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Steven Farram

The Maubara fort, a relic of eighteenth century local autonomy and Dutch-Portuguese rivalry on Timor

Introduction

At Maubara, near the central border on the north coast of Timor-Leste (the former Portuguese Timor), stands an unpretentious stone fort.¹ Although visitors to the site sometimes assume it is of Portuguese provenance, the fort, initially completed in 1760, was originally built and occupied by the Dutch East Indies Company (VOC) with the agreement of Maubara's rulers. Construction of the fort was just one episode in a long-standing rivalry between the Dutch and the Portuguese in the Timor region dating back to 1613 when they first clashed in their competition for the local sandalwood trade. The fort was also the result of a Timorese principality seeking to profit from that rivalry to improve its own trade and security. The Portuguese conducted trade in the name of their sovereign, whereas the VOC was a private company operating for the remuneration of shareholders.² Both sides sought a trade monopoly, but for logistical reasons and to maximise

¹ Place names are presented in the archives with a great variety of spelling. Modern equivalents are used for all place names in this article.

² Nevertheless, the VOC signed treaties, built forts etc. in the name of the Netherlands government under whose charter it operated; Gerrit Knaap and Ger Teitler, 'Inleiding', in *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie tussen oorlog en diplomatie*, ed. G. Knaap and G. Teitler (Leiden: KITLV Uitgeverij, 2002), p. 1.

profits they eschewed territorial control apart from strategic bases from which to conduct operations. When the Dutch established themselves at Kupang at the western end of Timor in 1653, the Portuguese were based at Larantuka on nearby Flores. Meanwhile, the Eurasian and local Christian element of Larantuka (called Topasses) became active in the sandalwood trade and established themselves in western Timor at Lifau in the present-day Oecusse-Ambeno enclave of Timor-Leste. The Topasses adopted outward symbols of Portuguese and Catholic authority, but their great success was their ability to forge alliances with many Timorese principalities,³ often through marriage, which gave them control over land, people and trade. The Portuguese often worked with the Topasses, but from the beginning of the eighteenth century they attempted to bring them under Portuguese leadership. The Portuguese took control of Lifau, but their relationship with the independent-minded Topasses was not always harmonious, as discussed later.

The Maubara fort was designed to enable extension of VOC trade into eastern Timor, but was never a success. The Portuguese and the Topasses provided the Dutch with many challenges in this regard, but there were other factors at work. One was the tension between trade and territory.

³ Although Europeans referred to Timorese rulers as ‘kings’ (*reis, koningen*) and their polities as ‘kingdoms’ (*reinos, rijken*) the latter term is rather grand for the small, fragile domains they described. I use the term ‘principality’ instead. By the late eighteenth century both the Dutch and the Portuguese began to refer to Timorese rulers by lesser titles, such as *regulo* (prince), *vorst* (prince), or the Malay *radja* (king), which could also include rulers of lower rank; Hans Hägerdal, *Lords of the land, lords of the sea: Conflict and adaptation in early colonial Timor, 1600-1800* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2012), p. 52.

Holden Furber characterises the VOC and other European trading companies in Asia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as constructing ‘empires of trade’ whilst avoiding becoming ‘empires of conquest’, meaning colonial territorial powers.⁴ The VOC established alliances with local rulers to conduct trade, but was wary of being drawn into conflicts that would diminish profits. The dilemma was, as Reinout Vos puts it, ‘too little involvement meant no trade, whereas too much would mean running at a loss’.⁵ The Maubara fort constituted a significant commitment of resources, and not one that all VOC officials agreed with. By the mid-eighteenth century, the VOC was already becoming a territorial power due to its growing involvement in Java, which added to its existing commitments in Maluku, Makassar and elsewhere.⁶ The company’s involvement in Maubara could arguably have led to a similar outcome, but the VOC never took control of Maubara and later tried to minimise its commitments there. Nevertheless, in its contest for trade with the Portuguese it insisted that it possessed special entitlements there, even if the trade as it was brought little or no profit.

⁴ Holden Furber, *Rival empires of trade in the Orient, 1600-1800* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1976), pp. 5, 311.

⁵ Reinout Vos, *Gentle Janus, merchant prince. The VOC and the tightrope of diplomacy in the Malay world, 1740-1800* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1993), p. 3.

⁶ J.C. van Leur, *Indonesian trade and society. Essays in Asian social and economic history* (The Hague: W. van Hoeve, 1967), p. 262; J. van Goor, ‘Introduction’, and L.W. Nagtegaal, ‘The Dutch East India Company and the relations between Kartasura and the Javanese northcoast, c.1680-c.1740’, in *Trading companies in Asia, 1600-1830*, ed. J. van Goor (Utrecht: Hes Uitgevers, 1986), pp. 15, 51-81.

In 1800, the Netherlands Indies government assumed the rights and responsibilities of the VOC and maintained sporadic contact with Maubara throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1861, however, the territory was formally transferred to Portuguese control. Ironically, the Netherlands Indies government relinquished its claim to Maubara during the period that the colonial state was just coming into focus. Why were the Dutch so willing to end their century-long connection with Maubara at this time? This article utilises Dutch archives, other contemporary documents, Maubara oral traditions and a range of secondary sources to achieve a detailed understanding of the reasons for the Maubara-Netherlands alliance, the resulting Dutch claim to Maubara, the circumstances surrounding erection of the fort, and the reasons for its later abandonment to the Portuguese. In doing so attention is given to how the VOC entered into local trade patterns, its role as protector, its need to maintain prestige, the importance of diplomacy, and the potential conflict between trade and territory. The different ways these matters were approached by the Netherlands Indies government is discussed and attention is also given to traditional political authority in Maubara and how well this was understood by the Dutch at the time. However, before delving into the main issues it may be useful to situate the article into existing historical literature on Timor and to explain the value of micro-histories such as this one.

Maubara is a relatively small part of Timor, but a detailed study of the principality for the period described aids our understanding of Timorese history as, amongst other things, it demonstrates that individual principalities in the eastern half of the island did not become allied or subordinate

to the Portuguese at an equal rate.⁷ Following the Portuguese relocation of their Timor capital from Lifau to Dili in 1769, the majority of nearby districts soon fell under Portuguese influence. Maubara, however, opted to retain its alliance with the VOC. Maubara did transfer its loyalties to the Portuguese in 1861, but only at the insistence of its Dutch overlords, who had made their own arrangements with the Portuguese. Maubara clearly had a different experience to other districts of Timor-Leste, but this is not a matter well-known by either foreigners with an interest in the half-island state or even many East Timorese.

One reason for this could be the inattention given to individual districts in the early historiography of Timor. Maubara is mentioned in a number of early Portuguese and Dutch articles and books, many of which are referenced in this article, but those sources are relatively obscure and difficult to access for the general reader. Probably better known and easier to find are the publications of historian Charles Ralph Boxer, who has written extensively on the roles of the Portuguese and the Dutch in the early colonial period. Yet in each of Boxer's two brief works in English that deal solely with Timor, *The Topasses of Timor* and 'Portuguese Timor: A Rough Island Story: 1515-1960', Maubara is mentioned only once, giving the reader the merest glimpse of the fact that it was once associated with the Dutch.⁸ Moreover, the latter article from 1960 appears with what amounts to a sub-title that declares, '[Timor] has been the scene of Portuguese

⁷ Studies such as this can serve as a reminder that, just as neither East Timor nor West Timor became Portuguese or Dutch territory overnight, the same was true for other areas and the creation of British Malaya and French Indochina, for example, were drawn-out affairs.

⁸ Charles Ralph Boxer, *The Topasses of Timor* (Amsterdam: Indisch Instituut, 1947), p. 9; C.R. Boxer, 'Portuguese Timor: A Rough Island Story: 1515-1960', *History Today*, May (1960): 355.

influence in Asia for more than 450 years'. This is not an isolated case and ignorance concerning the early role played by the Dutch in what is now Timor-Leste is often linked with a belief in 500 years of Portuguese domination of East Timor. The reality, of course, was quite different.

The Portuguese conquered Malacca in 1511 and they likely ventured to Timor soon after, but established no lasting presence in the region until Dominican missionaries settled on the island Solor in 1561. The first Portuguese-appointed governor to reside on Timor only arrived in 1702. The authority of his successors has been described as 'often tenuous in the extreme' and genuine colonial rule did not begin until the late nineteenth century. This was also true for the Dutch in the western end of the island and it was not until the first decades of the twentieth century that the two sides could truly claim to be in control of their respective halves of Timor.⁹ The best thing we can say of the assertion that the Portuguese dominated East Timor for half a millennium is that the claim is greatly exaggerated. First promoted by the Portuguese, the claim later proved to be a useful political tool in the struggle against the Indonesian occupation (December 1975-October 1999), as the East Timorese could argue that the long period of Portuguese influence had rendered them fundamentally different to most Indonesians and that the incorporation of East Timor into Indonesia was neither rational nor just. For example, in 1996 the veteran East Timorese politician and independence campaigner, José Ramos-Horta, told a London audience that the East Timorese had a 'Latin Catholic influence, a legacy of almost 500 years of Portuguese colonization'. The quote is from Geoffrey Gunn's seminal history of East Timor,

⁹ Hägerdal, *Lords*, pp. 28, 316-7; Steven Farram, 'The two Timors: The partitioning of Timor by the Portuguese and the Dutch', *Studies in Languages and Cultures of East Timor*, 2 (1999): 40-1, 51.

Timor Loro Sae: 500 Years, a book whose very title has helped to popularise and perpetuate the myth.¹⁰

In relation to Maubara, Douglas Kammen notes in his study of the district spanning three centuries that the people of Maubara know that it ‘was once under or allied with the Dutch’, but virtually no details of the Dutch period have been preserved in the oral tradition. A major reason for this, he suggests, is that such stories did not fit with the ‘imperial narratives’ promoted by the Portuguese or the later ‘nationalist narrative’ of the East Timorese themselves.¹¹ It is undeniable that Portuguese colonisation greatly influenced the East Timorese, but the extent of that influence varied from place to place and over time. It was the conscious choice of Maubara’s rulers to ally themselves with the Dutch that allowed Maubara to avoid overt Portuguese influence for over a century. Meanwhile, the Dutch have seemingly been largely forgotten by the East Timorese, but they did play an important role in early Timorese-European interactions and left to posterity a unique record of those times. One purpose of this article is to give a more

¹⁰ Geoffrey Gunn, *Timor Loro Sae: 500 Years* (Macau: Livros do Oriente, 1999), p. 14. A corresponding myth in Indonesia asserts 350 years of Dutch rule in that country. A few places may have experienced Dutch domination for such a period, but, as Smail notes, in many cases it may have been 200 years or only 50 years; John R.W. Smail, ‘On the possibility of an autonomous history of modern Southeast Asia’, *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 2, 2 (1961): 81, 89. Many parts of West Timor experienced Dutch domination for less than half a century.

¹¹ Douglas Kammen, *Three centuries of conflict in East Timor* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2016), pp. 40-1, 49, 53, 60.

accurate picture of the Timorese peoples' varying relationships with the Dutch and the Portuguese during that period.

Another reason that makes a detailed period study of Maubara worthwhile is its potential comparative value. It is beyond the scope of this article to do more than suggest some of the possible areas for comparative studies, but there are several. Maucatar, currently a sub-district of Cova Lima in Timor-Leste that directly borders onto Indonesian West Timor, is a good candidate. At least one man from Maucatar is known to have served with the Dutch military in the Timor region in the early seventeenth century, but documents dated 1735-1747 show that Maucatar was then subject to Portuguese authority, albeit via the Topasses in Lifau. An interesting feature of these documents is that not only do they reveal that the land-locked central Timor principality of Maucatar was in intimate contact with coastal Lifau, they also show that Maucatar had close relations with the principality of Amanuban, far to the west.¹² Maubara also had close contact with other, distant principalities and further study could reveal that such long-distance relationships were more common than presently assumed.

Furthermore, at the time of the negotiations between the Dutch and the Portuguese that led to the transfer of Maubara to the Portuguese, Maucatar was then accepted by both sides as a Dutch responsibility. There was some discussion of Maucatar also being transferred to the Portuguese and the Dutch were keen to take control of Portuguese-claimed Oecusse (present-day Oecusse-Ambeno); both areas were said to be rarely visited by their supposed European rulers and they

¹² Hägerdal, *Lords*, pp. 43, 346, 355.

had little or no control of the people, but in the end nothing was done.¹³ As it transpired, Maucatar was transferred to the Portuguese in a later round of negotiations agreed to in 1904. In return, the Portuguese enclave of Noemuti, south of Oecusse, was handed to the Dutch, but Oecusse itself remained with the Portuguese. Meanwhile, the Portuguese agreed that some of the districts in central Timor adjacent to Maucatar should stay with the Dutch, but demanded that the territory of Fialaran be ceded to them. In reply, the Dutch reported that the ‘chieftans’ of Fialaran ‘refused absolutely to pass under the sovereignty of Portugal’. The Portuguese finally dropped the claim.¹⁴ As discussed later in the article, Fialaran was one of the principalities associated with Maubara in its alliance with the Dutch. A useful avenue of research could be to investigate to what extent the old Dutch and Maubara connections are remembered in the oral traditions of Fialaran, considering that knowledge of the former has virtually ceased to exist in Maubara. The other principalities associated with Maubara noted in this article would also be worthy of investigation in this respect.

Detailed historical studies of individual Timor districts are rare, but some have been produced in recent times. This article is intended as a contribution to the effort to better understand the whole by gaining a stronger understanding of the parts. A good way to achieve this would be comparative studies. For example, this article could be used (in conjunction with Kammen’s less-detailed, but longer-ranging study, noted earlier) as a comparison with the work done on the

¹³ F. Fokkens, ‘De nieuwe regeling der grenzen tusschen Nederlandsch- en Portugeesch Timor’, *Koloniaal Tijdschrift*, (1914): 610-1.

¹⁴ ‘Judicial decisions involving questions of international law’, *American Law of International Law*, 9 (1915): 251-2.

principality of Luca in Timor-Leste by Susana Barnes, Hans Hägerdal and Lisa Palmer.¹⁵ One particularly relevant recent study is Laura Yoder's work on Oecusse, as that district has many comparisons with Maubara.¹⁶ Apart from its seacoast, modern Oecusse-Ambeno is completely surrounded by Indonesian West Timor, just as Dutch-allied Maubara was surrounded by a number of Portuguese-allied principalities. Both Maubara and Oecusse were mentioned in a number of border negotiations between the Portuguese and the Dutch, but whereas the Dutch were happy to trade Maubara for other territory, the Portuguese ultimately refused to cede Oecusse to the Dutch. But this is getting us too far ahead and it is time now to re-begin the story from the mid-seventeenth century.

Dutch attempts to extend their control on Timor

In 1661, Portugal and the Netherlands signed a treaty that guaranteed each party freedom of movement and trade, but also stipulated that each was to retain control of all areas they possessed at the time of the treaty's publication. Control of most of the Timor region, however, remained disputed.¹⁷ A number of places in eastern Timor had paid tribute to the Sulawesi kingdom of Gowa for many years and this may have freed them from the attention of the Topasses and the Portuguese. They were probably also left alone because they were too distant

¹⁵ Susana Barnes, Hans Hägerdal and Lisa Palmer, 'An East Timorese Domain: Luca from Central and Peripheral Perspectives', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde (BKI)*, 173, (2017): 325-55.

¹⁶ Laura S. Meitzner Yoder, 'The formation and remarkable persistence of the Oecusse-Ambeno enclave, Timor', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 47, 2 (2016): 281-303.

¹⁷ Hägerdal, *Lords*, p. 141.

from the Topass and Portuguese power centres whereas the central Timorese principalities of Cailaco and Wewiku-Wehali were attacked and plundered by a Topass force in 1665 precisely because they had sought an association with the Makassarese. However, with the Dutch defeat of Makassar in 1667, the ‘jurisdiction’ (*jurisdictie*) of Gowa on Timor was declared ended and several places that had been associated with the Makassarese sought the help of the Dutch.¹⁸ Seeing an opportunity to extend trading activities in eastern Timor, the Dutch signed treaties with Ade, Manatuto and other principalities in 1668,¹⁹ but offered them little assistance when the Portuguese decided to extend their own control in the east. Portuguese activity in the region had increased, partly due to Dutch pressure resulting in the expulsion of Portuguese traders from Makassar in 1660,²⁰ and the new freedom of movement allowed under the 1661 treaty. The

¹⁸ Arend de Roever, *De jacht op sandelhout: De VOC en de tweedling van Timor in de zeventiende eeuw* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2002), pp. 279-81; Hägerdal, *Lords*, p. 163.

¹⁹ ‘CCCXXI. Solor en Timor. 23 Mei–6 Juni 1668’, in *Corpus diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum. Verzameling van politieke contracten en verdere verdragen door de Nederlanders in het oosten gesloten, van privilegiebrieven aan hen verleend, enz. Deel 2: 1650-1675*, ed. J.E. Heeres (’s-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1931), pp. 392-8; J. de Roo van Alderwerelt, ‘Aanteekeningen over Timor en onderhoorigheden 1668 tot en met 1809’, *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde (TBG)*, 47, 3 (1904): 195. Ade was most likely located near present-day Vemasse; Andrew McWilliam, ‘Looking for Adê: A contribution to Timorese historiography’, *BKI*, 163, 2-3 (2007): 221-38; Hans Hägerdal, ‘A note on Ade’, *BKI*, 163-4 (2007): 556-8.

²⁰ All European traders other than the Dutch were excluded from Makassar from 1668, so there was no going back.

Portuguese encountered much resistance, however, and were only able to maintain control in the east with difficulty.²¹

Portuguese and Topass raids on areas allied with the Dutch were common, but the Dutch seem to have been powerless to prevent them. Dutch fortunes appeared to revive after the defeat near Kupang of a major Topass invasion force during the battle of Penfui in 1749. The Dutch had faced destruction, but became more assertive after Penfui and dreamed of chasing the Portuguese out of Timor altogether. In 1753, VOC *gouverneur generaal* (governor general) Jacob Mossel wrote that an expedition had left Java with 100 soldiers to bring Ade, Manatuto and other places under Dutch authority once again.²² If the expedition did take place, its results are unknown today.²³ Mossel also wrote to his Portuguese counterpart in Goa in 1753, stating that as far as the VOC was concerned the Portuguese had no claims in Timor, as the island had been gifted to the Dutch by the sultan of Ternate in 1683. The sultan became a vassal of the VOC in that year and transferred Timor, Solor and other places to the Dutch as part of the arrangement. Although Ternate's claim to any rights in the Timor region was questionable, the Dutch continued to cite the 1683 contract in the following years as a justification for doubting Portuguese claims in the

²¹ Hägerdal, *Lords*, pp. 141, 169-72.

²² 'Mossel XVIII. 31 december 1753', in *Generale missiven van gouverneurs-generaal en raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindisch Compagnie. Deel XII: 1750-1755*, ed. J.E. Schooneveld-Oosterling (The Hague: Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, 2007), p. 309; De Roo de Alderwerelt, 'Aanteekeningen', p. 201.

²³ The story is conspicuously absent from Hägerdal's detailed study of Timor from this period.

same region.²⁴ In 1756, the VOC sent *commissaris* (commissioner) Johannes Andreas Paravicini to Kupang to examine the state of affairs there and to establish new contracts with the Timorese in order to bolster trade opportunities. Paravicini succeeded in getting 16 rulers from western and eastern Timor and others from nearby islands to sign treaties of alliance. Rulers of minor principalities signed contracts with Paravicini, but in other cases a single signatory represented many districts. Thus, the *groot koning* (great king) of Wewiku-Wehali acted on behalf of several principalities in eastern Timor, including Maubara, as discussed later.²⁵ However, it seems Paravicini may have misled those involved about the purpose of the treaties, as many of the Timorese had already made similar contracts with the Portuguese.²⁶ By 1788, the Dutch had ceased to invoke the 1756 treaties, as they were considered worthless.²⁷ Nevertheless, Paravicini's activities had impressed *gouverneur generaal* Mossel, who concurred with Paravicini's view that the Dutch would never make a profit in Timor unless they expelled the Portuguese, or at least limited them.²⁸ As a result, the Dutch appear to have doubled their efforts to establish their authority and trade connections on Timor.

²⁴ De Roo van Alderwerelt, 'Aanteekeningen', p. 199; Hägerdal, *Lords*, pp. 241, 327, 370.

²⁵ 'CMXCVII. Timor. 5 Juni 1756', in *Corpus diplomaticum. Deel 6*, ed. F.W. Stapel ('s-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1955), pp. 87-106.

²⁶ Albertus Heyman, *De Timor tractaten (1859 en 1893)* (Leiden: S.C. van Doesburgh, 1895), pp. 12-13.

²⁷ De Roo van Alderwerelt, 'Aanteekeningen', pp. 218-29.

²⁸ Hermann Fiedler, 'Hans Albrecht v. Plüskow: Geschichte eines kleinen kontors V.C.O. 1758-1761', *Deutsche Wacht*, 4 (1931): 31. Fiedler provides no references. While many of his points

Establishment of the Maubara fort

Maubara may have been one of the Timor ports visited by Chinese traders in the fifteenth century,²⁹ but it does not appear to have been named in European records until 1703 when it was mentioned as one of the few principalities in eastern Timor that had not acknowledged the superiority of the Portuguese. However, in 1710, 1723 and 1733, Maubara is recorded as paying taxes to the Portuguese and in the latter year also provided men for the garrison at Lifau. In 1726, Maubara troops are said to have fought with distinction alongside the Portuguese to overcome a rebellion in Cailaco.³⁰

could be confirmed in the VOC archive during research for this article, the source for this particular information was not found.

²⁹ J.V. Mills, 'Chinese navigators in Insulinde about A.D. 1500', *Archipel*, 18 (1979), p. 85.

³⁰ Artur Teodoro de Matos, *Timor Português, 1515-1769: Contribuição para a sua história* (Lisbon: Instituto Histórico Infante Dom Henrique, 1974), pp. 156, 338-9, 368-73; Affonso de Castro, *As possessões Portuguezas na Oceania* (Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional, 1867), pp. 225-8. The information for 1733 comes from the latter source. The two lists reproduced there were compiled by *governador* (governor) Antonio José Teles de Menezes (1768-76) and the words *hoje no partido hollandez*, 'now with the Dutch', next to the entry for Maubara refer to the time of compilation, not 1733. Kammen interprets this differently; Kammen, *Three centuries*, pp. 33, 189.

A Dutch report from 1755, however, shows that Maubara by then no longer supported the Portuguese. In that year, a *vaandrig* (ensign) of the Mardijkers³¹ from Kupang, Jacob Pietersz, met the unnamed Maubara *regent* (king, ruler)³² who requested assistance to break free of the Portuguese, of whom there were many complaints.³³ An old grievance was that the Portuguese had once requested crews from Maubara for ships going to Macau, but the men were later sold into slavery.³⁴ A more recent complaint was the forced appropriation by the Portuguese of Maubara's annual beeswax production, one of the main trade goods produced in Timor.³⁵ Furthermore, a document sent to Kupang showed that Maubara and other nearby principalities had negotiated their freedom from Portuguese claims with *governador* (governor) António Moniz de Macedo in 1737 through a one-off payment of 100,000 *pardaus*, of which Maubara

³¹ The Mardijkers were free 'natives' who served with the Dutch military in their own companies throughout the Netherlands Indies. For more about the Mardijkers in general, and the Mardijkers of Timor in particular, see A. Haga, 'De Mardijkers van Timor', *TBG*, 27 (1881): 191-294.

³² In Dutch the term means the same as in English, that is, a person who rules in the sovereign's absence. The term's use could indicate that the person referred to was not considered the monarch, but just a representative.

³³ 'Opperhoofd Elias Jacob Beynon to Gouverneur Generaal Jacob Mossel, 15-9-1755', VOC 8348, Nationaal Archief (NA), The Hague.

³⁴ This abuse was recorded much later; 'Timor, 1824', Collectie Schneither, no. 131, NA.

³⁵ 'Beynon to Mossel, 15-9-1755', VOC 8348, NA.

supplied 1,147 *pardaus*.³⁶ These complaints against the Portuguese were well received in Kupang and the Maubara ruler was supplied with lead and gunpowder.³⁷

In 1758, *vaandrig* Hendrik Pietersz of the Mardijkers (son of Jacob, who had since died)³⁸ arrived in Maubara shortly before it was attacked by the Topasses. Pietersz and his men helped fight them off and the Dutch again supplied gunpowder and munitions. Meanwhile, the *hoofd regent* (main king)³⁹ of Maubara sent his brother and 18 followers to Kupang where they reported that the Portuguese *governador* had sent men from Sikka on Flores to Maubara posing as traders, but with the intention of capturing or killing the *hoofd regent* and his family. The plot failed and four Sikka men were captured, enslaved, and brought to Kupang as gifts to the VOC. One of these men identified himself as Pedro da Silva and claimed to be a *regent* of Sikka and to have also served as a sergeant for the Portuguese. He was thrown in chains and sent to VOC headquarters at Batavia (Jakarta) for further investigation. Meanwhile, a similar Portuguese-supported force had landed at Manatuto where the *hoofd regent*, a brother-in-law of the Maubara

³⁶ ‘Opperhoofd Hans Albregt von Plüskow to Gouverneur Generaal Mossel, 7-7-1760’, VOC 8354, NA. The *pardau* was a silver coin originally minted by the Portuguese at Goa; Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis (ING), *VOC-glossarium: Verklaring van termen, verzameld uit de rijks geschiedkundige publicatiën die betrekking hebben op de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (Den Haag: ING, 2000), p. 87.

³⁷ ‘Beynon to Mossel, 15-9-1755’, VOC 8348, NA.

³⁸ Fiedler, ‘Hans’, 5 (1931): 27.

³⁹ The use of this term implies that more than one *regent* could exist in any single principality, but all were subordinate to the *hoofd regent*.

hoofd regent, was stabbed to death by a Portuguese Catholic priest. In the face of these incidents Kupang accepted Maubara's offer to swear loyalty to the VOC, and to capitalise on the alliance Pietersz returned there with gifts of muskets, ammunition, a flag and a stone engraved with the VOC symbol. The latter was erected in front of the *hoofd regent's* house. Pietersz was also tasked with identifying a place to build a fort.⁴⁰ What had just occurred was more than the VOC merely supporting Maubara's opposition to the common foe, the Portuguese. It was, in fact, the establishment of a tribute-trade agreement; a common phenomenon in the eastern archipelago.⁴¹ The VOC had become a great power in the region and had assisted Maubara on several occasions before it was presented with the Sikka captives. This should be seen as the offering of tribute with the expectation that the VOC would repay Maubara with protection and further gifts of its own, as indeed happened shortly after.

Meanwhile, a son of the Maubara *koning* (king)⁴² and a son of the *tenente coronel* (lieutenant colonel)⁴³ visited Kupang to report the latest developments. One of these was that nearby Liquiçá

⁴⁰ 'Von Plüskow to Mossel, 22-7-1758', VOC 8351, NA.

⁴¹ Such arrangements were made not only with relatively simple principalities such as those of Timor; for example, Vos (*Gentle Janus*, p. 4) cites the case of Palembang, a much larger and wealthier domain in Sumatra, which at around the same time sold tin cheaply to the VOC in return for protection. Although the circumstances were quite different, Vos also interprets this as a tribute relationship.

⁴² As used here the term *koning* appears to be equivalent to *hoofd regent*.

⁴³ The term used in the document is simply *tenenty*. Elsewhere this appears as *tenenti colonel*, *tanenty cornel* and other spellings. The more correct Portuguese *tenente coronel* is used

had gone over to the Portuguese after the ‘rightful ruler’ (*wettingen koning*) was imprisoned in Dili and his brother placed on the throne. As a result, Maubara was surrounded by enemy forces. In December 1758, the government council at Kupang decided to send further gunpowder and munitions to Maubara, but also a European *tolk* (interpreter), *corporaal* (corporal) Dirk Bruijsterman, to facilitate communications. Bruijsterman was also to ensure that all wax, slaves and sandalwood from Maubara was sold to the VOC and not to any others.⁴⁴ This latter instruction underlines the fact that the VOC’s chief concern was always trade. In March 1759, Domingos Samuel Doutel, *tenente coronel* of Maubara, placed his mark on a letter declaring on his behalf, that of the Maubara *hoofd regent*, Don Joseph, and the various Maubara *vorsten* (princes) and *tommongong* (village chiefs), that they agreed with the 1756 contract signed with the VOC, and continued to pledge their loyalty.⁴⁵ The contract referred to was that signed by the

throughout this article. Since their earliest days on Timor, the Portuguese bestowed noble and military titles on some of their allies, with *tenente coronel* usually given to ‘executive regents’; Hägerdal, *Lords*, p. 319. The Dutch continued the practice, but in the process much of the original Portuguese was corrupted. Thus, the Portuguese title *dom* (lord, sir) is often presented in Dutch documents as *don*. The Portuguese names adopted by many of the Timorese are also often rendered in VOC reports with a Dutch equivalent or some other non-Lusophone form.

⁴⁴ ‘Ordinaire vergadering, 26-12-1758’, VOC 2965, NA.

⁴⁵ ‘MXVII. Timor. 27 Maart 1759’, in *Corpus diplomaticum. Deel 6*, ed. Stapel, p. 177. Citing this document Kammen (*Three centuries*, pp. 44, 191) suggests that Domingos was granted the title *tenente coronel* by the Dutch whereas the Maubara king was given the title *dom*. He may be right, but the document merely mentions these people having those titles, not how they got them.

groot koning of Wewiku-Wehali, discussed earlier. Maubara was now being accepted as playing a similar role to Wewiku-Wehali, although neither the princes and chiefs, nor the districts they represented, were identified in the document referred to.

By mid-1760, the Maubara fort was completed and *sergeant* Tobias Burger was appointed *tolk*, replacing *corporaal* Bruijsterman. The *tolk* was clearly more than just an interpreter and acted as an intermediary between the Timorese and the Dutch. He was also the VOC's eyes and ears in the countryside. The fort, meanwhile, was described as round, 80 feet (23.4 metres)⁴⁶ in diameter, with masonry (*gemetselde*)⁴⁷ walls 6 feet (1.8 metres) thick and in the shape of an eight-pointed star.⁴⁸ Not long after its completion, the Portuguese attacked the fort with troops from Dili, Liquiçá and elsewhere, under the command of Captain Balthazar Renoij (Renory?) from Lifau. The Dutch sent troops to assist, including several *Mardijkers*, who chased the Portuguese forces away.⁴⁹ Around this time, the Maubara *regent* came to Kupang with eight others from the Maubara region, each bearing gifts of beeswax. The Maubara *regent* brought 370

Although the Dutch did confer titles on later Maubara rulers, it is likely the ones discussed here were already in use when Pietersz made contact in 1755.

⁴⁶ The measurements are approximate, as the Dutch *voet* was similar to, but not exactly the same as the English 'foot'; Christopher Duffy, *Fire and stone: The science of fortress warfare, 1660-1860*, (London: Greenhill, 1996), p. 237; ING, *VOC-glossarium*, p. 122.

⁴⁷ The term is ambiguous in the context and may mean either stone- or brick-work.

⁴⁸ 'Von Plüskow to Mossel, 15-9-1760', VOC 8354, NA.

⁴⁹ 'Von Plüskow to Mossel, 7-6-1760', VOC 8354, NA; 'Report from Timor, 16-9-1760', VOC 2991, NA.

catties worth,⁵⁰ whereas the others offered amounts varying between 20 and 97 *catties*. In return, the Maubara *regenten* (kings) requested gunpowder, shot and muskets. The areas represented by these people were: Maubara, Nusadila (Lissadila?), Lanqueiro, Vatuboro, Deribate, Lissera, Ermera, Cutubaba and Bobonaro. The *regenten* of Atsabe and Cailaco also sought the VOC's protection at this time and requested firearms and ammunition, as did the four *jonge koningen* (young kings, princes) of Balibo, Fonora (Funar?), Fialaran and Paitoko.⁵¹ Most of these place names correspond to population centres or traditional principalities in present-day Timor-Leste or close to the central border. Funar (if identified correctly) is far further to the east, south of Manatuto. Paitoko, however, was on the island Alor, which is north of Maubara and is now part of Indonesia.⁵² The four *jonge koningen* also each requested a cane with a silver knob, which was a symbol of authority often presented by the VOC to its allies. The knob was usually engraved with the VOC symbol, but the Maubara *regent* requested that the knob of his cane also be engraved with his name and title: Don Domingos, *tenente coronel*.⁵³ The exchange of goods reported here was part of a tribute relationship, but it was trade nonetheless. From the Timorese

⁵⁰ The *catty* is a Chinese unit of weight still used in much of East and Southeast Asia. One *catty* is about 600 grams; ING, *VOC-glossarium*, p. 60.

⁵¹ 'Report from Timor, 16-9-1760', VOC 2991, NA. See also 'Von Plüskow to Mossel, 15-9-1760', VOC 8354, NA; 'Ordinaire vergadering, 29-8-1760', VOC 2991, NA. In the latter document it is made clear that the Maubara *regent* was *tenente coronel* Don Domingos.

⁵² For more on Paitoko and Maubara's connection to Alor, see Hans Hägerdal, 'Cannibals and pedlars: Economic opportunities and political alliance in Alor, 1600-1850', *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 38, 111 (2010): 237; Kammen, *Three centuries*, p. 27.

⁵³ 'Report from Timor, 16-9-1760', VOC 2991, NA.

perspective it must have been quite satisfactory if there was any truth in the 1755 report that the Portuguese had forcefully appropriated the yearly beeswax production without adequate compensation.

In a report from Kupang in 1761, the *tenente coronel* was portrayed as a loyal ally of the VOC, but it was stressed that his brother, the *koning* Don Luis, was the ‘real’ ruler of Maubara. It was also asserted that the Portuguese *governador* had recently sent three letters to the *koning* to entice him to return Maubara’s allegiance to the Portuguese. Fearing defection or intrigue, the VOC increased the strength of the Maubara garrison to 11 Europeans and 60 Balinese. Nothing amiss seems to have occurred, however, and more gifts of beeswax were sent to the VOC by the Maubara *koningen* (kings).⁵⁴ The number of Timorese principalities associated with Maubara wishing to ally themselves with the VOC even seems to have grown, with Leimea, Damara and Samoro Kecil added to the list, the latter being in the Manatuto district, much further east.⁵⁵

This increase in allies may have comforted the Dutch, but reports from Kupang suggest that VOC officials there may not have entirely understood who or what they were dealing with. For example, the authority (if any) that Maubara exercised over the principalities named alongside it in VOC reports is unclear, but VOC officials seemed to have no hesitation in awarding primacy to Maubara. It is also notable that in the documents discussed so far there are many cases where

⁵⁴ In other documents cited so far Maubara is presented as having only one *koning*, but in this case people otherwise referred to as *regent* are also given the title.

⁵⁵ ‘Von Plüskow to Mossel, 30-9-1761’, VOC 3024, NA. Mossel never read the report, as he died in May 1761.

important actors are identified merely by rank, but even when named as well it is often ambiguous where the Dutch believed each sat within the local hierarchy. In relation to Maubara, VOC records mention people with titles such as *tenente coronel*, *regent*, *hoofd regent*, *vorst*, and *koning*, but the titles are used inconsistently and sometimes it appears that one individual is given more than one title. It could be that the Dutch had little understanding of the internal workings of the Maubara political system and did not know what role each of the people they met with, or heard of, really played. A possible source of confusion was that many Timorese principalities operated under a dual-sovereignty system where four sub-territories ruled by secular lords surrounded a fifth sacral ruling centre. The ritual lord had superior status in many ways, but one of the secular lords took the active role in political affairs.⁵⁶ It is unclear how much the Dutch understood of this seemingly paradoxical system, but it is also unknown if such a system ever operated at Maubara, as discussed later.

Maubara's known oral tradition is unclear on the matter of dual-sovereignty, but it does assert that a division of authority existed there dating back to the arrival of three brothers from the south who showed by various signs that they were the real rulers. One brother went to live at Vatuvou, one to Lauana, and the paramount ruler, who was titled *coronel*, resided at Guguleur. Four leaders of the existing people of Maubara were given the title *tenente coronel* along with

⁵⁶ Clark E. Cunningham, 'People of the dry land: A study of the social organisation of an Indonesian people' (Ph.D. diss., Oxford University, Oxford, 1962), pp. 2-3; James J. Fox, 'The great lord rests at the centre: The paradox of powerlessness in European-Timorese relations', *Canberra Anthropology*, 5, 2 (1982): 24-6; Andrew McWilliam, 'From lord of the earth to village head: Adapting to the nation-state in West Timor', *BKI*, 155, 1 (1999): 129, 131.

legal and judicial functions, which included appointing the paramount ruler and other officials. The different posts were passed down through family lineages.⁵⁷ At the time the Dutch arrived, it seems the paramount ruler still resided at Guguleur, but the post was taken over by the Vatuvou lineage in the mid-1800s, as discussed later. The post of *tenente coronel* as described in the oral tradition is more difficult to reconcile with the position of the same name depicted in the archival record.

It is debatable whether the Dutch understood the Maubara political system or not, but the documents they left behind can be challenging for modern researchers. As noted earlier, Domingos Samuel Doutel was named as *tenente coronel* of Maubara in a document from 1759, while Don Joseph was declared to be *hoofd regent*. A person identified simply as Domingos was named as *tenente coronel* in other documents from 1760, but in a report from 1761 it was revealed that the ruler of Maubara was in fact Domingos's brother, the *koning* Don Luis. However, following extensive research, Hans Hägerdal concludes that Dom José Xavier Doutel was ruler of Maubara from before 1754 up to 1776,⁵⁸ so it was presumably he who was presented as Don Joseph in 1759. It seems reasonable to assume that in early Dutch reports that refer to an unnamed Maubara *hoofd regent* or *koning* it was Dom José who was meant, but one cannot be certain. The anomaly of the 1761 document that mentions Don Luis is dealt with by Kammen by suggesting that Luis was an error for José, or that Dom José's name 'was omitted because of his

⁵⁷ Ritual speaker Mau Lelo interviewed by David Mearns, Baiquinilau, 13 November 2010; copy of transcript with the author. Also see Kammen, *Three centuries*, pp. 25-7, 30, 38.

⁵⁸ Hägerdal, *Lords*, p. 422.

superior status' and the name of the head of a related royal family was used instead.⁵⁹ Whatever the truth may be in that case, the next mention of Dom José after March 1759 found during research for this article dates from June 1762, when he was cited in a VOC report as *hoofd regent* of Maubara, although once more under the name Don Joseph.⁶⁰ Don Joseph was mentioned again in a letter forwarded to Batavia in November 1762. The letter, credited to Don Joseph and 16 associated VOC allies, outlines the amounts of beeswax presented to the Dutch from each area and what was asked for in return. Maubara heads the list with an offering of 2½ *picul* of beeswax (1 *picul* = 100 *catties*) whereas the others offered 1 *picul* each. In return, the Timorese asked for the usual weapons and ammunition, as well as additional canes of authority for those who had not yet received them. A curious feature of the letter is that in the list of offerings and requests, the various rulers, including Don Joseph, are referred to as *panghoeloe*. In

⁵⁹ Kammen, *Three centuries*, p. 191.

⁶⁰ 'Opperhoofd Johan ter Herbruggen to Gouverneur Generaal Petrus Albertus van der Parra, 1-6-1762', VOC 8357, NA. In a VOC report from 1760, a person named Don Susjeeh (spelling unclear) is given the title *cornel coning van Maubara* (colonel king of Maubara). This may refer to Dom José, but if so his title appears to have been joined confusingly with that of Don Domingos, who is referred to elsewhere in the document as *tenente coronel*. On the other hand, the designation may be correct, as oral tradition states that Maubara rulers previously bore the title *coronel*, although no other examples of its use were discovered in the archives during research for this article; 'Translation of letter from Maubara to Batavia, 9-6-1760', file no. 3572, Archive of the Governor General and Councillors of the Indies (Asia), the Supreme Government of the Dutch United East India Company and its successors (1612-1811) [hereafter Archive of the Supreme Government], Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia (ANRI), Jakarta.

modern Indonesian a *penghulu* is a village chief, but in former times it designated a far higher position. In a later section, Don Joseph heads a list of the same rulers, who are then referred to as *radja* (king). The areas they represented have all been mentioned earlier, including two outside the immediate vicinity of Maubara; Paitoko on Alor and Samoro Kecil in Manatuto.⁶¹

The Dutch lose interest

VOC officials in Kupang seem to have been pleased with the trade arrangements made with the Maubara rulers and the role they played in the contest against the Portuguese. However, an apparent desire to cut back on VOC commitments to Maubara saw the Balinese soldiers stationed at the fort recalled in mid-1762 by the VOC *opperhoofd* (headman) at Kupang, Johan ter Herbruggen, and only a token garrison of 12 Europeans retained. The garrison had been increased earlier due to fears of defection to the Portuguese, so ter Herbruggen may have been encouraged to take this action when the *tenente coronel* assured him on behalf of his brother, the *koning*, that the Maubara people were totally loyal to the VOC. Unfortunately, neither the *tenente coronel* nor the *koning* are named in the relevant report, but if Don Domingos remained in the former role, the *koning* was presumably Don Joseph (Dom José). Another interesting point in this report is the mention that the Maubara *tolk*, Tobias Burger, was to be replaced by *corporaal* Godlieb Metschen.⁶² Burger was appointed to Maubara in mid-1760, so unless he had been relieved in between he had spent two years at the post. Burger probably travelled with the

⁶¹ ‘Translation of letter from Maubara to Batavia, 5-11-1762’, VOC 8357, NA. The same letter appears in file no. 3573, Archive of the Supreme Government, ANRI. Other documents in the latter archive prove that references to Timorese rulers as *panghoeloe* were not uncommon.

⁶² ‘Extracts of letters sent from Timor to Batavia, 1762’, VOC 8357, NA.

tenente coronel and others when they visited Kupang and may have frequented that place from time-to-time to make reports, but the long periods spent with the Maubara notables must have given him, and others who served in similar posts, valuable insights to the Timorese political system. It is difficult to imagine that they always misunderstood how things worked.

In a letter from the VOC *gouverneur generaal* dated 31 December 1762, an order was given to demolish the Maubara fort and return the occupation force to Java ‘as no benefit has been produced’. In the event, it seems that the fort was not demolished, but the small force retained there by *opperhoofd* ter Herbruggen was withdrawn and Maubara then had to defend itself.⁶³

What caused this extraordinary reversal of policy? The Kupang *opperhoofd* from 1758, Hans Albregt von Plüskow,⁶⁴ strongly favoured removing the Portuguese from the Timor region and appears to have been especially chosen for this purpose by *gouverneur generaal* Mossel. The ultimate aim was to control local trade and make profits for the VOC, so von Plüskow was also charged with establishing an outpost in eastern Timor to extend Dutch control of trade in those districts. He evidently believed that an alliance with Maubara would contribute to this goal and placed a high priority on the building of the fortress there.⁶⁵ However, the disastrous results of

⁶³ De Roo van Alderwerelt, ‘Aanteekeningen’, pp. 208, 220. The document referred to was not found during the research for this article.

⁶⁴ Almost without exception, the archives cited in this article for the time he was *opperhoofd* show von Plüskow’s full name as presented here. Later authors have routinely altered his second name to ‘Albrecht’, but there is no known reason why he could not have used the Scandinavian variant ‘Albregt’.

⁶⁵ Fiedler, ‘Hans’, 4 (1931): 31, 33.

von Plüskow's actions elsewhere are sure to have contributed to the Dutch taking a more cautious approach.

In 1760, the Portuguese *governador* at Lifau was recalled and a triumvirate consisting of the Timorese Dom José of Alas, Dominican padre Jacinto de Conceição, and Vicente Ferreira de Carvalho, ruled in the interim. In 1761, Ferreira de Carvalho sought refuge in Kupang after being forced to flee Lifau by the Topasses, who were in league with the padre. In Kupang, Ferreira de Carvalho declared that the Topasses were rebels against the Portuguese king and offered to handover to the Dutch their strongholds in Oecusse and Noemuti in exchange for assistance in returning him to office. Von Plüskow did not hesitate to accept the opportunity to extend Dutch control of territory (and thus, trade) and a large number of soldiers sailed for Lifau where they planned to restore Ferreira de Carvalho to power. The Topasses were apparently impressed by the Dutch expedition and agreed to submit to the VOC in return for a pardon. However, when von Plüskow went ashore to accept the submission of the Topasses in late October 1761,⁶⁶ he and all members of his small retinue were murdered.⁶⁷ *Gouverneur generaal* Petrus Albertus van der Parra, who replaced Mossel after his death in May 1761, had previously been responsible for trade policy and had never considered the costs involved in the strategy of conquest on Timor to be justifiable.⁶⁸ He now showed little sympathy for von Plüskow, stating that what had happened was his own fault, as he had sought only his own glory and meddled in affairs that could bring no profit for the VOC. Furthermore, he said that there could be no thought of revenge, as a force

⁶⁶ The exact date is uncertain from the documents examined.

⁶⁷ Hägerdal, *Lords*, pp. 388-90.

⁶⁸ Fiedler, 'Hans', 4 (1931): 31.

strong enough to achieve this did not exist in Timor and he prohibited the incurrence of any cost in checking the Topasses.⁶⁹ With this change in approach the Topasses continued to hold the upper hand and the plan to drive the Portuguese out of Timor was put to rest after only a few years.

In 1768, a new Portuguese *governador* arrived at Lifau, but the settlement was blockaded by the Topasses and local rulers. Unable to break the siege, the *governador* abandoned the settlement in 1769 and moved the Portuguese capital to Dili, further east.⁷⁰ Ironically, being forced out of Lifau proved to be vital for the Portuguese in their contest with the Dutch. Following their relocation to Dili, the Portuguese grew ever stronger in the east and the Dutch gradually dropped their claims there, although it took them longer to renounce their rights in Maubara.⁷¹ Yet even at Maubara the Dutch appear to have realised that they were likely to achieve more costs than profits. Maubara produced beeswax and sandalwood, but the days of great profits to be made from the latter had already passed, as the wood had been systematically stripped from the easily accessible areas and was increasingly difficult to obtain. Although local trade continued, the hope that Maubara would provide a base for extending Dutch control of trade further east was never realised and Maubara received less attention from the Dutch with each passing year.

Maubara's continued association with the Dutch

⁶⁹ De Roo van Alderwerelt, 'Aanteekeningen', pp. 207-8.

⁷⁰ Hägerdal, *Lords*, pp. 395-6.

⁷¹ Heyman, *De Timor tractaten*, pp. 8-9.

It could be said that the new *gouverneur generaal* showed greater generosity to the Timorese rulers than he had to the memory of the recently deceased *opperhoofd*. At the end of 1761, van der Parra and the members of his council in Batavia sent their ‘loyal friends and allies’ in the Maubara region a great number of presents. Some of the Maubara *regenten* were supplied with canes and other symbols of authority, such as drums and banners, but most received pieces of ‘extra fine’ Indian cloth known as *moeris*, *hamans*, *cassas* and *chelas*.⁷² In 1763, Maubara and six nearby principalities delivered quantities of beeswax to the VOC. The Maubara *koning* sought muskets and gunpowder in return, but he and the other rulers also asked for *parang* (machetes), axes and *swart salemvoeris*, a type of dark Indian cloth.⁷³ Indian textiles had been traded in the eastern archipelago since at least the fifth century. As the VOC extended its trade monopoly in the islands it soon realised the value of these textiles as items of exchange. Large quantities of lower grade cloth for everyday use were brought into the archipelago, but the VOC reserved the more refined cloth for special clients, especially those in the eastern islands where high quality Indian cloth was part of an exchange system used by rulers to gain loyalty from their

⁷² ‘Gouverneur Generaal van der Parra to the rulers of Maubara, 31-12-1761’, file no. 3589, Archive of the Supreme Government, ANRI. Similar letters to other rulers in Timor and nearby islands appear in the same file. For descriptions of the types of cloth, see ING, *VOC-glossarium*, pp. 28, 31, 52, 69.

⁷³ ‘Translation of letter from Maubara to Batavia, 23-9-1763’, file no. 3573, Archive of the Supreme Government, ANRI; ING, *VOC-glossarium*, p. 100.

subjects. Such cloth was used ‘as a means of indicating rank, status and prestige’ and even came to be valued as sacred heirlooms that played special roles in ritual practices.⁷⁴

In 1763, Maubara was recorded by the Dutch as one of only four places in the Timor region where they maintained a resident *tolk*.⁷⁵ It is unknown if this was the *corporaal* Metschen who had been appointed to the post in 1762, but it would seem that this was one of the last times for many years that the Dutch were prepared to commit manpower to the principality. In the following year, Don Joseph (Dom José), the Maubara *hoofd regent*, came to Kupang in person bringing presents of 137 pounds of beeswax and 500 pounds of sandalwood.⁷⁶ Up to this point the VOC records examined show that all contacts with the Dutch were made through the Maubara *regent* or *tenente coronel* (apparently the same person). This could support a conclusion that this person was the ‘active’ executive ruler of the principality whereas the *hoofd regent* or

⁷⁴ Joanna Barrkman, ‘Entwined: the influence of Indian patola and trade cloths on the ritual practices and textile motifs of the Atoin meto people of West Timor’ (Master diss., Charles Darwin University, Darwin, 2006), pp. 105-8. Barrkman credits the ‘double ikat’ silk *patola* as the most prestigious Indian cloth in eastern Indonesia. *Patola* were presented to other rulers in the Timor region in late 1761, but the textiles gifted to the Maubara *regenten* were all ‘fine’ or ‘extra fine’ and may have been their textiles of choice.

⁷⁵ De Roo van Alderwerelt, ‘Aanteekeningen’, p. 209.

⁷⁶ ‘Ter Herbruggen to van der Parra, 31-8-1764’, VOC 8358, NA. Don Joseph’s visit to Kupang and the presents he brought are also recorded in ‘Report from Timor, 31-8-1764’, VOC 3121, NA. There were a variety of Dutch weights known as the *pond*, each being a bit less than 500 grams; ING, *VOC-glossarium*, p. 92.

koning was the ‘inactive’ sacral lord. However, Don Joseph’s actions in visiting Kupang on state business in 1764 and on other occasions are at odds with this assumption, as are reports of him communicating directly with Batavia. In 1764, a letter attributed to Don Joese Sabiel Dotel (Dom José Xavier Doutel) of Maubara was forwarded to Batavia from Kupang.⁷⁷ Amongst other things, the letter includes requests from other *radja* of the Maubara region (Lissadila, Lanqueiro, Vataboru, Deribate, Atsabe, Fialaran, Ermera, Balibo) seeking rifles, gunpowder, handkerchiefs/scarfs (*neusdoeken*) and canes with a silver knob inscribed with the VOC symbol. The Maubara ruler made similar requests, but also expressed his interest in Christianity and asked for a teacher to provide religious instruction to local children.⁷⁸ In 1765, Don Soesi Sabiel Dotel (Dom José Xavier Doutel) came to Kupang with the rulers of the same eight principalities mentioned in 1764, all bearing presents of wax. The *regenten* of Fialaran and Balibo requested in return the usual muskets, lead and gunpowder, but the rest asked for *parang* and axes. The Maubara *koning* also requested that his son, Cleto Sabiel Dotel (Caletto Xavier Doutel) be conferred the titles of *don* and *captain* (captain). Lastly, the *koning* asked once again for a

⁷⁷ A letter sent to Batavia in the name of Don Joseph in 1762, and a probable one from 1760, were discussed earlier.

⁷⁸ ‘Translation of letter from Maubara to Batavia, 10-8-1764’, VOC 8358, NA. This letter also appears in VOC 3121, NA.

teacher of the Christian religion for the children of his principality,⁷⁹ but there is no record of a religious teacher ever being sent to Maubara.⁸⁰

In 1776, Dom José was succeeded by his son Dom Caletto Xavier Doutel,⁸¹ but he was challenged by Dom José's brother, Don Paul (Dom Paulo), who based himself in Portuguese-controlled Liquiçá. In 1777, Dom Caletto fled to the mountains, but continued to fight Dom Paulo. It was reported that stone markers with the VOC symbol were then sent to Macau from

⁷⁹ 'Translation of letter from Maubara to Batavia, 9-9-1765', VOC 3151, NA. The same letter appears in file no. 3573, Archive of the Supreme Government, ANRI.

⁸⁰ Kammen (*Three centuries*, pp. 47, 49, 191) acknowledges that little is known about Christian conversions during this period, but claims that at some time the Dutch constructed a large Protestant church west of the fort. It is unclear where Kammen got this information. The existing Catholic church west of the fort is considered to be one of the oldest in Timor-Leste, built by Bishop Medeiros, 1877-97; Luis Filipe F.R. Thomaz, 'Reconhecimento preliminary património histórico-cultural subsistente em Timor-Leste: Relatório da visita ao território efectuada em fevereiro de 2000 A.D.' (Lisbon, 2000. Kevin Sherlock Collection, Darwin), p. 47.

⁸¹ Hägerdal, *Lords*, p. 422. According to Kammen (*Three centuries*, pp. 45, 174), Dom Caletto Xavier Doutel and the Domingos Samuel Doutel who had served as *tenente coronel* to Dom José was the same person, that is, Domingos was José's son, not his brother, as stated in the VOC documents.

Maubara by the Portuguese,⁸² who also declared Dom Paulo to be Maubara's rightful ruler. In 1779, Dom Caleto wrote to Kupang seeking a *tolk*, soldiers and ammunition. As he explained, he was surrounded by former allies of the Dutch who had defected to the Portuguese, but he refused to follow their example. Kupang *opperhoofd* Willem Adriaan van Este then noted Maubara's proximity to the new Portuguese capital and reflected that Maubara had never succeeded in facilitating trade with eastern Timor and it was unlikely it ever would; the most van Este was prepared to supply was two muskets, 1,000 musket balls and a barrel of gunpowder.⁸³ Van Este's response was surely made with regard to potential risks and benefits. The VOC was conscious that in order to assure trade with the many principalities of Timor and other parts of the archipelago it had to maintain its reputation as a reliable ally. Conversely, the VOC was always careful to contain expenditure and was cautious not to get involved in war if possible because, as Vos puts it, 'not only [were wars] costly, they also had to be won' if VOC prestige was to be maintained.⁸⁴ In the case of Maubara, the likelihood of prolonged conflict with the Portuguese and Topasses was obvious and van Este clearly calculated it was not worth the risk. It would have defied VOC principles to have simply abandoned Maubara, but the assistance given was far short of that requested. Dom Caleto continued his fight against Dom Paulo and the Portuguese well into the 1780s and eventually prevailed. Despite the meagre assistance he received, he remained loyal to the Dutch.

⁸² 'Statement by Ong Tjailong to Opperhoofd Barend W. Fockens, 1776', VOC 3465, NA; 'Report from Kupang to Gouverneur Generaal Jeremias van Riemsdijk, 20-9-1777', VOC 3493, NA.

⁸³ 'Extract of letters from Timor to Batavia, 1777', VOC 3553, NA.

⁸⁴ Vos, *Gentle Janus*, pp. 116-17, 208.

In 1792, Maubara again sought help from Kupang. On that occasion, the VOC arranged for assistance to be provided secretly through the *keizer* (emperor) of Amakono (also known as Sonbai). The Dutch were then unsure of their rights in several places in Timor, including Maubara, and they did not wish to openly challenge the Portuguese. They were also attempting to cut costs and did not want any new commitments.⁸⁵ In 1794, Dom Caleto died and so did his oldest son. His son next in line then appealed hastily to *opperhoofd* Timotheus Wanjon in Kupang to recognise his rule, as he was worried that if a new ruler was not presented quickly the people would turn to the Portuguese.⁸⁶ His request was accepted, but Maubara appears by then to have been of little importance to the Dutch. The trade between the VOC and Maubara that began in the late 1750s lasted until the end of the century in the way it had begun, as an exchange of gifts in a typical tribute relationship. In the latter years, however, it appeared to be almost ritualistic and the number of principalities associated with Maubara in alliance with the Dutch continued to diminish.⁸⁷

The Dutch connection with Maubara continues to fade

For various reasons, including corruption, inefficiency and mounting debt, the VOC ceased to exist at the end of 1799 and its territorial possessions became the property of the Netherlands government. In the meantime, war in Europe between Britain and France, and the latter's

⁸⁵ De Roo van Alderwerelt, 'Aanteekeningen', p. 220; Hägerdal, *Lords*, pp. 402-3.

⁸⁶ 'Opperhoofd Timotheus Wanjon to Gouverneur Generaal Willem Arnold Alting, 28-9-1794', Comité Oost-Indische Handel en Bezittingen, no. 102, NA.

⁸⁷ Various documents in the Archive of the Supreme Government, ANRI.

annexation of the Netherlands in 1810, led the British to occupy many parts of the Netherlands Indies, including Kupang, where they arrived in January 1812.⁸⁸ The Portuguese used the situation to try and force their claims for several districts, including Maubara. For example, Andries Christian Muller was appointed as *tolk* to travel to the districts to inform people of the change from Dutch to British control. In Oecusse in April 1812, en route to Maubara, Muller was told that Maubara was Portuguese and that he should not go there. The Portuguese commander of Batugade repeated this advice, warning the captain of Muller's ship that if he took Muller to Maubara his vessel and cargo would be confiscated and his head chopped off. The captain would not risk going to Maubara and they returned to Kupang.⁸⁹

Following restoration of Dutch rule in Kupang in late 1816, the Portuguese appear to have accepted that Maubara was Dutch territory, as shown in a letter *resident* Jacobus Arnoldus Hazaart wrote to the Portuguese *governador* in 1817, apparently in reply to a request for the Dutch to control its vassal.⁹⁰ Hazaart apologised for Maubara assisting enemies of the Portuguese and for allowing runaway slaves from Dili to seek refuge in the principality. Hazaart assured his counterpart that he had admonished the Maubara *regent* to desist in such actions.⁹¹ Meanwhile,

⁸⁸ Steven Farram, 'Jacobus Arnoldus Haazart and the British interregnum in Netherlands Timor, 1812-1816', *BKI*, 163, 4 (2007): 465.

⁸⁹ 'C. Lambert. Statements from 'tolk' A. Muller and Chinese trader/captain, 1812', *Algemeene Secretarie, Arsip Timor, 1616-1890*, no. 21, ANRI.

⁹⁰ The *resident* performed similar functions to the *opperhoofd* of the VOC period.

⁹¹ 'Resident Jacob Hazaart to Governador José Pinto, 25-10-1817', *Arsip Timor, 1818*, no. 34, ANRI. Transcript provided by Hans Hägerdal.

Hazaart tried to develop agriculture, and recognising Maubara's suitability for coffee and pepper, encouraged their cultivation.⁹²

In 1831, Emanuel Francis was in Timor to prepare a report for the Netherlands Indies government. Of Maubara, he noted that its *vorst* had authority over 87,000 subjects,⁹³ and that some Chinese traders from Kupang carried out business there, but that the place was devoid of all supervision and no notice was taken of any Dutch laws or regulations.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, it is interesting that the Chinese came from Kupang, as it indicates that trade was still taking place under the Dutch flag. Although no record has been discovered to prove the thesis, it seems likely that private traders from Kupang or other places under Dutch administration were visiting Maubara even during the VOC period, as was commonplace in other places under VOC control or protection.⁹⁵ An account from 1836 suggests that there had been some revival in Dutch interest in Maubara, as it was noted as one of only six places on Timor outside Kupang where the

⁹² 'Timor, 1824', Collectie Schneither, no. 131, NA.

⁹³ Kammen (*Three centuries*, p. 193) observes that the figure is 'impossibly high for Maubara alone', concluding it refers to all the districts the Dutch believed to be subservient to Maubara. In 1862, the population of Maubara was estimated at 3,000 to 4,000; Affonso de Castro, 'Résumé historique de l'établissement Portugais à Timor, des us et coutumes de ses habitants', *TBG*, 11 (1862): 469.

⁹⁴ Emanuel A. Francis, 'Timor in 1831', *Tijdschrift voor Neerlands Indië*, 1, 1 (1838): 360.

⁹⁵ L. Blussé and F. Gaastra, 'Companies and trade: Some reflections on a workshop and concept', in *Companies and trade: Essays on overseas trading companies during the ancien regime*, ed. Leonard Blussé and Femme Gaastra (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1981), p. 12.

Dutch had stationed a *posthouder* (post-holder) to represent their interests.⁹⁶ In February 1836, however, no Dutch officials were present in Maubara when the English whaling vessels *Japan* and *Kingsdown* called in for provisions. The whalers were well received by the local ‘chief’ who sold them livestock. The Englishmen complained that the animals delivered were short by two goats, but these were soon supplied and all seemed well. However, when the men boarded the ships’ boats to depart a number of Timorese with muskets opened fire, killing Captain William Simmons of the *Kingsdown* and one of the men from the *Japan*. Consequently, a complaint was made at Batavia with a demand for prosecution of the offenders, but the government there seemed barely aware if the place was Dutch or Portuguese. An officer was appointed to investigate and after correspondence with the Portuguese *governador* of Timor concluded that Maubara was a Dutch responsibility, but that the murdered men had brought their misfortune onto themselves.⁹⁷ On what basis it was claimed that the whalers had brought about their own

⁹⁶ J.D. Kruseman, ‘Beschrijving van Timor’, *De Oosterling*, 2 (1836): 10.

⁹⁷ One Singapore newspaper reported the incident taking place at the otherwise unknown ‘Point Mobar’, insisting on this even when a rival newsheet pointed out that there was no such place; *Singapore Chronicle and Commercial Register*, 19 Nov. and 3 Dec. 1836; *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 1 Dec. 1836. Kammen (*Three centuries*, p. 53) says the newspapers reported that the Batavia government denied that the ‘natives’ of Maubara were Dutch subjects. It was in fact a newspaper correspondent who made the (incorrect) claim that the Dutch had ‘nothing to do with’ Maubara. The story of the Dutch in Batavia being unsure of the status of Maubara is found in P.J. Veth, ‘Het eiland Timor’, offprint of *De Gids*, 8, 2 (1855): 128-9.

downfall is unknown, but captains and crews of whaling vessels did have a reputation for disreputable and aggressive behaviour.⁹⁸

In 1846, a Dutch ship, *Doris*, was sent to Maubara to display the flag and to enquire into the production and cost of local coffee. The commander of *Doris* met the Maubara *radja* and various lesser nobles, handing the *radja* gifts of gunpowder, silk, arak and a Dutch flag. The *radja* asked if the commander had not brought anything for the nobles, as it was the custom since his forefathers' days that all received gifts. The *radja* produced a VOC document from 1767 to substantiate his claim, but when he learnt there was nothing, some of the gunpowder and arak were shared with the others, the *radja* declaring he would be ashamed to send them away empty-handed. A note in the subsequent report shows that the *radja* was to be informed that in his forefathers' day the gifts bestowed to the nobles were more like trade items to be exchanged for local products. A gift from the government today was a mere courtesy and nothing was expected in return. Meanwhile, the district's annual coffee harvest was reported to be 60 to 100 *picul*; the price per *picul* being 20 guilders in silver or a shotgun and two flasks of gunpowder. However, the plants were reported to be neglected and virtually wild.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, by the time the Dutch

⁹⁸ *Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser*, 1 Dec. 1836.

⁹⁹ 'Instructions for sea trip, 20-8-1846'; 'Report from commander of *Doris*, 6-10-1846', Arsip Timor, no. 56, Register der Handelingen en Besluiten van den Resident van Timor, ANRI.

Transcript provided by Hans Hägerdal.

ceded the principality to the Portuguese in 1861, Maubara coffee had become well known for its quality and was in high demand in the coastal trade.¹⁰⁰

The unnamed *radja* met in 1846 would have been Dom Caletto II, who became ruler in Maubara sometime before 1832.¹⁰¹ In 1849, A.G. Brouwer was investigating the mineral riches of Timor for the Netherlands Indies government, as well as seeking information to help settle the endless land disputes with the Portuguese.¹⁰² Brouwer reported that the Maubara *radja*, Don Caletto (Dom Caletto II), had killed his brother and all his family. Don Caletto's tyrannical and treacherous behaviour towards foreign traders, as well as his own people, resulted in him being abandoned by his *fettor* (district headman) and most of his subjects. In the ensuing conflict, both Don Caletto and his *fettor* sought assistance from neighbouring principalities that had submitted to the Portuguese. The situation, warned Brouwer, could lead to a complete Portuguese triumph.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ L.W.A. Kessler, 'Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van Nederlandsch Indië. Eene vredesluiting op het eiland Timor en de overgave van het koninkrijk Maubara aan het Portugeesche gouvernement. Fragment uit mijn dagboek', *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indië*, 20, 1 (1891): 254; W.G. Clarence-Smith, 'Planters and smallholders in Portuguese Timor in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries', *Indonesia Circle*, 57 (1992): 15.

¹⁰¹ Hägerdal. *Lords*, p. 422. The relationship of Dom Caletto II to the Dom Caletto first reported in 1776 is unclear, although Kammen (*Three centuries*, p. 174) presents him as a grandson.

¹⁰² Veth, 'Het eiland Timor', pp. 115-16.

¹⁰³ A.G. Brouwer, 'Geheime nota betreffende Timor en in 't bijzonder betreffende die landen welke de Nederlandsche vlag voeren, 15-8-1849', DH 731, Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-,

The Dutch offer Maubara to the Portuguese

Brouwer's report may have led some of his compatriots to conclude that their claim to Maubara was more trouble than it was worth. When Brouwer visited Maubara, there had been several recent territorial disputes between the Portuguese and the Dutch in the Timor region. For two centuries the Dutch had tried unsuccessfully to force the Portuguese out of Timor. In 1817, the Netherlands Indies *gouverneur generaal* proposed that Portugal sell its Timor possessions to the Dutch, but the Portuguese were not interested. On 1 August 1851, a joint Dutch-Portuguese commission met in Dili to discuss the colonial borders. The Dutch offered the Portuguese 200,000 guilders and the cession of Maubara in return for all Portuguese claims in Flores and the Solor archipelago, with the exception of the island Atauro. Portuguese *governador* José Joaquim Lopes de Lima was apparently so short of funds that he accepted the offer, but when the news reached Lisbon he was ordered home in disgrace. Nevertheless, negotiations continued and Lopes de Lima's cession of territory to the Dutch was formally acknowledged; the treaty sealing the deal was concluded in 1859.¹⁰⁴

Land- en Volkenkunde, (KITLV), Leiden. The circumstances could not have been wholly satisfying for the Portuguese either, as Brouwer reported that the principalities Atsabe, Deribate and Leimea were considered subordinate to Maubara even though all three flew the Portuguese flag.

¹⁰⁴ Farram, 'The two Timors', pp. 42-4.

Furber asserts that Europeans in companies such as the VOC ‘thought of themselves primarily as merchants rather than rulers’.¹⁰⁵ By the mid-1800s, territorial control was becoming of greater importance. The 1859 treaty shows that the Netherlands Indies government considered the Maubara enclave less useful than the territory it was exchanged for, which was contiguous with other Dutch-claimed districts and thus easier to secure. This was not the last treaty made by the Dutch and the Portuguese concerning their Timor possessions and it was only in the early twentieth century that the matter was settled. By then, the Netherlands Indies government was truly in charge of an ‘empire of conquest’, as it had joined with other European powers in the late nineteenth century ‘scramble for colonies’.¹⁰⁶ But this is to get too far ahead in the story; what had to happen first was the Dutch had to explain to the Maubara rulers why they were breaking off their alliance and surrendering Maubara to its old enemies.

The handover of Maubara to the Portuguese

In January 1861, the Dutch military commander and civil administrator of Atapupu, *luitenant* (lieutenant) L.W.A. Kessler, received notification that the treaty for ‘Timor and subordinate islands’ between the Netherlands and Portugal had been concluded on 20 April 1859 and it was now his duty to oversee the transfer of Maubara to the Portuguese. Kessler’s superior in Kupang stressed the importance of a successful handover and Kessler reflected that he would have to use force against the Maubara people if they resisted. The valued VOC ally was now merely an expendable pawn in a colonial power-play. Meanwhile, Kessler summoned the Maubara *hoofden*

¹⁰⁵ Furber, *Rival empires*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ M.C. Ricklefs, *A history of modern Indonesia, c.1300 to the present* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1990), p. 125.

(heads) to Atapupu to explain to them what would happen. The *radja* Don Joseph and the *hoofd* Boussa were indisposed and could not attend, but Don Joseph's son Naga Bata appeared, as well as the *fettor* Datoe Lau and the *radja* Mau Lay. The most important 'head' to meet with Kessler, however, appears to have been the *kolonel* (colonel) Don Karlo, whom Kessler described as 'the man who properly had the most to say'.¹⁰⁷ From this statement it would appear that Don Karlo was either the ascendant rival of Don Joseph or the executive ruler of the principality whereas Don Joseph played a more ritual role; a common division of authority in Timor, as discussed earlier. Kammen supports the former thesis, stating that the Don Joseph (Dom José in Kammen's account) reported by Kessler in 1861 was the same Don Caletto (Dom Caletto II) reported by Brouwer in 1849, whereas Don Karlo (Dom Carlos) was the leader of a rival royal family from Vatuvo. Kammen and Hägerdal agree that Dom Caletto II's reign ended in 1859, so at the time of the 1861 handover he may have been ruler in name only.¹⁰⁸ If so, one wonders if Don Karlo's title *kolonel* was merely a corruption of the old *tenente coronel*, the second-in-command, or if it corresponded to the *coronel* that oral tradition states had been the title of earlier Maubara rulers.

Kessler implies that he alone was responsible for convincing the Maubara representatives to accept the new circumstances, whereas H.E.K. Ezerman declares success in this matter was mainly due to the 'help and persuasion' offered by *posthouder* E. Vent who was presumably

¹⁰⁷ Kessler, 'Bijdrage', pp. 254-5.

¹⁰⁸ Kammen, *Three centuries*, pp. 45, 58-9, 194; Hägerdal, *Lords*, p. 422. Kammen also states that Datoe Lau was Don Karlo's brother, and Mau Lay was most likely an important local Chinese merchant.

stationed at Maubara.¹⁰⁹ The *posthouder*'s position seems similar to that previously titled *tolk* and Vent's familiarity with the local rulers would have been invaluable; although he is never mentioned by Kessler, one imagines that Vent was by his side throughout the negotiations. Kessler began those negotiations by showing the Maubara representatives a map of Timor, pointing out how Maubara was surrounded by Portuguese-controlled districts and explaining that the two governments had agreed to regulate the borders by placing Maubara under Portuguese control also. Kessler counselled against opposition as it would bring nothing but misfortune. The Maubara representatives accepted this, but claimed to be hurt as they had a great attachment to the Netherlands and had always been loyal. Furthermore, their oral tradition told them that the Portuguese had inflicted great cruelties on their ancestors. Kessler assured them that times had changed and they had nothing to fear. The following day, a meeting was held with the Portuguese commander of Batugade where the Maubara representatives reiterated their willingness to submit to the Portuguese; a document stating what had been said was then signed by all. Don Karlo and Mau Lay then accompanied Kessler to Dili where they were to receive a Portuguese flag 'and other things' to take back to Maubara.¹¹⁰

The group arrived in Dili on 30 May and were received with great ceremony, including a 21 gun salute given on the order of the acting *governador*, Major Cabreira. The Maubara representatives were given the Portuguese flag and it was arranged that Kessler and a Portuguese officer would oversee the lowering of the Dutch flag and its replacement with that of Portugal. The next day a

¹⁰⁹ H.E.K. Ezerman, 'Timor en onze politieke verhouding tot Portugal sedert het herstel van het Nederlandsch gezag in Oost-Indië', *Koloniaal Tijdschrift*, 6, 2 (1917): 894.

¹¹⁰ Kessler, 'Bijdrage', pp. 256-7.

Portuguese ship with the officer and some soldiers left for Maubara, while Kessler sailed in a Dutch cruiser; Don Karlo and his retinue travelled overland. The two ships arrived off Maubara on the morning of 1 April, but Kessler and the others did not disembark until Don Karlo arrived at four o'clock in the afternoon. Kessler launched immediately into his speech explaining the handover and Don Karlo repeated it in the local language, presumably Tocodede. Following the speech, Kessler 'drank with them to eternal friendship'. Kessler then lowered and raised the Dutch flag three times, each time greeted by a salute from the Portuguese ship. He then repeated the exercise with the Portuguese flag, this time with salutes from the Dutch ship, and on the third occasion he left it flying at the head of the flagstaff. The Portuguese then handed out gifts in the shape of sarongs, turbans (*hoofddoeken*) and arak. Kessler then took his leave of the Portuguese officer and the Maubara headmen, presenting the Dutch flag as a memento to Don Karlo. He then reboarded his ship, thus ending what appears to have been a brief ceremony.¹¹¹

Dom Caleto II (Don Joseph) was not present at the handover, but he is reported to have been unwilling to submit to Dili. One result was that Dom Carlos (Don Karlo) was appointed by the Portuguese to rule Maubara. It was not long, however, before Dom Carlos was also in conflict with the Portuguese, most likely over the matter of free trade.¹¹² Long before the transfer of authority in Maubara, smuggling, often involving local Chinese traders, had been common in the border districts. There was a great incentive to participate in such activities as both import and export duties in Portuguese Timor were high. Dutch authorities turned a blind eye to these

¹¹¹ Kessler, 'Bijdrage', pp. 258-9.

¹¹² Kammen, *Three centuries*, pp. 59, 64.

practices, as they considered any action, if necessary, should be taken by the Portuguese.¹¹³ In the decades following the transfer, Maubara was often in conflict with the Portuguese administration, which had to overcome two major revolts there in the 1870s and 1890s. The revolts are said to have been caused by Chinese traders who encouraged Maubara's rulers to reject paying customs duties for the export of coffee. During the periods of revolt, Maubara looked for assistance across the border, but all requests for help to its old allies in Atapupu and Kupang, and offers to return to Dutch rule, were refused.¹¹⁴

Postscript: What fort did the Dutch surrender to the Portuguese?

Although Kessler does not say so, it seems clear from his account that the handover ceremony took place at the fort, which is on the beachfront and would have been the only likely place to have had a flagstaff. However, it is also clear that the fort located in Maubara today is not the one reported as completed in 1760. That fort was described as being in the shape of an eight-pointed star, 80 feet (23.4 metres) in diameter. The present fort is almost rectangular with inward-sloping side walls allowing for enfilading fire from the protruding rear corners. During an inspection of the fort in 2011, the author paced the site and estimated the eastern and western walls to be roughly 60 metres in length and the northern and southern ones around 70 metres long; a quite different building to the one reported in 1760. An order for the fort's destruction

¹¹³ Ezerman, 'Timor', p. 894.

¹¹⁴ Bello de Almeida, *Meio seculo de lutas no ultramar: Subsídios para a história das campanhas do exército Português de terra e mar no seu império colonial* (Lisbon: Sociedade de Geografia, 1937), p. 256; Katharine G. Davidson, 'The Portuguese colonisation of Timor: The final stage, 1850-1912' (Ph.D. diss., University of New South Wales, Sydney, 1994), pp. 69-72.

had been given in 1762, but does not appear to have been carried out at the time. Kammen cites a VOC report from 1788 that mentions the construction of a stone fort and suggests that this could refer to a possible ‘upgrading of the original fortification’.¹¹⁵ However, the document he cites appears to refer to the building of the original fort, not some later addition.¹¹⁶ Peter Spillett, meanwhile, was told by the ‘guardian of the Fort’ in 1998 that the structure seen at Maubara today was built by the Dutch in 1844, but abandoned in 1850 when negotiations over territory began between the Dutch and the Portuguese.¹¹⁷

There are several reasons the fort could have been rebuilt, not the least being that the powerful artillery and explosive shells in common use by the nineteenth century rendered many older structures obsolete. It is also possible that the Dutch re-evaluated the purpose of the Maubara fort. The present fort’s shoreline position suggests it was built to protect against naval attack, which become more probable with improvements in naval gunnery in the nineteenth century. The whole purpose of the Dutch being in Maubara was trade, so presumably the fort would also have been used for storing cargo and a coastal position would have allowed for ease of handling. Coastal forts of the late eighteenth-early nineteenth century were characteristically built to simple ground plans with emphasis placed on the ability to fire on enemy ships rather than

¹¹⁵ Kammen, *Three centuries*, pp. 49, 191.

¹¹⁶ VOC 7440, NA. Transcript provided by Hans Hägerdal. The author was unable to consult this file directly as it was unavailable during research for this article.

¹¹⁷ Peter G. Spillett, ‘The pre-colonial history of the island of Timor, together with some notes on the Makassan influence in the island’ (Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin, 1999).

opposing land-based attacks.¹¹⁸ A conviction that sea-borne attack was likely could have been a reason for re-building the fort, but it is difficult to understand why the Dutch would have undertaken such a project in the 1840s (as reported to Spillett), as they appear to have virtually abandoned Maubara several years earlier. In the years immediately following the handover to the Portuguese, the fort had a nominal garrison of 30 men¹¹⁹ and it is possible the fort was re-built at this time, but it seems unlikely, as a Portuguese report from 1870, only nine years after the handover, suggests the fort was then in a rundown condition and was ‘defended’ by only one rusty cannon, balanced on a couple of rocks.¹²⁰ A more recent Portuguese report suggests that the current fort is Dutch, but that it had been restored at some stage by the Indonesians during their occupation of the territory from late 1975 to late 1999.¹²¹ Clearly, more research needs to be done on the probable re-building of the fort.

Conclusion

This article has explored the reasons for the Timorese principality Maubara seeking an alliance with the Dutch and how the differing policies of the VOC and the Netherlands Indies government affected it throughout the century-long relationship. To enter into local trading patterns the VOC offered protection to its allies, but it was cautious to avoid costly

¹¹⁸ Duffy, *Fire*, pp. 75-80, 191-200.

¹¹⁹ René Pélissier, *Timor en guerre: Le crocodile et les Portugais (1847-1913)* (Orgeval: R. Pélissier, 1996), p. 68.

¹²⁰ F.V., ‘Viagem da corveta Sà da Bandeira a Timor (continuação do no. 28)’, *Boletim da Provincia de Maucau e Timor*, 16, 45 (1870): 189-90.

¹²¹ Thomaz, ‘Reconhecimento’, pp. 13, 46.

commitments, as its main concern was always profits. In an attempt to extend its trading operations in eastern Timor the VOC established an alliance with Maubara and constructed a fort there in 1760. Maubara was a willing partner in these activities as part of an effort to improve its own trade and security. The activities of the VOC's (and Maubara's) Portuguese and Topass rivals always made it difficult for the VOC to achieve its goals on Timor, but when prolonged conflict loomed following the murder of the Kupang *opperhoofd*, a new VOC *gouverneur generaal* reversed his predecessor's Maubara policy in order to avoid further expenses. The VOC carefully guarded its reputation as a reliable ally, so it could not simply repudiate its connection to Maubara. Instead, it withdrew its troops from the fort and limited its support to the provision of guns, powder and ammunition. In the following decades, the VOC provided the Maubara rulers with other gifts and in return received beeswax and other products as part of an ongoing tribute-trade relationship, but the VOC's interest in Maubara eventually became merely perfunctory.

The Netherlands Indies government that succeeded the VOC was also interested in profitability, but the contest for trade that had driven its predecessor was eclipsed by new priorities by the second half of the nineteenth century. The Netherlands Indies government showed little interest in Maubara, but as a nascent colonial power it was interested in territorial control. While territory per se was not yet the aim, the government clearly wanted to protect what it already had, even if it meant sacrificing a part to secure the greater whole. In 1859, the Dutch concluded a treaty with the Portuguese that gained them possession of several strategic districts of the Timor region, but to achieve this they bartered their rights to Maubara.

On 1 April 1861, a ceremony was held at the Maubara fort where the Dutch flag was lowered for the last time and the Portuguese one hoisted in its place, thus ending a Maubara-Netherlands association that had lasted for over 100 years. The Maubara fort remains as a reminder that the land on which it stands was once considered by Europeans to be a Dutch possession while all around it was Portuguese. It is also a reminder of how a voluntary alliance entered into by an autonomous Timorese principality and a Dutch trading company altered over the course of a century: the Timorese principality was stripped of its autonomy and the Dutch merchants evolved into colonial rulers who could consign territories and people at will, such as happened at Maubara in 1861.