

Uncovering the Luso-Asian Sandalwood Trade Conducted by the Larantuqueiros of Flores Island 1500-1860 CE

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ABSTRACT

The elongated island of Flores in Indonesia stands at geological, zoological, cultural, and ethnic boundaries. But the area is also predominately Christian in the most populous Muslim country in the world, reflecting that this part of Indonesia was officially part of the Portuguese Empire until 1859 CE. This presentation attempts to explore the connection between the Luso-Portuguese Larantuqueiro community and the sandalwood trade between 1500 and 1860 CE. The trade essentially between the island of Timor and China has shaped the political geography of the region during the colonial period, resulting in the present curious exclave of Oecusse and the minor islands that are part of Timor-Leste.

Keywords: *Flores, Larantuqueiro, Portuguese, Sandalwood.*

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Figure 1: Map of changes in The Portuguese Sandalwood Trade to Macau (Source: Clifford Pereira)

Figure 2: Mount Ille Mandrini, Flores Island, seen from the hot springs at Obyek Wisata Wiaplatin (Source: Clifford Pereira).

1. INTRODUCTION

Since 1975 CE and the end of fascist rule in Portugal, there has been a movement among academics in Portugal and its former colonies in Africa and Asia to investigate the Portuguese Empire. This post-colonial movement accepts that Portuguese imperialism existed and impacted vast areas of the world and that its basis was initially maritime in nature. Unlike the studies of the colonial past, studies now include the role of subalterns who were marginalised or even excluded from the prescribed colonial narrative. As a case study, this presentation attempts to explore the connection between the Luso-Portuguese Larantuqueiro community and the Sandalwood trade between 1500 and 1860 CE.

Archival-based secondary sources and maps and images from the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) have been used alongside first-hand observations in the region as the major resources for this study. The author accepts that further data is available in archives in Portugal, the Macau SAR, and possibly in the Netherlands that have yet to be investigated.

The group of islands that the Portuguese referred to as ‘Flores’ are called the Lesser Sunda Islands. The largest of these islands is the Island of Flores, which is to the east of Komodo Island. Flores Island was originally called Pulau Nipa, or Snake Island, referring to its serpent-like shape, while Timor Island was said by locals to be the back of a crocodile.

Long before the arrival of the Europeans in the sixteenth century, Southeast Asians had been trading among themselves. By the fifteenth century a system of local trade routes had developed that connected

the region with China and Japan to the north, Malacca and on to India in the east and probably southwards beyond Timor to Northern Australia. The most precious exports of the region were cloves from the Islands of Ternate and Tidore, and nutmeg from the Banda Islands. But there were other valuable trading items, including Bird of Paradise feathers from the Aru Islands and New Guinea, *Batik* from Java, and Ikat textiles from Flores and Sumba. Rice and sago were extensively traded foods. But it is the trade in wood products that concerns us.

2. HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION

Within a year of their capture of Malacca in 1511 CE, the Portuguese realized that most sandalwood prized by the Chinese came from islands somewhere to the southeast of Malacca and perhaps southwest of the ‘Spice Islands’ (Aritonang and Steenbrink 2008, 74). In 1512 CE, they arrived at Ternate, Tidore, and Banda. But did not initially establish either a factory or a castle. Over the next ten years, the Portuguese explored the region, giving the name Cabo das Flores (Cape of Flowers) to the eastern end of a long island. East of Flores Island was a narrow passage, the Strait of Flores, that allowed vessels to sail in an “S”- shaped route between the Flores Sea in the north to the Savu Sea in the south. To the east of Adonara Island the Portuguese became aware of the Island of Lembata. However, they initially merged the islands of Pantar and Alor into one island that they called Ombai. The name survives today as the Ombai Strait.

The indigenous Kingdom of Larantuka, in the shadow of the volcano Ille Mandrini at the eastern tip of Flores, controlled the adjacent islands, including Solor. (Figure 1) Initially, around 1512 CE, the Portuguese were drawn to Lamakera, at the north-eastern end of Solor Island (Durand 2002, 50). Without doubt, the draw for the Portuguese was that this location was strategically located on an established trade route from Timor through the Lesser Sunda Islands to Makassar, the Maluku, and on to China. The hinterland of Solor was of little agricultural value, but the sea was rich in marine life, and the settlement was a producer of turtle shell, *bêche de mer*, and ambergris (Borschberg 2004, 12-13). The Island of Sumba to the west and the large island of Timor beyond the Savu Sea were particularly rich in sandalwood (*Santalum album*) and sappanwood (*Caesalpinia sappan*), which was used in dying in China (Souza 2004, 47). Between 1512 and 1558 CE, some Portuguese men and converted women from various Malay and Papuan ethnic groups settled at Lamakera on the eastern tip of Solor Island (Jarnagin 2011, 11). To this community were drawn people (often converts and slaves) from other Portuguese possessions, including Ambon, Malacca, Macau, India, and Mozambique Island. A form of creole Portuguese called simply ‘Portugis’ had developed in Malacca over the sixteenth century and became the lingua franca of this mixed population. At the time, this mixed Luso-Asian community was known by the Portuguese exonym ‘mestiço’ (Asian-European mixed) or ‘topaz’. The latter was a term from Portuguese India and suggested a community that was bilingual in Portuguese and another Asian language. But it also suggested some genetic mixture and Portuguese acculturation (Subrahmanyam

2009, 25-26). The first arrival of Portuguese traders at Lifau in Timor in search of sandalwood was probably before 1550 CE.

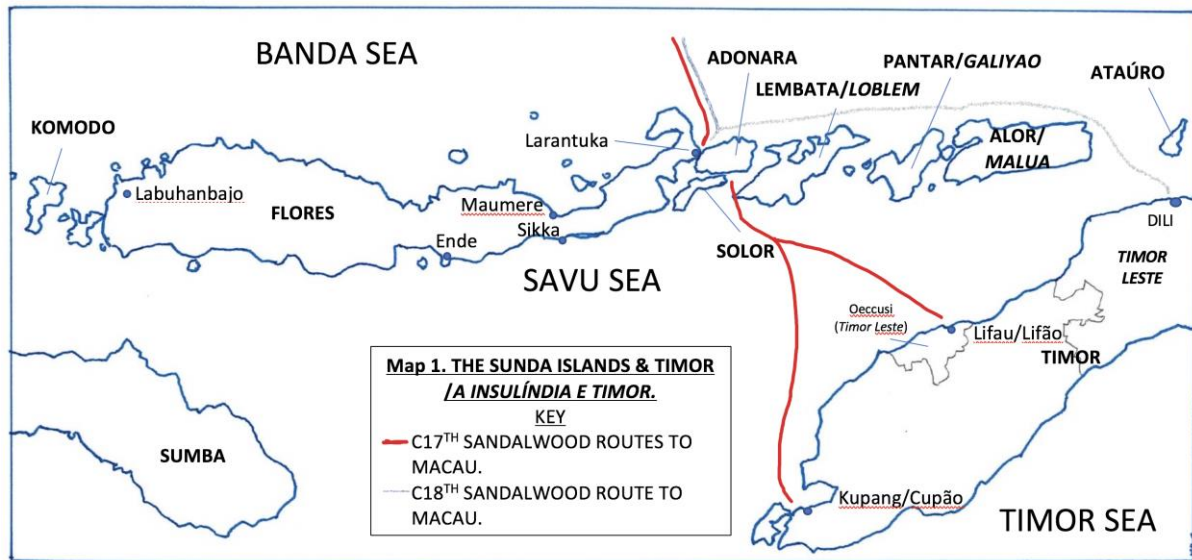


Figure 1: Changes in The Portuguese Sandalwood Trade to Macau (Source: Clifford Pereira)



Figure 2: Mount Ille Mandrini, Flores Island, seen from the hot springs at Obyek Wisata Wiaplatin (Source: Clifford Pereira).

In 1561 CE, four Dominican missionaries under the order of Brother António DaCruz left Malacca and arrived at Solor (Klamer 2010, 14). The Dominicans initially built a wooden fort at Lohayong on the north shore of the island facing Adonara in 1562 CE. The fort was burned down by a Javanese raid in 1563 CE. But the Dominicans continued their mission and reconstructed it in stone in 1566 CE. This became known as the O Forte de Solor. Within the fort, they built a dormitory, a seminary, and the church of Nossa Senhora de Piedade. Soon more Portuguese men with their Malay women arrived, and Lohayong became the primary Portuguese port for the sandalwood trade from Timor. By 1590 CE, the Christian population of Solor numbered 25,000. The Dominicans built the church of São João Evangelista (Saint John the Evangelist) at Lamakera, but it was destroyed in 1598 CE.

In 1541 CE, a fleet from Makassar attacked and captured Larantuka on Flores Island, thereby extending the Buginese control over the valuable sandalwood trade from Timor to Makassar. Some Portuguese traders and their 'mestiço' agents from Solor decided to relocate to Larantuka, away from the control of the Portuguese state and the Dominican missionaries. But they were quickly followed by the Dominicans, and in 1596 CE, a seminary with an intake of 50 students was built at Larantuka (Andaya 2010, 403). The refugees and traders at Larantuka began to call themselves Larantuqueiros in the 'Portugis' creole that was now a lingua franca in the region, and the cosmopolitan settlement became increasingly influenced by the Portuguese.

The Iberian Union between 1580 and 1640 CE brought all Portuguese settlements across the globe under Dutch attack, ousting the Portuguese from the spice trade (Van Zanden 1999, 8). Larantuka became the Portuguese trading centre for the region in 1613 CE (Boxer 1991, 143). Meanwhile, the fort on Solor was wrested back and forth between the Dutch and Portuguese from 1613 to 1648 CE. Each attack produces refugees at Larantuka, bringing with them their trading networks. Even the powerful Dutch merchant De Hornay relocated. The Dutch called the Luso-Asians 'Zwarte Portugeesen', or Black Portuguese. The Dutch conquest of Malacca in 1641 CE produced Portuguese refugees, some of whom arrived with their servants and slaves at Larantuka (Byrne 2011, 134). The demise of Solor increased Larantuqueiro sandalwood trading activities in Timor and resulted in clashes with the Timorese Kingdoms (Lewis 2012, 187). The Dominicans followed the Larantuqueiro traders and also concentrated their activities in Timor, especially at Lifau. By 1640 CE, Larantuka had become the centre of Portuguese influence in the entire region, including Kupang and Lifau on the island of Timor and this helped to consolidate the sandalwood trade to Macau. The Dominicans had followed the sandalwood traders to Lifau and converted the royal family of Ambeno in 1641 CE. Portuguese refugees from the Dutch attack on Makassar in 1660 CE added to Larantuka's population (Byrne 2011, 134).

The Luso-Dutch Treaty of 1661 CE formally consolidated Dutch rule over the bay at Kupang in Western Timor (Durand 2002, 50). In the following year, the Portuguese decided to make Lifau the capital of their interests in the region instead of Larantuka, which had held that position since 1613 CE (Boxer 1991, 1430). But it was not until 1681 CE that the Portuguese formally listed Timor and the Solor Archipelago as part of their Estado or Eastern Empire (Andaya 2010, 393). Theoretically, the Larantuqueiros were under the Portuguese crown, but in fact they were autonomous with the support of the Dominican clergy and did not pay tribute or taxes to Portugal. Letters sent to Lisbon by their kings were ignored. Locally, a power struggle between the da Costa and de Hornay clans ensued for many years until they agreed to share power. The Larantuqueiros established Portuguese as their official language. Though the languages of commerce remained Portugis Creole and Malay.

Throughout the seventeenth century, a series of Catholic kings ruled over Larantuka, backed by the Dominicans, who provided instruction in Portuguese as well as literacy for the elite. In 1701 CE, King João V of Portugal decided to separate the roles of the state and the church. He legitimized Portugal's role in the region by appointing a governor of the "Province of Solor and Timor" who would report to the Viceroy of the Indies in Goa. But with only about a hundred men at his disposal, the governor could only maintain indirect control, which allowed the Dom of Larantuka and the chiefs of Timor to manage their own affairs during his four-year term.

The weakness of the Portuguese crown allowed the Larantuqueiros freedom to seek any markets of profit, and while the eighteenth century, the Larantuqueiros at Lifau began trading with the Dutch based at Batavia, who found new global markets for Sappanwood (Souza 2004, 54). When the Portuguese government tried to wrest control of the trade, it was resisted by the Larantuqueiros. In response, the Portuguese moved their capital in 1769 CE to Dili (Aritonang and Steenbrink 2008, 93-95).

The Larantuqueiros continued to control the sandalwood trade into the nineteenth century, and when Portuguese tried to regain control of the sources at Timor, the Larantuqueiros contested their presence even at Dili (Durand 2002, 50). When the Lucy Cleveland visited Dili in 1829, the town was a distant Portuguese colony. Lucy Cleveland had joined her husband William, an American trader who was looking to purchase sandalwood as part of the 'China Trade'. Interestingly, they were unable to procure sandalwood in Kupang, but with the help of a Portuguese merchant, they did gain a cargo of sandalwood at Dili and sailed to Macau (Puga 2007, 3-33). This would suggest that the sandalwood trade in western Timor had already been oriented westward towards Batavia and Dutch control. While Portuguese Dili remained the source for direct trade with Macau (Figure 1). In 1844 CE, the Portuguese stopped administering the East Asian empire from Goa and shifted the administration of Larantuka and Timor to Macau. This reflected the strengthening of trading links in the region and attracted Cantonese traders.

In 1851 CE, the Portuguese in Timor were in debt and sought any means to provide an income for their two remaining possessions in Southeast Asia, Timor and the Lesser Sundas. In 1854 CE, the year that naturalist Alfred Wallace sailed out to Southeast Asia, the Portuguese offered the Dutch the sovereign rights to the Lesser Sundas and the remaining half of western Timor, with the exception of Oecussi and the settlement of Lifau for 200,000 florins. The treaty also allowed the Dutch and Portuguese to swap some territory on Timor (Durand 2002, 51). The total area of the Portuguese territory that passed to the Netherlands was around 20,897 sq. kms which is about the same area as Wales. The Luso-Dutch Treaty of April 20, 1859, ratified the frontiers suggested in 1854, but there were still border issues in Timor to be resolved (Durand 2002, 52). By the time Albert Wallace left Southeast Asia in 1862, the Larantuqueiros were no longer Portuguese nationals.

During the course of the eighteenth century, some Larantuqueiros relocated to Kupang where, they married European sandalwood traders, combining the Larantuqueiro regional networks with international networks. Women played an important part in this process, and perhaps this is how we should view the wife of Captain Drysdale, painted by Thomas Baines in 1856 CE at Kupang. Albert Wallace describes Mrs. Drysdale as a person of "European and Chinese parentage".

3. CONCLUSION

The Portuguese did not create new trade routes but entrenched themselves in pre-existing profitable systems. Portuguese men certainly played a part. However, most political and religious decisions were

made in Goa and later Macau, and the majority of the Dominican clergy that came to the region were of Luso-Asian or Christian Indian origins. Portuguese religious and political control followed the sandalwood traders. In the case of the sandalwood trade the Portuguese relied heavily on local brokers and their networks. Three distinct levels of ethnic interaction played their part in the sandalwood trade:

On a macro level, Portuguese weaponry and maritime technology were applied against local competitors such as the Buginese and Javanese or against rival Europeans such as the Dutch, but always with the contribution of mixed-ethnic crewmen and soldiers.

On a median level, Portuguese trade eventually relied on supportive networks established by cosmopolitan settlements like Solor, Laurantaka, Kupang, Lifau, and Dili, which were semi-autonomous and often beyond the reach of either Lisbon or Goa and where the creole Portuguese language served as the trading lingua franca.

On a micro level, individual Portuguese men entered mutually beneficial marital and extramarital relationships with local or migrant women resulting in competing clans of mixed-heritage Luso-Asian traders who, in many cases, represented the ‘Portuguese presence’ in the region.

From the seventeenth century on, the Luso-Asian Larantuqueiros became the leading brokers in the sandalwood trade in the Lesser Sunda Islands and Timor. They held agency over the local Timorese kingdoms and chieftains who supplied the sandalwood.

There needs to be a rewriting of history that takes into account local and subaltern brokerage and the roles of such people as the Larantuqueiros in the so-called Portuguese Empire. As the sandalwood source shifted to Timor and the Larantuqueiros sought to trade westward to the Dutch at Batavia. The Portuguese authorities moved eastward to Dili for their trade to Macau, and Larantuka itself was bypassed by the new trade route. The legacy of the sandalwood trade is that the island of Flores is predominately Christian in the most populous Muslim country in the world and that a curious Timor-Leste exclave of Oecussi exists on the northern coast of Indonesian West Timor.

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