

Jacques De Coutre

**Information about Building Some Castles and Fortresses in the
Straits of Singapore and Other Regions of the South, etc., c. 1625**

(Original Spanish text with English translation and annotations by Peter
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[The National Library of Spain in Madrid owns a series of manuscripts whose authorship is traced Jaques de Coutre, a gem merchant who spent many years of the late 16th and early 17th century travelling through Southeast Asia. The text reproduced in the original text (Spanish with a distinct Portuguese influence)¹ as well as the modern English translation assumes the form of an epistolary brief (called *Emformación* by De Coutre) written in the 1620s in which he advises the construction of three forts around the Singapore and Melaka Straits: one on present-day Sentosa at the site of Fort Siloso, one along the east coast of Singapore island (probably around Bedok) and one at the Muar River estuary in the present-day State of Johor. The construction of the forts was part of a broader plan devised by De Coutre to reverse the declining fortunes of the *Estado da Índia*, plug weak spots in Portuguese networks of trade, rein in Dutch freebooting in the Singapore and Melaka Straits and to firmly consolidate Johor within Portuguese and Spanish geo-strategic and mercantile interests. The letter is of central interest to the discussion of forts and security arrangements for the Singapore and Melaka Straits discussed in chapter 3.²]

Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, Ms. 2780, Jaques de Coutre, “Emformación para se hazer algunos castillos o fortaleças en el Estrecho de Sincapura y otras partes del sur, etc.”, fols. 270 recto–274 recto.³

La costa de Malaca corre casy norte y sur hasta el Estrecho de Sincapura. Por el dicho Estrecho van a Malaca y buelven muchas embarcaciones, baxeles grandes y pequeños de los reynos siguientes: del reyno de Jor, del de Pam, del de Pattani, del de Lugor, del de Sian, del de Camboya, del de Champa, del de Chochinchina, e las naos e juncos de la China, e de Chincheos, e de las Manilas, y del Japón, y algunos baxeles de Maluco, y del reyno de Borneo, e de Lavio, e Gamarmasin, e de todas las yslas de Borneo. Todas estas embarcaciones passan por el dicho Estrecho de Syncapura.

Y quando los Jaus saben que ay en Malaca algún capitán que los maltratan, como solían algunas vesses aver, supuesto que su derrota es por el Estrecho de Saban para Malaca, van por este respeto por adentro e por afuera las yslas a buscar la Ysla de Bintan, y se van a Jor. Estas embarcaciones vienen cargadas de nueces moscadas, maça, clavo, y otras mercaderías. Los Portugeçes van entonces de Malaca a Jor, con ropas para vender, e compran drogas y otras mercaderías; buélvençe a Malaca. Todas estas embarcaciones y mercaderías paçan estos Estrechos de Sincapura.

Todo este comercio ariba dicho han estorbado los rebeldes. Ellos son los que gossan oy el dicho comercio. Y para Remediar esso y para bolver el comercio a Malaca, Su Magestad avía de mandar hazer un fuerte o Castillo en el Estrecho de Sincapura muy fuerte, con buen precidio y Buena artillaría, municiones e bastimentos como conbiene. También podrá los del Castillo

proverse de bastimentos de las embarcaciones que pasan por el dicho Estrecho, ansí para Malaca como para d' Achén, de las que van y buelven.

Y en la mitad del Estrecho de ^A Sincapura ay una ysla, que será de tres leguas poco más o menos. La dicha ysla corre de una parte el Estrecho Viejo, de la otra parte el Estrecho Nuevo. Viene esta ysla a hazer en medio del Estrecho una punta de pietra a modo de un fuerte de naturaleza. Esta punta se llama Surgidera; haze un lado el Estrecho Viejo, y del otro lado el Nuevo. En esta punta avía de mandar Su Magestad hazer un castillo muy fuerte: todas las embarcaciones que passan por estos Estrechos, ansí por el Viejo como por el Nuevo, se paran y echan áncora en la dicha punta poco más adelante o menos. Es forçado porque paçan estos Estrechos en dos mareas, ansí entrando por un lado como por otro.

Y el Estrecho Viejo es tan angosto que se puede serrar con una cadena; el Estrecho Nuevo es más ancho, pero no podrá paçar ninguna embarcación por ningunos destes Estrechos que los del castillo con la artillería no los metan a fondo. En esta punta ay catorce braças de fondo, yendo de Malaca passando por la punta de Tangonburi, entrando por el dicho Estrecho de Sincapura entre la Ysla de las Cobras y otra de muchos arboledos que llaman salgeros, entrando por el medio son ocho braças; pasando pegado la punta dies y dosse braças, y catorce en la dicha punta arriba dicha. Y de ay por el Estrecho Viejo son ocho y siete y seis hasta salir fuera; y desta punta por el Estrecho Nuevo son doce y dies y ocho braças hasta salir afuera.

En todo este Estrecho se puede hechar áncora por ser estos canales muy seguros de tormentas, como si estuvieran en un río, supuesto que tiene corrientes de agua. Pueden passer por ellos naves de a tres y quatro cuiertas, como las carracas de Portugal. Sobre esta punta de la dicha ysla pueden estar los baxeles tan serca de la tierra que se puede desenbarcar en una plancha si quisieran. La ysla es muy fresca de frondossos árboles y tiene muy buena agua. Y por esso Su

Magestad avía de mandar que se haga un fuerte o castillo en esta ysla, como arriba dicho. Esta ysla es algo alcantilada de piedra, no se puede desembarcar tan facilmente, ny por esso es peor. A par de esta punta están unos salgeros. /⁵

Del lado del Estrecho Nuevo, allí se podía hazer una desembarcadera para los bateles y galeras, naves, y para todo el servicio del dicho castillo. La ysla es playna y tiene algunos penhascos. Quando vienen o van nuestras naves para la China e Manilas e otras partes, podrán recojer—y los demás baxeles amigos—debaxo del castillo, quando tubieren noticia de enemigos. En este Estrecho ay muchos pescadores que llaman Salettes; viven desso. Es gente de la tierra, son Malayos. Como les hizieren buena compañía servirán bien. Estos hombres corren todas las yslas destos Estrechos, y adonde estubieren enemigos ventrán a avisar a trueco de un paño de quarto reales que den, y para ellos estaren a nuestra sombra.

Para efeto del dicho comercio es neseçario que Su Magestad tenga en el dicho estrecho sinco o seis galeras de Manilas bien armadas, sugetas al castillo, para franquear el Estrecho. Son las dichas galeras de Manilas ligeras para poder entrar y salir quando les estar bien. El enemigo no podrá hazer tantas presas como suele, ny podrán estar con una nao en una boca del Estrecho y con otra en otra boca, como suele hazer agora y toman todos las baxeles que paçan por los dichos Estrechos, por respeto de las galeras. No podrá el enemigo apartar sus naves unas de otra por las calmarías y poco viento que ay en estas partes. De este modo podrán franquear estos Estrechos y podrán venir las embarcaciones susodichas a este fuerte y a Malaca, las quales no pueden venir agora porque los enemigos los empiden. La dichas galeras podrán yr al Estrecho de Saban; de allí no ay mais que dies leguas de estancia uno del otro y ay muychos canales para las galeras passar el dicho Estrecho de Saban. Luego en pocos días sabrán todos los passos por los

pescadores que llaman Saletes. Estos Saletes viven en unas embarcaciones muy pequeñas; allí duermen y viven y nacen en las dichas embarcaciones. Al fin es su cassa.

Quando llegare nuestra armada a este puesto para hazer el dicho castillo, avrá menesterse luego yntrincherarse en la propia punta que arriba diximos con sestones de tierra, y meter la artillería en medio con el modo y traça del fuerte que á-de quedar. No falta allí Madera para se entrincherarse mientras se aparaja materiales para se labrar el castillo. Allí no falta mucha piedra y muchas piedras blancas de la mar que llaman caran, que es como cal o yesso; ny tanpoco mucha leña para quemar después /⁶ de aver hecho provizión de los materiales. Podrán entonces començar los muros y los baluartes y lo que conviniere. En acabando un baluarte enpeçar otro, de manera que siempre queden yntrincherados por lo que pudiere suseder. Para este y otros effetos Su Magestad avía de mandar yngenieros que entienda de fortificaciones.

Conviene que estos castillos sean muy fuertes, entonces los rebeldes no podrán passer por allí, ny este Achén con sus armadas para saquear a Jor ny al reyno de Pam. Les sera fuerça passer por el Estrecho de Saban y rodear las yslas, o entre ellas; costaríanles mucho. Teniendo los nuestros allí galeras podrán franquear el dicho Estrecho de Saban, puesto que es ancho y tiene muchos baxos. Algunas vesses están las naos sette y ocho días sin poder passer por tener el viento contrario, aunque tienen la marea por sy. Es estrecho emfodasso, por este respecto son buenas las galeras para poder coger las naves surtas. De este modo harán gran daño al enemigo.

Vienen los rebeldes con sus naves, hechan áncora, y surgen en el dicho Estrecho de Saban afuera del río de Andregiri e Janbi, por ser poco hondo, para cargar pimienta. Dende la punta susodicha hasta este río no ay más que veinte y sinco leguas poco más o menos por los boquerones. Entretanto nuestras galeras podrán dar de noche o de día sobre ellos, y no podrán los enemigos cargar pimienta, que es el principal del comercio que ellos tienen. Como es serca de

nuestra fortaleza, podrán los nuestros comerciar y tartar. En este río no entran syno embarcaciones pequeños. Ny los rebeldes podrán estar seguros in Polinban, que es un reyno que siempre mostró ser nuestro amigo. De modo que con estas galeras y el castillo se podrá hazer gran daño al enemigo en su comercio, e franquear estos estrechos. Como estos estrechos estuvieren francos y libres vendrán de unas y otras partes todas las embarcaciones a este fuerte y a Melaca sussodichas, porque los Yndios se huelgan de vender sus mercaderías antes a nós que a los rebeldes, porque los dichos rebeldes hacen todas sus mercaderías estancos, así lo que compran como lo que benden. Y quieren notablemente mal a los dichos rebeldes, porque no venden ny compran como solían hazer los Portuguesses.

Es neççario hazer otra fortaleza o castillo en la barra de Jor, en la punta de la Ysla de la Sabandaría Vieja. Esta ysla haze la barra del río de Jor confina con el ⁷ Estrecho Viejo y Salet Boru. Esta fortaleza quedará de ystancia de tres leguas poco más o menos del castillo del Estrecho. La dicha Ysla de Sabandería es de siete leguas poco más o menos. El castillo de esta boca del río de Jor y el del Estrecho podrán socorrer uno al otro por mar y tierra. Entre una ysla y otra queda el Estrecho Viejo; es como un río que se puede serrar con una cadena. Sobre la punta susodicha Su magestad á-de mandar hazer un castillo como el otro que está dicho. Quedará señor de este puerto que es uno de los mejores que sirve la Yndia. Podrán hazer allí una ciudad y quedar señor de este reyno. Haziéndose este castillo allí no podrán entrar las naves enemigas que no metan en el fondo, supuesto que el río de Jor es ancho y la punta de Jor Viejo hecha una restinga mucho a la mar.

Y quando vienen las embarcaciones grandes, se arriman a la punta andonde se á-de hazer la fortaleza, y enfrente a tiro de piesa queda la restringa susodicha. En la dicha restringa podrán hazer un fuerte pequeño para franquear todo el río y enpedir que no entren baxeles pequeños ny

grandes. Los enemigos rebeldes adereçan y dan carena a sus naves dentro de este río. El dicho río es muy ancho y hermoso; pueden entrar las naves cargadas y salir sin peligro hasta dies y dosse leguas por el río adentro. Y no falta en estas partes maderas para se entrincherarse luego en lleguando, ny falta materiales para labrar el castillo, ny falta piedras para hazer cal o yeso. Los Portugueses tomaron en este puerto junto a la punta susodicha – tomó Don Pablo de Lima—Jor Viejo, y no quisieron sustentar.

El rey dela dicha ciudad de Jor Viejo huyó y se fue a vivir en la ysla de Bintan, y después bolvió e hizo otra ciudad, que está el río adentro catorce leguas, que se llama Batusavar y los Portugueses llaman Jor Nuevo. Este puerto tomó el rey Achén y lo tiene ocupado, mas con mil y quinientos hombres se pueden desocupar, y también la ciudad de Pam, que tienen el dicho rey de Achén ocupada. Y para este efetto fuera bueno llamar el dicho rey de Jor, que son quarto hermanos, y poner uno de ellos de posse. Como tuviéramos hecho los dichos castillos estaríamos seguros de gente de la tierra, y Su Magestad tendría un rey basallo como solía ser el de Ormús. Hasta que el tiempo /⁸ diere más lugar y tendrán mantenimiento para sus castillos y lo que fuere necesario, ayuda y socorre para qualquier efetto, y el dicho rey de Achén no tendrá tan gran poder. Como los naturales vieren su rey y favor nuestro, en la ysla de Samatra: Çiaca, y Campar, e Bincales, y las terras de d'Arú todos se levantarán contra el Achén, que son Malayos.

Esta tierra era del rey de Jor, y la ysla de Samatra es un reyno que governava el raxo Siaca, que era hermano del dicho rey de Jor. Siaca queda a la entrada del Estrecho de Saban, era señor de más de sesenta leguas de costa; todo tiene agora ocupado el rey de Achén. En este río de Jor Su Magestad pudiera tener galeras y galeones. Pueden entrar y salir con marea e viento, e si Su Magestad tuviere en este puerto seys o siete galeones de Dunquerque, en ninguna parte del sur estarían los rebeldes seguros. Porque los dichos rebeldes hechan áncora y surgen en todos y

más puertos del sur más de legua y media a la mar. Podíanse llegar a ellos, porque están apartados unos de los otros—en un puerto están una nao, en otro dos -, y por la vía de los pescadores, como está dicho, podrá nuestras naves tener aviso adonde quedan los dichos rebeldes e hir sobre ellos. Como son de una nación muchas vezes se engañarán los nuestros a los rebeldes, ansí de noche como de día. De este modo se podrá quitar el comercio a los rebeldes y desruirlos.

Y para efetto de se hazer estos fuertes avrá menester que Su Magestad envíe veinte galeones de Españoles castellanos, entre ellos algunos seis o siete galeones de Dunquerque, que haga quantía de veinte galeones bien guarnecidos de artillería y bastimentos con dossientos y sincoenta hombres en cada uno, y algunos yngenieros con petrechos que conviene para las fortificaciones. Y en llagando al Estrecho de Sincapura podrán enbiar aviso a Manila para si allá ubiere alguna armada que se venga a juntar con esta, prencipalmente las galeras que allá uviere. Y Su Magestad avía de enbiar oficiales que sepa hazer galeras en el río de Jor. No falta sityo ny Madera para labrallos, no falta árboles para mástil de las galeras, ny liames, ny curbas, ny remos, pez, aseyte para sifallas.

Quanto a la chusma para las galeras, /⁹ pueden mandar a Goa buscar Cafres, que son negros fuertes como los de Angola. Se compran en Goa a veinte reales de a ocho cada cabessa. De Manila van a Goa a conprar para sus galeras, y cargan embarcaciones de essa gente. También podrán nuestros naos hir a la Costa de Cheramandel a cargar ropas y llevar drogas como hazen los Olandeses. Su Magestad tiene dos puertos en la Costa de Cheramandel, que se llama el uno Negapatán y el otro San Thomé, adonde se podrán descargar, y los Portuguesses se holgarán mucho con este comercio. De Jor o del Estrecho podrán enbiar naves cargadas de drogas a España como hazen los Portuguesses, y de este modo se enchirá Espanha, Castilla y Portugal de

drogas, y renderán las aduanas de Su Magestad mucho más. Y de aquí podrán los mercaderes enbiar a Francia y Alemania.

De esta manera no podrán los Olandesses hazer tanto provecho; de este modo se disminuirán ellos y su trato. Como es compañía de marcaderes, en no aviendo provecho cada uno se retirará de la dicha compañía, viendo el poco provecho. Manila y estos dos castillos a fortaleças, y Malaca e Macao podrán socorrer unos a otros, por ser serca. Los dos castillos, uno del Estrecho y el otro de la boca del río de Jor, á menester que se haga entranbos en un ynstante, los quales se podrá socorrer y ayudar unos a otros por la mar y por la tierra, como arriba está dicho. Y será neseçario entrincherarce luego: no faltará recaudo ni avrá quien los empida. Antes que vaya a noticia de los rebeldes ya estarán entrincherados. Podrán dexar dies galeones en el Estrecho debaxo del fuerte y otros dies en la boca del río de Jor, hasta assegurar los dichos castillos. Y después de aver hecho los dichos dos castillos podrán hazer otro en la punta del río de Muar; no podrá entonces el rey de Achén socorrer a Jor de ningún modo ny por mar ny por tierra.

Este río es muy hermoso y mucho mejor que el de Malaca. Pueden entrar en el dicho río de Muar con los juncos, balas, lanchares—que son embarcaciones de la gente de la tierra -, y galeotas cargadas. E las naves no podrán entrar, mas podrán hechar /¹⁰ hierro y surgir a tiro de piesa como en Malaca. Tiene buen sitio para tener galeras y fustas, también no falta recaudo para hazerlas. Podrán hazer este fuerte sin enpidimiento de la gente de la tierra. Allí serca está un pueblo muy pequeño, cossa de muy poco momento—se llama Muar -, mas tiene un playa de dos leguas muy hermosa. Al lado de la dicha playa ay unas caserías, cossa de poco momento; son de pescadores. Luego esta gente nos obedecerán y vendrán a vivir debaxo de nuestro fuerte, y la

gente de Jor por consiguiente. En la dicha ciudad de Jor ay mucha gente que no viven sino de mercaderías y navegación de una parte y de otra.

Este es el mejor modo para destruir y deminuir los rebeldes que yo entiendo en my conciencia. Sy Su Magestad embiare quarenta galeones, sería de más efetto para acabar, y destruir, y espulción de los Olandesses que están en la Yndia Oriental.

Jaques de Couttre hizo aquella planta del sitio de los Estrechos de Sincapura y de Saban. Para Remediar las dichas partes da a Vuestra Excelencia esta emformación conforme lo que se parece y trató con Vuestra Excelencia los días passados sobre el particular de quitar a los Olandesses el comercio que ellos tienen en la Yndia Oriental, etc.

Jaques de Coutre /¹¹

Emformación que Jaques de Couttre da a Vuestra Excelencia para se hazer los fuertes en el Estrecho de Sincapura y en la punta del río de Jor en el sur, etc.

English Translation

“Information about Building Some Castles and Fortresses in the Straits of Singapore and Other Regions of the South, etc.”, folios 270 recto–274 recto.¹²

The coast of Melaka extends north and south nearly as far as the Straits of Singapore. Many ships go to Melaka and return through these Straits, large and small *baxeles*¹³ from the

following kingdoms: from the Kingdoms of Johor, Pahang, Patani, Ligor, Siam, Cambodia, Champa, Cochinchina, and ships and junks from China, and Zhangzhou,¹⁴ and from Manila, and Japan, and some *baxeles* from the Malukus, and from the Kingdom of Borneo, and Ryukyu, and Banjarmasin, and from all the islands of Borneo. All these vessels pass through the said Straits of Singapore.

When the Javanese know that in Melaka there is some captain who treats them badly, as sometimes was the case, though their course is through the Strait of Kundur to Melaka, they go from inside and around the islands in search of the island of Bintan, and they go to Johor. These vessels come laden with nutmeg, mace, cloves and other merchandise. The Portuguese then go from Melaka to Johor, with cloth to sell, and buy spices¹⁵ and other commodities; and return to Melaka. All these vessels and wares pass through these Straits of Singapore.

All this commerce described above has been disturbed by the [Dutch] rebels.¹⁶ They are the ones who today benefit from the said trade. To remedy this [situation] and to bring back [this] trade to Melaka, Your Majesty must order that a very strong fortress or citadel be built in the Straits of Singapore, with a good dungeon¹⁷ and good artillery, munitions and supplies as is advisable.¹⁸ The residents of the citadel could also acquire supplies from the vessels that pass through the said Straits, both from those that sail towards Melaka as well as those that are going to Aceh, from the ships that go and return.

In the middle of the Singapore Straits¹⁹ there is an island, which measures more or less three *léguas*.²⁰ The Old Strait is [situated] on one side of the said island, the New Strait on the other side. This island forms a stone peak [which is located] between the [two] Straits [and] that resembles a fortress created by nature.²¹ This peak is called Surgidera;²² the Old Strait lies on one side [of it], and the New Straits on the other. Your Majesty should order that a very strong

citadel be built on this peak; all the vessels that pass through these Straits, through the Old Strait as well as through the New Strait, stop and cast anchor around the said peak. It is necessary because two [daily] tides pass through these Straits, entering from one side as well as from the other.

The Old Strait is so narrow that it can be closed off with a chain;²³ the New Strait is wider, but no vessel can pass through either of these straits without being within reach of the citadel, which can sink them with artillery.²⁴ At [Surgidera] point²⁵ [the water] is 14 *brazas* deep. As one comes from Melaka [one passes] the tip of Tanjong Bulus, and enters the said Strait of Singapore between the Ilha das Cobras²⁶ and another island that is densely forested with trees that they call *salgeros*.²⁷ Entering by the middle [the water measures] eight *brazas* deep; when approaching the aforementioned [Surgidera] point ten and 12 *brazas*, and 14 next to it.²⁸ [Passing] through the Old Strait from this point [the water measures] eight, seven and six [*brazas*] up to the exit; [passing through] the New Strait from [Surgidera] point the water measures 12 and ten and eight *brazas* until one exits.

One can cast anchor anywhere in these Straits since these channels are safely sheltered from storms, as though one were in a river, although there are currents of water. Ships with three and four decks can pass through these Straits, such as the carracks from Portugal. At the tip of the said island the *baxeles* can come so close to shore that it is possible to disembark on a plank if necessary. The island is very lush with trees with [thick] foliage, and it [also] has very good [fresh] water.²⁹ This is why Your Majesty should order a fort or citadel to be built on this island, as mentioned above. This island has a number of stone cliffs, [where] it is not easy to disembark, but it is none the worse for this. There are some willows beside this point. /³⁰

On the side of the New Strait, here one could build a quay for skiffs and galleys, [and] ships, and to service the said citadel. The island has places that are flat,³¹ and others with cliffs. When our ships come and go to China and the Manilas and other parts, they—and other friendly *baxeles*—can take shelter below the citadel when they hear news of enemies.³² There are many fishermen called *saletes* [*orang laut*]³³ in these Straits. They are local people, Malays. If one accompanies and pays them, they will serve well. These *orang laut* visit all the islands around these Straits, and where there are enemies, they come to warn [us] in exchange for [a piece of] cloth worth four reales, which they are given, and for them to remain under our protection.

For the purposes of [maintaining] the said commerce, Your Majesty must maintain in the said Straits five or six well-armed Manila galleys, [that be] placed under [the command of] the citadel to patrol the Straits.³⁴ These Manila galleys are sufficiently light that they can enter and leave whenever necessary. The enemy will [then] not be in a position to capture as many [vessels] as they habitually do now, nor given the presence of the galleys will they be able to keep one ship at one entrance of the Straits and another at the opposite entrance, as they habitually do now, and capture all the junks that pass through these Straits. The enemy will no longer be able to separate their ships one from the other because of the lulls and the absence of wind that prevails in this region. In this manner the [galleys] can patrol the Straits, and the aforementioned vessels would be able to call at this fort and [also] at Melaka, which is presently not possible because the enemy impedes them from doing so. The galleys can proceed to the Strait of Kundur; from there one [Strait] is no more than ten *léguas* away from the other and there are many channels for the galleys to pass through the said Strait of Kundur. Thus, in a few days they will know all the passages thanks to the fishermen who are known as *orang laut*. These

orang laut live aboard very small vessels; they sleep there and live and are born on their boats. In short, these vessels are their home.

When our armada will reach this place to build the said citadel, it will then be necessary to entrench oneself on the aforementioned peak [Surgidera] with sacks of earth, and place the artillery in the middle according to the manner and design of the citadel to be built. There is no lack of wood there to entrench oneself while one prepares materials to build the fortification. There is no lack of stone here and [there are] lots of white stones from the sea that they call [*batu*] *karang*,³⁵ which is like limestone or gypsum; there is also a lot of firewood to burn after /³⁶ having made provisions for materials. They will then be able to begin the walls and the bulwarks and whatever else is advisable. When they finish a bulwark they can begin to build another, so that they are always entrenched [and prepared] for whatever might happen. For this and other purposes Your Majesty must dispatch engineers who are well versed in [building] fortifications.

It is advisable that these [proposed] citadels be very strong, [for] then the rebels will not be able to pass through here, nor the [king of] Aceh with his armadas to sack Johor or the Kingdom of Pahang. They would be forced to pass through the Straits of Kundur and bypass the islands, or sail between them; [in any case] it would be very difficult for them. When we have galleys stationed there, they can patrol the Strait of Kundur, although it is broad and features a lot of shoals. Sometimes carracks remain here seven or eight days without being able to sail through because of contrary winds, even when the tide is in their favour. It is a challenging Strait, and the galleys are thus ideally suited for capturing ships lying at anchor. In this way the [galleys] will inflict a great deal of damage on the enemy.

The rebels come with their ships to load pepper, cast anchor and moor around the said Straits of Kundur outside the Indragiri and Jambi Rivers, where [the water] is not very deep. No more than about 25 *léguas* separate the aforementioned point from these river estuaries. Meanwhile, our galleys can be on [their heels] night or day, and our enemies will not be able to load pepper, which is the mainstay of their commerce [in these regions]. Since it [would be] close to our [proposed] fortress, our men would be able to trade and negotiate. Only small vessels enter these rivers. Nor would the rebels find refuge in Palembang, which is a kingdom that has always been a friendly power. So with these galleys and the citadel one could inflict a great [deal of] damage to the enemy and his trade, and [also] patrol the Straits. When these Straits are patrolled and free [of enemy craft], all the vessels will come from all around to call at the fort and [also] Melaka, because the Malays³⁷ are happy to sell their wares to us rather than to the [Dutch] rebels, because the rebels charge levies on all their merchandise, both what they buy as well as what they sell. They visibly do not like the [Dutch] rebels, because they do not sell nor buy like the Portuguese used to do.

It is necessary to build a second fortress or citadel in the Johor River estuary at the promontory of the Isla de la Sabandaria Vieja. This island is situated in the Johor River estuary and is bordered by the ³⁸Old Strait and Tebrau Strait. This [second] fortress should be located about three *léguas* from the [first located] at the [Singapore] Straits. The said Isla de la Sabandaria Vieja measures about seven *léguas* across. The [second] citadel situated at the Johor River estuary and the [first one] at the Singapore Straits can lend each other assistance either by sea or by land. The Old Strait is situated between one island and the other;³⁹ it resembles a river that can be sealed off with a chain.⁴⁰ At this [second] location Your Majesty must order a citadel to be built like the first one that has been mentioned [above]. [Your Majesty] should become the

lord of this port,⁴¹ which is one of the best that serves the [East] Indies. [Your Majesty] can build a city there and become the lord of this kingdom. By constructing this citadel there, no enemy ships would be able to enter without being sunk, even though the Johor River is wide and at the promontory of Old Johor is a shoal that is surrounded by sea.⁴²

When large ships arrive, they move closer to the point where the fortress should be built, and across, [just] a stone's throw away, is the shoal. A small fort could be built on the said sandbank to patrol the entire [Johor] River and to prevent both large and small junks from entering. The enemy rebels repair and careen their ships in this river estuary. The [Johor] River is very wide and beautiful; ships laden with wares can enter and exit without any danger up to ten or even 12 *léguas* upstream. There is no lack of wood in these parts to entrench oneself after arriving, nor is there a lack of materials [with which] to build the citadel, nor a dearth of stones with which to make lime and plaster. In this port, near the aforesaid promontory, the Portuguese captured—[or should one better say] Dom Paulo de Lima captured—Johor Lama, but they did not wish to keep it.⁴³

The king of the city of Johor Lama fled and went to live on the island of Bintan, and later returned and built another city, [located] 14 *léguas* upstream, which is called Batu Sawar, [but which] the Portuguese call New Johor. The king of Aceh captured this port and has kept it occupied, but it could be taken with 1,500 men, as could the city of Pahang, which the said king of Aceh has [also] occupied. For this purpose it would be good to call on the aforementioned king of Johor, since there are four⁴⁴ brothers, and put one of them in power. Once we have constructed the citadels, we will be safe from the local people,⁴⁵ and Your Majesty would have a vassal king [just] like the king of Hormuz used to be. Over time there will be more space, and there will be more provisions for citadels and whatever is necessary, help and assistance for any

purpose, and the said king of Aceh will no longer be so powerful. When the locals will see their king and our protection, on the island of Sumatra, Siak, Kampar, Bengkalis and the lands of Aru, all of them will rise up against the [king of] Aceh, for they are Malays.

This land used to belong to the king of Johor, and the island of Sumatra features a kingdom that was governed by the raja of Siak, who was a brother of the said king of Johor. Siak is situated at the entrance of the Kundur Strait, [and the raja] controlled more than 60 *léguas* of coastline. The king of Aceh has now occupied all of it. Your Majesty could maintain galleys and galleons in this Johor River. They can enter and exit with the tide and wind. If Your Majesty had six or seven Dunkirk galleons⁴⁶ in this port, the rebels would not be safe anywhere in the South[ern Seas], because the [Dutch] rebels cast anchor and moor more than a *légua* and a half [from the shore]⁴⁷ in each and every port of the South[ern Seas]. It is possible to get close to them, because they are separated from one another—there is one ship in one port, two in another. As has been said, with the help of the *orang laut*, our ships can garner information on the whereabouts of the [Dutch] rebels and attack them. As they belong to a single ethnicity, our men are very often mistaken for the [Dutch] rebels, both by night and by day.⁴⁸ In this way one can deprive the rebels of commerce and destroy them.

In order to construct these fortifications, it will be necessary that Your Majesty dispatch 20 galleons with Castilian Spaniards, among them [should be] about six or seven Dunkirk galleons, which make a total of 20 galleons. [They need to be] well-equipped with artillery and supplies, with 250 men on each one, and some engineers with the appropriate tools [to build] the fortifications. On arriving in the Straits of Singapore they can inform Manila, should there be an armada [stationed] there that could come and join them. [In Manila there are] principally the galleys. Your Majesty must dispatch skilled craftsmen who know how to construct galleys in the

Johor River. There is no lack of [construction] sites or wood to construct them, there is [also] no lack of trees to make masts for the galleys, nor [a lack of] cordage, nor ribs,⁴⁹ nor oars, pitch, [or] oil with which to paint the hull.

As for the crews for the galleys, /⁵⁰ *kaffirs* can be brought from Goa. They are strong, dark-skinned people like those from Angola. They can be bought in Goa for 20 pieces of eight per head. From Manila the Spanish⁵¹ go to Goa to buy for their galleys, and they load ships [full] of these people. Our ships could also proceed to the Coromandel Coast and load textiles and take on spices⁵² like the Dutch do. Your Majesty has two ports on the Coromandel Coast, one of which is called Nagapatnam and the other São Tomé, where one could dispose of the cargoes. The Portuguese profit greatly from this commerce. From Johor or from the Straits one can send ships laden with spices to Spain like the Portuguese do, and in this way one will fill Spain, Castile and Portugal with spices, and Your Majesty's customs houses will yield much more. From there merchants can send [these wares] to France and Germany.

In this way, the Dutch will not be able to make such profits. In this way they and their trade will diminish. As [the VOC]⁵³ is a company of merchants [and] if there are no profits, each one will withdraw from this company, seeing low profits. Manila and these two citadels or fortresses, [together with] Melaka and Macao, can assist one another, because they⁵⁴ are nearby. [As for] the two citadels, one in the Straits and the other at the mouth of the Johor River, it is necessary that they both be built in a trice. This will enable them to assist and help one another by sea and by land, as has been mentioned above. It will be necessary to entrench oneself quickly: there is no absence of safe locations, nor will there be anyone [there] to [stop] them. Before the [Dutch] rebels learn about [the arrival of our men],⁵⁵ they will already have established themselves. [Your Majesty] can leave ten galleons in the Straits by the fortress and

another ten at the mouth of the Johor River, until the said citadels have been secured. After constructing the two citadels, [Your Majesty] can build [a third]⁵⁶ at the tip of the Muar River; then the king of Aceh will not be able to assist Johor in any way, neither by sea nor by land.

The Muar River⁵⁷ is very beautiful and much better than the Melaka River.⁵⁸ One can enter the Muar River with junks, *balas*,⁵⁹ *lancharas*—which are vessels of the local people—or [also] laden galliots. [Large] ships cannot enter [the river], but they can cast /⁶⁰ anchor and moor close by as they do in Melaka.⁶¹ It has a good site to harbour galleys and foists, and there is also no lack of secure places to construct them. [Your Majesty] can construct this fortress without hindrance from the local people.⁶² There is a very small village nearby. It is not very noteworthy—it is called Muar—but it has a very beautiful beach that is two *léguas* long. Next to this beach there are some huts of minor significance; they belong to fishermen. Afterwards, these people will obey us and will come to live around⁶³ our fort, and consequently also the people of Johor. In the aforementioned city of Johor⁶⁴ there are many people who make a living only from merchandise and [from] sailing from one land to another.

This is the best way to destroy and diminish the [Dutch] rebels as per my understanding in good faith. If Your Majesty were to send 40 galleons, it would be more effective to put an end to, and destroy, and expel the Dutch who are in the East Indies.

Jaques de Coutre devised this plan of the site of the Straits of Singapore and Kundur.⁶⁵ To remedy the said parts he gives to Your Excellency⁶⁶ this information according to what [the situation] appears [to be] and [as] discussed with Your Excellency recently, especially about depriving the Dutch of the commerce that they have in the East Indies.

Information that Jaques de Coutre sends to Your Highness to construct forts in the Straits of Singapore and in the Johor River estuary⁶⁸ in the South[ern Seas], etc.

¹ De Coutre's son Esteban, a Portuguese-speaking Goan, is known to have edited the text in its present form. Esteban may have also translated an original Portuguese draft into Spanish. See Winius and Chorba, "Literary Invasions in La Vida de Jaques de Coutre: do they prejudice its value as an historical source" in *A Carreira da Índia e as Rotas dos Estreitos*, ed. De Mota and Thomaz, p. 718.

² For further information concerning the authorial intention and historical context of De Coutre's writings as well as the value of his manuscripts for the history of the region, see Borschberg, "Jacques de Coutre as a Source for the Early 17th Century History of Singapore, the Johor River, and the Straits", *JMBRAS*, 81.2 (2008), pp. 71-97.

³ Transcript according to the Spanish text transcribed, edited and published by Benjamin N. Teensma, *Como Remediar o Estado da Índia?*, Intercontinenta, no. 10, Leiden, 1989, pp. 16–21. The Latin ligand "&" is rendered as "et". Nasalisation symbols such as "ā" and "ō" have been transcribed as "an" or "am", and "on" or "om" respectively, in full conformity to modern Spanish spelling conventions. Correspondingly, the symbol "ē" is rendered as "en" or "em". Accents, capitalisation and punctuation prevailing in the late 16th century print text have been retained.

⁴ Fol. 270 verso.

⁵ Fol. 271 recto.

⁶ Fol. 271 verso.

⁷ Fol. 272 recto.

⁸ Fol. 272 verso.

⁹ Fol. 273 recto.

¹⁰ Fol. 273 verso.

¹¹ Fol. 274 recto.

¹² Translated from the original by Roopanjali Roy (Lisbon) and Peter Borschberg. Sentences have been broken up or restructured to smoothen comprehension for the modern reader. Words placed within square brackets have been added by the editors to clarify the text.

¹³ According to Leitão, *Dicionário*, p. 75, the Portuguese expression *baixel* refers to a ship or barque. The Malay craft in question is probably a *prahu* or more likely a junk. In another document penned by De Coutre entitled *Emformación para Su Magestad remediar el estado en la India Oriental* that is “Information for His Majesty to remedy the State in the East Indies”, which one also finds transcribed in *Como Remediar o Estado da Índia?*, p. 23, it is claimed that the *baxeles* are also known as junks (... baxeles que llaman juncos.)

¹⁴ The Spanish term *Chincheo* refers to Chinese merchants and sailors from along the Fujian coast (Amoy). The term, which the Spanish sometimes also use to speak of the Chinese generically, represents a terminological corruption of the town and port of Zhangzhou.

¹⁵ The Spanish and Portuguese term *drogas* was broadly employed in the early modern body of literature and can be translated as “spices and medicinal substances”. In practice, the two meanings overlap considerably, as many spices were – and are still - believed to possess certain medicinal properties.

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- ¹⁶ De Coutre, who was Flemish, from Bruges in the Spanish Netherlands, speaks here of the Dutch from the United Provinces as “rebels”, as they had technically deposed the king of Spain as their legitimate ruler and seceded as a separate state, a move that was not formally recognised by Spain until the ratification of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.
- ¹⁷ In Spanish and Portuguese, the term *presídio* is used variously to designate a permanent military garrison. In the present context, however, the *presídio* should be understood as a prison or a dungeon.
- ¹⁸ A similar proposal for the fortress on present-day Sentosa is also found in a second brief of De Coutre, *Como Remediar o Estado da Índia*, p. 30; AA, p. 422.
- ¹⁹ Fol. 270 verso.
- ²⁰ It is insufficiently clear which “legua” De Coutre has in mind here, the Spanish *legua* or the Portuguese *legoa*. According to Teensma, the former measures approximately 5,500 metres while the latter is larger at just over 6,100 metres. Given the context of Portuguese India, the present author believes the *legua* in question here is the Portuguese sea-mile and not the Spanish mile. This view, however, is not shared by Teensma. See *Como Remediar o Estado da Índia?*, introduction, p. xi. – A similar observation on the location of the island is repeated in the *Vida de Jaques de Coutre*, AA, p. 107, and a second brief or memorial of De Coutre titled “Information for His Majesty to Remedy the State in the East Indies”, in *Como Remediar o Estado da Índia?* p. 30, and AA, p. 422.
- ²¹ The statement about the “fortress by nature” is repeated in a second brief or memorial of De Coutre titled “Information for His Majesty to Remedy the State in the East Indies”, in *Como Remediar o Estado da Índia?* p. 30, and AA, p. 422.

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- ²² The precise etymological origin of this name is uncertain. It might derive from the Portuguese term *surgidoiro*, meaning “roadstead” or “anchorage”. It could also be derived from *surgir*, which means “to rise up” or “emerge”. From the present context and de Coutre’s further explanations that follow, either interpretation makes perfect sense. The location described here is in any case the northwestern tip of present-day Sentosa, which is also home to Fort Siloso. Part of the original hill was levelled to make room for the British fort. Teensma understands Surgidera to be a place of anchorage, see *Como Remediar o Estado da Índia?* p. 69.
- ²³ De Coutre repeats this statement below, see note 40.
- ²⁴ This point is repeated in a second brief or memorial of De Coutre titled “Information for His Majesty to Remedy the State in the East Indies”, in *Como Remediar o Estado da Índia?* p. 30, and AA, p. 422.
- ²⁵ Reference here is to the northwestern tip of present-day Sentosa, where Fort Siloso is currently situated. De Coutre refers to the location as Surgidera. He repeats the depth of water at this location a few lines below.
- ²⁶ Situated at the western entrance of the Tebrau or Johor Strait. The islet is featured on British colonial maps as “Snake Island”.
- ²⁷ For a similar description, see AA, p. 95. Salgeros are willow trees, but one surmises that de Coutre is referring here to banyan trees. The location of this “island” is not exactly certain. According to navigational instructions surviving from the late 16th and early 17th centuries, including Linschoten’s *Reysgeschrift* and *Itinerario*, ships passed between present-day Jurong island (formerly Pulau Sembilan) and Singapore island, skirted the

coastline at Pasir Panjang, and then entered one of the two Singapore Straits that ran either along the north or south side of present-day Sentosa.

28 See note 234.

29 These points are repeated in a second brief or memorial of De Coutre titled “Information for His Majesty to Remedy the State in the East Indies”, in *Como Remediar o Estado da Índia?* p. 30, and AA, p. 422. Fresh water on the island is also mentioned in the *Vida de Jaques de Coutre*, AA, p. 107.

30 Fol. 271 recto.

31 The Spanish text reads literally that the island is flat. This would not fit into the present context and also contradict what De Coutre claims about *surgidera*. The present English translation is thus a free one.

32 A similar claim is repeated in a second brief or memorial of De Coutre titled “Information for His Majesty to Remedy the State in the East Indies”, in *Como Remediar o Estado da Índia?* p. 30, and AA, p. 422.

33 Saletes, celates, *orang laut* or sea gypsies. The name is etymologically linked to the Malay word *selat*, meaning “the sea, strait”. See also AA, pp. 95, 96.

34 See also *Como Remediar o Estado da Índia?*, p. 30; AA, pp. 422-3.

35 *Karang*, or *batu karang*, is the Malay term for coral.

36 Fol. 271 verso.

37 The actual word employed is *Indios*, or “Indians”. In this context, the word refers to the local or native population.

38 Fol. 272 recto.

³⁹ That is to say, the Old Strait of Singapore is located between the main island of Singapore (Isla de la Sabandaria Vieja, or “Island of the Old Shabandar’s Compound”) and Sentosa (Isla de Arena).

⁴⁰ De Coutre mentions this possibility a second time; see note 23.

⁴¹ It is not certain where this port is actually located. Given the distances involved, it would probably be located somewhere along the coast between present-day Kallang and Bedok, and not, as might be expected, at the Singapore River estuary!

⁴² Reference here is almost certainly to the so-called Johor Shoal, which is featured prominently on many early modern maps and charts, including de Bry’s sketch of 1607. It is now located approximately where Tanah Merah and the present-day Changi International Airport are situated.

⁴³ Concerning the capture of Old Johor, Johor Lama or Kota Batu, see appendix 2 in this volume.

⁴⁴ The term *quarto* (meaning one-fourth) appears to be a transcription error here. The word should probably read *quatro*, or four, meaning, there are four brothers. The four sons of the Johor ruler Raja Ali Jalla Abdul Jalil, namely King Alauddin of Johor, Raja Bongsu (or Raja Sabrang), Raja Siak and Raja Laut, are described in some detail in the travel account of Dutch Admiral Cornelis Matelieff de Jonge. The descriptions were made in conjunction to his visit to the Batu Sawar court around September 1606. See the “Historische Verhael Vande treffelijckke Reyse, gedaen naer de Oost-Indien ende China ... door ... Cornelis Matelief de Jonge”, *BV*, III, pp. 10-11. Passages from this description are also found in

Rouffaer, “Was Malaka Emporum vóór 1400 A.D. genaamd Malajoer?”, *BKI*, 77 (1921), pp. 445-6.

45 The actual word employed by de Coutre is *naturales*, or “natural people of the land”.

46 De Coutre, *Como Remediar o Estado da Índia?*, introduction, p. viii, “[S]hips of this fleet should be manned by Spanish Dunkirkers who in the twenties of the 17 th century were extremely popular in Spain for their successful privateering against the Dutch ‘rebels’.”

47 The text reads literally “one and a half leguas at sea”, which means they are one and a half leguas from the shoreline.

48 What De Coutre is saying here is that all these European peoples derive from a single ethnic group, and to the Asians all Europeans tend look alike. He recommends that the Spaniards use this confusion of nationalities to their advantage.

49 According to Leitão, *Dicionário*, p. 193, a *curba* or *curva* refers to pieces of wood or iron that are used in the construction of boats or ships.

50 Fol. 273 recto.

51 The text reads “they can go”. From the context, it is evident that reference is to the Spanish from Manila.

52 The term *drogas* literally means “drugs”, but in a more familiar sense it means “spices”. Many spices were, and still are, thought to possess medicinal properties.

53 From the context, it is clear that reference here is to the Dutch East India Company, the VOC.

54 From the narrow wording of the text, it is not certain whom “they” actually refers to. One presumes that De Coutre is talking here only about the “two citadels” around Singapore, and not in Melaka, Manila and Macao. Those would certainly not be “nearby”. The subsequent sentence reinforces the view that “they” refers only to the two Singapore citadels.

55 This interpretation is based on the context.

56 The text reads literally “another”.

57 The text reads “this river”.

58 The text reads “than that of Melaka”.

59 The term *balas* is probably a corruption of the Portuguese *bâlos*. This is an Asian type vessel that is propelled by breast oars and can be sailed. See also note 136 above.

60 Fol. 273 verso.

61 The text literally reads “a stone’s throw away like in Melaka”.

62 De Coutre’s testimony here would appear to deny the earlier claim of Manoel Godinho de Erédia that a fortress had been founded and constructed at Muar in or around 1604. The triangular-shaped fortification featured in the original manuscript of the *Declaração de Malaca* was not a depiction of an actual fortification, but what in modern terminology would be called an “artist’s impression”.

63 Literally, “below”.

64 Reference here is to Batu Sawar.

65 Unfortunately, this plan is no longer extant.

⁶⁶ This final paragraph does not belong to the main text of the memorial and is evidently a note addressed to a third party.

⁶⁷ Fol. 274 recto.

⁶⁸ Literally, at the “tip of the Johor River”.