburg Sklavenkasse and growing distrust of the economic rationale of its own consuls in North Africa signalled a break in this approach. The Royal Declaration of 19 November 1742, which announced reciprocal ransom agreements, marked a mature preventive strategy to protect sailors serving in the Swedish merchant fleet by making their security a multinational concern—a different approach to the traditional captive exchange in the Mediterranean between the regencies in North Africa and European countries such as France, Italy and Spain.<sup>42</sup> Captive exchange was never an option for Sweden, since it refused to countenance Swedish raids on Muslim ships.

Instead, as we can see in the initial correspondence about the reciprocal ransom agreement centred on the Swedish consulate in Smyrna, and especially its main advocate, consul Henrik Hackson, the shift in policy went hand in hand with the newly established Svenska Levantiska Compagniet (Levant Company). Like many European seafaring nations, Sweden wanted a trading company which would strengthen its position in the eastern Mediterranean. The result was the founding of Levantiska Compagniet in Stockholm in February 1738. Its charter assigned the business of representing Sweden's interests to the newly appointed Swedish consul in Smyrna, Henrik Hackson. The company had few successes, however, and after ten years its charter was renewed and its privileges were made even more exclusive, which did not help matters. After 1752 the company's trading operations effectively ceased. Yet while the trading company failed, trade between ports in the Mediterranean became profitable, and especially Swedish cargo operations.

More important, in terms of Sweden's security concerns, the Levantiska Compagniet charter of 1738 was backed up by further declarations of the intent to strengthen trade in the Mediterranean. In a four-page report, dated 14 March 1743, written by consul Hackson in Smyrna for the Board of Trade, he referred to a resolution issued by the King in Council regarding the safety of Swedish sailors in the Mediterranean. The resolution ordered that if Barbary corsairs captured a Swedish ship and enslaved the crew, all foreign seamen aboard would be treated as Swedish nationals and the Swedish government would pay their ransom. However, this offer

<sup>41</sup> Östlund (2014).

<sup>42</sup> Weiss (2011: 82).

would only be acted on if Swedish seamen were guaranteed the same rights as foreign seamen under a reciprocal ransom agreement:

*All seafarers and sailors of foreign nations serving on Swedish ships with the bad luck to be seized and made slaves by corsairs from the Barbary coast, should receive the same mercy as Swedish nationals.*<sup>43</sup>

In his report to the Board of Trade, Hackson explained that he had informed the European consular community in Smyrna about the royal declaration of reciprocal ransoms. The letter also reported that similar reciprocal ransoms had been practised when Englishmen, serving on a Swedish ship captured and taken to Tangiers, were ransomed by the Swedish state.<sup>44</sup> The ship had been seized in 1735, and the crew, including three Englishmen, were ransomed in 1742.<sup>45</sup> From the sources it seems only Hackson described it as an example of reciprocal ransom.

The next known example was a Danish ship seized by Algiers in 1743 where a Swedish sailor was among the captives: one Jöns Arfwidson Halin, a 25-year-old from Halmstad on the west coast of Sweden. When Swedish officials referred to the case in 1743 they said that ‘reciprocal praxis’ had resolved the ransom.<sup>46</sup> Danish documents confirm that the Danish government financed the release of Jöns Arfwidson Halin. In 1744, the Swedish minister to the Danish court was ordered by the Swedish king to ask the Danish council to agree that if all foreigners taken in captivity in North Africa while serving on Swedish ships were ransomed ‘there should be no difference between Swedes and others, if other nations show the same reciprocity towards those of Swedish Nation serving the Danes’.<sup>47</sup> This suggestion was accepted, and in January 1744, after further correspondence, the Danish government agreed to pay the ransom for the Swede.<sup>48</sup> The fruitful negotiations were a sign of a changing dynamic in Sweden’s practices to secure its sailors, and equally of the viability of international consensus in providing security in an ill-defined legal space like the Mediterranean.

<sup>43</sup> RA, Kommerskollegium, Huvudarkivet, Konsulatet i Smyrna, EVI aa, Skrivelser fr sv konsuler, vol. 438, Hackson till kommerskollegiet, 14 Mar. 1743.

<sup>44</sup> RA, Kommerskollegium, Huvudarkivet, Konsulatet i Smyrna, EVI aa, Skrivelser fr sv konsuler, vol. 438, Hackson till kommerskollegiet 14 Mar. 1743.

<sup>45</sup> RA, Diplomata Turcica, Bihang maroccana, vol. 4, Brev från Johan Malmberg, Tangiers 26 May 1736; RA, Kommerskollegium, Skrivelser från Konsuler Vol EVIaa vol. 224; RA, Kommerskollegium, Skrivelser från Konsuler Vol EVIaa vol. 224, Lissabon.

<sup>46</sup> RA, Sammansatta kollegier, vol. 15, Ang. säkerhet för svenska sjöfarande mot algeriska kryssare, 6 Sept. 1743.

<sup>47</sup> Landsarkivet for Sjælland, Lolland-Falster og Bornholm (Regional Archives of Sjælland, Lolland-Falster and Bornholm), Copenhagen (LA Sjælland), EA-001, Sjaellands Stift, 1715–1758 Kopibog for udgaade breve vedr. slavekassen, Bind 1734–1745, fols. 212–214.

<sup>48</sup> LA Sjælland, EA-001 Sjaellands Stift, 1715–1758 Kopibog for udgaade breve vedr. slavekassen, Bind 1734–1745. fols. 235–9.

## The end of the reciprocal ransom experiment

However, despite this positive outcome, not all commentators were convinced. At around the time Jöns Arfwidson Halin's release was secured there was also criticism of reciprocal ransom agreements. For instance, the Swedish consul in Tunis, Rönling, commented on the question in a letter to the Swedish Board of Trade on 10 June 1743 when he outlined the case of three English sailors ransomed by the Swedish government after a Swedish ship had been taken by corsairs from Tangiers. He questioned the viability of reciprocal ransoms, and their novelty, when he reported his discussion with the other consuls in Tunis: the French consul had said France had always done that, and 'each and everyone taken while serving the French flag had been released, no matter what nation they belonged to'. That was also the case when a large number of captive sailors of Italian origin who served under the French flag were ransomed in Algiers, and the principle was the same for the Dutch Republic, according to the Dutch consul: the Netherlands ransomed its foreign crew, albeit after Dutch nationals. The English had also acted like that for a long time, according to Rönling, who explained that when foreign sailors were captured under the English flag they were 'perceived as nationals'.<sup>49</sup> One can conclude from Rönling's letter to the Board of Trade that he did not support reciprocal ransom agreements, if only from his references to existing practices among the English, Dutch and the French consuls who 'have always ransomed captive foreigners under their national flag'. However, as we have seen, Rönling was exaggerating or even lying.

The Swedish authorities were aware of the challenges for the consuls since the end of the 17th century, especially in Algiers. An obvious example of this was the information gathered by the Dutch consul in Algiers, Ludolf Hammeken. He reported 66 captured Dutch ships between 1690 and 1726, with Swedish crew on 27 ships totalling 42 men, of whom 13 were public slaves (*Deylick slaven*) owned by the Algerian state or the Dey and 29 were private slaves (*Particulier slaven*) serving in private households.<sup>50</sup> None of this information ever reached Sweden, and there is no indication of whether the Swedish crew from Dutch ships were ransomed or not.

We can only guess why Rönling did not support reciprocal arrangements. Probably all the consuls were aware of the problem, and it is even possible to believe the Swedish proposal was perceived as a threat to the Mediterranean's ransom economy. Consuls were state representatives, but also had loyalties towards local elites and commercial communities with interests in the lucrative ransom economy. If preventive ransom treaties were agreed between states, the consuls' control of the ransom economy would be undermined.<sup>51</sup> In 1739, prompted by an attempted ransom in Morocco, the Board of

<sup>49</sup> RA, Kommerskollegium, Huvudarkivet, EVI aa, Skrivelser fr sv konsuler, vol. 468, Rönlings skrivelse till kommerskollegiet, Tunis 10 June 1743.

<sup>50</sup> Östlund (2014: 94–9).

Trade and the Royal Chancery (*Kanslikollegium*) wrote separately to complain to the king about the consuls' interests in the ransom economy. Both letters suggested that 'private traders' should take over from 'agents, consuls or other official individuals' in negotiating ransoms.<sup>52</sup> This was considered a serious option, both to lower costs and, in the specific Moroccan case, to speed things up. The consuls countered that they were the experts and knew all about the changing prices of captives in the ransom economy. When the Swedish consul in Algiers, George Logie, informed the Magistrate in Hamburg of his competence as a negotiator, he wrote that 'private slaves' had been cheaper, while carpenters were often valued at the same price as a navigating officer. The prices changed—sometimes the ransoms were half the normal price and sometimes more—but one thing was clear, said Logie: he always negotiated with great care, as if 'the Money was to come out of my own Pocket'.<sup>53</sup> Logie was active in arranging ransoms for several European countries, by his account because of his personal contacts with the Dey of Algiers: 'I am entirely in favour with this Dey and I am Sure I can redeem the Slaves from him cheaper than can any other'.<sup>54</sup> Ransoms were big business, as was obvious when Logie went on to ask the Magistrate in Hamburg if they were to recommend any contacts to him who could aid help him ransom a number of Danish captives, it would save them 'some thousands of Dollars'.<sup>55</sup> As this suggests, arranging ransoms was a lucrative way to earn money. It was also true for the Swedish consul in Tunis, Olof Rönling, who over the years had a hand in the ransom of at least 50 Italians.<sup>56</sup> Normally, consuls acting as middlemen could claim 10 per cent or more of the ransom.<sup>57</sup>

In this, everyone seems to have differentiated between the consular communities in North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean. In Smyrna, the Swedish consul Hackson reported confidently when promoting the reciprocal ransom agreement, while the view was rather different for those at the centre of the ransom economy in North Africa. While no objections were reported from the European consular community in Smyrna, in Tunis the European consuls instead argued there was no practical need for agreements. Ransom agreements were not mentioned in their correspondence, whether by the consuls themselves or the authorities in Sweden. And yet there were continuing reports of Swedish sailors taken captive while serving under a foreign flag.

<sup>51</sup> RA, *Diplomatica Turcica*, *Bihang Algerica*, vol. 4, *Svenska konsulers skrivelser*, George Logie, 24 Apr. 1754.

<sup>52</sup> RA, *Skrivelser till Kungl. Maj:t*, vol. 14, *Sammanstatta kollegier till Kungl. Maj:t*, Ang. 2ne i Tanger varande svenska fångars utlösen, 2 May 1739; RA, *Skrivelser till Kungl. Maj:t* vol. 14, *Sammanstatta kollegier till Kungl. Maj:t*, Ang. utlösen av styrman Malmberg m.fl. från slaveriet i Tanger, 19 July 1739.

<sup>53</sup> StAHH, 111-1 Senat Cl. VII Lit. Ca Nr.2 Vol.3 Fasc.5 b, Document 5.1, SH.

<sup>54</sup> StAHH, 111-1 Senat Cl. VII Lit. Ca Nr.2 Vol.3 Fasc.5 b, Document 5.1, SH.

<sup>55</sup> StAHH, 111-1 Senat Cl. VII Lit. Ca Nr.2 Vol.3 Fasc.5 b, Document 5.1, SH.

<sup>56</sup> RA, *Konsulatarkivet i Tunis*, vol. 4, *Kanslibok 1738*, 8 Mar. 1762.

<sup>57</sup> Östlund (2014: 224).

As all these episodes demonstrate, Sweden's strategies to protect its commerce in the Mediterranean and the lives of Swedish sailors who made it possible were shaped not only by the legal and social contexts of Swedish long-distance trade, but also by the political and cultural conditions in the Mediterranean. In this way, intra-European commercial competition, the threat from corsairs and the movement of sailors across national borders all contributed to the complex environment, and to the contestation of the Swedish strategy among those individuals, the consuls, who were meant to represent it.

## Conclusions

The Swedish maritime presence in the Mediterranean was a source of insecurity for Swedish sailors. From the mid-17th century to the mid-18th century, ransoming was a complicated and contested business, based on different networks and geographies, and developed in parallel. One system of security developed in the highly international environment in North Africa; another, wedded to the idea of the sovereign state, developed in Europe. Consuls and traders knew of the challenges caused by the captivity of sailors.

Consuls were state representatives, but also often powerful actors in their own right in the local sphere. Ransoming could be made into a lucrative business by the often underpaid consuls who served their country far from home. The Royal Declaration of 19 November 1742, proposing reciprocal ransom agreements, came simultaneously with the founding of the Swedish Levant Company and against the background of the failure to change the rules for insuring Swedish crew on Hamburg ships. Both initiatives gave the Swedish government a greater presence in the Mediterranean world, creating a conflict between local customs and new multinational concepts of security. Consuls, firmly attached on the local level in North Africa, defended their own interests and tried to keep states out of the existing ransom culture. The two security cultures, one based on local communities and the other on multinational agreements, had not only different resources and capacities to protect sailors in Barbary captivity, but also concepts of security. This was evident when the Swedish agent Stralenheim in 1732 argued that ransoms should follow the rules of international law, 'ein reciprocirliches Völcker Recht'.

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# Communities beyond borders: internal boundaries and circulations in the 18th century

Nicoletta Rolla

*Abstract:* To understand the political, social and economic conditions which made possible a certain freedom of movement in early modern Europe, it is necessary to abandon the idea of a state sovereignty which expressed itself through the control of boundaries and its territory, which is a relatively recent notion in Western legal culture. Thus, in early modern Europe external borders were porous, and surveillance systems were organised in a plurality of jurisdictions and responded to multiple logics and interests. This article focuses on Turin, the capital of the States of Savoy, where boundaries were defined by the control of urban institutions responsible for the police of the city, as the Vicariate. To observe the process of defining these frontiers, I have chosen to use an emic perspective, attentive to the point of view of the actors. This contribution is interested in the strategies adopted by a group of people subject to high mobility—construction workers—when faced with internal borders. This approach allows us to consider the ‘relational’ substance of the border, its multiple and changing nature.

*Keywords:* multi-local communities, internal boundaries, trade brotherhoods, professional circulations, construction workers.

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## Introduction

Boundary, in all its meanings, represents a complex object of study, as shown by the amount of works that have been devoted to it. The related notion of frontier has also opened up passionate debates, and it is significant that Daniel Nordman devotes a large part of his famous book to analysing the different terms used in French to designate a multiple reality up to the end of the early modern era.<sup>1</sup> In particular, boundary as a demarcation line between two states, two sovereignties and two jurisdictions is the result of a long and complex process. In early modern Europe, the Peace of Westphalia (1648) is traditionally referred to as the beginning of an international system in which states recognise that they are mutually entitled to exercise authority and jurisdiction in their territories. However, the idea of a state sovereignty expressed through control of its boundaries and its territory was still far from being fully agreed by Western legal culture, which was established only in the 19th century.<sup>2</sup> Concretely, sovereignty was organised for a long time within a plurality of jurisdictions with which the central power shared administration and control of the territory. Thus, for example, the very definition of borders involves a plurality of institutional and social actors—village communities, landowners, local institutions—who constantly incite their redefinitions. Some studies have recently shown that boundaries, far from being defined exclusively by governments at the time of international treaties, are the product of social practices.<sup>3</sup> In the middle of the 19th century, for example, certain disputes over boundaries were still resolved on the basis of the rights of land use.<sup>4</sup>

For this reason, in early modern Europe, external borders were often porous and surveillance systems were organised as part of a plurality of jurisdictions and responded to multiple logics and interests.<sup>5</sup> It is no coincidence that Daniel Roche's monumental book on the circulation of people in early modern Europe devotes only a few pages to borders.<sup>6</sup> Control, in fact, was exercised more over the movement of people and goods than over territories. Historiography has shown that controls were carried out along routes of communication, in strategic and commercial places, and inside cities,<sup>7</sup> defining a multitude of internal borders, according to the idea that boundaries are located where control materialises.<sup>8</sup> In this perspective, the institutions

<sup>1</sup> Nordman (1998).

<sup>2</sup> Itzcovich (2013).

<sup>3</sup> Stopani (2008); Herzog (2015).

<sup>4</sup> Di Fiore (2013); Di Fiore & Meriggi (2013); Beltrametti (2016).

<sup>5</sup> Moatti (2004).

<sup>6</sup> Roche (2003: 363–71).

<sup>7</sup> Lefèvre (2004).

<sup>8</sup> Le Courant (2010).

that exercised their authority over the routes of communication provide a useful case for analysing border making.<sup>9</sup> Or rather, if we want to reverse the terms of the reasoning, it is mobility itself that in some way contributes to defining these jurisdictions and these internal boundaries.<sup>10</sup> The rights of passage and the access to towns were continuously negotiated with local authorities and were the subject of special agreements, conventions and privileges: mobility thus sparked the shaping and defining of jurisdictions.

This article contributes to debates regarding the definition of borders, and in particular internal borders, from the point of view of actors engaging with them. What strategies do actors adopt when confronted by borders? And how are their actions able to negotiate conditions of access, exclusion and inclusion? To answer this question, in this article I examine a group of people characterised by their high mobility: workers of the building sector. More specifically, this article analyses professional migrations from Alpine villages in the 18th century. In the building sector, geographical mobility was an inherent condition of the professional careers of construction workers. Since the early modern period, their spatial circulations quickly acquired a European and—from the middle of the 19th century onwards—also a global dimension. Their vicissitudes therefore allow me to observe the extent and dynamics of their mobility and to probe their ability to build their professional itineraries by forging ties across European borders. This article is focused on the case of Piedmont, which allows me to observe the process of defining internal borders and the way in which these can be negotiated at different levels.

### **Labour migration of artists of the Lakes: a European diaspora**

The migrations of architects, entrepreneurs and masters (masons, carpenters, sculptors, plasterers, stonecutters, etc.) from Alpine villages towards the principal European towns began in the medieval period and became more constant during the 17th and 18th centuries.<sup>11</sup> Alpine villages were the epicentre of a far-reaching movement that crossed all of Europe, from Spain to Russia.<sup>12</sup> These were seasonal or temporary movements, the duration of which varied from a few months to several years. Here, this article focuses more precisely on the so-called ‘lakes region’ (Lago Maggiore and the lakes of Como, Lugano, Varese) that lies between the Duchy of Milan and Switzerland, and on that surrounding the city of Biella, the *biellese* (the Elvo, Mosso

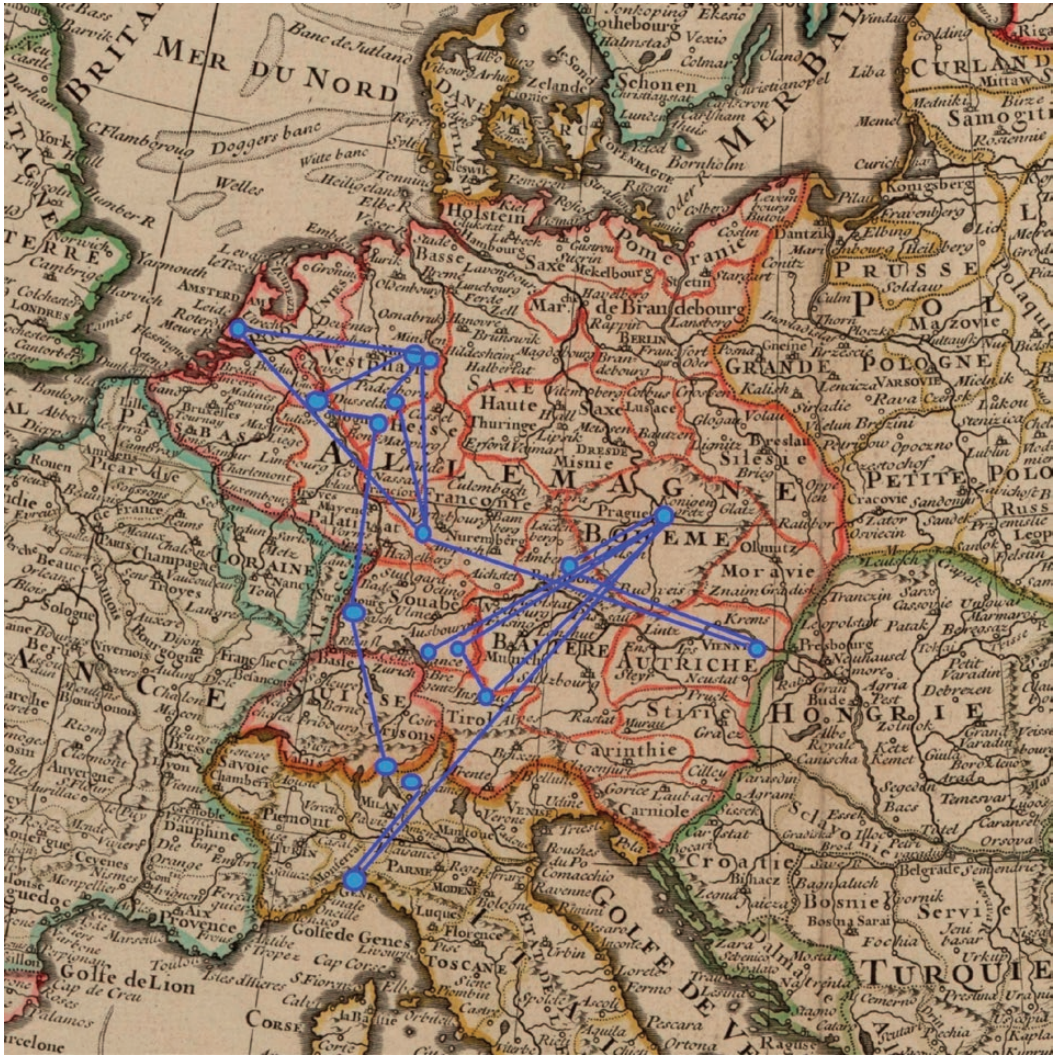
<sup>9</sup> Torre (2007); Bernard (2014); Scholz (2018).

<sup>10</sup> Bernard (2018).

<sup>11</sup> P.P. Viazzo (1989); Audisio (1989); Bernardi (1995).

<sup>12</sup> Agliati (2010); Navone (2010); Parnisari (2015).





**Figure 1.** Giovanni Oldelli's journeys according to his letters (1707–58); source: [Martinola \(1963: 123–154\)](#). Europe's map (detail) by Guillaume Delisle, 1724; source: Gallica, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

and Andorno valleys). As Arslan argues, the circulation of 'artists of the Lakes'—also called *magistri commacini*—was one of the most important 'artistic diasporas' in the history of architecture.<sup>13</sup>

In the construction sector, labour practices were inextricably linked with the experience of migration. To observe the extent and intensity of these circulations, we can attempt to map the itineraries of construction workers, based on their regular letters to their families sent during their wanderings from one construction site to another.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Arslan (1964).

<sup>14</sup> Martinola (1963).

The itinerant life of construction workers from Alpine villages began early, with the signing of an apprenticeship contract (*pacta ad artem*).<sup>15</sup> Young people left home at the age of 12 or 13, following adults in their ‘campaign’ as workers or apprentices. It was the beginning of wanderings that would last for a lifetime, taking them around Europe to wherever job opportunities opened up. Generations of men of all ages, married and unmarried, spent most of their lives away from their countries of origin. These long journeys were interrupted only periodically by visits to their hometown every four or five years. The plasterer Giovanni Antonio Oldelli, for instance, left Meride, his birthplace near Lugano, in 1707 at age 16 with—and probably in the service of—two countrymen, and after a perilous journey he arrived at Münster. It was the beginning of a long life of itinerancy, which over the next 50 years took him to Germany, Holland, Austria, Bohemia, Switzerland, France and Italy, crossing borders many times (figure 1).<sup>16</sup> The compass for this plasterer’s journeys was the information that migrants transmitted to each other on the various job sites. From the different countries where he worked, Giovanni Antonio maintained regular relations with his country of origin and with other migrant workers—both local and non-local—dispersed throughout various European construction sites.

Giovanni Antonio’s case was the norm in the construction sector, where workers left their countries of origin for several years in order to follow job opportunities by moving long distances. It is now well established that early modern societies were not, as has long been thought, inhabited by sedentary populations, but were traversed by continuous movements of people and goods. Migratory phenomena, of short or long duration, characterised modern Europe and has attracted the attention of historians who have attempted to reconstruct the conditions and dynamics of this mobility. The question of control over migrations is clearly an important one, especially for contemporary sensibilities, accustomed to the dramatic images of migrants trying to cross the many barriers that have multiplied in the world in recent years. But the idea of police or total control applied to the territories of the *ancien régime* states would be anachronistic. In these contexts, the activities of control were not necessarily carried out on the state’s external borders. On the one hand, because unguarded crossings—through, for example, the Alpine passes—involved a significant flow of migrants. On the other hand, because the frontiers themselves in this period were still undergoing a process of stabilisation, often involving the interests of local communities. It is not surprising that in the many travel accounts there is rarely any mention of identity checks on people at the borders, while complaints about the exorbitant taxes on transported goods are recurrent, at least in Italy.<sup>17</sup> Even when reading letters from construction

<sup>15</sup> Dubini (1991).

<sup>16</sup> Martinola (1963: 123–54).

<sup>17</sup> Bertrand (2004: 255–6, 263–4).



workers, the border experience is never mentioned. The journey is instead recounted to describe the difficulties or dangers travellers might encounter on the road, or the cost of transportation.

However, in early modern Europe the tools for identifying people were not yet generalised and unified. It was often letters of recommendation, passes, licences or safe-conducts that allowed people to move. These documents expressed—and contributed to construct—legal categories that legitimised the mobility of people. In societies organised into classes, such as those of early modern Europe, rights were attributed not so much to individuals as to those individuals who could prove their belonging to a particular social group. Mobility thus became a matter of ‘class’, or rather of social group. There were mobilities admitted by virtue of the ‘quality’ of the persons, such as that of diplomatic agents, merchants, pilgrims or students.<sup>18</sup> These constituted groups that were endowed with certain privileges that allowed them to move, crossing external and internal borders. Other categories of people acquired this faculty by virtue of treaties between states: this was the case, as will be seen, for the Swiss in the States of Savoy. The mobility of construction workers did not properly fall within a juridical category, but it used the same instruments of legitimation as letters, namely letters of recommendation. In 1703, for example, the plasterer Giovanni Battista Clerici helped a compatriot in difficulty, Antonio Melchion, by buying him some clothes and paying for his journey by carriage from Würzburg, where they were, to Frankfurt, and by writing him a letter of recommendation to be delivered to some merchants in Frankfurt who would direct him to Münster ‘without danger’.<sup>19</sup> The risks were primarily related to the route one chose to take. The one Giovanni Battista chose for Antonio avoided the roads considered most risky, namely those towards Mainz and Cologne. Instead, he faced dangers of a different nature. In his first letter home, Giovanni Antonio Oldelli recounted that during the journey to Münster he had run into a company of hussars who had ‘respected’ him because of the passport he had with him.<sup>20</sup> Even a promise of recruitment could be a useful document to legitimise a journey: in his letter home Giovanni Battista Clerici in 1721 wrote that he was in Mannheim and was waiting for a letter of engagement in order to leave for Darmstadt.<sup>21</sup>

To be part of this world in constant motion, there were certain conditions to be fulfilled. First, the circulation of construction workers—such as, for example, that of chapmen studied by Laurence Fontaine<sup>22</sup>—was based on and presupposed a transnational credit network. Available funds were mandatory in the building sector.

<sup>18</sup> Gilissen (1958).

<sup>19</sup> Martinola (1963: 15).

<sup>20</sup> Martinola (1963: 124).

<sup>21</sup> Martinola (1963: 27).

<sup>22</sup> Fontaine (1993: 153–75).

They were necessary to leave one's birthplace and to cover the cost of the journey. Recourse to credit was frequent also to support workers through periods of unemployment that intermittently afflicted migrant workers, especially in a context such as the construction sector, which offered only irregular jobs and did not guarantee constant employment. In this situation of uncertainty, periods of illness or inactivity could not be borne without recourse to credit. For instance, in 1725, during his stay in Prague, Giovanni Antonio fell sick and was unemployed, and he was forced to write to his family in Meride asking for a loan.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, when artisans obtained an order, they had to buy materials and tools, borrowing significant sums of money to start and complete a job. When in 1719 Giovanni Antonio Oldelli, after a period of uncertainty and wandering, received a long-term job offer in Hégenheim in France, he did not have enough money to buy the necessary material and asked for a loan from his cousin Pietro Francesco, at that moment in Weltenburg in Bavaria.<sup>24</sup> A transnational credit network connected countrymen dispersed in different countries and connected them with others in their birthplace. Furthermore, when work abounded, a migratory chain was activated, which attracted other workers from their country of origin or from various parts of Europe, defining a transnational labour market. The network woven by these migrant workers was one that unfolded throughout Europe and that guaranteed the circulation of information and reputation, financial and social resources.

Observation of this network between migrants who maintained strong ties with each other as well as with their country of origin beyond boundaries, has led historians to conclude the existence of multi-local communities. This perspective has enriched our understanding of Alpine migration and of migration dynamics more generally. They have shown how mobility in the Alpine context was part of a specific economic system<sup>25</sup> and was organised in multi-sited communities, settled in several localities and based on a system of multiple memberships.<sup>26</sup> Several factors combine to define the multi-local character of these communities: the dynamics involving the different places where migrants work;<sup>27</sup> the strong emotional and economic connections between the place of origin and the places of work; the family structures that often included branches in different places.<sup>28</sup> Due to the multi-local character of the social systems to which they belonged and the continuous mobility in which they participated, construction workers were constantly faced with

<sup>23</sup> Martinola (1963: 129).

<sup>24</sup> Martinola (1963: 135).

<sup>25</sup> Fontaine (1993; 2003); Ceschi (1994; 1999); Lorenzetti & Merzario (2005); Viazzo & Cerri (2009).

<sup>26</sup> Albera *et al.* (2005).

<sup>27</sup> Portes (1997).

<sup>28</sup> Gabaccia (2000).

frontiers and developed strategies and tools that could affect their mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion.

### Internal boundaries in Savoy States: the Vicariate of Turin

If we assume that boundaries in early modern Europe coincided with places where there were apparent measures of control,<sup>29</sup> they became particularly visible in cities. In the 18th century, Turin—the capital of the States of Savoy—was a fortified city and the seat of a military garrison stationed in the Citadel which occupied a large part of the city's north-eastern sector (figure 2). The four city gates—Porta Palazzo, Porta Po, Porta Susina and Porta Nuova—were the first place of control where the guards were responsible for noting the entries of people and merchandises. Within the walls, the control of the mobility of people and things was under the jurisdiction of urban political and police institutions. From 1724, this responsibility was entrusted to the Vicariate of Turin.<sup>30</sup> This was a medieval institution, which experienced a series of changing fortunes, but always remaining at the centre of city politics. In 1724 this institution became, in the king's intentions, an instrument of central control over the city's administration, which until then had been managed with relative autonomy by the city council. From then on, the Vicariate was placed under the direct control of the king and its powers were extended.<sup>31</sup> After this reform, the Vicar brought together large competences which cannot be reduced to mere police control alone. The Vicar was first and foremost an ordinary judge in charge of hearing and adjudicating on matters of offences against public order, but also those related to the retail trade in foodstuffs, the salaries of servants and day labourers, and rural bans. He was also responsible for ensuring the regular supply of essential goods to the city and all the city's markets and shops for food, wood and wine fell under his jurisdiction. He dealt with weights and measures, the maintenance of streets and squares, fire prevention and the cleaning of the city. In short, according to the definition of the politics and police of the ancient regime, it was responsible for 'everything that may concern the peace, security and happiness of citizens and inhabitants'.

Despite these extensive powers, the Vicar only had command of a small police force. According to the edict of 1723, he had eight guards under his direct command, in charge of monitoring the observance of the rural bans, enforcing political and police regulations and ensuring public order. Every day, guards visited the farmlands

<sup>29</sup> Le Courant (2010).

<sup>30</sup> Balani (1987); Rolla (2010).

<sup>31</sup> F.A. Duboin, *Raccolta per ordine di materie delle leggi, editti, manifesti ...*, Turin: Davico e Picco, 1827, vol. 5, pp. 1467–9, *Regio editto per l'unione dell'Ufficio del Vicario a quello della prefettura della città e provincia di Torino, con la giurisdizione e incombenze ivi stabilite (11 febbraio 1724)*.

near the town, the town markets, the shops and taverns to check compliance with the prohibitions on the production and sale of foodstuffs, town cleaning, public feasts and prohibited games. In the event of infringements, they had to draw up a report on their inspection and summoned the offender before the Vicar's court, which would determine the amount of the fine. The guards also had to arrest criminals guilty of loitering, brawling, insults and disturbances, who were imprisoned in the Porta Palazzo Towers. In the arrest of criminals, they benefited from the cooperation of the governor's guards, who were required to hand over to the Vicar's office all prisoners under his jurisdiction. From 1717 onwards, the Vicar's guards were called upon to collaborate with those of the Hospital of Charity in the arrest of beggars, who were then entrusted to the charitable institution. The Vicar also benefited from the collaboration of 50 district captains. They were responsible for compiling up-to-date lists of the inhabitants of the city, classified according to age, sex, profession and military skills. The district captains were also given the task of registering daily and domestic workers employed on the blocks under their jurisdiction.

The competences and composition of the Vicariate show how the police of the ancient regime performed complex functions that were not limited to repressing or preventing crimes, but touched on heterogeneous areas of city administration, starting from the provisioning of the city and the control of the market for essential goods. Only an efficient administration of these aspects of city life and the guarantee of the population's well-being could ensure public order and legitimise the vicar's intervention against those who threatened to compromise it.<sup>32</sup> Among these, the Vicar undoubtedly also identified the foreigners against whom his interventions multiplied in the first half of the 18th century. From this point of view, his activities defined the internal borders and contributed to fix criteria of inclusion and exclusion. It was on the definition of foreigners, therefore, that the definition of internal borders was played out.

### **Foreigners in the town**

At the beginning of the 17th century, Turin has only recently become the capital of the Duchy of Savoy and was still a relatively small city. One hundred years later, Turin was the capital of the kingdom of Sardinia and its surface area had increased significantly after three successive expansions of its walls in 1620, 1673 and 1719.<sup>33</sup> As in many other European cities, urban development—a material consequence of demographic growth—was due in no small measure to the presence of immigrants from different

<sup>32</sup> Piasenza (1990; 2002).

<sup>33</sup> Comoli Mandraci (1983).

areas within the Duchy and nearby States. Between 1614 and 1719, that is between the first and the third expansion of the city walls, the number of inhabitants rose from 14,244 to 47,433.<sup>34</sup> An analysis carried out on the origin of married couples makes it possible to estimate that immigrants represented 51.6 per cent of married couples in the first decade of the century (1700–9) and 68.1 per cent of married couples in the central decade (1740–9).<sup>35</sup> According to the data provided by the population census of 1705, several districts of Turin were inhabited mainly by immigrants: for instance, 65 per cent of heads of families residing in the district of St Christopher and 60 per cent of those who lived in that of St Juvenal declared that they came from outside Turin.<sup>36</sup>

The capital was thus traversed by and involved in the movement of people mainly from the territories of the Kingdom, but it was not so much definitive emigration that characterised the population of the *ancien régime* as temporary and cyclical emigration that implied periodical returning to the communities of origin.

As early as the 1670s, a number of royal provisions aimed to control the movements of people into and within the city. Inside the city, according to a royal edict of 1679, all innkeepers had to report the presence of individuals coming from the territories of the kingdom and from abroad to the colonel of the urban militias and, from 1724, to the Vicar and the Military Governor of the Citadel. To ensure that the order was known to those concerned, ‘the Guardians, the gatekeepers of this City’ were instructed ‘to warn all those who enter that they must ask the innkeepers to report to our office every evening’.<sup>37</sup> Each evening, the Vicar received a list of foreign people who spent the night in Turin from the guardians of city gates and innkeepers.<sup>38</sup> This was an attempt to gather information on the passage of foreigners through the city, but in addition to the difficulty of obtaining compliance from innkeepers and gatekeepers, there was a more complex problem surrounding the identification of people. Even the movements of Turin residents within the city was under control. This function was entrusted to the 50 Quarter captains, officers who were appointed by the Vicar and responsible for reporting changes of residence of the inhabitants of the blocks under their jurisdiction.

Faced by the population growth, one of the most important government acts concerned public assistance. Through a series of regulatory initiatives, the city’s main institution, the Charity Hospital, was reformed between 1716 and 1717. The aim was to rationalise its intervention and the provision of aid at a time when population

<sup>34</sup> Balani (2002)

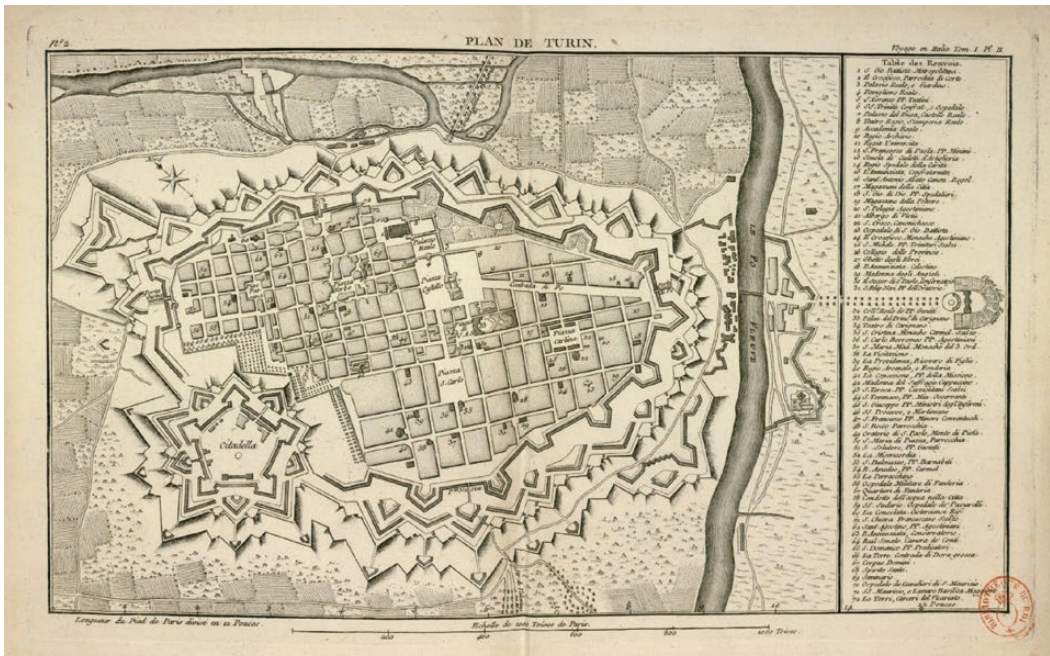
<sup>35</sup> Levi (1985); Zucca Micheletto (2012).

<sup>36</sup> National Archives of Turin (ASTo), S.R., Art. 530, mazzo 1, (1613–14; 1705).

<sup>37</sup> Historical Archives of the City of Turin (ASCT), Editti, Patenti, Manifesti, 1697.

<sup>38</sup> F.A. Duboin, *Raccolta per ordine di materie delle leggi, editti, manifesti ...*, Torino: dai tipi degli editori Davico e Picco, 1827, vol. 5, pp. 1467–9, *Regio editto per l’unione dell’Ufficio del Vicario a quello della prefettura della città e provincia di Torino, con la giurisdizione e incombenze ivi stabilite (11 febbraio 1724)*.





Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

**Figure 2.** Turin's city map by Francesco Scotto, 1761; source: Gallica, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

growth was also resulting in greater demand for assistance. Stricter criteria were set for access to the Charity Hospital. A first criterion for selection was belonging to the citizenship or, at least, stable residence in the city for a minimum of three years, which was considered an indispensable requirement to benefit from Turin's welfare service. Foreigners were not only prohibited from begging, which was also valid for residents, but were also ordered to leave the city to avoid being a burden on the city's welfare system, which was reserved for needy local persons only. However, even among the latter, there was a hierarchy of need that created differences in status among the poor on the basis of a logic of patronage rather than criteria of necessity more familiar to contemporary sensibilities.<sup>39</sup> The importance attached to citizenship did not only respond to the need to rationalise the distribution of aid, but also reflected an established practice that favoured, among candidates for assistance, those who knew the mechanisms of preferential access and were able to activate a certain circuit of protection.

According to the edict of August 1716, foreigners were to leave the city and return to their countries of origin, while beggars from Turin were to present themselves spontaneously within three days to the Charity Hospital where they would be examined and, if possible, helped. The hospital's eight guards, together with those

<sup>39</sup> Cavallo (1991: 149).



of the Vicariate, were responsible for arresting idlers and vagrants who did not turn themselves in or leave the city, while the Vicar's court was to deal with cases against people caught giving alms. From the welfare reform emerged a definition of strangers linked to the duration of residence in the city which, according to the edict, defined citizenship. The figure of the stranger, in these measures, was juxtaposed with that of the beggar, vagrant and idler. Here itinerant life and a lack of work defined the very category of foreigner.

This juxtaposition returned later in the edicts against theft that were issued in the 1740s. Concern about crimes against property was recurrent in the legislative provisions of the first half of the 18th century. During these years, according to sovereign's edict in 1740, the suspicion of the authorities was directed towards the 'vagabonds, and the idlers, without trade, or profession, without goods or sufficient income to maintain them',<sup>40</sup> who for this reason had to be locked up in the prisons of the Vicar. A few years later, in 1747, the list of suspects was expanded to include 'foreign individuals, who enter the city of Turin',<sup>41</sup> about which the Vicariate was invited 'to inquire about their movements [...] if they have come to exercise a trade, or profession, or for what legitimate reason'. Otherwise, the Vicar 'will not allow him to stay in the city just for a short time, but will expel them from our states, if they are foreigners, or from the city of Turin in other cases'.<sup>42</sup> In these ordinances, then, 'strangers' as well as beggars and idlers were often indicated as the main suspects for disorder and thefts committed in the city. It is not surprising that in the Vicar's prisons most inmates for theft or suspicion of theft were not from Turin, and that the origin of the inmates more than the seriousness of the crime or the value of the stolen goods weighed on the length of detention.

Also significant is the evidentiary system applied in court, where a person suspected of theft could be convicted if he was 'defamed', i.e. if he did not enjoy a good reputation, and if the goods he had with him did not correspond to his status. The procedure applied in the Vicariate, in short, favoured precisely that evidence, reputation, which could only be built through stable insertion in the local social context, and which therefore translated the criteria of local belonging into the legal system. By combining reputation, mobility and lack of work, the legislative action of the sovereign and the activity of the Vicariate translated and contributed to clarifying a definition of foreigner.

<sup>40</sup> F.A. Duboin, *Raccolta delle leggi editti patenti manifesti*, vol. 8, *Editto di provvedimenti a riguardo de' furti* (5 janvier 1740), p. 119.

<sup>41</sup> F.A. Duboin, *Raccolta per ordine di materie delle leggi, editti, manifesti ...*, vol. V, *Regie Patenti con le quali S. M. commette al Vicario di Torino l'espulsione dei mendicanti, gente di mal costume ...* (25 settembre 1747), p. 1515.

<sup>42</sup> Ivi, p. 1514.

The Vicariate of Turin carried out its function of controlling mobility in the dual role of police institution and civil and criminal court of first instance. Its competence was limited to criminal misdemeanours and to disputes that arose in the city markets and regarding the salaries of servants and journeymen. In this capacity, the Vicar had the authority to expel people who, having been arrested for some reason, were not considered to have a legitimate reason to remain in the city.

To obtain release from the Vicariate's prisons and avoid expulsion from the city, the prisoners had to sign an act of submission in which they accepted certain conditions. These were often the result of negotiation between the judge, the prisoner and those who presented themselves as guarantors (in most cases family members). Among the conditions imposed to obtain the release and the right to remain in the city was the promise to exercise a job. On 21 April 1727, for instance, Giovanni Francesco Delfino, detained as insolent and suspected of theft, was released from prison thanks to the intervention of his mother and the carpenter and *minusiere* (woodworker) Felice Cheis and in recognition of his commitment to 'learn the art of carpentry, and *menusiery* under the discipline of Felice Cheis'.<sup>43</sup> Application for a profession had to represent the guarantee of a good integration into the city community and the possibility of living off one's work, avoiding the risk of falling into idleness and vagrancy.

The legal action of the Vicar and the ordinances on public order issued during the period under consideration outline a physiognomy of foreigners, on whom the Vicariate's attention was directed. The presence of migrants, which in itself was not perceived as a danger, became a public order problem when combined with idleness and the lack of stable employment. This last point has been the subject of recent studies that have shown how the category of foreigner in the societies of the *ancien régime* was not necessarily defined by geographical origin. In particular, Simona Cerutti has insisted on the relational nature of the category of foreigner, which was defined as such because it lacks the social relations that allowed the construction of local belonging and access to certain rights.<sup>44</sup> So, the definition of 'foreigner' was not necessarily linked to the geographical origin of individuals, but to a relational weakness. Residential stability was often indicated—by the sources as well as by historiography—as a fundamental tool for social insertion. The foreigner was someone who, because of his mobility and temporary residence in the city, was unable to build up a network of stable social relations there. The foreigner was therefore such not so much by virtue of his geographical origin as by virtue of his imperfect inscription in the city context. It was deregulated mobility, outside of a social or institutional framework, that raised the concerns of the police. In the case of Turin, the apposition in legal texts of beggars and idlers—that is to say unemployed—with foreigners

<sup>43</sup> ASCT, Vicariato, Sottomissione dei detenuti, vol. 9, f. s.n.

<sup>44</sup> Cerutti (2012).

is interesting. Work, like residential stability, in itself traced a boundary between social inclusion and exclusion. Lack of work pushed migrants, who ordinarily were a resource for city economy, into the grey zone of deregulated mobility, on which the attention of the city authorities focused. It is not surprising if the Quarter captains paid particular attention to the movements of apprentices, journeymen and servants, who were noted in specific lists, updated each month. In these provisions, attention was clearly directed towards worker mobility. The case of construction workers, who experienced a double mobility both geographical and professional, represents an interesting point of view to observe the capacity of the actors to shape this internal border, the one drawn by the city authorities on the basis of the criteria of local belonging.

### **The boundary between migrants and foreigners**

The demographic growth in the first half of the 18th century coincided with an important process of urban transformation. During the years of peace between the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) and the entry of the Kingdom of Sardinia into the War of the Austrian Succession (1742), Turin experienced a period of great architectural and urban development. Demographic pressure and the prospect of fruitful real estate speculation boosted the works for the third expansion of the city, with the construction of 18 new blocks in the western sector from 1719. At the same time, the acquisition of the royal title by the House of Savoy (1713) relaunched the realisation of an architectural programme that was both urbanistic and political. Over the course of 30 years, the appearance of the city and its surroundings was transformed, with the construction of some of the masterpieces of the Italian Baroque—Madama Palace, the Basilica of Superga, Stupinigi, to name a few—and with the improvement of the road system. Simultaneously, the period of peace made it possible to repair and improve the defence system of the state and its capital, leading to work on the main fortresses in Piedmont (such as Exilles, Brunetta and Fenestrelle).

At the height of its urban development, Turin attracted many entrepreneurs and construction workers, most of them coming from Alpine villages and the ‘lakes region’.<sup>45</sup> The strength of attraction of Turin and Piedmont can be measured by analysing the contracts of the *Azienda fabbriche e fortificazioni*, the office responsible for royal building sites: between 1713 and 1742, only 25 per cent of contractors were from Turin—or, at least, defined themselves as such—and from communities around Turin. The others came from around ten communities in the region of Biella (25 per cent), from the Duchy of Milan (20 per cent, in particular from Como, Varese, Valsolda and

<sup>45</sup> Di Fiore & Rolla (2018).

the Intelvi valley), while 7.9 per cent were from Lugano.<sup>46</sup> The presence of Luganese in Piedmont was part of a migration practise dating back to the previous century, encouraged by the special conditions enjoyed by the Swiss in the Savoy states. As early as 1512, a military treaty between the 12 Swiss cantons and Duke Charles III of Savoy regulated, among other things, the conditions for the entry and stay of Swiss subjects in the Savoyard states. Under this bilateral agreement, they enjoyed special privileges, including the exemption from certain taxes, such as *cottizzo* (trade tax) and *fogaggio* (hearths tax), and from the obligation to lodge soldiers.<sup>47</sup> They were also exempted from the *ubena* which allowed the Piedmontese authorities to confiscate the assets of foreigners who died without legitimate heirs in the Duchy of Savoy.

As we have seen, workers in the construction sector could only rely on irregular employment, since the construction site was a constantly changing workplace, where labour was employed and dismissed in a rapid turnover that followed the progress of the work and the seasonality of some jobs. Workers in this sector were often exposed to the intermittency of work and moments of unemployment, which stimulated geographical mobility. What also made the position of construction workers more fragile were the types of employment contracts, based on oral agreements, whereby part or all of the wages were only paid at the end of the ‘campaign’.<sup>48</sup> Construction workers were also exposed to frequent accidents at work that forced them into inactivity.

In these short or long periods of unemployment there was a strong risk of entering the crowd of those who, without a stable job and residence and because of this foreign, easily attracted the suspicions of the authorities. In May 1736, for example, one of the prisoners in the Vicar’s jails was a certain Giuseppe Calvi from Lugano, accused of being part of a gang of criminals who used to attend fairs to commit thefts. When questioned together with two other defendants, Calvi claimed his innocence and declared he had worked as a bricklayer all over Italy for two years. Although witnesses questioned by the Vicar did not recognise him as a member of the gang of thieves, he was detained in prison because—having no fixed abode and having been absent from his homeland for seven years—he could be considered a vagrant.<sup>49</sup> The case of Calvi shows very well how mobility without a framework—provided by networks of relations or the exercise of a profession—was soon associated with vagrancy and punished by imprisonment or expulsion from the town.

To overcome these problems, workers and entrepreneurs in Turin set up instruments to regulate and manage geographical and professional mobility, such as the

<sup>46</sup> ASTo, S.R., Ministero della Guerra, Azienda fabbriche e fortificazioni, Contratti, m. 1–19, *passim*.

<sup>47</sup> Severin (1933).

<sup>48</sup> Rolla (2011; 2018).

<sup>49</sup> ASTo, Corte, Materie economiche, Vicariato, Mazzo 1, f. 27.

‘national’ trade confraternities. The term ‘national’ appears in the sources themselves and roughly indicates the geographical origin of the members, even if in reality, belonging to a ‘nation’ followed more complex processes. Historiography has shown the importance of confraternities in the process of social inclusion and access to local resources.<sup>50</sup> Maurice Agulhon’s classic study of sociability in southern France at the end of the 18th century had already shown the range of functions fulfilled by these heterogeneous institutions.<sup>51</sup> In the confraternities and in their assistance activity, some historians have seen the anticipation of workers’ mutualism of the 19th century.<sup>52</sup> The confraternities also represented autonomous political spaces, used by their members to defend their rights and prerogatives.<sup>53</sup> The political aspect was evident in the world of work, where the confraternities were instruments for organising workers’ discontent<sup>54</sup> and for regulating labour mobility.<sup>55</sup> The contribution of confraternities to the local economy,<sup>56</sup> and in particular to credit circuits, has recently been demonstrated in the rural context.<sup>57</sup>

In Turin, building professions were represented mainly by two confraternities, both devoted to Saint Anne: the Company of architects and master masons from Lugano and Milan, founded in the 1620s, and the Confraternity of master carpenters from Graglia, Muzzano and Pollone (three villages in the Elvo valley, in the department of Biella), created around the 1710s. The balance sheets of the Turin confraternities reveal their main areas of intervention.<sup>58</sup> Their financial efforts were in part allocated to the devotion of their patron saint, such as with the construction and maintenance of chapels, but they also provided assistance to masters in difficulty and their families. Faced with the strong variability of the job offer in the construction sector, the assistance offered by the two confraternities assumed a fundamental function, especially in the Turin context, recently concerned by the profound reform of the welfare system. The reform of 1716–17, detailed above, and their admission criteria created obstacles for the access to assistance for these migrants, who did not have solid social ties to count on in the city.<sup>59</sup> In this way, the exclusion of some from urban assistance contributed to define who was a foreigner and to fix criteria for inclusion and exclusion from citizenship. Thus, an assistance system was organised, outside the charitable

<sup>50</sup> Canepari (2007)

<sup>51</sup> Agulhon (1966).

<sup>52</sup> Massa & Moioli (2004).

<sup>53</sup> Torre (1995).

<sup>54</sup> Garrioch & Sonenscher (1986); Garrioch (2013).

<sup>55</sup> Cerutti (2010).

<sup>56</sup> Pastore & Garbellotti (2001); Bianchi (2009).

<sup>57</sup> Schwindt (2008); Di Tullio (2011).

<sup>58</sup> Archives of Sainte Anne Company (henceforth ACSALT), Ordinati e verballi, II, 1, *passim*.

<sup>59</sup> Cavallo (1989; 1991).

institutions of the city, and in particular at the autonomous initiative of professional groups and migrants.<sup>60</sup> In the Turin context, construction workers were pioneers in their autonomous organisation of assistance. This precocity of their institution was sparked by the specific requirements of the building trade, being exposed to dual mobility, both spatial and professional, which could limit access to local assistance.

The assistance to master masons in moments of inactivity was often transformed into support for their return to the country in the form of a small contribution towards travel expenses. Requests arrived at the brotherhoods for assistance because of 'bad luck, fell from a scaffolding in Turin', for 'vacillating infirmity', being 'in very miserable condition due to a long illness', for 'having no food' and being 'devoid of anything and father and mother'. The request ultimately petitioned the brotherhood for economic aid to be able to 'withdraw as best as he can to the homeland where he has a few parents'.<sup>61</sup> In 1719, for example, the Company of Saint Anne of Master Masons supported the travel expenses for returning to the country of origin of eight masters, a widow and three journeymen from Milan and Lugano. Through this company, the community of origin was able to regulate the mobility of workers, by financial aid and the exercise of social control.

The confraternities' assets were also used to offer loans, which were mainly but not exclusively granted to members. The interest-bearing loan was counted among the activities of the company of master masons since its foundation in 1622, when the company 'by having some unproductive sums [...] decided to invest them with an able and responsible person'.<sup>62</sup> The amount of credits recorded in the Saint Anne accounts varies from 40 to 3,000 lire. As we have seen, access to credit represented one of the conditions for working in the construction sector, at any level: from the manual worker to the entrepreneur, everyone at some points of their professional cycle had to resort to credit. Letters mentioned above show the capacity of migrants to manage a translocal credit network that linked arrival countries with birthplaces. Locally, in the countries of arrival, migrants were able to equip themselves with the necessary instruments to encourage the circulation of financial resources via the confraternities. Ultimately, the credit activity of the confraternities was part of that transnational circuit that supported the circulation of 'artists of the Lakes'.

The Company of architects and master masons from Lugano and Milan performed another essential function, negotiating the conditions of the Luganese presence in Piedmont. The renewal of the privileges enjoyed by the Swiss in the Savoy states was the subject of negotiations during the 17th century. The supplications sent to the sovereigns for the confirmation of privileges are kept in a collection called 'Negotiations

<sup>60</sup> Rolla (2020).

<sup>61</sup> ACSALT, Attività assistenziali, Sussidi, *passim*.

<sup>62</sup> ACSALT, Conti e bilanci, fol. 40.



with the Swiss',<sup>63</sup> which also contains all the documentation concerning the political-military negotiations that marked the relations between the Savoyard state and the Swiss cantons during the 17th and 18th centuries, also concerning boundaries. During the whole of the 17th century, in fact, the correspondence between the Swiss and Piedmontese authorities was intense, especially regarding the rights and interests that the Dukes of Savoy claimed in some territories in Vaud and Geneva. Thus, the conditions of the presence of the Swiss in Piedmont remained strictly connected to the outcome of the Swiss–Savoy political-military negotiations. In this process, the Company of Saint Anne proposed itself as a legitimate interlocutor with the Piedmontese authorities to represent the interests of the Swiss residing in the states of the Dukes of Savoy regardless of their profession.

It was the company that turned to the sovereign whenever abuses were committed by the Piedmontese authorities to the detriment of an inhabitant of Swiss origin for non-compliance with the exemptions provided for by the Swiss–Savoy agreements. Such violations suffered by a single individual were perceived as a threat, a precedent capable of compromising and eroding the privileges enjoyed by the entire Swiss population in Piedmont. It is indicative that in the archive of the company of Saint-Anne in the Statutes series there is no statute, only the renewal licences of the privileges enjoyed by the Swiss in Piedmont.

The company also played an essential role in defining the membership of the community of Luganese in Turin. From its foundation, in fact, the company had the authority to certify the real geographical origin of those who declared themselves Luganese, determining their access to the privileges provided by the agreements between the states of Savoy and the Swiss cantons. It is important to note that these exemptions assimilated the Swiss immigrants as subjects of the Duke of Savoy, being the same enjoyed by the citizens of Turin.<sup>64</sup> In this respect, the company's action thus in many ways determined the boundary between migrants and foreigners, between those who belonged to a community recognised by the urban authorities, protected during their moments of inactivity, and framed in their mobility, and those who, without this protection, risked being considered by the city authorities as vagrants to be expelled.

## Conclusion

The case of construction workers allows us to observe from a novel perspective the places and moments in which borders materialised and in which inclusion and

<sup>63</sup> ASTo, Corte, Materie politiche per rapporto all'estero, *Negoziazione con gli Svizzeri e i Vallesani*.

<sup>64</sup> Cerutti (1995).

exclusion were disputed. Their profession required them to continually cross European borders during their itinerant life moving from one construction site to another. But in building workers' reports and letters, the experience of boundaries was not noted, and they paid more attention to other aspects of their itinerant lives: work and unemployment, access to credit or economic aid, reputation and belonging to a social network were the elements that determined the demarcation between inclusion and exclusion. These same elements constituted the criteria used by the urban authorities to define the 'stranger', i.e. someone who has no solid social ties, no certain reputation, no stable house and job and who, for this reason, had to be expelled. The lack of these resources made the presence of migrants in European cities precarious and, in the eyes of local authorities, illegitimate. In Turin, it was often the lack of work and access to assistance that defined the border between inclusion and exclusion from the city. In the prisons of the Vicariate, this boundary was continuously subject to negotiation between the institution and the prisoners. To cope with these problems, the construction workers from the Alpine regions—the artists of the lakes—built trans-local networks of credit, information and assistance that guaranteed the circulation of people and resources beyond the borders of states. These circuits were supported and consolidated locally thanks to some institutional instruments. In the case of the Savoyard states, it was the brotherhoods that, by providing those same resources, i.e. credit, assistance and information to their members, favoured their presence and circulation. Not only was the company of Saint Anne recognised by local institutions as a legitimate counterpart in the process of negotiating the conditions for the presence of the Swiss in the Savoyard states, by defending the privileges of the Swiss the company also obtained their assimilation as subjects of the Dukes of Savoy. This process of continuous negotiation of the internal borders made them variable according to the social body to which one belongs. In Piedmont, for instance, the internal frontier represented by the city's police authorities was not the same for all individuals but changed according to their membership of a specific social body: this was the case of the Luganese building workers, whom a series of privileges assimilated to the people of Turin and put in a favoured position compared to others. Looked at from the point of view of the actors, borders are not only porous, they are also multiple: they are as many and as changeable as the statuses of people.

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