When a large Dutch Army finally conquered the *dalam* (citadel) of Atjeh in January 1874, after two costly campaigns, it found little documentary evidence within of Atjeh's illustrious past. The exception was a beautifully-written letter within a blue and gold border, signed by Louis Philippe of France and his Foreign Minister Guizot in January 1843. The French Consul in Batavia confirmed its authenticity, but could shed no further light on why it should have been addressed to the Atjehnese Sultan. Writing forty years later, E. S. de Klerck reproduced it 'as a curiosity — the letter lacks any political importance'.

The present attempt to unravel the motives behind this letter, and other mysterious French appearances on the Sumatran scene, has not entirely succeeded in removing the air of unreality about them. France never had an important share in the riches of the Archipelago spice trade, and appeared slow to understand the importance of Portuguese, Dutch and British commerce there. Consciously or otherwise she appeared drawn rather towards policies and commitments on the Asian mainland. The ambitions the French occasionally entertained for the Archipelago tended to focus at its extremities, Sumatra or the Sulu-Basilan area, which they perceived as serving more important activities in the Indian Ocean and China respectively.

Such initiatives as were taken in the Archipelago were motivated as much by the desire to maintain the status of a great power, or to pursue chimerical visions both material and spiritual, as by a sober calculation of practical advantage. The boldest ventures were all left to languish after a few years. The more modest ones (the French Catholic Mission in Malaya, and some minor commercial enterprises), which did build an unobtrusive basis for permanent French influence in the Malay world, appeared incapable of exciting the French imagination.

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Nevertheless such intermittent activities could not fail to produce an impression on some of the Indonesian rulers concerned. In the 18th and especially the 19th century France did appear to many Malay and Indonesian rulers as a powerful alternative to their threatening neighbours, Holland and Britain. The British and Dutch themselves, moreover, frequently invoked the threat of French interference to justify further expansion. The long-term French contribution to the colonial history of the Malay Archipelago was more important in the shadow than the substance.

France's first contact with the Malay world was characteristic of all that followed, as much by the boldness of its conception as by the pathos of its outcome. The gifted Parmentier brothers of Dieppe led the first non-Portuguese expedition from Europe around the Cape to Indonesia. Hoping to reach China, they landed at Tiku, on the West Coast of Sumatra, in November 1529. Within a month both brothers had died there, and there was nobody to follow their footsteps.¹

Frenchmen joined the seventeenth century wave of northern Europeans which took the pepper and spice trade between Indonesia and Europe out of the hands of Portuguese and Muslim traders. A number of expeditions sailed from St Malo and Dieppe in the period 1601-1630, to trade in such ports as Atjeh, Banten and Makassar. The difficulties of coping both with Dutch naval predominance and with the political intricacies of the region, however, quickly discouraged the financiers of these voyages. Although a factory of St Malo traders maintained a tenuous existence at Banten from 1617 until 1684, a Dutch historian could rightly conclude that the V.O.C. 'had little to suffer from the competition of the French'.²

Among the most ambitious of the early voyages was that of Augustin de Beaulieu, who supplies the first record of a letter from an Indonesian ruler to a French king. The mighty Sultan Iskandar Muda of Atjeh received Beaulieu well, in 1621, and bestowed on him a letter for Louis XIII: ‘Since God has made us great kings in this world, it seems reasonable that we should be friends and communicate with one an-


Nineteenth Century Western Sumatra.
A century later another letter in Malay was received at the court of France, from a Malay ruler in very different circumstances. Sultan Abdul Jalil of Johor had been chased from his capital by Raja Kechil in 1718, but hung on in Trengganu until murdered by his victors in 1721. From Trengganu he appealed in vain to the Dutch, the English, and finally the French, to help him regain his fortunes. An English trader, Alexander Hamilton, and a French one, Pierre Villaumont-Gardin, happened both to call at Trengganu in 1719, the Frenchman on route to China. When Sultan Abdul Jalil was discouraged by Hamilton, he asked Villaumont-Gardin:

if he thought the French nation might be induced to settle in his Dominions, and the French Gentleman gave him Hopes that the King of France might be induced to accept of his Friendship, and settle a Colony, providing he would certify his Request by a Letter, which the King of Johore readily agreed to.4

The Sultan's letter, which offered in return for assistance as much freedom for French subjects 'as for my own' to trade, settle, and build fortifications, now rests in the Bibliothèque Nationale.5 It appears to have aroused no interest in France.

By this time French interest in Asia had retreated to the limited Far Eastern trade of the Compagnie de Chine, the activity of the Missions Étrangères, and above all the long losing battle with the British for control of India. The decisive eighteenth century wars for hegemony in Bengal and the Carnatic depended on the naval strength the rival powers could muster in the Bay of Bengal. As the Indian coast of the Bay became unsafe during the stormy November-December monsoon, the British fleet habitually 'wintered' and refitted in Bombay. French fleets, on the other hand, repeatedly retired either to Mergui or Atjeh, whence they were able to return to the fight in India before the British fleet could beat around Ceylon. At least as early as 1746 a French fleet made use of Atjeh in this way.6 The most famous such visit, however, was in 1782, when de Suffren arranged a rendezvous in Atjeh with de Bussy.

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Even though the two fleets failed to meet in Atjeh because of de Bussy's late arrival, de Suffren's fleet alone must have been one of the largest ever to anchor off Atjeh, with eight ships and several thousand men. The reigning Sultan, Ala'ad-din (1781-95), in fact spoke some French and possessed a considerable knowledge of French military tactics, as a result of having spent a month working in the arsenal of Ile de France (Mauritius) as a young man. Nevertheless the Sultan and his subjects were understandably alarmed at the French arrival, 'never having seen such substantial forces in their port'. Only by spending freely and keeping a tight control of his crew did de Suffren avoid hostilities. The Atjehnese, the French noted, 'are very jealous of their women, who are nevertheless not temptingly beautiful'.

De Suffren's brilliant campaign was the last seriously to threaten British naval superiority in the Indian Ocean. The French nevertheless continued to harass British shipping in Indian and Indonesian waters through daring raids mounted from the Ile de France. Not content with making prizes of British trading vessels, these raiders attacked the East India Company's factories on the West Coast of Sumatra. So poorly were most of these defended that they could be seized for ransom or plunder with hardly more difficulty than an armed vessel.

The way for later privateers was shown by the Naval Admiral Comte d'Estaing, during the seven years' war. In 1760 he seized the principal British post in Indonesia, Fort Marlborough (Bengkulen), as well as its string of dependent settlements along the west coast of Sumatra. The French occupying force was so afflicted by disease, however, that it abandoned Sumatra within a few months.

It was during the Revolutionary War, when the French Navy was no longer a force in the Indian Ocean, that Ile de France acquired its reputation as a nid de corsairs through the dashing exploits of privateers like the famous Surcouf brothers. One of the first in the field was Le Même, who crowned two enormously lucrative privateering expeditions with the capture of Padang in December 1793. The leading Dutch establishment in Sumatra, Padang was still presumed loyal to

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9 Ibid., p. 200.
the Stadtholder. Le Même departed after two weeks' occupation, with a heavy ransom from the burgers and Chinese of Padang.\textsuperscript{12}

Earlier in the same year three privateers from Ile de France had already attacked the British posts of Bengkulu and Natal while on an abortive expedition against Batavia.\textsuperscript{13} In 1794 Natal and Tapanuli were again briefly taken by privateers.\textsuperscript{14} When the Napoleonic war began the French Admiral Linois was again quick to attack Sumatra, seizing Bengkulu in December 1803 by the ruse of entering the port under false colours. In four days' occupation he burned the warehouses and all the vessels in the harbour he was unable to take with him.\textsuperscript{15} Even as late as 1809, when the balance of naval power was hopelessly against the French, Admiral Hamelin was able to sack the small but prosperous British post at Tapanuli, burning and plundering the whole town.\textsuperscript{16}

This vigorous French activity came to an end with the British capture of Ile de France in December 1810. This was the last and strongest French base east of Suez, and it was not returned after the war. Neighbouring Réunion, returned to French control in 1815, was only gradually developed as an alternative in the 1830s.

*Neglected Opportunities*

The size and frequency of these naval expeditions must have made Sumatra relatively familiar, at least to French Naval and Colonial circles. Yet it is striking how negligible was the permanent French influence which survived into the nineteenth century. A number of individual Frenchmen, flotsam of the wreck of empire, lived on in Sumatra as renegades\textsuperscript{17} or adventurers, but France possessed neither the strength nor the interest to make any use of them.

The most intriguing, unconfirmed report of individual French survival

\textsuperscript{12} E. Netscher, *Padang in het laatst der XVIIIe eeuw* VBG XLI, (2), (Batavia/ The Hague, 1880), pp. 56-73.

\textsuperscript{13} Toussaint, pp. 172-3.

\textsuperscript{14} Bastin, p. 117n.


\textsuperscript{17} One Frenchman with the standard Muslim convert's name, Abdullah, took a prominent part in an attack on a French brig at Pidie by Atjehnese pirates in 1793. H. R. C. Wright, *East-Indian Economic Problems of the Age of Cornwalls and Raffles* (London, 1961), pp. 260-1. Deserters from French privateers were also noticed in Atjeh in 1810. Campbell to Edmonstone 24 July 1810, FCCP 18 July 1811 in Straits Settlements Factory Records [henceforth SSFR], Vol. 31.
in Sumatra appeared in the official *Le Moniteur* in 1858. The report stated that some members of a family de Molac left the service of de Bussy (presumably in February 1783 when his fleet called at Atjeh) to establish themselves in ‘the wildest part of Sumatra’. They built magnificent ‘agricultural establishments’ on the coast, and eventually acquired great influence among the Bataks. In the 1850s one of the family was allegedly elected a ‘Batak chief’. Though the report was emphatically denied by the French Consul in Padang, the factual basis which gave rise to it remains a mystery.18

Like the adventurers, French ‘country traders’ had virtually no contact with their government in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Based on the ports of the Coromandel coast, they played a minor role with British country traders and chulia (Tamil Muslim) merchants in trading Coromandel cloth and Bengal opium for the pepper, spice, betel and tin of the Malay Archipelago. Such merchants came to dominate the commercial affairs of several contemporary states in Sumatra and the Malay Peninsula.

Between about 1806 and 1810 a small group of ‘French’ country traders, in close commercial association with chulisas, obtained a commanding position in the Atjeh Sultanate. Their leader, Francis L’Étoile, was considered to have ‘the entire control of the state and unlimited influence over the King’ shortly before his death in 1810.19 British fears on his account, however, were unnecessary. Far from being an agent of France, L’Étoile had changed his nationality from French to Danish at Tranquebar, after serving some time on French, British and Danish ships. His policy was to prevent any Western Power gaining a foothold in Atjeh, although in an emergency he appeared more willing to rely on British than French assistance.20

18 Eroplong (Padang) to Paris 23 August 1858, citing *Le Moniteur* 104 (14 April 1858); Ministère des Affaires Étrangères [henceforth M.A.E.], Pays-Bas, Correspondence Politique des Consuls, no. 5. Official knowledge of Batakland in this period was hardly sufficient to justify such emphatic denials. An intriguing detail which may or may not be connected with the de Molac story is that Roman Catholic elements were very marked in the Batak *promailim* sect, which became known to Europeans only about 1900. These elements are usually attributed solely to the Italian traveller Modigliani, who visited the Batakland in 1891. Gentilis Aster, *Een Volk Ontdekt Christus. De Katholieke Missie onder de Bataks op Sumatra* (Voorhout, 1959), pp. 104-112. J. M. van der Kroef, in Sylvia Thrupp (ed.), *Millenial Dreams in Action. Essays in Comparative Study* (The Hague, 1962), p. 99.

19 Campbell to Edmonstone 24 July 1810, FCCP 18 July 1811 in SSFR 31.

At no point, therefore, did France gain any advantage from the activity of its errant sons in Sumatra. Heeres\textsuperscript{21} records an abortive French plan in the early eighteenth century to establish trading relations with Atjeh. Subsequently it appears not to have impressed the French Government as it did the British that a permanent base in the Straits of Malacca region would be invaluable both for naval operations in the Indian Ocean and for intra-Asian commercial activity. The first of these assets was sufficiently demonstrated by de Suffren; the second had been pointed out as early as the 1740s by the enterprising and persistent Pierre Poivre. Other prominent Frenchmen, including the conqueror of Bengkulen, D'Estaing, echoed Poivre's insistence that in addition to obtaining spice plants for cultivation in Ile de France and Bourbon, the French needed a permanent base in Southeast Asia. Only this could provide the goods needed for trade with China, and avoid a ruinous drain of specie from France.\textsuperscript{22}

In contrast to the other Powers, however, France consistently preferred to seek such a base in Mainland Southeast Asia. To serve the needs of the French fleet in the Bay of Bengal Dupleix established a connection with Burma, which was renewed by some of his successors.\textsuperscript{23} The proponents of a commercial entrepôt to serve the China trade were attracted rather to Vietnam, mainly because of the existing French missionary stake there and the false assumption that island Southeast Asia was already under Spanish or Dutch control. The archipelago remained virtually out of the reckoning, save for an ephemeral interest in Mindanao and Sulu in the 1760s and '70s.\textsuperscript{24}

Exaggerated fears of French activity in the Straits of Malacca nevertheless affected British policy at some vital points. During the War of American Independence fears that the French might occupy Atjeh, or destroy Bengkulen once more, led to the appointment to Atjeh of a British 'commercial resident' in 1784. Although this move was un-

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{21}{ENI III, p. 531.}
\footnote{23}{G. D. E. Hall, \textit{A History of South-East Asia} (London, 1960), pp. 422-4.}
\footnote{24}{Ibid., pp. 364-70. Kennedy, pp. 266-76. Cady, pp. 11-12.}
\end{footnotes}
productive it was an important step towards the decision to occupy Penang two years later.\textsuperscript{25}

L'Étoile’s influence over the young Sultan Jauhar al-Alam aroused new British fears during the Napoleonic War. These appeared to be confirmed in June 1809 by the capture just south of Bengkulen of Lt. Col. Leon de la Hussaye, an aide-de-camp of Marshal Daendels in Batavia. Daendels had despatched de la Hussaye to the court of Burma, to see what advantage could be gained from the powerful King Bodawpaya’s designs on Bengal.\textsuperscript{26} Such was the weakness of French seapower that he was sent up the west coast of Sumatra in a small Indonesian \textit{prahu}, which leaked so much it was forced to land near Bengkulen. De la Hussaye carried letters to the Sultan of Atjeh, presumably designed to facilitate his passage on to Burma. When captured, however, he appears to have thrown the British off his real objective by ‘admitting’ that he had a special mission to Atjeh. The Penang Governor, Macalister, wrote angrily to Sultan Jauhar reporting the capture of ‘documents proving the negotiation that has existed between Your Majesty and the French’.\textsuperscript{27} It was only a year later that missions sent to Atjeh by the Penang Government revealed the complete lack of interest which even L’Étoile and his fellow Frenchmen had in any connection with France.\textsuperscript{28}

No doubt these fears in Penang sustained Raffles, when in 1810 he insisted that British troops occupy Atjeh as part of his grand strategy for the Malay world.\textsuperscript{29} Raffles also used the French bogey more broadly in his attempt to stimulate an energetic British policy in Southeast Asia.

That the attention of the French Government has been particularly directed to Java and the Malay States from the time of their losing all hopes of establishing a solid footing on the Continent of Hindostan, may be inferred from a variety

\textsuperscript{27} Macalister to Sultan of Atjeh n.d. [July 1809?], and other correspondence in A. C. Baker, ‘Some Account of the Anglo-Dutch Relations in the East at the Beginning of the 19th Century, Based on the Records preserved in the Colonial Secretary’s Office in Singapore, and in the Resident’s Office, Malacca’, \textit{JBSRAS} 64 (June, 1913), pp. 2-6.
\textsuperscript{28} Lee Kam Hing, pp. 110-15.
\textsuperscript{29} D. C. Boulger, \textit{The Life of Sir Stamford Raffles} (London, 1897), p. 91.
of circumstances, one of which is the cultivation of the Malay language in Paris
under the celebrated Professor Langlès [sic].\(^{30}\)

Raffles was wide of the mark. When Louis-Mathieu Langlès became
first administrator of the new *École Spécial des Langues Orientales Vivantes*, in 1795, it was indeed intended that Malay should be taught there. But the fact that neither Langlès nor any other French orientalist
apparently took the trouble to master this language until forty years later is testimony to the limits of French interest.\(^{31}\)

Whatever very limited capability France had to the East of the Cape of Good Hope was eliminated with the British capture of Ile de France and Réunion in 1810, to which the capture of Java was a mere appendix. Ile de France, which had proved such a dangerous base for privateers, was retained by Britain under its earlier Dutch name, Mauritius. The French factories in India (Pondichéry, Chandernagore) were returned in 1816 on the condition that they could not be fortified. Thus the only strategic base left to the French in the Indian Ocean was Réunion, renamed Bourbon by the restored monarchy. It was slowly built into a naval base, though not until the late 1830s did France attempt to use it to return to a position of influence in Southeast Asia.

It was the missionaries and the private peppertraders who began a more intensive French contact with the Malay world in the 19th century.

*French Missionaries in Sumatra*

The Société des Missions Étrangères, organised in Paris in 1663 in response to Alexander de Rhodes' appeal for missionaries for Indo-China and Siam, had maintained a tenuous, occasionally interrupted hold there ever since. The first venture of the French missionaries of the society into the Malay world was a mere extension of their work in Siam. Following the short-lived banishment of missionaries by King P'ya Taksin in 1781, shortly before his death, a mission station was established at Kedah to serve about 80 Siamese Christian refugees from Junk Ceylon (Phuket). Far from seeing it as an entry to the Malay world, the Vicar Apostolic Coudé thanked God for 'the consolation of being in Siam, and of having a Church of Siamese in Kedah, where


the lord has never been praised in that language'.

However within a year Fr. Garnault was already hoping to work among Chinese and Malays. When the British settled Penang in 1786, Garnault rapidly made this island the southern centre of his Bangkok Vicariate, because of its ready communications with the area. The island came to seem such a centre of stability in an uncertain environment that in 1806 Penang was chosen as the new site for the Collège Général, the sole seminary of the Society in the Far East, which had led a precarious, shifting existence since its establishment in Ayutia in 1665. However this decision came during the most critical period for the French Missions, curbed and demoralised by Revolutionary anti-clericalism. At times it was struggling to find 3 priests to cover the whole of Siam and the Malay Peninsula. Only after the Bourbon restoration and the Catholic revival of the 1820s was it possible for the mission in Penang to consider new activities.

Although the French missionaries steadily expanded their work among the non-Malay population of Malaya throughout the nineteenth century, Sumatra was the first part of the Malay world to attract the enthusiasm of the missionary revival. In 1826 a new Vicar Apostolic, Florens, was asking for a priest to send to Atjeh. This peculiar idea came from the bishop of Pondichéry, who must have picked up some loose talk from French pepper-traders. But the isolated, still animistic island of Nias, off Sumatra’s west coast, attracted more serious attention.

It was Jean-Baptiste Boucho, later to become the first Vicar Apostolic of the Malayan Peninsula (1845), whose enthusiasm gave rise to the Nias venture. He came into contact with Nias slaves and ex-slaves soon after his arrival in Penang in 1824, and baptised about thirty of them. Almost half were the windfall of the British judicial system:

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35 Florens to Directors 16 July 1826 and 20 June 1829, S.M.E. 888, ff. 11 and 172. Although a Portuguese Franciscan mission had cared for some of the foreign traders in Atjeh between 1671 and about 1703, it would be difficult to conceive a less promising field. C. Wessels, ‘Uit de missiegeschiedenis van Sumatra. Atjeh in the 16e en 17e Eeuw’, *Historisch Tijdschrift XVIII* (1939), pp. 14-16.
Last year some Chinese traders brought a large number of these unfortunate Nias here to sell them; as this trade is forbidden by the English laws the dealers were arrested and put into prison, but to condemn them witnesses were necessary, and there were only these very Nias who could testify to the fact. The difficulty was that the Nias knowing nothing of a future life or of the punishments reserved for pagans could not be admitted by the law to the oath. Without losing time, I asked the government for authority to instruct these people, which was given me the more easily because the government had no other means than that to bring the affair to a successful conclusion. By means of the Nias who were already Christian, these new compatriots were so well instructed, to the great satisfaction of the court which had them examined by the grand jury. All got their liberty. There were 10 girls and 3 boys. The girls were already Christian, and 4 of them are married to 4 new Chinese Christians. The boys will be baptised at Pentecost.

Boucho could not sufficiently praise his Niassers, ‘good, simple, faithful, and very attached to their faith once Christian’. From them he learned enough to compile half a Nias dictionary and write a few prayers in the language. Boucho was delighted to discover that they already recognised a beneficent creator God, ‘Laubalangi’, although they directed most of their ritual to placating the evil spirit, named ‘Cekhou’. Their moral code was very strict, adultery and fornication being punished with death.

Despite Boucho’s keen desire to go to Nias, however, he could not be spared from the College at Penang, and the task fell to two young priests. Jean-Pierre Vallon, ordained only after his arrival in Penang in August 1831, caught Boucho’s enthusiasm to such an extent that the Vicar could not oppose ‘so obvious a vocation’ for Nias. His companion, Jean-Laurent Bérard, appears to have joined the mission partly because of difficulties experienced in Penang.

On 14 December 1831 the two priests left Penang in a small Malay vessel belonging to the Radja of Trumon, accompanied by a Nias catechist named Francisco and his wife Sophie. Their journey to Trumon by way of seven Atjehnese ports was slow and difficult. The Malay nakhoda and some hadji passengers returning from Mecca did their

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36 Boucho to Directors 24 May 1829, S.M.E. 888, ff. 154-5.
37 Ibid. ff. 154-6. Boucho’s scanty information was reasonably accurate. Both North and South Nias recognise Lowalangi (or Lubulangi) as the sky god from whom men derive life. The lord of the underworld is Latura, and it seems that Boucho’s Cekhou must be one of many locally important evil spirits. ‘A peculiarity of Nias law consists in the severity with which offences against women are dealt with. . . . Sexual morality . . . had diminished upon their becoming Christians.’ E. M. Loeb, Sumatra - Its History and People (Vienna, 1935), pp. 141-57. Also Encyclopedie van Nederlandsch-Indië III, 23.
best to convert Vallon and his party to Islam. At Trumon they encountered a state of war between the Radja and his subjects. By the time they reached the first Dutch port, Tapanuli (now Sibolga), the whole party was ill and Sophie was out of her mind.³⁹

The original plan had been to travel first to the main Dutch centre at Padang, to establish a Christian bridgehead among its five or six thousand Nias (mainly slave) residents. Having returned to health in Tapanuli and neighbouring Natal, however, Vallon was eager to go straight to Nias rather than risk further mishaps in travel. Bérard alone therefore continued the journey south to Padang.⁴⁰

Ignoring warnings from the Dutch military, whose experience in Nias had been particularly dismal, Vallon sailed with Francisco for the main trading and slaving port, Gunung Sitoli, in March 1832. Vallon improved his knowledge of the language, travelled through several villages and baptised a few children, before dying of unknown causes in June 1832. Bérard, "tout écrasé", received this mournful news as he lay with fever in Natal preparing to rejoin his colleague.⁴¹ Nevertheless he proceeded to Gunung Sitoli, where he died within a few days. Both priests were just 30. A sympathetic merchant, Bérard's host in Padang, described what little was known of their death:

Our friends already spoke enough Nias on their arrival in that island to make the poor islanders understand that their mission was entirely peaceful — that they in no way came to oppress them — on the contrary that it was for their spiritual & temporal good. They were well received by the inhabitants, who are not as bad as people say, which aroused the jealousy of their chiefs and of the Muslims, and it is supposed that as a result they were poisoned.⁴²

The accusation of poisoning was treated with great scepticism by this merchant, Embrecht. Subsequently, however, it assumed the status of fact in the official record by the efforts of Dutch officials anxious to emphasise the violence of Nias, and pious recorders seeking to add the halo of martyrdom to the heroic mission of these young priests. Poison is not mentioned by the American Congregationalist Lyman, the only other contemporary missionary to visit Nias. Lyman was in and around Gunung Sitoli for two weeks of June 1834, just before his own

⁴⁰ Bérard to de Copse 29 February 1832; Vallon to Boucho 1 March 1832; S.M.E. 888, ff. 281-7. Bérard's letter from Padang failed to mention the Nias colony there, however.
⁴¹ Bérard to Embrecht 15 June 1832, S.M.E. 888, ff. 313-4.
⁴² Embrecht to Supries 2 January 1833, S.M.E. 888, f. 415. Emphasis in original.
⁴³ Adrien Launay, Mémorial de la Société des Missions Étrangères (Paris, 1911-1916), II, pp. 36-7 and 615.
death among the Bataks. Despite his fear of 'the curse... of papal delusion', Lyman gave an endearing picture of Vallon and Bérard:

They were, from all we learn, monkish, clownish enthusiasts. Their pay was but one hundred Spanish dollars per annum, and they were miserably fitted out. They, however, refused all assistance for themselves, but willingly received old clothes from the officers, to give to the Nyas.\(^44\) One of them embarked at Padang,\(^45\) in a little open boat, which, after he had put in his own baggage, scarcely contained room for himself. He arrived at Gunung Stollis [Gunung Sitoli], and was kindly received by Messam [a Christian from Tapanuli, resident in Gunung Sitoli and married to a high-born Nias], who offered him his own house. But he chose rather to erect a little miserable open shed, on the hill, near the house of a petty chief. He visited among the people, and obtained a child of that chief as his pupil; but in a short time took a fever, and died. His servant, also, had the same fever, but returned soon after to Padang, and resided a while with Mr. Embrecht. This man was hardly dead, and his goods sealed up, ere the other came, having embarked at Natal, where he had been to visit the upper stations of the Dutch. But the fever was already upon him, and he only landed at Gunong Stolis, to linger out eight or ten days, and go to his final account.\(^46\)

The Société des Missions Étrangères did not abandon hope of Nias. It sent three more French priests to renew the work on better-prepared foundations in 1834. Problems of ecclesiastical jurisdiction had already arisen, however, and the priests sailed to Padang via Batavia, where they became involved with the Dutch Vicar Apostolic of Batavia and the colonial bureaucracy. Roman Catholic clergy had been officially permitted to enter Netherlands India only since 1808, and then under stringent conditions. They were forbidden to proselytise among Indonesians under Dutch control. The three priests encountered consistent official pressure to divert their attentions from Nias to the European population of Sumatra.

Until the French missionary initiative, no Dutch priest appears to have visited Sumatra. Vallon and Bérard had discovered that over half the two thousand or more Dutch soldiers in West Sumatra for the 'Padri' War were Roman Catholic, mainly of Belgian origin. Most lived with Indonesian women, but according to Bérard they were prepared to regularise these unions if their mistresses could be instructed and baptised. Dutch law prevented their marriage to non-Christians.

\(^{44}\) Bérard had pleaded for cloth to be sent from Penang, because he feared 'their state of nudity would make them unapproachable'. Bérard to de Copse 29 February 1832, S.M.E. 888, f. 284.

\(^{45}\) Vallon in fact embarked for Nias in a Chinese vessel from Natal, and never visited Padang. This may be a confusion with Bérard's very difficult voyage from Padang to Natal.

Bérard had spent some three months ministering to these soldiers and their women before his ill-fated journey to Nias. He had travelled as far south as Padang and Painan to visit them, and inland as far as Batu Sangkar, where he had climbed a mountain (Merapi?) barefoot! 47

This scattered European parish therefore provided a ready diversion from the dangerous challenge of Nias. The heroic enthusiasm for Nias of Vallon and Bérard appears in any case not to have been shared by their successors. One of the three later priests returned immediately from Padang to Batavia to plead for more money. The other two, Candalph and Galabert, accepted uncritically the hostile picture of Nias provided by embittered Dutch officials:

it is impossible for foreigners to penetrate the island without suffering death or at least being sold into slavery; and until this island is occupied by troops, any foreigner who wants to enter it will perish without fail.48

Worse still, Fr. Candalph proposed the 'almost certain' alternative method of buying Nias slaves in Padang, to be educated in servility as priests or catechists. While awaiting approval, Candalph and Galabert remained in Padang serving the European Catholics and baptising their illegitimate children. The Dutch Vicar Apostolic of Batavia made his first visit to Sumatra in November, 1834, and formally appointed Candalph Vicar of Padang. The French priests left Sumatra six months later, however, when the Dutch Governor-General continued to oppose their presence.49

This close identification with an unpopular colonial power brought to an end not only French but all effective Catholic missionary work in Sumatra for a century.

The Dutch duly occupied Gunung Sitoli in 1840, and brought fire and sword to the surrounding area in 1863. Not surprisingly the process of Christianising Nias, begun by the Rhenische (Lutheran) Mission in the wake of this conquest, was painfully slow.50

47 Bérard letters of 29 February, 5 and 18 March, 12 April and 15 June 1832, S.M.E. 888, ff. 281-4, 289-93, 297-8, and 313-4.
48 Candalph to Directors 29 November 1834, S.M.E. 888, f. 591.
50 Th. Muller Krüger, Sedjarah Geredja di Indonesia (2nd ed., Djakarta, 1966), pp. 235-6. Another Catholic priest, the Dutch Caspar de Heselle, died in Nias in 1854. He was already mortally afflicted with fever on arrival, and could not commence work. Van der Velden, p. 154.
The French Government appears to have had no connection whatever with this missionary initiative in Sumatra. It was only the rapid expansion of French commercial activity in the area in the 1820s and '30s which attracted serious official interest in Paris.

In the closing years of the eighteenth century a remarkable development of pepper cultivation had begun in the southernmost dependencies of the Atjeh Sultanate on the west coast of Sumatra. By 1820 this region had come to furnish about half the world's supply of pepper. While the Dutch and British still struggled to extract smaller amounts from their declining stations farther south under conditions of monopoly and forced labour, private traders flocked to buy this Atjehnese pepper. New England vessels took the lion's share, but Arab, Indian, Penang (British and Chinese), and French ships were all participating by the 1820s. In 1823 four large French ships were reported to have taken cargoes of pepper from the coast, as against twenty-seven American vessels. Twenty years later the French were considered to occupy third place behind Americans and British. Nine or ten of their vessels visited Penang each year, and most of them went on to Atjeh to collect pepper.

Successful trading on the Atjeh coast depended on fluency in Malay, if not Atjehnese, familiarity with the dangerous coast and its numerous tiny ports, and contacts with the Atjehnese rulers and traders who controlled the pepper. Those who acquired this special knowledge tended to spend a good part of their lives in the trade. With the development of Penang as an entrepôt they often used it as a base for multiple trips to Atjeh during one voyage from France. One example is provided by the most well-known and respected French trader of the period, Captain Martin of Marseilles. Leaving Marseilles in March 1838, he sailed to Sumatra via Bourbon for a lading of pepper, which he sold in Penang.


53 Martin was decorated by the French Government in 1843 for the way he had upheld the name of France in his long association with the Atjeh pepper coast.
He then returned for a second cargo of pepper, which he disposed of in Singapore. Finally he loaded 80,000 Kg. of tin in Penang, filled his holds with a third cargo of pepper in Atjeh, and sailed back via Bourbon to arrive in Marseilles in November 1839 — a total voyage of twenty months.\(^54\)

The fact that the Atjeh 'pepper coast' comprised numerous autonomous petty states, which acknowledged the sovereignty of the Atjeh Sultanate but paid little heed to its commands, made the coast a classic area of western 'gunboat diplomacy'. Captains who showed reasonable tact, patience, and fairness experienced few difficulties, and indeed established credit arrangements requiring a high degree of trust with the Atjehnese sellers. The rapid fluctuations of price in this unstable market, however, did give rise to conflicts which no political authority was in a position to resolve. Few foreigners sought any more centralised control, either Atjehnese or colonial, which might have put restrictions on their trade. Instead their ultimate recourse if attacked while trading in Atjeh was to ask their respective navies to destroy the village where the offence occurred. As a 'system' for the protection of trade it was arbitrary and barbaric, but at least it caused only temporary destruction when practised in moderation. The Atjehnese always withdrew inland until the avenging gunboat had completed its destruction, and rebuilt their wooden houses quickly on its departure.

British and Dutch warships had long used these methods in the Malay world, even including other parts of the Atjeh coast. It was the Americans, however, who introduced this form of chastisement to the West Atjeh pepper trade. American warships destroyed the coastal village of Kuala Batéë in 1826, and the same village together with neighbouring Meuké (Muckie) in 1838, in retaliation for the murders of Captains Endicot and Wilkins respectively. Soon after the second incident, in May 1839, the French Captain Van Tseghem of Nantes was fatally stabbed in a quarrel with a wealthy Atjehnese trader at Meuké. The Governor of Bourbon, where the French now had a strong naval presence, immediately sent La Dordogne to burn Meuké, just as it was getting on its feet after the American attack.

With this negative gesture began a brief period of French official interest in the West Atjeh pepper-coast. It was visited by four warships

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\(^{54}\) Martin to Commissaire de Marine, Marseilles, 16 November 1839, M.A.E. Mémoires et Documents, Asie 22, ff. 243-6.
from Bourbon in as many years. Much of the impetus for this came from reports by Captain Martin on the Van Tseghem affair, first to the Governor of Bourbon and subsequently to naval officials in France. After describing the attacks on Wilkins, Endicot and Van Tseghem, Martin continued,

Should we not naturally conclude... that these are atrocious people, with whom all relations should cease? Nevertheless it is the case that we would be mistaken in so judging them. It is not that I wish to be their defender or apologist, but I am persuaded and I have been able to verify by experience that in proportion to its population the West Coast of Sumatra does not provide many more evil subjects than other parts of India. Captains Wilkins and Endicot were assassinated by order of the Rajas; and they would not have ordered these barbarous acts without having asked and begged these very captains, over several years, not to behave fraudulently, loading half their cargoes at night. As for the Captain Van Tseghem business, there was no premeditation on their part; this was only the unfortunate consequence of a brawl.\[^{55}\]

Martin recommended that instead of burning market villages, which caused little loss to the Atjehnese, the gunboats should seize and destroy the boats of the offending port, which were always well-stocked with arms and money. On the positive side, the captain suggested that the French should capitalise on the fear of retribution of the Atjehnese around Meuké to demand the cession of part of the coast as a trading base. The Atjehnese, he claimed, were convinced that, in contrast with the upstart Americans, the French, 'first among the white races', would exact a terrible punishment. Moreover the contemporary Dutch attacks on Atjehnese border settlements just south of this pepper coast made the need for protection clear to all.\[^{56}\]

The Governor of Bourbon received Martin’s suggestion with some enthusiasm, sending the brig *Le Lancier* a few months behind *La Dordogne* to show the flag on the Atjeh coast and investigate the prospects for some sort of base. Stressing the poor state of French commerce in the Malay world, and the rapid expansion of British and Dutch territories there, he urged Paris to move quickly to establish a base on some part of Sumatra not yet occupied by Holland.\[^{57}\]

This opportunity struck France at a moment of greatly revived interest in the Far East in general and the Malay world in particular. As her economic and naval strength gradually returned, France was alarmed

\[^{55}\] Idem, f. 245.
\[^{56}\] Idem, f. 246.
\[^{57}\] Marine to Affaires Étrangères 30 April 1841, citing letter of Bourbon Government of July 1840, M.A.E., Mémoires et Documents Asie 23, ff. 20-21.
to discover the extent and continued growth of British commercial predominance in the East. The 'well-nigh desperate concern' of the regimes which ruled France after 1830 to recover international great-power status gave rise to an unaccustomed eagerness to come to the aid of French traders and missionaries.\textsuperscript{58} So limited was the existing French stake in Asian trade that the pepper-traders of the Atjeh coast were seized upon with gratitude. In Bourbon the Chamber of Commerce claimed wishfully that French commerce predominated on the Sumatra coast.\textsuperscript{59}

Nothing did more to bring home to the French the growing value of the Far Eastern trade, and the key role which Singapore played in this for the British, than the activity of Adolphe Barrot as first French Consul in Manila (1835-8). He proved a splendid propagandist for the commercial attractions of Southeast Asia. On leave in 1839 he succeeded in winning his Government and a number of leading commercial houses throughout France to a broad strategy to break into the burgeoning trade of the East. He was sent back as Consul General for 'Indochine' (meaning all Southeast Asia), based at Manila. His deputy Eugène Chaigneau, a veteran of lengthy and abortive negotiations in Annam, was to be based in Singapore, where he did not obtain an exequatur as first French Consul until 1840. The Dutch would allow no Consul in Batavia, but Barrot appointed a French merchant there as 'correspondent'. Another agent was installed in Macao. From all of these sources, but particularly from Chaigneau in Singapore, a stream of information was provided about the commercial possibilities of the region. Barrot and Chaigneau agreed, however, that the best way to compete with the British in Singapore and the Dutch in Batavia was to establish a comparable French base in Southeast Asian waters.\textsuperscript{60}

For a few months following the receipt of Martin's report and that of the Bourbon Governor, the possibility of acquiring territory in Sumatra for a French Naval and commercial base was actively considered in Paris. By early 1841, however, the Ministries involved (Affaires Étrangères, Marine et Colonies, Commerce) had all agreed that this was impracticable in view of French cordiality towards the Netherlands, which had already manifested its 'pretensions... for the

\textsuperscript{58} Cady, pp. 17, 25 and 29.

\textsuperscript{59} Report of Captain le Comte, 21 June 1843, M.A.E., Mémoires et Documents, Asie 23, f. 135.

\textsuperscript{60} Jean-Paul Faire, \textit{L'Expansion Française dans le Pacifique, 1800-1842}. (Paris, 1953), pp. 367-82.
integral occupation of Sumatra'. Interest turned further East, where the Opium Wars would soon open the Treaty Ports in China, bringing about a general redirection of commerce in that direction. Various possible bases were considered on the fringes of the Dutch and Spanish empires in the Malay Archipelago — Sulu, Basilan, Sumbawa, Borneo, as well as Pulo Condore or Tourane in Vietnam. When Lagréné's large-scale attempt to occupy Basilan for France ended in fiasco in 1845, French interest shifted away from the Archipelago altogether in favor of the East Asian mainland. France became ever more deeply embroiled in the affairs of Vietnam and China, and the conquest of Saigon in 1859 provided the needed point d'appui for French commerce there.

The period of official French concern with the Malay world was thus fairly brief, between about 1839 and 1845. Initiatives taken during this period were of more lasting significance, however. The chair of Malay which had been neglected at the beginning of the century was finally established in 1844, as a result of the Foreign Minister's insistence on the necessity 'of facilitating the teaching in France of a language as widespread as Malay is from the Cape of Good Hope to New Guinea and the north of the Philippines', especially when France was engaged in strengthening its commercial and political links with Southeast Asia. Édouard Dulaurier, an Arabist whose interest had shifted to Malay during a visit to London in 1838, thus became one of the first professors of that language in any country. Throughout the remainder of the 19th century he and his successors Favre and Marre made Paris one of the leading centres for Malay scholarship.

Official Relations between Atjeh and France

The diversion of official French interest from Sumatra to Basilan and then Indo-China did not prevent a growing interest on the part of Atjeh in this potential new ally. Atjehnese could not but be impressed with the succession of French warships suddenly reinforcing the French pepper-traders between 1839 and 1843. The first visits were not particularly friendly. La Dordogne had destroyed Meuké in 1839, and Le Lancier did the same for Seunagan in February 1840 after the

61 Marine et Colonies to Affairs Étrangères 30 April 1841, and reply 8 June 1841, M.A.E. Mémoires et Documents, Asie 23, ff. 20-1 and 48-9.
63 Damais, pp. 140-1.
murder there of the first mate of the Marseilles trader *Comte de Paris*.\(^{64}\) This second attack, before any attempt had been made to investigate the cause of murder, had reportedly infuriated the vigorous Atjehnese Sultan of the period, Ala’ad-din Mansur Shah, popularly known as Ibrahim (1838-1870).\(^{65}\)

On the other hand Captain Martin, on a visit to the Atjehnese capital in August 1840, was able to assure the Sultan that the chastisement of Seunagan had not been approved in Bourbon and did not imply any official French hostility toward Atjeh. Indeed the Governor sent the frigate *La Magicienne* to Seunagan in September 1840, expressly to restore the good relations interrupted by *Le Lancier*’s over-hasty bombardment.\(^{66}\)

Before *La Magicienne*’s arrival, Sultan Ibrahim had already given Captain Martin a letter for King Louis-Philippe, ‘who rules with justice the city of Marseilles’. The Sultan appealed to an alliance between France and Atjeh which he had heard existed in the time of his grandfather.\(^{67}\) He sought to revive this imaginary alliance in view of the seemingly relentless Dutch advance on the West Coast, where they had already taken Singkil and Barus (1839-40) at Atjeh’s expense. Ibrahim was convinced:

> we will have to fight the Dutch because they want to occupy our Kingdom. Nevertheless, with the help of God, we will yield them no part of it. What concerns us particularly in this matter is the ability of the Dutch on the sea, whereas we do not know how to fight there. We therefore come to ask help of our friend… If he helps us to gain the victory, we will give him a base wherever it suits him.

> We make known further to our friend, regarding the merchant ships which come from the Kingdom of France, which is under his dominion, that he should order them to visit our Kingdom [i.e. the capital, Banda Atjeh] so that we can give them the permission and the facilities to sail wherever they wish to trade. If, after having come to Atjeh, they are subsequently robbed, we undertake formally to be responsible to them for the value of all the goods lost. This is what I have to say to our magnificent ally.\(^{68}\)


\(^{65}\) Captain Le Comte of the corvette *La Fortune* discovered in Meulaboh in 1843 that the Atjehnese who had piloted *Le Lancier* to Seunagan in 1840 was afraid to visit Banda Atjeh because of the Sultan’s anger. M.A.E. Mémoires et Documents, Asie 23, ff. 134-5.


\(^{67}\) His grandfather was Sultan Ala’ad-din Muhammad Shah (1781-95), who had visited Ile de France as a youth and received de Suffren’s fleet in 1782.

\(^{68}\) Sultan Mansur Shah to King Louis-Philippe 15 Jumadi II, 1256H (14 August 1840). Dulaurier’s French translation of 24 April 1841, from which this extract is taken, is in M.A.E. Mémoires et Documents, Hollande 152, ff. 159-60. I was unable to locate the Malay original.
Ibrahim’s demand that the European powers invoke the authority of the Atjehnese sovereign, rather than settling matters directly with his vassals, was a consistent one throughout the nineteenth century. Although perfectly within his rights in pointing this out to French, British, American and Dutch alike, the Sultan was too weak to enforce it. It suited the Western traders to avoid entanglements with the Sultanate and remain free to play off the powerless pepper-producing tributaries of the West Coast against one another. The Americans, despite the great value of their trade with Atjeh throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, appear never to have had any formal relations with the Sultanate in this period. The French similarly preferred to avoid the capital until after receipt of Ibrahim’s letter. Only in February 1843 did the Corvette *La Fortune* call at Banda Atjeh in the course of a detailed investigation of North Sumatra and Pegu, called for by the Minister of the Navy and the Colonies. The Governor of Bourbon had also commissioned its commander, Le Comte, to encourage French commerce, in particular by obtaining Atjehnese acceptance of the French 5 Franc piece.

On his preliminary tour of the West Coast ports Le Comte was repeatedly referred to the capital on the question of currency — mainly, one may assume, as a polite way of avoiding having to point out the difficulty of disposing of French coins, in contrast to the popular Spanish silver dollar. On the other hand he found the rulers of the states nearest to the Dutch garrison of Singkil more emphatic than ever in their desire for French protection. Bulo Samah and Trumon, where the leading men of Singkil had settled after failing in its defence, had a particular hatred of the Dutch:

They told me formally that their greatest desire is that France should take them under its protection, and that they wanted to be French.\(^{69}\)

In Banda Atjeh Le Comte was received with great formality but little warmth. Sultan Ibrahim undertook to do his best to have French coins accepted, and replied to Le Comte’s greeting in the name of the Governor of Bourbon by saying

*That formerly* there had been good relations of friendship between his country and France, and that it did not depend upon him to have them re-established.\(^{70}\)

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\(^{70}\) Idem f. 137.
The question of the sack of Seunagan was discreetly sidestepped at the royal audience on February 25. The following day, however, the Shahbandar and the Sultan's secretary made clear to Le Comte that Ibrahim remained upset about the attack on Seunagan, and repeated the demand that French vessels call first at Banda Atjeh before trading on the coast.\(^{71}\)

Le Comte would have fared much better had he brought some answer to Sultan Ibrahim's letter of 1840. Consistent with the arbitrariness which appeared to govern all France's actions in Sumatra, however, a reply was written only in January 1843, when *La Fortune* was already on its way to Atjeh. Louis-Philippe himself then signed a gracious letter expressing his desire for closer relations, and for the Sultan's continued protection of French trading vessels.\(^{72}\)

Ibrahim was accustomed to receiving letters from the British Governor of the Straits Settlements, or the Dutch Governor of Padang. This was the first time that he, or any of his predecessors since the 17th century, had received a friendly letter from a European Head of State. Not surprisingly the impressive letter, which appears to have been delivered by a warship, was one of the few documents safely preserved in the Atjehnese palace until the Dutch conquest of 1874. It appears also to have disposed Ibrahim to regard the little-known French as perhaps his most promising potential ally.

Well before the French monarch had signed this letter, the Quai d'Orsay had decided against the possibility of establishing a naval station in Atjeh. Yet the short-lived period of official interest had made an impression on some of the French pepper-traders, who may in addition have been sounded out by the Sultan when they visited Banda Atjeh. In 1845 Noel Berchou of Nantes, an Atjeh pepper-trader for fifteen years, resurrected the issue with the foreign ministry. He claimed to possess great influence in Atjeh, where the Sultan and his chiefs 'have often manifested to me the desire they have to be under the protection of the French King'.\(^{73}\) Berchou was politely turned down, and seemed to be growing more desperate by the following year, when the Minister of Agriculture and Commerce was informed that Berchou was planning

\(^{71}\) Idem f. 138.
\(^{72}\) King Louis-Philippe to Sultan of Atjeh 2 January 1843, reproduced in E.S. de Klerck; *De Atjèh-oorlog* (The Hague, 1912), p. 435.
\(^{73}\) Berchou to Guizot 12 August 1845, M.A.E. Mémoires et Documents, Asie 23, ff. 273-4.
to 'sell' his interests in Atjeh to the British, having been rejected by his own government.74

Sultan Ibrahim did not reply formally to Louis-Philippe's letter until early 1849. Taking advantage of the intended pilgrimage to Mecca of Muhammad Ghauth, a wealthy nephew of the ulêëbalang of Meulaboh distantly related to the ruling house, Ibrahim entrusted him with two further important missions. He was to carry to Constantinople an appeal for diplomatic and military support on the basis of Atjeh's strong sentimental and religious ties with Turkey. At the same time he was to journey to Paris to present a letter to Louis Napoleon, whom he addressed as 'Paduka Sri Sultan Republic Peranchis'.

Ibrahim's letter to the French President began with gratitude for the letter of Louis Philippe, promised that French coins would be accepted, and repeated the request that French traders call first at Banda Atjeh for a safe-conduct. But Ibrahim had pressing needs of his own:

'May you give me a warship or if possible two, so that I can control the people of each state and town. If there is a warship all the ulêëbalangs will certainly be afraid of me. Regarding payment for this ship I have the necessary goods, but I wish to postpone payment if possible for two years. Once this period is up I will pay you the price. Please ensure the ship is complete with equipment.

Furthermore I ask your great mercy, because my country has been taken by the Dutch. There are two or three towns, beginning with Airbangis and extending to Singkil as well as the island Nias, whichhave been taken by the Dutch because these countries are rather far from Atjeh. May it be by your prayer and your decision that the Dutch are removed from all these states.

The Sultan's letter ended with a statement of complete confidence in Muhammad Ghauth as his plenipotentiary.75

The embassy of Muhammad Ghauth produced striking results at both the French and Turkish courts, each of which appears to have seized eagerly upon this exotic evidence of its international status. The envoy proceeded from Mecca to Constantinople sometime in 1850, to find Sultan Abdul Mejid highly gratified with the homage he brought from such a distant 'vassal'. The Turkish Sultan issued two firmans renewing his ancient 'protectorate' over Atjeh. To facilitate his homeward journey

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75 Sultan Ibrahim to President of France 15 Rabi I, 1265H (8 February 1849), M.A.E. Mémoires et Documents, Hollande 152, f. 161. This is my translation from the Malay text, of which a romanised version follows in an Appendix.
Muhammad Ghauth was given a recommendation to the Khedive in Egypt, while the Turkish Governor of Yemen was instructed to send the envoy on to Atjeh.\textsuperscript{76}

This royal treatment must have precluded the continuation of Muhammad Ghauth’s mission to Paris, quite apart from practical difficulties of money and language. While in Cairo on his return journey in 1852, therefore, he entrusted Sultan Ibrahim’s letter to the French Consul, along with his own apology for his ‘inability to come in person’.\textsuperscript{77}

Louis Napoleon, however, was obviously flattered to receive a letter from this obscure oriental kingdom, particularly in the honorific French into which the orientalist Desgranges rendered the rather casual original.\textsuperscript{78} He authorised Ghauth’s journey to Paris as a guest of the government, while 5,000 Francs were set aside for his expenses in France.\textsuperscript{79}

Whether the envoy was still in Cairo to receive this reply is not clear. However the Atjehnese who took advantage of the offer, who was escorted around Paris by Foreign Ministry officials, and who was finally received by the Prince-President on 31 October 1852, was clearly not Muhammad Ghauth. It was his young writer Teuku Nyak Adum, who became known in France as Sidi Muhammad. Perhaps the French did not care. In any case they did not appear to realise the mistake until after the envoy’s departure. Meanwhile he and an Atjehnese companion lived in France at government expense for almost a year, before being sent back to Atjeh in January 1853 with a magnificent sword as a present from Napoleon to Sultan Ibrahim.

The incident naturally created some alarm in The Hague, which was little accustomed to such flamboyant imperial gestures. The Dutch need not have worried. As they were told, the Atjehnese visit was simply ‘a matter of curiosity’.\textsuperscript{80} Its only political significance was the exotic

\textsuperscript{76} Anthony Reid, \textit{The Contest for North Sumatra} (Kuala Lumpur, 1969), p. 84.
\textsuperscript{78} Mohammad Ghaus to Louis Napoleon 21 Jumadi I, 1268H (12 March 1852), French translation in M.A.E. Mémoires et Documents, Hollande 152, f. 167.
\textsuperscript{79} Alix Desgranges, Professor of Turkish at the Collège de France, translated from the Arabic text of Ibrahim’s letter, assuming it to be identical with the Malay text. \textit{If so, his translation was unusually free}. M.A.E. Mémoires et Documents, Hollande 152, ff. 161-5.
\textsuperscript{80} Affaires Etrangères to Lemoyne 20 April 1852, M.A.E., Egypte, Dépêches Politiques des Consuls, Alexandria, 24, f. 69.
\textsuperscript{81} Dutch Ambassador, Paris, to Buitenlandse Zaken, 1 and 2 November 1852, Archive of Buitenlandse Zaken dossier 3076. Also De Klerck, pp. 208-9.
embellishment it was intended to give to the court of the Prince-President — soon to be Emperor.

The honour of transporting 'Sidi Muhammad' back to Sumatra was given, in January 1853, to Noel Berchou, the Nantes pepper-trader who had earlier claimed such influence in Atjeh. He became increasingly suspicious about the envoy's credentials, and finally discovered his real identity upon arrival in Atjeh. Berchou appeared not to be amused, complaining that 'Sidi' had even tried to swindle him in a pepper transaction.81

The Sidi Muhammad affair ended official French relations with the independent rulers of Sumatra. Like the missionaries earlier, the French Government henceforth conducted its relations exclusively through the Dutch as overlords. In 1856 a full-time French Consul for Sumatra was sent to the seat of the Dutch Governor at Padang, over thirty years earlier than any other foreign consul in the island. The appointment to a small Dutch garrison town must have originated with the interest of the previous decade in the Atjehnese pepper trade. It is characteristic of French relations with Sumatra, however, that the only period of official French representation was also one of exceptionally low French involvement. During the 1850s French pepper ships virtually ceased to visit Sumatra as the market for Atjeh pepper shifted to Penang, served by regular steam lines. Until the Consulate's abolition in 1865, successive Consuls had nothing with which to fill their time except an occasional report on Dutch military activity and a continuing squabble to establish their diplomatic privileges.82 The task of reviving French commercial interest was obviously hopeless. The last and most interesting of the Consuls, Le Comte A. de Pina, pointed out that Dutch policies made it impossible for any European merchant to survive in their Sumatran possessions.83

Although de Pina collected some interesting material on Sumatra, it was only after the revival of French interest during the 1870s that he was able to find a publisher for it. His book was remarkable for its final chapter, in which he advanced the cause of Malay as the great lingua franca of Asia. Instead of struggling to master Vietnamese, Thai

81 Berchou to Affaires Étrangères n.d. [1853], M.A.E. Mémoires et Documents Asie 24, ff. 11-12.
82 The Correspondence of these consuls is in M.A.E. Pays-Bas, Correspondence Politique des Consuls, No. 5 (1857-69).
and Chinese, de Pina argued, France should promote Malay:
expand it in our East Asian possessions, encourage its study at home, and make
it obligatory for officials destined for colonial service.84

The Atjeh-Dutch War, 1873

The interest France had shown in Atjeh in the early 1850s was ephemeral, like that of Turkey. Both countries had forgotten Atjeh’s existence within a few years. But despite the absence of continuing relations, Atjeh continued to regard these two Powers as the most promising potential source of help against the Dutch. About 1862 Sultan Ibrahim asked an Italian adventurer at his court, Cesar Moreno, to look to France in the first instance for a defensive treaty against the Dutch.85 When Habib Abdur-Rahman az-Zahir came to guide Atjeh’s foreign relations after 1870, it was again France and Turkey which he looked upon with greatest favour. The Habib even claimed in his memoirs to have been twice in France, once in his youth and once as Atjehnese envoy in 1873.86

When in November 1873 it became clear to Atjehnese leaders that the Dutch were determined to establish their power over Atjeh by one means or another, there was a considerable burst of diplomatic activity. On the one hand the royal favourite Muhammad Tibang was sent to Singapore to try to delay Dutch overtures while sounding out the representatives of the major European powers. Britain had already proved a disappointment. The importance of France in Atjehnese hopes was indicated by the fact that Tibang carried one royal letter specifically addressed to the Consul of France, and another open letter to serve the consuls of all the other powers. However Tibang appears to have been persuaded in Singapore to by-pass the unsympathetic French Consul in favour of the American.87

84 Ibid. p. 315.
85 A. Reid, The Contest, p. 85. Later, in America, Moreno referred to the two letters and the sword from France, which Sultan Ibrahim has asked him to translate and explain.
86 Alexander, ‘Korte Levensschets van de Arabier Habib Abdoo’r Rahman Alzahir’, De Indische Gids 2 (1880). Part II, 1010 and 1016. See also my translation of the same memoirs in Indonesia 13 (1972), pp. 45 and 54-5. An 1873 visit to France was certainly imaginary, and it seems probable that the earlier one was also based on ‘Sidi Muhammad’s experiences rather than the Habib’s own.
Soon after Habib Abdur-Rahman az-Zahir, regent of Atjeh, arrived in Penang on the French steamer Patty owned by his friend Édouard Roura. Early in January 1873 he took the mail steamer for Jidda and Europe, letting it be known that he intended to appeal to both French and Turkish Governments. When Holland declared war on Atjeh on 26 March he was still no further than Mecca. His first thought on hearing of the Dutch invasion appeared to be France, and the French Consul in Jidda reported early in April that the Habib was on his way to Paris. However like Tibang he seems to have discovered France's real attitude quite quickly, probable in Cairo, and he decided instead to concentrate solely on Turkey.

In the panicky mood into which the Netherlands was thrown prior to the declaration of war on Atjeh, and still more after the Dutch expedition had retreated from Atjeh in defeat on April 25, the slightest indications of foreign support for Atjeh were wildly exaggerated. France, along with Italy, America, Turkey and Britain, was momentarily suspect. But of all these states France went to the greatest lengths to assure The Hague of full support in the war. While Britain and America attempted to pursue at least a formal neutrality, President Thiers wrote personally to The Hague to convey his confident prayers, 'that Dutch arms may establish their legitimate ascendancy in the Indies'. If, he added, 'the Sultan of Atjeh had the singular idea of addressing himself to us, he would be abruptly repudiated'.

Consistently with this policy Thier's successor MacMahon refused to reply to a written appeal of July 1873 from Teuku Paya, an Atjehnese leader in Penang, complaining about the false accusations of the Dutch. The letter was immediately shown to the Dutch Government. The French Ambassador in Constantinople, similarly, was instructed to advise Turkey to drop its plans for mediation in the war.

Having at last recovered its role as a colonial power in Asia, France was no longer interested in flirting with the peripheries of the Dutch empire. The Government could now find no particular French interest in North Sumatra beyond the 'chaos of piracy' which it feared would result from an Atjehnese victory. Policy was therefore governed-

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88 Affaires Étrangères to Gabriac (The Hague) 19 April 1873, M.A.E. Pays-Bas, Depêches Politiques 672, f. 102.
89 Thiers to Gabriac 27 April 1873, loc. cit., f. 119.
90 Reid, 'Indonesian Diplomacy', pp. 90-1.
91 Affaires Étrangères to Bresson (The Hague) 9 August 1873, M.A.E. Pays-Bas, Depêches Politiques 672, ff. 242-3.
92 Marine et Colonies to Affaires Étrangères 6 May 1873, loc. cit., ff. 150-1.
exclusively by friendship with Holland and 'solidarity among all the countries of Europe in regard to their eastern policies', to see that European 'prestige' was maintained.  

The Geographical Movement

For French governments of the 1870s Continental strategy was paramount. The pursuit of effective colonial schemes had to be sacrificed to the all-consuming demand to make good the humiliation of 1871, and to heal the wounds of the Paris commune. The overwhelming public sentiment was against wasting on expensive colonies resources which could be used for the task of national survival in Europe.

A minority of French intellectuals and businessmen, on the other hand, reacted quite differently, seeking salvation overseas from the disaster suffered in Europe. The vehicle for such views was the geographical movement. Geographical societies blossomed throughout Europe in the 1870s, but in France they became an obsession. The hitherto austere Société de Géographie in Paris opened the way by announcing in 1871 that it would no longer limit itself to pure scholarship, but would pursue the more urgent imperative of demonstrating a new and successful foreign role for French enterprise. Within three years the society doubled in membership, and before the end of the decade it had spawned a dozen geographical societies in the provinces. The recipe under which these societies flourished was a blend, as Mackay puts it, of 'national honor, scientific interests, and commercial prosperity'. Frenchmen must be made aware of the dazzling commercial and civilising opportunities that awaited them in Africa and the East. By supporting exploration and colonisation Frenchmen were serving science, commerce and the Fatherland all at once.

One of the most interesting off-shoots of the movement was the Société de Géographie Commerciale, which resulted from a commission formed in 1874 by the Société de Géographie on the one hand and the Paris Chambers of Commerce on the other. By 1876 it had assumed a separate life, dedicated to placing the latest scientific knowledge of foreign places at the disposal of French commerce. Among its first projects was to prepare a map of the globe showing every place where Frenchmen resided and where the French government was represented.

93 Affaires Étrangères to Duchesse de Bellecourt (Batavia) 8 October 1873, M.A.E. Pays-Bas, Dépêches Politiques des Consuls 8, ff. 292-3.
Although the principal emphasis of the movement was Africa, the opportunities for France in the Far East were not forgotten. The most ambitious Asian venture arising from the Paris Société de Géographie was the formation of a task force called the colons explorateurs, to establish an experimental commercial colony in the East as a base for further scientific and commercial work. The founder and moving spirit of this project, Brau de Saint-Pol Lias, proclaimed the manifesto of the group as follows:

the true way to study a country seriously is to support exploration upon colonial establishments which allow it all the length of time, all the continuity which it must have, all the security which it must enjoy; just as the way to harvest all the fruits of exploration is to have the exploration radiate from these establishments, to place, behind the explorers, colonists of which they are the avant-garde, who can profit from their discoveries, take root were they have penetrated, and push them yet further afield.

The enthusiasm of Brau de St-Pol Lias for his vision of a revived expansionist France was tireless and infectious. One of the instigators of the Société de Géographie Commerciale, he was convinced that France could only return to her traditional place of honour among nations by forging a new vigour in the fires of overseas adventure:

Colonization is the most effective spring from which the powers of a people can be refreshed. It not only produces wealth; it makes men vigorous and energetic; it tempers characters.

He never ceased to denounce the argument that Frenchmen lacked the aptitude for colonization, or the adaptability to foreign languages and customs. Every example to the contrary is emphasised in his books.

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86 François-Xavier-Joseph-Honoré Brau de Saint-Pol Lias (1840-1914) trained as a lawyer in Paris, and worked for five years (1868-73) in the Banque de France. Thereafter he devoted himself entirely to publicising the geographical and colonial movements. A prominent member of the Paris Société de Géographie, he was also a founder of the Société des Etudes coloniales et maritimes (1873), and the Société de Géographie Commerciale. The convening by the latter society of a Congrès Internationale de géographie commerciale in 1878 was largely at his initiative. He founded various French companies to operate in Sumatra, Malaya and Indo-China, and travelled to Java and Sumatra (1876-7); Sumatra and Malaya (1880-1); and Burma, Indo-China and Malaya (1884). His numerous writings depict the opportunities in these countries in glowing colours.


Indeed, he argued in a fascinating extension of Hobsonian logic, it was not only the need to dispose of excess manufactures which demanded that Europe acquire Asian colonies, but the problem of excess talent, education and leadership. Capable men ‘finding nothing to organise at home... are led by a fatal necessity into disorganising something’. The disastrous deficiency in France was not talent, but a firm colonial policy.

Unlike many of his colleagues in the geographical movement, however, Brau’s concern was not limited to the expansion of French territory. Colonization to him was the work of individuals and firms as much as governments. France, like Germany before her, would draw great benefit from the commercial ventures of her sons in foreign colonies. Equally, like Holland, she would gain from possessing colonial territories even if they were exploited by foreigners. Resentful of British attempts to curb French expansion while fattening on her own Empire, Brau was nevertheless a Europeanist in his approach to colonization. His bitterest denunciations of Britain were because of her refusal to co-operate with the ‘patriotisme de race’ which was his vision for Europe in its dealings with Asia.

For these reasons Brau’s first commercial adventures were directed to the newest and apparently richest possessions of the Netherlands and Britain, rather than to French territory. Brau saw himself as a French pioneer at the colonial frontier, whose efforts would bring wealth, prestige, and the growing stimulus of foreign adventure to France without necessarily extending her territory.

As an initial experimental base for the colonos explorateurs Brau selected the booming new plantation district of East Sumatra, centred around the minor sultanate of Deli. The remarkable suitability of this area for tobacco-growing had been demonstrated just a decade earlier by the Dutch planter Nienhuys. Despite numerous last-minute defections Brau eventually brought together a half-dozen enthusiastic Frenchmen, who subscribed their own capital for the expedition of which they formed the members. There was a young mining engineer, Wallon; an even younger ‘agriculturalist’, Tabel, and his assistant; a doctor; and a few non-specialists. After two difficult months in Java obtaining the necessary Dutch official backing, they succeeded in marking out a plantation in the last months of 1876. Their concession was in remote

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100 Chez les Atchéês, pp. xii-xxii.
101 Ibid. p. x. Also De France à Sumatra (Paris, 1884), pp. 79-80.
Bedagai, bordering Batu Bara and Simelungun Batak territory. At that time it was well to the south of the recognised frontier of the tobacco plantation area of Deli.  

For two years this tobacco plantation cut from the virgin jungle at Bedagai struggled on. The first crop was good, the second disappointing. But it was not the continuing routine of finding labour, planting, and harvesting that called to these romantic French hearts, but the lure of discovery. Within six months of arrival the colons-explorateurs had already fallen out with each other in their rush for the fabled gold of Sumatra.

The Quest for Atjeh Gold

Gold is present at many points of the mountain ridge running down the western side of Sumatra, and has been exploited throughout historic times. For the early Portuguese Minangkabau had been the best-known centre of gold production. Further north, Atjeh had also exploited the alluvial gold of the mountain ridge since at least the 17th century. The richest area in Atjeh was the federation of uleëbalangships known as Kawaj XII, at the headwaters of the Teunom and Wojla rivers, whose population had been principally occupied in panning for gold until the nineteenth century pepper-boom drew them nearer the West coast. About 1840 the ruler of Seunagan, further south, also encouraged two hundred Chinese to work the alluvial gold in the higher reaches of his river, although their efforts were ultimately thwarted by disease. The existence of gold in these areas was never a secret. In 1877 a brochure was published in Amsterdam arguing that the gold in the mountain backbone of Sumatra was potentially as rich as the Californian and Australian fields, though since it had been worked for centuries there would be no windfalls for the casual surface prospector. However the dramatic and widely-reported Dutch setbacks in attempting to conquer Atjeh after 1873 tended to inflate the idea of spectacular riches awaiting the conqueror.

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102 'Deli et les Colons-explorateurs Français', pp. 298-327. De France à Sumatra, pp. 48-54. Pétrak, pp. 6-9. W. H. M. Schadee, Geschiedenis van Sumatra's Oostkust (Amsterdam, 1918-19) II, 103-4, notes that the Bedagai area was only officially opened to planters in 1882.
The *colonos-explorateurs* very probably had their attention drawn to West Atjeh gold by Édouard Roura, the only French sea captain still operating in Sumatran waters. Although of Spanish origin Roura had been naturalised in Marseilles, and had traded in Atjeh pepper since the 1850s with his base in Penang. At the outbreak of the Atjeh war he was considered to be the European trader best acquainted with Atjeh, speaking Atjehnese and having close relations with the *ulëbalangs* of the West Coast pepper-growing states — especially Paté. Habib Abdur-Rahman, the regent of Atjeh, was his friend. The Dutch wooed him with special exemption from their blockade, and later by chartering his vessel the *Patty*, in return for his information and his influence. But Roura was too well aware of Atjehnese determination to resist to give the Dutch much pleasure. He constantly stressed the need for negotiation, and fell increasingly out of favour with a government committed to military victory. By 1876 he was very embittered against the Dutch, whom he felt had given him inadequate compensation for the loss of his pepper trade and the help he had provided.

During the early months of 1877 the mining engineer of the ‘*colonos explorateurs*’, Wallon, toured Teunom and Wojla, quite possibly with the help of Roura who made a voyage to the coast in late January.¹⁰⁵ Wallon must have obtained the support at least of Teuku Imam Muda of Teunom, the most important *ulëbalang* of the area, who was just then negotiating his submission to the Dutch.

Despite his inability on this visit to cope with water seepage into his experimental diggings, Wallon became insatiably eager to return to exploit the fabled gold.¹⁰⁶ He immediately set about organising a large-scale expedition on his own account, setting off a bitter disagreement with Brau de St-Pol Lias, ‘which ended all relations between us’.¹⁰⁷ By November of 1877 Wallon had found his own financial backing in Paris and returned to Singapore with another engineer, Moulle, and a businessman, Pillard. In a clumsy attempt to deceive the Dutch, the group claimed to be going to West Atjeh to buy pepper and establish an agricultural enterprise. Evidently they were foolish enough to think that if they succeeded in negotiating mineral agreements with the local rulers, the Dutch would then be reluctantly obliged to accept their pre-emption of the fabulous wealth they envisaged there.

¹⁰⁵ Lavino to Governor-General 13 March 1877, A.R.A. Consulaatsarchief, Penang 102.
In reality Dutch officials in West Atjeh had no illusions about Wallon's intentions, and commended his enterprise. Nevertheless the Frenchmen were not allowed in to the Teunom area in late 1877, to their intense annoyance, because the Dutch could offer no security whatever.

The colons explorateurs did not long survive the dispute over gold. Brau left the East Sumatran plantation for Paris about March 1877. He hoped to find additional finance to enable him to use the plantation as the base for exploiting West Atjeh gold. However he had little control over the other colons explorateurs, who had contributed their own funds and envisaged more spectacular roles for themselves than planting tobacco. Most of the group drifted back to France. Brau failed to find in Paris the money to keep Tabel going, and when his own resources were exhausted in 1878 the experiment had to be abandoned. Tabel remained in Deli as the chief assistant on the only other French plantation in Sumatra — that of the two brothers De Guigné, from Réunion. In 1886 Tabel organised finance in Paris for his own Société de tabac de Deli, but this too failed within a few years because of the poor location of its concession.

The experience with his colons explorateurs modified Brau's colonial theories considerably. The romantic assumptions which had led the original colons to pool their resources and energies now seemed hopelessly unrealistic for a permanent business operation. Above all the colons explorateurs had failed to reinforce the authority of the leader with a single source of capital. The objective therefore had to be the formation of a large-scale Compagnie coloniale d'études et de préparation d'entreprises commerciales, industrielles, et agricoles, similar to the great British Chartered Companies being formed at this time.

By the beginning of 1880 Brau had succeeded at least in forming 'an embryo of this company', the aims of which would be to demonstrate the practicability of his new vision. The most spectacular profits now seemed to be in minerals rather than agriculture, however. Brau's only

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111 Schadée II, 196.
112 De France à Sumatra, pp. 56-9.
113 Ibid., pp. 59-61.
companion was therefore a mining engineer, M. J. Errington de la Croix, with whom he left Toulon in January 1880. The first objective was the gold of Atjeh, 'one of the richest countries in the world, and still one of the least known'. 114 Failing this, they would explore the tin resources of Malaya or the minerals of Borneo.

Although conditions in West Atjeh were hardly very different in 1880 from 1877, the Dutch attitude had changed. Desperately short of men, money, and national will to go on killing Atjehnese, the Netherlands was anxious to prove to itself and the world, despite most of the evidence, that the war was really over. 115 In response to Dutch statements to this effect, Brau's party and that of Wallon began at the end of 1879 a race to reach the hitherto forbidden eldorado in West Atjeh.

Wallon made sure of being the winner. Accompanied by Guilhaume, another mining engineer, and Courret, the son of the principal financier of his party, he arrived in Singapore a few weeks before Brau. After a short period obtaining the necessary approval in Batavia, Wallon took a steamer to Padang and then a small Atjehnese prahu from there north to Meulaboh, instead of following the orthodox steam route via Penang and Ulêëlheüë. When Brau and Errington de la Croix reached Singapore on 1 March 1880, Wallon's party was already at Meulaboh.

Wallon's relationship with Dutch officialdom was a crude caricature of Brau's. Brau and Errington, although officially entrusted by the Ministry of Public Instruction with a mission scientifique, made clear to Dutch officials that they regarded the quest for an economically viable enterprise as the more important object of their journey. 116 Wallon lacked these scholarly credentials, but engaged in an elaborate pretence that his haste to reach Atjeh and explore the gold-bearing regions was 'animated by a fervent love for science'. 117 The French Consul was alarmed lest in being discovered Wallon would involve the French in great embarrassment, especially as he was smuggling several rifles in as gifts for the radjas with whom he wanted to sign contracts. 118 Dutch officials, however, appear to have decided to play along with both French teams.

114 Ibid., p. 44.
115 Reid, The Contest, pp. 201-7.
116 Brau, Côte du Poivre, pp. 17-19; De France à Sumatra, pp. 182-3.
117 Netherlands Indies press cuttings on the Wallon affair, translated in Rinn (Batavia) to Affaires Étrangères, 15 April 1880, M.A.E. Dépêches Politiques des Consuls, Pays-Bas 9, ff. 64-5.
118 Rinn to Affaires Étrangères 15 April and 9 May 1880, M.A.E. Dépêches Politiques des Consuls, Pays-Bas 9, ff. 59-65 and 98-100.
Although suffering the effects of their wretched voyage from Padang, Wallon and Guilhaume stayed only a day in the Dutch post at Meulaboh. Courret however was too ill to proceed with them to Bubun, Teunom and Wojiila. Wallon negotiated at Wojiila with Teuku Dy-Blanc, one of the uléëbalangs reputed to control the gold-bearing area, but this chief wanted more than the fifth of the revenue Wallon offered him. The Frenchmen then decided to explore upper Teunom. Teuku Imam, the influential uléëbalang of Teunom, tried to persuade them to wait until he could accompany them himself. Failing in this he provided a few men to smooth their path among the suspicious highlanders. It was to no avail. One Panglima Lam Ara of the Kawaj XII area cut down Wallon and Guilhaume at Tui Peuria, two days' journey up the Teunom river, on 11 March. ‘You coastal people have already become infidels’, he told their Atjehnese companions, by attempting to make sophisticated distinctions between Dutch and French kafirs.

Far from terminating the French quest for Atjeh gold, the death of these two rash explorers increased the certainty of their colleagues that the forbidden fruit was of surpassing delicacy. Brau and Errington arrived in Atjeh at the beginning of April, hot on the heels of their illfated rivals. They were in time to join the expedition which the Dutch military Governor sent to the area to ‘avenge’ the death of the Frenchmen. As usual with such expeditions, the principal result was simply to worsen relations between the Dutch and Teuku Imam Muda of Teunom, who by the strange logic of accessibility was held responsible. It also meant that the Dutch forbade further French ventures into the politically uncertain interior of West Atjeh.

Brau de Saint-Pol Lias, always assiduous at cultivating his connections in high places, quickly re-established good relations with the local Dutch officials. The Assistant-Resident for the West Coast, Van Langen, took the two Frenchmen with him to all the important West Coast ports as far south at Tapak Tuan, and described in grandiose terms the gold reported by Atjehnese to lie up some of the rivers. He could not, however, allow Brau and his colleagues to proceed into the interior over

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which he had no control. After a month’s travel on the coast, the two men turned their attention to Lohong, the northernmost river-state on the West Coast of Atjeh and one of the most pro-Dutch. After examining the very limited goldworking carried on there by a dozen Chinese Brau decided to attempt to make an establishment, if necessary on an agricultural base, in order to be on hand when the great gold rush he still expected became possible.\footnote{121} While awaiting government approval for more extensive operations in Lohong, Brau and Errington de la Croix accepted in August 1880 an invitation from Hugh Low to visit Perak. De la Croix remained for seven months investigating Chinese and Malay tin-mining methods there. He obtained two tin concessions which became the basis of the \textit{Société des Étains de Pérak}, formed in Paris for the purpose.\footnote{122}

Brau de St-Pol Lias, however, remained obsessed with the elusive promise of Sumatra. He left Perak after a few weeks to tour the Deli area once more, until permission arrived to explore Lohong without Dutch escorts. Then he rushed back to stay with ‘mon ami le kerdjourouan’ at Lohong, and to stake out a concession intended to become his Atjeh base. Seldom can such enthusiasm have been lavished on less promising prospects. Fortunately for Brau de St-Pol Lias the Governor-General refused to ratify his concessions despite three months of urgent lobbying in Batavia at the beginning of 1881. The Frenchman appears finally to have abandoned the project in favour of the much more realistic Perak venture, and was thus spared the certainty of disaster as Dutch authority was gradually eroded in Atjeh.\footnote{123} Brau’s later interests shifted to Mainland Southeast Asia, with a mission to Burma and Indo-China in 1884. His continuing fascination with Atjeh gold, however, is evident from the fact that in the plethora of writing with which he publicised his 1880-1 expedition after his return to Paris there is scarcely a mention of the gold which was the principal object of his quest. Only in 1891 had his own hope of returning dropped to the point that he published details about the gold in his last book, \textit{La Côte du Poivre}, for the benefit of ‘those who will come after us’.\footnote{124}

\footnote{121}{Brau, \textit{Côte du Poivre}, passim.}
\footnote{123}{Brau de St.-Pol Lias, \textit{Chez les Atchés. Lohong} (Paris, 1884), passim; \textit{Pérak}, pp. 192-3 and 294-5.}
\footnote{124}{\textit{Côte du Poivre}, p. 236.}
The fascination aroused in Paris by Wallon and Brau de St-Pol Lias was a long time dying. Only nine months after Wallon's death his two brothers-in-law were in Singapore hoping to continue the gold-hunt under the pretext of searching for his body. The French Consul in Batavia, still suffering from the trauma of concealing the small armoury in Wallon's luggage from Dutch eyes, ensured that they did not reach Sumatra.125

By the end of 1882 another Compagnie Malaisienne was formed in Paris, and sent three men out to continue the gold hunt. The same formula of elaborate subterfuge was adopted. The leader, Paul Fauque, obtained a mission gratuite from the Minister of Public Instruction to continue the 'scientific' work of Wallon and Guilhaume and investigate their death. However 'certains affaires délicates' upset the financing of the project after arrival in Singapore. Fauque's two companions returned directly to Paris, and Fauque followed them after filling in two months exploring the commercial potential of Siak in East Sumatra.126 The following May (1884) he returned to Sumatra, however, with Burlaud, who had already worked on a Deli plantation for two years. Fauque spent about two months in West Atjeh, at a time when the Dutch were hopelessly at odds with Teuku Imam Muda of Teunom, who was holding captive the British crew of the wrecked steamer Nisero. Fauque could not reach the Wojla area which was his principal aim, but he did explore Meulaboh, reporting optimistically about its coal and copper, though carefully avoiding any mention of gold.127

Not to be left out, Édouard Roura, quite probably the originator of this enduring French dream, managed to organise his own mission in France, where he had lived since 1878. Carrying the usual official commission, this time a hydrographic one from the French Naval Ministry, Roura reached West Atjeh in October 1883 with a French companion, Denis Richards. Once again, however, the French Consul was convinced

that the scientific mission of M. Roura was a mask, and that he was charged by some French capitalists to study the mineral and other resources in the interior of Sumatra; perhaps even to obtain from the indigenous princes some concessions.128

125 Rinn to Affaires Étrangères 8 January 1881, M.A.E. Dépêches Politiques des Consuls, Pays-Bas, ff. 140-1.
126 Fauque, Rapport, pp. 4-9; De France à Sumatra (Journal de Bord), pp. 1-13. These two official reports to the Ministre de l'Instruction Publique are bound together though separately paginated.
128 Portales-Gargier (Batavia) to Affaires Étrangères, M.A.E. Dépêches Politiques des Consuls, Pays-Bas 9, f. 240.
Roura's friendship with the radjas of Teunom and Wojla put him in a better position than his predecessors to negotiate concessions, but not to earn the approval of the Dutch.

By a curious chance, Roura and Richards were negotiating with the Radja of Wojla on the very day the Nisero was shipwrecked nearby. Roura accepted a Dutch request to use his influence with Teuku Imam Muda of Teunom to negotiate the release of the twenty-nine crew members. However during the three days Roura was at Teunom, 29-31 November, the Radja evolved terms which included a British guarantee for the freedom of his trade, a brilliant stroke which immediately internationalised the issue and brought a powerful Penang mercantile lobby on to his side. In a fury at this escalation of the issue Dutch officials immediately suspected Roura, not without reason, of having assisted Teuku Imam to evolve these terms. He was immediately banned from the coast by the Dutch. More bitter than ever, Roura went to Singapore to offer his services to the British in trying to free the crew. In face of Dutch hostility, however, Sir Frederick Weld reluctantly declined to use him.

Roura returned to Europe in 1884, but when the West Coast ports were re-opened a year later he hastened back to his search. By an intriguing coincidence he was also involved in the second great affair of captured European mariners in Atjeh. On 14 June 1886 he disembarked at Rigas as the sole passenger on the S.S. Hok Canton, to conclude a pepper-deal with Teuku Uma, the famous Atjehnese war-leader who at that time was effective war-lord of the West Coast north of Teunom. A few hours later Teuku Uma's men attacked the five Europeans remaining on the ship, evidently with a view to capturing them and re-creating a Nisero situation. Roura reappeared in time to conduct the Hok Canton back to Uléilheue after two of its officers had been killed and the other two captured, together with the captain's wife. The probability seems great that Uma's action was connected with remarks made by Roura, but no evidence has appeared to suggest any motive Roura can have had for involvement.

For the inveterate gold seekers the total absence of Dutch control on the West Coast of Atjeh between 1885 and 1893 put paid to further hope of exploration. When the area was eventually pacified at the turn

130 Weld to Derby 20 April 1885, copy C.O. to F.O. 27 April 1885, F.O. 37/699.
of the century the Dutch mining engineer Jansen did investigate the best known areas of the Kawaj XII and Lohong, and came to largely negative conclusions about commercial possibilities. Not until 1939 was a serious attempt made to work the gold of Kawaj XII on an economic scale. Brau de Saint-Pol Lias’ patriotic wish was eventually fulfilled. It was the French enterprise, the ‘Marsman Concern’ which began commercial mining of Atjeh’s gold.

The King of the Sedangs

It is, perhaps, a little unfair to end this chronicle of false starts on a note of pathetic absurdity, particularly as Charles David de Mayréna appears never to have set foot in Sumatra. Yet in the magnificence of his style, the quixotic heroism of his preoccupations, and the unreality of his financial basis, there is something characteristic of nineteenth century French ventures in that island. ‘Good-looking, a crack shot ... intelligent and energetic’, Mayréna was a French caricature of James Brooke, with all of the style but little of the substance. He had a dashing military career until wounded in the Franco-Prussian War. Later, in 1883, he had to leave France suddenly when he was accused of embezzlement, and from that point sank ever deeper into a fantastic world of his own devising. He made his way to Java, where he lived on credit for almost a year before being deported in August 1884 on another charge of embezzlement.

133 Penjedar (Medan) 1 January 1940, p. 11. J. Jongejans, Land en Volk van Atjeh Vroeger en Nu (Baarn, 1939), pp. 203-4.
134 Auguste-Jean-Baptiste-Marie-Charles David was born in Toulon in 1842, and entered military service in 1859. He served in the Spahis Cochinchinois in Indo-China (1863-8), and earned the Croix de la Legion d’honneur as a Captain in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1), being wounded three times. Thereafter he worked as a banker in Paris until 1883, when an embezzlement charge forced him to flee. After a year in Java and three months back in Paris, he departed in December 1884 for his remarkable exploits in Vietnam. From that point he styled himself le Baron David de Mayréna, this last name being one his father, a naval officer, had adopted to distinguish himself from other members of the family. In 1890 he adopted another title, Comte de Maas, in addition to his royal one, Marie I, roi des Sedangs. A detailed biography is Jean Marquet ‘Un aventurier du XIXe siècle: Marie Ier, roi des Sedangs (1888-1890)’ Bulletin des Amis du Vieux Hué 14, nos. 1 & 2 (1927).
136 Marquet, pp. 11-14.
Nevertheless his experience gave him good value on his return to Paris, where he let it be known that he had deserted from the Dutch army in Atjeh (as dozens of European soldiers of fortune had done) and obtained the complete confidence of the Sultan of Atjeh. The exaggerated optimism about Atjeh raised in Paris financial circles by Brau de St-Pol Lias and Wallon played into his hands. The Atjehnese, moreover, were just celebrating the great triumph of a Dutch retreat to a 'concentrated line' occupying only a few square miles of Atjeh territory. Mayréna was able to persuade a Paris broker, baron Sellière, to advance him 30,000 francs to return to Atjeh and take over the lucrative sections of the Sultanate's economy, including mining, arms manufacture, and the minting of money. Despite his dubious past, he also received a commission from the Ministre de l'Instruction Publique for scientific exploration in Atjeh. On arrival in Saigon in May 1885, however, Mayréna and his brother Henri made no serious attempt to reach Sumatra, but used Sellière's money profitlessly in Saigon. Sellière's backing and the Government commission were both withdrawn in 1886.

Nevertheless Mayréna had a phenomenal success in Indo-China. By January 1888 he had persuaded the colonial government to entrust him with a semi-official political task among the Moi tribes living near the southern Laotian border, in what is now Kontum province. Under the guise of a prospector for gold Mayréna was to attempt to woo the Montagnards away from Siam and into the arms of France. At Saigon's request Fr. Gerlach of the Kontum mission put his enormous prestige among the Moi behind Mayréna. The results were astonishing. Within a few months he persuaded numerous mutually hostile villages of Sedangs, Hamongs and Bahnars to unite. On 3 June 1888 they agreed to form a Kingdom of the Sedangs, with Mayréna as King Marie the first.

Having achieved this unique feat of unification, however, Mayréna was more interested in magnifying his royal office than giving way to rule from Hué or Saigon. To raise revenue for his new state he issued stamps and bestowed royal titles and decorations on amused or credulous businessmen in Saigon and Hong Kong. When the French challenged

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138 Marquet, p. 17.
these practices and prosecuted him for fraud, he threatened to sell his kingdom to the Germans.  

In 1889 the King of the Sedangs returned to Paris in the hope of winning official recognition and money. He obtained neither, despite the regal style with which he graced society functions and issued high-sounding titles. In July 1889 he moved to Belgium for greater security against law suits. There at last he found another credulous financier. The young Belgian industrialist Somsy paid all his debts and financed his return to his kingdom with five well-connected young Belgians, eleven cases of arms and ammunition, and plentiful supplies.

On arrival in Singapore, however, in February 1890, Mayrêna's arms were seized by the police. France and Siam both made clear that he would not be allowed to reach his kingdom through their territories. Rapidly Mayrêna's world began to collapse and his companions to desert him. He began to talk again of going to Sumatra to lead the Atjehnese armies against the Dutch. Even though he became a Muslim and took a Malay wife (his fourth), named Aisa, he had little success raising an army among the Muslims of Singapore. As his fantasy world began to appear ridiculous, he left Singapore in March to live out his dream in the isolation of Pulau Tioman, a tiny island off Rompin, in Pahang. He died under mysterious circumstances on 11 November 1890, leaving only the anjing peranchis (French dogs) of Pulau Tioman as a permanent mark of his sojourn in the Malay world.

Mayrêna appears to have been the last French adventurer to consider intervening directly in Indonesian affairs at the periphery of the Dutch empire, in defiance of Dutch claims to authority. Subsequent French interest in the area, in the shape of planting and commercial concerns as well as a fine scholarly tradition, operated through the Dutch colonial framework. Indeed many French scholars and officials, like Angoulvant and Bousquet, were attracted to Dutch rather than British colonies in search of parallels with their own.

The chronicle of French activities in Sumatra remains a disjointed one, with no connecting thread beyond the persistence with which bold

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140 Marquet, pp. 86-93.
ventures were left to languish or diverted into profitless paths. The name of France nevertheless remained formidable, if mysterious, to many of the coastal peoples, and played a role in their diplomatic calculations.

The Australian National University, Department of Pacific History

Appendix

SULTAN IBRAHIM TO PRESIDENT OF FRANCE
15 RABI I, 1265H (8 FEBRUARY 1849)

(Romanised Malay Text) 142

Bismi'llahi 'l-rahmani 'l-rahim
Al-hamdu li'llah wahdahu wa'l-salatu wa'l-salamu cala rasuli'llah wa anna Isa ruhu'llah wa cala alihi wa sahibihi ridha Allah. Amma ba'du, adapun kemudian dari itu maka inilah warakat al-ikhlas wa tuhfat al-ajnas yang termaktub dalam-nya dengan beberapa sembah salam serta ta<zim dan takrim yang keluar daripada kalbi yang nurani dan fu'ad yang hakiki dan rahasia yang terbunyi, ya'itu ialah yang datang daripada pihak hamba yang hina dina lagi fana lagi tiada menaruh daya dan upaya lagi dhafif dan miskin serta dengan tiada mengetahui c<adat dan majlis, ya'itu yang bernama Sultan Mansur Syah ibni al-marhum Sultan Jawhar al-calam Syah yang ada jabatnya memerintahkan c<adat yang kuat dan hukum yang c<adil, ya'itu dalam daerah negeri Aceh bandar Daru'1-salam. Maka barang disampaikan Allah subhanahu wa ta<ala datang mendapatkan kebahaw kadam sahabat hamba yang mahamulia lagi as'la dan fudhla yang telah dikurniai daripada Tuhan yang bernama rabbukum al-a'la, ya'itu sayyidina wa maulana Paduka Seri Sultan Republik Peransis yang ada jabat takhta kerajaan daripada emas kudrati yang sepuluh mutu lagi yang bertahankan ratna mutu ma<nikam< daripada intan dikarang dan berumbai2-kan mutiara dan zabjarb yang telah terseradi dalam daerah negeri Pari makam Daru'1-ma<mur wa'l-masyhuriah serta dengan memerintahkan c<adat yang kuat dan hukum yang c<adil dengan ke<adilannya, ya'itu dalam daerah negeri Peransis Daru'1-amen. Maka tiadalah hamba perpanjangkan kalam melainkan sekadar hamba mengatakan hal dengan ahwal yang maksud sahaja. Amin.

Syahadan hamba beri ma<jumlah kepada Tuan yang sahabat hamba lagi syaudara hamba: Adapun karena tatkala dahulu zaman Louit Pilib (Louis Philippe) adalah dikirimkan surat kepada hamba serta dengan kapal perang dan adalah khabarnya dalam surat itu dianya hendak bersahabat dengan hamba dan serta dengan disuratkan kepada hamba mengambilkan rial Peransis kepada sekalian negeri hamba dalam makam Sumatra bak jadilah rial Peransis jual beli dalam tiap2 negeri dan tiap2 bandar. Sudah itu maka hamba berfikirlah

142 The original text in Arabic script is in M.A.E. Mémoires et Documents, Hollande 152, f. 161.
dengan segala hulubalang dan segala syaudagar dan serta dengan segala racyatnya fasal rial itu. Maka sudahlah ridah sekalian orang yang dalam negeri Sumatara menerima rial Peransi itu pada tiap2 negeri dan tiap2 bandar yang dalam perintah hamba. Sudah itu dengan takdir Allah ta'ala maka gaduhlah Louit Pilib dengan segala orang Peransi dan berperanglah diannya dengan segala racyatnya, maka Louit Pilib pun larilah kenegegi yang lain. Sekarang sudahlah jadi yang memerintahkan <adat> yang kuat hukum yang <adil> dengan sifat ke<adilannya Sultan Republik dan daripada hamba sama juga Sultan Republik sahbat hamba lagi syaudara hamba. Dan hendaklah sekarang Tuan suruh kapal Peransi berniaga kenegegi Sumatra dan hendaklah mula2 datang kepada hamba kenegegi Aceh, kemudian maka berlayarlah kepada tiap2 negeri dan tiap2 bandar serta <alamat daripada hamba kepada segala hulubalang surat satu pucuk. Dan hendaklah mula2 bak banyak kapal sekali itu dan lain kali miski satu kapal pun jadi juga karena sebab setelah mas<ru>f banyak rial Peransi pada tiap2 bandar. Dan hendaklah Tuan beri kapal perang kepada hamba al-kadar dua buah karena sebab hamba dis<fi> sedikit pada menghukumkan racyat pada tiap2 negeri dan bandar; jika ada kapal perang niscaya takut segala hulubalang kepada hamba dan tentang harga kapal itu barang yang patut adalah diatas hamba tetapi hendaklah hamba bertangguh pada Tuan kadar dua tahun. Jika sudah sampai hadnya maka hamba bayarlah akan harganya itu kepada Tuan. Dan hendaklah dengan siap alatnya kapal itu sematanya. Sebagai lagi hamba minta' kasihan banyak2 pada Tuan karena negeri hamba sudah diambil oleh orang Belanda adalah dua tiga buah bandar, mula2 negeri Airbangi hingga sampai kenegegi Singkil dan serta dengan satu pulau Nias sudah diambilnya oleh orang Belanda itu karena negeri itu jauh sedikit daripada negeri Aceh dan hendaklah dengan do'a Tuan serta dengan ikhtiar Tuan bak maulah berpindah orang Belanda pada tiap2 negeri itu. Itulah hal ahwalnya dan yang lain dari itu tiadalal hamba sebutkan melainkan hendaklah Tuan periksa pada orang yang membawa surat ini namanya Muhammad Ghaüth karena diannya hulubalang hamba lagi nasab dengan hamba. Apa2 khabarnya, sungguhlah khabarnya dan apa2 pekerjaannya maka sungguhlah pekerjaannya hamba karena diannya badal ganti hamba yang mutlak menyuruh pergi berjalan kepada Tuan kenegegi Peransi karena harus hamba seharap2, kecil laut besar harap, rendah bukit tinggi harap. Demikianlah harap hamba akan Tuan, janganlah Tuan kejap harap dan tadalal tanda hayat hamba melainkan do'a sahaja fi kulli'<l-lail wa'1-ayyam. Dan Hendaklah dengan segara2 Tuan kurnia perintah dan niat, seperti Muhammad Ghauth hendaklah lekas2 kembali kenegegi Aceh serta dengan kapal dan orang2 daripada Tuan, dan hendaklah Tuan berikan apa2 yang dipinta' oleh Muhammad Ghauth, janganlah syak waham akan diannya. Itulah khabarnya.

Tersurat2 ini pada tatalka lima belas hari bulan Rabi<u'>l-awwal pada hari Khamis pada waktu zuhur pada tarikh sanat 1265.

Bibarakat al-Syaikh Mac<ru>f al-Karkhi. Tammat kalam.

Al-Sultan Mansur

(seal)