

Laut Sulawesi: The Celebes Sea, from Center to Peripheries

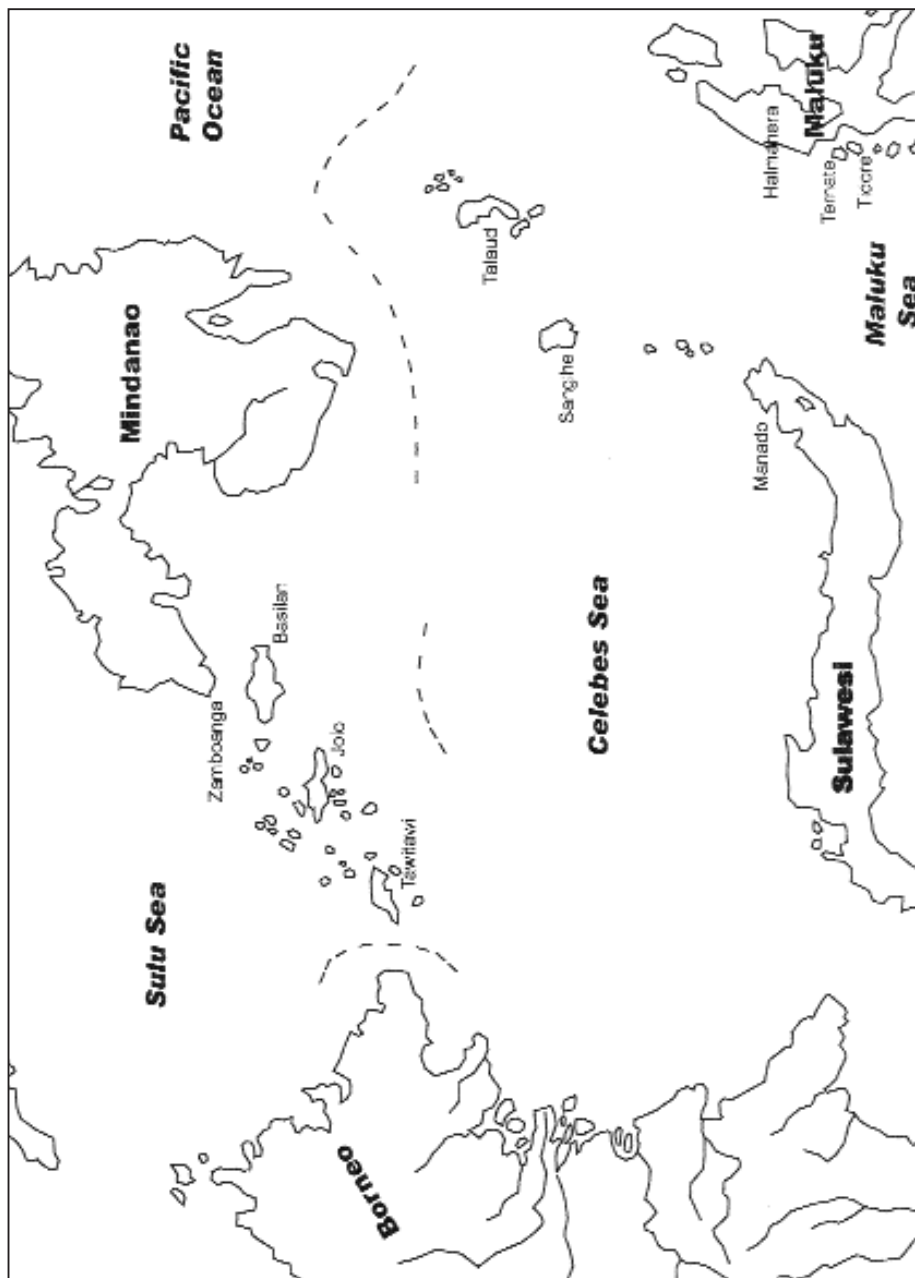
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The area known as Laut Sulawesi, or Celebes Sea, is a basin enclosed to the north by the Sulu Archipelago and Mindanao, to the east by the Sangir (or Sangihe) and Talaud islands, to the south by the peninsula of North Sulawesi, and to the west by the eastern coast of Sabah. Maritime traffic from the south has access through the Straits of Makassar that links the area with both the Java and the Flores seas, while shipping from the South China Sea can use the many sea lanes between Tanjung Unsang in Sabah and Zamboanga Point in Mindanao, and connections with the Pacific are made through the submarine thresholds of the Sangir and Talaud ranges. Today the area is divided among the republics of the Philippines and Indonesia, and the Federation of Malaysia, but in earlier times it was an economic and – to a certain extent – cultural unit overriding present political boundaries. This paper deals with the historical process that has brought about the present division.

EARLY CONTACTS

Archaeological remains such as Neolithic adzes, cave dwellings, as well as pottery and megaliths, prove that people had settled in the area in prehistoric times. However, not much is known about these early settlements as until now studies have been limited to brief surveys. The Harrissons made a study of the prehistory of Sabah, while Spoehr excavated several sites in the Zamboanga peninsula and the Sulu islands. Only recently did excavations conducted in the southern Philippines and in Indonesia (notably in Minahasa and the Talaud islands) reveal that the area was already inhabited around 4000 B.C. The collection of oral literature (such as

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The Celebes Sea and its region.

the old Manobo epics, Sangirese songs, Tontemboan folk tales, etc.) reveals some historic episodes of certain ethnic groups (Harrisson & Harrisson 1971: 68-116, Spoehr 1973: 106-111, Aebersold 1959: 372-389, Schwarz 1907, Bellwood 1976, Santoso 1999: 4). But this information has to be dealt with in a more comprehensive way in order to reconstruct the early history of the area.

If interpretations of archaeological finds are correct, links should be established with mainland Southeast Asia, western Micronesia, and the island of Papua or New Guinea. Linguistic theories also connect the area with the spread of Austronesian languages. It is believed, however, that the rock shelter remains at Sanga-Sanga (dated at 5,995 and 4,700 B.C.) are too old to be linked with historic ethnic groups of the area. Hence the latter are probably descendants of migrants (speaking Austronesian languages) from a later period (Spoehr 1973: 273-274).

For early historical references about the Celebes Sea area, we have to turn to Chinese sources, of which the oldest report is, perhaps, that of Kangtai and Zhuying (third century A.D.). According to this report, to the east of Funan was the country of Zhubo, and further east one could find an island consisting of a volcano. Pelliot located Zhubo in North Borneo, but Moens identified the place with Toubouc or Tabouk, an old designation for Cotabato in Mindanao. The volcano – also mentioned in a ninth-century Arab source – was placed by Moens in Ternate, while a second volcano (from the same Arab source by Mas'udi) was identified with Gunung Awu in Siau (Sangir islands). Wolters, however, agreed with Pelliot for its location in the northern part of the island of Borneo (Pelliot 1904: 270, Moens 1937: 366-370, Wolters 1967: 52).

The scarcity of information suggests that contacts must have been very rare, indeed. Nevertheless, we can conclude that the area was already known to the Chinese of the Han period through contacts with Funan. The main problem for readers of Chinese texts, however, is to discover the exact location of sinicized toponyms. Moreover, a detailed knowledge of geographical names is necessary to locate their proper positions. Many toponyms mentioned by Zhao Rugua in his *Zhufan zhi*, an account of Chinese and Arab trade in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, have not yet been identified. The editors of the text thought that among these toponyms some have to be found in Sulawesi and Maluku (Hirth & Rockhill 1911: 61, 77, 83-86, 157-159, 176). It should also be noted that many informations mentioned in the *Zhufan zhi* are found in an earlier text, the 1178 *Lingwai daida* by Zhou Qufei (Ptak 1998: 9).

The presence of cloves in Hainan could be an indication that these spices were imported directly from Maluku, thus proving a sea route through the Celebes Sea, perhaps by way of Sulu. It is, however, in the Yuan dynasty that Sulu became known in Chinese texts, notably the *Daoyi zhilüe*, written by Wang Dayuan in 1349-1350. Sulu then was known as a producer of mother-of-pearl, especially among traders in Amoy. But intensive as well as extensive overseas trade for the Chinese market only developed after the Ming era. A 1417 report said that two kings of Sulu and a queen visited China during the reign of Emperor Yonglo: An “Eastern King” called Paduka Matara (*Baduge Badala*), a “Western King” called

Maharajah Kolamating (*Mahalachi Gelamading*), and the “Wife of the man who lived in a cave,” with the name of Paduka Prabhu (*Baduge Balabu*) (Rockhill 1914-15: 270, n. 1, Wang 1967: 312, Scott 1983: 8-9).

The flourishing of this trade with China is corroborated by archaeological evidence in the form of ceramic sherds. The excavated sites in Sabah yielded Chinese pottery from the twelfth century, later to be dominated by Ming ceramics. From about the beginning of the fifteenth century comes the earliest indigenous text in east Sabah, written in Jawi (i.e., Arabic script) in the Idahan language. It presents a firm evidence that Islam had then begun to spread to this part of the world, to become the dominant religion of most of the coastal ethnic groups in the area (Harrisson & Harrisson 1971: 229).

It goes without saying that for an area like the Celebes Sea, only those ethnic groups with an advanced maritime culture could have played an important role in the economic and political spheres. And among them, Sulu was the first to develop as a maritime power of more than local proportions, later followed by Maguindanao. In Sulu, the Taosug assumed leadership, based on the maritime skills of the Samal and Bajau. Sopher, who studied the literature about the Bajau and other sea nomads, advanced a theory that the Bajau nomadic way of life was common among the Samal and that the latter adopted a more sedentary culture. However, Nimmo – supported by Spoehr – was of the opinion that the seafaring skills of the Samal was a later development from their earlier land-oriented way of living, as they also had a certain degree of skill in making pottery. As a matter of fact, the Samal people were and are the only skilled pottery makers in the area. But the way in which the Bajau are related to the Samal is still a problem to be solved. The Bajau tongue belongs to the Samal language family. Moreover, Bajau communities in Indonesian territory also call themselves “Orang Sama” (Spoehr 1973: 25, Sopher 1977, Nimmo 1967: 211).

Another sea-oriented ethnic group is the Sangir and Talaud people, in the eastern part of the Celebes Sea, as yet virgin territory for historical research. Their settlements in southern Mindanao, the northern peninsula of Sulawesi, and North Maluku attest to their extensive overseas voyages. However, owing to political fragmentation, they never developed into a major maritime power. On the island of Sangir only, according to Valentijn, there were originally two kingdoms, but in the seventeenth century they split into nine separate units that, together with the kingdoms of Siau and Ta(g)hulandang to the south, made up a total of eleven kinglets for the whole Sangir-Talaud group. In the nineteenth century, there were still six kingdoms in the area – Tabukan, Manganitu, Kandahar, Tahuna, Tahulandang, and Siau – all belonging to the same ethnic group (*Mededeelingen* 1912: 5-20, 40).

Fragmentation is apparently a distinctive feature of the area, although centripetal forces were also in operation. The inhabitants of Minahasa, for example, profess to form a single entity, as reflected by their name itself (Minahasa is derived from *Mina-esa*, where *esa* means “one”), but they retained until quite recently a differentiation into different clans (*walak*). The Gorontalo people were usually

divided among five kinglets, who joined to form one entity called the *Lima-pahalaa*. Likewise, in the interior of Mindanao, the Maranao people recognized a quadruple polity, the *pat-a-pangampong-ko-ranao*, or the four “states” of (Lake) Lanao: Bayabao, Masiu, Unayan, and Baloi. Later, the Maranao were divided into fifteen “big” and twenty-eight “little” sultanates. However, fragmentation continued and at the beginning of the twentieth century, according to the American occupation forces, there were hundreds of small states, some of them comprising only a thousand people (Saber 1974: 220).

THE IBERIAN INVOLVEMENT

After Francisco Serrão arrived in Ternate, where he established a trading post, the Portuguese tried several times to find a northern sea route via the Celebes Sea that would link Maluku with Malaka. This alternative route could shorten the voyage by about 200 leagues (approximately 600 miles); moreover, shipping could thus avoid the Java and Flores seas, then dominated by local Muslim powers hostile to the Portuguese.

In 1522, Garcia Henriques attempted to sail from Ternate, and the following year António d'Abreu ventured on the same route, but both voyages failed. It was only in 1526 that Dom Jorge de Menezes successfully accomplished his voyage through the Celebes Sea, but he sailed from the opposite direction. He was sent from Malaka to replace Dom Garcia Henriques as *capitão* of Ternate. His route took him to North Borneo, via Cagayan Sulu to Mindanao and Basilan, then across to Halmahera. The itinerary through the Sangir and Talaud archipelago was not mentioned (Teixeira 1962).

In contrast, the first “Spanish” navigation in this area was well-documented thanks to the account of Pigafetta, who accompanied Magellan in the first circumnavigation. Towards the end of October 1521, the expedition entered the Celebes Sea via Sulu and Basilan, then proceeded to Maguindanao. The toponyms mentioned between Mindanao and Maluku are found in the Sangir and Talaud Islands, among others: Cawiao (Kawio), Cabaluzao (Kawaluso), Lipan (Lipang), Nuza (Nusa, another name for Manipa), Sanghir, Cheama (Kiama), Carachita (Kahakitang), Para (Para), Ciau (Siau), Paghinsara (Panginrolong), and Meau (Beong). The expedition arrived in Tidore, in the Moluccas, on November 6th, 1521 (Pigafetta 1969: 63-64).

The arrival of the Spanish ships in Maluku caused quite a stir among the local Portuguese, who considered this area as their territory, allotted to them as a result of the Papal division of the world outside Europe into a Spanish and Portuguese spheres for exploration and exploitation. The demarcation line in the Atlantic was clearly defined (although the delineation of frontiers between Spanish and Portuguese South America was only settled by the Treaty of Madrid in 1750) but, in the Pacific, the situation was rather vague. Although the Treaty of Saragossa (1529) set the demarcation line at 297.5 leagues east of Maluku, the Spaniards remained active in the central Philippines, and for a long time the “Questão das Malucas”

became a source of conflict between the two Iberian powers. Eventually the Spaniards settled in the Philippines while the Portuguese concentrated on the Moluccas, but the two spheres remained separated, even after 1580, when the two countries came under the same sovereign, King Philip. But the demarcation in the Laut Sulawesi area remained vague, because here the line was never fixed. And soon, this “Moluccan problem” became irrelevant, as in 1575 the Portuguese were driven out of Maluku by the Sultan of Ternate (Boxer 1969: 64).

Many attempts were made by the Portuguese, with Spanish assistance from Manila, to regain their position in Maluku. But these efforts failed, and when a Spanish fleet finally occupied Ternate in 1606, the fort became a Spanish stronghold. Nowadays, its ruins are still known as Kastela, a reminder of former Castilian glory. Spaniards in the region were known as Castilians or, in its local form, Tasikela (Argensola 1992).

In the Celebes Sea area, however, Portuguese involvement was more of a religious nature. Here, missionaries were rather more active than conquistadors, especially during the second half of the sixteenth century. Around 1563, Fr. Diogo de Magelhães reported having baptized 1,500 people in Manado, and in Siau the king and 2,500 of his subjects became Christians. In 1569, Fr. Pero Mascarenhas visited Manado to solidify the local Christian community, and in Kolongan (Sangir islands) he was well received, and baptized the whole population (Jacobs 1974: 413-416, 534-536).

After the Castilian conquest of Ternate, “Spanish” missionaries replaced the Portuguese, especially in Siau, where substantial numbers had become faithful Catholics. In 1614 Ternate, with the help of VOC forces, conquered Siau, but ten years later the Spaniards came back and held the place until 1677. Meanwhile, the VOC had responded to an appeal of the chiefs of the Minahasa clans to help them chase away the Spaniards from North Sulawesi in 1644, but the latter returned in 1651, and only in 1657 did Dutch forces come to drive them out again. From then on, the VOC maintained a stronghold in Manado, which they called “Fort Amsterdam” (Godée Molsbergen 1928: 11-12).

It was also as a deterrent against Dutch encroachments that the Spaniards built a fort in Zamboanga in 1635. At the same time, this fort served as a wedge between the area's only two big Muslim powers, Maguindanao and Sulu. Thus the Celebes Sea area had become an arena of Spanish clashes, in which they tried to settle conflicts originating in Europe: firstly, the age-old rivalry with their Portuguese neighbors; secondly, an extension of the war against the United Provinces of the Netherlands, the so-called Eighty Years' War of the Dutch people; and lastly, the war against Islamic forces, which was won by Spain with the fall of Granada in 1492, but which in the Celebes Sea area lasted until the very end of Spanish involvement, towards the end of the nineteenth century.

THE DUTCH DOMINANCE

Because of a lack of local sources, the internal dynamics of the region are still obscure. Only when indigenous people came into contact with Europeans does

some information seep through the bulk of documents, which, however, were more concerned with European activities. In the previous sections, we have seen that, in the sixteenth century and afterwards, this region was more of an arena for European rivalries, as if the Celebes Sea had become peripheries of Iberian and Dutch political interests. Indeed, by the middle of the seventeenth century, there were two European bastions in the area – a Spanish fort in Zamboanga and a Dutch garrison in Manado. For the local inhabitants, however, life went on as usual, as Bajau, Samal, and Sangir ships plied along the coasts and traded from island to island, while in the interior tribal life, with its internal dynamics such as tribal warfare, continued more or less undisturbed by this alien competition (see Henley 2002).

Of course, for the coastal people, there must have been a big change, with conversions to either Islam or Christianity. Although, according to the sources, many saw conversion as an expediency to procure economic support (for example, the so-called “rice Christians”), the situation was advantageous to the Dutch, for it was stipulated that, after a successful conquest in which the Dutch had helped Ternate in its struggle against Spain, the Islamic population would come under Ternate's rule, while the Christian community would become VOC subjects. In this way, the Dutch could gain more followers and expand their influence in the area (Godée Molsbergen 1928: 11-12).

Beside the Dutch-Hispanic rivalry, there was also competition between the kingdoms of Ternate and Makassar, which contended for hegemony in the Celebes Sea area. In the course of the sixteenth century, the South Sulawesi kingdom of “Makassar” (actually a twin kingdom consisting of Gowa and Tallo) had grown in importance and, by the seventeenth century, its influence had spread northward. There it came into conflict with Ternate's expansionist policy. But Makassar was defeated by the VOC with Ternate's help, and in 1667 the Treaty of Bungaya stipulated that Makassar had to withdraw from North Sulawesi.¹

With the disappearance of Makassar from the scene, the Dutch then turned against the Spaniards. As a matter of fact, the Peace of Munster of 1648 had ended eighty years of fighting between the two, and in 1663 the Spanish establishments in Ternate and Zamboanga were abandoned to reinforce Manila in the face of a possible threat from the north by Coxinga, who had made Taiwan his headquarters. However, there were still Spanish missionaries in Siau and although, according to the Treaty of Munster, the *status quo* had to be upheld by the two parties, the VOC saw the Spanish presence here as an obstacle to their ambition to extend their monopolistic policy in the area, especially as it was reported that clove trees were also grown in Siau (Lapian 1984: 30-45).

Since the Dutch were bound by treaty to honor Spanish claims in Siau, the island was conquered in 1677 in the name of the sultan of Ternate, at the time an ally of the VOC. And despite strong protests from the Spanish side, the island remained under the Dutch, and local Catholics who did not depart with the missionaries to Manila switched over to Dutch Calvinism (Robidé van der Aa 1867: 97-99).

After the elimination of Spanish competition, relations between Ternate and the VOC became strained, not least on account of the latter's aggressive monopolistic policy. In 1680 the conflict resulted in a war. The sultan of Ternate was captured in 1681 and forced to sign a treaty in 1683, whereby he became a vassal of the VOC. Hence many parts of North Sulawesi that were formerly regarded as vassals of Ternate came into the Dutch orbit. But prior to this, the VOC had already signed treaties with the Sangir kings of Tabukan, Kandahar, Taruna, and Tahulandang in 1677, and with the chiefs of Minahasa in 1679 (*Mededeelingen* 1912: Appendix IV).

Subsequently, the Dutch considered themselves masters of the southern and eastern parts of the region. And for more than a century, their bastion in Manado dominated politics in the area, especially in those districts near the fortress. However, in the northern territories, the sultanates of Sulu and Maguindanao were growing into maritime powers of more than local proportions.

SULU'S SUPREMACY

At the time the VOC was engaged in collecting tribute from chiefs and kinglets in North Sulawesi, the Sulu and Maguindanao sultanates farther north were flourishing and experiencing a period of economic prosperity. Sultan Nasiruddin of Maguindanao, better known in Western sources as Sultan Qudarat, ruled over an area extending from Zamboanga to the Gulf of Davao. He was recognized as the supreme authority in the Pulangi River, and his influence was felt in the country of the Maranao, and even as far as Butuan, on the north coast of Mindanao. According to the Maguindanao *tarsila* (genealogies), Sultan Qudarat died about the end of 1671 after having remained on the throne for half a century (Majul 1973: 28).

Compared with the sultanate of Maguindanao (and the inland kingdom of Buayan), Sulu was relatively more centralized and its political institutions were heavily influenced by those of the countries in the western part of the Malay Archipelago, whereas Maguindanao underwent influences from Ternate. Under Sultan Shahabuddin (1685-1710), Sulu began to collect tribute from the chiefs in the northern part of Borneo, which was formally considered as part of Brunei territory (Majul 1973: 20).

But in 1718 the Spaniards re-established themselves in Zamboanga. The restoration of the fort was urged by the Jesuits, but another consideration was a fear of Dutch expansion into the area as a result of trade connections with both Sulu and Maguindanao. Henceforth a new phase of Moro wars ensued, which was to last on and off until the end of the nineteenth century. Fragmentation and internecine warfare among the local chiefs allowed the Spaniards to withstand attacks by Muslim forces (Majul 1973: chapter 6).

Meanwhile, trade went on as usual. Traditional trade connections with the Chinese and Bugis continued, but after the middle of the eighteenth century the arrival of British country traders in the area gave a boost to the local economy. A British trading station was established on the island of Balambangan between 1773

and 1775, mainly based on opium dealing and the traffic of arms. When Sulu sacked this post, thereby cutting off direct supplies for its rivals, especially Maguindanao in Cotabato, regional trade was drawn to Jolo, the capital of Sulu. It was then that Sulu rose into an important commercial power (Warren 1981: 37).

By virtue of Sulu's character as a segmentary state, local chiefs (*datu*) were competing to equip fleets of ships to venture through island Southeast Asia. These were expeditions of trading and raiding, whichever circumstances allowed. Most raiding operations involved the capture of people to offset the shortage of manpower in Sulu, which was expanding. Warren has calculated that a total of 200,000 to 300,000 people were transported as slaves to Sulu between 1770 and 1870 (Warren 1981: 208). Most of the sailors were of Iranun or Ilanun ethnic stock, and it is no wonder that in the western part of the Indonesian Archipelago the name "Lanun" became synonymous with "pirate," while in the eastern part the same was true of "Mangindano."

The raids on the Philippine Islands had an additional purpose, *viz.* as an extension of what the Spaniards called the Moro Wars. In this connection, a Dutch writer, too, saw the pirate raids as "a special form of Holy War against the Infidels" (Veth 1870: 175-176).

When Hunt visited Sulu in 1814, however, he found the sultan "... a mere cypher, neither feared nor respected; his orders disputed by the meanest individual, unable to decide on the most trivial points, without the concurrence of his Ruma Bichara..." Indeed, the Ruma Bichara, the country's council of ministers, became increasingly powerful as a consequence of the *datu*'s increasing wealth. When Western powers reproached the sultan for his people's marauding expeditions, he proved to be a powerless figure, incapable of asserting his authority (Hunt 1968: 36).

In the 1830s, a new marauding group emerged, named after their island stronghold, Balangingi. This name soon became notorious as a designation for ruthless pirates who ventured south as far as the Java and Flores seas, where they combined forces with local raiders. They were a mixture of ethnic groups that had found their way to Balangingi, amassed arms and power, and in the end came to almost rival the Sulu sultanate (Warren 1981: 182).

COLONIAL PERIPHERIES

The Western powers' race for colonies in the nineteenth century did not leave the Celebes Sea area untouched. After the Treaty of Vienna (1815), the Dutch, who had decided to return to their former territories, which had been conquered by the British during the Napoleonic Wars, started to reassert their territorial claims on North Sulawesi by appointing government officials at strategic places. However, a system of indirect rule was established, as local government was conducted through traditional rulers, who were forbidden to enter into relations with foreign powers. Only the area of Minahasa – where Fort Amsterdam was located – came under direct Dutch rule.

Initially, the Dutch felt secure of their possessions within the area, which they thought were equally divided among the Spaniards and themselves. The boundary in the eastern part was more or less fixed, of course, without taking into consideration the indigenous powers' traditional rights. In Mindanao, however, the Spaniards moved to take advantage of local fragmentation.

But the case of Sulu was a different matter, and the western boundary became an issue for diplomatic debates. Sulu had territorial claims on Sabah, while the Spaniards claimed sovereignty over the Sulu sultanate, based on an 1851 treaty, which, however, was not immediately acknowledged by Britain. At the Protocol of Madrid (1877), Sulu's sovereignty was still recognized by Britain and Germany. And meanwhile, a British North Borneo Company was established, which in 1878 received rights in Sabah from the sultan of Sulu in exchange for an annual payment of \$5,000. The Company was conferred a Royal Charter in 1881, and in 1885 Spain abandoned its claims in Sabah in return for British and German recognition of Spanish sovereignty over Sulu. In 1888, Sabah, together with Brunei and Sarawak, became a British Protectorate. The boundary line between British and Dutch territory in North Borneo was determined by an 1891 Anglo-Dutch convention, and the present frontier was established in 1912 by a joint survey team of the two colonial powers (Sturler 1881, Irwin 1955: chapter X, Tarling 1978: 166, Hunter 1963).

German participation in the Madrid Protocol reflected the growing force of the new empire that came into being in 1871 under Prussia's leadership. German shipping increased in the course of the nineteenth century, and Jolo, the capital of Sulu, also became a trading place for adventurous German captains in spite of the Spanish blockade. However, German colonial ambitions were directed more eastward, to the Pacific and New Guinea.

Previously, in the 1840s, there were French attempts to establish a naval station in the area. France's mercantile fleet, which suffered a setback in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, was steadily growing and began to develop contacts with the Far East, especially China. In this context, France entered into a commercial treaty in 1843 with Sulu, which was considered an independent sultanate. The following year, the corvette *La Sabine* under Captain Guérin's command paid a visit to the island of Basilan, and a small boat was sent ashore. But most of her crew was murdered by the local inhabitants and the rest captured as slaves. A punitive expedition was sent, and this time the Spaniards in Manila were alerted and filed strong protests against the French. The matter was referred to Paris and Madrid and, to the relief of the Spaniards (and the British), the French decided to abandon this plan (Nardin 1978: 29-40).

Belgium and Austria were also marginally involved in this area. Belgium separated from the kingdom of the United Netherlands in the 1830s to become an independent state of its own in 1839. James Brooke, who in the initial stages of his enterprise in Sarawak was not supported by the British government, turned to Belgium (and Prussia), but this project did not materialize. There were three occasions in the course of the nineteenth century when some Belgians showed some interest

in the area, *viz.* in 1840-41 (the so-called Ouvrard Project), then in 1869-73, when King Leopold II looked for an “independent country” in the neighborhood of the Philippines, and in 1898, when Belgium was mentioned as a possible mediator in the troubles around the status of the Philippines. We know that the Belgian king found his colony in Africa, when in 1885 he became master of the Congo Free State, which he considered as his private enterprise (Greindl 1962).

In 1868, the Austrian government sent a naval expedition to East Asia, which was followed by the British with suspicion. Perhaps this was only a show of force, but the subsequent visit of the corvette *Friedrich* under Captain Oesterreicher's command in 1878 was of a more serious nature. At the time, Baron von Overbeck, the Austrian consul in Hong Kong, was engaged in acquiring the rights of an American firm for exploitation in North Borneo, which Americans had negotiated with the sultan of Brunei. The corvette was sent to make observations on the spot, but her crew, landing in the delta of the Sebuku River, on the eastern coast of Kalimantan, came under attack by a group of Bajau from Omaddal Island. Although von Overbeck, through arrangements with the sultan and the Pangeran Tumenggung of Brunei, was in 1877 made “Maharaja of Sabah and Raja of Gaya and Sandakan”— a title that was strengthened in 1878 by a separate arrangement with the sultan of Sulu, whereby he became “Datu Bendahara and Raja of Sandakan”— he could not enlist his government's support, so in 1879 he withdrew from the scene and transferred his rights to Alfred Dent and his associates, who founded the British North Borneo Company (Irwin 1955: 199-201).

Another country interested in the area was Italy, which emerged as a united state in the 1860s and made Rome its capital in 1870. Soon the Italians were looking for overseas territories, especially to serve as a penal colony for their many convicts, who were a threat to the country's security. For this purpose, the government sent the *Principessa Clotilde* under Captain Carlo Racchia to the sultan of Brunei, whose territory was considered as being outside the authority of any Western power. However, as Brunei had signed a treaty with Britain, the Italian government approached London in this matter. The Dutch, who preferred to deal with several nations, such as “English, North Americans, Spaniards and Italians who surely would neutralize each other, than with one big purely English colony”, were in principle not opposed to this Italian venture. But they eventually filed strong protests against Italy, because the latter had been in touch with the British government, implying a recognition of the British position in this part of the island. Moreover, they thought that a colony of convicts nearby, close to the center of “pirate” villages, would endanger the security of the region. In the end, the Italian scheme was abandoned, mostly because the British had “strong ground for resistance on account of the disorders which would follow the introduction of a desperate class of European convicts into Borneo...” (Tarling 1978: 127).

Meanwhile, American traders had also been drawn to the area, and were soon followed by government officers to protect trade interests. In 1842 contacts were made with Sulu, and in 1845 the *USS Constitution* under the command of Percivall visited Brunei, but a treaty with Brunei was only signed in 1850 through the efforts

of Joseph Balestier, the American consul in Singapore. C.L. Moses, the American consul in Brunei since 1865, received the right to exploit a vast expanse of land for a period of ten years, in exchange for annual payments of \$4,200 and \$4,000 to the sultan and the Tumenggung, respectively. He transferred this right to the American Trading Company of Borneo, established by Joseph W. Torrey and Thomas B. Harris, in cooperation with a few Chinese traders in Hong Kong. Although some plantations of rice, sugar cane, and tobacco were started, especially near the Kimanis River, production proved to be below expectation. The project was discontinued after 1866, when Harris died, and the American consulate in Brunei was closed in 1868 (Wright 1970: 48-55).

Thus the American venture in North Borneo failed, but, as we have seen, it led to the British taking over the enterprise, through Baron von Overbeck, and to the establishment of the British North Borneo Company. Towards the close of the century, however, the Americans returned to the area, and in 1899 they took over the Philippine Islands – including the Sulu Archipelago – from the Spaniards. The boundary with British North Borneo was settled in 1930, and with the Dutch East Indies in 1928 (Homan 1985: 25-42).

With the delineation of boundaries between the colonial territories of Great Britain, the United States of America, and the Netherlands, the area of Laut Sulawesi was divided into three distinct parts, each becoming more oriented towards the capitals of Singapore, Manila, and Batavia.

Note

1 See C. Speelman, "Notitie Makasar 651," *Koloniaal Archief, Overgekomen Papieren 1166*, fol. 928-936.

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Summary: Laut Sulawesi, or the Celebes Sea, is a basin enclosed to the north by the Sulu Archipelago and Mindanao, to the east by the Sangir and Talaud islands, to the south by the peninsula of North Sulawesi, and to the west by the eastern coast of Sabah. Maritime traffic links the area with the Java, the Flores, and the South China seas and the Pacific Ocean. Today the area is divided among the republics of the Philippines and Indonesia, and the Federation of Malaysia, but in earlier times it was an economic and – to a certain extent – cultural unit overriding present political boundaries. This paper deals with the historical process that brought about the present division.

***Laut Sulawesi: la mer de Célèbes,
un centre devenu pépiphéries***

Résumé : *la mer de Célèbes, Laut Sulawesi, est un bassin limité au nord par l'Archipel des Sulu et Mindanao, à l'est par les îles de Sangir et Talaud, au sud par la péninsule septentrionale de Célèbes et à l'ouest par la côte orientale de Sabah. Le trafic maritime connecte ce bassin avec les mers de Java et de Flores, la mer de Chine méridionale et le Pacifique. Cette région, aujourd'hui partagée entre les républiques des Philippines et d'Indonésie et la Fédération de Malaisie, présentait à plus haute époque une unité économique – et, dans une certaine mesure, culturelle – qui recouvrait les frontières politiques actuelles. Cet article décrit le processus historique qui amena la présente division.*

Key-words: Celebes Sea, Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, Sabah, Maluku, Kalimantan, Mindanao, Sulu, history, colonial history, state formation.

Mots-clés : *mer de Célèbes, Indonésie, Philippines, Malaisie, Sabah, Maluku, Kalimantan, Mindanao, Sulu, histoire, histoire coloniale, formation de l'état.*