THE SURAT CASTLE REVOLUTIONS: MYTHS OF AN ANGLO-BANIA ORDER AND DUTCH NEUTRALITY, C. 1740-1760

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> le gouverneur de la forteresse . . . onvaincu que les Hollandois n'étoient propres qu'à dominer et non pas à se sacrifier pour leurs amis.
>
> Anquetil Duperron[1]

Abstract

In 1759 the British captured Surat Castle. This later turned out to be one of the first steps towards what would soon become their Indian empire. This paper aims to re-examine the history of events leading to this Castle Revolution on the basis of the altogether neglected Dutch sources at the National Archives in The Hague. To make sense of what appears to be a decade of ongoing revolutions and endless jockeying for power, the paper proposes the existence of an underlying mechanism of highly flexible networks that connected and encompassed the various political and commercial, local and interregional, maritime and continental spheres of Surat's open-ended political economy. With this in mind, the paper also briefly reassesses the current idea of the so-called Anglo-Bania order and takes a critical look at the neutralist discourse of the Dutch sources.

Introduction

In 1759 the English East India Company (EIC) wrested Surat castle from Sidi Ahmad Khan, the local representative of the admiral of the

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[1] *Voyage en Inde, 1754-1762: Relation de voyage en prélimionaire a la traduction de* Zend-Avesta, eds. J. Deloche, M. Filliozat and P-S. Filliozat (Paris, 1997), 327.

Mughal fleet. Although the takeover appeared to be nothing out of the ordinary—in the previous decade other forces had captured the castle several times—the incident became known as *the* Surat Castle Revolution. In retrospect the event deserves this somewhat bombastic label, as the English had come to stay in the castle for almost two centuries. But nobody at that moment, perhaps not even the English themselves, seems to have been aware that something revolutionary had happened in Surat. Actually, from the official Mughal point of view, the English "revolution" had returned the *ancien régime* to a situation of ongoing political upheaval. Hence Company Bahadur was soon recognised as the new "holder of the castle" (*qiladar*) and "admiral of the royal fleet" (*darogha-yi armad-i badshahi*). Thus six years before it became the official *diwan* of Bengal province in 1765, the EIC was already officially incorporated in the Mughal administrative structure.[2]

Even after these events, it was not at all clear that, about half a century later, the English would gain the upper hand in India. Although the Mughal Empire was in a shambles, the subcontinent appeared to be on the eve of a new era of regional state-formation and if any new power at all was going to supersede all others, it would have been one of the two most flourishing and powerful regional polities at that time, that of the Marathas under the Peshwa Nana Saheb, or that of the Afghans under Ahmad Shah Durrani. We tend to forget that in the 1750s the role of the Europeans was still considered marginal, although the French and English grew increasingly important as mercenary captains fighting each other, most conspicuously in the service of the various claimants to the thrones of Arcot and Hyderabad, two other newly emerging regional principalities in the south of the subcontinent.

In the midst of these processes of regional centralisation and increasing Anglo-French rivalry, the political profile of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) remains somewhat inarticulate. To date, research on the VOC has either focused on its commercial policies in Asia or on its political activities in Southeast Asia and, to a lesser extent, on Ceylon.[3]

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[2] Ali Muhammad Khan, *Mirat-i Ahmadi*, ed. Syed Nawab Ali, (Baroda, 1927), II, 565-66 and trans. M.F. Lokhandwala (Baroda, 1965), 887. For political upheaval, one finds terms like *hangama* or *fitna wa fasad*.

[3] The only study that really deals with both the economic as well as political history of the VOC in India is G.D. Winius and M.P.M. Vink, *The Merchant-warrior Pacified: The VOC (The Dutch East India Company) and its Changing Political Economy in India* (Delhi, 1991). The Dutch maritime historians F.S. Gaastra and E.M. Jacobs focus on the commercial developments from a European and all-Asian perspective: F.S. Gaastra, *The Dutch East India Company: Expansion and Decline* (Zutphen, 2003); E.M. Jacobs, *De handel van de Verenigde*

Although in these latter areas the VOC became more aggressive after the mid-eighteenth century, in India it merely attempted to hold on to its position, keeping up appearances as the frugal trader standing aloof from the various imbroglios at the local courts. This paper aims to re-examine the Dutch position by studying the surprisingly much neglected Dutch sources regarding the events leading to the Castle Revolution. With this in mind, we will first re-investigate the historical context of these events in the light of Surat's volatile political economy. Hence this paper combines political analysis with a critical re-evaluation of the discourse and the sources used for this analysis.[4] Let us briefly summarize the main issues at stake.

Until recently, the Surat Castle Revolution has not attracted a great deal of scholarly attention as it was somewhat overshadowed by the apparently more far-reaching events in Bengal. This changed dramatically during the late eighties and early nineties of the last century when the late eighteenth-century developments in Surat became a fiercely contested issue between the Indian historian Lakshmi Subramanian and her Italian counterpart Michelguglielmo Torri. According to Subramanian the Castle Revolution should be treated as the starting point of what she calls "the Anglo-Bania-order," a long-term and mutually beneficial commercial partnership between the English—Company and private merchants—and the mercantile-*cum*-financial community of the Banias. Besides, during the second half of the eighteenth century, we witness a gradual but decisive shift in the direction of trade: away from the Surat-centred, "Muslim" trade, mainly focused on the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea, to the Bombay-centred, Anglo-Bania trade mainly focused on Bengal, Southeast Asia, and especially China. Later in the century, this transition also engendered communal tension between the increasingly deprived Muslim merchants and textile workers and the increasingly well-off Hindu brokers and bankers.[5]

Oost-Indische Compagnie tijdens de 18de eeuw (Zutphen, 2000) . Om Prakash's recent survey is also mainly about European commerce: Om Prakash, *The New Cambridge History of India: II, 5: European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-colonial India* (Cambridge, 1998).

[4] Meanwhile, we will also take a fresh look at the prime Indo-Persian source for our period, the *Mirat-i Ahmadi* written by Ali Muhammad Khan, the last Mughal *diwan* of Gujarat province (see footnote 2) and the French account of Anquetil Duperron, one of the founding fathers of modern Indology, who was a witness of the Castle Revolution of 1759 (see footnote 1). Apart from Dutch documents, these contemporary sources remain underused as most historians rely on English documents only.

[5] Lakshmi Subramanian's principal contribution is her monograph *Indigenous Capital and Imperial Expansion: Bombay, Surat and the West Coast* (Delhi, 1996). On the same subject, her publications include: "Capital and Crowd in a Declining Asian Port City: The

Contrary to what Subramanian argues, Torri claims that the cooperation between the English and the Banias was not of *mutual* benefit. According to him the Banias did not act as a single group. While Subramanian claims that after the Castle Revolution the English only in theory had to share their power with the governor, Torri argues that during the entire second half of the eighteenth century the Mughal ruling elite was still wielding a great deal of power. He also questions the communal background of the late-century conflicts in Surat and stresses that there were continuously changing alliances.[6]

Whatever one may think of the respective positions, both scholars certainly helped to build a bridge between "maritime" historians working on the rise and decline of this pre-colonial port-city and its trade, and "continental" historians working on Mughal decline and the British rise to power. In particular Subramanian's thesis of the Anglo-Bania order created a new and sophisticated linkage between the social and economic conditions in Surat proper and the much wider financial and political networks across the entire Indian subcontinent. For this reason, one can still strongly sympathize with Subramanian's overall thesis without

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Anglo-Bania Order and the Surat Riots of 1795," *Modern Asian Studies*, 19 (1985): 205-37; "Banias and the British: The Role of Indigenous Credit in the Process of Imperial Expansion in Western India in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century," *Modern Asian Studies*, 21 (1987): 473-510; "Western India in the Eighteenth Century: Ports, Inland Towns and States," in I. Banga (ed.), *Ports and their Hinterlands in India (1700-1950)* (Delhi, 1992): 153-81; "Power and the Weave: Weavers, Merchants and Rulers in Eighteenth-century Surat," in R. Mukherjee and L. Subramanian (eds), *Politics and Trade in the Indian Ocean World: Essays in Honour of Ashin Das Gupta* (Delhi, 1998): 52-83. Subramanian's insightful analysis of the financial liaison between English private traders and Indian bankers is an elaboration of Holden Furber's earlier *John Company at Work: A Study of European Expansion in India in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge Mass., 1951).

[6] For Torri's main criticism on Subramanian, see his "Surat during the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century: What Kind of Social Order? A Rejoinder to Lakshmi Subramanian," *Modern Asian Studies*, 21 (1987): 679-710. For Subramanian's reply, see "The Eighteenth-century Social Order in Surat: A Reply and an Excursus on the Riots of 1788 and 1795," *Modern Asian Studies*, 25 (1991): 321-65. Torri's other articles on the subject include: "In the Deep Blue Sea: Surat and its Merchant Class during the Dyarchic Era 1759-1800," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 19 (1982): 268-74; "Social Groups and the Redistribution of Commercial Wealth: The Customs Houses of Surat (1759-1800)," *Studies in History*, New Series, 1 (1985): 57-86; "Ethnicity and Trade in Surat during the Dual Government Era: 1759-1800," *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 27 (1990): 377-404; "Trapped inside the Colonial Order: The Hindu Bankers of Surat and their Business World during the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century," *Modern Asian Studies*, 25 (1991): 367-401; "Mughal Nobles, Indian Merchants and the Beginning of British Conquest in Western India: The Case of Surat 1756-1759," *Modern Asian Studies*, 32 (1998): 257-315.

disagreeing with much of Torri's commentary.[7] But before we revisit the political events with the help of Dutch sources, it may be worthwhile to take a closer look at the apparently ever-shifting conditions of Surat's political economy in the 1740s and 1750s.

Surat's spherical political economy

The city of Surat had been the single most important commercial maritime entrepôt of the Mughal Empire. Its numerous interregional trade connections and its highly cosmopolitan mercantile community have been very well described and analysed by various scholars, most thoroughly by Hans van Santen for the early seventeenth century and Ashin Das Gupta for the early eighteenth century.[8] All scholars agree that in real terms of trade, Surat declined in the eighteenth century. Nonetheless, although it never managed to regain the exceptionally high trade levels of the seventeenth century, Surat continued to be a major port-city, catering to an extensive, multilateral commercial and financial network reaching almost each and every coast along the Indian Ocean. All in all, during the eighteenth century an increasing portion of Surat's trade went through private English hands, an increasing part of it going eastward to Southeast Asia and China. As Surat's early rise was facilitated by its incorporation into the Mughal Empire, its decline has naturally been attributed to its growing isolation from its rich, cotton- and textile-producing hinterlands in Gujarat and Hindustan. Adding to this the simultaneous crises of the Safavid and Ottoman Empires, Surat's decline appears to have been inevitable. So what are we to make of the persisting commercial and financial eminence of Surat even after 1730? Indeed, the question of Surat's remarkable survival is no less important than the question of its decline.[9]

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[7] On the contrary, by reading the contemporary correspondence of the VOC servants at Surat, much of the historical detail provided by Torri is confirmed. At the same time, however, Torri's criticism tends to inflate somewhat the importance of Subramanian's unwary statements and to overrate the ongoing power of the Mughal elite after 1759.

[8] H.W. van Santen, *De Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie in Gujarat en Hindustan, 1620-1660* (Meppel, 1992); Ashin Das Gupta, *Indian Merchants and the Decline of Surat, c. 1700-1750* (Wiesbaden, 1994).

[9] Later we found that K.N. Chaudhuri had already raised this point (K.N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company 1660-1760* (Cambridge, 1978), 197). See also Anquetil Duperron's comment: "Mais cette administration tyrannique, en tirant les richesses d'une main, les répandoit dans une autre, ce qui, au fond, n'approuvissoit pas la ville, et l'avidité trop commune chez les commerçans ne leur faisoit

So far, the discussion of Surat's ups and downs has suffered from a too rigid functional dichotomy between rulers and merchants, the former very much the prerogative of the Mughal historian, the latter that of the Company historian.[10] Of course, one historian made the valid point that in a place like Bengal the Mughal nobility itself was at times heavily involved in overseas trade.[11] Others came up with the Janus-faced figure of the portfolio-capitalist who, in a place like the Coromandel Coast, managed to criss-cross the porous borders between state and economy.[12] Unfortunately, nothing of the sort has been proposed for Surat. On the contrary, for our period in particular, Surat appears to be still very rigidly divided between increasingly corrupt and bankrupt administrators, and merchants and bankers desperately seeking the protection of the English Company.[13]

For a better grasp of the complicated events of the 1740s and 1750s, we first need to modify the disjuncture between politics and trade. How are we to understand what appears to be an extremely unstable, faction-ridden city? The most recent accounts of events in Surat propose either a completely arbitrary factionalism or a hidden logic of enduring common interests that created stable coalitions. In our view, both perspectives are too one-sided. At the risk of becoming too schematic, we propose a broad tripartite classification of functionally separate but closely intersecting and overlapping spheres. This aim is not to remove entirely the distinction between politics and trade, but to stress the close interweaving of these fluid and open-ended domains by placing them in a continuum running from the primarily political to the primarily commercial. The first sphere (1) is that of the political elites in Surat. This is a progressively locally oriented group strongly interested in trade and finance but not publicly participating in it. The middle sphere comprises the regional, portfolio enterprises of merchant-warrior groups: (2a) the Sidis and the

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envisager, dans la ruine d'un concurrent, que l'occasion de faire de nouvelles fortunes" (*Voyage*, 311).

[10] This clear-cut dichotomy is suggested in M.N. Pearson, *Merchants and Rulers in Gujarat. The Response to the Portuguese in the Sixteenth Century* (Delhi, 1976).

[11] O. Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal, 1630-1720* (Princeton, 1985).

[12] S. Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce: Southern India, 1500-1650* (Cambridge, 1990); cf. C.A. Bayly and S. Subrahmanyam, "Portfolio Capitalists and the Political Economy of Early Modern India," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 25 (1988), 401-24.

[13] For a recent comparative study, see O. Prakash, "The Indian Maritime Merchant, 1500-1800," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 47 (2004): 435-58.

European Companies protecting and taxing the maritime routes, and, to a different degree, (2b) the Marathas protecting and taxing the overland routes. This category smoothly runs into a third sphere that is predominantly commercial and financial in nature: that of the merchants, brokers and bankers who specialize in the various interregional linkages between production, trade and finance. As with the previous category, a rough distinction should be made between (3a) mainly but not exclusively Muslim ship-owners and maritime merchants, and (3b) mainly Hindu and Parsi brokers primarily—but not exclusively (!)—dealing with the markets and production centres of the interior.[14] Surat's political economy could only survive if, one way or the other, the connections between all these functional groups and sub-groups were maintained. This required coalitions that encompassed the above-mentioned spheres, so as to combine and connect the political with the commercial, the local with the interregional, and the overseas with the overland routes.

The local political sphere (1)

In the best of circumstances, Surat's Mughal political establishment facilitated the smooth logistics of incoming and outgoing trade and derived much of its income from it. This establishment had always reflected a relatively open, interregional service network that connected Surat to the provincial and imperial capitals of the Mughal Empire. In our period, however, this network had broken down and political elites had become more reliant on pragmatic alliances that involved more parties from within and some new parties from outside the city.[15] In addition, as the Mughal administrators lost much of their former sources of income from the revenue districts in the surrounding countryside, they increasingly looked for financial support from Surat-based merchants and bankers.

At this point one may wonder why the Surat elites were not able to establish an autonomous polity of their own, like so many other more regionally oriented ruling groups in late Mughal India. In practical

[14] Note that some Banias and Parsis were also heavily—and increasingly so—involved in interregional shipping and shipbuilding.

[15] Beyond Surat, in Ahmadabad and Cambay, however, the Mughal provincial governor was still a person to be reckoned with as the Dutch were to experience when their goods at Ahmadabad were "plundered" in the wake of Momin Khan II's take-over of the city in 1756 (Aniruddha Ray, "Cambay and its Hinterland: Early Eighteenth Century," in Banga, *Ports and their Hinterland*, 149).

terms, it appears that, from about 1733, Surat's government under Tegh Beg Khan (r. 1733-1746) became almost completely detached from the Mughal administrative structure. The last flickering of Mughal interference was under the powerful all-Indian figure of Nizam al-Mulk Asaf Jah who became governor of Gujarat in 1723-4. Even after the Treaty of Bhopal (1738), when he granted the whole province of Malwa and all lands between the Narmada and Chambal rivers to the Marathas, Nizam al-Mulk continued to meddle in the political affairs of Surat. For this, he probably employed the ailing but still-existing Mughal provincial apparatus at Ahmadabad (e.g. through his followers, the governors Hamid Khan, Abdul Aziz Khan and Fakhr al-Daula), but also increasingly depended on the cooperation of the local Maratha warlords in Gujarat, the Dabhades in the 1720s and the Gaikwars in the 1740s.[16]

Nizam al-Mulk strongly promoted the fortunes of the Juybari family in Surat.[17] His patronage was built on a mixture of Sufi and ethnic loyalties to one Shah Makhan, one of the family's ancestors who had lived at Burhanpur. In our period, the Juybaris became one of the two ruling families in Surat. As their main political patron increasingly retreated to the background, there was no other option than to associate themselves more closely with the most powerful other local power in Surat at that time: the Beglar family of the ruling *mutasaddi* (i.e. accountant but in Surat also the actual "governor") Tegh Beg Khan. Hence, while both families jockeyed for power against each other, they also intermarried with each other, making the position of *mutasaddi* the prerogative of their combined families.[18] Behind the scenes, it was the widow of Azarat Khan, one of Tegh Beg Khan's brothers, who engineered this connection between the Beglar and Juybari families by having her daughter married to Miyan Achhan, the leader of the Juybari family.[19] Of course, this kind of inbreeding among the administrative elites was not peculiar either to the eighteenth century or to India, as it was the strategy of any oligarchic group to control access to office and power. Here eighteenth-century Surat is not at all different from, for example,

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[16] *Mirat*, II, 302-26 (trans. 637-60).

[17] Anquetil Duperron, *Voyage*, 312. On the early history of the Juybari family in India, see R.C. Foltz, *Mughal India and Central Asia* (Karachi, 1998), 97-99.

[18] Christopher Buyers provides a convenient genealogy at www.4dw.net/royalark/India4/surat.htm. It differs in detail, though, from Anquetil Duperron's information on Tegh Beg Khan's brothers (Anquetil Duperron, *Voyage*, 312).

[19] Anquetil Duperron, *Voyage*, 312,323. Actually, Anquetil Duperron blames this Begam for the political unrest in Surat and thus for the take-over by the English.

seventeenth-century Amsterdam. Far from indicating decline or degeneracy, it could equally well indicate that Surat was well on its way to becoming a fully autonomous port-city.

The dual governmental structure of the city had prevented this from happening. The most important office in Surat was that of the *mutasaddi*, the foremost executive power in the city. The position of *qiladar* was meant to keep an eye on the *mutasaddi* and as such was supposed to be fully detached from the city's administrative structure. Both officials were supposed to be directly appointed by the Mughal court. As previously mentioned, in our period the office of *mutasaddi* came to be monopolised by the combined Beglar and Juybari families. Under Tegh Beg Khan and during the first terms of Safdar Muhammad Khan and Miyan Achhan, they even managed to co-opt the position of *qiladar* as well.[20] But the old dual structure of court (*darbar*) and castle (*qila*) was restored in 1752 when Sidi Hafiz Masud Khan gained control of the castle. In other words, with the Mughals in retreat, other regional powers stepped in to maintain Surat's dyarchy and to prevent Surat from having its own version of eighteenth-century regional centralisation coming into full play.

The regional portfolio-entrepreneurial sphere (2a, 2b)

Relatively new regional powers controlled Surat's contacts with the outside world. At the interface of city and sea-lanes, we find first the Abyssinian (*habshi*) maritime power of the Sidis and then the European Companies, in particular the EIC. These groups served as intermediaries, not only between Surat and the high seas but also, as it were, between Surat's political and mercantile worlds. Both the Sidis and the EIC are examples of a portfolio-capitalist enterprise fruitfully combining inter-regional trade and shipping with political power and protection rackets. Not surprisingly, we find both eagerly competing for control of Surat castle. At the other fringe of the local sphere, physically on the outskirts of the city, we find the Marathas overseeing the continental trade routes that linked Surat with the markets and production centres of the interior. Of course, the Marathas were primarily land- and warlords and appear not to have combined these capacities with those of maritime transport

[20] From c. 1733-1750 we find the following combinations at respectively court and castle: Tegh Beg Khan and his brother Beglar Khan; Safdar Muhammad Khan and his son Wiqar Muhammad Khan; Miyan Achhan and his son Saiyid Hafiz al-Din Khan.

and commerce. Generally speaking perhaps, seas and ships appear to have been more conducive to portfolio enterprises than land and forts.[21] Such a contrast is, however, too superficial: we know that behind the martial facade of raiding and campaigning, there was an extensive apparatus of Brahmin and Khatri bureaucrats-*cum*-businessmen operating the cash nexus between production, trade and revenue farming.[22] So, despite marked differences in degree and specialisation, we believe that, like the Companies, the Sidis and many of the newly emerging eighteenth-century regimes, the Marathas should also be considered a portfolio power that fruitfully combined mercantile operations with political power.[23] Since the European perspective of the Companies is relatively well represented in the existing literature, let us briefly elaborate on the positions of the Sidis and the Marathas.

Hafiz Masud Khan was the representative of the Sidi chief in Janjira, the fortified island off the Konkan coast.[24] In theory, the latter served as the admiral of the Mughal fleet, an office that gained him considerable emoluments (*tankhwa*) to be deducted from the Surat revenue. In practice, of course, there was no Mughal but only a Sidi fleet that was increasingly financed from Surat as the Marathas tightened their grip on the other Sidi centres along the Konkan coast. In order to survive in Surat, the Sidis attempted to strike root there by playing off local parties against one another and by associating themselves with the Muslim merchants in the city. In the long run, the commercial activities and political ambitions of the Sidis clashed with those of the EIC and the English private traders. Both appear to have had similar but competing shipping interests in the trade with West Asia, and both were selling maritime protection on these routes. When in the early 1750s the Sidis gained the upper hand in Surat, the English had no scruples about

[21] Horses, however, could as easily as ships turn merchants into princes. This can be witnessed in the fortunes of Mir Jumla and various Afghan chiefs. Also in Surat, one of the few merchants who became *mutasaddi* was one Ali Akbar Isfahani (1647-8) who was a regular supplier of horses to the Mughal court (Farhat Hasan, *State and Locality in Mughal India: Power Relations in Western India, c. 1572-1730* [Cambridge, 2004], 41). See also Van Santen, *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, 19.

[22] See e.g. F. Perlin, *'The Invisible City': Monetary, Administrative and Popular Infrastructures in Asia and Europe, 1500-1900* (Aldershot, 1993).

[23] This categorization is meant for the sake of convenience, as the political-economy of the Marathas itself consisted of various intersecting spheres.

[24] Sidi forces did not always work together. Anquetil Duperron writes that during the Maratha siege of Janjira in 1759, the chief Sidi offered Surat castle to the English in return for their help, obviously against the wishes of the Sidi *qiladar* at Surat (Anquetil Duperron, *Voyage*, 324).

cooperating with the Marathas, who had always considered the Sidis their archenemies. Despite endless jockeying for power by ever changing coalitions, there cannot be any mistake about the structural antagonism between the Sidis and the Marathas. This mainly reflected long-term colliding interests concerning the control of the Konkan coast.[25]

Speaking about Sidi rivalry with the Marathas, however, we should be aware that this refers only to the central authority of the Peshwa Nana Saheb (Balaji Bajirao). The latter had increased his hold over the Konkan after conducting successful campaigns against the Sidis (1733), the Portuguese (1739) and the Angrias (1755). In Gujarat the Peshwa had to share power and revenue with the local Maratha warlord Damaji Gaikwar who, based at Baroda, became the dominant power in the region from the mid-1730's onward.[26] Hence, Maratha rule in Gujarat entailed two separate networks of officials and revenue collectors. In Surat, for example, a certain Appajirao represented the Peshwa while one Madhavra represented the Gaikwar, each charged with one half of the Maratha share of the local revenue. Far from forming a closed front, each official kept a jealous eye on the other and built local coalitions of his own. As mentioned before, the Peshwa's agent tended to be against the Sidi, but the Gaikwar's agent at times supported the Sidi when this would favour his patron against the Peshwa. Quite apart from this rivalry in Surat, the Peshwa could never really trust the loyalty of his commanders as they were all, one way or the other, involved in the turbulent and fluid playing field of Maratha sovereignty.[27]

All in all, the regional powers of the English, Sidis and Marathas competed with each other for the control of the Surat market. For this purpose, they had to forge coalitions with local elites. As the Mughal

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[25] In the 1740s and 50s the English and the Sidis at Janjira were on good terms with each other, in the face of the common maritime threat of the Angria "pirates". In the 1750s the EIC and the Peshwa closely cooperated in destroying Angria power. On the part of the EIC, this alliance was also directed against the Dutch. Partly thanks to English arbitration, the Sidis of Janjira survived the Maratha threat during 1759-61. At this time, the EIC considered the Sidis no longer a serious maritime competitor. For English-Maratha relations during this period, see W.S. Desai, *Bombay and the Marathas up to 1774* (New Delhi, 1970), 118-77.

[26] The Gaikwars had made their career as lieutenants of the Dabhades, the Maratha commanders-in-chiefs (*senapatis*) who, until 1731, had been in charge of the province. For details, see A. Wink, *Land and Sovereignty in India: Agrarian Society and Politics under the Eighteenth-century Maratha Svarajya* (Cambridge, 1986), 115-29; Stewart Gordon, *The New Cambridge History of India, II,4: The Marathas 1600-1800* (Cambridge, 1993), 114-54.

[27] T.J. Shejwalkar, "The Surat Episode of 1759," *Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute*, 8 (1947): 173-203.

service network had faded away and their revenue districts had been expropriated by the Marathas, local elites could only survive by cooperating more closely with the powers that dominated access to the outside world. And as the local and portfolio-entrepreneurial elites drew toward one another, together they also turned more eagerly toward the various mercantile business classes of the city.

The interregional mercantile sphere (3a, 3b)

The mercantile sphere has been incisively analysed by Van Santen, Das Gupta, Subramanian and others. In our period, the most prominent group of ship-owners were the Turkish Chellabis, who appear to have concentrated on the Red Sea. Apart from the Chellabis, there were various indigenous Muslim, Bohra ship-owners who had traditionally played a prominent role in the trade with West Asia.

In the light of the continuous political uproar in the city, the persistence of some of these merchant families is remarkable. Actually, in the previous century, Surat's merchant families, like that of the Chellabis or that of the Bohra ship-owner Mulla Abdul Ghafur, turned out to be less perishable than many of its ruling families. When, in the 1730s, Mulla Muhammad Ali, the grandson of Abdul Ghafur, started a political career of his own, the fortunes of the Mulla family rapidly collapsed. Although later we find his son Fakhr al-Din returning from exile and attempting to take up the family's cause, he never again achieved the prominence of his ancestors. This not only demonstrates the relative ease with which a prosperous merchant could start living the life of a prince but also shows how hazardous such a sudden metamorphosis could be.[28] Mulla Muhammad Ali could have learned a lesson from the past, when manipulating politicians and bureaucrats had proven more effective than trying to exercise authority directly, and certainly less dangerous. The older strategy was used again in the 1730s and 1740s when the Chellabis gained a dominant position behind the scenes by supporting the cause of the ruling Beglar family under Tegh Beg Khan.[29]

The Muslim ship-owners and merchants dominated Surat's overseas connections with the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf, exporting both their own as well as other people's goods. As has been mentioned, the

[28] In the translation of the *Mirat*, Fakhr al-Din is mistakenly styled as "merchant-prince". Considering the political ambitions of the Mulla family this would be most appropriate but the Persian text has merely *umdat al-tujjar*, i.e. "the pillar of merchants."

[29] For these instances, see Das Gupta, *Indian Merchants*, 197ff.

European Companies and the English private traders in particular were also operating along these routes, competing for markets and cargoes. As the English private merchants, protected by "their" Company, started to dominate this sector, we see the Chellabis and other Muslim ship-owners more often seeking the friendship and protection of each other and of the Sidis. Such pragmatic Muslim coalitions perfectly matched with already existing networks involving the *hajj* and Sufi diasporas. Surat, for example, was an important centre for the Aydarusiyya, a Sufi brotherhood that was widely scattered all over the Indian Ocean, making it particularly instrumental in providing "spiritual insurance" to Muslim pilgrims and traders.[30] In addition, Sufi-centres (*khanaqa*s) like that of Saiyid Abdulla Aydarus in Surat could serve as safe havens or hideouts for Muslim merchants on the run from penny-pinching rulers.[31] Whatever one may think of early-modern communal identities, the existing Arab-centred religious infrastructure clearly stimulated the formation of Muslim coalitions in the city.

The overseas trade of Surat was closely linked to the cotton and textile producing areas and markets of the interior. This linkage was mainly taken care of by Hindu Bania, Parsi and Muslim Bohra brokers who provided the textile villages with cotton and silk, and then provided the European Companies and other overseas merchants with the raw and finished products earmarked for overseas export. Closely connected to the trade affiliations of the Companies, some of these brokers were also involved in short- and long-distance shipping, although on a lesser scale than the Chellabis and their sort. From this group also emerged Surat's famous banking community that remitted and redistributed Surat's huge cash surpluses—not only arising from the West Asian input but also from the silk-trade with Bengal—deep into the fields, villages and towns of the hinterland. During the eighteenth century, however, less of Surat's already diminishing cash surpluses flowed into the interior. This may partly be related to external developments such as the new,

[30] For the migration of the Aydarus sufis to Surat, see the examples and references in F. Hartwig, *Hadramaut und das indische Fuerstentum von Hyderabad (i.e. Mitteilungen zur Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte der Islamischen Welt*, 8) (Wuerzburg, 2000), 99-107. The idea of "spiritual insurance" derives from P. Risso, *Merchants and Faith: Muslim Commerce and Culture in the Indian Ocean* (Boulder 1995), 71. This refers to the practice in which merchants enter into an agreement whereby they accept the protective blessing (*baraka*) derived from the virtue of the order's dead founder, in exchange for a payment upon the safe completion of a commercial journey.

[31] *Mirat*, II, 384-85 (trans., 715-16).

more direct maritime connections between Europe and India,[32] but it may also be due to the contraction of production centres in Gujarat and beyond, following Mughal decline and Maratha incursions. It remains to be seen, though, to what extent commercial connections with the Surat hinterland were as badly hit as the political connections based on Mughal patronage and revenue extraction. Some evidence from Cambay indicates that the trade relations in Gujarat were not necessarily much disrupted by the military operations of the Marathas. Although one should be careful not to overstate the current revisionist view by denying structural disruptions, it appears that the continental networks of Surat bankers and brokers survived the Maratha invasions, although they may have shifted in other directions.[33]

Whatever may have happened in economic terms, it seems safe to assume that cash kept flowing into Surat but that a larger part of it was used to finance the maritime circuits of the English private traders and the deficits of the EIC. Neatly following shifting European fortunes in the overseas trade, we can see the simultaneous rise and decline of the Bania and Parsi inland and overseas networks that were associated with them. Concomitantly, the competition between the English and Dutch Company was paralleled in the rivalry between the Parekh house serving the EIC and the house of Muncherji Khurshedji serving the VOC.[34] When taking account of the multifarious and extensive political and commercial interests of the latter, one may wonder who was

[32] This also involved a sharp decline of the Bengal overland export of raw silk and piece-goods to Gujarat. At the same time, though, Gujarat's export of (increasingly cheap) raw cotton to China increased. See Asiya Siddiqi, "Introduction," in her (ed.), *Trade and Finance in Colonial India 1750-1860* (Delhi, 1995), 9-11. For the intimate connection between banking and the silk trade, see Torri, "Trapped inside the Colonial Order," 373.

[33] See the contributions by Aniruddha Ray, "Cambay and its Hinterland," and Dilbagh Singh and Ashok B. Rajshirke, "The Merchant Communities in Surat: Trade, Trade Practices and Institutions in the Late Eighteenth Century," in Banga, *Ports and their Hinterlands*, resp. 131-53; 181-91. See also Chaudhuri, *Trading World*, 196.

[34] EIC brokerage was a bone of contention between the Parekh and Rustam houses. Muncherji started as a manager and bookkeeper of the Rustam house under Manakji Naoroji, who lost the position of EIC broker in the mid-1740's (Torri, "Mughal Nobles," 262-63). "As he was rich and powerful" Muncherji also represented the main religious branch of the Surat Parsis (*shahanshahi fasali*) against the early-eighteenth century reform movement of the *qadimi* (i.e. paradoxically, the "ancients") under Jamasp Vilayati of Kirman and his Surat disciple Darab Kumana. The latter was in the English camp and was the main instructor of Anquetil Duperron. Through the Dutch chief Taillefert, "homme poli et lettré," Anquetil Duperron was in a position to collate Darab's with Muncherji's copy of the *Vendidad*, one of the books of the *Avesta* (Anquetil Duperron, *Voyage*, 24-30, 341-42, 349-50).

actually serving whom.[35] But it is clear that the Dutch Company and the Parsi broker needed each other, as they operated in different but also complementary spheres, the first providing protection and access to overseas markets, the latter providing access to mainly inland markets, and, as we will see shortly, to political power as well. Hence, although ship-owners like Mulla Muhammad Ali and brokers like Khurshedji apparently concentrated on trading activities, politics was always of major concern to them; they never really ruled out the possibility that one day they would start a political career for themselves.

The rules of the game

What can be said about the process of coalition building on the basis of the above-mentioned classification? First of all, every effective political coalition of the 1740s and 50s had to include stake-holders from each of the three spheres (1-3), ideally including both the maritime and continental sub-spheres (a-b) of the portfolio and mercantile spheres. As participants within each sphere often competed with each other for the same positions, we generally do not find strong coalitions within the various spheres although one may find exceptions in the case of short-turn familial or communal solidarities, or in the rare case when one sphere as a whole was threatened by outside interference. The usual pattern, however, was one of multi-ethnic coalitions and networks that crossed the spheres' boundaries to connect in a chainlike manner: (1) local political power, (2a) regional portfolio *maritime* enterprise, (2b) regional portfolio *continental* enterprise, (3a) interregional *maritime* trade and shipping and (3b) interregional *continental* brokerage-*cum*-banking businesses. For example, in the case of the Anglo-Bania order, 1 (thanks to the Castle Revolution), 2a and 3a were controlled by the English, 3a and 3b by Banias. The weakest link was 2b, which implied that either the Peshwa or the Gaikwar had to join this coalition or that the English themselves should conquer the hinterland. In our period Surat politics showed a remarkably consistent English-Maratha alliance. Again, all this is not meant to reduce Surat politics to lifeless mathematics but to open up our bipolar mindset of, for example, setting politics against trade or east against west, to the more complex connectivity of closely interrelated

[35] Torri, "Mughal Nobles", 262-64; 270-71. For the commercial relations of this Parsi broker, see G.A. Nadri, "The commercial world of Muncherji Khurshedji and the Dutch East India Company: A Study of Mutual Relationships" (Unpublished paper, Leiden University, 2004).

interests that ruled the political economy of Surat as a whole.[36] Hence, we do not intend this model to be rigidly applied to the variegated historical experience of the city, but merely as something to keep in mind when reading the remainder of this paper.

Castle Revolutions

The place where the above-mentioned spheres converged was Surat castle. Facing the court (*darbar*), it stood just between the city's termini of maritime and continental trade: the *lattijs* or open storage yards at the riverside, and the *maidan* or open plain at the side of the city. Hence, political events between 1747 and 1759, when we witness no less than three castle "revolutions," can serve as a kind of thermometer of the physical condition of Surat's political economy. In this section, the main events surrounding each revolution will be re-examined with special attention to the hitherto overlooked Dutch material. Finally, the last paragraphs will briefly reconsider the Anglo-Bania order from the Dutch perspective and highlight the neglected role of the Dutch East India Company in these revolutions.

The castle revolution of 1747-1748

After the death of Tegh Beg Khan in 1746, his younger brother, Safdar Muhammad Khan occupied the post of *mutasaddi* while the latter's son, Wiqar Muhammad Khan, was made the *qiladar*. This renewed concentration of local power was regretted by almost all the regional powers, including the English under their director James Lambe. Meanwhile, Nizam al-Mulk continued to back his own candidate for office, Miyan Achhan, the son of Shah Makhan Juybari, who now also happened to be married to a niece of Safdar Muhammad Khan.[37]

In October 1747, Miyan Achhan, supported by Maratha soldiers and the riches of his mother-in-law,[38] openly revolted against Safdar Muhammad Khan and succeeded in occupying the castle. Encouraged

[36] Hence, one can easily break down our five spheres to many more sub-spheres, depending on the subject of analysis.

[37] Nizam al-Mulk also appears to have supported the refugee Bohra merchant Mulla Fakhr al-Din, who apparently had few friends in town and seems to have supported the Beglar cause of Safdar Muhammad Khan (National Archives The Hague (NA), VOC 9074: 6-30, 56-63; NA, Hoge Regering te Batavia (HRB) 838: 53-6; *Mirat*, II, 356-63 (trans., 689-94); Torri, "Mughal Nobles," 262; Anquetil Duperron, *Voyage*, 319).

[38] Anquetil Duperron, *Voyage*, 312.

by the unearthing of buried treasure, Safdar Muhammad Khan continued fighting for several months, during which time the Dutch director Schreuder attempted to mediate between the parties. His aim was to preserve dual rule while, at the same time, remaining strictly neutral; at least this is what the Dutch sources tell us.[39] It appears, however, that Dutch non-involvement was somewhat compromised by their own and their broker Muncherji's sympathies for Safdar Muhammad Khan. According to the French Indologist *avant la lettre* Anquetil Duperron, the Dutch had been bribed into "neutrality" by accepting 80,000 Rs from Safdar Muhammad Khan. Due to their sudden decision not to take sides, Miyan Achhan lost 300-400 soldiers, among them three Maratha leaders.[40] Despite Dutch "arbitration," Safdar Muhammad Khan was forced to leave the city when Miyan Achhan became the new *mutasaddi*, making his nephew and Safdar Muhammad Khan's son-in-law Ali Nawaz Khan his *naib* or deputy. Miyan Achhan's son Mir Hafiz al-Din Khan took charge of the castle. In this conflict, the main supporters of Miyan Achhan, Nizam al-Mulk and Lambe, were the clear winners. Also as a result of the conflict, the Marathas under their chief Kedar Rao, the cousin of Damaji Gaikwar, gained one third of Surat's revenue as a reward for reopening the roads to the interior they had blocked and raided earlier.[41] Power in the city was again concentrated; this time it was the Juybari family of Miyan Achhan that occupied both court and castle.[42] At first, the Dutch suffered from the take-over. To avenge the death of their three chiefs in Surat, the Marathas seized Dutch merchandise at their factory in Broach. As their complaints at the Surat court were of no avail, VOC officials decided to leave the town altogether and to capture several Muslim ships that were lying on the bar. Under pressure of the Muslim traders Miyan Achhan had to give in to the Dutch demands and compensate them for all damages. As a result, the Dutch, cheered on by Muslim merchants, triumphantly re-entered the city.[43] Apparently, the rulers and merchants of Surat were not yet in a position to do without them.

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[39] NA, VOC 9074: 6-30. Cf. *Mirat*, II, 360-63 (trans., 691-94).

[40] Director Schreuder wrote that the English had spread false rumours that the Dutch supported Safdar Muhammad Khan. After the war the Dutch broker was arrested because the Dutch had refused to support Miyan Achhan (NA, VOC 9074: 23; 31-33).

[41] According to Anquetil Duperron, Maratha involvement followed Safdar Muhammad Khan's threat to invite the Kolis or river-pirates into the city (Anquetil Duperron, *Voyage*, 313).

[42] *Mirat*, II, 360-63 (trans., 691-94).

[43] Anquetil Duperron, *Voyage*, 314-18.

The castle revolution of 1751-1752

The Sidis, now under the able Hafiz Masud Khan, as well as the Dutch, were anxious to mend the situation by playing Miyan Achhan off against the new *naib* and Safdar Muhammad Khan's son-in-law, Ali Nawaz Khan. In 1751, Ali Nawaz Khan managed to capture the court, supported by the Sidis and (once again) financed by some freshly unearthed treasures of the female relatives of Wiqar Muhammad Khan.[44] To lead the military operations, Safdar Muhammad Khan himself returned from exile on a Dutch (!) vessel. Supported by the English commander Lambe, Miyan Achhan retreated into the castle to withstand a siege that would take ten months. Meanwhile he had allowed the English to take possession of the castle—eight years before the actual Castle Revolution!

During the protracted siege, we see the Dutch grudgingly but actively mediating between the warring parties, the Sidis in particular insisting on Dutch involvement.[45] Twice the Dutch managed to produce an agreement in favour of the Sidi party that was on both occasions rejected by the English authorities in Bombay.[46] Following repeated military setbacks in which English forces were compelled to pull out of the castle, Bombay preferred to take a tough stand by sending a fleet to blockade the mouth of the river Tapti and to raid the surrounding countryside. After more than half a year of unremitting rebuffs, the English once again attempted to retake the castle, not knowing that Miyan Achhan—as dysentery spread among the garrison—had just handed over the castle to the Sidis. Two months later, the English themselves made peace with the Sidis.[47] Safdar Muhammad Khan was re-established as *mutasaddi*, his son-in-law Ali Nawaz Khan stayed on as *naib*, Sidi Hafiz Masud Khan becoming the new *qiladar*. Miyan Achhan had left the city to find refuge with the Marathas. The latter had scarcely intervened in the fighting in Surat, since they were fully absorbed in their own conflicts,

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[44] Actually the treasures belonged to his mother and mother-in-law (*Mirat*, II, 382-92 (trans., 714-22); NA, VOC 9077: 945-46; 955-57). According to the *Mirat* the Sidi captured the fort some time before Muharram 1163 AH, i.e. December 1749 / January 1750, which is at least two years too early (II, 390 (trans. 722). Torri briefly refers to what the English records label "Mr Lambe's war," taking place from June 1751 to March 1752 (Torri, "Mughal Nobles," 266).

[45] Apart from the Dutch, the French and (at the second occasion) the Capuchin friars were co-mediators in the conflict. At the second occasion, the English councillors insisted on Dutch mediation against Mr. Lambe's wishes.

[46] See also Desai, *Bombay and the Marathas*, 131.

[47] NA, VOC 9078: 116-36.

be they against Salabat Jang, the successor of the late Nizam al-Din, or against each other: the Peshwa fighting Tarabai and Damaji Gaikwar.[48]

It is remarkable that neither the *Mirat*, nor Torri, nor Subramanian mention English intervention during the conflicts of 1751-52. So neither the first English occupation of the castle nor the various Dutch attempts at mediation can be analysed from other than Dutch sources.[49] It would be interesting to re-examine the English sources for this period, the more so as this would balance the Dutch interpretation of the events. From the Dutch accounts it appears that the VOC remained neutral and sought merely to negotiate a peace that was acceptable to all parties. It may be doubted, however, that the Dutch in Surat were really as neutral as they wanted their superiors in Batavia to believe. From their own reports, it appears the English accused them of being in the camp of the Sidis, Ali Nawaz Khan and Safdar Muhammad Khan. As we have seen, the Sidis had insisted on Dutch mediation and it had been a Dutch ship that had returned Safdar Muhammad Khan to Surat to take charge of the siege against Miyan Achhan.[50] But perhaps the most important indicator of Dutch partisanship is the remark by the Dutch director Pecock that he wanted to remain neutral regarding the Indians, but did not at all feel obliged to remain neutral towards the English.[51] As the English were closely entangled in Indian politics, such a neutral policy was of course not workable. From later material, it also becomes crystal clear that the Dutch, whether or not instigated by their broker Muncherji Khurshedji, bolstered the new dual regime of Safdar Muhammad Khan at the court and Sidi Hafiz Masud Khan at the castle.[52] This temporary Dutch-Parsi-Sidi network smoothly connected the various overlapping spheres of Surat's political economy: the Beglar family being in charge of local power (1) to be shared, though, with the Sidis and, to a much lesser extent, with the Dutch, the latter two mainly taking

[48] After these events, the English sought a Maratha alliance against the new Surat regime of Mughals, Sidis and Dutch (Desai, *Bombay and the Marathas*, 131-3). This alliance had no immediate effect on Surat but sealed the fate of the Angrias (*idem*, 134-53).

[49] For what seems to be a confirmation from English sources, see Desai, *Bombay and the Marathas*, 130-1.

[50] Anquetil Duperron mentions the fact that the Dutch had a factory at the Sidi headquarters of Rajapur-Janjira, to be destroyed during the Maratha siege in 1759 (*Voyage*, 324).

[51] NA, VOC 9078: 12-16; 116-22; VOC 9077: 940-43; HRB 842: 70-86. For an Indian perspective on the position of the Dutch (*Valandisan*) during these years, see *Mirat*, II, 388 (trans., 720). See also Desai, *Bombay and the Marathas*, 130.

[52] See also Anquetil Duperron's analysis of the situation before 1758 (*Voyage*, 323).

care of the intermediate maritime protection (2a) and shipping businesses (3a). Finally, Muncherji's commercial and financial enterprises (3a and 3b) served the network's links into Surat's regional economy and hinterland.[53]

The Castle Revolution of 1758-1759

After Sidi Masud had taken possession of the castle and become the most powerful man in town, there was a relatively quiet period lasting until his death in 1756. His successor and son, Sidi Ahmad, is depicted as a drunkard who also lacked the administrative abilities of his father.[54] Real unrest started when Safdar Muhammad Khan and Ali Nawaz Khan concocted secret plans to end dual rule and remove the Sidi from the castle. Shortly thereafter, however, the two became estranged from each other. Fighting was obviated when Safdar Muhammad Khan suddenly died in early 1758, whether or not poisoned, as some rumours would have it. With his chief rival dead, Ali Nawaz Khan (with the help of the Sidis) claimed the office of *mutasaddi* for himself.

The English seized this opportunity to regain the initiative they had lost during the previous round. Now we see the early beginnings of Subramanian's Anglo-Bania order. A number of great city-bankers requested the English capture the castle in return for a substantial income.[55] According to Subramanian, the Banias took the initiative, but according to Torri, the English chief Ellis had long toyed with the idea of taking the castle. The English military intervention that followed was nipped in the bud when the Marathas suddenly sent an army to besiege Bombay. According to the Dutch, the Peshwa had acted upon the request of Ali Nawaz Khan.[56]

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[53] With the decline of Mughal control, and as with the Anglo-Bania order, the overland protection business (2b) was the weak spot. This time it probably meant cooperation with the Gaikwar.

[54] Torri, "Mughal Nobles," 267-70.

[55] Much of the Subramanian-Torri debate is about who exactly represented these bankers.

[56] Torri, "Mughal Nobles," 271-77; Subramanian, *Indigenous Capital*, 93-94; NA, HRB 844: 136. Neither the *Mirat* nor Subramanian mentions Ellis' attempt to take the castle. In the VOC-archives it is only mentioned in the *Memorie van overgave* of 1760, but not in the letters and resolutions of 1758. The *Memorie* states that the reason for cancelling the operation was not the fact that the Marathas were approaching Bombay, but that the English were afraid of French counterattacks. By the way, Anquetil Duperron suggests that the Sidi himself requested Maratha intervention in Bombay (Anquetil Duperron, *Voyage*, 327).

Meanwhile, Surat's comeback kid, Miyan Achhan, also attempted to regain his former position; he marched to Surat, this time with the military and moral support of the Peshwa. Soon afterwards, though, the Peshwa decided to change sides again and now preferred to join forces with Ali Nawaz Khan.[57] It is likely that from the very beginning the Peshwa had been using the threat of Miyan Achhan to regain a foothold in Surat. Meanwhile, although Ali Nawaz Khan had previously concluded a treaty with the Sidi, the latter now refused to renew it, probably after he heard that Ali Nawaz Khan had allied with his archenemy, the Peshwa. This conflict stimulated Miyan Achhan to resume his march on Surat, with or without Maratha support.[58] According to Torri, and this is confirmed by Dutch documents, he concluded an agreement with the Sidi who was suddenly confronted with a Beglar-Maratha alliance. Anquetil Duperron adds that the Beglar Begam and mother-in-law of Miyan Acchan was again instrumental in forging and financing this new alliance against Ali Nawaz Khan. Meanwhile, the English were not in the camp of Miyan Acchan but, instead, were pushing their own candidate Faris Khan. In the ensuing fights, Miyan Achhan got the upper hand, mainly as a result of food shortages caused by the defection of two officials, both former slaves of Tegh Beg Khan, Sidi Zafar Yab Khan and Sidi Wali al-Lah.[59]

According to Dutch reports, the Dutch refrained from joining the conflict.[60] But their neutrality can be questioned again as they refused to recognise Miyan Achhan's rule, presumably because he was not yet officially installed and also because Ali Nawaz Khan had always been friendly towards them. Whatever one may think of Dutch neutrality, their broker Muncherji had strongly supported Ali Nawaz Khan. Since the latter had been thrown out, Muncherji's position was now in jeopardy. As a result, the Dutch expressed concern about Muncherji's play for a share of power, since it now threatened their own standing in the city. In the previous years, though, the Dutch had been much less troubled when the Parsi broker had used his unparalleled political power in Surat to frustrate the EIC and its broker Jaganath Das Laldas.[61]

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[57] See also Desai, *Bombay and the Marathas*, 160.

[58] Torri, "Mughal Nobles," 289; NA,VOC 2967: 24-30; HRB 844: 128-35; *Mirat*, II, 550-51 (trans., 872).

[59] NA, VOC 2967, 24-30; Cf. Torri, "Mughal Nobles," 289-90. Cf. Anquetil Duperron, *Voyage*, 326; *Mirat*, II, 550-3 (trans. 872-74). For the rise and fall of these Sidi slaves, see Anquetil Duperron, *Voyage*, 311, 333.

[60] At least at this occasion, it is confirmed by Anquetil Duperron (*Voyage*, 328).

[61] Torri, "Mughal Nobles," 271; NA, VOC 2967, 30-7; VOC 10427: 647-53. According to Desai, the Dutch were in the camp of Ali Nawaz Khan and the Sidis; the English

Although Miyan Achhan had captured the office of *mutasaddi*, he still had to share power with Sidi Ahmad Khan who occupied the fort. According to the *Mirat* and English sources, all Surat merchants suffered from the ongoing depredations of the Sidi.[62] Meanwhile an English navy squadron had appeared in Bombay in connection with the Anglo-French war. This made the English strong enough to withstand a possible Maratha attack on Bombay and gave them a free hand for a new expedition against Surat. According to Torri, at this juncture Muncherji failed to convince the Dutch, the Gaikwar, and Ali Nawaz Khan to support the Sidis. Other merchants sent two representatives to the new English chief Spencer and asked him to wrest the castle from the Sidi.[63]

In general, the VOC archives confirm Torri's view that, initially, the English were not doing business with Miyan Achhan but promoting their own creature, Faris Khan.[64] Even with the help of a squadron, the English faced huge difficulties in conquering the city. Soon they realised that success depended on the cooperation of the remaining Mughal forces under Sidi Zafar and Sidi Wali al-Lah, now serving under Miyan Acchan. Then suddenly the Begams of the Beglar family entered the fray again. They promised the support of their family on the condition that the English would accept Miyan Achhan as the *mutasaddi* and the English candidate Faris Khan as his *naib*. The English had no option but to give in. Subsequently, with the help of the Mughal forces, the English succeeded in wresting the castle from Sidi Ahmad Khan.[65] Dutch documents suggest that the English victory should be mainly attributed to the fact that the troops of the Sidi refused to fight because of arrears of pay.[66]

The Marathas, who remained inactive on the outskirts of the city, played no part in this latest caste revolution. Apart from the usual rivalries between the Peshwa and the Gaikwar, they appear to have

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had first supported Safdar Muhammad Khan (?) and later Faras Khan (Desai, *Bombay and the Marathas*, 157).

[62] Torri, "Mughal Nobles," 292-93; Subramanian, *Indigenous Capital*, 94-95; *Mirat*, II, 553-4 (trans., 875); NA, VOC 10428: 443.

[63] Torri, "Mughal Nobles," 292-95.

[64] NA, VOC 10428: 414-9. Subramanian's account of the events of 1758-9 is misleading as she assumes that Miyan Acchan is permanently in the camp of the English while Faras Khan is supposed to be his son, to be pushed as *naib* by Sidi Zafar Yab Khan and Sidi Wali al-Lah (Subramanian, *Indigenous Capital*, 93-96).

[65] Torri, "Mughal Nobles," 292-96; 300-04; 309-13; Subramanian, *Indigenous Capital*, 96.

[66] NA, VOC 2967: 45-48.

been busy with the siege of the Sidi headquarters in Janjira. Obviously, for the Peshwa, the English revolution in Surat held the attractive prospect of once and for all quenching the power of the Sidis, not only along the Konkan coast but also in Surat, all in one blow.[67]

The Anglo-Bania order revisited

Dutch sources appear to be altogether silent about the role of the Banias during the various castle revolutions. This does not, however, rule out the formation of some kind of Anglo-Bania order. In 1759 it appears that almost all Surat merchants were fed up with the oppressive rule of Sidi Ahmad Khan. It is plausible that many of them asked the English to interfere. This underscored the English rhetoric to the effect that the Company's aim was to protect the fair trader against the unscrupulous tyranny of indigenous rulers. This myth of Anglo-Bania partnership even reverberates in the *Mirat* when the English are reported to deplore the current tyranny, extortion and disorder (*zulm wa ta'addi wa binasaq*) while aiming at the establishment of security and tranquillity (*amn u aman*) for the merchants.[68]

Obviously, looking beyond the myth, Subramanian's Anglo-Bania order should not be interpreted too literally. What certainly happened was a gradual shift of the flow of cash and commodities into the hands of the English Company and, even more crucially, English private traders. This process was facilitated by a growing number of Bania merchants and bankers.[69] Of course, Torri is correct that there was not such a thing as a horizontally oriented Bania social category. As we have indicated already in our tripartite classification of Surat's political economy, it was neither particular classes, religious communities, nor ethnic groups that came to dominate Surat after the Castle Revolution. There was merely *a* new Anglo-Bania network under Miyan Achhan that replaced *a* Sidi-Parsi-Dutch network under Safdar Muhammad Khan.[70] What characterises these networks is that they succeeded, one way or the other, in connecting the five functional and spatial spheres of Surat's

[67] Shejwalkar, "Surat Episode," 181-85.

[68] *Mirat*, II, 555 (trans., 876).

[69] As we know from Subramanian herself, not all merchants, Banias or otherwise, were part of the deal with the EIC (Subramanian, *Indigenous Capital*, 96-99).

[70] There were many more such, often short-winded networks, such as the Chellabi-Parsi network under Tegh Beg Khan involving Ahmad Chellabi and Manakji Naoroji, and through the latter, the Bombay council (Das Gupta, *Indian Merchants*, 254-55).

political economy. Within these networks, the portfolio powers increasingly dominated and encompassed the movements of the other powers or turned them into political figureheads, at the one end, or into mere peddlers, at the other end of the continuum. In any case, although some Banias, in coalition with the English, clearly won the day, Dutch archival material does not confirm the existence of a fully-fledged Anglo-Bania order as conceived by Subramanian.

The myth of Dutch neutrality

In the same way that the English propagated the idea of fair Indian traders seeking English protection, the Dutch circulated their own myth of neutrality. From its very beginning, neutrality had always been a cornerstone of the foreign policy of the Dutch Republic. As such it had been a traditional plaything of Dutch jurists, one well suited to the ideas of *Mare Liberum* and the neo-stoic ideals of *constantia, patientia* and *temperantia.*[71] In practical terms, however, the Dutch did not become a world power or conquer large parts of Southeast Asia by remaining neutral. What in due course became a Dutch principle of neutralist abstentionism was more a reflection of a Dutch-Calvinist embarrassment about power and violence than a description of real policies.

As for Surat in the mid-eighteenth century, it is striking that the Dutch always pretended to be neutral whereas in reality they almost never were. Without questioning its very existence, George Winius and Markus Vink remarked that neutrality was sensible enough as long as the Mughal emperor was still all-powerful. In the eighteenth century, however, the VOC failed to adjust its policies and disregarded the new power vacuum that was rapidly filled by the competing English and French companies.[72] However, this somewhat naive interpretation of power politics not only downplays the aggressive policies of the VOC at Surat and Bengal in the early 1750s but also tends to take the Dutch reports too much at face value. Here we should not forget that the VOC as a centralized organization was as interested in monopolizing the production of discourse as that of spices. Actually in both cases, the

[71] See e.g. G. Oestreich, "Politische Neustoizismus und Niederländische Bewegung in Europa und besonders in Brandenburg-Preuszen," *Bijdragen en Mededelingen Historisch Genootschap*, 79 (1965): 11-75.

[72] G.D. Winius and M.P.M. Vink, *The Merchant-warrior Pacified. The VOC (the Dutch East India Company) and its Changing Political Economy in India*, (Delhi 1991) 1-6, 87-91.

Dutch were far more successful than either the Portuguese or the English. It is all the more surprising that the deconstruction of this discourse still remains very much in its infancy.[73]

The Surat documents are imbued with neutralist rhetoric. Reading the various *Memories van overgave*—reports in which a departing director informed the coming director about the current situation of the factory—one gets the impression that nobody ever doubted that the Dutch were exclusively interested in trade and kept aloof from local politics. Both Jan Schreuder (1750) and Louis Taillefert (1760) had to admit that the local authorities looked down on them since they were neither able nor willing to use force. Schreuder stressed that one could reach many objectives by means of friendly and polite behaviour, but one should never beg or act submissively. Only when "soft means" did not have the hoped-for result should one use or threaten to use force. At the same time, he advised against intervening in conflicts that had nothing to do with the interests of the Company. But again, when it was really necessary to take sides, one should always choose the party that exercised the most legitimate authority as servant of the king. Taillefert could only agree, but added that the VOC should choose the party that best looked after the interests of the Company.[74]

Christiaan Lodewijk Senff (1768) echoed his predecessors. With regard to the English—note that they were now the *de facto* rulers in Surat—he remarked that it was important to obey the rules and be polite towards them in order to give them no reason to complain. But when the English demanded full subordination, the Dutch should defend themselves. They should first try to reach their goal without pressure, either orally or with informal letters. Only when that did not work should they turn to formal notices of objection or force.[75] Although the reports keep repeating the mantra of neutrality, it is also clear that there was still much room for manoeuvre. The message is: of course we will concentrate on trade and stay aloof from local intrigues but particular conditions may force us to take sides and use force.

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[73] See, however, recently J.D. Tracy, "Asian Despotism? Mughal Government as seen from the Dutch East India Company Factory in Surat," *Journal of Early Modern History*, 3 (1999), 256-80 and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Forcing the Doors of Heathendom: Ethnography, Violence and the Dutch East India Company* (*The Wertheim Lecture 2002*) (Amsterdam, 2003). According to Subrahmanyam, "a constant but low-level violence was in a sense inscribed in the [Dutch] Company's presence from the very start."

[74] NA, HRB 838: 105-14.

[75] NA, HRB 848.

How did the factors' superiors in Batavia and the Republic respond to all this? Probably, much of the neutralist discourse of the Surat letters was specifically meant for them only, as they in particular were worried that too much political interference would involve rising protection costs. Having read the letters from the governors in Batavia, one may share the conclusion of Winius and Vink that the directors did not know much about the situation in India and the relations between the different groups there. After the Castle Revolution, they were of the opinion that it would not make much difference whether the Indians or the English were in possession of the castle. Taillefert had to explain to them that not one but two governors ruled the city and that the English, who had previously been the equals of the Dutch, had now suddenly grown superior to them. Batavia, however, thought that if the Dutch would recognise their authority, the English would not disturb the Dutch any further. At the same time they inquired about a place to which the VOC could withdraw if they were forced to leave Surat.[76] The Gentlemen XVII in Amsterdam seemed somewhat more realistic. They considered the intentions of the English harmful and expressed their concern about the consequences of the English take-over.[77]

It appears that neutrality had become almost second nature to the Dutch. One may wonder whether Batavia's ongoing insistence on cautious neutrality was anything more than a slogan to be used in the face of crisis. For example, in 1759 Batavia decided to send a fleet and army to India in order to counter the English encroachments in Bengal. The campaign's military execution had been not much worse than the one in which the English had captured Surat castle and, in purely military terms, it could easily have succeeded.[78] Even after the disastrous outcome of the expedition, the Dutch remained a power to be reckoned with on the subcontinent. As late as 1779 the Mughals invited the Dutch in Bengal to become their commander-in-chief (*sipah-salar*) to expel the

[76] Much later, in 1767, the Marathas invited the Dutch to open a factory in Bassein. The negotiations that followed were unsuccessful since the Dutch appear to have been too demanding (NA, VOC, HRB, inv. nr. 848, f. 17-29). Cf. Winius and Vink, *Merchant-warrior*, 99.

[77] NA, VOC 10428: 443-56; VOC 9086: 56; VOC 1013: 32,53,59-61; VOC 2997: 135-6.

[78] For the latest analysis on the expedition, see H. s'Jacob, "Bedara Revisited: A Reappraisal of the Dutch Expedition of 1759 to Bengal," in J. Gommans and O. Prakash (eds), *Circumambulations in South Asian History: Essays in Honour of Dirk H.A. Kolff* (Leiden, 2003), 117-33.

English from their territories. For the Dutch, the offer came too late to be seriously contemplated.[79]

Much earlier, it appears a similar offer had reached the Dutch in Surat. In a document from 1768, there is a reference to a letter from 1759 in which the Dutch declined an invitation to take possession of the castle. Unfortunately the original letter from 1759 has not been preserved, but the offer is also mentioned in a letter from Batavia in response to the news that the English had taken the castle.[80] At first glance, this appears to confirm neutrality—why else would the Dutch chief Taillefert have refused to act on this invitation?[81] One of Taillefert's successors, Christiaan Senff raised this very question. He was angry that Taillefert had not taken the opportunity when the Sidis had offered the castle to the VOC. At the time, Taillefert believed that the Sidi's move was not authorised by his superior in Janjira. Besides, the English would certainly take revenge on the Dutch and throw them out of the castle again. Senff was of the opinion that the English chief Spencer had convinced Taillefert—presumably in return for vague promises—to remain on the fence when the English were to capture the castle by force.[82] Another source suggests that Spencer had bribed Taillefert on this occasion.[83] Whatever the truth of the matter, we should keep in mind that although the companies were often at each other's throats, the English and Dutch factors shared common financial interests, for they assisted each other in transmitting legally and illegally gained money to Amsterdam and London.[84]

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[79] VOC 4786. One of the letters is by Najaf Khan, the *de facto* ruler of Delhi.

[80] NA, VOC 1013: 53; HRB 848: 38.

[81] According to Winius and Vink the Dutch made a half-hearted attempt to take the castle in 1762. For this they refer to Subramanian, "Capital and Crowd," 93-94. Unfortunately, we were not able to trace this information in that article (Winius and Vink, *Merchant-warrior*, 99, 142).

[82] NA, VOC 3026: 36-39.

[83] Torri cites Johan Splinter Stavorinus ("Mughal Nobles," 308, fn. 201). Winius and Vink make similar accusations against Adriaan Bisdom, the Dutch chief in Bengal during the Bedara fiasco in 1759 (*Merchant-warrior*, 128).

[84] For the personal relationships of Dutch servants in Bengal, see Gaastra's first Van Gelder lecture: *Particuliere geldstromen binnen het VOC-bedrijf 1640-1795* (Leiden, 2002). Of course, it is very well possible that Dutch neutrality in both Bengal and Surat was instigated by such personal agendas. Director Jan Drabbe (1759-63), for example, who like Taillefert had a "Bengali" background, is most keen to stress restored Anglo-Dutch harmony in Surat (NA, VOC, 9086: 56). Bengal, however, had no monopoly on these undercover multinational networks as is shown in the *Fackiero Mirachub* affair of 1747 concerning Jacob Mossel at Batavia, Willam Wake at Bombay and Mulla Fakhr al-Din and Jan Pecock at Surat. See H. Furber, *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600-1800* (Minneapolis, 1976), 283.

But the commercial position of the Dutch in Surat really was different from that of the English. The Dutch were first of all sellers of their Asian products—mainly copper, spices and sugar—and were not concerned with a cash deficit as was the case with the English. It follows that they were less dependent on the credit and transfer facilities of the Banias, the more so since they hardly had to bother about the interests of a mere handful of Dutch private merchants. These circumstances are far more important for understanding Dutch policy in Surat than repeatedly expressed principles of neutrality. With the benefit of hindsight, one may say that Dutch intervention in 1759 would most probably have precluded the castle's take-over by the English, especially taking into account the shaky military balance during actual fighting. But with that same hindsight, one sees that the Dutch probably underestimated the English and certainly could not foresee the dire and long-lasting consequences of what only later turned out to be a revolution to end all revolutions.[85]

Despite the fact that neutrality and disengagement pervaded the letters of the Surat factors, these principles never really determined Dutch policy. Although Taillefert had decided not to intervene in 1759, for whatever reasons, during the previous two decades it is clear that the Dutch had intervened, and quite successfully. With the help of their broker Khurshedji, they had become active participants in a thriving politico-commercial network that usually included, apart from their Parsi and Bania brokers, the Sidis and the Beglar family. As indicated already by the opening citation of this paper, the picture of a more aggressive Company is generally confirmed by the account of Anquetil Duperron, a far from hostile insider to Dutch circles in South Asia.[86]

In terms of commercial results, these were golden years for the Dutch. According to Om Prakash, for the eighteenth century, the period between 1745 and 1760 clearly constituted the high point of Dutch Company's trade with Gujarat.[87] Unfortunately, the English success-story of 1759

[85] NA, HRB 842: 5-9; HRB, 848: 44-48.

[86] Apart from the opening citation, see Anquetil Duperron, *Voyage*, 314-18. Especially Lubbert Jan van Eck, the Francophile Dutch commander at Pulicat, facilitated Anquetil's entry into Dutch circles. Anquetil's "intellectual" network in India included the Dutchmen Van Vechten at Cochin, Van Dorts at Colombo and Taillefert at Surat (*Voyage*, 158-59, 162, 200-02, 341). For a favourable evaluation of Anquetil's perspective on matters pertaining to Indian politics, see Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Entzauberung Asiens: Europa und die asiatischen Reiche im 18. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1998), 293-97.

[87] Prakash, *European Commercial Enterprise*, 303. See also Desai, *Bombay and the Marathas*, 154.

is too often projected backwards into the 1740s and 50s as if victory was inevitable. Hence, Dutch decline is often assumed to have set in earlier than it actually did.[88]

Conclusion

The various castle revolutions in mid eighteenth-century Surat reflected important political and commercial changes in and beyond the Surat region. In the context of declining states in West Asia, the Marathas had already replaced the Mughals in the Surat hinterland and the English—Company and private traders—were soon to replace the Surat-based Sidis and Bohras in the Arabian Sea. But despite the political and commercial upheavals, it appears that the interconnected structure that supported the Surat political economy—the three spheres discussed above—remained fully in place. In the 1750s it was in full swing, engaging an ambitious ruling elite that cooperated in shifting coalitions with a still thriving mercantile community of Bohras, Banias, Parsis and other groups. Outside the city, Maratha, Sidi and English portfolio-entrepreneurs eagerly attempted to connect to these coalitions through various, commercial, political and military means.

Amidst a great deal of uncertainty but also hopeful expectations the Dutch did not simply stand by but actively mediated between parties and gained from it. Hence, despite Dutch neutralist discourse, in Surat they hardly acted as "a true merchant" as they operated in both the mercantile and the portfolio-entrepreneurial sphere and as such actively supported the Surat dyarchy under the Beglar family and the Sidis.[89] Hence Schreuder could only but enjoy the status quo he observed in the city: in the case that neutrality was not possible, the Dutch were advised to support the Muslims (*Moren*) and not the Marathas, the regents and not the common people. Whereas the Muslim regents, as the most durable and legitimate representatives of the Mughal king, promoted stability, the common people would neither be able to establish durable order nor to protect Dutch privileges in the longer run.[90] As Schreuder insisted, the mob (*het gemeen*) is fickle (*wisperturig*) and always inclined to change. Apparently he never expected that change would soon come from an entirely different direction.

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[88] Furber, *Rival Empires*, 158-59.

[89] The thesis of the "true merchant" appears to be the latest version of Dutch neutralist discourse. For this, see Jacobs, *Koopman in Azië*, 296.

[90] NA, HRB 838: 105-14.