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KORA-KORA, JUNKS AND BAROTO:
INSULINDIAN BOATS IN PORTUGUESE WARFARE
AND TRADE ACCORDING TO THE *RELAÇION*
OF MIGUEL ROXO DE BRITO (1581-1582)

by

JACKY DOUMENJOU

Translation: Cathy Gaboreau

Many historians have carried out research on high board vessels, such as carracks, which were used during the Portuguese expansion in Asia and whose characteristics are relatively well-known. However, they have spent a great deal less time researching the local boats which made possible the thorough exploration of every nook and cranny of the Insulindian archipelago and contributed to trade between islands and throughout Asia. The Portuguese and in particular merchant-adventurers¹ often regarded local boats to be the key to their success in their integration of the vast sea-board, whose geography was largely unknown during the second half of the 16th century. Portuguese merchants traded locally using small boats which took them to port cities in the Strait of Malacca and occasionally further east in the archipelago.²

One cannot stress enough the importance of these voyages of exploration for Eastern as well as Portuguese History. The discovery of the “Spice Islands”, large trading ports of the archipelago, and more generally established trade routes is relatively well documented but less is known about the ones off the beaten track. We have very few details about the first voyages of exploration east of the Moluccan archipelago (known today as the Rajat Empat archipelago), and the western coast of New Guinea which was at the time called “Papua Islands”.

¹ Charles R. BOXER, *Francisco Vieira de Figueiredo: A Portuguese Merchant-Adventurer in South Asia (1624-1667)*, 's-Gravenhage, Martinus Nijhoff, 1967.

² Fernando RADIN, “Metamorphosis of the Luso-Asian Diaspora in the Malay Archipelago, 1640-1795”, in Peter Borschberg (ed.), *Iberians in the Singapore-Melaka Area (16th to 18th Century)*, *South China and Maritime Asia*, Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz, 2004, p. 163.

Handwritten sources available on this part of the world are very few, of diverse nature and not many carry a detailed description of the boats that the first Europeans encountered. Consequently, we have to rely on personal accounts transmitted by Europeans authors, such as Pigafetta or Argensola, to get an idea of the shape of the boats which sailed all over the archipelago, changing according to commercial or cultural movements and of which the Portuguese were the main discoverers. Details of these journeys were essentially related by Portuguese chroniclers and by a few short relations, amongst which are listed the peregrinations of the Portuguese Miguel Roxo de Brito known under the title *Relaçion que miguel roso de brito da de la nueva guinea*. The scroll, currently preserved at the Lilly Library of Indiana University was kept by the famous orientalist Charles R. Boxer,³ until his death in April 2000.

Thanks to Charles R. Boxer and Pierre-Yves Manguin, we can be acquainted with the *Relaçion* of Miguel Roxo de Brito, through an article published in 1979 in *Archipel* magazine under the title "Miguel Roxo de Brito's narrative of his voyage to the Rajat Empat, May 1581-November 1582".⁴ In 1994, a former officer in the Dutch marine, J. H. K. Sollewijn-Gelpke, published in the KITLV magazine an article titled "The Account of Miguel Roxo de Brito of his Voyage in 1581-1582 to the Rajat Empat, the MacCluer Gulf and Ceram".⁵

The scroll of the *Relaçion* comprises twenty folios, numbered from folio 139 (first side of the page) to folio 149 (back of the page). It has been extracted from a Sino-Hispanic codex written in Castilian and compiled in Manila around 1590. It had probably been copied out from an original version in Portuguese later translated and copied again with many transcription mistakes, possibly during the first half of the 16th century and then again in the 19th century. The whole codex comprises various documents, together with colourful drawings from the Philippine Islands.

The conquest of Malacca in 1511 opened the doors to the main navigation routes in the Far East. From this large entrepot, Portuguese ships, always steered by Oriental men, came closer to the main Asian supply centres and, in particular, the "Spice Islands" located in the Moluccas archipelago. In April 1581, during a meeting of the *Cortes* in Tomar, Philip II was recognized king of Portugal. Under this union of the two crowns, one month later, in May 1581, Miguel Roxo de Brito undertook a voyage of exploration.

³ Mentioned for the first time in April 1950 in an article written by Prof. Charles R. BOXER: "A Late Sixteenth Century Manuscript", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, April 1950.

⁴ Charles R. BOXER and Pierre-Yves MANGUIN, "Miguel Roxo de Brito's narrative of his voyage to the Raja Empat, May 1581-November 1582", *Archipel*, n.º 18, 1979, pp. 175-194.

⁵ J. H. F. SOLLEWIJN-GELPKE, "The Report of Miguel Roxo de Brito of his Voyage in 1581-1582 to the Raja Ampat, the MacCluer Gulf and Seram", *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, n.º 150 (1), 1994, pp. 123-145.

He left Batjan Island in Moluccas for Waigeo, Misool and Ceram Islands and the western coasts of New Guinea. The news of the election of the king of Spain to the Portuguese crown only arrived in the Moluccas in March 1582.

Archipelagos in one archipelago: nao, *kora-kora*, junk and *baroto*

The first route charts and accounts of voyages give a detailed description of the maritime natural features so specific to the Insulindian archipelago: a maze of islets, islands and archipelagos forming a larger archipelago. A great deal of time before the arrival of the first Europeans, Insulindian seas, such as Banda, Ceram and Timor seas, all acted as bridges and cross-roads between the numerous populations of the archipelago (Javanese, Indians, Bugis, Timorese, Moluccans, Arabs, Chinese, Papuans, etc.).

Portuguese and Spanish were confronted with a geographical specificity for which they were unprepared: the parcelling of an archipelago made of multiple islands, islets, coral reefs, deep-sea bed, etc. The borders of this maritime zone, still undefined in the 16th century, formed a hard to penetrate barrier. Moreover, high board Portuguese vessels were badly suited to both the exploration and the control of this new environment. In his chronicle on the *Conquista de las islas Malucas*, the Spaniard Leonardo de Argensola gives us a geographical description of the Moluccas: "From the north, they bear the names of Ternate, Tidore, Motiel, Maquien and Bacham. (...) Bacham is divided into many islands split with stretches of sea on which only light boats can navigate".⁶

In New Guinea, islands and coasts are completely inhospitable to navigation; mangrove swamps flow over solid ground, estuaries are shallow and tidal conditions provoke dangerous bores capable of causing boats to capsize; the coasts are dotted with reefs and deep sea-bed; powerful currents flow between the islands; winds are changeable and populations unsociable and often hostile. In his recommendations to King Philip II at the end of his narration, Brito stressed the importance of these difficulties: "In the land of New Guinea, for the part and for the route I travelled through, there are a great number of shallow beds, sandbanks and rocks and many mangrove swamps, currents between the numerous islands. The water also creates lots of whirlpools; this is the reason why high board ships cannot follow this route in New Guinea".⁷

⁶ Nicole BIROS, "La conquête des Iles Maluques' (1609) par Bartolomé Leornado de Argensola", *Cahiers de l'Asie du Sud-Est*, n.º 21, 1987, p. 115.

⁷ Ms. fol. 149r, l. 29-30; fol. 149v, l. 1-5: "Tiene esta tierra de la Nueva Guinea por la parte e camino por donde anduve [fol. 149v] ve muchas bajas y coronas de arena e piedra y muchas restingas y corrientes por entre las yslas porque son muchas. Tambien ay muchas rolleras de agua por que no pueden por este camino yr navios de alto bordo a la Nueva Guinea".

The first Europeans to cover this area of the archipelago for the first time turned their attention to local boats, which were of many sorts, large and small and with specialized nautical characteristics; they were all perfectly adapted to the transport of both soldiers and goods, coastal navigation and steering between islands and estuaries. The voyage of exploration of the archipelago forced the Europeans to adapt to the local navigation practices and thus to adjust to a new naval culture.

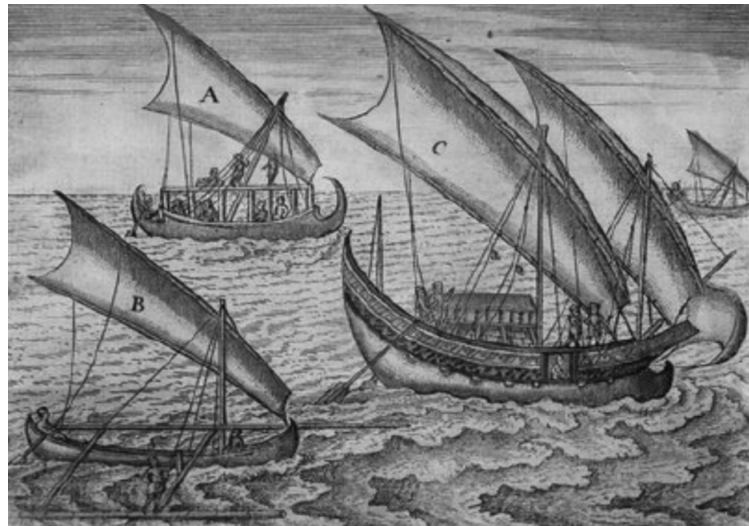


Fig. 1 – *Journal vande reyse der Hollandtsche schepen ghedaen in Oost Indien*, circa 1598. This plate is taken from the anonymous travel journal documenting the first Dutch sea voyage to Asia (1595-1597) led by Cornelis de Houtman. There is a key numbered A-C indicated on the image, but there are no explanatory notes. © 2009, Atlas of Mutual Heritage, www.atlasofmutualheritage.nl

In May 1581, aboard two *kora-kora*, Brito set off in the company of forty men from Obi and Tapat Islands, situated close to Batjan Island. His aim was to explore the islands and the coasts of New Guinea called “Land of the Papuans”. However, a few cable length away, he had to disembark the younger men in favour of *hombres de fuerça*, “men of strength” who were more apt to paddle. The choice of boat was not accidental. Brito chose the largest local boat. The *kora-kora* was commonly used, above all else, for transporting loads in the Moluccas Islands. Brito understood this perfectly. He used the *kora-kora* for his mission to explore around the islands in search of local influential trading places, known spices, promising new products, and, of course, gold and slaves.

When Brito disembarked on Misool Island, the king swore allegiance to him and put a “gold chain” around the prow of his *kora-kora*: “[He] welcomed me, offered me many gifts, and put a gold chain around the prow of the *kora-kora* I navigated which must have been worth 90 ducats”.⁸

⁸ Ms. fol. 139v, l. 13-15: “(...) me recibio haziendome muchos regalos y echandome une cadena de oro al cuello de la caracoa en que yo venia que pesaria 90 ducados”.

The Portuguese took a keen interest in the technical characteristics of these local boats. Due to its large number of rowers, the *kora-kora* was a very fast boat. This technical fact was a source of constant amazement: “And when I was aboard one of these boats, I could not stand up due to the lightness of the craft and at each stroke of oars, the whole body loses its balance”.⁹

This impressive outrigger was obviously not a transoceanic vessel as it could not venture onto high sea; it was limited to remain a precious local “relay” boat adapted to the Insulindian geography and allowing contact between the islands, carrying a large number of rowers who, if necessary, became back-up soldiers.

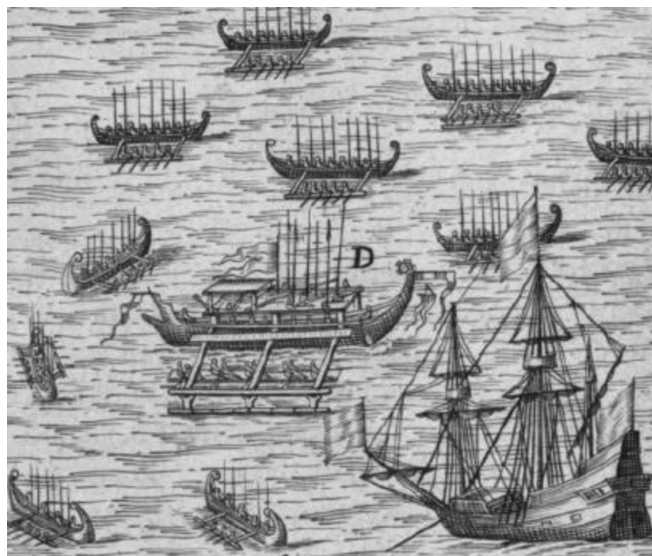


Fig. 2 – Bird’s eye view of a the reception at sea near Ternate, *circa* 1600.¹⁰

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On Batjan Island, located in the Moluccas, Brito chartered both *kora-kora*, “at his own expense”. There is nothing surprising in this fact. We actually know that the Moluccans harboured large ship yards designed to build substantial war *kora-kora* for the Moluccan kings’ *armada*. This type of *kora-kora* was a long voyage canoe, typically Moluccan, identical to a large *fusta* equipped with outriggers where sat several rows of oarsmen or more exactly paddlers, and similar to the Mediterranean trading galleys. It could carry around seventy paddlers whom Brito named “*chiourma*”. In his *Rela-çion*, *chiourma* refers to “galley-slaves” or “paddlers” and in any case “men of strength”.

⁹ Ms. fol. 140r, l. 17-19: “(...) y andando yo en ellas por ninguna manera podia tener en pie, por ser muy ligeros y a cada vogada hurtan el cuerpo al hombre”.

¹⁰ The second voyage to Indonesia, led by Jacob van Neck and Wijnbrant van Warwijck, was reasonably successful. The fleet set sail in May 1598 and arrived in Banten towards the end of that same year. In Banten the fleet split: four vessels sailed on to the Moluccas. This part of the fleet sailed under the command of Wijbrant van Warwijck and Jacob van Heemskerck.

This type of *kora-kora* had a main hull fitted with a central deck, which covered the whole length of the boat. Passengers and goods were sheltered under a deck located in the middle of the craft whereas the paddlers were on the outer sides. On each side of the main hull, the oarsmen sat on double rowing benches. These boats could weigh around four tons and the largest ones could carry up to two hundred paddlers. However, the steering of such crafts was sometimes dangerous in bad weather conditions. During a chase on the north coast of Ceram, almost a year after he set off, Brito observed that the *kora-kora* had become very heavy and difficult to manoeuvre: “(...) I wish I had time to retire since both ships I brought to the Moluccas were very heavy – they had been at sea for almost one year – and the *chiourma* were exhausted”.¹¹

There is no precise information on the internal organisation of a *kora-kora*. The crew consisted of paddlers, a pilot and a captain. As some pictures of the 17th century¹² show it, modest artillery of light pieces such as *berços* – small culverins – and harquebuses were probably placed on the top deck. The deck of the *kora-kora* could not hold heavier pieces of artillery. As this craft had a distinctive low floating line, it could not bear the weight of heavy artillery such as canons, which had to stand on a gun deck and not an orlop or a makeshift arrangement. Light pieces of artillery, such as culverins and harquebuses, could be taken ashore in the event of a land battle.

It is possible to find a detailed description of this large rowing vessel in the testimony of Francesco Carletti, an Italian traveller. In his *Third Reasoning on Oriental Islands*, written during his voyage around the world (1594-1606),¹³ he observed that the Sumatrans also used rowing vessels called *caracoli*:

(...) we use certain rowing vessels which I shall mention for their curiosity. They are called *caracoli* but we would call them brigs for their hull shape and size. However, the rowing method is very different: three or four oarsmen per bench, each one holding an oar that resembles a wooden paddle. They dip the oar straight into the water as one would with a spade, sitting in a row on reeds which stick out of the boat; their faces turned towards the poop, they row rapidly as one, while singing in their own fashion. The vessels have extravagant shapes of fantastic and strange animals and birds, finely carved and so light that they seem to be flying over the seas. The counterbalance of the people, that is to say the oarsmen, makes it difficult for the craft to list because by sitting on the reeds on the outside they readjust its balance.¹⁴

¹¹ Ms. fol. 148v, l. 1-6: “(...) porque ansi tuviese yo tiempo para me recojer porque los dos navios que yo llebe del Maluco eran muy pesados por auer casi un año que andavan en el agua, y la chusma cansada y trabalada de vogar, (...)”.

¹² Jacob Cornelisz VAN NECK, *Het tvveede boeck, iournael oft dagh-register*, Middelburg, 1601. This book described the second voyage to the East Indies by Jacob van Neck and Wijbrand van Warwijck.

¹³ FRANCESCO CARLETTI, *Voyage autour du monde (1594-1606)*, Paris, Chandeigne, 1999.

¹⁴ *Idem*, pp. 233-234.

On the subject of “extravagant shapes” of fantastic animals and birds, one must refer to the engravings which illustrate Jacob Cornelisz van Neck’s work, published in Middelburg in 1601¹⁵ and on which the prow and the stern represent dragon-snakes. This type of vessel did intrigue Europeans, and later on during the 17th century they used them again to illustrate several¹⁶ books on vessels from the Moluccas and Banda Islands.

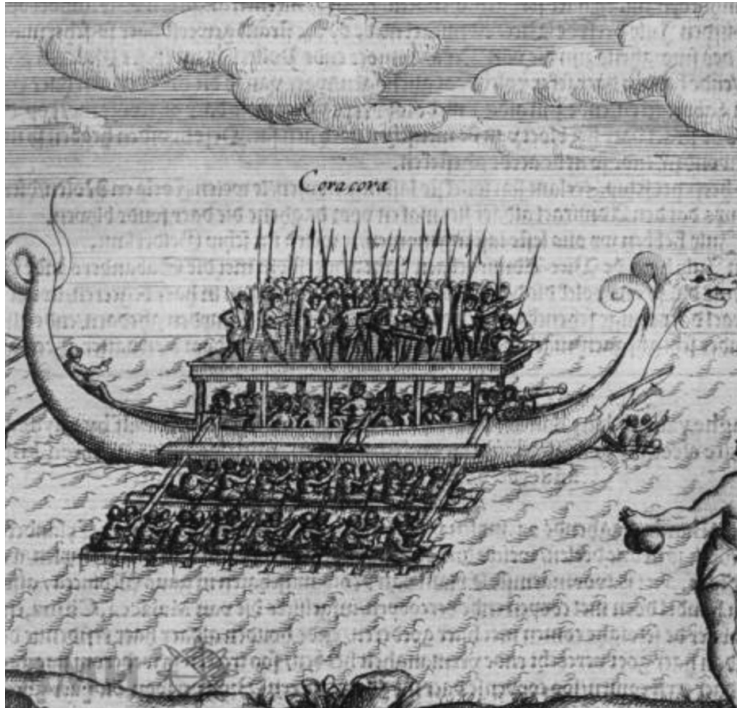


Fig. 3 – Bandanese vessel, also knew as a *coracora* (detail), Jacob Cornelisz Van Neck, *Het tweede boeck, iournal oft dagh-register*, Middelburg, 1601.
© 2009, Atlas of Mutual Heritage, www.atlasofmutualheritage.nl

Details of events recounted by Carletti are close enough to Brito’s to be unsettling. Brito also emphasised the lightness and manoeuvrability of the vessel. He seemed confused at the fact that one could not stand up due to the speed of the boat. He observed that seventy paddlers who moved at an extraordinary speed steered it: “(...) they build very light crafts which cover over 12 leagues¹⁷ in one day and carry four rows of paddlers: one row inside the hull and three on the outside”.¹⁸

¹⁵ J. C. VAN NECK, op. cit.

¹⁶ Isaac COMMELIN, *Begin ende Voortgangh, van de Vereenighde Nederlandsche Geootroyeerde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, [Amsterdam], [J. Janssonius], 1646. J. C. VAN NECK, op. cit.

¹⁷ About 76 kilometers.

¹⁸ Ms. fol. 140r, l. 14-17: “(...) por lo qual hazen unas embarcaciones muy ligeras que cada jornada andan mas de doze leguas y traen en ellas quatro ordenes de remos, una por dentro en el cuerpo del navio y tres por fuera (...)”.

Still at the same time, from 1606 to 1609, Bartolomé Leonardo de Argensola wrote a text in Castilian for king Philip III of Spain, titled *Conquista de las islas Malucas*.¹⁹ This work mentions, on several occasions, the use of a *carcoa* by the Moluccans: “They reached Borneo and from this coast came towards them a fleet of painted carcoas, the prows of which had the shape of the head of a golden snake”.²⁰

Light, swift and with a shallow draught: such are the three main qualities of a *kora-kora*. Brito was aware of this when he drew alongside a small island to get fresh supplies. He was then at the head of an *armada* of thirteen *kora-kora* which he decided to beach on solid ground: “On this island, we beached the fleet which comprised thirteen *caracoas* (...)”.²¹

In the Insulindian maritime environment, only the large Chinese junk with a single hull could rival with Portuguese tall board vessels for the transport of goods to India, Siam, Champa and Japan. Its tonnage was relatively substantial compared to the European ships of that time. Its shape raised at the back and its weighty masts made it resemble the large European vessel of that time. The Chinese junk had a deck and a flat hold to allow large cargo loads. Generally, it had three masts, and the rudder situated at the back made it easier to sail and made it possible on many points for it to rival at high sea with most European trading ships.²² However, the Moluccas archipelago was the place for large Javanese junks used for trade between Spice Islands and Java. Brito appeared to know this type of junk very well as during a call to an island off the coast of New Guinea, the headquarters of an important trading community, he observed with amazement: “These people of Serdanha sail amongst all the Timor Islands via internal route, aboard ships which are well-made and similar to Javanese junks (...)”.²³

Native Papuan traders, originating from the unidentified Island of *Cerdenha*,²⁴ navigated all over the archipelago islands – Java, Bali, Timor, Bima – in search of gold, wax, amber and sandalwood. They went to the Oriental coast of Celebes to search for iron, which they bartered against the

¹⁹ Bartolomé Leonardo de ARGENSOLA, *Conquista de las islas Malucas*, Madrid, A. Martin, 1609.

²⁰ N. BIROS, op. cit., p. 126.

²¹ Ms. fol. 142r, l. 19-20: “En esta ysla varamos el armada la qual era de treze caracoas (...)”.

²² L. AUDEMARD, *Les Jonques Chinoises*, Rotterdam, Publicaties van het Museum voor Land- en Volkenkunde en het Maritime Museum Prins Hendrik, 1957, p. 15.

²³ Ms. fol. 141v, l. 1-3: “Navegan estos de Serdanha en sus navios los quales hazen muy buenos como juncos Javos por todas la yslas de Timor por la banda de dentro (...)”.

²⁴ In this text, this island is the most mysterious one. It is mentioned on several occasions under different spellings (*Serdena*, *Serdenha*, *Cerdenha*, *Serdanha*, *Cerdeña*); According to Brito’s description, we know that it is situated close to Ceram island and has a population of over 5000 men. These people apparently held a key position in trading between the Moluccan archipelago and the main island of New Guinea named in the manuscript *tiera firma*. Some pointers left by Brito let us supposed that the island of *Cerdenha* designated the island now called Seram Laut.



Fig. 4 – Papuans: a woman with a child and two warriors (detail). Original subtitle: “Esta xente es d’esta baya de San Millan, son yndios algo blancos, sus armas son dardos arroxadicos y macanos, sus bastimentos son yñames, cañas duces, pan de maluco y muchos frutos”, circa 1606. Indios-Papua Nueva Guinea, 18th century. *Dibujos*, MPD, 18, 082. © Archivo General de Simancas.

bark of massoy that was then sent to Java to supply the western coast of New Guinea.

Inhabitants of these areas traded sandalwood, gold, fabric, wax, amber and iron. They travelled up to Java and Bali, Sumbawa and the east coast of Celebes, from where they brought back iron which they exchanged in New Guinea for the bark of massoy,²⁵ a very sought after ingredient in oriental pharmacopoeia. Insulindian produced the most precious spices, sought after in Europe but also in India, Persia and China. In Moluccas, clove trees grew wild as well as nutmeg trees on Banda Islands. The Javanese provided the supply of these spices, which they swapped for rice and cotton and directed them overseas. Medicinal and aromatic plants, such as the bark of massoy, were renowned for their virtues and exported to Java; white sandalwood, which had many uses, was loaded in Timor and shipped to Java Island.

The spice trade, clove, nutmeg and mace provided prosperity for Moluccan communities converted to Islam. From the Moluccas Islands to Sumatra, all over Insulindia, Arab colonies, spread out along the coasts, developed thanks to their trading activities and exploitation of maritime traffic which linked them. Moluccans traded in Insulindian ports where many Chinese communities settled, attracted in the 16th century by the wealth of Javanese principalities.

²⁵ Ms. *masol*: massoy (*Massoia aromatica* Becc.). The fragrant bark strips of massoy, also called in French “masoi” or “masoyi”, were much sought-after in pharmacopea and certain rituals. Massoy was so valuable that it could be exchanged for Chinese or European ceramics and for iron, as mentioned in Brito’s *Relaçion*.

During a stopover in the island of *Serdenha*, the precise location of which, to this day, remains unknown, Brito marvelled over the boldness of the traders and the organisation of their trading network across the archipelago. Brito pointed out that the inhabitants of *Serdenha* Island had organised themselves into trading communities which contributed to the trade of the archipelago and they sailed aboard large ships, identical to “Javanese junks”. They sailed up to Timor, Bali and Java Islands using a maritime route called *banda de dentro*, which means “internal route”, either by following the sea of Banda between Celebes Island and the small islands of Sonde, in opposition to the “external route”, which passes through North Borneo and later on was abandoned in favour of the “internal route”.²⁶

Based at the source of massoy bark production on the *Tierra Firme* of New Guinea, traders of *Serdenha* Islands navigated up to the oriental coast of Celebes Island, where they exchanged it for iron,²⁷ which was then redistributed in New Guinea. It would appear that the nautical skill and trading audacity of the inhabitants of *Serdenha* amazed Brito, who found there an active seafaring trading network.

Sea battles, firearms

On their arrival to the final border of the Insulindian world, the Portuguese tried to assert themselves in spite of their low numbers, protected by their weapons and European war techniques: the *harquebus*. However, the sea battle methods used by the Papuans surprised them and they found the people to be very organised: “They sailed forthwith towards us in a semi-circle, having about thirty-five ships at each end; and all these people were in battle order, not like barbarians, but as skilful and sensible people. This scared me and the reason for this was to witness so many [ships] covering the sea”.²⁸

This sea-board was an unsettling place, midway between the protection provided by the *kora-kora* and the dangerous navigation, mixed with the

²⁶ In the 16th century, it was possible to get to the Moluccas by using the *banda de dentro*, the “internal route”, which follows the Banda Sea between the island of Celebes and Lesser Sunda Islands, instead of using the “external route”, which goes through Brunei and the north of Borneo. The direct route from the Moluccas to Malacca via Brunei was open by the Portuguese in 1526, but the Portuguese merchants favoured the longer route via Banda Islands, Java and Sumatra in both directions. That way, the ships would sail along the coast from port to port allowing traders to get richer whilst indulging in money-making deals. MAGELLAN, *Le voyage de Magellan (1519-1522); la relation d'Antonio Pigafetta & autres témoignages*, Paris, Chandeigne, 2007, p. 824.

²⁷ See note 25.

²⁸ Ms. fol. 144r, l. 14-21: “(...) se embarcaron todos y vinieron luego a la mar descubriendo la punta y tanto que reconocieron nuestros navios y estuvieron parados como hombres que se querian determinar, luego se vinieron hazia nosotros en una media luna trayendo en cada cuerno treynta e çinto navios y todo lo demas conpuesto no como barbaros sino como gente diestra y de razon. Lo que me puso espanto y temor fue por ver tantos que cubrian la mar (...)”.

attraction of undiscovered shores on the coasts of New Guinea and the possible hostility of its natives.

As it was sailing along the south coast in the Gulf of MacCluer, Brito's *armada* was ambushed under a shower of arrows and javelins fired by over three thousands Papuan warriors who were standing in water up to their waist, all painted in red and with feathers on their head, "as was the custom in Guinea",²⁹ Brito explained. The Portuguese were in great danger, as inadvertently they had come too close to the entrance of their attackers' lakeside village. Both the *kora-kora* came under attack and found them exposed to the Papuans' missiles. The Portuguese, in low numbers, and especially because they were caught unaware, responded by firing with harquebuses from their *kora-kora*. In a panic, the attackers ran away towards the mountain as if the devil was after them ("*como si el diablo fuera atras ellos*").³⁰ An unfortunate Papuan was shot in one leg by a bullet fired with a harquebus and Brito had him heaved up on board. His companions who had taken refuge on the mountain, aroused with curiosity, turned around and went on to the beach to demand their unfortunate fellow in exchange of palm wine and poultry. In response to this peaceful gesture and with the help of the king of Waigeo, Brito gave them a "*campane*"³¹ as a token of friendship. His intention was to attract the good favours of the Papuans and to obtain some information thanks to the mediation of the king of Waigeo, who was a familiar figure amongst the unsociable population. There is no doubt that Brito's mission of exploration in the Gulf of MacCluer was made easier by the presence of the king of Waigeo, used as a pilot and a mediator and also with firearms, culverins and harquebuses which were all part of the expedition. Moluccans and Papuans created favourable conditions for the establishment of relations between the Papuan world and the Portuguese. Brito saw the Asiatic and



Fig. 5 – A *kora-kora* with two culverins on the central deck. Bird's eye view of a the reception at sea near Ternate (detail), circa 1600. © 2009, Atlas of Mutual Heritage, www.atlasofmutualheritage.nl

²⁹ Ms. fol. 143v, l. 23: "(...) asi de la manera que lo usan en Guinea".

³⁰ Ms. fol. 143v, l. 27.

³¹ Bronze gongs (ms. "*campanas*") from Java, presumably, used as trade commodities. C. R. BOXER and P.-Y. MANGUIN, op. cit.

European sea knowledge as complementary. He was never condescending in his description of local boats. He felt curiosity towards these indigenous vessels that allowed him to fulfil his mission of exploration.

Following this unfortunate incident on the south coast of the Gulf of MacCluer, the *armada* of *kora-kora* continued to sail along the coast towards a peninsula in the north coast of New Guinea. After spending a whole day rowing, Brito decided to drop anchor to allow his crew, exhausted and starving, to catch fish to feed themselves. The smoke of the fire they had lit signalled their presence, and from the other end of the strip of land, one hundred and sixty vessels appeared. Surprised by the smoke, the Papuans, who were also ashore, got back into their boats and steered around the strip. At that moment, they were astounded to discover the haven where the small Portuguese *armada* anchored. The Papuan squadron presented a front of seventy outriggers, which manoeuvred to retaliate and positioned themselves in a semi-circle, thirty-five boats on each end turned towards the Portuguese fleet ready for confrontation. The layout made it possible to circle the Portuguese ships whilst forming a large defensive arch. On this *armada* of one hundred and sixty boats in total, seven thousand Papuans were aboard to go to sea to carry out a religious ceremony: “This *armada* held seven thousand men who were on an outing to help them recover and chase away their sadness after their queen’s death; it seems that it is part of their customs”.³²

From the top deck of his *kora-kora*, Brito, accompanied by the king of Waigeo, had time to watch his enemies’ manoeuvres and on seeing such a great number of boats, he realised the danger ahead and feared the disproportion of the two forces: “They sailed forthwith towards us in a semi-circle, having about thirty-five ships at each end; and all these people were in battle order, not like barbarians, but as skilful and sensible people”.³³

The small *armada* of *kora-kora* led by Brito was low in number. He decided to attack, using the same tactics previously used on the south coast of the very same gulf. From the top deck, he undertook to fire with two culverins and two harquebuses. Once again, firearms produced the expected effect. In terror, the Papuans plunged into the water: “(...) they all plunged into the water, not one of them remained aboard”.³⁴

In the general confusion, the terrorised attackers abandoned ship on the spot and went to seek refuge in the mountain. On seeing this, the king of Waigeo, who accompanied the Portuguese, acted as a pilot and a mediator,

³² Ms. fol. 144v, l. 11-15: “Serian en esta armada siete mill hombres los quales se salian a holgar y a desechar la tristeza que tenian por la muerre de su Reyna que parece ser aquella su constumbre”.

³³ Ms. fol. 144r, l. 13-16: “(...) luego se vinieron hazia nosotros en una media luna trayendo en cada cuerno treynta e çinto navios y todo lo demas conpuesto no como barbaros sino como gente diestra y de rason”.

³⁴ Ms. fol. 144r, l. 20-21: “(...) se lansaron todos en la mar sin quedar ninguno en sus navios”.

and, leading his own *armada* of *kora-kora*, decided to help them and he rescued several aboard a small *baroto*, a little craft used as a rowing boat to go ashore: “(...) the king of Waigeo got into a small *baroto* and helped them climb aboard”.³⁵

The *baroto*, sometimes spelt *boloto*,³⁶ refers in the Philippine nautical world to a small one-mast canoe.³⁷ This term was often used in Spanish texts of the 16th century. It is therefore not surprising that the manuscript transcriber preferred it, as the term was already in use amongst Pilipino seafarers and directly intelligible for the Castilian reader.

Interpreters and go-between

The peregrination of Miguel Roxo de Brito gives many examples of the preponderant role played by interpreters. Some were perhaps half-cast or *mestizos*; others were Moluccans who had learnt one or several languages in an effort to adapt and adjust to a new culture. Malay was then the language in use in the largest part of the archipelago of Moluccas, with a number of idioms borrowed from Arabic and Moluccan languages. The domination of Islam on coastal sultanates made Arabic, above all else, the language of culture. The many languages encountered on Papuan islands forced the Portuguese to use local mediators recruited amongst their allies, and one of them was the king of Waigeo Island. On leaving Batjan Island, at the start of his expedition, Brito recruited a mediator on *Tamilonga* Island, which the manuscript referred as “*naguatato*”.³⁸ The term *naguatato* used in the narration originated from the Nahuatl. For the inhabitants of New-Spain, it described a Mexican Indian interpreter who spoke both Nahuatl and Castilian.³⁹

We do not know exactly the native language of the *naguatato* used by Brito. We know that Brito dismissed the unfortunate *naguatato* after learning and mastering his language in a few months, which was enough to keep the king of Waigeo. In fact, the source does not specify the language, probably Malay. The sudden dismissal of the *naguatato* can be explained by his sharing of personal information with king of Waigeo and Brito. The position of a *naguatato* often raised suspicion during a voyage of exploration. Miguel Roxo de Brito was perhaps tempted to mistrust a mediator who knew too much and could betray him on his return to his island.

³⁵ Ms. fol. 144r, l. 22-23: “(...) despues el Rey de Bayceo se metio en un baroto pequeno y los hizo embarcar (...)”.

³⁶ MAGELLAN, op. cit., p. 129.

³⁷ *Idem*, p. 393.

³⁸ Ms. fol. 147r, l. 13.

³⁹ J. H. F. SOLLEWIJN-GELPKE, op. cit., p. 141.

By way of conclusion

It transpires that with this peregrination to the borders of the archipelago, in 1581, Miguel Roxo de Brito, who had passed *de facto* at the service of the king of Spain, had pressing and probably personal reasons to identify the islands east of the Moluccas and to venture onto the *Tierra Firme* of New Guinea. We now know that he wished to go there and was able to do so because he knew the route, thanks to the complicity of his close contacts with the kings of Batjan, Misool and Waigeo Islands. The local boats used by Brito, and specifically the *kora-kora*, formed a link between the Asiatic and European worlds. They were piloted on many occasions by adventurers who found them to be an instrument of privileged penetration ideally suited to the geographical environment than simple boats.

Miguel Roxo de Brito's voyage of exploration involved a non-official mission, as he undertook to do it "at his own expense". Did he hope to open diplomatic relations with the local kinglets which could insure the Portuguese a definite priority to settle and trade? However, Miguel Roxo de Brito's mission also involved other plans. Should we believe that Brito's small *armada* of *kora-kora*, accompanied by his faithful ally, the king of Waigeo, was armed only for trading purposes? The presence of the Papuan king of Waigeo squadron only partially justifies this hypothesis.

It is clear that the king of Waigeo acted as a scout for Brito. The *kora-kora* was the favoured tool in the voyage of exploration lead by Portuguese Miguel Roxo de Brito. This nautical fact invites us to believe that Brito lead on his own initiative an *armada* of reconnaissance whose mission was to gather commercial and military information about people and goods encountered and to widen their nautical and geographical knowledge on these countries, which they only knew through partially erroneous sea maps.⁴⁰ On his return from Moluccas, Brito would volunteer to inform king Philip II of his discoveries. The account of his *Relaçon* was wholly dedicated to him. Voyage of exploration or trade? The point is not to choose between two hypotheses but to underline that these objectives, far from being incompatible, were two sides of the same coin.

Just before Brito's departure in May 1581, the Spanish claim to this part of the archipelago was a known fact. The coast of New Guinea had already been briefly seen but not recognized. Not wanting to be presented with a *fait accompli*, it was important for Brito to gain speed over Castilian fleets, which recently based in Manila, always had showed an interest for the Moluccas Islands and would venture one day further east, beyond the "Spice Islands" which they had already visited.

Like most of his contemporaries, Brito showed a great interest in the material wealth this expedition could bring. Amongst these recently visited

⁴⁰ Ms. fol. 145r, l. 26-28.

lands, the islands and the west coast of New Guinea did not immediately catch the attention of the Castilian king as they were too far from existing trading routes, populated with warlike people, and their access by boat was too difficult to establish a profitable trading frequency using high board vessels. The focus was towards “small” Spice Islands, mainly Ternate, Tidore and Banda, which had an easier military and trading control and a well-established Asiatic trading network.

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