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The Dutch-Spanish conflict in the Philippines between 1600 and 1648

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The Dutch-Spanish conflict in the Philippines between 1600 and 1648

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Introduction

The Philippines had been a part of the Spanish empire for 35 years when Dutch captain Olivier van Noort and his fleet suddenly appeared in front of the Bay of Manila in the year 1600. At this point in history, the Spanish Crown had been at war with the rebellious protestants for almost four decades; a war that had already cost both sides countless expenses and men. This was the first time a Dutchman had ever entered Philippine waters, and one can imagine the Spanish were not happy to see their most hated enemy in yet another part of the world.

To reach the Philippines, Olivier van Noort had followed the route taken by Ferdinand Magellan around the South American coasts and across the Pacific Ocean between 1519 and 1521. After departing from modern day Mexico, Van Noort and his fleet crossed the Pacific and arrived off the coast of the Philippines on 14 October 1600, where they decided to blockade the Bay of Manila for two months. The Spanish governor, Francisco Tello, had immediately realized the reason for this blockade: Van Noort was waiting for one of the biannual Manila Galleons, enormous ships that were carrying silver and other resources from Acapulco in New Spain to Manila.¹ With the arrival of Van Noort begins a period of fifty years in which the Dutch sent fleets and ships to damage Spanish interests in the region. The Dutch fleets would circle the surrounding waters for months in hope of catching one of the silver galleons, while simultaneously harassing and raiding other ships bound for Manila.

A number of explanations for the Dutch presence in the Philippines have been put forth in the past. One assumption is easily made: the Dutch wanted to conquer the Philippines to incorporate them into their own colonial empire because of their internal riches. This is, however, completely untrue, as the Philippines were actually some of the poorest islands in the region. The lack of internal riches in the Philippines has raised the question why the Spanish chose to occupy the islands in the first place. Historian Manel Ollé Rodríguez, who specializes in Chinese history and wrote about the Spanish occupation of the Philippines in his 2004 article 'Early Spanish Insertion into Southeast Asia: the Chinese Factor', touches upon the discussion that the Philippines were an unprofitable colony for Spain in the long run, but argues that scholars are too focused on the economic value of the islands and disregard the strategic advantages of the Philippines, especially in the fight against the Dutch in the seventeenth century.² John Crossley, who wrote intensively about the Spanish governors in the Philippines, agrees with Rodríguez when it comes to the economic value of the Philippines. He wrote

¹ Certificate of Governor Don Francisco Tello of that which happened in the expedition against the Dutch corsair, in Henry E.J. Stanley, *The Philippine Islands, Moluccas, Siam, Cambodia, Japan, and China, at the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, by Antonio De Morga 1609, henceforth Stanley, *Antonio de Morga* (Farnham 2010), 170.

² Manel Ollé Rodríguez, 'Early Spanish Insertion into Southeast Asia: the Chinese Factor' in Peter Borschberg ed., *Iberians in the Singapore-Melaka Area and Adjacent Regions (16th to 18th Century)* (Lisbon 2004), 24.

that the islands were “a drain on the resources of the Spanish government”, and principally served as a trading post between America and China for the extremely important Manila Galleons.³

Considering Rodriguez’ comment about the strategic advantages of the Philippines, we turn to another theory that might explain the Dutch interest in the islands, which proposes that the Philippines were coveted because of their situation with reference to the rich Moluccas: to possess both the Philippines and the Moluccas was to have a sense of security. The position of the isles made it so that it was easy to attack one from the other, and even though the Spanish held the Philippines for over 333 years, the Moluccas changed owners multiple times. If the Dutch were able to remove the Spanish from the Philippines, they would secure their own holdings in the area and potentially gain access to other parts of Southeast Asia as well. This theory is suggested by Dirk Abraham Sloos, who in 1898 wrote a dissertation entitled *De Nederlanders in de Philippijnsche Wateren vóór 1626* on the Dutch in the Philippines. Sloos argued that the reason why the Dutch frequented the Bay of Manila and the surrounding areas so often is not necessarily because they wanted to conquer the islands for themselves but because they wanted to prevent the Spanish from creating a solid military base in Manila, which would make them a threat to Dutch interests in the Moluccas and other parts of Southeast Asia.⁴

Historian William Schurz, who studied the Dutch attacks on Manila in his 1939 work *The Manila Galleon*, agrees with Sloos. However, Schurz adds that the Dutch “desired possession of the Philippines not only for the purpose of removing a barrier to their commercial ambitions in the Orient, but also for the sake of controlling the positive commercial advantages of the islands themselves.”⁵ With this comment, Schurz was not referring to the potential riches of the Philippines, but to the already existing trade routes between the Philippines and other nations or kingdoms in the region, specifically China and Japan. The islands are situated at a very advantageous location in the context of the Southeast Asian trading network, and China and Japan were the most powerful Asian nations during the seventeenth century, producing desirable luxury goods for European markets.

Additionally, Schurz suggests that the Dutch were often acting out of spite and hatred for the Spanish, with whom they had been engaged in an exhausting and bloody religious war for almost forty years.⁶ That it was the memory of the bloody repression of Protestantism that drove the Dutch to the Spanish- and Portuguese controlled East Indies.

³ John N. Crossley, *Hernando de los Ríos Coronel and the Spanish Philippines in the Golden Age* (Farnham 2011), 16.

⁴ Dirk Abraham Sloos, *De Nederlanders in de Philippijnsche wateren voor 1625* (Amsterdam 1898), 5.

⁵ William Lytle Schurz, *The Manila Galleon: [the history of the Spanish galleons trading between Manila and Acapulco]* (New York 1959), 351.

⁶ *Ibidem*, 351.

Otto van den Muijzenberg is one of the few modern Dutch historians to touch upon the topic of Dutch-Philippine relations throughout history. When writing about the Philippines in the seventeenth century, he urges readers to remember that the Philippines should not be seen as an insignificant part of the East Indies that both the Dutch and the Spanish simply sought to own to complete their sphere of influence, but that the Philippines played an essential part in Spanish hegemony in the Pacific world, and were “the heart of the imperial system”.⁷

None of these authors are necessarily wrong in their conclusions, but all of their pictures are incomplete: if we want to fully understand the relevance of the Philippines and, consequently, the reasons why the Dutch attacked these islands for half a century, all the theories mentioned above should be taken together. The main question that this study will answer is the following: *What were the Dutch motives for repeatedly attacking the Philippines in the first half of the seventeenth century?* This is not only relevant as just another part of the Eighty Years’ War, but speaks to a far broader context of Spanish-Dutch relations during that time. To answer this question, it is first necessary to uncover the ‘value’ of the Philippines in the eyes of both colonial powers and the role the islands played in an emerging global system of trade. But instead of focusing solely on the economic value of the Philippines, either for their internal wealth or for the wealth they secured as a strategic base amidst larger trading networks, this study will shed light on how the changing dynamic between the economical and strategic aspects of the colony created a unique situation that rapidly attracted the attention of the Dutch. As a result, it will become clear why the Dutch repeatedly attacked the Philippines and why the Spanish fought tooth and nail to protect and maintain this strange part of their colonial empire.

The Dutch motives for their attacks on the Philippines are inherently connected to one another and cannot simply be classified as just economic, political or strategic. Moreover, the situation in the Philippines and the Asian colonial theatre was subject to internal and external developments that directly or indirectly influenced both the Dutch and Spanish policies in the area. However, there are three returning fundamental elements of the Dutch-Spanish conflict that factor into the situation in the Philippines during the first half of the seventeenth century. Simplified, these three ‘red threads’ can be identified as the continuation of the Eighty Years’ War, the extremely valuable Acapulco-Manila trade and the rivalry between the Dutch and Spanish trading networks in Asia. Essentially, the Dutch motives for their attacks on the Philippines can all be traced back to these three factors, but it is vital to remember that these three factors, and consequently all motives for the Dutch attacks, are inherently connected to each other. For the sake of this study, however, an attempt will be made to categorize some the motives of the Dutch and connect them to the three most influential factors mentioned before. Eventually, it will become clear that the conflict constitutes the interest and the interests

⁷ Otto van den Muijzenberg, *Four centuries of Dutch-Philippine economic relations, 1600-2000* (Manila 2000), 11.

constitute the conflict: the Dutch-Spanish war in the Philippines is a more like a vicious circle than the cause-and-effect situation proposed by historians such as Schurz.

Driving the narrative of this thesis is the analysis of the most well-known Dutch naval blockades of Manila. To get an accurate picture of the importance of the Spanish presence in the Philippines – and therefore of the Dutch motives for their attacks – contemporary and secondary archival material from both Spanish- and Dutch sources is used. Through these sources, we can discover the considerations and priorities of both the Dutch and the Spanish regarding the Philippines, how fleets were equipped and how the conflict impacted the Dutch and Spanish policies in Southeast Asia.

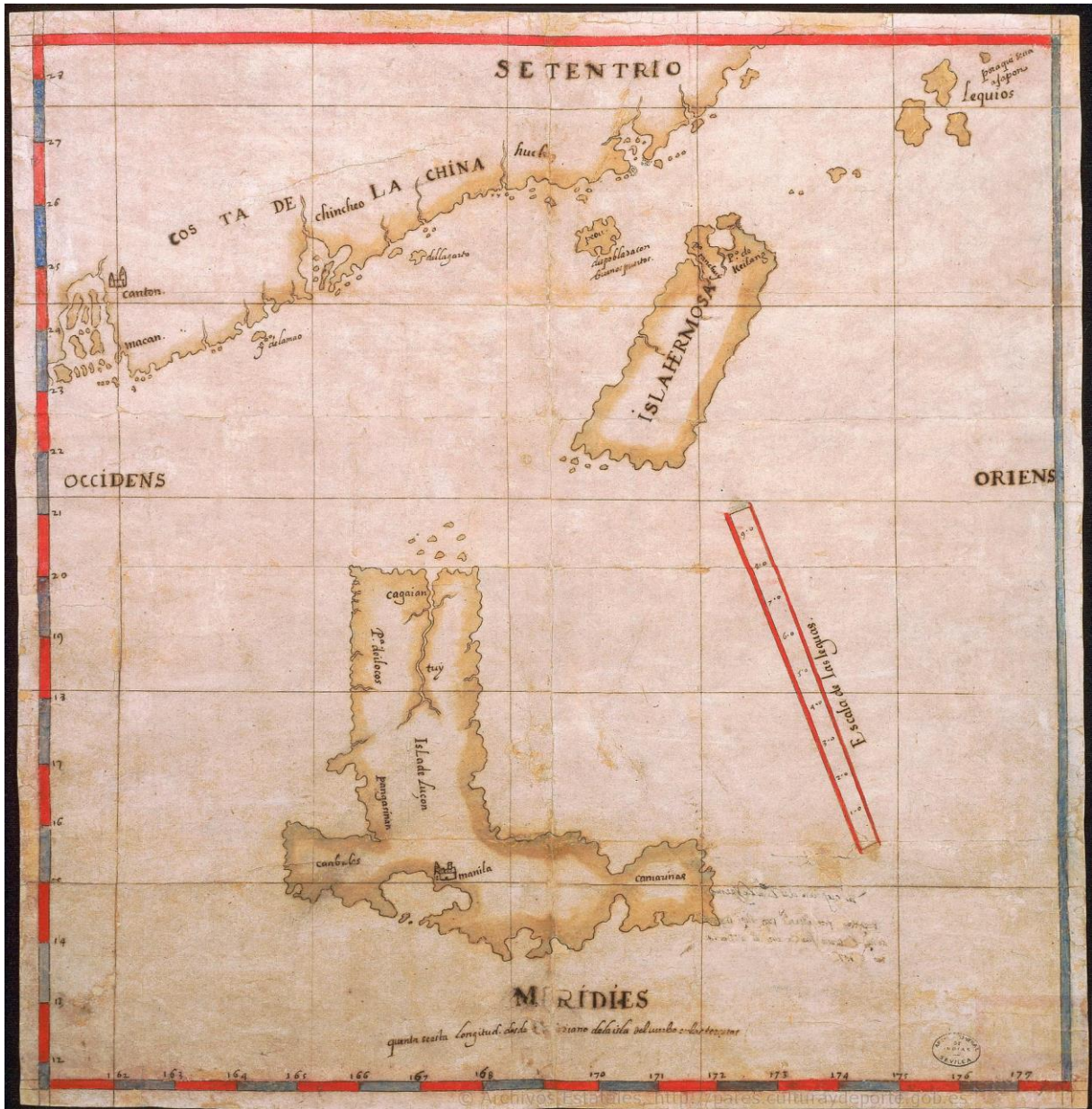
One of the very first accounts of the Dutch presence in the Philippines was written by Antonio de Morga as part of his *Sucesos de las islas Filipinas*, published in 1609. Morga was stationed at the Philippines as a lieutenant to the governor for over eight years and wrote *Sucesos* after he returned to Spain. Moreover, Morga was in charge of the fleet that defeated Olivier van Noort in 1600, and a detailed account of this battle is included in his work. For this study, the edited and translated 2010 version of Morga's *Sucesos* by Henry E. J. Stanley has been used.

As mentioned before, Sloos has studied the Dutch presence in the Philippines, and he primarily used Dutch sources when writing his dissertation, in particular the correspondence between Jan Pietersz. Coen and the directors of the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC), or the Dutch East India Company. Sloos' dissertation dates back to 1898, and it is one of the most detailed accounts of the Dutch activities in the Philippines by a Dutch author. While very informative, Sloos' dissertation only covers the history in the region up to 1626 using Dutch sources and does not include the Spanish side of the story.

Contrary to Sloos, historian José Eugenio Borao Mateo has described the Dutch attacks on Manila in the seventeenth century in great detail while primarily using Spanish sources. In his 2009 book *The Spanish Experience in Taiwan 1626-1642: The Baroque Ending of a Renaissance Endeavour*, Mateo dedicates a chapter to the Manila blockades, and includes the names of the people and ships involved in the blockades and naval battles. Through Borao Mateo's work, we discover a new aspect of the Philippines issue that has mostly been omitted by other authors: the involvement of Taiwan. During the 1620's, the Dutch-Spanish conflict extended to Taiwan when both parties established forts on the island.

Even though these authors have compiled detailed and relevant information on the Manila blockades, the subject deserves to be studied more extensively using both Spanish and Dutch sources. The comparison of these sources offers interesting insights into the fifty-year long dispute between two major powers in the region.

All documents concerning the Spanish Philippines have been collected within the *Archivo General de las Indias* (AGI) in Seville, so most Spanish primary sources that have been used in this study originate from this archive. Between 1904 and 1909, Emma Helen Blair and James Alexander Robertson translated and published historical documents regarding the Philippines in a 55-volume series entitled *The Philippines Islands, 1493-1898*. This enormous work contains translated letters and documents sent from and to the Philippines, including correspondence between the governors and kings and accounts of battles with enemy ships. The series also include the letters and *relaciones* of Hernando de los Ríos Coronel, a priest, diplomat, soldier and scientist stationed in the Philippines from 1588 until his death in 1624. De los Ríos Coronel has written many accounts on the situation in the region, as well as many letters to the Spanish kings concerning the islands and what should be done to protect Spanish interests there. Because not all sources in the AGI are digitized, some have been taken from Blair and Robertson.



1.1: Map of Luzon and Taiwan made by Hernando de los Ríos Coronel in 1597.

Most Dutch authors who have written about the Dutch in the Philippines heavily relied on the many documents concerning the East Indies that have been collected and published by Pieter Anton Tiele in his series of works entitled *Bouwstoffen voor de geschiedenis der Nederlanders in den Maleischen Archipel*. Tiele (1834-1889) was a historian and librarian at Utrecht University who specialised in Dutch colonial history. He has also written multiple works about the Portuguese presence in the East Indies. His *Bouwstoffen* consists of three parts and includes letters and other types of correspondence from and to Dutch officials in the Southeast Asian region. Most primary sources that were used when writing this essay have been taken from Tiele's works. Apart from the sources published by Tiele, the Huygens Institute for the History of the Netherlands has created a digital database for the general missives of the VOC, consisting of letters and other types of correspondence between Batavia and the Dutch Republic between 1618 and 1793. This database was based on the 1960-1968 work of W. Ph. Coolhaas, entitled *Generale missiven van gouverneurs-generaal en raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, consisting of seven volumes. Coolhaas was a government official in Batavia with a special interest in history.

The purpose of this thesis is not to draw a superficial image of the general conflict between the Dutch and the Spanish in Asia, but rather to focus specifically on the Philippines. Source material will deal solely with events and motives relevant to this defined geographical scope, with one important exception. Events and positions on Taiwan relate directly to the struggle over control of the Philippines, and any story about this time period would not be complete without also mentioning the role of this particular island. The fascinating history of colonialism in Taiwan itself is not covered in this study, as the focus remains squarely on the Philippines.⁸

The chapters in this study are loosely based on the chronological division of the fifty-year period during which the Dutch were present in the Philippines made by Borao Mateo. Even though the main subject in Borao Mateo's work is the Spanish presence in Taiwan, his chapter on the Manila Blockades and the Dutch-Spanish rivalry in the Philippines sketches a comprehensive general overview of the fifty-year period discussed in this study, a period which Borao Mateo has divided in roughly four phases. These phases usually include at least one great blockade or battle but are also slightly different from each other because of the general situation in Southeast Asia or the political developments of the Spanish and Dutch colonial empires.

Before diving into the Dutch-Spanish conflict in the Philippines, a general overview of the Spanish discovery and settlement of the islands is given to illustrate why it was such a unique territory in the Spanish colonial empire. The second chapter covers the beginning of the Dutch invasion of the Philippine waters (the first phase), which includes the Dutch discovery of the East Indies in the last

⁸ For more information on the Dutch and Spanish occupation of Taiwan, see for example Borao Mateo, *The Spanish Experience in Taiwan* and Tonio Andrade, *How Taiwan became Chinese: Dutch, Spanish and Han colonization in the seventeenth century* (Cambridge 2010).

years of the sixteenth century. This chapter will also briefly explain the limited influence of the Twelve Years' Truce (1609-1621) on the Dutch-Spanish dispute in the Philippines. During the second phase, both the Dutch and the Spanish took more drastic measures gain the upper hand in the Philippines: the Dutch allied with the English and the Spanish with the Portuguese in an effort to defeat the other. The third chapter will cover the years 1613 – 1623 and studies these alliances and the resulting confrontations. During the third phase, which lasted from 1624 until 1629, the Dutch fleets sailed mainly from Japan and Taiwan, where the Dutch had established a solid base of operations in 1624.⁹ From their newly acquired possessions, it was much easier to organise an attack on the Philippines: entire fleets could be build and supplied in Taiwan instead of travelling from Holland or Batavia. The Spanish, not wanting to be outdone, followed suit and erected their own forts in Taiwan only two years later. This third phase will be discussed in the fourth chapter. The last chapter concerns the fourth and last phase of the Dutch-Spanish conflict in the Philippines, which is marked by increasing Dutch aggression before coming to a sudden end because of the Treaty of Munster in 1648, which forced the Dutch to cease their attacks on the islands.

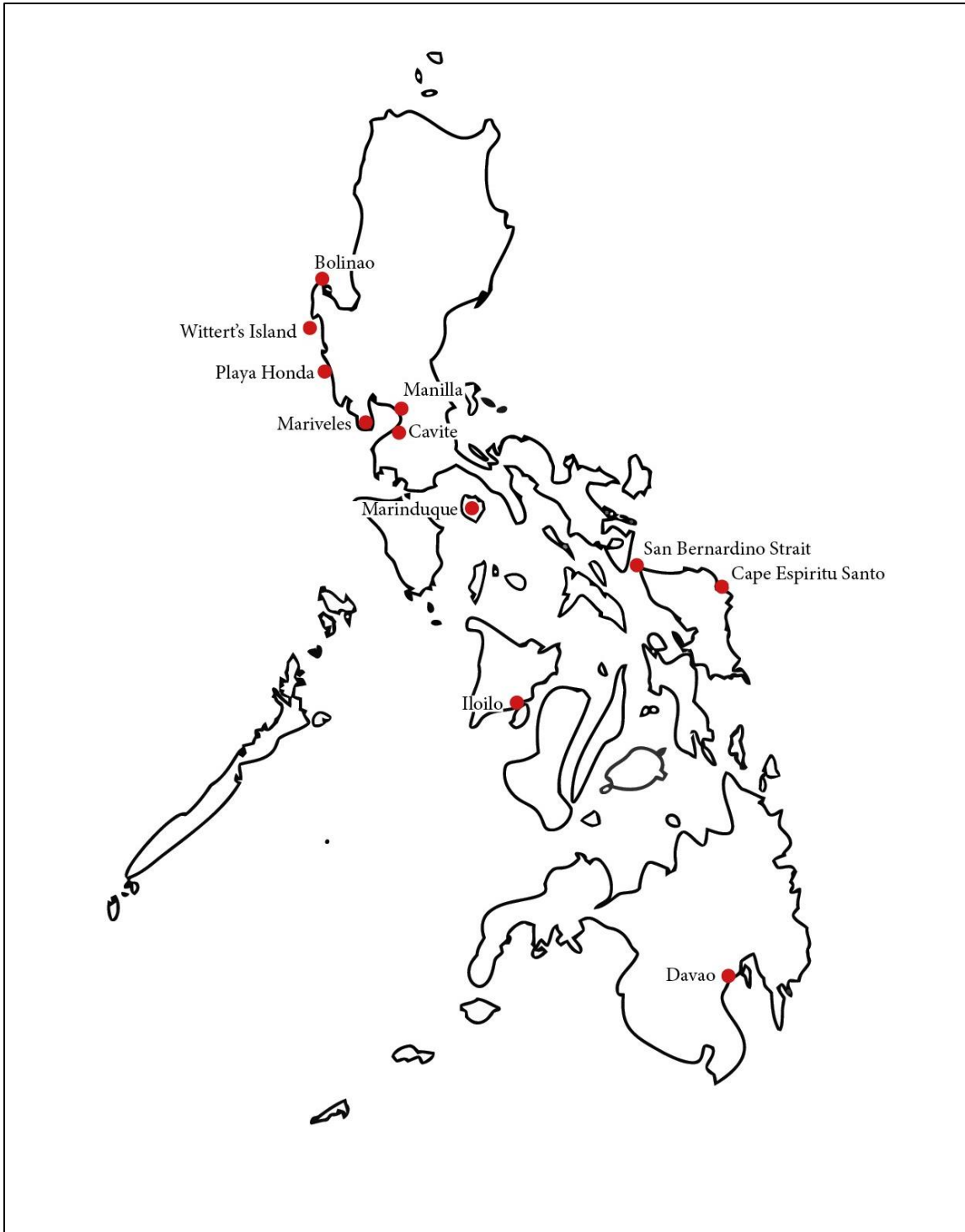
Within each chapter, an analysis will be made of the Dutch attacks on the Spanish holdings in the Philippines during that particular time period. This analysis is structured by establishing the predominant motives for the attacks, how these motives were influenced by important developments concerning the Dutch-Spanish conflict, and how these attacks changed the situation in the Philippines afterwards.

⁹ Borao Mateo, *The Spanish experience*, 16.



1.2: General map of Southeast Asia.¹⁰

¹⁰ Taken from Borao Mateo, *The Spanish Experience*, xiii.



1.3: Map of the Philippines with relevant locations.

The Spanish Philippines

Spain and Portugal had been fighting for the Moluccas, nicknamed the ‘Spice Isles’, since the first Spanish intrusion into Southeast Asia in the beginning of the sixteenth century.¹¹ The Treaty of Tordesillas from 1494 had divided the known world into a Spanish and Portuguese half, with the line being drawn through Brazil. But the extensions of this line were unclear on the other side of the globe, and both Iberian powers were determined to claim the profitable Spice Isles as their own. The first Spanish attempt to gain foothold in the region was the circumnavigation of Ferdinand Magellan in 1519-1521, which was unsuccessful. Spanish expeditions continued to infiltrate the Portuguese controlled waters for a decade.¹² But the fight for the Moluccas was costly, and Spain, unlike Portugal, had no settlements in the Southeast Asia and less experience with sailing to the other side of the world. Moreover, the Spanish King Carlos V was fighting multiple rebellions and insurgences within his European empire, while simultaneously conquering the newly discovered Americas. Finally, in 1529, Carlos V and the Portuguese King João III signed the Treaty of Zaragoza, which cleared up the confusion regarding the division made by the Treaty of Tordesillas by adding a line on the other side of the world, seventeen degrees east of the Moluccas, which placed both the Philippines and the Moluccas within the Portuguese sphere of influence.¹³

Even though the Philippines officially ‘belonged’ to the Portuguese, no attempts had been made by them to occupy the islands. Even though this did not mean that the islands were uninhabited, it presented an opportunity to the Spanish. The colonization of the Philippines began in 1565 under the command of conquistador Miguel López de Legazpi, who was commissioned by the viceroy of New Spain to sail across the Pacific Ocean to find the Spice Isles.¹⁴ Legazpi landed in Cebu, where he was met with fierce resistance from the native inhabitants. After many battles, the Spanish were able to secure a victory and began settling the island.

Where the Moluccas had always been rich and profitable, the Philippines were poor and dry. The clove tree that had made the Moluccas the most desirable group of islands in Southeast Asia did not grow on the Philippines, and they were lacking in other valuable crops and spices as well.¹⁵ The only spice that was encountered on the islands was cinnamon, which was not enough to meet the growing demand of spices in Spain and the rest of Europe.

The great distance between the Philippines and the other parts of the world, as well as the fact that it was dangerous for Spanish ships to take the Portuguese-controlled routes between Asia and Europe,

¹¹ Schurz, *The Manila Galleon*, 18.

¹² *Ibidem*, 17.

¹³ *Ibidem*, 20.

¹⁴ Rodolfo C. Severino, *Where in the World Is the Philippines?: Debating Its National Territory* (Singapore 2010), 6.

¹⁵ Schurz, *The Manila Galleon*, 23.

meant that communication between Spain and Manila, which was quickly made the capital of the new colony, was exceptionally slow. Messages from the Spanish *Consejo de las Indias* (Council of the Indies), which was created after the Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire in the beginning of the sixteenth century and was responsible for overseeing all colonies, could take up to two years to reach the Philippines, and vice versa.¹⁶ The closest Spanish territories were those in North and South America (and occasionally parts of the Moluccas and Taiwan), and the distance between those and the Philippines measured an entire ocean, so it took a long time to carry a message from Manila to New Spain. Because of the communication issue, the appointed governor of the Philippines received much administrative power and had a profound influence on the islands, as well as the responsibility to act swiftly and accordingly whenever necessary without being able to seek advice from the Council in Spain. The relative isolation of the Philippines from the rest of the Spanish Empire also meant that migration to the islands was slow and limited, with most settlers coming from New Spain instead of the Spanish territories in Europe.¹⁷ Because few Spaniards willingly migrated to the Philippines, most inhabitants of Manila were either soldiers or clerics. Around the turn of the seventeenth century, Manila only counted 200 or so Spanish inhabitants.

So why did the Spanish not abandon this impractical and unprofitable colony in the sixteenth century? According to Crossley, this was because of Spain's sacred mission of Christianisation: "Spain had contemplated giving up the colony quite early in its dominance, but the moral obligation to the Christian souls there was sufficiently strong in the conscience of the king to prevent Spain abandoning the Philippines and its people."¹⁸ Crossley argues that it was only later that the Spanish fully realized the potential of the Philippines in their colonial and political network. Despite the lack of resources on the Philippines, this potential was enough to incite the Spanish to stay.

The first Spanish settlers quickly chose Manila as capital of their new colony. This city traces its roots back to as early as 900 CE, and by the fourteenth century Manila was a fortified settlement that served as the capital of one of the provinces of neighbouring Hindu Empires. When the Spanish arrived in the Philippines in the mid-sixteenth century, the city was part of series of Muslim thalassocracies and had been renamed a city state within the Kingdom of Maynila.¹⁹ The people of the Philippines had established trade with China centuries before the arrival of the first Spanish colonists, and after conquering the city, the Spanish were easily able to insert themselves into this trading network²⁰

The city of Manila lies within a bay protected by land and is only accessible through a narrow strait. This natural fortification makes for a difficult siege from the water, and the bay can be defended from

¹⁶ Crossley, *Hernando de los Ríos*, 21.

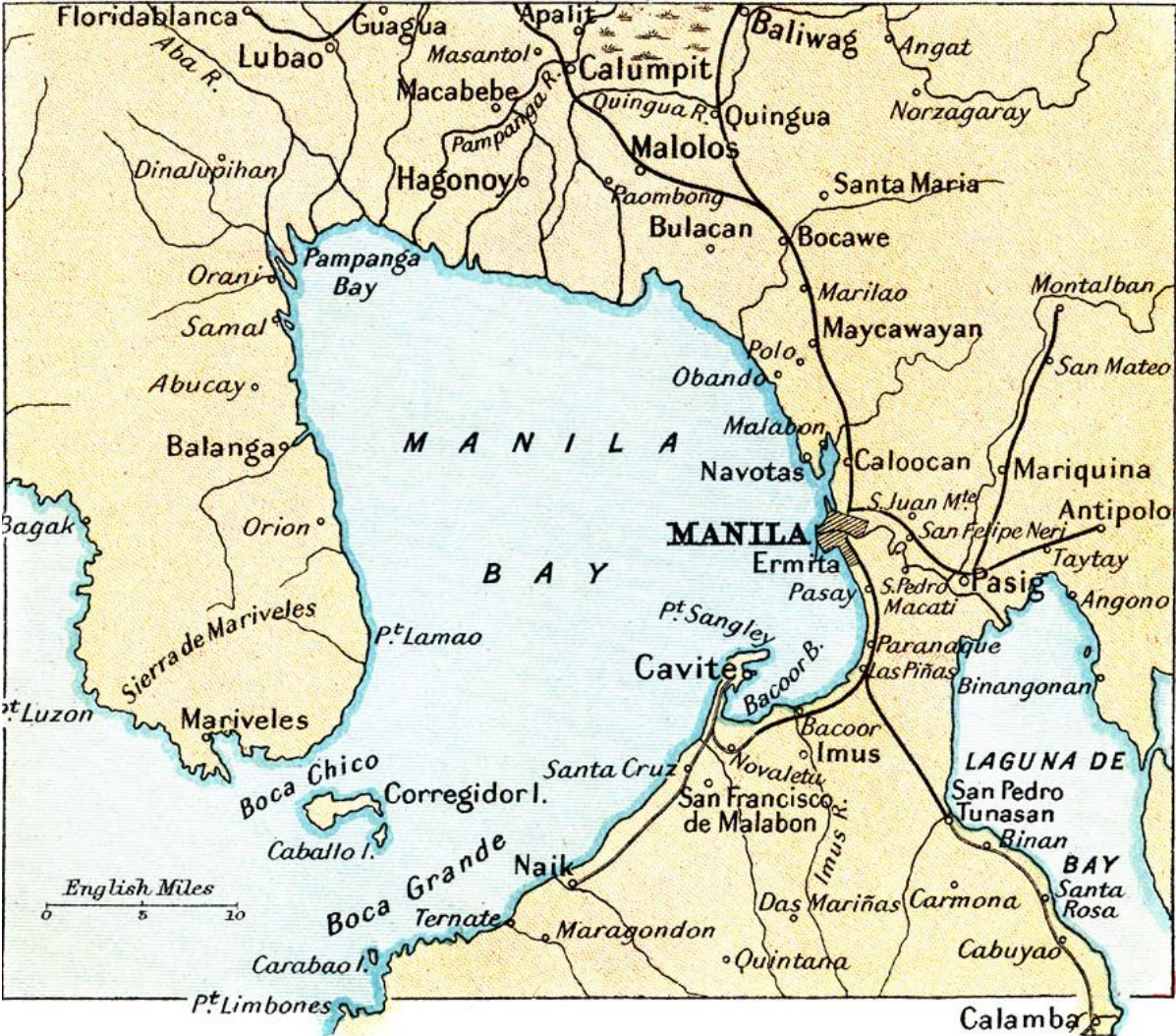
¹⁷ *Ibidem*, 17.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, 24.

¹⁹ Borao Mateo, *The Spanish Experience*, 35.

²⁰ Crossley, *Hernando de los Ríos*, 15.

land if necessary. To sail into the bay is dangerous, and ships risked getting stuck. Almost no Dutch ships ever entered far into the Bay of Manila, afraid of getting caught and being overpowered from land, and also because the Dutch preferred blockading the entire bay over besieging the city.



2.1 Map of the Bay of Manila from 1912 with Cavite, Mariveles and the island of Corregidor.²¹

²¹ Image taken from Ernest Rhys e.a., *A Literary and Historical Atlas of Asia* (New York 1912), 87.

The Manila Galleons

Upon their arrival in Asia, the Spanish seamlessly inserted themselves into an already existing intra-Asian trading network that was centred around Manila. But they also set up an entirely new network: the Acapulco-Manila route, which existed for 250 years. The very first ships from the Americas arrived in Manila in 1570, and by 1593 the trade was officially regulated with a royal decree by Felipe II.²² Twice every year, two galleons arrived from Callao or Acapulco in Mexico, loaded with silver from the Spanish colonies in America. American silver was interesting to Chinese and Japanese traders, who were in return able to offer the Spanish the well desired spices, silks and other luxury goods that were in popular demand in Europe. During the Ming dynasty (1363-1644), silver even became the main commodity in China, which resulted in a stable trade between the two powers. Additionally, Asian silk was hugely popular in the Spanish colonies in America, where it sold for twice the purchase price it did in Asia.²³

The Acapulco-Manila route took the galleons all the way across the Pacific Ocean. The Philippines were technically not that hard to find when departing from Mexico, but the journey was exceptionally long and perilous. Scurvy especially, posed a significant risk to the sailors during the crossing. From Acapulco, the journey to the Philippines usually lasted about three months, and there were no resupply locations along this route. Three months was a long time to spend on a crowded ship, considering the risk of storms, shipwreck and scurvy, and there were few sailors who voluntarily signed up for this voyage.²⁴ Adding to the dangers was the lack of information about the route: in the sixteenth century, the Pacific Ocean was sparsely navigated and only few maps existed, which were not always accurate. Moreover, the ocean was unpredictable and notoriously hazardous, and the nights could get very cold. In 1732, Dutch diplomat and poet Jan Jacob Mauricius wrote in a report to his superior about the route to the Philippines taken by the Spanish in the beginning of the sixteenth century. He accentuated that the decision of the Spanish to take a westward route to Asia was an important one, because “after the testimony of witnesses, there is not a navigation so difficult in the world as the westward journey to the Philippines.”²⁵ Mauricius continued to describe the difficulties the Spanish had faced in reaching, settling and maintaining the Philippines, also noting that the city of Manila would be doomed without the biannual arrival of the Manila Galleons.

Another problem presented itself when the Spanish ships set out to return to Mexico after trading in the Philippines: the winds and currents were not favourable for an eastward journey across the Pacific and, until 1580, the Spanish were unable to enter Portuguese waters because of the Treaty of

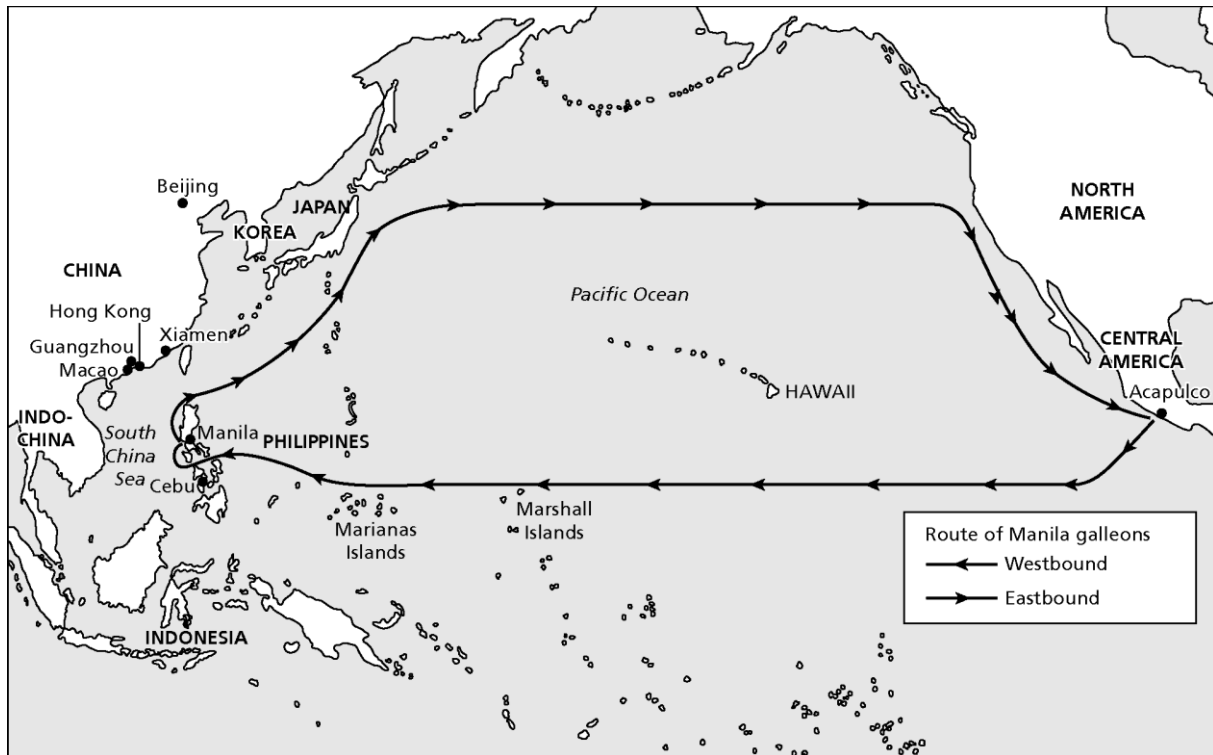
²² Schurz, *The Manilla Galleon*, 193.

²³ Crossley, *Hernando de los Ríos*, 15.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, 6.

²⁵ Jan Jacob Mauricius, *Historische versaamelingen over de vaart der Spanjaarden na de Philippines* (Hamburg 1732), 3: “... , want na het getuigenis der Reisbeschryvers is in den Waereld geen moeylyker vaart, dan West om na de Philippines.”

Zaragoza.²⁶ Therefore, the return journey to Mexico could take up to six months and was even more hazardous (see figure 2.2).



2.2 The route taken by the Manila Galleons. Because of the ocean currents, the Galleons were forced to take a significantly longer route on the eastward journey to Acapulco.²⁷

²⁶ Mauricius, *Historische versamelingen*, 7.

²⁷ Image taken from Eva Maria Mehl, "Intertwined Histories in the Pacific: The Philippines and New Spain, 1565–1764." in *Forced Migration in the Spanish Pacific World: From Mexico to the Philippines, 1765–1811* (Cambridge 2016).

Multiple historians and contemporaries agree that the Philippines themselves did not have much to offer the Spanish. Historian Eva Maria Mehl, who specializes in Mexican history, summarizes: “Besides cinnamon and some gold in Luzon, no apparent rich natural resources comparable to the Mexican silver were found in the archipelago. The Manila galleon, though profitable for many, did little to develop the islands because the trade did not rely on any major local product. The sizable commercial profits deterred the Spanish from engaging in a system of agricultural or mineral exploitation and the internal economy remained isolated and underdeveloped.”²⁸ It becomes clear that it was the advantageous location of the Philippines that made them attractive to the Spanish colonists, of which the first immediately recognized the potential of the islands.

The Spanish had a relatively weak presence in the Philippines, which was partially caused by the disinterest of the Spanish Crown in the islands. The Philippines were not the main priority for the Spanish king, not by a long stretch. The islands mostly functioned as a destination and entrepot for silver brought by the Manila Galleons from New Spain but when they needed to be defended, reinforcements often arrived late, if they even arrived at all. Officials in New Spain had very little interest in supporting Manila by sending more ships or soldiers when necessary.²⁹ Most Spanish inhabitants of the Philippines had travelled across the oceans and settled on the islands were either soldiers or missionaries for the Catholic Church.³⁰ However, the first Spanish settlers had experienced little resistance while subjugating the local people into the *encomienda* system when they arrived, and although there was an abundance of missionaries, there were few ‘barbarians’ left to convert on the islands.³¹ Thus, the majority of Spanish inhabitants in the Philippines were soldiers and clergymen without much to do, which was one of the reasons why the sole purpose of maintaining the colony seemingly became welcoming the Manila Galleons from Acapulco. Because of the relatively poor state of the Philippines as a producing colony, Crossley called the Acapulco-Manila trade the “economic lifeline of the Spaniards in the Philippines”, and the success or failure of the Manila Galleons heavily influenced the life of the Spanish colonists.³² It should be noted, however, that the Philippines were the only location in Southeast Asia where the Spanish silver galleons could safely dock before distributing their cargo into the intra-Asian trading network. The Manila Galleons might have been the lifeline of the Philippines, but without the Philippines, the Manila Galleons were doomed as well.

Despite the weak state of the islands in the first few years of Spanish occupation, it seems that the islands slowly improved in later years: in 1638, Spanish admiral Jerónimo de Bañuelos y Carrillo wrote from Mexico about Manila to the president of the Spanish Council of the Indies. Bañuelos y

²⁸ Mehl, “Intertwined Histories”, 36.

²⁹ Rodríguez, ‘Early Spanish Insertion’, 26.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, 23.

³¹ *Ibidem*.

³² Crossley, *Hernando de los Ríos*, 15.

Carillo was pleased with the city of Manila, commenting how food and drink was abundant and the inhabitants of the city lived a life of luxury.³³ From his account we also learn that although sheltered by a bay, Manila was still beaten by northern winds, and that it was very difficult for ships to make anchor once inside the bay. The port of Cavite was much easier to land, being situated less deep into bay and being sheltered from heavy winds on all sides (see figure 1.2).³⁴ Most ships from New Spain did not sail all the way to Manila, but instead docked at Cavite, from where supplies and trading goods were transported to the bigger city by land or with a small boat. Bañuelos y Carillo also warned the Council about the neighbouring people; some of the ethnic groups that had previously agreed to remain neutral in the European conflicts in the surrounding waters were secretly, or even openly, favouring the Dutch by helping and sheltering them, which is why they could not be trusted. Bañuelos y Carillo continued to write about the Dutch:

“for there is scarcely a place in those islands (the Moluccas) where the Dutch do not possess a factory. Thus, have they become the masters, and they give arms to the natives to make war on us” ... The observation of all the above points will be of use to us in keeping off the Dutch, who are the most terrible enemy that we have; and who will become absolute masters of the Manilas (the Philippines), if they can attain their ends.”³⁵

As will later become clear, the Dutch did not actually endeavour to become the masters of the Philippines, but Bañuelos y Carillo’s words about them being the most terrible enemy they had rang true: the Dutch-Spanish conflict in the Philippines was one of the fiercest in the area and persisted for almost fifty years.

³³ ‘Relation of the Filipinas Islands’ by Don Hieronimo de Bañuelos y Carillo, 1638, in E. H. Blair, J. A. Robertson, *The Philippine Islands, 1493-1898*, vol. 29 (Cleveland, 1905), 69.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, 79.

The first phase: 1600 – 1613

The arrival of the first Dutch expedition in the Philippines quickly resulted in the first big naval battle in the area, which in turn gave way to fifty years of conflict. Before discussing the consequences of the first Dutch arrival, we first need to answer another question: why did the Dutch sail to the Philippines in the first place, and what did they see there that caused them to keep coming back? Did these first Dutch explorers immediately recognize the hidden potential of the Philippines, or was there another reason why the newly established VOC kept sending ships to the region? In other words: what motive drove the Dutch to the Philippines during this first phase, and how were the Philippines incorporated in the brand new Dutch colonial policy in East Asia? Another interesting occurrence in the first phase was the signing of a peace treaty between the Spanish and the Dutch: how did this treaty influence the situation in the Philippines?

The Dutch ambition to get directly involved in the Southeast Asian trade started when King Felipe II closed the Spanish and Portuguese ports to the Dutch in retaliation to the declaration of independence by the rebel provinces in 1581. A year before, Portugal and Spain had been united under one crown in the Iberian Union.³⁶ If Dutch ships continued to trade in Iberian ports, they risked confiscation of their ships and cargo. This gave Dutch merchants the final push to try and find their own trading routes to the profitable East Indies. The first attempts to do so were made in the last decade of the sixteenth century: three expeditions tried to navigate the polar ice caps in order to find a northern route to Asia, but all were unsuccessful. At the same time, a fleet of four ships opted to cautiously follow the Portuguese route around the Cape of Good Hope. This expedition, under the command of Cornelis de Houtman, arrived in Java in June of 1596.³⁷ And with that, the floodgates were opened.

In 1602, the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* was founded and chartered to conduct trade in Asia. Before the official formation of the VOC, there had already been thirty-six Dutch ships loaded with spices and luxury goods that had successfully returned from various islands and ports in Asia to their homeland.³⁸ The East Indies trade proved even more lucrative than previously thought, but there was another benefit to direct involvement in the spice trade; In a resolution dated 1 November 1603, the Staten-Generaal agrees that ships bound for the East Indies:

“... can have charge and instruction to damage the enemies and inflict harm on their persons, ships and goods by all means possible, so that they may with reputation not only continue their

³⁶ Ruurdje Laarhoven & Elizabeth Pino Wittermans, ‘From Blockade to Trade: Early Dutch Relations with Manila, 1600-1750’ in *Philippine Studies* 33, no. 4 (Manila 1985), 486.

³⁷ Vibeke Roper & Diederik Wildeman, *Om de wereld: De eerste Nederlandse omzeiling van de wereld onder leiding van Olivier van Noort, 1598 – 1601* (Nijmegen 1999), 16.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

trade, but also expand it and make it grow; otherwise by neglecting this they will certainly lose it.”³⁹

The Dutch were not hiding the fact that the VOC, at least in the first decade after its establishment, was used as a way to fight the war on two fronts. The Spanish Crown was using its colonial earnings to fund the war in Europe, and to weaken Spain’s colonial possessions was to weaken the Spanish war effort. In the words of Peter Borschberg, who specializes in the Portuguese, Dutch and Spanish imperial history, the VOC was “an instrument of both commerce and war.”⁴⁰

So, starting from 1603, the VOC were actively sending out fleets to the East Indies with the purpose of harming the Iberian interests in the region. Captains in charge of leading expeditions to Southeast Asia, either via South America or via Africa, received instructions to hinder and diminish Iberian influence there however much they could. When reading these kinds of instructions, one will undoubtedly stumble upon the Dutch words “*afbreuk doen*”, which can be translated to “do damage”.⁴¹ Fleets were specifically sent out to damage Spanish interests in the region, which is why the Spanish usually referred to the Dutch on these expeditions as *corsarios* or *piratas*.

The Spanish-Dutch conflict in Asia grew more violent when the Dutch successfully drove the Portuguese from the Moluccas in 1605: until that year, the Spanish forces had tried to infiltrate the lucrative Moluccas trade but were always repelled by their Portuguese neighbours, even after the Union of the Crown in 1580.⁴² When the Dutch succeeded in that which the Spanish had failed to do for over twenty years, it meant that Spain had a new and much more hated rival in the East, with which they had been embroiled in a war since 1586. After the VOC also succeeded in expelling the Portuguese from Ambon in 1605, captain Gaspalar de Mello fled to Tidore and wrote to the current governor of the Philippines, Pedro de Acuña, to send reinforcements.⁴³ Acuña, like many of the Spanish governors on the islands before and after him, had frequently written to the Council of the Indies with requests for more manpower and weapons in the region, but had never received the reinforcements he needed. Acuña wrote an account of the incidents of 1605 and expressed his fear that the Dutch would go on to expand their territories to the Philippines if given the chance, once again pleading the Council to take this threat seriously by sending more troops.⁴⁴

³⁹ Peter Borschberg, ‘From self-defence to an instrument of war: Dutch privateering around the Malay Peninsula in the early 17th century’ in Y. H. Teddy Sim ed., *Piracy and surreptitious activities in the Malay Archipelago and adjacent seas, 1600-1840* (Singapore 2014), 37.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, 38.

⁴¹ See for example the instructions to captain Jan Jansz. dated 23 December 1619, in: H. T. Colenbrander, ed., *Jan Pietersz. Coen: Bescheiden omtrent zijn bedrijf in Indië*, vol. 2 (Den Haag 1920), 627.

⁴² Borao Mateo, *The Spanish Experience*, 16.

⁴³ P. A. Tiele, ‘De Europeërs in den Maleischen Archipel’, vol. 7, in: *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië* 32, no. 1 (Leiden 1884), 52.

⁴⁴ AGI Filipinas, 7, R.1, N.25, Carta de Acuña sobre el Maluco y los holandeses, 8 July 1605.

According to historian David Barrows, who has done extensive research on the history of the Philippines, a distinction should be made between the Iberian and Dutch commercial and colonial policies in Asia. He argues that the Spanish and Portuguese were determined to expand their empire overseas, as they had previously done in South America and Africa, by settling or admitting as many territories as they could, regardless of the commercial or strategic value of those territories. The Dutch, on the contrary, were in the beginning not at all interested in creating an empire, and instead opted to form alliances with local rulers to assist one another and to promote mercantilism.⁴⁵ Moreover, the Dutch had no religious motives, and did not seek to convert their new allies in Asia to Protestantism. The lack of religious and territorial pressure worked in favour of the Dutch, who beat the Spanish and Portuguese when it came to striking up alliances with local rulers. By 1602, the same year in which the VOC was founded, the Dutch had acquired permission from the king of Bantam to establish a factory on the island.⁴⁶ One can imagine that local sultans, kings or chiefs were more amiable towards the Dutch, who did not long to claim their lands for themselves or force a new religion upon them and who promised to defend their independence and lands against a mutual enemy. After all, the enemies of one's enemies can potentially be one's friends.

Olivier van Noort

The first successful Dutch expedition to the East Indies had just returned from Bantam when a plan was made in 1597 to send a fleet to South America to discover if Asia could be safely reached by taking a westward route. This was a risky but potentially extremely rewarding enterprise. The fleet was to be captained by Olivier van Noort, an Utrecht innkeeper who had worked at sea in his younger years.⁴⁷ The expedition was a private endeavour, which meant Van Noort had to request permission from the Staten-General to undertake his voyage to South America. He received a letter of marque from Prince Maurits in which Van Noort was explicitly instructed to harm and sabotage Portuguese and Spanish interests in the area during his expedition in any way possible.⁴⁸

In the official request made by Van Noort to undertake a voyage through the Strait of Magellan, there is, however, no mention of the Spanish enemy, nor what Van Noort plans to do once he encounters Spanish ships. Moreover, it seems as though Van Noort never planned to visit the Philippines: in his request and the instruction he received, only the Moluccas are mentioned.⁴⁹ However, it is unlikely that Van Noort accidentally ended up in the Philippines. According to Van Noort's journal, he was

⁴⁵ Barrows, *A History*, 191.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷ Borao Mateo, *The Spanish Experience*, 19.

⁴⁸ Roeper & Wildeman, *Om de wereld*, 19.

⁴⁹ National Dutch Archives (NA), The Hague, Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, access number 3.01.14, inventory number 3066: *Rekest van de Colleges ter Admiraliteit van Amsterdam en van Rotterdam aan de Staten-Generaal om aan hen een octrooi te willen verlenen voor de door hun kapiteins Olivier van Noort en Jacob Claeszn. ontdekte doorgang door de Straat van Magelhaen, [1599]; afschrift (eind 16^e eeuw).*

using a map of Southeast Asia made by cartographer Peter Plancius.⁵⁰ This map, most likely Plancius' famous "Spice Map" from 1592 (see figure 2.1), shows the location of the Philippines in great detail. Although perhaps he initially did not plan on visiting the Philippines, it is most likely that Van Noorts fleet was in need of supplies and water and made a stop in the Philippines in search of fresh provisions, as it was the first land they sighted after crossing the Pacific.



2.1 *Insulae Moluccae Celeberrimae sunt ob Maximam aromatum copiam quam per totum terrarum orbem mittunt*, or the "Spice Map", made by Peter Plancius in 1592. Via Maritiem Museum Rotterdam.

⁵⁰ Crossley, *Hernando de los Ríos*, 145.

Van Noort was given command of a fleet consisting of two galleons: the *Mauritius*, Van Noort's flagship, and the *Hendrick Frederick*. The galleons were accompanied by two yachts, the *Eendracht* and the *Hoop*.⁵¹ The crew consisted of around 250 men of all ages, and the ships were loaded with weapons and gunpowder. After a long and difficult voyage, in which the Dutch had lost half of their fleet and had suffered many hardships, Van Noort arrived in the Philippines on 14 October 1600.

At the time of the arrival of the Dutch fleet, Francisco Tello was governor of the Philippines. He wrote an account of the Dutch blockade and following battle, which was included in Antonio de Morga's work on the Philippines. In this account, Tello writes how the Dutch fleet, consisting of only two armed ships, arrived and blockaded the Bay of Manila for at least two months.⁵² Tello speculates that Van Noort was hoping to catch the Manila Galleon *Santo Tomas*, which was due to arrive from Acapulco. Tello was not planning on letting that happen: on 31 October, he instructed Antonio de Morga, who by then was more involved in the military than in politics, to equip a fleet against the enemy, which he was able to achieve in only forty days.⁵³ Morga's fleet was gathered at the port of Cavite, within the Bay of Manila. The fleet departed to meet the Dutch on the 12th of December, and the enemy was sighted on the 14th. The *Mauritius* was boarded by Morga with thirty soldiers and a few sailors, and the Spanish were able to achieve victory that day after a battle of six hours, although Van Noort survived and fled to Borneo. The other Dutch ship, under the command of Lambert Viesman, was captured and taken back to Manila, where most of its crew was executed.⁵⁴

According to Morga, the flagship of Van Noort was severely damaged and stripped of its flags, sails and rigging, and was only able to escape because it had the wind at its back. The Spanish did not escape the battle unharmed: many ships had been damaged and were taking water. Morga's own flagship had taken so many blows that it sank that same day, along with some of its crew. Morga and the other survivors swam to a small island near the site of the battle, where boats arrived for them the next day.⁵⁵ At the end of Tello's account of the battle, he compliments Morga for his bravery and willingness, recounting that Morga spent his own earnings to equip the fleet as quickly as possible, and that he trained some of the volunteers on board himself.⁵⁶ Moreover, when the captured Dutch ship was towed to Manila, Morga did apparently not take any of the cargo for himself, but rather turned his portion of the bounty over to king and country, so that the city may be better defended against the enemy in the future. Governor Tello and general Morga had acted on time, as the Manila Galleon *Santo Tomas* arrived in Manila not long after the battle. It seems as though Morga has slightly exaggerated the success of the Spanish fleet: in his work, he writes that Olivier van Noort was

⁵¹ Roeper & Wildeman, *Om de wereld*, 21.

⁵² Stanley, *Antonio de Morga*, 170.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, 171.

⁵⁴ Tiele, 'De Europeërs', vol. 7, 161.

⁵⁵ Stanley, *Antonio de Morga*, 172

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, 173.

captured and later executed, but Van Noort was actually able to escape the battle and sail back to Rotterdam.⁵⁷

From the Van Noorts account, we learn that he had also realized that the Philippines had little to offer. In the report of his circumnavigation, he wrote:

“These islands themselves have no riches, but most important is the trade of the Chinese, who come there everywhere to barter ...”⁵⁸

While the Dutch rarely directly attacked Spanish ships or fortifications in the Philippines, they often harassed and raided Chinese junks and other local ships carrying supplies and goods to Manila. This was partially done to hinder the Spanish and to line their own pockets, but also to sustain their fleet while it was blockading the islands. Chinese junks were most often the victims of the blockades: Dutch fleets sometimes captured no less than 25 of them while stalking the region. They were, however, careful when it came to Japanese ships bound for Manila, as the VOC needed to uphold a careful treaty with the emperor of Japan to secure their own trading networks.⁵⁹

After the Spanish victory over the Dutch in 1600, a new governor was sent to the Philippines from New Spain: Pedro de Acuña had been the governor of Cartagena but was now responsible for defending and maintaining the Philippines. He replaced Francisco Tello, but it is unknown why. Tello would die of a sudden illness the next year, so his replacement came none too soon. Governor Acuña quickly realized how dangerous the Dutch could be and took immediate action to strengthen the defences of Manila and the rest of the Philippines. He urged the Council of the Indies to establish a fortified base at Cavite, as well as a fleet responsible for circling the islands in search of Dutch ships so that the Spanish forces at Manila could not be taken by surprise in the future.⁶⁰

The Twelve Years' Truce in the East Indies

In 1609, representatives from the Spanish king and the United Provinces signed a peace treaty that would last for twelve years, until 1621. One crucial issue that instigated the peace talks was the Dutch-Iberian rivalry in Asian and Atlantic waters, which had been brewing for two decades and which the Spanish resented, as they suddenly had to defend their territories on two separate continents. Originally, the Spanish were willing to grant the United Provinces full sovereignty in exchange for their complete withdrawal from the Pacific and Atlantic theatre, a proposition that the Dutch immediately refused. In the end, after a year of negotiations, an agreement was reached: the Twelve

⁵⁷ Stanley, *Antonio de Morga*, 175.

⁵⁸ J. W. IJzerman, ed., *De Reis om de Wereld door Olivier van Noort, 1598-1601* (Den Haag 1926), 113.

⁵⁹ Borao Mateo, *The Spanish Experience*, 14.

⁶⁰ AGI Filipinas, 19, R.3, N.53 Carta de Acuña sobre materias de gobierno, 26 September 1602 & Laura Pérez Rosales, Arjen van der Sluis, *Memorias e historias compartidas intercambios culturales, relaciones comerciales y diplomáticas entre México y los Países Bajos, siglos XVI-XX* (Mexico City, 2009), 156.

Years' Truce of 1609 called for peace and a ceasefire within and outside of Europe. The parties even took care to assure their foreign officials would receive word of the truce at the same time, as to avoid more conflicts: the ceasefire would officially take effect outside of Europe a year after its signing, on 10 April 1610.⁶¹

But despite the actions taken to ensure news of the treaty reached the colonies in time, the Twelve Years' Truce can be considered a failure outside of Europe: within a year, the Dutch and Spanish (and Portuguese) were at each other's throats again, claiming that the other party had broken the peace terms of simply denying ever having heard of the existence of the treaty. According to publicist Johan Karel Jacob de Jonge, who compiled documents from the Dutch colonial archives in eight volumes between 1862 and 1895, the Spanish authorities in the colonies refused to acknowledge the truce unless they received direct confirmation from their king that it was legitimate.⁶² Another explanation for the continued Spanish aggression despite the truce comes from Tiele, who wrote that the Spanish government were not in any hurry to inform their vassals of the peace treaty, and that it might be true that some parts of the Spanish empire never received the news at all.⁶³

On 31 July 1612, the Staten-Generaal complained in one of their resolutions that Juan de Silva and his Portuguese allies, despite being reminded of the existence of the Twelve Years' Truce many times, continued to attack VOC possessions in the East Indies.⁶⁴ They even emphasised that these attacks were carried out in name of king Felipe III. A year later, the issue of the Spanish and Portuguese disregarding the Treaty was brought up once again, and apparently, even though the Dutch had urged both Silva and his second-in-command Jerónimo de Silva to adhere to the ceasefire, the enemy continued to attack Dutch settlements and ships, all the while growing in strength and power.⁶⁵ In the same resolution, it becomes apparent that the VOC feared that the apparent Dutch weakness would make the local people, who were considered riotous by nature, susceptible to Iberian corruption. Therefore, the company called for an annual resupplying missions to strengthen the current Dutch battlements and war fleets in the East Indies. On the other hand, the Dutch were actively sending hostile expeditions to not only the East Indies but also to the Americas, where they themselves had no colonies and no reason to be. The aggressive resolution of 1603 was still the blueprint for Dutch expeditions going to Asia, and this did not change after the signing of the treaty.

⁶¹ S. Groenveld, *Unie – Bestand – Vrede: Drie fundamentele wetten van de Republiek der Verenigde Nederlanden* (Hilversum 2009), 118.

⁶² J. K. J. de Jonge, *De oorsprong van Neerland's bezittingen op de kust van Guinea: in herinnering gebracht uit de oorspronkelijke stukken, naar aanleiding van een voorgenomen afstand dier bezittingen aan Groot-Brittannië* (Den Haag 1871), 12.

⁶³ P. A. Tiele, *Bouwstoffen voor de geschiedenis der Nederlanders in den Maleischen Archipel*, vol. 1 (Den Haag 1886), vii.

⁶⁴ A. Th. van Deursen ed., *Resolutiën der Staten-Generaal: Nieuwe Reeks, 1610-1670*, vol. 1 (Den Haag 1971), 703.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, vol. 2 (1917), 154.

The first Battle of Playa Honda

Of the many battles fought between the Dutch and the Spanish in the Philippines, three have gained considerable recognition. So much so, that they have received an official title in both Spanish and Dutch literature: the Battles of Playa Honda, named for a strip of coast to the north of the entrance to the Bay of Manila. It concerns the naval battles of 1610, 1617 and 1625, respectively fought by François Wittert, Jan Dirksz. Lam and Pieter Muyser on the Dutch side, and Juan de Silva, Juan de Ronquillo and Jerónimo de Silva on the Spanish side. All three battles resulted in a victory for the Spanish.

In 1607, a Dutch fleet left the Netherlands with Bantam as its destination. The goal of the expedition was to acquire some of the Portuguese possessions in Africa and the East Indies by force.⁶⁶ The commander of the fleet was Pieter Willemsz. Verhoeff, who had garnered attention for expertly taking over command after the death of admiral Jacob van Heemskerck at the Battle of Gibraltar in April 1607. He was promoted to admiral for his heroic action and given command of his own fleet that same year.⁶⁷ Second in command to Verhoeff was vice-admiral François Wittert from Rotterdam. Verhoeff received explicit instruction to hinder the Spanish enemy whenever possible, both in Africa and in Asia. He arrived at Banda after a difficult journey on 8 April 1609. Apart from hindering the Spanish, Verhoeff had also been instructed to consolidate a trading treaty with the Bandanese, and to use violence if necessary. This would prove fatal: Verhoeff was killed by the locals, after which command quickly passed to Wittert, who changed course to the Philippines to try and catch one of the Manila Galleons.⁶⁸

After the death of the previous governor Rodrigo Vivero and a brief period of intermediate administration, Juan de Silva had been appointed as the new governor of the Philippines in 1609. He was known as a resourceful and clever man, tasked with defending the island against enemy attacks. At this point, the enemy was usually Dutch, but every now and then there were small Japanese or Chinese raiders active in the region, as well as occasional indigenous insurgents. Governor Silva has played a significant role in the defence of the Philippines in the second decade of the seventeenth century and warded off two of the largest Dutch attacks on the Philippines.

In April of 1609, the news of the Dutch fleet had not yet reached Manila, and Silva was preoccupied with Malaysian pirates in the region when tidings came from the island of Panay that Wittert had arrived on 25 October with three great ships.⁶⁹ Wittert's flagship was the *Amsterdam*, which was carrying 300 men. The Dutch had already captured no less than 23 Chinese junks and were headed for the Bay of Manila to resume their blockade there. Wittert anchored at a small island called El Frayle

⁶⁶ Schurz, *The Manila Galleon*, 346.

⁶⁷ Tiele, 'De Europeërs', vol. 7, 88.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, 101.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, 107.

where he waited for any Manila Galleons while simultaneously intercepting every ship bound for the city carrying food or other goods.

Meanwhile, governor Silva was hastily gathering his own fleet to meet Wittert. At that moment, there were very few battleships in Manila, so Silva confiscated several merchant ships and transformed them into ships suitable for battle by reinforcing their hulls. But there was also a shortage of iron in the city, so Silva stripped the houses of Manila of their iron railings and melted down church bells in order to gather enough materials to create his fleet.⁷⁰ In the end, Silva was able to equip two galleons, two galleys and four small ships. He also gathered about a thousand men. The Spanish fleet set out to meet the Dutch on 25 April 1610. Wittert was outnumbered, having just three ships, and was killed in the battle. Two of his ships were taken by the Spanish while the third ship, the *Paauw*, was able to flee with a small sloop.⁷¹ Over 250 Dutchmen were taken prisoner. This was the first of Juan de Silva's decisive victories over the Dutch pirates, and the first Battle of Playa Honda. Some historians, such as Ernst van Veen, who wrote about the decline of the Portuguese dominance in Asia, argue that the death of Wittert was one of the reasons why the Twelve Years' Truce failed outside of Europe: Wittert was killed on 25 April 1610, roughly two weeks after the treaty was officially bound to take effect in the Dutch and Spanish colonies. This was enough reason for the Dutch to believe that the Spanish had broken and would continue to break the armistice, and that strong counteraction was therefore unavoidable and necessary.⁷²

Juan de Silva wrote to the Council of the Indies on 16 July 1610 about his victory over the Dutch but was quick to remind the Council of the pitiful state of the Moluccas and the Philippines, and that one victory was not nearly enough to drive the Dutch from the East Indies. He asked permission to equip a new fleet to sail to the Moluccas, specifically Ternate and Tidore, and confront the Dutch forces there.⁷³ A response to Silva's letter was written nearly a year later, on 20 May 1611: the Council agreed that they should remain wary of the Dutch threat in the Indies, especially after the battle with Wittert. On 9 December 1611, a royal degree was signed that instructed Silva to build a squadron of galleons in case the Dutch would attack either the Moluccas or the Philippines. Silva was to ensure that *la nueva España China* was able to defend itself against Dutch corsairs.⁷⁴ The squadron was to be stationed at the port of Manila and had to be ready to sail whenever Dutch vessels ventured too close to Spanish territories. Silva was given permission to gather ships and soldiers for a new fleet, but the Council also reminded him of the peace treaty that has been concluded with the Dutch two years earlier.⁷⁵ However, Silva was still urged to equip his fleet, for that would technically not be in violation

⁷⁰ Blair & Robertson, *The Philippine Islands*, vol. 17, 15.

⁷¹ De Jonge, *Opkomst*, vol. 3, 107.

⁷² Ernst van Veen, *Decay or defeat?: an inquiry into the Portuguese decline in Asia 1580-1645* (Leiden 2000) 178.

⁷³ AGI Filipinas 20, R.4, N.35 Carta de Juan de Silva sobre las Molucas, 16 July 1610.

⁷⁴ AGI Filipinas 37, N. 57 Causa contra Jerónimo de Silva, 12 August 1618.

⁷⁵ AGI Filipinas 1, N.134 Consulta sobre lo que escribe Juan de Silva, 20 May 1611.

of the Treaty, as it was never decreed that either side was not allowed to maintain a standing army or fleet. However, Silva clearly meant to attack the Dutch with his fleet, as he suggested in his letter of 1610. Yet the instructions from the Council clearly state that Silva was only authorized to attack in retaliation or self-defence. It appears the members of the Council realized they needed to voice their concerns more clearly: on 22 October 1611, another letter was written to Silva, with an attached copy of the Treaty of Antwerp. In this letter, the Council explicitly wrote that Silva must conform to the peace terms made with the Dutch, specifically the fifth agreement in which it was decided that the Dutch and the Spanish would cease all hostility at sea. However, this letter was quickly followed by another that stated that should the Dutch choose to neglect the treaty and attack, Silva was authorized to retaliate.⁷⁶ Whether it was because of the truce or because of the lack of serious Dutch threats to the Philippines, Silva's fleet was not constructed until 1615.

The initial reason why Olivier van Noort sailed to the Philippines was not to attack the Spanish colony there but because the Philippines were the logical end of the route to the East Indies from the Americas. Upon his arrival, Van Noort realised that the islands held little to no internal value but was quick to discover that they functioned as an entrepot for silver from the Americas and luxury goods from China and Japan. Ten years later, the Dutch were becoming a major power in Asia alongside the Spanish and the Portuguese. Although the strengthening of their own trading networks received the highest priority from Dutch authorities, there was a very different reason why the Philippines were included in the Dutch colonial policy during these first years: the Manila Galleons. Both Van Noort and Wittert had hoped to capture one of the silver galleons, and both had failed and suffered defeat after the Spanish forces at Manila attacked.

⁷⁶ AGI Filipinas 1, N.141 Consulta sobre peligro Holandes en Terrenate, 31 October 1611.

The second phase: 1613 – 1624

By 1613, the Dutch had started establishing themselves as an important colonial power in the East Indies. The age of discovery and careful treaties was over: the Dutch were now prioritizing territorial and commercial gain. The carefully established Twelve Years' Truce had long since lost its power, and the Dutch and Spanish were at each other's throats again. What role had been assigned to the Philippines in the Dutch colonial policy now that the Dutch had gained foothold in the East Indies? This chapter will discuss the beginning of the shift in Dutch motives for attacking the Philippines, as well as the Spanish response to the increasing power of their enemy in the East Indies.

Fifteen years after Olivier van Noort had been first sighted in the Philippines, the Dutch threat was ever as present. At this time, the temporary peace in the Pacific and Atlantic regions of the world was hanging by a thread: every hint of aggression could be interpreted as a deliberate attack and thus a reason to retaliate with force. The Dutch had already drafted a new policy which stated that every captain was authorized to retaliate if attacked by the enemy, and the Spanish authorities in the East Indies had received similar instructions. Moreover, the Dutch were not respecting the aspect of the truce that stated they could not anchor at or trade with Iberian ports.

In 1614, there was a fleet of Dutch ships near the harbour of Manila. This is what William Adams, who was at the time situated in Japan for the English Crown, wrote in one of his letters, dated 26 July 1614:

“Now heer is news covm that thear is 20 ssaylles of hoolanders about manillia with 2 or 3 English ships which yf it be trew will do no good at manillia befor thear departevr.”⁷⁷

Unfortunately, there is no trace of this fleet in Spanish or Dutch sources, and it is unclear if there ever was a confrontation between this fleet and the forces of Manila. The only other notable attack on Manila in this year was under the command of Laurens Reaal, the governor of the Moluccas, but he sailed from the Moluccas in September of 1614 with only seven ships and three yachts. Reaal anchored at Iloilo, on the island of Panay (see figure 1.3), where the Dutch sacked and burned the surrounding settlements and destroyed all the ships in the harbours.⁷⁸ Apparently, Reaal had planned to continue onwards to Manila but had to turn around because of the incoming monsoon. The attack of 1614 was recorded by procurator General Grau y Monfalcón in 1637, when he wrote a report about the Philippines during the years 1611 to 1617, but he dedicates only one sentence to the incident, confirming that an entire town and its surroundings were burned.⁷⁹ While relatively unknown, this attack by Reaal is unique during this phase when compared to the other attacks, which were essentially all blockades or small raids that ended in battle because of Spanish retaliation. The reason why Reaal

⁷⁷ C. J. Purnell, ed., *The logbook of William Adams, 1614-19* (London, 1916), 272.

⁷⁸ Tiele, 'De Europeërs', vol. 8, 294.

⁷⁹ Crossley, *Hernando de los Ríos*, 107.

decided to launch this attack cannot be found in the Dutch archives, and apart from the one sentence written by Monfalcón, Spanish contemporaries omitted it as well. Iloilo is not close to the San Bernardino Strait (see figure 1.3), where the Manila Galleons usually arrived, and it is even further from the trading routes taken by Chinese junks, which suggests that this was indeed a planned attack and not a blockade.

The great fleet of 1615

In 1615, a few months after Reaals attack on Iloilo, governor Silva was definitively ordered by the Council of the Indies to assemble a war fleet to protect the Spanish trade in the region and, if possible, to drive the Dutch from the East Indies once and for all.⁸⁰ The fleet was supposed to meet with Portuguese reinforcements from Goa in Malacca, and together they would attack the Dutch forces in the Moluccas. To build this fleet, Silva had to forcefully enlist the help of the native inhabitants of the Philippines. Taxes were raised to fund the enterprise, and native men were forced to join the crew as soldiers and sailors. Besides the construction of ships, all artillery and equipment had to be furnished on the spot as it was too difficult and time consuming to import weaponry from New Spain.⁸¹ By December 1615, the fleet consisted of ten galleons, four galleys, one patache and three frigates, equipped with 300 cannons and 4500 guns and more than 5500 men, both sailors and soldiers. It was the biggest fleet the Philippines had ever seen.⁸² Silva captained the fleet from his 1.700-ton flagship the *San Marcos*. After months of preparations, the fleet sailed from Cavite on 7 February 1616.⁸³

Unfortunately for Silva, the Dutch knew what was coming: they had received news of the construction of the fleet long before the Spanish left Cavite. Moreover, they knew that Silva planned to unite with Portuguese reinforcements in Malacca. The Dutch realised that if the two fleets were able to meet, the Iberian forces would be virtually unstoppable. So, instead of taking on Silva and his war fleet, a Dutch squadron, aided by their native allies from the sultanate of Aceh in Indonesia, sailed for Malacca to destroy the Portuguese fleet that had already arrived there in August of 1615. The consequent battle in the beginning of December of the same year resulted in a victory for the Dutch and their allies, and all four Portuguese galleons were lost, as the Portuguese had set fire to them to prevent the Dutch from adding them to their own fleet.⁸⁴ In a letter to the directors of the VOC from 10 March 1616, captain Steven van der Hagen wrote about the success at the Strait of Malacca and described the strength of Silva's fleet, which consisted of "ten well-equipped galleons and so many galleys with about 1500

⁸⁰ Borschberg, *Iberians*, 45.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, 46.

⁸² *Ibidem*, 54.

⁸³ Barrows, *A History*, 193.

⁸⁴ Arturo Giraldez, *The Age of Trade: The Manila Galleons and the Dawn of the Global Economy* (London 2015), 94.

soldiers, as well as Japanese and natives”.⁸⁵ The Dutch knew about the Spanish fleet from the start, and the clever decision to attack the Portuguese at Malacca saved them from certain defeat.

The Spanish lost their allies, but they still possessed a strong fleet that could inflict serious damage upon the Dutch. They were, however, in for another surprise: throughout the fifty-year period in which the Dutch blockaded Manila or invaded Philippine waters, there was usually only one large Dutch fleet in the area. But in 1616-1617, there were two Dutch fleets: that of Steven van der Hagen, which had crushed the Portuguese in Malacca, and that of Joris van Spilbergen. Silva knew of one, but was ignorant of the other, which was headed for Manila at the same time he left with his enormous fleet in the spring of 1616.

Joris van Spilbergen had departed from Middelburg on 6 August 1614 and had travelled around the coast of New Spain, attacking and pillaging Spanish ships and settlements, just as he was instructed to do by the VOC prior to his departure. Apart from harassing the Spanish in South America, Spilbergen had another clear objective: to intercept the Manila Galleons coming from Acapulco, and he was planning to lie in wait around Manila in hope of encountering the Galleons there.⁸⁶

Governor Silva had received reports of Spilbergens fleet from New Spain in 1614, but he had not heard anything else about it for almost two years. Therefore, he wrongly assumed that the fleet had either been defeated or suffered some natural disaster in the Americas and was no longer a threat.⁸⁷ But when Silva departed from Cavite in 1616, Spilbergen was already sailing on the outskirts of the Philippine waters. The Dutch fleet was a terrifying surprise for those left in Manila, for the colony was essentially defenceless: almost every soldier and piece of artillery had been assembled by Silva for his fleet. Those living in coastal towns were so fearful of the Dutch fleet that they fled into the more mountainous interior of the islands. A few indigenous inhabitants sped to Manila to report what they had seen to the Spanish council: six great ships with many soldiers with red and white faces, big beards and light hair.⁸⁸ The Dutch appeared as fearful barbarians to the people of the Philippines and caused a great panic. The fleet had been spotted on 26 February and 13 March, and these dates coincide with Spilbergens attempts to reach Manila. Even though the Dutch captain had been instructed to hinder the Spanish and capture the Manila Galleons, the sight of the empty docks at Cavite and Manila and the lack of Spanish retaliation after he entered hostile waters should have been enough to entice him to sail further into the Bay of Manila. But surprisingly, Spilbergen decided not to attack the completely defenceless city. Instead, after capturing a few Chinese and Japanese junks, he set sail for the Moluccas, because contrary to the misinformation, or rather the lack of information, that had reached Juan de Silva, Spilbergen had understood from some of the prisoners he had taken

⁸⁵ Letter of Steven van der Hagen to the Heeren XVII, 10 March 1616, in: Tiele, *Bouwstoffen*, vol. 2, 124.

⁸⁶ J.C.M. Warnsinck, ed., *De reis om de wereld van Joris van Spilbergen, 1614-1617* (Den Haag 1943), 101-102.

⁸⁷ Sloos, *De Nederlanders*, 35.

⁸⁸ AGI Filipinas 39, N.19, Informaciones sobre los corsarios holandeses, 1616.

from the captured junks that there was an enormous Spanish fleet threatening Dutch interests in the Moluccas. Spilbergen arrived at the Dutch Fort Orange on Ternate on 29 March 1616, bringing the news of Silva's fleet. Surprisingly, the Dutch at Ternate had not yet heard anything about the Spanish threat. However, they had little to fear should Silva decide to directly attack Dutch holdings in the Moluccas: there were 5000 soldiers in Fort Orange alone, and the rest of the Dutch possessions in the region were in a similar fortified state.⁸⁹

In the end, what would be the greatest naval battle the region had ever seen never occurred: the Portuguese fleet was destroyed before the Spanish even arrived, and governor Silva, after assembling his enormous fleet, was not able to achieve stardom by destroying the Dutch enemy. He would also never return to Manila: Silva died in Malacca on 19 April 1616, probably after suffering a stroke.⁹⁰ After his death, the fleet stayed in Malacca for a few weeks before returning to Manila without having fired a single shot.

The events of 1616 prove that the Spanish favoured the Moluccas, a set of islands heavily occupied by the enemy, over the Philippines, their undisputed territory since 1565. Governor Silva risked the safety of Manila to have a chance at winning the Moluccas for the Spanish Empire. It should be noted, however, that when Silva left the Philippines in the spring of 1616, he was unaware of the rapidly approaching Dutch fleet from New Spain. Yet it can still be argued that the Moluccas held more importance for the Spanish, as Silva left the Philippines completely defenceless: when Spilbergen arrived, there was not even one ship left in the harbour fit for sailing, and because Silva had taken all artillery, the remaining Spanish inhabitants scrambled to collect any iron they could find to quickly assemble new cannons to defend the city.⁹¹ During the turbulent first half of the seventeenth century, in which Dutch fleets were a constant threat to the Philippines, it is surprising that Silva left the islands completely unguarded.

The Second Battle of Playa Honda

After Silva's death and the retreat of the Spanish fleet, Spilbergen conferred with governor Reaal about what should be done with his relatively strong and well-supplied fleet.⁹² According to some sources, Spilbergen somehow returned to the Philippines after arriving in the Moluccas to bomb the port of Iloilo on 29 September 1616.⁹³ This is false: Spilbergen and Reaal decided that the fleet could stay in the Moluccas to defend the Dutch forts in case Silva attacked, but that this was also the perfect opportunity to sail to the Philippines, which, as they now fully realized, were almost completely

⁸⁹ Ferdinand Blumentritt, *Filipinas: ataques de los holandeses en los siglos XVI, XVII y XVIII: bosquejo histórico* (Madrid 1882), 29.

⁹⁰ Sloos, *De Nederlanders*, 33.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, 35.

⁹² *Ibidem*, 37.

⁹³ United States Philippine Commission, et al. *Report of the Philippine commission to the President-December 20, 1900* (Washington 1900) Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <www.loc.gov/item/01022358/>, 366.

unprotected. It was decided that Spilbergens fleet would be split, and the multitude of his ships would form the basis of a new fleet that would sail to the Philippines under the command of admiral Jan Dirksz. Lam. So, it must have been Lam, not Spilbergen, who attacked Iloilo on 29 September.

Unfortunately for the Dutch, the realisation that the Philippines were undefended came too late: after his death, the remains of Silva's fleet had already returned to Manila in June of 1616, and by the time Lam arrived the Spanish were well aware of the newest Dutch fleet. Since the ships in Manila had already been outfitted to go to war the year before, they were readied again with little effort and set out to meet the enemy on 8 April 1617 under the command of captain Juan Ronquillo,⁹⁴ Lam only possessed six big ships and was overconfident when he decided to face the superior Spanish fleet, consisting of seven galleons and three galleys, instead of retreating. The two parties met each other on 16 April at what the Dutch had dubbed 'Wittert's Island': a small island slightly north of the Playa Honda. The battle ended in a victory for the Spanish, and half of Lams fleet was destroyed. The three remaining ships fled back to the Moluccas.⁹⁵

A Spanish *relación* written about the battle emphasises how great the victory of the Spanish was, though the author admits that the Spanish did not escape the battle completely unscathed: Silva's initial flagship, the *San Marcos*, was very close to sinking and had to be towed back, and many other ships were heavily damaged.⁹⁶ One thing that is not mentioned in the *relación* is how the Spanish fleet was caught in a storm on its way back. In a report from Laurens Reaal from May 1618, he writes how some prisoners who were released from Manila in March that same year came to Banda with news of the fleet: apparently, the ships first remained in Cavite for some time before the current acting governor of the Philippines, Jerónimo de Silva, gave the command to sail to the island of Marinduque (see figure 1.3) to repair the damaged ships.⁹⁷ Unfortunately for Silva, the fleet was hit by severe weather, which caused several ships to sink and drove others onto the cliffs. Already badly damaged, the rest of the ships were lost completely, at least according to the prisoners, who had been speaking to survivors. Their report turned out to be true: the greatest fleet the Philippines had seen thus far had been destroyed by heavy storms and only a remnant was able to return to Manila.⁹⁸

The blockade of 1620

In three turbulent years, the Philippines had faced many threats but remained safely in Spanish hands. The state of the colony, however, was deplorable: in letter to Spain from 1618, Jesuit Juan de Ribera

⁹⁴ Tiele, *Bouwstoffen*, vol. 1, xxix.

⁹⁵ Manuel de Madrid, *Relacion verdadera de la gran vitoria que el Armada Española de la China tuuo contra los olandeses piratas* (Sevilla, 1618).

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁷ Letter from Laurens Reaal, Castle Nassau on Banda-Neira, 7 May 1618, in: W. Ph. Coolhaas, *Generale missiven van gouverneurs-generaal en raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, vol. 1 (Den Haag 1960), 82.

⁹⁸ Sloos, *De Nederlanders*, 47.

wrote that the city of Manila urgently needed more ships and artillery to defend itself. In this letter, Ribera also emphasized the importance of the Philippines in the Spanish colonial empire, especially related to the trade in white silk, pepper, cinnamon, cloves, mace and other spices, which reached Spain through the Philippines and was of vital importance to the Spanish economy.⁹⁹ But the colony was constantly plagued by Dutch ships, the last ones appearing in 1616, and two years later, when Ribera wrote his plea, the Dutch had become even stronger by establishing factories in Curate, Paliacate, Malau, Java, Sunda, Macasar and signing a new treaty with the king of Japan.¹⁰⁰ Ribera reminded the intendent recipient of his letter that this was not the first time he had requested reinforcements for the Philippines, and that the colony was on the verge of collapse. Despite Ribera's pleas, hardly any reinforcements were sent. The Spanish state treasury was close to empty after decades of war; there was very little money to manage the Spanish Philippines, and the islands were not a priority to the king and the Council of the Indies.¹⁰¹ To make matters worse, the natives of the islands were starting to harbour (even more) feelings of hatred towards the Spanish, who had been forcing them to pay taxes, deliver materials and enlist as soldiers, all in an effort to repel the Dutch. The assembly of Silva's fleet in 1615 had taken a toll on the native inhabitants of the islands, and tensions were rising.

Another problem presented itself in the form of depletion: since Spanish occupation, and especially after the outfitting of Silva's fleet in 1615, the islands were stripped bare. Most natural resources of the Philippines had been exhausted by shipbuilding, which is why the colony now depended on acquiring ships and materials from surrounding territories, such as India.¹⁰² With the ever-looming threat of the Dutch, and the destructive battles that followed, the Philippines needed more ships than they were able to produce.

The Dutch threat had become so serious that the Spanish council in Manila even suggested finding a different route to the Philippines for the silver galleons. The narrow passage through the San Bernardino Strait had been swarming with Dutch ships for the past twenty years, as they had discovered that this was the preferred route taken by arriving Manila Galleons. A plan was proposed in 1618 by Hernando de los Ríos Coronel to open up another river that flowed into Manila Bay so that the Dutch would not so easily be able to blockade the city or lie in wait of the Manila Galleons.¹⁰³ Unfortunately for Los Ríos Coronel, no efforts were even undertaken to realise his plan.

While the Spanish were struggling to manage their colony, the Dutch were already planning for the next attack, though not a direct one: in a letter to the directors of the VOC dated 6 January 1618,

⁹⁹ AGI Filipinas 20, R.12, N.80 Carta del jesuíta Juan de Ribera sobre situación estratégica, 2 December 1618.

¹⁰⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁰¹ Ibidem.

¹⁰² Blair & Robertson, *The Philippine Islands*, vol. 18, 5.

¹⁰³ Crossley, *Hernando de los Ríos*, 157.

governor Reaal wrote that he planned on systematically disrupting as well as diverting the Chinese trade from Manila even more than ever.¹⁰⁴ He must have known that the Spanish were struggling, so not only would the Dutch profit from the influx of trade but they would rob the Spanish of their supplies and goods as well, weakening them even further. Reaal also wrote that by raiding Chinese junks in the area, the Chinese would be less inclined to take the Manila route. At the same time, efforts would be made to attract more Chinese trade to Bantam by warmly welcoming them in Dutch ports. It becomes clear that the Dutch were actively trying to increase their share in the trade with China, and that capturing junks bound for Manila was not just done in an effort to get their hands on the precious Chinese goods in the cargo holds.

No large blockades were launched through all of 1619, but in 1620 the Dutch returned with three ships. While lying in wait at the entrance of the San Bernardino Strait, the Dutch squadron spotted the Manila Galleon *San Nicolás*, accompanied by two smaller ships, which they attacked. They had, however, underestimated the strength of the silver squadrons: the Dutch flagship was heavily damaged and sunk by the Spanish, while the other two ships escaped and arrived back in Hirado on 26 July 1620.¹⁰⁵ This blockade is one of the rare occasions in which the Dutch actually intercepted a Manila Galleon, but it shows how powerless they were against the defences that accompanied the silver ships. The current governor, Alonso Fajardo de Tenza, was lucky that the silver squadron was able to take on the Dutch, as he did not have the means to meet the enemy at that moment. He wrote a letter about the Dutch blockade on 15 August 1620, stating that three enemy ships had been stalking the San Bernardino Strait but that he had little resources to drive them away. He further wrote that it was difficult for him to continue equipping ships to meet the Dutch, and the inhabitants of Manila were growing tired of having to pay or submit iron for ships.¹⁰⁶

The Anglo-Dutch Fleet of Defense

In 1619, the Dutch and the English came together to fight their mutual enemy. They signed the so called 'Treaty of Defense', which reached Southeast Asia in the early months of 1620, and was supposed to protect and enhance both the Dutch and English trade in the region by attacking the Spanish and the Portuguese.¹⁰⁷ The Dutch and English authorities in the region began equipping a joint fleet in Batavia that was planned to attack the Philippines in 1621 and would consist of at least ten great galleons, five English and five Dutch, and multiple smaller ships. Admiral E. Robert Adams was in charge of the English delegation, and Willem Jansz., a renowned admiral who had previously acted as the governor of Banda and Solor, was in charge of the Dutch vessels.¹⁰⁸ It was eventually decided

¹⁰⁴ Letter from Laurens Reaal to the Heeren XVII, Jakarta, 6 January 1618, in: Coolhaas, *Generale missiven*, vol. 1, 81.

¹⁰⁵ Borao Mateo, *The Spanish Experience*, 17.

¹⁰⁶ AGI Filipinas, 7, R.5, N.61, Carta de Alonso Fajardo de Tenza sobre asuntos de gobierno, 15 August 1620.

¹⁰⁷ Borao Mateo, *The Spanish Experience*, 17.

¹⁰⁸ Letter from J.P. Coen, Batavia, 22 May 1620, in: Colenbrander, *Jan Pietersz. Coen*, vol. 4, 9.

that supreme command would go to Robert Adams, as it was more agreeable to have just one general commander for the fleet. Willem Jansz. was bestowed the role of vice-admiral.

The fleet did not leave Batavia together: instead, four of the ten galleons, two English and two Dutch, formed a small squadron and sailed for Japan on 31 May 1620 to patrol the waters there and intercept ships bound for Manila.¹⁰⁹ They were to meet up with the rest of the fleet in Japan in August of the same year and then sail to the Philippines to blockade the Bay of Manila. There, the fleet would be split: half of the ships would remain near the bay to try and damage the Spanish ships and harbours there while the others would patrol the surrounding waters to intercept Chinese junks and Manila Galleons. Additionally, the fleet was to bring along a few old ships to use as ‘burners’: these ships would be set on fire and driven into the Spanish ships in the bay or at the harbour of Cavite.¹¹⁰ Unfortunately, misfortune befell the fleet, and it was not able to leave Japan until January 1621, mainly because of diplomatic difficulties with the Japanese.¹¹¹ After resolving these issues, the fleet planned to set out in January of 1621. This delay eventually worked in favour of the Dutch and English, because while waiting in Japan they received intel that there were a few richly stocked Chinese junks bound to arrive in Manila in the spring, as well as daily supply missions from the Spanish colonies in the Moluccas.¹¹² The delay gave them the chance to intercept these ships.

As per usual, the enemy already knew of the imminent danger: governor Fajardo had received news of the Anglo-Dutch fleet and had warned his Chinese allies to hold back their richest junks to save them from falling into enemy hands. The ships from the Moluccas were also instructed to delay their supply missions. Finally, Fajardo had fortified both the harbours of Manila and Cavite against enemy attack.¹¹³ From behind his walls, Fajardo watched the Anglo-Dutch blockade for almost six months. His preparations paid off: the Dutch and the English were forced to retreat on 19 June because of severe weather and diminishing supplies without capturing any important vessels and without causing any damage to the Spanish settlements. Had they waited one more month, they would have witnessed the arrival of the Manila Galleons and the richly loaded Chinese junks, which all arrived in the last days of July.¹¹⁴

But the Fleet of Defense, albeit a failure, had brought with it an important change: for the first time since the Dutch arrival in 1600, there had existed a solid plan to directly attack Manila, and for the first time, the Spanish had chosen to remain in the city instead of seeking out the enemy with their

¹⁰⁹ P. A. van Dyke, ‘The Anglo-Dutch Fleet of Defense, 1618-1622’, in: Leonard Blussé, ed., *About and Around Formosa* (Taipei, 2003), 66.

¹¹⁰ Letter from J. P. Coen, Batavia, 22 May 1620, in: Colenbrander, *Jan Pietersz. Coen*, vol. 4, 8.

¹¹¹ Van Dyke, ‘The Anglo-Dutch Fleet’, 66.

¹¹² *Ibidem*, 74.

¹¹³ Letter to the king from governor Fajardo, 21 July 1621, in: Blair & Robertson, *The Philippines Islands*, vol. 20, 49.

¹¹⁴ Sloos, *De Nederlanders*, 57.

own fleet.¹¹⁵ Previous attacks always took place in the form of just blockades and were rather an attack on the Manila Galleons and the trade to Manila than on the city itself. This time, the Dutch had brought burner ships that were specifically meant to damage the Spanish ships and harbours. Too often had Spanish fleets deterred the Dutch from succeeding in their blockades, and many Dutch ships had been destroyed. This time, the Dutch (and the English) meant to cripple the Spanish fleet before it even had the chance to leave the Bay of Manila.

After surviving the attack of the Fleet of Defense, the Council of the Indies sent reinforcements three years later, in 1623: a ship arrived from New Spain carrying 300 soldiers. But instead of stationing the new forces in Manila, they were used to build a Spanish fort near Menado, on Celebes (Sulawesi).¹¹⁶ This location was chosen for strategic purposes, as the Spanish would be able to resupply their ships with materials and soldiers along the route from Manila to the Moluccas. Once again, the Council of the Indies opted to use the few available resources it had to strengthen the position of the Spanish in the Moluccas instead of in the Philippines, which desperately needed reinforcements.

The Blockade of 1621-1622

The failure of the first Fleet of Defence prompted the Dutch and the English to try again the next year, using the remaining ships of their fleet as well as one or two additions. This time, vice-admiral Willem Jansz., was given command of the fleet, leaving for Manila in December 1621.¹¹⁷ He blockaded the Bay of Manila for almost six months, until May 1622. Before the blockade, governor Fajardo wrote to the Council of the Indies that he was completely unprepared for an attack, and that there were only three ships in Cavite.¹¹⁸ Just like the previous year, Fajardo decided to draw his ships back into the harbours and fortify them as best as he could. He also sent out warnings to his Chinese allies again, but these arrived too late: three richly loaded ships were captured south of the bay, as well as several small junks.¹¹⁹ Fajardo was unable to send out his own fleet to meet the Dutch and the English, as his ships were too few and too weak. Still, he was adamant in dissolving the Anglo-Dutch blockade, and he sent an embargo to threaten the fleet just north of the Bay of Manila. This embargo was received with cannon fire, which frightened Fajardo so much that he unloaded all ships in the harbour of Cavite in case the enemy decided to fire at them and destroy their cargo.¹²⁰ Eventually, the Anglo-Dutch cooperation did enter the Bay of Manila and defeat seemed inevitable for Fajardo. But the fleet did not sail much further than the entrance of the bay and anchored their ships there without attacking for several days. One night, after carefully gathering as much fighting force as possible with his limited

¹¹⁵ Technically, Laurens Reaal was the first to launch a direct attack on the Philippines in 1614, but he attacked the city of Iloilo, much further to the south. Additionally, the Spanish also refrained from attacking Spilbergen in 1616, but that was because there were no ships in the colony to mount an attack.

¹¹⁶ Sloos, *De Nederlanders*, 90.

¹¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹¹⁸ AGI Filipinas, Carta de Alonso Fajardo de Tenza, 20 August 1622.

¹¹⁹ Sloos, *De Nederlanders*, 72.

¹²⁰ AGI Filipinas, Carta de Alonso Fajardo de Tenza, 20 August 1622.

resources, Fajardo launched several galleys from Manila as a surprise attack in the middle of the night, which resulted in the exchange of heavy cannon fire.¹²¹ The Anglo-Dutch fleet fired back, but surprisingly chose to leave the bay not long after that, even though they seemingly had the upper hand.

The Anglo-Dutch fleet left for a good reason: the Spanish surprise attack occurred somewhere during July 1621, around the same time the next Manila Galleons were expected. Therefore, the Dutch and the English, knowing that the Galleons were heavily guarded, chose to await them in the San Bernardino Strait instead in the Bay of Manila, to avoid having to face both Spanish forces at once.¹²² But as it turned out, the Manila Galleons had been delayed, and instead of waiting longer or sailing back to the Bay of Manila, the Dutch and the English abandoned the blockade and left the Philippines; Fajardo had survived another attack. From previous Dutch-Spanish encounters and the instructions given to the Dutch fleets, we know that the capture of the Manila Galleons was prioritized. Even when allied with the English, and thus having a stronger force than usual, the Dutch chose to abandon Manila in favour of trying to catch the Galleons.¹²³

The Anglo-Dutch cooperation in Japan and the Philippines was dissolved on 2 August 1622, most likely because the English no longer sought to expand their trade with Japan. The Fleet of Defense, constructed under a precarious treaty, had failed to do much damage in the Philippines.¹²⁴

The second phase of the Dutch-Spanish conflict is characterized by growing aggression on both sides: governor Juan de Silva used all resources available to build his giant war fleet, and five years later the Dutch repaid the favour by allying with the English to create a war fleet of their own. Yet, despite the growing tensions, there were few actual consequences for both sides. The Spanish suffered a lot of misfortune but were still able to repel most Dutch attacks, despite severe shortages in the Philippines. One could argue that it was the cleverness of Fajardo that saved the colony, but from the important events that occurred during this second phase we can see that the Dutch were not all that interested in taking Manila. Spilbergen opted to sail to the Moluccas because he thought they were in danger, and the other blockades during this phase were aimed at catching the Manila Galleons. The direct attack of the Anglo-Dutch fleet can be explained within this narrative as well: since the arrival of Van Noort, the biggest threat to the Dutch ambitions in the Philippines were the Spanish forces in Manila. Usually, the Spanish did not attack the Dutch to defend Manila, but to defend the coming Manila Galleons from being captured by the enemy. Therefore, the attack of the Anglo-Dutch fleet in 1621 was meant to cripple any Spanish forces that could potentially prevent the capture of the Manila Galleons.

¹²¹ Laura Pérez Rosales & Arjen van der Sluis, *Memorias e historias compartidas: intercambios culturales, relaciones comerciales y diplomáticas entre México y los Países Bajos, siglos XVI-XX* (Mexico City 2009), 163.

¹²² Ibidem.

¹²³ This fleet was commanded by a Dutch admiral, so perhaps the English had no choice but to follow their allies, or perhaps they also favoured the potential riches from the Americas over destroying the Spanish colony. Nonetheless, all ships left Manila together.

¹²⁴ Dirk J. Barreveld, *The Dutch Discovery of Japan* (New York 2001), 247.

Unfortunately for the Dutch, they never got the timing quite right and were always too late or too early to catch the Galleons. Additionally, this phase shows the increasing importance of the China trade in the Dutch policy in the Philippines. For example, the blockade of 1620 was not just meant to intercept the Manila Galleons but also the incoming trade from China in an effort to direct the Chinese ships to Dutch harbours. The Dutch started systematically cutting of the China-Manila trade not just to loot the cargo of the Chinese junks but also to increase their own influence in the East Indies.

The third phase: 1624 – 1639

The importance of China and other powerful trading nations becomes even more prominent during the third phase of the Dutch-Spanish conflict in the Philippines. During this phase, the fight between the two powers extended to Taiwan, where both the Dutch and the Spanish established forts and naval bases. This chapter will discuss how the Dutch and Spanish presence in Taiwan influenced the conflict in the Philippines, and why the Dutch decided to settle on Taiwan in the first place. Another interesting occurrence in the period was the seemingly temporary cessation of hostilities during a period of more than twenty years. The reasons for the lack of aggression from the Dutch side, as well as the situation in the Philippines during this time, will be explained in this chapter. Furthermore, it will become clear that the Dutch priorities in the East Indies were shifting, and that the VOC changed their manner of attacking and hindering the Spanish during this phase.

Taiwan

Two decades after their first encounter with the Philippines, the Dutch started taking more drastic measures to achieve a monopoly in the Moluccas-Japan corridor. In 1623, the Dutch cautiously started settling on Taiwan (then called Formosa, after the Spanish *Isla Hermosa*) to open up the trade with China, which had refused to be intimidated by previous threats of raids and plunder. The Chinese king had denied all Dutch requests of establishing a trading post in the Pescadores (Penghu), a set of islands to the west of Taiwan, despite the constant attempts made by the VOC.¹²⁵ Despite Dutch aggression and the previously caused damages, the Chinese magistrate at Fujian allowed and even suggested the Dutch to set their sights on Taiwan, which was inhabited by both the Chinese and the Taiwanese indigenous people, albeit sparsely. The Dutch agreed, and the fort of Zeelandia was established at Taoyuan in 1624. Taiwan served as an excellent base from which to launch blockades or attacks on the Philippines, being situated much closer than the Moluccas or Batavia. On Taiwan, the Dutch could build their own base of operations from which ships could be sent, supplied, and repaired. Moreover, Taiwan was close to China, which meant the Dutch had more opportunities to insert themselves into the lucrative China trade, which became a deciding factor in the Dutch colonial policy since 1620.

The Spanish quickly realised that they had to stop the Dutch from extending their sphere of influence to protect the Philippines and their own commercial interests. A Spanish squadron was sent to the island in 1626 but had to settle with only acquiring the northern part.¹²⁶ The Dutch had thus far never attempted to conquer more of the island apart from the southern part where they had built their fort, so the north of the island was still unoccupied (by European forces; there were Taiwanese people living in these parts, as well as a few Chinese traders). The Spanish erected a fort at Quelang (Keelung). In

¹²⁵ Borao Mateo, *The Spanish Experience*, 16.

¹²⁶ H. H. Chiu, 'The Colonial 'Civilizing Process' in Dutch Formosa, 1624-1662', in: Leonard Blussé & Cynthia Viallé ed., *TANAP Monographs on the History of Asian-European Interaction*, v. 10 (Leiden 2008). 101.

1626, a document was drafted by the Spanish government to justify the Spanish occupation of the island. According to this document, the main reason why Taiwan had to be conquered was because of the duty given by Pope Alexander VI to the Spanish king to preach the gospel in all ‘barbarian’ regions of the world. It was decided through religious reasoning that the island had to be taken for the Spanish colonial empire, as it was the ‘divine duty’ of the king to convert those who did not yet practice Catholicism.¹²⁷ But the Spanish occupation of Taiwan mainly served an economic and strategic goal: after settling on the island in 1624, the Dutch had been effectively cutting off the Spanish trade with China by diverting ships to their new harbours on Taiwan.¹²⁸ Moreover, the Dutch were building a powerful naval base on the island from which they could equip fleets to send to the Philippines and the Moluccas. During the 1620’s, the rivalry between the Spanish and the Dutch in southeast Asia was at its highest point, so it is safe to assume that expelling the Dutch from this strategically beneficial place held more importance for the Spanish than the Christianization of the Taiwanese people. Historian H.H. Chiu declared that the “the Spanish occupation of northern Formosa was a strategic move made in reaction to the Dutch menace.”¹²⁹ Indeed, it was a counter-offensive against the Dutch expansion to Taiwan in 1624 under the guise of Christianization. The Spanish had to do something to not only protect the Philippines and their interests in the Moluccas but also their trade with China, which was steadily being diverted to the Dutch forts in Taiwan.

The third Battle of Playa Honda

With their new fort in Taiwan, the Dutch were suddenly stationed closer to the Philippines than they had ever been. This opened up many opportunities for the VOC. For example, a fleet bound for Manila could now depart from Taiwan and arrive in Philippine waters without suffering a perilous journey across the Pacific Ocean or through dangerous waters in the East Indies. The first fleet from Taiwan departed even before the Spanish occupation of the island in 1626. The subsequent confrontation has been named the third Battle of Playa Honda. It was the end of a month-long Dutch blockade, this time under the command of Pieter Muysier, who arrived from Taiwan with a fleet of five ships on 10 February 1625.¹³⁰ The Dutch were not able to surprise the Spanish at Manila: Muysier noted in his report that the people living in coastal towns and villages warned Manila by creating big fires.¹³¹ Despite these warnings, the Spanish did not equip a fleet to meet the Dutch: once Muysier reached the Bay of Manila, he encountered very little resistance, which prompted him to sail deeper into the bay to observe the strength of the Spanish forces. It turned out that even though the Spanish had been warned of the imminent arrival of the Dutch, they were still wholly unprepared for an attack: there was only

¹²⁷ Chiu, ‘Dutch Formosa’, 101.

¹²⁸ Borao Mateo, *The Spanish Experience*, 43.

¹²⁹ Chiu, ‘Dutch Formosa’, 101.

¹³⁰ Letter from Pieter de Carpentier, Jacques Specx, dr. Pieter Vlack and Antonio van Diemen, Batavia, 3 February 1626, in: Coolhaas, *Generale missiven*, vol. 1, 187.

¹³¹ Sloos, *De Nederlanders*, 93.

one big ship in the port, but it was stripped of its railings and not ready to set out. If Muysier had so desired, he would have been able to take the city right then and there. Yet instead of attacking and securing an easy victory, the Dutch resupplied at Mariveles (see figure 1.2) and afterwards chose to sail to Bolinao up north to intercept Chinese junks. Muysier looted five Chinese ships before being forced to search for water.¹³² Then, on 13 April, the Dutch were approached by a hastily assembled Spanish fleet, yet were not directly attacked, even though the Spanish seemed ‘furious’.¹³³ Muysier, who did not like his odds, turned and fled towards open sea but was pursued by the Spanish, until it became clear that a battle was inevitable. The Dutch and the Spanish once again met each other near the Playa Honda. In the end, there was a confrontation between the two fleets but without severe losses. The Dutch were able to escape after sacrificing one ship, after which the Spanish returned to Manila and the Dutch sailed north to intercept another Chinese junk near Bolinao on 17 May.¹³⁴ Afterwards, Muysier returned to Taiwan.

Just like Joris van Spilbergen in 1616, Pieter Muysier had the chance to invade the city of Manila and drive the Spanish from the Philippines, but he chose not to. It has now been established that occupation of the Philippines was not one of the goals of the VOC. Muysier had been instructed, just like his predecessors who visited the region, to capture Chinese junks and, if possible, the Manila Galleons and to hinder the enemy as much as possible, but not to take Manila for the Dutch. The outcome of third Battle of Playa Honda is surprising considering the Dutch fleet left from Taiwan, freshly outfitted without suffering the usual misfortunes that accompanied a journey across the Atlantic or the dangerous seas in the East Indies. From Taiwan, the Philippines were just a short crossing away, but the Dutch were not able to use this advantage to secure a victory over the Spanish.

Temporary peace

When comparing the years in which attacks occurred on Manila, we see that more than twenty years passed between the blockade of Muysier and the next large blockade in 1646. It is as though the Dutch temporarily withdrew from the Philippines, or at least refrained from launching deliberate blockades. Laarhoven and Wittermans suggest that the of worsening Sino-Dutch relations during that time caused the cessation of Dutch attacks: for 25 years, the Chinese junks traversing the Philippines waters had been the victims of the Manila blockades, and the Dutch must have fallen out of favour in China.¹³⁵ Not only did the Dutch frequently capture and loot these ships, but they also imprisoned and kidnapped Chinese sailors. Wanting to preserve their alliance with the Chinese, the Dutch started to become more cautious of taking the junks bound for Manila.

¹³² Sloos, *De Nederlanders*, 93.

¹³³ *Ibidem*.

¹³⁴ Borao Mateo, *The Spanish Experience*, 19.

¹³⁵ Laarhoven & Wittermans, ‘From Blockade to Trade’, 491.

The fact that the Dutch halted their attacks on the Philippines could not have come at a better time for the Spanish: during the 1630's, Spanish possessions in the East Indies were attacked multiple times by Moro (the name the Spanish gave to native Islamic groups in the Philippines) pirates and Chinese insurgents, and the subsequent efforts to quell these uprisings had cost the colony many men. Furthermore, in 1638, the current governor of the Philippines, Don Sebastian Hurtado de Corcuera, attacked a Philippine island that had been defended by its native inhabitants since Spanish arrival and was met with fiercer resistance than anticipated.¹³⁶ A year later, disaster struck again when over two thousand Spaniards perished due to a small epidemic in Manila. During the same decade, the Spanish king Felipe IV failed to reunite with the Portuguese in an effort to drive the Dutch out of the Southeast Asian seas. The Portuguese had grown dissatisfied and revolted against the Iberian Union, which was dissolved in 1640. With the break between Portugal and Spain, the trade between Macao and Manila was partially ceased and the Manila trade declined ever more.¹³⁷

The years between 1624 and 1639 present a sort of paradox: one would expect that the expansion the Dutch-Spanish conflict to Taiwan would result in increasing aggression and deadlier conflicts, but instead only one relatively harmless battle occurred during this phase before the conflict came to a halt that lasted more than twenty years. The reason for the temporary cessation of aggression is unclear, but it can at least be partially explained by the growing dissatisfaction of the Chinese at having their vessels captured so often by the Dutch. During the 1630's, the Spanish Philippines were severely weakened by both environmental and political calamities and would not have survived a direct attack from the Dutch. The motives of the Dutch during the third Battle of Playa Honda still revolved around the Manila Galleons, but it can be argued that the expansion to Taiwan was part of the increasingly important Dutch policy of diverting Asian trade away from the Philippines to their own harbours.

¹³⁶ Elihu Root, *Elihu Root Collection of United States Documents Relating to the Philippine Islands*, vol. 195 (New York 1907), 369.

¹³⁷ L.C.D. van Dijk and G.W. Vreede, *Neêrlands vroegste betrekkingen met Borneo, den Solo-Archipel, Cambodja, Siam en Cochin-China: een nagelaten werk* (Amsterdam 1862), 288.

The fourth phase: 1640-1648

After vacating the Philippines during the 1630's and focusing on disrupting Spanish trade with other Asian nations by establishing trading posts on Taiwan, the Dutch returned in the 1640's to directly and indirectly attack the Spanish with more aggression than ever. This chapter will discuss this renewed aggression and the subsequent changes in the manner of Dutch attacks on the Philippines.

In January 1641, Malacca was taken by the Dutch after having been a Portuguese colony for 130 years.¹³⁸ This change of hands had significant impact on the structure of the Asian trading network because it isolated Manila from Goa. Realizing that the Spanish were essentially cut off from their Portuguese allies in India, the Dutch upped the pressure on the Philippines by cruising the surrounding waters for months before attacking and seizing the Spanish post of Quelang in August 1642.¹³⁹ The Spanish were successfully driven from Taiwan.

After ten years of peace, the Spanish suddenly suffered two devastating blows. In the previous years, the Dutch were usually the waiting party in the conflict, attacked by the Spanish after lingering in their territory for too long. When studying Dutch sources from this period in search of a reason for the sudden aggression, we encounter an interesting report from Antonie van Diemen, governor general of the VOC, concerning the Dutch East Indies, dating from 1642. Van Diemen noted:

“... if the Company undertakes the matter with seriousness, they could take possession of it (Manila), but it is doubtful the Company will benefit greatly from that conquest, in such a way that the particular Spaniards do, because, as we have been informed, the Philippines are more a burden than a blessing to the King of Castile, where the Company would not thrive.

However, we will gather more information and make our findings known to You...”¹⁴⁰

It has already been established that the Dutch were aware of the fact that the Philippines were not a rich colony but had strategic value. Therefore, the VOC has always favoured the Dutch enterprise in the Moluccas, and the Dutch usually only visited and attacked the Philippines in hope of capturing the Manila Galleons or in an effort to diminish Spanish trade in the region or boosting their own. In 1642, however, the Dutch took a sudden interest in the Philippines themselves, going to lengths to gather information about the islands, even though they were aware of the lack of riches on the islands. This sudden interest is reflected in the last Dutch attack on the Philippines before the end of the Eighty Years' War.

¹³⁸ Borao Mateo, *The Spanish Experience*, 23.

¹³⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴⁰ Report of Antonie van Diemen, Batavia, 12 december 1642, in: Coolhaas, *Generale missiven*, vol. 1, 173.

The last blockades

The Dutch attacked once again in 1646, two years before the signing of the Treaty of Münster. A squadron of seven ships, led by admiral Maarten Gerritsz. de Vries and manned by more than 700 men, was instructed to sail to the Philippines from Batavia via Borneo.¹⁴¹ The squadron hoped to intercept the Manila Galleons that were supposedly arriving in the Philippines at the Cape of Espirito Santo. After taking the silver ships, de Vries planned to blockade the Bay of Manila. Instead, he caught sight of two grand Spanish galleons and two junks, which prompted him to sail south on 26 June and blockade the Bay of Tigao (on the northern part of the island of Davao (see figure 1.3)). However, illness had ravaged the crew and without being able to resupply safely, De Vries was forced to surrender the blockade and withdraw from the Philippines. The Spanish, sensing weakness, followed the Dutch ships and attacked them on 30 July. The battle was not in favour of the already weakened Dutch squadron: De Vries lost two ships and the crew suffered nineteen deaths, as well as many wounded. Afterwards, two Manila Galleons safely sailed into the bay, while De Vries and his remaining ships, perhaps in a show of petty vengeance, sailed along the northern coast of Luzon, attacking and burning small towns until he returned to Batavia on 4 October.

But De Vries was determined, and the next year, on 10 April 1647, he once again set sail to Manila from Batavia, only this time he had gathered a significantly bigger fleet: the Dutch attacked with fourteen ships and 1820 men, of which at least 360 were trained soldiers.¹⁴² On the way to Manila, De Vries was joined by another four ships, two of which came from Ternate and two from Siam. This considerable fleet arrived in the Bay of Manila on 11 June, ready to crush the Spanish forces. At the time, Manila was relatively undefended: De Vries only encountered a few unmanned and unrigged galleons lying at the harbour of Cavite, which were very well guarded. When De Vries tried to damage the docked galleons, he himself took heavy damage and even suffered thirty-nine deaths and seventy-three wounded.¹⁴³

Disheartened by the failure in the bay, De Vries sent out a few ships to search for any silver galleons, only to find out that no ships had departed from Acapulco in the previous months. This scouting squadron instead set sail for the northern part of Luzon and Taiwan to once again loot and burn some coastal villages. The scouts also spotted a heavily guarded Spanish galleon they had not seen before, but that they did not dare to attack. All the while, De Vries remained with a few ships in the Bay of Manila to blockade the city. He achieved some success on the coast of the bay, even taking the fort of Santo Domingo and killing 250 men.¹⁴⁴ The scouting expedition reunited with the original fleet in the bay on 15 October only to learn that De Vries had passed away. The blockade had already lasted four

¹⁴¹ N. MacLeod, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie als zeemogendheid in Azië*, vol. 2 (Leiden 1921), 873.

¹⁴² *Ibidem*, 874.

¹⁴³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, 875.

months, and the fleet had not remained unscathed during that time: over 320 had already died, mostly of illness. The new captain futilely attempted to continue blockading Manila but was forced to return to Batavia due to lack of supplies and the continued sickness aboard the Dutch ships. According to reports from Franciscan missionaries in the area, the Dutch looted and burned many churches and convents during this blockade of the islands, demonstrating their hatred for the Spanish religion.¹⁴⁵

Withdrawal of the Dutch

In 1648, despite the failure of De Vries in the previous year, yet another fleet was being equipped to attack Manila. But in November, an English ship arrived in Batavia carrying the news that a peace treaty had been signed in Münster with the Spanish king, and that the Eighty Years' War was over.¹⁴⁶ Reluctantly, the newest Manila squadron was disbanded. This time, the Dutch complied with the terms of peace.

While the Twelve Years' Truce was almost completely disregarded outside of Europe, the Treaty of Münster was upheld by the Spanish and the Dutch. Signed in 1648, this treaty formally decreed that the Dutch would refrain from visiting or attacking Spanish possessions in East Asia. At the same time, it had been decided that the Spanish would not try to increase their colonial possessions in the area, which meant that the Dutch would be able to take the remaining islands or any territories that were left for themselves.¹⁴⁷

The last eight years of the Spanish-Dutch conflict in the Philippines were perhaps the most aggressive ones on the Dutch side, who deviated from their usual strategy of intercepting trade by blockade to directly attack Manila. It seems as if the Dutch had taken a sudden interest in the Philippines as a colony. This is evident from the last attack of De Vries on Manila in 1647: instead of blockading the surrounding waters in hope of catching a Manila Galleon of Chinese junks, De Vries directly sailed into the Bay of Manila and attacked the Spanish ships. His attack was repelled, but he was able to inflict serious damage to a Spanish fort near the entrance of the bay. Only after this direct attack did De Vries set out in search of the Manila Galleons. During this phase, the Dutch also aggressively attacked coastal villages on the islands, something that they had rarely done in the past as these villages were mostly inhabited by native Filipinos instead of Spaniards. According to missionary Fray Joseph Fayol, who wrote a relation about the affairs in the Philippines in the years 1644 to 1647, the sudden Dutch aggression can be explained by the obvious frustration they must have felt after years of failures in the Philippines.¹⁴⁸ Fayol specifically refers to the fact that the Dutch had never managed to capture a Manila Galleon, which was usually the main reason why they blockaded Philippines waters.

¹⁴⁵ Barrows, *A History*, 208.

¹⁴⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁴⁷ Laarhoven & Wittermans, 'From Blockade to Trade', 496.

¹⁴⁸ Fray Joseph Fayol, 'Affairs in Filipinas, 1644-1646', in: Blair & Robertson, *The Philippines Islands*, vol. 35, 228.

Conclusion

The Philippines were a strange part of the Spanish colonial world, being situated far from all other Spanish successions and offering few profitable resources. Still, the Spanish fought tooth and nail to defend and maintain the islands for over 330 years, even though occupation of the Philippines was often a strain on the economy. The Eighty Years' War that had been raging in Europe since 1568 reached the Philippines in the year 1600, when Olivier van Noort became the first Dutchman to traverse the waters surrounding the Spanish colony.

The Dutch adopted a strategy of forming blockades along the straits and routes leading to the Bay of Manila. These blockades functioned to catch the biannual Manila Galleons, loaded with silver from the Americas. While lying in wait of the Galleons, the Dutch intercepted incoming vessels from China and sometimes Japan on route to the Philippines and plundered their cargo. Then, after unsuccessfully waiting for the Manila Galleons for several months, the Dutch would lift the blockades and leave the Philippines, usually because they were running low on supplies. Another outcome of the blockades was a violent confrontation after the Spanish set out to meet the intruders and drive them from their territory. The subsequent naval battles were almost always initiated and won by the Spanish, after which the Dutch were forcefully driven back.

After careful consideration of both Spanish and Dutch sources and the points of view of several authors, we can distinguish the motives for the Dutch attacks on the Philippines. All historians who have studied the Manila blockades agree on the same thing: the attacks on the Philippines were not born from a desire to gain more territory for the Dutch colonial empire; it is more complicated than that. There are three main motives for the Dutch attacks which can be placed within a political, economic, and strategic narrative: First and foremost, the Dutch wanted to hinder their enemy, the Spanish, however they could. In 1600, the Eighty Years' War had been raging for almost forty years and would continue to be fought between the rebellious Dutch provinces and the Spanish king until 1648 (including the Twelve Years' Truce, which can generally be considered a failure in the Atlantic and Pacific theatres). The Spanish were the enemy, and any harm dealt to the enemy was advantageous in the ongoing war. This becomes clear when studying instructions given to Dutch expeditions to the East Indies: apart from the main goal of the expeditions, captains received another set of instructions that urged them to hinder and damage Spanish interests in the area however much they could. Even though they almost seem like an afterthought, these instructions prove how the Dutch would take every chance to inflict damage upon the Spanish colonies in the East Indies. Weakening the Philippines would eventually have negative consequences for the Spanish in Europe, for the colonial trade played a huge part in the economy.

Another explanation for the blockades has been clearly expressed in Dutch sources: the Manila Galleons. Most Dutch expeditions destined for the Philippines were sent to that area to try and capture

a ship of the biannual Acapulco-Manila squadron, loaded with silver from the Americas. The route taken by the Manila Galleons was the worst kept secret of the Spanish, and the Dutch stalked the straits surrounding Manila for months in hope of capturing one of the silver ships and looting its extremely valuable cargo. However, during the fifty years in which the Dutch blockaded the Philippines, not one Manila Galleon was ever captured. A few galleons had to diverge from their original route due to Dutch threats, and there are even records of Manila Galleons being driven ashore, but their precious cargo always remained in Spanish hands and was never looted by Dutch ships.¹⁴⁹

There is another motive for the Dutch attacks that can be connected to the Manila Galleons. Silver from the Americas was one of the most important sources of income for the Spanish Empire and the main commodity in the trade with China. Manila was the only port in Asia where the Galleons could safely dock and unload their cargo. Thus, losing Manila equalled losing the Manila-Acapulco trade, which would result in a huge financial blow to the Spanish state treasury, which was virtually bankrupt throughout most of the Eighty Years' War and would not survive the loss of the silver trade.¹⁵⁰

The Dutch might never have managed to take a Manila Galleon, but the same cannot be said for all the Chinese junks that were captured during the Dutch blockades. The Chinese (and sometimes Japanese) ships bound for Manila often fell victim to the Dutch, and their looted cargo served multiple purposes. Firstly, the Dutch were able to line their own pockets: the junks from China were usually carrying luxury goods, such as silk, which the Dutch took for themselves to transport back to Europe or Batavia. Secondly, the provisions and other food meant for trade helped sustain the Dutch fleets during their blockades, which could last several months. Another obvious consequence of the Dutch raids on the junks bound for Manila was the disruption of Spanish trade in valuable goods, which were in high demand in Europe, and resources, which were necessary to defend and maintain the Philippines.

These three developments can mostly be explained within an economic narrative with extensions to the ongoing war between the Dutch and the Spanish in Europe. Following this reasoning, it can also be argued that the Dutch wanted to lessen Spanish influence in the Indies by attacking their primary base of operations, or, as Roeper and Wildeman describe the Philippines in their work on the circumnavigation of Olivier van Noort, "the heart of the Spanish domain in Asia".¹⁵¹

The actions of the Dutch had another important outcome: they served to strengthen the influence of the Dutch colonial empire by weakening one of its most important rivals. The fall of the Philippines and

¹⁴⁹ Schurz, *The Manila Galleon*, 287. According to Barrows, the Dutch frequently managed to surprise and take the galleons from Mexico: "*The Mexican galleons were frequently destroyed or captured by these lurking fleets of the Dutch...* (*A History*, 194), but it is unclear whether Barrows is referring to the actual Manila Galleons here, which were laden with silver, or other ships arriving from Mexico. There seems to be no record of the Dutch ever capturing a Manila Galleon carrying silver.

¹⁵⁰ M. van Ittersum, *Profit and Principle: Hugo Grotius, Natural Rights Theories and the Rise of the Dutch Power in the East Indies, 1595-1615* (Leiden 2006) 195.

¹⁵¹ Roeper & Wildeman, *Om de wereld*, 35.

the subsequent retreat of the Spanish would open up the rest of the East Indies to the Dutch. Since the year 1600, the Spanish and the Dutch had been battling for the most profitable islands and territories in the region and without Spanish interference, the Dutch would be able to secure an incredible trading network, which included the powerful nations of China and Japan. Since the Spanish had seamlessly inserted themselves into the already existing intra-Asian trading network when they settled the Philippines, the Dutch had always been fighting their European rival to gain access to the trade with China. As mentioned before, the raiding and looting of Chinese junks was also done with the purpose of diverting trade away from Manila to Dutch-controlled harbours. Out of fear, Chinese traders chose to avoid Philippine waters and docked at other ports to sell their precious goods, and these ports were often in the hands of the Dutch. This aspect of the Dutch-Spanish rivalry becomes even more obvious when examining the role of Taiwan during the third phase of the conflict: by opening up trading bases in Taiwan, the Dutch were effectively disrupting the China-Manila trade, further crippling the Philippines while simultaneously increasing their own trading networks.

Here we see the strategic consequences of the Manila blockades. Within this narrative it is also important to consider the role of the Moluccas in the conflict, which were without a doubt the most coveted islands in the East Indies during the first half of the seventeenth century. Every time the Dutch succeeded in securing the islands for themselves, they had to be mindful of the Spanish forces in the Philippines, which were situated relatively close to the Moluccas and were the perfect location from which to launch an attack. This is what happened in 1615, when governor Juan de Silva planned to conquer the Moluccas with the biggest fleet the Philippines had ever seen. He was unsuccessful in his endeavour, but the Spanish presence in the Philippines called for constant vigilance in the Dutch forts on the Moluccas.

The Dutch had good reasons for attacking the Philippines, but it is safe to say that all their blockades and other sorts of direct or indirect attacks were relatively unsuccessful in doing considerable harm to the Spanish. And after fifty years of Dutch presence in the Philippines, nothing major had changed in the colonial and commercial structure of the area. Schurz summarises:

“When the long series of Dutch aggressions ended in 1648, the Spaniards still held the Philippines and the Acapulco line was yet to continue for over a century and a half.”¹⁵²

It can be argued that the most advantageous result of the blockades was the disruption of the trade between Manila and China. And after the Dutch settled on Taiwan and were able to infest the waters surrounding the Philippines even more, many Chinese junks, fearful of crossing to Manila and risking capture by the Dutch, docked at Taiwan and did business there, causing an influx in trade.¹⁵³ Apart

¹⁵² Schurz, *The Manila Galleon*, 287.

¹⁵³ MacLeod, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie*, vol. 2, 876.

from these small advantages, the Manila blockades were a costly expense, and never saw much success in the fifty years the Dutch attempted them.

The differences between the four phases discussed in this study are subtle but important. Over a period of fifty years, it becomes clear that the role of the Philippines changed in the Dutch policy in the East Indies: at first, the islands were merely observed as entrepot for American silver and Asian luxury goods. Yet instead of taking Manila, the centre of the Spanish colony, the Dutch opted to blockade the routes to the city in hope of catching one of the Manila Galleons before it could safely dock at the Spanish ports. This method of cruising the Philippine waters, while simultaneously intercepting trade from China and Japan, is characteristic for the first two decades of Dutch interference in the Philippines, and contrasts with later Dutch aggression against the Spanish. In these first decades, the Spanish almost always fired the first shot, and the Dutch never actually entered the Bay of Manila.

This method of peaceful approach continued during the second phase, but by now the Dutch had realised the importance of the Philippines from a strategic point of view. Moreover, by now the Dutch had established themselves as a colonial power in the East Indies alongside the Spanish and the Portuguese, and this had created a new sort of rivalry. Originally, the dispute between the two European powers was fuelled by an ongoing war, but now the Dutch were more than just an old enemy: they were undermining Spanish trade in the region, and the same could be said the other way around. The Philippines were no longer just interesting for their function as landing dock for the Manila Galleons, but because they were the heart of the Spanish colonial empire in Asia. As said before, removing the Spanish from the Philippines meant removing the Spanish from Asia altogether, something the VOC would greatly benefit from. We clearly see a change in motives: the situation becomes more complicated and the role of the Philippines changes in the eyes of the Dutch, who were now looking to enhance their own influence in the region by diminishing the Spanish trading networks with important nations such as China. This explains the increased aggression against the Spanish colony in the second half of the fifty-year period discussed in this study.

This increased aggression become more visible in the beginning of the third phase of the conflict, during which the Dutch established a fort in Taiwan from which they became an even bigger threat to the Philippines. Yet the addition of Taiwan to the Dutch-Spanish situation had little effect: the Dutch were still beaten by the Spanish, and strangely enough decided to abandon the Philippines for more than twenty years. This sudden cessation of hostilities can partially be explained by worsening Sino-Dutch relations and makes for a unique period within the fifty-year conflict. When the Dutch returned to the Philippines in the 1640's, they did so with more aggression than ever: the Bay of Manila was directly attacked twice, and it seems as though the Dutch suddenly decided they wanted to remove the Spanish by force.

The Dutch-Spanish rivalry in the Philippines is strongly connected to their respective activities and aspirations in the rest of the East-Indies: the Moluccas were the most treasured islands in the area, and it can be argued that expelling the Spanish from the Philippines was merely a means to an end. A more complete study of the Manila blockades should include more research on the connection between the Moluccas and the Philippines. Additionally, the relationship between the Dutch and Spanish and the kingdoms of Japan, China and other powerful nations in Southeast Asia had a considerable influence on the course of actions taken by the European parties. Hence, future studies should take into account what was happening elsewhere in the area while the Dutch and Spanish were fighting in the Philippines.

Appendices

Appendix 1: The governors-general of the Philippines

The governors-general of the Philippines from 1596 to 1653, appointed by the Real Audiencia de Manila.

1596 – 1602	Francisco de Tello de Guzmán
1602 – 1606	Pedro Bravo de Acuña
1606 – 1608	Cristóbal Téllez de Almansa (acting governor on behalf of the Real Audiencia)
1608 – 1609	Rodrigo de Vivero y Velasco
1609 – 1616	Juan de Silva
1616 – 1618	Andrés de Alcaraz (acting governor on behalf of the Real Audiencia)
1618 – 1624	Alonso Fajardo de Tenza
1624 – 1625	Jerónimo de Silva (acting governor on behalf of the Real Audiencia)
1625 – 1626	Fernándo de Silva
1626 – 1632	Juan Niño de Tabora
1632 – 1633	Lorenzo de Olazo y Lecubarri (acting governor on behalf of the Real Audiencia)
1633 – 1635	Juan Cerezo de Salamanca
1635 – 1644	Sebastián Hurtado de Corcuera
1644 – 1654	Diego Fajardo Chacón

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