

Illustration 1. Map of Ambon, with an inset map of Castle Victoria (map XXXI) from *Valentijn's Oud en Nieuw Oost Indië* (map XXV). 1724-1726.

## Complaints Lodged by the Inhabitants of Hunut on the Island of Ambon, 14 July 1695

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## 1 Introduction

Gerrit J. Knaap, “Complaints Lodged by the Inhabitants of Hunut on the Island of Amboin, 14 July 1695”. In: *Harta Karun. Hidden Treasures on Indonesian and Asian-European History from the VOC Archives in Jakarta*, document 8. Jakarta: Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2013.

BY GERRIT J. KNAAP

The document called ‘Translation of a Malay request, written by some inhabitants of Amboina to the Supreme Government of the Netherlands Indies, received in Batavia 14 July 1695’<sup>1</sup> is short and at first sight rather unimpressive. However, after a proper reading of the text and after putting it in context, it discloses many interesting details about the living conditions of ordinary people in Amboina in the seventeenth century when the island was ruled by the Dutch East India Company (VOC).

The document can be summarized as follows:

Two or three persons, in the name of all inhabitants of a settlement called ‘Houmit’ or ‘Homit’, describing themselves as ‘humble servants and poor subjects’, ‘with tears in their eyes’, take the opportunity ‘in all humility’ to communicate their miserable situation to the ‘foot soles’ of the members of the Honourable Government in Batavia. All their lands, in fact their entire territory, has been expropriated by the people of six other villages, which makes it difficult for them to make a living. The perpetrators have occupied their fields, cutting old clove trees and coconut palms and substituting these by newly planted saplings. Adding insult to injury, they have also harvest their sago and

their other fruit trees. During the terms of office of previous VOC governors of Amboina, the men of ‘Houmit’ had brought an action against the perpetrators in a court of law, but they had lost the case because of the ‘foul play’ and ‘false witnesses’ produced by the defendants. The accused people from the six villages claimed that they were the lawful owners basing their claim on some form of inheritance. However, those from ‘Houmit’ state that they are not aware that such people ‘originated’ from ‘Houmit’, because, since the VOC had expelled the Portuguese from Amboina in 1605 none of their daughters had converted to the Christian religion or had been married to any of the defendants. This tells us that ‘Houmit’ was Muslim, whereas those from the six villages were Christian. During the Portuguese period, ‘Houmit’ apparently did not make much use of its territory because it joined Hitu and other groups in the fight against the Portuguese. After the defeat of the Portuguese, those who sided with Hitu returned to their territories and began to work their land again. During the term of Governor Arnold de Vlaming van Oudtshoorn, who ruled Amboina from 1647 to 1655, intruders from the six villages had begun to occupy and plant the lands of ‘Houmit’. During the term of Governor Dirk de Haas, in charge from 1687 to 1691, ‘Houmit’ had brought the matter to court. However, after De Haas had left, the case was thrown out of court with the aforementioned unfortunate outcome for those from ‘Houmit’. Consequently, for their livelihood they remained dependent on the willingness by other people from Hitu to share their resources. The text ends with a plea

<sup>1</sup> ANRI VOC, Archief Hoge Regering, 2514, fol. 461-463.

## INTRODUCTION



Illustration 2. Cloves. Drawing from G.E. Rumphius, *Amboinsche Kruidboek*, 1741.

to the Supreme Government to give the people of 'Houmit' justice.

Consequently, this document, however short it might be, touches on matters of land rights, agricultural land use, the administration of law, religious changes and colonial relations. It is a text rich in information. But let us add some more information to put the matter in an historical perspective and local context.

It appears that we are dealing with Hunut, a place

belonging to Hitu the northern coast of the Island of Amboina. In the sixteenth century and the first part of the seventeenth century, Hitu was politically speaking an independent state. It had fought successive colonial intruders, first the Portuguese and later the Dutch, represented by the VOC. The headquarters of the colonial state in Amboina was in the castle, located in present-day Kota Ambon. This stronghold dominated the southern part of the Island of Amboina, in particular the peninsula of Leitimor and the coasts of the Bay of Amboina. The best introduction to seventeenth-century Hunut is as always the *Generale Lantbeschrijving* of Amboyna by the prominent VOC employee, botanist and scholar Georgius Everhardus Rumphius (1627-1702).<sup>2</sup> Rumphius records that, historically speaking, the name Hunut had two meanings, namely it was a conglomerate of five *negeri*, that is villages, and it was the name of the principal village among these five. Three of the five villages had already become extinct, falling victim to such disturbances as inter-village warfare during the sixteenth century. By the second part of the seventeenth century, what was left of the conglomerate was divided between two places. The majority, including Hunut proper, lived in Hitulama on the north coast; the smaller part belonged to Hukunalo, otherwise called Rumahtiga, was located on the northern shore of the Bay of Amboina. The first, Hunut proper, was Muslim; the second, namely those integrated into Hukunalo, had become Christian.

The late Indonesian historical anthropologist Joost Manusama has combined Rumphius's information with further ethnological evidence.<sup>3</sup> Hunut in the sense of the conglomerate was part of a

<sup>2</sup> The best edition of Rumphius's *Lantbeschrijving* is W. Buijze (ed.), *De Generale Lant-beschrijvinge van het Ambonse Gouvernement ofwel De Ambonsche Lant-beschrijvinge door G.E. Rumphius*. Den Haag: 2001. I am referring to 17, 45-46.

<sup>3</sup> I am referring here to the posthumously published part of Manusama's dissertation edited by Chris F. van Fraassen: Z.J. Manusama, *Historie en sociale structuur van Hitu tot het midden der zeventiende eeuw*. Utrecht: LSEM, 2004, 38-39, 65, 81.



## INTRODUCTION

larger federation of villages, known as an *uli*, bearing the name of Uli Helawan, the 'Golden Uli', which formed the core of the state of Hitu, with its original centre in Hitulama. It is therefore not surprising, that the people mentioned in the document prepared to share their livelihood with the needy from Hunut, were actually from Hitulama. Hunut was then an integral part of Hitulama and later, when Hitulama itself split into Hitulama and Hitumesen, Hunut became part of the latter.

The historical sequence in which this document figures is as follows.<sup>4</sup> During the wars between Hitu on the one hand and the Portuguese and the VOC on the other, in the second part of the sixteenth and the first part of the seventeenth century respectively, the northern shore of the Bay of Amboina was transformed into a war zone, and became a no-man's land. The settlements of Hunut retreated to Hitulama, while others, including Hatiwi and Tawiri, moved to the surroundings of the colonial castle in Leitimor. When the wars were over, the villages remained in their new locations because the VOC wanted to keep an eye on them. In as far as the villagers wanted to use their former lands, they were only allowed to go there to do the necessary agricultural work, but not to live there on a more or less permanent basis. The upshot was that the no-man's land remained fairly empty, and fell prey to the 'land hunger' of others, most notably villagers from Leitimor and urban dwellers from Kota Ambon, where population pressure was quite high. The people of Hunut saw their lands occupied by those from Halong, Soya, Mardika and others, who even built semi-permanent 'garden houses' on these plots notwithstanding the fact that such dwellings had been forbidden by the VOC since 1658. However, Hunut's chance came in 1687 with the coming to

office of the aforementioned Governor Dirk de Haas, a man who was considered a 'liberal gentleman' by both friend and foe. The year 1687 was also the year in which De Haas resumed the old custom requiring that documents used in a court of law were to be submitted not only in Dutch but also in Malay, which must have made it easier for Hunut to lodge a complaint. All this was set in motion because De Haas' predecessor had conducted a campaign of destruction on the 'garden houses', which among other 'abuses' had roused widespread protests among the population of the island of Amboina. De Haas was sent to restore the peace among the inhabitants, which he did by setting in train a thorough investigation, making some concessions and requiring a less strict observance of the regulations.

Unfortunately, as mentioned in their plea, the people of Hunut had not been successful in their attempt to obtain justice. How they had been faring can be seen in the 1706 *Memorie van Overgave*, the memorandum of transfer of office, of Balthasar Coyett.<sup>5</sup> As said in this document, soon after De Haas had left in 1691, the law case between Hunut, represented by Timolohalat, and the other villages, of which Halong was in the vanguard, had been decided in favour of the latter. Halong and its allies had even received title deeds of land ownership which had been registered at the secretariat of the VOC. In the years thereafter, the question was still regularly touched upon in the correspondence of the VOC. In December 1705, descendants of the original parties met each other in court once again. Coyett advised that the demands of Hunut be dismissed because Timolohalat and his descendants were deemed to be of a 'restless and quarrelsome character'. We can presume that Hunut lost again.

<sup>4</sup> This account is based on the second, revised imprint of Gerrit Knaap, *Kruidnagelen en Christenen; De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie en de bevolking van Ambon 1656-1696*. Leiden: KITLV, 2004, 42, 51, 58-60, 153.

<sup>5</sup> See G.J. Knaap (ed), *Memories van Overgave van gouverneurs van Ambon in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw.*'s-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1987, 304.



## 2 Transcription of the Dutch text

Gerrit J. Knaap, “Complaints Lodged by the Inhabitants of Hunut on the Island of Ambon, 14 July 1695”.

UIT: DAGHREGISTERS VAN BATAVIA, 14 JULY 1695 [BEGINNEND BIJ FOL. 461]

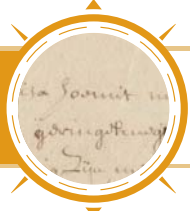
Translaet Maleyts klagtschrift door eenige Ambonse inwoonders aan de Hoge Regeringe van Nederlants India geschreven tot Batavia, onfangen den 14<sup>en</sup> July 1695.

*Klachten van enige Ambonse inwoners van Houmit, 14 juli 1695.*

Aldus maken wij te Moulo Halut en Malita Hoemit, mitsgaders alle inwoonders van Homit, U Ed. Hoog Achtb. geringe knekten en arme onderdanen die ontferminge waardig zijn, met beschreyde oogen in alle eerbiedigheyt onsen bedroefden staet aan de voetsoolen van U Ed. Hoog Achtb. bekend hoe dat alle onse landen, dorpen en thuynen afgenomen worden door sommige der volkeren van de negorijen Halo-en Sawo Mardyka, Nousa Nywa, Hylaliva, en Alan, en wij in een groot onvermogen sijn vervallen, omdat wij van gemelte ackers de minste voordeelen niet genieten, om ons leven te onderhouden ten aansien sijlieden onse landen besitten, nemende eerst voor een beginsel, van haar wreetheyt en onrechtmatigheyt tegens ons, dat se thuy-nen op ons landen maekten, vellende onse oude nagel- en klappusboomen omverre en planten [fol. 462] weer jonge boomen in derselver steede, ja de lagoe plantagiën en eenige andere vrugten meer, te weten duriaan, tsiampada, lance en goemut, mitsgaders diverse boomen ons toebehoorende die op onse ackers staen, nemen sij ook na haer op een behoorlijke wijze.

Ten tijde der voorige heeren gouverneurs tot Ambon hebben wij menigmael man voor man, tegen voornoemde persoonen geregt, maer dewijle sij haar met guyterijen en leugenagtige getuygen behelpen, soo zijn wij verlooren gegaan te oorsaeke dat se sijden haer eygen besittingh gebruyken, te weten de thuynen der inwoonders van Houmit, hoewel wij Houmitters in het minste geen kennis hebben dat sij luyden van ons oorspronkelijk sijn, want zedert dat d’Ed. Compagnie de Portugesen uyt het land van Ambon verjaagde tot heden toe, soo hebben wij Houmitters g’eenige onser dochters in de Christelijke Religie ingelijft off met bovengemelte volkeren in huwelijk doen treden.

Hoe kunnen sij nu seggen, dat sij dese als haer eygen, en oorspronkelijke ackers besitten, en schoon het klaerblijkelijk is dat sij haer met leugens en onregtveerdigheyt behelpen, soo word ons evenwel nog ongelijck gegeven, hebbende wij tot duslange geen recht kunnen verkrijgen. Indien zij nu seggen oorspronkelijk van ons te zijn, doe de Portugesen in Ambon waren, soo spaaren sijlieden daaraan ook de waarheyt, want doe ter tijt oorlogden sij en de Portugesen nagt en dag tegen de inwoonders van Hytoe-



## TRANSCRIPTION OF THE DUTCH TEXT

wa en Noysa Nywy, en wij waeren te dier tijt met de volkeren van Hytoewa en Noysa Nywy tesamen. Wie heeft het dog aan haer verhaelt dat sij oorspronkelijk van ons soude wesen?, sijnde dit ook geloogen, maer wanneer de Hittouanesen uyttrocken om d'E. Compagnie te roepen, en deselve komende, de Portugesen op Ambon overwon, soo hebben wij onse ackers en landen in possessie genomen, en de volkeren van Nossa Nywy, en die van [Mysme?] namen doe de haren ook wederom, gelijk sulx tot heden is. En als de Heer Gouverneur en Admiraal De Vlaming vanwegen de Compagnie in Ambon regeerde, soo gingen zij geen, en maekten thuynen, plantende daarin pysang en pattatus mitsgaders meer andre eetwaren, dog hierna hebben sij onse plantagiën die reets out en volwassen waren, omgekapt en daer weer jonge boomen in geplant, berovende aldus geweldiglijk onse landen en thuynen.

Doe de Edele Heer de Haes het bestier van 's Compagnie saken in Ambon [fol. 463] waarnam, sijn wij Houmiters tesamen vergadert, en hebben voorsz. volkeren voor het gerigt geroepen, hetwelke heeft geduert tot de Ed. Heer de Haas vertrok. Hierna is dese saek getermineert en wij hebben verlooren onse landen, ackers, en al wat wij hebben en besitten nu niets om van te leven maer Latouloukus en Talawawa hebben nog yts off nemen een weynig ackers van de voorsz. landen, alsoo sij met gemelte volkeren vermengt zijn. Dog wij hebben de minste inkomsten onser landen niet, en tegenwoordig niets te eeten, tenzij dat wij den coning van Hytoewa, den orangkaya Booy Giegier en de menschen een sagoe of andere vrugtboom afsmeeken, welke wij dan nemen, waarvan sij lieden ook haar part voor haar plantagie korten, te weten een deel, en wij een deel, daar wij ons, en onse kinderen mede onderhouden.

Dierhalven soo komen wij nu met de oogen vol tranen, en versoeken met behoorlijke reverentie en menigvuldige smeekinghen, dat U Ed. Hoog Achtb. haar dog over haar geringe knegten en onderdanen gelieven te erbermen, en sodanigen regt wijsen als met de billikheyt en reden overeenkomt, sullende U Ed. Hoog Achtb. geringe knegten het-selve in alle nedrigheyt agtervolgen.

Geschreven op Ambon den 24en Junius 1695.

Onderstondt te Moulo Halut, Malita Humit en Latouloukut.



### 3 English translation

Gerrit J. Knaap, “Complaints Lodged by the Inhabitants of Hunut on the Island of Ambon, 14 July 1695”.

FROM : DAILY JOURNALS OF BATAVIA CASTLE, 14 JULY 1695 [BEGINNING WITH FOL. 461]

*Translation of a Letter of Complaint Written in Malay by Some Inhabitants of Ambon to the Supreme Government of the Netherlands Indies in Batavia, received on 14 July 1695.*

We the poor and humble servants of Your Excellencies, Muolo Halut and Malita Humit, in conjunction with all the residents of Humit who have a claim to your protection, with eyes downcast and with the most profound respect, are desirous of presenting our wretched state before the soles of the feet of Your Excellencies because all our lands, villages and gardens have been seized by some of the people of the *negori* Halun Sawo Mardyka, Nusa Nywa, Hylaliva and Alan, and we find ourselves powerless, as we do not enjoy even the most meagre profit from the said fields to sustain ourselves, as these people possess our lands. One prime instance of their cruelty and injustice [they have perpetrated] against us is that they have turned our land into gardens, felling far and wide our mature clove trees and coconut palms and planting [462] saplings in their stead, yea indeed even the sagu plantations as well as those of other fruits, to wit durian, breadfruit or jackfruit, lychee and sugar palms, as well as other trees standing in the fields which were ours, have they claimed in like manner. In the time of former Lord Governors of Ambon, often from one after the other have we sought justice against the aforesaid people, but as they resorted to knavish tricks and mendacious testimonies, we have lost because they have claimed that they were using their own property, namely the gardens of the people of Houmit, even though we, the people of Houmit, did not have the slightest inkling that they were once our people and came from the same origins as we do, because, since the Honourable Company drove the Portuguese from Ambon until this very day, we the people of Houmit have given not one of our daughters to the Christian religion nor have we married them to the above-mentioned people.

How can they possibly say that they possess these fields as their own original property, whereas the plain unvarnished truth is that they are making shift with lies and injustice, and hence we are put in the wrong and so far have been unable to obtain justice. If they now claim that, when the Portuguese were in Ambon, they were originally part of our people they are being economical with the truth because at that time war raged continuously (day and night) between the Portuguese and the inhabitants of Hituwa and Nusa Neywy, and we were the allies of the people of Hitutuwa and N[e]wyw. Who filled their ears with the tale that they were originally one people with us? It is all lies. When the Hitunese set out to call upon the help of the Honourable Company, and the same came and defeated the Portuguese in Ambon, we took possession



## ENGLISH TRANSLATION

of our lands and fields, and the people of Nusa N[e]ywy, and those of [Myome?] also claimed theirs, just as is happening now. When Lord Governor and Admiral De Vlaming [van Oudtshoorn] ruled Ambon for the Company, they went and made gardens, planting bananas and sweet potatoes and other edible crops in them. However, later they went out and chopped down our plantations, which were mature, and planted young trees in them, thereby violently robbing us of our land and gardens.

At the time the Honourable Mr De Haes was in charge of Company affairs in Ambon [463], we the people of Humit rallied together and summoned the aforementioned people before the court, [a case] which dragged on until the departure of the Honourable Mr De Haes. After this the case was closed and we lost our lands, fields and all which we had and possessed and now have nothing from which to live and Latolukus and Talawawa have even helped themselves to one or two fields from the aforesaid lands, as they have mingled with these said people. Hence we do not enjoy the tiniest income from our lands, and have nothing to eat, unless we beg a sago or other fruit trees from the King of Hituwa, the *orang kaya* Booy Gigier, and the people, which we then accept, and for their part these people also take a share for [the use of] their plantation, namely one part and we one part, and this is how we keep ourselves and our children.

This is the reason we come, our eyes brimming with tears, to beseech with all due reverence and a thousand entreaties, that Your Excellencies will have compassion on your unworthy servants and subjects and judge fairly and reasonably, in which the least worthy of Your Excellencies' servants will acquiesce.

Written on Ambon 24 June 1695.

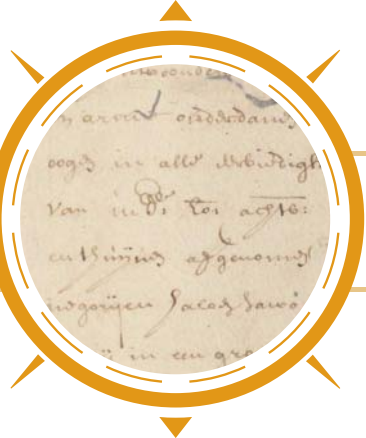
Declared at Muolo Halut, Malita Humit and Latulukut.





## 4 Colophon

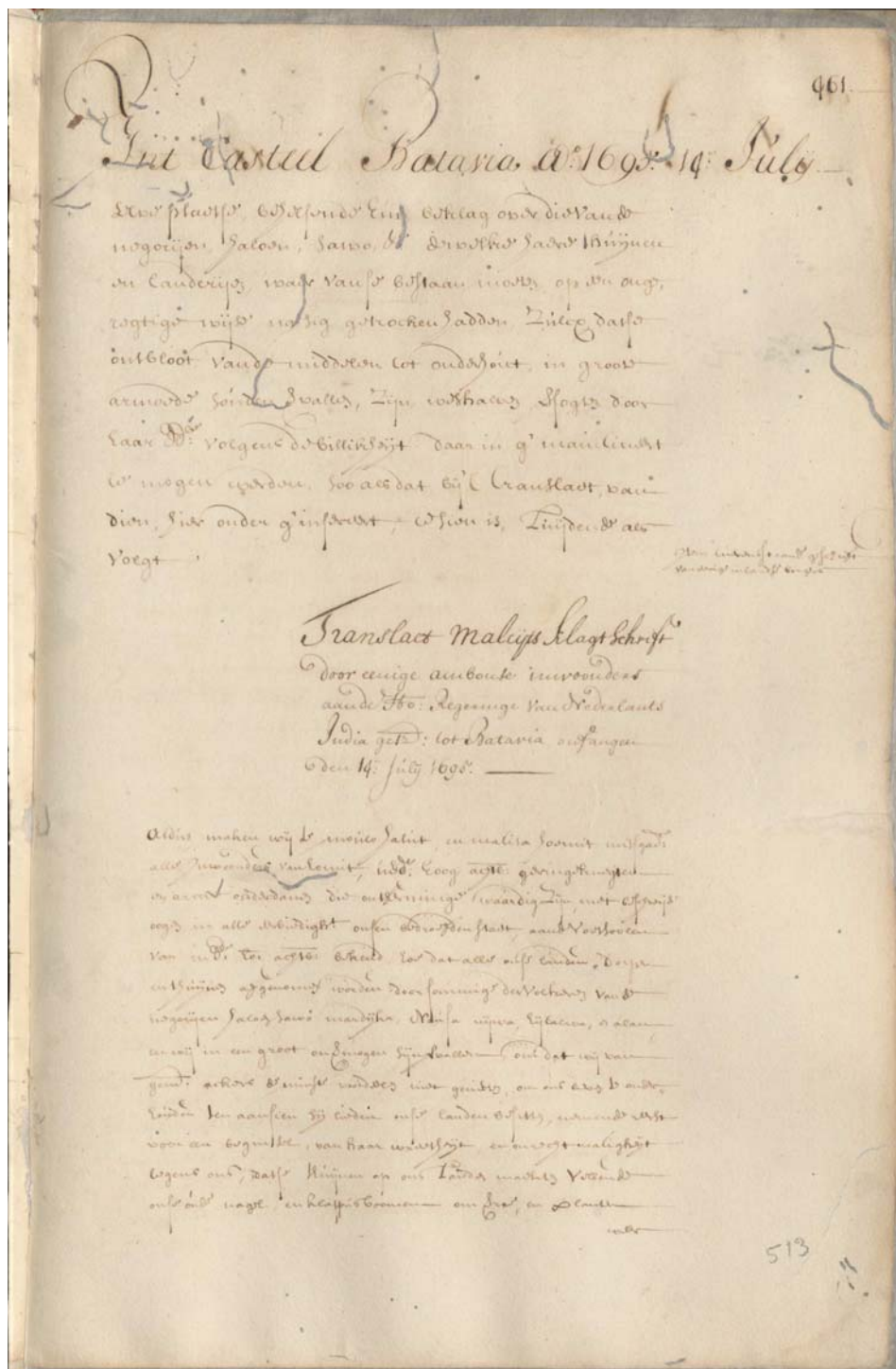
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### 5 Folio image

This is the first page of the original document. All folios may be viewed on the website via the Tab 'Images' in the Harta Karun section or in the Digital Archive Collections.

Archival Source, ANRI, HR 2514, fols 461-463.



Luit Castiel Bataria, d. 1697. 14. July.

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