



Philosophical Magazine Series 1

ISSN: 1941-5796 (Print) 1941-580X (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/tphm12>

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C. Hansel

To cite this article: C. Hansel (1800) I. Observations on the Straits of Malacca, in regard to natural history, geography, and commerce , Philosophical Magazine Series 1, 7:27, 193-205, DOI: [10.1080/14786440008562574](https://doi.org/10.1080/14786440008562574)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14786440008562574>



Published online: 18 May 2009.



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THE
PHILOSOPHICAL MAGAZINE.

AUGUST 1800.

I. *Observations on the Straits of Malacca, in regard to Natural History, Geography, and Commerce.* By C. HANSEL*.

THE island of Pulo Pinang, which lies close to the coast of Queda, between the fifth and sixth degree of northern latitude, and which now belongs to the English East India company, may serve as a proof how well the English understand the art of establishing colonies, and bringing them in a short time to a flourishing condition. About the year 1784, the Malay king of Queda made a present of the whole island to Mr. James Light, the captain of a country ship trading thither, and the latter sold it to the East India company, with the proviso that he should be appointed governor of it; which was accordingly done, and he remained in that office till the end of the year 1795. The island was uninhabited, and entirely covered with wood. In order to erect a few houses it was necessary, therefore, to destroy part of the wood, which was effected chiefly by means of fire.

This island, which was now called Prince of Wales Island, I visited, for the first time, in the year 1793, consequently nine years after it had been taken possession of by the English. At that period a beautiful town, of a pretty considerable extent, and regularly laid out, had been built. A particular part of it was destined for the Malays and other Asiatics, a great number of whom had already established

* From *Journal sur Fabrik, Manufaktur, Handlung, und Mode*, October 1799.

themselves in the place. The market was well supplied with fruits, fish, and other necessaries. A considerable trade had also begun to be carried on. Ships from Bengal brought hither opium, rice, and cotton, which were bartered for pepper, tin, betel-nuts, and gold-dust. All the company's ships touch here in their voyage to China, as well as the large fleets from Bombay and Madras. The arrival of so many vessels makes this place a staple, where buying, selling and bartering are continually going on. The harbour, which is formed by the coast of Queda and the east coast of the island, is deep, and secure from every wind. Those who are unacquainted with its geographical situation imagine they are entering a river; so short is its distance from the continent. When viewed from the west side, the island appears to be round, and its mountains may be seen at a considerable distance. It is about thirty-five or thirty-six miles in circumference. The present inhabitants have applied chiefly to the cultivation of pepper, which is in a thriving condition, and promises to turn out very advantageous. As the island produces excellent timber for ship-building, docks have been formed, and a great many vessels have already been launched.

A few miles from the town is a forest, which, rising gradually, covers the mountains behind it. From the summit of the highest of these mountains a large stream of water projects itself more than a hundred feet, with a prodigious roaring noise, on the rocks below, where, after being collected in various natural basons, it forms a small rivulet, and then proceeds through the town, with a winding course, to the sea. One can hardly conceive how pleasant and refreshing it is for those relaxed by the heat of the climate to bathe in one of these basons, as the water is kept in a continual state of coolness by the shady branches of the trees, which form over them a sort of arches, and defend them from the rays of the sun. The coolness of these groves, the majestic roar of the waterfall, and the noise of a variety of unknown insects, make this an agreeable retreat to those who have a taste for the beauties of nature. In the year 1796, country-houses were erected amidst these fairy groves, which, in
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the course of time, may be converted into English gardens.

In the year 1789 the king of Queda took it in his head to demand back the island from the English; and, as the latter showed no inclination to comply with his desire, he assembled a considerable army on the coast opposite to the island, in order to lay siege to it in form. That he might inspire his troops with more courage he gave them an entertainment, at which opium was not spared. His Malayan majesty did not fail to get intoxicated along with his warriors; and this being reported to the English by means of their spies, they attacked the Malays in their camp, killed their king, made a great slaughter among them, and thus put an end to the war. A regular stone fort has since been built, in which a garrison is constantly maintained of three battalions of sepoy and Europeans.

At first, ships that touched here were obliged to sail back the same way they had entered; which was attended with this inconvenience, that those vessels destined to proceed further through the Straits of Malacca could not take advantage of a fair wind, because it blows directly into the harbour, and by these means five or six days were often lost. In the year 1791, however, captain Popham * discovered a passage round the south-east end of the island, by which this inconvenience is obviated.

To sail hence for Malacca there are two ways; one of which, for large ships, lies between two dangerous sandbanks, where a continual and rapid current, which runs either north-west or south-east, requires all the attention of

* Captain Popham is the gentleman who commanded the expedition of the English to Ostend. As far as I remember, he commanded, in the year 1791, a ship named *Il Trufco*, which had been fitted out at Ostend by the English and sailed under the Tuscan flag. During the peace he obtained permission from the Board of Admiralty, being then a lieutenant in the navy, to enter into the merchant service; but as soon as the war broke out, he was again employed on board a ship of war.—H.

Captain Popham superintended last year the embarkation of the Russian troops destined for Holland, and assisted the operations of the British army in that country. He received the honour of knighthood from the emperor Paul, being made a knight of Malta.—EDIT.

the pilot to pass in safety. Nature, however, seems as if desirous to afford here every possible assistance, since the Aru islands on the west side, which consist of some small uninhabited rocks, serve the pilot as good marks to steer by. When these disappear, the summit of the mountain Parcelar is discovered on the east side, which must be kept in a certain direction, according to the current, in order to pass without danger. As navigators between these sand-banks have often to struggle with bad weather and contrary winds, it is impossible to proceed but by continually heaving the lead, which is indeed attended with danger. The second passage lies along the coast through the small channel of Calum, which is scarcely so broad as the Elbe at Dresden. Nothing more beautiful can be conceived than this passage, where vessels sometimes approach so near the coast that the bowsprit is often entangled among the branches of the trees. Birds of the most shining and variegated colours, unknown to the Europeans, are seen fluttering around, while others delight the ear with their song. As a sand-bank in the middle shuts this passage against large ships, it is practicable only for those which draw very little water.

When vessels have reached the northern part, nothing can be more pleasant than the navigation. They proceed along the coast, from which the wind, when it blows from the land, wafts along with it the most delicious aromatic odours. The mouths of the small channels, the different windings of the coast, the bays which they form, and the land rising like an amphitheatre, all together form the most enchanting prospect. Nothing is wanting to complete the picture but habitations; for, in an extent of twenty or thirty miles, the only things of the kind that can be discovered, even with a spying-glass, are a few fishermen's huts.

At last, after weathering a headland, you suddenly discover the town of Malacca, formerly belonging to the Dutch. It lies at the head of a bay, and, though small, is neat and well built. It is surrounded by beautiful gardens and country-seats. No place in the world produces more valuable fruits. The ananas here are half an ell in length and a quarter of an ell in diameter. They have an exceedingly sweet mellicious taste.

taste. The mangoftan, called in India the queen of fruits, is found here in great abundance, fo that from two to three hundred of them may be purchafed for a dollar. They grow only in the ftraits of Malacca, Sunda, Banca, and in the ifland of Java. They are found neither at Madras nor Bengal, nor in the Philippines or China. The ufual fruits of India thrive here better than any where elfe. The bay abounds with well-tafted fifh, and excellent oysters, crabs, cray-fifh, &c. Though this place lies nearly under the line, the climate is exceedingly healthful, and nothing is known here of thofe fevers and difeafes to which other Afatic colonies are fubject. The temperature of the air is cooled by the fea and land breezes, which alternately prevail. The former begins between eleven and one in the forenoon, and blows very ftrongly till towards fix in the evening; at which time, however ftrong it may be, the land-breeze affumes its place, and continues till about eleven the next day. By thefe means an agreeable coolnefs is always preferved. At Calcutta, in Bengal, the heat is much more intense and infupportable, though it lies at the diftance of twenty-three degrees from the line; for it is not uncommon there to fee Fahrenheit's thermometer, in the fhade, during the months of April and May, at between eighty and ninety degrees. At the interval only when both winds ceafe, the heat is ftifling. The reafon of the land-breeze here being fo cool is, that, as Malacca is a peninfula, the wind always paffes over a portion of fea, whereas the land-breeze on the coaft of Coromandel paffes over the burning deferts of Perfia.

The frequent and exceedingly violent thunder-ftorms which take place here, contribute alfo very much to moderate the heat. They arife moftly in the north-weft, and bring with them fuch coolnefs that I remember having been feveral times fo cold that I was obliged to have recourfe to warmer clothing. The body here, indeed, is far more fenfible of the fmalleft degree of cold than in the European climates, as the pores are kept fo open by the heat. Thefe ftorms are highly gratifying to the navigators bound to the Chinefe feas; for, as a fouth wind, except in a very few places, where the fea and land breezes fucceed each other regularly,

regularly, prevails in the straits, they are glad to see such storms, which always begin to be formed in the north-west. In the night, however, they cannot be used with so much advantage, on account of the many sand-banks, islands, and even the coast itself, which must be avoided. It has been remarked, that during these storms the magnetic needle is in a continual state of perturbation; and I have heard the captain of an English East Indiaman declare that he has seen, during a violent storm, the north end of the needle point directly south.

The European productions brought to Malacca for the purposes of trade are confined to a very few articles. Rice, opium, white and coloured cottons, form the principal part of them. The Malays bring hither pepper, nutmegs, sago, rotangs, Spanish reeds, and gold-dust. The latter article is first examined by the officers of the company, and then made up into small packets in Chinese paper, bound round with a thread and impressed with a seal containing Malay characters. Each packet contains a catty, and is worth from 460 to 500 piastres. The Spaniards, who go from the Philippines to Madras for the purposes of trade, touch here always in order to exchange their piastres for gold-dust, which they carry with them to the coast of Coromandel, where, according to circumstances, they gain two *per cent*. These packets, when sold, are never opened, but are taken on the seller's report; and no instance is known of any fraud ever having been practised on such occasions. The small Spanish reeds are sold for about eight piastres *per* hundred, and pepper at fifteen piastres *per* pickel of $17\frac{1}{2}$ Spanish pounds. The cotton and opium brought hither are sold mostly to the Dutch, who sell them afterwards to the Malays. The branch of trade, however, by which the inhabitants chiefly live, is supplying the ships which touch here with provisions, fresh water, salted and fresh fish, poultry and fruit. The price of fowls is generally a piastre for eight or ten. Pine-apples are sold at the rate of from four to six *per* piastre. Those who are acquainted with the number of the ships which pass through these straits every year to China, the Philippines, the South Sea, Batavia, Borneo, Coringa, &c. may form some idea of the importance

importance of this trade. The tavern where strangers reside is generally furrounded by a multitude of Malays having for sale, apes, parrots, cowries, Spanish reeds, and various other articles. Among these people one may see many of their kings, who are distinguished by a turban embroidered with gold, and who enter the tavern without receiving any particular marks of honour from the Europeans. The case is the same with all the petty Indian kings, of whom too high ideas are entertained in Europe, but who in India are looked upon as little better than corporals. It may be readily understood that I here speak of the lesser princes; for the greater ones, such as the kings of Atcheen, Borneo, Pegu, &c. are in general treated with more respect.

The Dutch government, formerly established here, considered it as of great importance to clear the straits from the numerous Malay pirates by which it is infested. For that purpose it maintained a flotilla of cruisers and flat-bottomed vessels, which from time to time fought out the Malays in their places of retreat behind the small islands in shallow water, where their flat-bottomed vessels were of excellent service. The Malay prows generally carry a 24-pounder in the bow; have only one mast, which can be lowered or raised at pleasure; and are furnished with a rudder. They never attack a vessel when there is wind, because in that case it can manoeuvre and make use of its cannon in every direction; but, if a calm take place, and they discover a ship from their retreats, they then come out and attack the vessel behind and before, where they are out of reach of the cannon; massacre, with their poisoned daggers called *kris*, all the white men on board; and carry off the blacks as slaves. A Dutch captain named Bloem, who commanded one of these cruisers, was a terror to the Malays. Being acquainted with their most private retreats, he often surprised them when they least expected it. They once imagined they should be able to overcome him, and advanced against him, during a calm, with fourteen of their prows; but before they got near him a small breeze sprung up, so that he was enabled to direct his vessel, and to give them such a reception, that five or six of the prows were sunk, and others had their rudders shot

away; so that they were obliged, to avoid total destruction, to throw themselves into the sea, and to save themselves by swimming. The rest betook themselves to flight; for the Dutch give the Malays no quarter.

Of the last instance of this man's courage, which cost him his life, I myself was an eye-witness. The French frigate *La Prudente*, of thirty-six guns, on board which I was a prisoner, being in the straits of Malacca, about two o'clock on the 17th of July 1795, the man at the mast-head calling out *Vive la Republique*, announced that he saw a sail which seemed to be steering towards us. As there was then little or no wind, the two vessels approached each other very slowly; and it was therefore near sunset before we could perceive that the strange sail was a vessel with two masts. About ten at night, after I had lain down in my hammock, I was roused by the drum beating to quarters. The officers near whose birth my hammock was slung, immediately started from theirs, and desired the *citoyen prisonnier*, meaning me, to do the same. The fore-deck was cleared, and every preparation made for battle. I then proceeded to the fore-deck, and obtained permission to remain there: The two vessels by this time were so near that they could speak each other. Our commandant hailed the strange sail, and asked to what nation she belonged. The answer was, that she was a Dutch ship of war.—Strike to the republican frigate *La Prudente*, and lower your sails.—Are you really French? said the Dutch captain.—Yes: take in your sails and drop your anchor, or I'll sink you.—I have no anchor on board, replied the Dutchman, but plenty of cannon; and at the moment we received a whole broadside; which we instantly returned. Several of the Dutchmen being killed, they then called out that they struck. Having taken possession of the Dutch vessel, and shifted the prisoners on board the frigate, we found the former to be the *Java*, of eighteen 9-pounders; commanded by the beforementioned captain Bloem, who had that day sailed from Malacca. A shot had carried away part of his left breast, but he ordered that the colours should not be struck till after his death.

The inhabitants of Malacca are a motley race, consisting
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of Europeans, creoles; mulattoes, black Christians (called commonly Portuguese), Chinese, and Malays. The Dutch and Germans established here, all have mulatto or créole wives, for I do not know one whose wife is an European. The wife even of the last governor, Abraham Couperus, was a mulatto. The customs, manners, and dress of these ladies, are all in the Malay taste. The dress which they use, both in the house and on public occasions, consists of a silk gown with wide sleeves, which has a great resemblance to a powdering-gown. Their hair is twisted together and fastened on the crown of the head with a silver pin. In the house their favourite female slaves sit at their feet; and when they go out to walk, or pay visits, they accompany them, bearing a small silver box divided into different compartments, which contain certain articles indispensably necessary for a Malay lady. These articles are, betel, areka-nuts, chalk, a pair of small tongs, and a knife for spreading the chalk on the betel-leaves, in which they wrap up small bits of the areka-nut for the purpose of chewing them. The care which they bestow on their domestic economy consists only in seeing the orders which they give to their slaves carried into execution. When a stranger is invited to dinner, he is first introduced into an apartment where he is treated with a pipe of tobacco. Female slaves then make their appearance, one of whom brings him a silver basin for washing the hands, another a vessel containing water, and a third a towel. The company then sit down to table, and are waited on by the female slaves belonging to the master of the house. They are attended also sometimes by musical slaves, who, during the entertainment, perform pieces of music.

Slaves here, both male and female, a few excepted, are treated with great severity. The master of one of the taverns, a German, named Krejs, born in Hohenlohe, is particularly distinguished in this respect. I never entered his house, which I did above ten times, without seeing punishment inflicted on some of his domestics. If the cook had not prepared the dinner according to his taste, he was immediately carried into the back court, when two other slaves appeared with bambóos in their hands, and belaboured him

on the posteriors till his master, who walked up and down with his pipe in his mouth, told them to stop. If the slaves did not execute his orders with sufficient severity, he applied to their shoulders a bamboo, which he always on these occasions carried himself. He always made it a rule when any stranger who happened to be in his house interceded for his slaves, to punish them doubly. Females slaves even were not excepted from this correction, which was inflicted in the most indecent manner. The Dutch government not only authorised this severity, but even put it in practice itself. A poor slave belonging to the same Kreis had conceived an attachment to a female slave who resided in the neighbouring house, and belonged to one Adrian Koek. The lovers could only visit each other in the night-time, and for this purpose the former was obliged to clamber over the roof of a penthouse. This nocturnal intercourse being discovered, Koek complained to the fiscal, and requested that the slave might be punished. Kreis, therefore, was obliged to give up his slave, and the sentence was, that he should receive 500 blows with a bamboo, to be inflicted publicly. A ring was then put round each of his legs, between which an iron bar was fixed, so that when he walked he was obliged to describe an arch with each foot, and in this state was sent back to his master.

On the other hand, I must observe that it is hardly possible, by the severest punishment, to restrain the profligacy and villainy of these men. What idea must we entertain of a man, who, having been severely punished for drunkenness, will, the very next day, take the key of the cellar from his master's closet and get so intoxicated as to be unable to stir from the spot? To a circumstance of this kind I have myself been a witness. The punishment, indeed, was cruel; for the culprit was made fast by the neck, middle, and legs, to iron rings fastened in the earth, and belaboured till the blood gushed from every part of his body. I was a witness also to a more striking instance, which shows how little impression good treatment makes on these uncivilised people. An opulent Englishman, who had resided some time at Malacca, taking a fancy to one of Kreis's slaves, purchased him
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for the sum of 300 piastres. This slave was treated by his new master like a free man; he received money from him and permission to go abroad on asking leave, provided he remained to take care of the house in his master's absence. But this slave, unaccustomed to freedom, notwithstanding every threat and admonition, when he got out of the house, would not return in the course of the whole day, and at last, after being eight days in his new service, he stole from his master a piece of money. His master endeavoured to make him confess the theft, with a promise of forgiveness for this first offence, but without success. This circumstance being told to Kreis, he considered it as a good opportunity of exculpating himself from the charge of cruelty brought against him by strangers, as he imagined he could now prove that mild treatment to such men would be entirely lost. He offered also, not only to take back the slave, but to force him to confess. As the Englishman well knew that no one but his slave could be the thief, he delivered him over to Kreis, who tied him to a ladder, and then caused the usual punishment to be inflicted. When he had received two hundred blows, his body was bent, and in that condition he was thrown into a hole till the next morning; when the punishment was renewed. He still continued to hold out for some time, but Kreis having threatened to continue the punishment till he should confess, he at length acknowledged the theft, but would not tell what he had done with the money. On the punishment being once more applied, he confessed that he had sold the piece of money for a sixteenth part of its worth to a Chinese; who was immediately sent for, and obliged to give it up. After this he remained in the service of Kreis, who declared that he had never after any occasion of complaint against him.

By what I have here said, I do not mean to justify the cruelties exercised in this country, I only thought it necessary to show, by some examples, how cautious people ought to be in forming opinions on this subject. The profligacy of these people is undoubtedly to be ascribed to their masters, who do not pay the least attention to the formation of their moral character. They allow them to grow up like cattle,

without taking care to give them any idea of religion, or of other knowledge, except what is immediately necessary to their masters.

Those who possess a whole family of slaves, never sell any individual of that family, because there have been numerous instances in such cases of the father's or mother's dying through grief, of becoming melancholy, or of destroying themselves. The names given to these slaves are generally those of the months in which they have been born or purchased. The commerce by sea with the Malays is an armed commerce. All ships engaged in this trade carry a considerable number of guns, and from ten to twenty sepöys or black soldiers. When a ship comes to anchor in any of the Malay ports, a beam is laid across the deck before the main-mast to serve as a barrier between the buyers and the sellers, and strict watch is at the same time kept by the sepöys, with their arms loaded and their bayonets fixed. If a Malay have any particular business to transact with the captain that requires longer time, he is admitted into the cabin in the after-part of the ship, but he must first suffer himself to be searched, to see whether he has about him a knife or any kind of weapons. Neglect of this precaution has occasioned the loss of many lives as well as vessels. The treacherous Malay can never entertain any friendship for the Europeans; even if they should live in habits of intimacy with him for a dozen or twenty years, when a favourable opportunity occurs of promoting his own interest, he will make no ceremony of doing it by sacrificing his old friend. I could here give many instances of this kind, but I am convinced by what I have seen that the Europeans often give occasion to this villainy by their own conduct. Being once on board a large Bombay ship, bound from Manilla to Madras, we discovered in the straits of Malacca five large Malay vessels, which, on discovering us, anchored between us and the land, except two, which were further out at sea. As it was nearly calm, and the ship made little way, the captain, in a fit of intoxication, sent one of his officers on board them to ask whence they came, and whither they were bound. Their answer was, that they came from Rio, were bound to Malacca

lacca, and were laden with rotangs. This, however, did not satisfy the captain, and he immediately began to fire among them. Being much alarmed at this conduct, they cut their cables and rowed with all their might towards the land, where they were in danger of running on shore. In the mean time we passed the other two, which being without us were not able to escape, but, very fortunately, our captain did not observe them on account of his ideas being deranged, and because his attention was directed to the other side. As soon as we had passed, all the Malays on board bent themselves three times with their foreheads towards the deck, which in all probability was by way of returning thanks to Providence for the danger they had escaped.

In the straits there are a great many islands which abound with excellent fresh water; but it cannot be at all times used, as the Malays poison the springs: to such length do these men proceed in their hatred towards the Europeans. When ships enter the straits, they are generally visited by small Malay boats, which bring fish and tortoises for sale. The tortoises are of that kind called the green tortoise, which is three feet in length, about two in breadth, and weighs from two to three hundred pounds. A Spanish dollar, a small quantity of rice, and a bottle of brandy, are in general the price of a tortoise and a certain number of fish. The flesh of these tortoises is well tasted and much like that of veal, but difficult of digestion. The eggs, on the other hand, a hundred of which are sometimes found in one animal, are a great delicacy, and made into soup. The greatest advantage to seamen in purchasing these tortoises is, that they live a long time: we kept many of them alive from three to four weeks on the deck without any nourishment, and without any other care than throwing sea-water over them in the morning and evening. The whole straits are a real paradise interspersed with a multitude of small islands. Those who visit them cannot help wishing that they could spend their whole lives on them, but while the Malays exist they must be uninhabitable for Europeans.