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# Government Slavery in Portuguese Melaka, 1511–1523

This chapter studies the state-owned slaves in the city of Melaka, in the years following the Portuguese conquest in 1511. It was the first time that a Western European country took control of a Southeast Asian city, a moment of enormous and troubled intercultural exchange. I will specifically focus on how colonization affected the compensation and social class (status) of local slaves and labourers.

The effect of colonization upon slavery regimes in Asia remains poorly understood. On the one hand, many scholars have noted that European colonists often maintained local slavery systems and took advantage of them.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, many have also noted that the Europeans often made significant changes, not only to slavery specifically, but also to the entire labour structure.<sup>2</sup> There was clearly a mixture of both continuity and change. However, while this mixture is well noted, it is less well understood. It is often unclear what exactly about slavery changed, how it changed, or who precisely changed it. To some extent, this is due to ideological obstacles, for example the colonial distortion of perspectives on slavery, but also the notorious problem of defining ‘slavery’ (a problem which this volume amply explores). In addition, there is also a basic lack of sources. In many regions, pre-colonial Asian sources on slavery are fragmentary or lacking. The European sources can also be sparse, not to mention biased. There are thus many information gaps, making it hard to continuously track the evolution of slavery practices.

I will examine a case in which the documentary record is unusually rich, a case in which it is possible to get a certain sense of the ‘before and after’, at least with regard to one aspect of slavery: that of income. On the Malay side, we have the Melakan law codes, most notably the *Undang-Undang Melaka*, as well as those of Perak and Johor, dating to the seventeenth century. These law codes contain numerous comments on slaves. On the Portuguese side, there are a number of reports from the captains of Melaka which describe the slavery situation. In addition, there are a few extant notebooks of the *almojarife dos mantimentos*, the officer charged with food

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1 See Markus Vink, “‘The World’s Oldest Trade’: Dutch Slavery and Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean in the Seventeenth Century,” *Journal of World History* 14, no. 2 (2003): 149–60; Nigel Worden, “Indian Ocean Slaves in Cape Town, 1695–1807,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 42, no. 3 (2016): 397–402.

2 See, for example, Richard B. Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500–1850* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2015): 19–24; Rafaël Thiébaud, “Some Thoughts Concerning the Effects of the European Slave Trade on the Dynamics of Slavery in Madagascar in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” in *Slaving Zones*, ed. Jeff Fynn-Paul and Damian Alan Pargas (Leiden: Brill, 2017): 169–204.

supply (who will henceforth be called ‘the rations officer’).<sup>3</sup> These documents give detailed information on slave salaries. In comparing these Malay and Portuguese documents, it is possible to reconstruct some of the structural changes that happened during the transition into colonization.

I will argue for a specific way of understanding the relationship between precolonial and colonial slavery regimes, what I will refer to as ‘the framework approach’. The basic idea is that while the colonists did maintain various local practices, they changed the meaning of these practices when they placed them into their own socio-economic framework. In our case, the Sultanate of Melaka and the Portuguese Empire approached slavery using very different ideologies. The former based the master-slave relationship upon the model of patron and client. The latter, in contrast, based it upon the model of employer and employee – a much more commercial mindset. Accordingly, although the Portuguese did indeed adopt the basic labour remuneration system of the Sultanate, they used this system in a very different way. The result was that many slaves and labourers (though not all) were adversely affected, falling into poverty, losing social status.

## 1 The Melakan Framework: Slavery as a Form of Clientelism

Let us first note the social structure within the Sultanate of Melaka. It has often been said that Early Modern Malay society was built upon the patron-client relationship.<sup>4</sup> The upper classes built up political and social power by accumulating dependents and subordinates.<sup>5</sup> Each of these subordinates, in turn, accumulated their own clients. The pattern extended from the Sultan (the greatest patron), down

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<sup>3</sup> For the period of this study, the records of three rations officers have been preserved: Francisco Cardoso (1513–1514), Juzarte Homem (1519), and Francisco Bocarro (1523–1524). Note that in the case of Homem and Bocarro, their documents are not listed under their own names in the bibliography. For Juzarte Homem, the documents are under the name of Afonso Lopes da Costa, captain of Melaka in 1519. For Francisco Bocarro, they are under the name of Jorge de Albuquerque, captain in 1521–1524. It was the captain who issued the distribution order to the rations officer, and who was thus the official author of the document.

<sup>4</sup> Dean Messinger, “Slavery, Dependency, and Obligation in the Early Modern Malay Archipelago: Towards a Refashioned ‘Slave Mode of Production’,” *Footnotes: A Journal of History* 4 (2020): 27–28.

<sup>5</sup> Anthony Reid, “The Structure of Cities in Southeast Asia, Fifteenth to Seventeenth Centuries,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 11, no. 2 (1980): 243–47.

to the village chiefs.<sup>6</sup> ‘Malay society’, wrote Matheson and Hooker, ‘functioned through a system of formalized obligations, the prime obligation being owed to the ruler who was the source of life, and to whom a subject could surrender himself, and in return expect everlasting protection’.<sup>7</sup> That is to say, dependency was built into the social structure.

The slavery was one element within this structure. The master took the role of patron, and the slave that of client.<sup>8</sup> The analogy between slavery and clientelism can be seen in the language, in the way that citizens referred to themselves as ‘domestic slaves (*sahaya*)’ of the Sultan, as a sign of deference and loyalty.<sup>9</sup> Ideologically, this implied a reciprocal relationship between slave and master, one with mutual (although unequal) duties: the master offering benevolence and the slave responding with loyalty. This perhaps shows the influence of the medieval Muslim tradition, in which the master-slave relationship was compared to the father-son relationship.<sup>10</sup> While the reality of slave labour was doubtless not so beautiful, the foregoing gives a sense of the ideological framework of slavery.

I should also offer a warning. It was nineteenth-century Britain which largely forged the image of a hierarchical, rather feudal Malaysia.<sup>11</sup> To some extent, this stereotype shaped, and continues to influence, scholarly views of the Melakan Sultanate. This makes it difficult to distinguish between historical facts and colonial prejudices. I have sought to avoid oversimplifications in this chapter, but I know that there may be blind spots. I invite other researchers to correct any unjust assumptions that I may have made.

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6 The most comprehensive study on pre-colonial Malay political systems is John Michael Gullick, *Indigenous Political Systems of West Malaya* (rev. ed., Abingdon, NY: Routledge, 2020). However, it should be noted that Gullick focuses on Malay cities in the nineteenth century that had not yet been subjected to England.

7 Virginia Matheson and M. B. Hooker, “Slavery in the Malay Texts: Categories of Dependency and Compensation,” in *Slavery, Bondage and Dependency in Southeast Asia*, ed. Anthony Reid (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983): 200.

8 Luís Filipe F.R. Thomaz, “A escravatura em Malaca no século XVI,” *Studia* 53 (1994): 264–66.

9 Such polite usage of the word survives up to this day. See Thomaz, “Escravatura”: 266. See also the humorous anecdote in the annals in which a Melakan envoy refers to himself in this way: *Malay Annals*, trans. John Leyden (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Ormf, and Brown, 1821): 181.

10 Paul G. Forand, “The Relation of the Slave and the Client to the Master or Patron in Medieval Islam,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 2, no. 1 (1971): 59–66.

11 This point is forcefully made by Cheah Boon Kheng, “Feudalism in Pre-Colonial Malaya: The Past as a Colonial Discourse,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 25, no. 2 (1994): 243–69.

## 2 Four Types of Dependency in the Sultanate of Melaka

I will now introduce four different groups of dependent labourers in the Sultanate of Melaka. I will try to explain two things about each group: 1) their social status, and 2) their income. We will track these four groups over the course of this chapter, and see what happened to them after the Portuguese took over the city.

First, there was the large, diverse group of ‘regular slaves’ – slaves who did not have any special privileges. In this chapter, we will mainly see the domestic slaves (*hamba sahaya*),<sup>12</sup> the elephant caretakers, and the enslaved war captives (*hamba tawanan*).<sup>13</sup> These people were of the lowest social class.

In regard to income, it seems that they functioned within the traditional cliental framework. They were not remunerated specifically for their work. At least, the *Undang-Undang Melaka* never says that this was required. However, the text does mention that masters were expected to feed their slaves.<sup>14</sup> The Portuguese sources affirm this, saying that the Sultan had previously distributed rice and clothing to them – that is to say, the basic necessities.<sup>15</sup> In other words, it seems that the master had a general moral duty to provide for the slaves, like a father for his children.

Second, there were the royal slaves (*hamba raja*).<sup>16</sup> The term ‘royal slave’ is probably a general term for all the more honored slaves of the Sultan. It included various sub-classes. For example, the *Malay Annals* seem to equate them with *bi-duanda* (court attendants).<sup>17</sup> In contrast, various Portuguese sources, in describing battles with other Malay states, say that royal slaves led troops into battle.<sup>18</sup> For his part, the Renaissance historian João Barros, using an unidentified source, says that they served as administrators in the Melakan trade bureau.<sup>19</sup> One might also add that if they were war commanders and trade administrators, then it is likely that

12 See Matheson and Hooker, “Slavery in the Malay Texts”: 192–93.

13 Aminuddin bin Baki, “The Institution of Debt-Slavery in Perak,” *Peninjau sejarah* 1 (1966): 1–2; Matheson and Hooker, “Slavery in the Malay Texts”: 193–94.

14 *Undang-Undang Melaka: The Laws of Melaka*, trans. Liaw Yock Fang (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976): 118–19.

15 Diogo Lopes de Sequeira to King Manuel I, December 28, 1519, in *Diogo Lopes de Sequeira*, ed. Ronald Bishop Smith (Lisbon, 1975): 38; João de Barros, *Da Ásia: Década Terceira, Parte Primeira* (Lisbon: Regia Officina Typografica, 1777): Livro 1, Cap 9, 88.

16 See Matheson and Hooker, “Slavery in the Malay Texts”: 195–98.

17 *Malay Annals*: 97 (also quoted below); Matheson and Hooker, “Slavery in the Malay Texts”: 192–99.

18 Thomaz, “Escravidura”: 270–71. Barros also seems to describe them in the battle for Muar, Livro 3, Cap. 2, 257.

19 Barros, Livro 1, Cap. 9, 88. This practice is also discussed in Daniel Perret, “From Slave to King,” *Archipel* 82 (2011): 171–72.

they were also the captains of the Sultan's trade ships, which were reportedly run completely by slaves.<sup>20</sup>

It seems likely that the royal slaves functioned within the cliental framework as well in regard to income. Like the regular slaves, they received their basic necessities from the Sultan, rice and clothing. This can be inferred from the fact that the Portuguese distributed such things to the royal slaves, and said that they were following local custom in doing so.<sup>21</sup> That said, receiving such gifts was probably more a symbolic recognition of vassalage than a financial necessity for them. Many probably had significant incomes, based upon their duties within the administration (court attendant, ship captain, trade officer, etc). This income was probably not an official salary, but rather a benefit derived from their privileged social position. For example, trade administrators and captains were perfectly positioned to engage in private trade and investment (not to mention corruption).

Third, there were the debt bondsmen (*hamba berhutang*).<sup>22</sup> These were people who had either voluntarily given themselves into slavery in exchange for money, or who had forcibly been enslaved after defaulting on a loan.<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, this group also must have been very socially diverse, with people from many different walks of life. In this study, we will mainly see bondsmen in the roles of sailors, dockworkers, carpenters, and blacksmiths, though there must have been many other types of labourers as well.<sup>24</sup> In addition, they might have also been ethnically

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**20** Afonso de Albuquerque himself described the Sultan's slave-run merchant fleet, in "Afonso de Albuquerque to King Manuel I, April 1, 1512," in *Cartas de Affonso de Albuquerque*, vol. 1, ed. Raymundo Antonio de Bulhão Pato (Lisbon: Academia Real das Sciencias, 1884): 50. This practice of slave sailors is also mentioned in Perret, "From Slave to King": 172–74.

**21** Lopo Vaz, "Rol de vários pagamentos e compras que fez o feitor Lopo Vaz," entry for January 26, 1518, Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Corpo Cronológico PT/TT/CC/2/72/111, fol 28v (<https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/details?id=3796934>). In this passage, the slaves who receive the cloth are working in the *feitoria*, and as mentioned above, those slaves were royal slaves.

**22** See Matheson and Hooker, "Slavery in the Malay Texts": 194–95. Thomaz, "Escravidura": 285–91.

**23** The law code of Perak contains the most detailed discussion of the conditions under which enslavement could happen (voluntarily or involuntarily through debt). The relevant passages are translated in William Edward Maxwell, "The Law Relating to Slavery among the Malays," *Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 22 (1890): 283–86.

**24** See the two extant general salary rate documents for 'escravos e negros': Afonso Lopes da Costa, "Mandado de Afonso Lopes da Costa, capitão e governador da fortaleza de Malaca, para Juzarte Homem, almoxarife dos mantimentos, pagar aos escravos cativos," April 1, 1519, Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Corpo Cronológico PT/TT/CC/2/80/211, <https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/details?id=3798366>; and Jorge de Albuquerque, "Mandado do Capitão . . . Jorge de Albuquerque, para o almoxarife Francisco Bocarro e o escrivão André de Chaves pagarem aos negros e escravos do rei," August 1, 1521, Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Corpo Cronológico PT/TT/CC/2/97/70, <https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/details?id=3801313>. The dockworkers are mentioned in Barros, Livro 1, Cap. 9, 88.

diverse. João Barros says that these slaves were procured from ‘outside of Melaka’.<sup>25</sup> In regard to their social status, the debt bondsmen retained certain privileges associated with freedom. For example, the *Undang-Undang Melaka* says that while debt bondsmen are slaves, their wives and children are not, unless they have contractually agreed to it.<sup>26</sup> This is in contrast to regular slaves, whose family belonged to the master as well. As Thomaz has noted, the general assumption seems to be that debt bondsmen would eventually pay off their debts and return to freedom, even if in practice this rarely happened.<sup>27</sup>

In regard to income, the debt bondsmen seem to have straddled the line between cliental and commercial systems. On the one hand, it seems that they did receive their basic necessities from the Sultan, like other slaves.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, they also received a salary specifically for their work. This can be inferred from a 1521 letter by the governor of India, Diogo de Sequeira. He described what seem to be the debt bondsmen:

In the time of the King of Melaka, there were many slaves, both married and single, with their wives and children, who had salary [*mantimento*]<sup>29</sup> when they served, whether on land or on sea. And when they did not serve, they did not have anything except cloth for festivals.<sup>30</sup>

These people received pay when they worked, but nothing when they did not work – that is to say, the pay was a direct compensation for their labour. Furthermore, it seems that this payment was made in cash. We can infer this from the fact that their debt, and the interest on the debt, was calculated monetarily.<sup>31</sup> In this same commercial spirit, the bondsmen apparently had considerable autonomy. Some legal texts distinguish between bondsmen who had to work full-time for their masters, and those who could work independently to pay off their debts.<sup>32</sup> The *Undang-Undang Melaka* gives the impression that these latter often worked for third

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<sup>25</sup> Barros, Livro 1, Cap 9, 87. Similarly, Afonso de Albuquerque, 50, said that these ships were run by Javanese slaves.

<sup>26</sup> *Undang Undang*: 169. See also Matheson and Hooker, “Slavery in the Malay Texts”: 188–89.

<sup>27</sup> See Thomaz, “Escravatura”: 285–91.

<sup>28</sup> Barros, Livro 1, Cap. 9, 87–88, directly says that the *ballâtes* received rice and cloth on a regular basis. These *ballâtes* are probably the same as the *batos* mentioned in Costa, “Mandado . . . pagar aos escravos”: fol. 2a, and also in Jorge de Albuquerque, “Mandado . . . pagarem aos negros e escravos do rei”: fol. 2a. My assumption is that these people are none other than the former debt bondsmen. *Ballâtes* and *batos* would thus be corruptions of the word *hamba berhutang* (debt slave). My reason for believing this is that the *ballâtes* were reported to live independently and have their own businesses (Barros, Livro 1, Cap. 9, 87–88). This fits with what is known about the autonomous debt bondsmen.

<sup>29</sup> See below on the confusion between the food ration (*mantimento*) and the salary.

<sup>30</sup> Diogo Lopes de Sequeira to King Manuel I, December 28, 1519, in *Diogo Lopes de Sequeira*, ed. Ronald Bishop Smith (Lisbon: Silvas, 1975): 38.

<sup>31</sup> Thomaz, “Escravatura”: 285–91.

<sup>32</sup> Matheson and Hooker, “Slavery in the Malay Texts”: 195.

parties without consulting their masters.<sup>33</sup> Clearly, the bondsmen did not conform to the traditional ‘father-son’ model of slavery.

Fourth and finally, there were many free Melakan citizens who lived in conditions that might be called semi-dependent. Neither the *Malay Annals* nor the laws tell us much about these people, but we will see them among the labourers of Portuguese Melaka. These were presumably poorer folk, perhaps former debt bondsmen, who still depended on their patrons (the Melakan court) for work, for protection, for advocacy. They were legally free, but socially and financially dependent.

To summarize, these were the four groups of dependents under the Sultanate whom we will track in this chapter: 1) the regular slaves, 2) the royal slaves, 3) the debt bondsmen, and 4) the free clients. Broadly, the first two classes functioned within the cliental framework, receiving provisions and honours, but not a salary (in the sense of ‘pay in exchange for labour’). While the master did give payments to them, and while the slaves did indeed provide labour for the master (and often hard labour), there was not necessarily a direct, one-to-one relationship between the payments and the labour. There were other moral and social factors that were also intervening. The major exception was that of the debt bondsmen, who did receive a work-based salary. Their existence perhaps reflects the changing culture of the Sultanate as it developed during the age of commerce.

### 3 The Portuguese Conquest: Maintaining the Basic Slavery Practices

First of all, it should be recognized that the Portuguese did indeed maintain certain aspects of Melakan slavery. In 1518, Francisco de Faria wrote that the Governor of India, Afonso de Albuquerque, wishing to secure the city’s labour force, had promised to the slaves that ‘all those who wished to come and live in Melaka would live freely (*eram em sua liberdade*) and would only serve in that which they had served in the time of the King [of Melaka]’.<sup>34</sup> That is to say, they retained their preexisting rights and job duties. Similarly, João Barros, who probably had not only Faria’s letter, but also others which are no longer extant, wrote that Albuquerque ‘ordered to send out announcements that all who returned to the city to repopulate its houses, would be guaranteed good treatment of their persons by him, and he would maintain them legally in the manner that they had lived previously.’<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> *Undang-Undang*: 91.

<sup>34</sup> Francisco de Faria to King Manuel I, August 14, 1517, Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Corpo Cronológico PT/TT/CC/1/22/62, fol. 3r (<https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/details?id=3769930>).

<sup>35</sup> Barros, Livro 1, Cap. 9, 87.

These claims are not untrue. The Portuguese continued the Sultanate's general practice of distributing rice. The ration documents amply testify to that fact. Similarly, just as the Sultanate had distributed cloth to the slaves, so also did the Portuguese. The city's warehouse records contain entries showing such distributions.<sup>36</sup> And as we will see, slaves do seem to have continued working in the same areas as before. For example, we will see slaves continuing to appear within the trade bureau, within the ships, etc. In short, at least at a rudimentary level, the Portuguese did respect their promise to maintain preexisting Melakan slavery practices.

## 4 Consequences of the Transition: Loss of Income

The Portuguese economic and social framework was different from that of the Sultanate. It was fundamentally commercial. The Portuguese Empire has been described as a form of state capitalism, an enterprise whose primary goal was not territory, but rather profit.<sup>37</sup> The fortress of Melaka very much embodied this spirit. Writing to the King, Afonso de Albuquerque justified the conquest of Melaka based upon the trade revenue that it would generate: 'Melaka is a very great thing, it is in a place where, even if there were no Melaka there, due to the trade in those parts, it would be good for you to make a fortress there.'<sup>38</sup> Thus, the fortress of Melaka was run somewhat like a business, constantly trying to minimize expenses and maximize profits. This 'business model' determined the treatment of slaves. The government slaves were basically viewed as low-class state employees.

In concrete terms, one of the main consequences of this commercial framework was that it caused many slaves to lose income. One reason for this was that the Portuguese streamlined the remuneration system. We have seen that under the Sultanate, some slaves had been receiving both a food ration for basic necessities, and a separate income for their work (sometimes official, sometimes unofficial). Initially, the Portuguese might have been planning to do something similar, with a ration in rice and a salary in money.<sup>39</sup> But then the fortress ran into considerable currency

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<sup>36</sup> Vaz, fol 28v.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, Bailey W. Diffie and George D. Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire, 1415–1580* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977): 301–37.

<sup>38</sup> Afonso de Albuquerque, 53.

<sup>39</sup> This can be seen from Afonso Lopes da Costa's 1519 general order, which set salary rates. It prescribes both a ration and a monetary salary for slaves, citing tradition. See Costa, "Mandado . . . pagar aos escravos." The practice was allowed in some other fortresses in the colonies. The fortress of Sofala, for example, distributed food rations and salaries separately. See Bartolomeu Perestrelo, "Rol do milho que o almoxarife dos mantimentos de Sófala havia de dar aos moradores," March 1, 1511, Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Corpo Cronológico PT/TT/CC/2/25/172, <https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/details?id=3787812>.



problems. Unable to provide a stable currency, it began to pay the Portuguese citizens a salary in rice.<sup>40</sup> In essence, it merged the salary and the ration into one single payment. The administration applied this same principle to the slaves. The ration records of 1513–1514 show that the slaves were either receiving rice or money, but not both.<sup>41</sup>

For many slaves, this merging of salary and ration was unfortunate. As we have seen, the debt bondsmen had previously received both a salary and a food ration. They now effectively lost one of them. They found themselves eating through their salary each day, quite literally, making it difficult to build up funds to purchase their own freedom. Those who had large families to feed certainly struggled. On the other hand, this merging probably did not affect the domestic slaves much. Having previously only received basic necessities from the Sultan, without any salary, a single rice payment from the Portuguese was not much of a change.

The administration also streamlined the remuneration system by setting one standard salary rate for almost all slaves: one day of work was paid with a half-ganta of rice. (The ganta is an earlier Malay measure of volume, equal to 1.75 liters.) This comes out clearly in the 1513–1514 records of daily ration distributions. As an example, here is one entry from the records of Rations Officer Francisco Cardoso, from November 30, 1513:

Item, on the thirtieth day of the aforementioned month, the aforementioned rations officer, in accordance with the aforementioned general order of the aforementioned trade officer, distributed one hundred and twenty gantas and a half of the aforementioned rice, which he gave to the black men (*negros*<sup>42</sup>) who serve in construction of the fortress and docks: namely, to four carpenters and four blacksmiths, at the rate of one ganta to each, and to two hundred and twenty five other black men, at the rate of a half ganta to each, among whom are included the ninety-nine of the jailhouse.<sup>43</sup>

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**40** On the early currency problems of the Portuguese administration in Melaka, see, for example, Francisco de Albuquerque to King Manuel I, December 18, 1512, in *Cartas de Affonso de Albuquerque*, vol. 3 (Lisbon: Academia Real das Sciencias de Lisboa, 1903): 361.

**41** The source is Francisco Cardoso, “Receita e despesa do vinho, vinagre, arroz, azeite e outros, que o almoxarife de Malaca, Francisco Cardoso, recebeu e despendeu,” December 5, 1514, Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Corpo Cronológico PT/TT/CC/2/53/93, <https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/details?id=3793515>. In Cardoso’s ration documents, rice is distributed almost every day. However, for two days, January 23 and 24, 1514 (399b–400a), Cardoso issued coins to the slaves – sometimes using the locally minted tin coin called the *bastardo*, and sometimes using Portuguese *réis* – instead of rice. On those two days of monetary payment, no rice ration is recorded. The document explicitly says that Cardoso was giving the coins for ‘their food (*mantimento*) and daily salary (*journal*).’ Thus, the slaves either received either rice or cash, but not both at the same time.

**42** The Portuguese used the term *negro* for all non-Europeans with a dark complexion. The term often indicates local Malays.

**43** Francisco Cardoso, “Receita e despesa do vinho, vinagre, arroz, azeite e outros, que o almoxarife de Malaca, Francisco Cardoso, recebeu e despendeu,” December 5, 1514, Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Corpo Cronológico PT/TT/CC/2/53/93, photo no. m0389 (<https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/details?id=3793515>).

The labour classes mentioned in this passage will be explained later. For the moment, let us just note the salary rates: the free artisans (carpenters and blacksmiths) received one ganta per day, and the slaves (the ‘others’) received a half-ganta per day. For both of these groups, salary was paid on a day-by-day basis. When the workers did not work, they were not paid.

This salary system caused financial loss for the debt bondsmen, royal slaves, and free clients. We have seen that the Sultan had distributed basic necessities regularly, as a general patronal duty, regardless of the actual work done. In contrast, the Portuguese directly linked payment to work. To make matters worse, they did not have slaves work on a consistent basis. For example, Francisco Cardoso’s records show that on January 24, 1514, pay was distributed to 27 unchained slaves.<sup>44</sup> In contrast, on August 14, 1514, pay was distributed to 182 unchained slaves.<sup>45</sup> The numbers seem to swing wildly from day to day. One suspects that certain slaves, such as the court attendants, who had been serving almost every day under the Sultanate, now found themselves rather idle – without work and without rice.

The royal slaves also lost income for another reason. They had formerly run the Sultanate’s bureaucracy, led troops, and captained the ships. But now Portuguese lackeys took over these positions. (The nepotism of the successive Portuguese administrations was a topic of endless complaint in the city.<sup>46</sup>) While the royal slaves continued to work in the same administrative offices, and while they continued to help aboard the ships, they no longer had official leadership. They apparently dropped from the status of administrator to that of assistant. This demotion probably eliminated much of their supplemental income: the former slave trade administrators could no longer cut private deals; the former slave captains could no longer rent out cargo space. While their official salary was maintained, their unofficial income, which was much more important, was taken away.

Perhaps less intentionally, the Portuguese also caused the debt bondsmen and the free clients to lose income for still another reason. As mentioned, under the Sultanate, it was common for bondsmen to independently work for third parties. Presumably the free clients were doing the same. However, it seems that under the Portuguese administration, such third parties largely ceased to exist. It is not entirely clear why. We only know this from later problems that arose, which we will see later in this chapter. Perhaps one major issue was that the Portuguese formed a cultural and economic bubble within the city, a European enclave within a Southeast Asian

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<sup>44</sup> Cardoso, photo no. m0400v.

<sup>45</sup> Cardoso, photo no. m0409r.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Pero de Faria, 1517, 342; see also Costa, 1518, 476–77.

port.<sup>47</sup> The debt bondsmen seem to have committed themselves to this enclave, many converting to Christianity.<sup>48</sup> They were thus rather cut off from the surrounding Muslim community, and consequently from their former business contacts. In any case, it seems that many could no longer supplement their salary by working for others. Increasingly, they were trapped in a cycle of poverty.

In summary, we can see the problem of ‘frameworks’ generating the salary crisis. The Portuguese officers, doubtless with some hypocrisy, insisted that they were maintaining the basic rice distribution that the Sultan had instituted. Only, they wanted to make the system more efficient, to make the employees earn their salary: no work, no pay. From the slaves’ perspective, however, the Portuguese were morally failing as patrons. They were not supporting and taking care of their clients as they should.

Facing such conditions, the slaves and labourers began fleeing. In 1517, a disgruntled officer of the city, Pero de Faria, wrote that ‘Malaca has now been completely depopulated’.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, the officer Simão de Andrade, who arrived in Melaka with a relief force in June 1518, reported that he had found the city ‘almost unpopulated of all the merchants and people from there, due to the tyranny and robbery that was being done there’.<sup>50</sup>

Some of the slaves had fled in order to find a better income. In 1515, Pero de Faria had already reported that the former Sultan of Melaka, from his new base in Bintam, was trying to draw sailors away from the Portuguese by offering them higher salaries.<sup>51</sup> And again in 1517, Faria cried out with urgency:

This persecution that the local people have, it is more from the Portuguese than from the King of Bintam! [. . .] Furthermore, they [the forces of Bintam] are their countrymen, and they receive better jobs than what they receive from us, which moreover is not much. Since they are their countrymen, they flee to them and leave Your Highness. Because clearly Nuno Vaz [one of the city officials] persecutes them [. . .] principally by taking away their salary [*mantimentos*].<sup>52</sup>

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47 See, for example, Pierre-Yves Manguin, “Of Fortresses and Galleys: The 1568 Acehnese Siege of Melaka, after a Contemporary Bird’s-Eye View,” *Modern Asian Studies* 22, no. 3 (1988): 607–28. Jorge dos Santos Alves and Nader Nasiri-Moghaddam, “Une lettre en persan de 1519 sur la situation à Malacca,” *Archipel* 75, no. 1 (2008): 154.

48 On the question of conversion, see Thomaz, “Escravidura”: 291–97.

49 Pero de Faria, 1517, 340.

50 Simão de Andrade, Letter of Simão de Andrade to King Manuel I, August 10, 1518, in *Gavetas da Torre do Tombo*, vol. 5 (Lisbon: Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1965): 125.

51 Pero de Faria to King Manuel I, January 4, 1515, in *Cartas de Affonso de Albuquerque*, vol. 3 (Lisbon: Academia Real das Sciencias de Lisboa, 1903): 130–31.

52 Pero de Faria, 1517, 340.

While there were also other factors causing the population to flee, the salary/ration problem was clearly one major factor.<sup>53</sup> It was perhaps a matter of survival.

## 5 Consequences of the Transition: Loss of Social Status

Another major consequence of the Portuguese salary system was that many slaves lost not only salary, but also social status. Perhaps unintentionally, the Portuguese salary policy challenged the preexisting social hierarchy. Looking back at the sample entry from November 30, 1513, quoted above, one can see that it does not use the traditional Malay categories, such as royal slave, debt bondsman, etc. The Portuguese knew of such categories, but they seem to have chosen to ignore them in this document.<sup>54</sup> Instead, the entry refers to labourers using a new set of categories. It speaks of three types of labourers: 1) eight free artisans (four carpenters, four blacksmiths), 2) ninety-nine ‘black men’ who were kept in the jailhouse, and, by inference, 3) one hundred and twenty six ‘black men’ who were not kept in the jailhouse. (Henceforth, I will refer to the latter two groups as ‘chained’ and ‘unchained’ slaves.<sup>55</sup>) The reason why the document uses these new categories was probably financial. The rations officer was trying to keep track of the payroll, and accordingly, he grouped the various labourers according to their salary rate – for free labourers, unchained slaves, and chained slaves each had slightly different salaries.

The following table summarizes the pay rates of the different labour classes during that time:<sup>56</sup>

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53 There are many other reasons for slaves fleeing which go beyond the scope of this study. On these other reasons, see Thomaz, “Escravatura”: 274–77.

54 The Portuguese were somewhat aware of the different social classes of slaves in the Melakan system. João de Barros speaks of two classes of slaves: the *ambarages* (*hamba raja*) and the *ballâtes* (*hamba berhutang*) – that is to say, the royal slaves and the debt bondsmen. Barros, Livro 1, Cap 9, 87.

55 In regard to the terms ‘chained *afferolhados*’ and ‘unchained *aliberdados*’, see Thomaz, “Escravatura”: 266–69. Note that this distinction between chained and unchained slaves apparently continued under the seventeenth-century Dutch regime. See Messinger, “Slavery, Dependency, and Obligation”: 36.

56 This table has been simplified to emphasize each general labour category. For a more detailed chart, see Pierre-Yves Manguin, “Manpower and Labour Categories in Early Sixteenth Century Malacca,” in *Slavery, Bondage and Dependency in Southeast Asia*, ed. Anthony Reid (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983): 212–13.

Tab. 1: Salary Rates for Labourers.

Primary Labour Classes	A. 1511 system <sup>57</sup>	B. 1519 sea system <sup>58</sup>	C. 1523 land system
Free labourers	1 ganta per workday <sup>59</sup>	Official employee of crown: 30 gantas per month	30 gantas per month <sup>60</sup>
Supervisor slaves ( <i>tuções</i> )	20 gantas per month, regardless of total workdays <sup>61</sup>	Chief <i>tução</i> : 30 gantas per month Secondary <i>tuções</i> : 22 gantas per month	<i>Tução</i> of unchained slaves ( <i>batos</i> ): 1 ganta per day <i>Tução</i> of the elephant caretakers: 20 gantas per month
Unchained slaves ( <i>aliberdados</i> )	Half-ganta per workday	Scribes and pilots 24.5 gantas per month ‘ <i>Gerennendes</i> ’ 18.5 gantas per month <sup>62</sup> Interpreters 17.5 gantas per month ‘ <i>Aves paraos</i> ’ 15 gantas per month <sup>63</sup>	Carpenters and blacksmiths: 1 ganta per workday, half ganta per rest day Other unchained slaves ( <i>batos</i> ): fifteen gantas per month
Chained slaves ( <i>afferlhados</i> )	Half-ganta per day, paid every day	15 gantas per month	15 gantas per month

<sup>57</sup> All of the salary rates in column A are from the records of Francisco Cardoso. The categories of ‘chained’, ‘unchained’, and ‘free artisan’ appear throughout the record, almost every day. The one exception is the category of *tuções*, which appears less frequently, and which has a footnote of its own, below.

<sup>58</sup> All of the salary rates in column B are from Costa, “Mandado . . . pagar aos escravos.” The one exception is the salary rate of the free Malay sailors, which changed in 1521 (see below).

<sup>59</sup> From Cardoso. See, for example, the entry of November 29, 1513, fol 389, which, as always, lists their salary rate as ‘uma ganta’.

<sup>60</sup> All of the salary rates for Column C come from Jorge de Albuquerque, ‘Mandado . . . pagarem aos negros e escravos do rei’.

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, Cardoso, photo no. m0391r, photo no. m0392r.

<sup>62</sup> The *gerennendes* have never been identified. They appear in the list of slaves who work aboard ships in both Lopes da Costa’s “Mandado . . . pagar aos escravos,” 2v, and in Jorge de Albuquerque’s “Mandado . . . pagarem aos negros e escravos do rei,” 1r. In the latter document, their title is spelled *jurunudes*. As the table indicates, their pay scale is slightly higher than that of interpreters, which suggests that they were highly skilled. Lacking solid evidence, I tentatively suggest that they were perhaps *berunding*: (trade) negotiators.

<sup>63</sup> The *aves paraos* have never been identified. They appear in the list of slaves who work aboard ships in both Lopes da Costa’s “Mandado . . . pagar aos escravos,” 2v, and in Jorge de Albuquerque’s “Mandado . . . pagarem aos negros e escravos do rei,” 2v. Some fairly probable conjectures can be made as to their role. Their title clearly includes the word for ship (*perahu*). As the table indicates, their pay scale is the same as that of chained slaves – the lowest labour class. Most likely, they were basic sailors.

In other words, perhaps unwittingly, the Portuguese were creating a new social structure, one built within a commercial framework. This structure was not based upon proximity to the patron, but rather upon salary. It was much flatter than the previous social structure, for almost all slaves had the same basic pay rate: a half-ganta per day. This included royal slaves: for example, the clerks within the trade bureau who were not in supervisory roles.<sup>64</sup> It included the majority of debt bondsmen, such as the unskilled dock workers.<sup>65</sup> And it included regular domestic slaves, such as the elephant caretakers.<sup>66</sup> All of them received the same half-ganta per day. One can sense the Portuguese tendency to view ‘slave’ as a single social class.

The one class of slaves who received a higher salary rate were the supervisors (*tuções*). This was also a mixed group. It seems to have included some royal slaves (such as the ship captains<sup>67</sup>), some debt bondsmen (such as the chief carpenters<sup>68</sup>), and some domestic slaves (such as the chief elephant caretaker<sup>69</sup>). The common denominator between them was that, at the worksite, they acted as directors. While such leadership roles must have existed in the days of the Sultanate, they apparently did not have any particular legal status back then, for they are not discussed in the Malay law codes. Again, it seems that the Portuguese prioritized the concrete work duties, whereas the Sultanate prioritized proximity to the patron.

For those debt bondsmen who were not supervisors, this new social structure probably felt like an insult. They had previously been slightly higher than the domestic slaves, slightly closer to freedom. However, the Portuguese abolished such privileges. In the chaos following the invasion, the Europeans did not know who was a slave and who was not.<sup>70</sup> One can safely infer that they did not know how

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**64** As mentioned, Barros, Livro 1, Cap. 9, 88, says that royal slaves were working in the trade factory. Yet Afonso Lopes da Costa’s general order of April 1, 1519, which gives the salary rates of slaves, does not mention any separate salary category for slaves of the factory. We can only assume that they were being paid at the same rate as other ‘unchained slaves’ (the *ballâtes* – see note below).

**65** That is to say, the ‘ballâtes’ / ‘batos’. See note 28, above. We can presume that they were unskilled labourers from Albuquerque, “Mandado . . . pagarem aos negros e escravos do rei”: fol 2v, which says that the *batos* are ‘slaves who are not officials’, and gives them a lower salary rate than artisan slaves such as carpenters.

**66** The half-ganta salary rate of the elephant caretakers is already specifically mentioned in Costa, “Mandado . . . pagar aos escravos”: 1.

**67** The chief *tução* of ships is mentioned in Costa, “Mandado . . . pagar aos escravos”: 2v, and also in Jorge de Albuquerque, “Mandado . . . pagarem aos negros e escravos do rei”: fol.1.

**68** Two *tuções* of carpenters are mentioned in Jorge de Albuquerque, “Mandado . . . pagarem aos negros e escravos do rei”: fol.1: *tução Agimar* and *tução Mangana*.

**69** A *tução* of the elephant caretakers is already mentioned in Cardoso, photo no. m0392r.

**70** As is clear from a 1516 incident, in which the Portuguese administration accused various Melakan residents of being false freemen: of being slaves who had lied about their status at the time of the conquest in 1511, claiming to be free when they were in fact bonded. In 1516, the Portuguese arrested and enslaved these people. But the accusations were sometimes incorrect, and the local population was scandalized. See Barros, Livro 1, Cap. 9, 88–89.

much money any given bondsman owed either – especially since they did not understand the Melakan currency system. They thus demoted the debt bondsmen to being regular, unchained slaves, with the same salary and the same privileges as domestics. The former debt bondsmen could still hope to purchase their manumission, but this was just a general opportunity, open to all slaves.

This loss of status was particularly rude for those bondsmen who possessed specialized skills. As mentioned, many of them were sailors, and some were carpenters and blacksmiths. These were high-demand professions that doubtless had brought greater prestige under the Sultanate. One can assume that skilled artisans had received higher salaries for their work as well, and could pay off their debts more quickly. In any case, the *Undang-Undang Melaka* remarks that slaves' skills could raise their selling price.<sup>71</sup> In contrast, under the Portuguese salary system, the skilled debt bondsmen received the same amount as other slaves: a half-ganta per workday. The carpenter bondsmen must have felt especially unappreciated. They worked side-by-side with the Portuguese carpenters (who usually received 40 gantas per month) and free client carpenters (who received about 30 gantas), and yet they were paid considerably less (about 15 gantas).<sup>72</sup>

To summarize, the Portuguese did not directly oppose the preexisting social hierarchy. However, they had different priorities, and paid employees according to their work duties rather than by their status. This switch to a commercial framework indirectly created an alternate hierarchy.

The Portuguese sources contain scattered evidence of the anger and shock of the former royal slaves. One early testimony comes from Francisco de Albuquerque, a client of Afonso de Albuquerque. In his letter of 1514, he describes how he forcibly gathered slaves from the various private merchants to help build the fortress of Melaka. However, he mentions that as he did so, one high-ranked slave became angry with him. This was a slave of the *Bendahara* Nina Chatu,<sup>73</sup> the prime minister, and also chief of the Tamil merchant community:

None of the men whom I brought to work in this fortress were offended by me, except for one slave [*escravo*] of Nina Chatu [. . .], who was jealous of me, because, rightfully, all the services that I was doing, in bringing over these slaves [*negros*] and increasing the commerce of your highness, [. . .] rightfully, he should be doing them. Because he had been in the region for two years, and I had never been to Melaka in my whole life, except then.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> *Undang Undang*: 139.

<sup>72</sup> The salary rate of regular Portuguese carpenters is already given in Bocarro's ration documents. See, for example, 395b–396a (entry for December 11). The pay rates for Portuguese employees basically remain stable throughout the period of this study. On the pay rate of the free labourers, see Tab. 1, Column A.

<sup>73</sup> On Nina Chatu, see Luís Filipe R. Thomaz, "Nina Chatu e o comércio português em Malaca," in *De Ceuta a Timor*, ed. Luís Filipe R. Thomaz (Lisbon: Difel, 1994): 487–512.

<sup>74</sup> Francisco de Albuquerque to King Manuel I, December 18, 1512, in *Cartas de Affonso de Albuquerque*, vol. 3 (Lisbon: Academia Real das Sciencias de Lisboa, 1903): 362.

The slave in question here was probably not a traditional Melakan royal slave. Most likely, he was from Coromandel, like his master, Nina Chatu. Still, he held considerable power in the local administration, and one can see his confusion at being stripped of his authority. Francisco de Albuquerque had supplanted him.

There is an interesting case of theft by royal slaves as well. It is described by Pero de Faria, in his furious letter of 1517. The Captain of Melaka in 1519, Afonso Lopes da Costa, seems to refer to it obliquely as well.<sup>75</sup> Faria says that the crime was committed by slaves at the trade factory – that is to say, by royal slaves.<sup>76</sup> He says that one of the city officials, Diogo da Guilhem, was selling sugar from his house, while the slaves were selling sugar ‘in the city’.<sup>77</sup> That is to say, da Guilhem was handling large-scale sugar transactions (for example, with merchant ships), while the slaves were dealing with small-scale, local sugar-selling. The slaves broke through ‘the wall made of straw matting and stole sugar from there, as well as other fine things, such that the theft was so great that it became known’.<sup>78</sup>

We can only speculate on the motivations of the slaves. It is certainly possible that they were engaging in opportunistic thievery. We know that this happened under the Sultanate, since the *Undang-Undang Melaka* discusses punishments for royal slaves who are caught stealing.<sup>79</sup> Still, I would argue that retaliation was also a motive. Faria seems to imply that the slaves primarily stole sugar. This is curious, since sugar was not the most precious commodity in the warehouse. Presumably the slaves wanted sugar, specifically, because they themselves were also selling it. That is to say, they perhaps wished to take back what belonged to them – what Diogo da Guilhem had taken from them to run his own sugar business.

There is also a second case of theft among royal slaves, though fewer details are given. It is reported in the account book of the chief trader, Lopo Vaz. On January 25, 1518, he reported that three slaves who worked for the trade factory broke into the storage of the customs house and stole trade goods which belonged to certain merchants from Coromandel.<sup>80</sup> On a highly speculative level, it is possible that there was an element of dissent involved here as well. On January 26 – the day after Vaz recorded the crime – he distributed clothing to the remaining slaves of the trade factory.<sup>81</sup> Was this to appease other angry royal slaves in the factory? Was there perhaps a broader sedition taking place? There is not enough evidence to say, but the conjunction of events hints at something more complex than just simple thievery.

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<sup>75</sup> Costa, 1518, 475.

<sup>76</sup> It is Barros who wrote that the slaves of the *feitoria* were royal slaves: Barros, Livro 1, Cap 9, 88.

<sup>77</sup> Pero de Faria, 1517, 348.

<sup>78</sup> Pero de Faria, 1517, 348.

<sup>79</sup> *Undang-Undang*: 75.

<sup>80</sup> Vaz, fol. 26r.

<sup>81</sup> Vaz, fol. 28r.



## 6 The Portuguese Concessions to the Slaves, 1518–1523

By 1517, the fortress of Melaka was experiencing a labour crisis. Many slaves and workers had fled, and those who remained were becoming increasingly dissatisfied and prone to criminality. This crisis functioned much like a labour strike: it forced the Portuguese to make concessions. Those concessions are what we will now examine. One major reform was that the Portuguese loosened the equation between work and pay. Looking at Tab. 1, columns B and C, one can see that by 1523, all workers received rice every day, whether or not they worked. This was true for all the classes: slaves (both chained and unchained, both land-based and sea-based), and free labourers. Clearly, this must have been one of their most urgent demands.

Although the Portuguese administration began paying workers on rest days, this does not mean that it ideologically renounced the work/pay equivalency. It did not treat this change as a return to the traditions of the Melakan Sultanate, nor did it recognize a legal duty of masters to provide basic necessities to slaves on an unconditional basis. Rather, the administration explained this shift as an expression of charity. For example, in 1523, Jorge de Albuquerque, captain of Melaka, gave the following explanation for paying free labourers even on rest days: ‘they have wives and children who are also of the King [of Portugal], and they do not have any other food source [*mantimento*]’.<sup>82</sup> Albuquerque does not say that he is fundamentally changing the salary system in order to settle a labour dispute. Rather, he says that he is showing compassion to the workers’ families, to the women and children, who need the king’s mercy.

The same notion of Christian charity comes out in another method that the administration used to meet the food needs of the population: alms-giving. The first extant case of this was in April 23, 1519, when the rations officer was ordered to provide rice to the vicar of Melaka. The church was then to give one ganta to each of the ‘poor Christians, natives of the land’.<sup>83</sup> In this case, it might have been a special donation, related to the recent Easter celebrations, for there are no other records of any such alms-giving that year. However, starting in June 1522, this practice became a regular, monthly distribution.<sup>84</sup> It seems that alms-giving shifted from being a special donation

<sup>82</sup> Jorge de Albuquerque, “Mandado . . . pagarem aos negros e escravos do rei”: fol. 3v.

<sup>83</sup> Afonso Lopes da Costa, “Mandado de Afonso Lopes da Costa . . . para o almoxarife dos mantimentos dela dar ao vigário . . .” April 23, 1519, Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Corpo Cronológico PT/TT/CC/2/81/86, <https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/details?id=3798469>.

<sup>84</sup> Jorge de Albuquerque, “Mandado do Capitão . . . Jorge de Albuquerque, para o almoxarife . . . Francisco Bocarro, dar 1320 gantas de arroz ao vigário,” June 1, 1522, Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Corpo Cronológico PT/TT/CC/2/101/88, <https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/details?id=3801975>.

to being something akin to social welfare, for the rations officer began including the monthly alms-giving within the monthly salary distribution.<sup>85</sup> Again, although the administration basically was reverting to a policy closer to that of the Sultanate (and closer to the demands of the workers themselves), it did not explain it that way. Giving out ‘unearned’ rice was a form of charity, rather than of patronal duty.

The Portuguese administration also addressed the crisis over social status. For example, let us note the shipping industry (see column B of Tab. 1), and in particular, the free sailors. The Portuguese granted both more rice and more honour to them. Starting in 1519, they were given a raise to a salary of thirty gantas per month. There was some social affirmation in this figure of thirty gantas. That was the same salary rate that lower-class Portuguese sailors received. A similar recognition can also be seen in the monthly payroll documents. In 1521, the Rations Officer stopped including the free sailors in the payroll for ‘escravos e negros’, shifting them instead to the payroll of ‘servants of the King’ – that is to say, the regular payroll for Portuguese employees of the Crown.<sup>86</sup> This was a status that was closer to what they had known prior to the conquest, when they were considered normal sailors rather than subalterns. Let us note, however, that this recognition was only offered to the free sailors, not to other free labourers.

Similarly, the royal slaves who worked in shipping, the *tuções* of ships (the former slave captains), also received a significant payroll increase. It seems that they had previously received twenty gantas per month – the same as other *tuções*. In 1519, their salary was increased to thirty gantas per month – the same as the free sailors (Tab. 1, Column B). That is to say, although they were slaves, they were nonetheless paid the same amount as entry-level free sailors (both Portuguese and non-Portuguese). That was probably not coincidental, since it is very possible that the *tuções* still commanded the free sailors aboard the ships, as they had prior to the conquest. The *tuções* also seem to have received a certain social recognition from the Portuguese. A document from 1521 speaks of a certain ‘*tução*

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**85** See, for example, Jorge de Albuquerque, “Mandado de Jorge de Albuquerque . . . para o almoxarife . . . Francisco Bocarro, pagar adiantado a 277 homens o mantimento de arroz,” October 1, 1523, Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Corpo Cronológico PT/TT/CC/2/111/44, <https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/details?id=3803510>.

**86** This is not stated directly, but it can be inferred. In the 1521 slave salary document (Jorge de Albuquerque, “Mandado . . . pagarem aos negros”), the free sailors are not mentioned at all. This is in contrast to the free carpenters, who are mentioned. However, the general salary document orders the distribution of the regular salary ‘to all men of arms, of whatever status and condition.’ That is to say, being Portuguese was no longer a condition for being paid as a regular employee. The Malay free labourers had probably passed from the slave salary payroll to the regular employee payroll. See Jorge de Albuquerque, “Mandado de Jorge de Albuquerque . . . para Francisco Bocarro . . . pagar o mantimento . . . às pessoas que na dita fortaleza serviam ao rei,” September 30, 1521, Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Corpo Cronológico PT/TT/CC/2/98/47, fol. 1 (<https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/details?id=3801444>).

Laçana, quartermaster (*mestre*).<sup>87</sup> That is to say, this document attributes to Laçana both the Malay title of *tuçãõ* and the Portuguese title of *mestre*. The administration apparently had begun treating him like a full ship's officer, rather than simply as a leader slave. This was not as high a status as ship's captain, but it was better than before.

Similar benefits were given to another key profession: carpenters. The free labourers who worked as carpenters eventually received a pay raise to thirty gantas per month (see Tab. 1, Column C). The debt bondsmen who worked as carpenters also received a raise to one full ganta per workday, and a half-ganta per non-workday. This meant that there was slightly more parity between the enslaved and the free carpenters, with equal salaries on workdays, though not on rest days. In short, the Portuguese did begin to recognize qualifications, offering better salaries and more honours to the workers.

Still, this was not a return to the Melakan social hierarchy. Not all the slaves received as many benefits as the sailors and carpenters. In pre-conquest Melaka, the royal slaves, such as the court attendants, had been at the top of the hierarchy – a reflection of the priorities of the Melakan Court. Now, in contrast, the sailors and carpenters occupied the summit – a reflection of the priorities of the Portuguese commercial enterprise. Indeed, the Portuguese honoured these privileged labourers by treating them more like Europeans – including them in the Portuguese payroll, giving them Portuguese job titles, etc.

## 7 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the transition from the slavery system of the Sultanate of Melaka to that of the Portuguese. I have particularly focused on the government slaves. It should be noted that the private slaves, who belonged to the local Portuguese citizens, would undergo a very different historical evolution. Many aspects of Melakan slavery that did not survive in the government system – the father-son model, the effort to accumulate clients – would flourish in the private one.<sup>88</sup>

In this chapter, we have seen that there certainly was a tension between continuity and change. I have tried to show that while the Portuguese did adopt many elements of the Melakan slavery system, they always adjusted these elements to fit their own commercial framework. This process of 'fitting' radically altered each element, giving it different meaning and impact. In principle, the slaves had the same

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<sup>87</sup> Garcia Chainho, "Mandado de Garcia Chainho para o almoxarife do armazém de Malaca," June 10, 1521, Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Corpo Cronológico PT/TT/CC/2/96/169, <https://digitalq.arquivos.pt/details?id=3801183>.

<sup>88</sup> On the private slaves, see Thomaz, "Escravidura": 282–83.

salary in post-conquest Melaka that they had had in pre-conquest Melaka, but in practice, they were impoverished. In principle, the slaves maintained their previous job classes, but in practice, the nature and status of each job shifted dramatically.

It is not completely clear if the Portuguese made these changes intentionally. In some cases, they seem to have been willfully trying to save money and exploit the slaves. In other cases, they seem to have been proverbial sorcerer's apprentices, trying to manipulate cultural and social forces that they did not understand. In both cases, it was the slaves themselves who generally paid the price.

## 8 Reflection

In regard to the tension between continuity and change in European colonial slavery, this chapter can be fruitfully compared with those of Hägerdal and Shahid. Many similar themes run through all three. The Dutch, the British, and the Portuguese all handled labour using a fundamentally European approach. Our three chapters show how the colonists dramatically shifted the regional economy to fit their economic frameworks: the Dutch importing plantations, the British importing public works projects. And yet our three chapters also show how the colonists adopted and incorporated many local customs: some local Bandanese were kept alive to work on the islands for the Dutch, and the caste system was not, in fact, eliminated from the British aid policies. Doubtless, many colonial labour regimes which have previously been considered European will reveal similar complexities upon closer reexamination.

In my chapter, I have tended to emphasize, perhaps excessively, the commercial aspect of Portuguese slavery policy. Only towards the end of the piece did I touch upon broader socio-cultural matters, such as religion and ethics (Christian charity, etc). From this perspective, this chapter can also be compared with that of Ekama. The Dutch, the British, and the Portuguese all used religious ideals to justify their slavery policies, pairing morality with finances. The Dutch used moral denunciations of fornication among slaves in order to deal with economic problems such as property rights. The British used relief for enslaved women and children as a pretext for strengthening their control over the labour force. In these chapters, there is a blurry line between ruthless religious hypocrisy, and sincere but ignorant good intentions. Perhaps future research might shed more light upon this sensitive question.