

## **THE UNREGULATED DOMAIN: THE ABSENCE OF ISLAM IN THE 1681 ALLIANCE TREATY BETWEEN CIREBON AND THE DUTCH EAST INDIA COMPANY**

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### **Abstrak**

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Sejak abad ke-17 Islam merupakan tumpuan penting tradisi politik di Cirebon. Penelitian ini membaca sumber primer berbahasa Belanda (dokumen VOC) dan sumber lokal Cirebon (*Babad, Naskah*, dan lainnya). Studi ini berkesimpulan bahwa VOC tidak begitu tertarik berurusan dengan agama, terutama agama dari penguasa lokal. Sementara itu, para Sultan Cirebon memanfaatkan ketidakpedulian VOC untuk menjadikan ritual-ritual agama sebagai saluran kekuatan dan pengaruh mereka.

**Kata Kunci:** Cirebon; VOC; Islam di Cirebon; Perjanjian tahun 1681

### **Abstract**

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Since the 17th century Islam has been an important pillar of the political tradition in Cirebon. This study investigated the primary Dutch sources (VOC documents) and local Cirebon sources (*Babad, Naskah*, and others) brought "against the grain". This study concludes that the VOC was not so easily offended by religion, especially the religion of the local rulers. Meanwhile, the Cirebon Sultans took advantage of the VOC's indifference to use religious rituals as channels of their power and influence.

**Keywords:** Cirebon; VOC; Islam in Cirebon; the 1681 Treaty

## Introduction

Islam is a fulcrum of Cirebon court life. The centrality of Islam in Cirebon's court life is apparent in both foreign records and local sources. One of the oldest outsider accounts about Cirebon is Tome Pires' travelogue: *Suma Oriental*, published in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. Pires dedicated a short entry to describe the Javanese coastal city of Cherimon/Choroboam. He began his entry by telling what he assumed to be Cirebon's leader: Lebe Uça, a political officer who reported to the ruler of Demak.<sup>1</sup> Twentieth-century research by R.A. Kern corrected this observation and argued that Lebe Uça was likely to be a religious official than a political office-holder.<sup>2</sup> However, Pires was not the only observer who finds it difficult to differentiate between political and religious officials in Cirebon's context.

In the upcoming seventeenth century, Dutch records appraised Cirebon's kings with similar attribution to the ruler of Giri. However, unlike Mataram or Banten, The Dutch East India Company (henceforth, the VOC) recognized Giri as a priesthood or priestly-kingdom. Jan Pieterszoons-Coen even appalled the leader of Giri as the "Javanese Pope."<sup>3</sup> Although Cirebon never obtained the same title, VOC leaders believed that Cirebon kings were holy figures. In some instances, VOC also recorded how Mataram kings also adopted a similar view regarding its small ally in the northern shore.

The importance of Islam is also present in Cirebon local sources. Among other literary works, *Babad Tjerbon* holds a special status compared to other sources. Concerning its popularity, Cirebonese has at least seven versions of the *babad*. These versions share at least one similarity, positioning Sunan Gunung Jati as Cirebon's *raison d'être*. Sunan Gunung Jati is one of nine prominent Javanese saints (*Wali Sanga*) who established Cirebon in 1445. Concerning his saintly figure, the Sunan saw Islamization as his utmost responsibility. His political, economic, and military functions were only meant to serve the Islamization purpose.

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<sup>1</sup> Tomé Pires, Francisco Rodrigues, and Armando Cortesão, *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires: Volume I, Works Issued by the Hakluyt Society, Second Series* (Surrey: Hakluyt Society, 2010), <https://login.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2443/login?URL=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xww&AN=508147&site=ehost-live>. p. 183-184.

<sup>2</sup> R.A. Kern, "Het Javaanse Rijk Tjerbon in de Eerste Eeuwen van Zijn Bestaan.," *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde / Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia* 113, no. 2 (January 1, 1957): 191–200. p. 194.

<sup>3</sup> H.J. Graaf and Th. G. Th. Pigeaud, *De Eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen op Java, Studien over de Staatkundige Geschiedenis van de 15de en 16de Eeuw* (Leiden: KITLV, 1974). p. 134.

Sunan Gunung Jati's attitude that centralized Islam in Cirebon's court politics became a norm. The sunan's predecessors continued his legacy in prioritizing their religious duties. Panembahan Ratu II, Cirebon's third king, is narrated as unfond of trades (including Chinese and the Dutch who consistently promoted it in Cirebon). In contrast, the king showed no sign of annoyance in having a sleepy port. On the contrary, he claimed that a quiet port with a few Arabs (who actively promoted religion) is better than a busy one with many Chinese and Dutch. Later in his life, such a priority is no longer traceable. The king will fall for the "worldly trap," to which local sources blame his wife for the "moral degradation."<sup>4</sup>

The norm remained after Panembahan Ratu II passed away. However, the significant political changes halted Panembahan Ratu II's predecessor(s) to undergo the ascetic lifestyle. In the early 1660s, Panembahan Ratu II surrendered to Amangkurat I, the Mataram king and his father-in-law. After Amangkurat I accused his son-in-law of sheltering Mataram's fugitives, thus asking Panembahan Ratu II to surrender. Subsequently, the Cirebon king became Mataram's prisoner and leaving his kingdom in a power vacuum.<sup>5</sup>

Following the leaderless period, Cirebon went into unexpected turns. *Firstly*, Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa of Banten intervened in Cirebon's domestic politics and trifurcated the sultanate. Since then, Cirebon has three rulers: Pangeran Marta Wijaya as Sultan Sepuh I (lit: the old sultan), Pangeran Karta Wijaya as Sultan Anom I (lit: the young sultan), and Panembahan Kacirebonan (the lord of Cirebon). *Secondly*, the three new rulers secured a treaty with the Dutch East India Company (henceforth, VOC). The treaty was meant to seek VOC's protection from Banten and Mataram, two local powers that pressured Cirebon. However, Cirebon historiography considers this period as the very beginning of *sejarah peteng*, a local term in depicting the decline of Cirebon's political, religious, and economic influence.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Irianto Bambang, ed., *Sejarah Cirebon: naskah Keraton Kacirebonan: alih aksara dan bahasa teks KCR 04* (Cirebon: Ngaglik, Sleman, Yogyakarta: Rumah Budaya Nusantara Pesambangan Jati Cirebon; Deepublish, 2013). p. 87-89.

<sup>5</sup> Atja and Ayatrohaedi, *Nagarakretabhumi 1.5: Karya Kelompok Kerja Di Bawah Tanggungjawab Pangeran Wangsakerta Panembahan Cirebon* (Bandung: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1986). p. 75-76.

<sup>6</sup> *Sejarah Peteng* is a blanket term applied by Cirebonese to categorize controversial histories that Cirebon royal families consider taboo. Islamic boarding schools (*Pesantren*) as another authority among Cirebonese often tries to break the tradition by discussing it publicly. The boundary of *sejarah peteng* is continuously disputed mainly by the royal families and the *Pesantren*. In general, the dark history covers royal intrigues or betrayals.

The three new rulers got the protection they wished. However, the VOC did not offer a "free lunch." To be the company's protectorate, both parties must sign a political treaty. This treaty then significantly stripped Cirebon sultans' power exercise. Notwithstanding, both parties negotiated every clause within the treaty. Therefore, the final draft of the so-called 1681 treaty has accommodated both partakers' consent. Nevertheless, the three Cirebon rulers consciously agreed to hand over their political, military, economic, and legal sovereignty to the VOC.<sup>7</sup>

However, the treaty did not regulate anything concerning Islam, the Cirebon rulers' primary source of power. Therefore, this paper aims to address the absence of Islam as the core of "Cirebon power" from the treaty that aimed to pave the VOC's way to establish their influence over Cirebon. Why did the treaty not include the issue that Cirebon rulers consider essential? Was it due to the company's limited knowledge concerning Cirebon's power exercise? Or does the VOC merely have no interest in regulating the domain that hardly affected them?

As written in the previous paragraph, Cirebon's cooperation with the VOC was the beginning of the unceasing darkness in the history of Cirebon. Therefore, some publications have attempted to unravel this period. For example, in *Selective judicial competence: the Cirebon-Priangan legal administration, 1680-1792* (1994), Mason Hoadley wrote that the consensual colonization of Cirebon by the VOC marked the beginning of the legal transformation in the area.

Whereas Tendi in *Perjanjian dan Kontrak Sultan-Sultan Pertama Cirebon dengan Pemerintahan Agung VOC* (2021) has also attempted to inventory and translate treaties between Cirebon and the VOC in the late seventeenth century. However, Tendi barely provided any analysis concerning the treaties and solely presented those legal documents as they were. The relation between the VOC and Cirebon rulers was also the core of at least two bachelor thesis: "Perjanjian 7 Januari 1681 dan Implikasinya Terhadap Kehidupan Sosial Ekonomi di Kerajaan Cirebon" (2016) by Firlianna Tiya Devianni from IAIN Syekh Nurjati, Cirebon and "Pecahnya Kesultanan Cirebon dan Pengaruhnya Terhadap Masyarakat Cirebon tahun 1677-1752" (2015) by Heni Rosita from Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta.

The last two bachelor thesis adequately explained why the VOC managed to present in Cirebon political setting. However, both studies rely upon a single primary source: the 1681 Cirebon contract published within

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<sup>7</sup> Heeres and Stapel, eds., *Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum BKI*, 91, 3e Deel (1676-1691) (s'Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1934). p. 240.

the Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlandico Indicum. Both studies did not go into documents before the treaty that reveal the formulation process of the 1681 treaty. Not to mention that both studies paid no attention to Islam as the "missing issue." The present article examines the treaty by going into the final draft and supporting documents produced before the treaty signing. Furthermore, this study also attempts to unravel why the treaty that aimed to limit Cirebon rulers' power did not include Islam, the core source of Cirebon power?

In answering the above questions, this paper will firstly elaborate on the relatively peaceful relations between Cirebon and the VOC. The following part delves into the formalization of the relations by formulating a treaty in 1681. Next, the section looks into the pre-signing correspondences between both parties that barely touch upon Islam as an issue that the treaty must regulate. Finally, before the conclusion, the last sections will unravel the extent to which the VOC showed its interest toward religion, especially Islam, and why it left this element out.

This study combines and contrasts the VOC sources with local (yet translated or Latinized) Cirebon sources. The former refers to the VOC archives stored by the National Archief of the Netherlands in the Hague and Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia in Jakarta. The latter covers at least three versions of Babad Cirebon and some minor manuscripts produced by Kraton Kacirebonan.

### **The Quest of Cirebon's Guardian**

In nationalist historiography, the VOC was synonymous with an armed trading body. The portrayal is not entirely misleading, although it hardly represents the whole image. Compared to its English and French competitors, the VOC underwent more "peaceful" methods in manifesting "local disposition into European possession."<sup>8</sup> In this context, the peaceful method was the formulations and signings of treaties with local rulers. Such a method that emphasized both parties' consent might contrast the use of military power. Nevertheless, both ways aimed to transfer local's ownership into their European "allies."<sup>9</sup>

However, a conquest through the treaty signing was consensual. In other words, local rulers also agreed to welcome the European's presence. Subsequently, the core question has always been why local rulers were open

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<sup>8</sup> Saliha Belmessous, "Introduction" in Saliha Belmessous, ed., *Empire by Treaty: Negotiating European Expansion, 1600-1900* (Oxford, UK; New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015).p. 5-6.

<sup>9</sup> Saliha Belmessous, "Introduction." p. 5.

(or keen, in some instances) to have a foreign power roaming around their courts. For Cirebon, the reason came from the urgency to have a third party mediating the power contest between Banten, a sultanate in the west-end of Java that shares Sunan Gunung Jati's bloodline with Cirebon, and Mataram, a Javanese hinterland empire in the southeast of Cirebon.<sup>10</sup>

Firstly, three Cirebon rulers had discrepancies concerning the necessity of inviting the VOC. The oldest sultan or Sultan Sepuh I believed that the Dutch would restore his privilege in being the sole leader of Cirebon.<sup>11</sup> The privilege was taken away by Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa of Banten, who trifurcated Cirebon for the sake of mitigating successional conflict. Responding to the situation, the young sultan or Sultan Anom I objected to his brother's preference. Therefore, he invited Banten, that coronated him as a sovereign king, to be Cirebon's guardian.<sup>12</sup>

On another end of the spectrum, the VOC also had a political projection to "secure" some cities in Java's northern shore (*pesisir*) from disputants in the Trunajaya rebellion. Worth mentioning that in the 1670s, island-wide unrest led by a Madurese prince, Trunajaya shattered Java. The unrest almost forced Mataram to kneel, should the company did not intervene.<sup>13</sup> However, within this chaos, the company was sure that Mataram's king had no power to counter the prince's political adventure and lose its territories. Consequently, the company would take Mataram's territories to be its protectorate.

In the late 1670s, The VOC got its opportunity to manifest its political plan over Cirebon. Mataram, occupied with Trunajaya's resistance, requested the company's help to extinguish smaller-scale unrest in its Western Java territory: Karawang, Indramayu, and Cirebon.<sup>14</sup> The upheaval

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<sup>10</sup> Hasan Muarif Ambary, "Peranan Cirebon Sebagai Pusat Perkembangan Dan Penyebaran Islam," in *Kota Dagang Cirebon Sebagai Bandar Jalur Sutera*, ed. Susanto Zuhdi (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1998). p. 48.

<sup>11</sup> De Haan, *Dagh-Register Gehouden In 'T Casteel Batavia Van 'T Passerende Daer Ter Plaetse Als Over Geheel Nederlands India Anno 1678* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1907), 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> December 1678, p. 204.

<sup>12</sup> R.H. Unang Sunardjo, *Selayang Pandang Sejarah: Masa Kejayaan Kerajaan Cirebon Kajian Dari Aspek Politik Dan Pemerintahan* (Cirebon: Yayasan Keraton Kasepuhan Cirebon, n.d.). p. 58-59.

<sup>13</sup> H.J. De Graaf in, *De Opkomst van Raden Troenadjaja*, vol. 20, 1 (1940, n.d.). p. 2-3. & De Haan, *Dagh-Register Gehouden In 'T Casteel Batavia Van 'T Passerende Daer Ter Plaetse Als Over Geheel Nederlands India Anno 1677* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1904), 17<sup>th</sup> September 1677, p. 300.

<sup>14</sup> De Haan, *Dagh-Register Gehouden In 'T Casteel Batavia Van 'T Passerende Daer Ter Plaetse Als Over Geheel Nederlands India Anno 1678* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1907), 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> December 1678, p. 725.

was initiated by Pangeran Kidul, a Banten's proxy that intended to create chaos in Mataram's territory while the Javanese empire fought Trunajaya. In its reports, the company appalled the resistance's leader as *Pangeran Kidol*, whereas his followers were *De Kidolese Rover* (lit: the Kidulese bandits).<sup>15</sup> However, the anti-bandit campaign subsequently let the company in serving Cirebon's sultans.

Sultan Anom I, who showed his alignment toward Banten, also backhandedly supported the bandits. In other words, the young sultan contributed to creating chaos on his territory for the sake of giving Banten a way to conquer Cirebon. Therefore, instead of deploying his soldiers to help the company combat the bandits, he did it the other way around.<sup>16</sup> Sultan Anom I deployed six hundred soldiers in assisting the Banten's prince. This number even exceeded Banten's request of five hundred men.<sup>17</sup> Such gesture indeed worried Sultan Sepuh I, who did not want Banten's influence in his court politics. Based on this reason, Sultan Sepuh I frequently leaked his brother's decisions in supporting the bandits to the company.<sup>18</sup>

Although Banten and Sultan Anom I backed the bandits, the company quickly excelled in the military campaign. It only took a year for the company to claim its valiancy on the battlefield. Being shown the company's superiority, Sultan Anom I conceded to his brother's alignment and, no matter how half-heartedly, accepted the company's presence in Cirebon.

On May 1680, One of the VOC officers, Jacob van Dijk made a courtesy call with the three Cirebon rulers. He brought the company's mandate in figuring the three rulers' attitude toward the VOC as the victor of the anti-bandit campaign. In response to Van Dijk's question, Sultan Sepuh I answered that he would live and die with the company. In contrast, Sultan Anom I did not provide a bold answer to the company's officer. Sultan Anom I even gave Van Dijk a riddle by saying he only wants to ally with a strong party. In response to this riddle, Van Dijk ensured the young sultan that the

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<sup>15</sup> NA, VOC, 1.04.02, 1340, Aentekening bij sinjeur Couper gehouden in zijn reijse van Indermajoe over Cheribon naer Tegal sedert, 21 -29 December 1678, f. 1516.

<sup>16</sup> De Haan, *Dagh-Register Gehouden In 'T Casteel Batavia Van 'T Passerende Daer Ter Plaetse Als Over Geheel Nederlands India Anno 1678* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1912), p. 181.

<sup>17</sup> De Haan, *Dagh-Register Gehouden In 'T Casteel Batavia Van 'T Passerende Daer Ter Plaetse Als Over Geheel Nederlands India Anno 1680* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1912), 4<sup>th</sup> May 1680, p. 62.

<sup>18</sup> De Haan, *Dagh-Register Gehouden In 'T Casteel Batavia...., 1680* p. 62.

VOC and Cirebon would constitute one strong party if he accepted the alliance.<sup>19</sup>

Karaeng Bissei, a Makassarese nobleman who fought for the company, added that the company's presence in Cirebon aimed to serve the sultans' interest.<sup>20</sup> Hearing the responses, Sultan Anom I verbally agreed to accept the VOC. However, Sultan Sepuh I still informed the company that his younger brother has yet to abandon his loyalty toward Banten in the upcoming years.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the youngest sultan did not show any objection nor stated any agreement, for his central role was to be Sultan Sepuh I's deputy.

Based on the consensus between the three, Jacob van Dijk reported back to the company's high government in Batavia. The high government answered Cirebon's request with a draft of a treaty of alliance. According to the treaty, Cirebon conferred the VOC with core responsibility to ensure the safety of the sultans, their offspring, and subjects.<sup>22</sup> The protection was costly as the company asked Cirebon to grant them unlimited political, economic, military, and legal power. The company drafted clauses that allowed them to monopolize commodities, exempt them from taxes, and construct any establishment without necessary to notify the local rulers.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, the VOC obliged the sultans to seek their permission before taking any policy.

The combination of internal and external factors provided the VOC an opportunity to intervene with Cirebon's affairs. Such a condition was followed up with clause negotiation that the company would write in the treaty. Although the three sultans agreed to have the VOC as their protectors, the negotiation did not go smoothly. The following section will elaborate on the negotiation process that came up with the first treaty between Cirebon rulers with the Dutch East India Company. The treaty was finally signed in January 1681 and became the basis of other follow-up cooperations between both parties. Worth mentioning that the VOC received no resistance from any of Cirebonese until the early eighteenth

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<sup>19</sup> De Haan, *Dagh-Register Gehouden In 'T Casteel Batavia...., 1680* p. 204.

<sup>20</sup> NA, VOC, 1.04.02, 1360, Missive van den capiteijn Michielse en den raet tot Cheribon in dato primo Maij 1680 aen haer edelens tot Batavia geschreven, 1st May 1680, f. 2186.

<sup>21</sup> De Haan, *Dagh-Register Gehouden In 'T Casteel Batavia...., 1680* p. 204.

<sup>22</sup> NA, VOC, 1.04.02, 1360, Missive van den capiteijn Michielse en den raet tot Cheribon in dato primo Maij 1680 aen haer edelens tot Batavia geschreven, 1st May 1680, f. 2186.

<sup>23</sup> Heeres and Stapel, eds., *Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum BKI*, 91, 3e Deel (1676-1691) (s'Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1934). p. 70-74.



century. Regardless of the 'heroic' act, some Cirebon historiographies labeled the resistance's leader, Sultan Matangaji, as someone with mental illness.<sup>24</sup>

## Negotiating Clauses

The present study argues that VOC's presence and intervention in Cirebon's domestic politics occurred after the sultans consented. Nonetheless, the consent was only a gate-opener. After Cirebon rulers agreed to have the VOC as their protector, both parties began negotiating the treaty's clauses. For the VOC, the clauses negotiation should be straightforward as the company tended to use the preexisting treaty to draft a new agreement.

In Cirebon's case, the company used its treaty with Mataram in 1677 as a template. The 1677 treaty was an answer after Mataram requested the company's help in countering Trunajaya's rebellion. However, the military assistance came with some costs: Sunan of Mataram must exempt the company from taxes and tolls, allowed the VOC to conduct a free trade of opium and textiles, and the VOC was righteous to limit the Sunan's contacts with certain ethnic groups such as Chinese, Makassarese, Balinese, Moors, and Malays.<sup>25</sup>

However, Cirebon rulers were not blank canvases. They also had their interests that they could put in motion. Nevertheless, Cirebon rulers showed no objection to the company's proposal to enlarge its political, economic, and legal influence exponentially. The rulers were also not interested in criticizing the company's request of Cirebon's military to fight in the company's war.<sup>26</sup>

Cirebon rulers were mainly and consistently concerned about the company's plan in treating them equally. The principal objector was Sultan Sepuh I, who used to hold the exclusive right to reign. Throughout the negotiation period, he convinced the company to appoint him as the sole leader of Cirebon. In so doing, he reminded the VOC that his late father, who died in Mataram's captivity, mandated him to be the only leader. Apart from that, he never failed to show his loyalty to the company, unlike his brother

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<sup>24</sup> Irianto Bambang, ed., *Sejarah Cirebon: naskah Keraton Kacirebonan: alih aksara dan bahasa teks KCR 04* (Cirebon: Ngaglik, Sleman, Yogyakarta: Rumah Budaya Nusantara Pesambangan Jati Cirebon; Deepublish, 2013). p. 227-228.

<sup>25</sup> Heeres and Stapel, eds., *Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum BKI*, 91, 3e Deel (1676-1691) (s'Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1934). p. 70-74.

<sup>26</sup> Heeres and Stapel, eds., *Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum BKI*, 91, 3e Deel (1676-1691) (s'Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1934). p. 240.

Sultan Anom I. Sultan Sepuh I always warned his Dutch allies regarding Sultan Anom I's dishonesty in almost every letter to the company.<sup>27</sup>

A few days before the signing, no agreement was made between Sultan Sepuh I and the company. Sultan Sepuh I insisted that the VOC must acknowledge him as the only ruler. The VOC also stood its ground and decided not to change what they called the Banten's arrangement. Banten's arrangement refers to Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa's decision to trifurcate Cirebon and acknowledge the three rulers equally.<sup>28</sup> To solve the stalemate, the VOC deployed Jacob van Dijk to persuade Sultan Sepuh I. Before the old sultan, van Dijk promised that the company would always protect him from the despotic Mataram ruler.<sup>29</sup> Apart from the promise, van Dijk also said that Sultan Anom I and Panembahan Kacirebonan had agreed with the company's proposal. Regardless of how the former continuously showed his hostility toward the company.<sup>30</sup>

After delivering his speech, van Dijk witnessed how Sultan Sepuh I reconsidered his stance toward the treaty. The sultan asked his aides to keep a draft for him to study overnight. As expected, Sultan Sepuh I altered his mind the following day. Since the company has overcome its main objector, the first treaty between them and Cirebon was ready to be signed. However, as Cirebon sultans did not file their objections, the VOC proceeded with clauses from the 1677 treaty with Mataram with an additional clause that regulated equal treatment toward the three Cirebon rulers.

The final draft was signed in January 1681 by both parties. In signing the treaty, Cirebon rulers even asked their aides to hold Al-Qur'an above their heads. The sultans believed that if they violated the clauses, the holy book would curse them.<sup>31</sup> However, the involvement of Al-Qur'an was only one out of two symbolic representations of Islam around the treaty-making and signing. Another representation was written as one of the clauses that

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<sup>27</sup> De Haan, *Dagh-Register Gehouden In 'T Casteel Batavia...., 1680* p. 62.

<sup>28</sup> NA, VOC, 1.04.02, 1360, Missive van den capiteijn Michielse en den raet tot Cheribon in dato primo Maij 1680 aen haer edelens tot Batavia geschreven, 1st May 1680, f. 2186.

<sup>29</sup> NA, VOC, 1.04.02, 1354, Copie rapport van den E. Jacob van Dijk behelsende sijne verrichtinge als expres commissaris op Chirrebon in dato 16 April 1681, f. 1015.

<sup>30</sup> NA, VOC, 1.04.02, 1360, Copie rapport van den E. Jacob van Dijk behelsende sijne verrichtinge als expres commissaris op Chirrebon in dato 16 April 1681, f. 1014.

<sup>31</sup> De Haan, *Dagh-Register Gehouden In 'T Casteel Batavia Van 'T Passerende Daer Ter Plaetse Als Over Geheel Nederlands India Anno 1680* (Batavia: Landsdrukkerij, 1912), 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1681, p. 46.

forbad Cirebon sultans to circumcise European prisoners.<sup>32</sup> The complete version of the 1681 treaty is presented below:

No	Issue of the Clause	Clauses that Bind The VOC	Clauses that Bind Cirebon
1	War-conducting and Treaty-Signing	The noble company agreed to protect the brethren of Cirebonse kings, their land, people, and their descendants, from all enemies, against which the noble company itself is in no covenant of peace as long as the party still respected their treaty with the VOC.	<p>The kings and their people promise to be always ready to assist the noble company in emergency times.</p> <p>Should the king requested VOC's help, the former will bear the cost, <i>vice versa</i>.</p> <p>The VOC strictly forbids the kings to wage war and to sign any peace treaty with any party without the company's permission.</p>
2	Mediating role in the case of a court conflict	The VOC agreed to be the mediator should there any conflict between the kings	The kings should take VOC's advice

<sup>32</sup> Heeres and Stapel, eds., *Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum BKI*, 91, 3e Deel (1676-1691) (s'Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1934). p. 70-74.

<p>3</p>	<p>Relations with Susuhunan of Mataram</p>	<p>The VOC is responsible for inviting Susuhunan of Mataram to ratify the treaty.</p> <p>The company was obliged to punish the kings, collectively or individually, should they violate the clauses that deal with their relationship with Susuhunan of Mataram.</p>	<p>Sultans of Cirebon must show nothing but integrity to the Susuhunan and being a steadfast and faithful ally who honors, respects and recognizes their authority without being prejudice toward the relationship with the company</p> <p>The kings and people of Cheribon shall remain within the confines of their land, such as they are known today, without being allowed to expand further or move slightly from their territory to the damage and harm of the company or the Susuhunan.</p> <p>If there may be a difference in the limits, this will be settled by the other party committed, without prejudice to this bond of friendship.</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>Construction of any establishment</p>	<p>The VOC can build a lodge or any establishment as they wished that will facilitate their trading activities</p>	<p>Sultans shall not build any establishment on land or off the Cirebon's shore without the company's permission</p>

5	Monopoly and exemption of toll and other taxes	<p>The VOC will monopolize the textile and opium trade in Cirebon</p> <p>VOC could determine the price of the pepper and is righteous to confiscate any excess stock</p>	<p>Sultan shall not permit anyone under his power to collect a toll or other forms of taxes from VOC's fleet/traders.</p> <p>Sultan must only trade peppers that grow within their territory to the company or the third party that the company had appointed</p>
6	Mobility of traders	The VOC could police any trader in Cirebon while forcing them to hold or show a pass. The company could also determine the amount of tax that the trader must pay.	Sultans' port master (Sahbandar) must assist the VOC in monitoring the traffic of traders that arrive or leave Cirebon and collecting taxes from them
7	Supply of rice, sugars, and woods	<p>The VOC may request the sultans to provide them with rice, sugars, and wood(works) and determine the purchase price</p> <p>The VOC could collect taxes from merchants that sell the staple products in Cirebon by 200 <i>rijksdollars</i>/trader</p>	<p>Sultan must fulfill VOC's request and agree to the set price.</p> <p>Should there be any cancellation, Sultans could sell the products on the market after VOC's permission</p>

8	Policy on seaport and sail safety		<p>Sultans should do their best to prevent any pillaging of stranded ships, mainly from VOC's armadas</p> <p>Sultans should bear the expense of paying any party in safeguarding the cargo. They were as well responsible for compensating for the loss of any cargo, apart from punishing the looters</p>
9	Citizens and Domestic Security		<p>Sultans must not allow any Makassarese, Malays, or Moors to settle in their territory, nor they are allowed to permit other nations to mingle and to conduct any business with Makassarese</p>
9	Policy on fugitives, escaping slaves, and treatment of prisoners		<p>Sultans must repatriate and shall not provide asylum for any fugitive, escaped-slaves, thieves, murder, or any other criminals that flee from the VOC or Susuhunan's territory</p> <p>The sultans deserve ten <i>rijksdollars</i> for an escaping slave and twenty <i>rijksdollars</i> for a criminal fugitive if they</p>

			<p>can capture and repatriate them</p> <p>The sultans must not forcefully circumcise any Christian prisoner</p>
10	Travel restriction	In any emergency occasion, the VOC must provide sea transports for Sultans and residents of Cirebon to evacuate from the locality	In any case, where the VOC could not provide any ship, Sultan Sepuh I is allowed and must be able to replace VOC's role: as long as the sailing does not pass Bali in the east and Borneo in the north

Source: NA, VOC, 1.04.02, 1354, Copie articulen tusschen den gouverneur generael ende de raden van India en de gebroeders coningen van Chirrebon in dato 7 Januarij 1681, ff. 1034-1042. The same treaty is also published in Heeres and Stapel, eds., *Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum BKI*, 91, 3e Deel (1676-1691) (s'Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1934). p. 233-240.

### The VOC and Religion

The introductory part of the present article has indicated that Cirebon rulers positioned Islam as their source of authority. Being a pious king was their utmost priority, more relevant than being a strong or prosperous king. Such a perspective was inherited by Cirebon's founding father, Sunan Gunung Jati, who positioned Islamization as the core business of being a king.<sup>33</sup> Politics, economy, and military power were solely pillars that supported his religious duty.<sup>34</sup> However, this notion was only traceable among Cirebon rulers. The VOC, Cirebon's new ally, hardly acknowledged the importance of this domain.

In comparison with its successor, the VOC accommodated more religious symbolism in its daily operation. Thus, God as the "unseen power" actively meddled in their affairs: from winning the war to blessing their Asian counterparts with long life and uninterrupted health. For example, in

<sup>33</sup> Sulendraningrat, *Babad Tanah Sunda Babad Cirebon* (Cirebon, 1984). p. 35.

<sup>34</sup> Sulendraningrat, *Babad Tanah Sunda Babad Cirebon*, p. 36.

some letter openings to the Sultans of Cirebon, the VOC official wrote as follows:

*“Godt de Heere wil haer geven met een langh leven , geluck , voorspoel , welvaren in dese werelt tot in der euwigheyt en helpen in alle haere gedoenten.”<sup>35</sup>*

*God the lord will bless her with long life, happiness, and prosperity in this world forever and ever, as well as help in all her deeds.*

However, their strong faith in the divine's intervention did not automatically push them to intertwine their political-economic endeavors with the spirit of proselytization or other pragmatic policies.<sup>36</sup> In VOC ships, a priest who had the dual role of a physician was only present in daily prayers or if someone was on the brink of death.<sup>37</sup> Thus, religion in the company's vessels (and operation) came in the form of chaplaincy, more than anything profound. Only by 1623, more than two decades after the company's establishment, the VOC received an order to support Calvinism.<sup>38</sup> However, the support never transformed the VOC to be as pious as the Portuguese and the Spanish. The East Indiamen, the alias for VOC's ships, still bore "secular" names such as the Amsterdam, Hilversum, or De Ruijter but barely took its names from Biblical references.<sup>39</sup>

Even if a company official implemented religious reasoning, the emphasis is on religious exclusivity; thus, dividing the world into two camps: the religious and the infidel. Such dichotomy was relevant in the context of treaty-making and the formation of an alliance. Notwithstanding, VOC was one of the few European organizations that pioneered treaty signings with "infidel" rulers compared to other powers. This debut took place when other European countries and organizations were still debating the legitimacy of such cooperation.<sup>40</sup> Again, despite its progressiveness, the company's stance on religion in the matter of contract signing and making

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<sup>35</sup> *Dagregister van Het Casteel Batavia, 9 August 1687.*

<sup>36</sup> Jan S. Arintonang and Karel A. Steenbrink, eds., *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, Studies in Christian Mission, v. 35 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008). p. 99.

<sup>37</sup> *Historia. South Africa: Historiese Genootskap van Suid-Afrika*, 2002. p. 173.

<sup>38</sup> Jan S. Arintonang and Karel A. Steenbrink, eds., *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, p. 99.

<sup>39</sup> [https://sejarah-nusantara.anri.go.id/marginalia\\_ships/](https://sejarah-nusantara.anri.go.id/marginalia_ships/)

<sup>40</sup> Richard Tuck, "Alliances with Infidels in the European Imperial Expansion," in *Empire and Modern Political Thought*, ed. Sankar Muthu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 61–83, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139016285.004>. p. 61-64.



also hardly equipped them from understanding how their local counterparts, especially the so-called Mohammedans, operated.<sup>41</sup>

Beyond its inability to comprehend the matter, one should consider how Asians, especially Cirebonese, circulated their information. A few days before the VOC managed to secure Cirebon sultans' support toward the treaty, Sultan Sepuh I relentlessly objected to the proposition. However, as Van Dijk, VOC's representative, visited Cirebon Court, Sultan Sepuh I's aides informed that their lord had changed his mind.<sup>42</sup> Regardless of the importance of this change, the VOC seemed to be clueless regarding the fundamental reason behind it. According to the report, the sudden support resulted from a closed-door mind exchange between the sultan and his confidants.<sup>43</sup> Despite operating a vast circuit of information, including many spies and local informants, the VOC did not always manage to collect disclosed information.

Apart from the VOC's difficulty grasping the importance of religion for their counterparts, the VOC might show no interest in understanding it. M.C. Ricklefs in *The Seen and Unseen Worlds in Java, 1726-1749: History, Literature, and Islam in the Court of Pakubuwana II* observed the possibility that VOC officials "simply" did not care with all the symbol plays that represent the Javanese spiritual world. In 1602, the *Staten General* established the VOC for apparent political-economic reasons. Yet, throughout the time, the company did not find homogenous methods in achieving the planned goal. Some officers, especially in Java, argued that understanding how the king lived was one way to pave their progress. However, most of them found that "dry" reports of how a ruler did his religious ritual were sufficient. This attitude was distinctive with the company's colonial successor, which invested so much resource and curiosity in understanding the "unseen world."

The absence of knowledge and interest indicates a different case. In such a scenario, the VOC might understand the invisible world of Javanese Muslims, yet they decided not to take it seriously. Regardless of the difference, the line between both was porous. If we revisit the case of Cirebon: which argument is fruitful to understand the absence of Islam, the religion that traversed rituals and practices, in the 1681 alliance treaty

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<sup>41</sup> Arthur Wetsteijn. "Love Alone Is Not Enough: Treaties in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Colonial Expansion" in Saliha Belmessous, *Empire by Treaty: Negotiating European Expansion, 1600-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 19.

<sup>42</sup> Arthur Wetsteijn. "Love Alone Is Not Enough: Treaties in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Colonial Expansion," p. 20.

<sup>43</sup> NA, VOC, 1.04.02, 1360, Copie rapport van den E. Jacob van Dijk behelsende sijne verrichtinge als expres commissaris op Chirrebon in dato 16 April 1681, f. 1015.

between the sultans and the VOC? Or, Cirebon's case proposed an alternative view in observing the company's attitude toward religion?

### **The Absence of Islam**

As a background, one shall revisit how Jan Pieterszoon-Coen, VOC's infamous fourth governor-general, positioned Giri, an entity located on Java's Northern Shore (*Pesisir*). According to Coen's lenses, Giri was not a kingdom; instead, it was a priesthood or a religious rule. Therefore, the one who helmed this entity was a priestly-king (*pandita-ratu*) instead of a "secular" king. Specifically, Coen even mentioned that the chief priest of Giri was equivalent to the "Javanese Pope."<sup>44</sup> In practice, some Javanese leaders sought blessings from the chief priest of Giri before they conducted war or "rebellions," including Adipati Pajang, who once resisted Sultan Agung Hanyakrakusuma.<sup>45</sup> However, in several instances, the chief priest of Giri did not issue his support for the sake of peace among the leaders.

Subsequently, Rijcklof Van Goens, a VOC officer who later ratified the 1681 treaty and VOC's 13<sup>th</sup> Governor-General, replicated Coen's viewpoint of Giri to Cirebon. However, Van Goens never appalled Cirebon sultans as "pope" but underlined their holy characteristics. According to Van Goens, this characteristic was inherited from the founding father of Cirebon: Sunan Gunung Jati.<sup>46</sup> Beyond that, the VOC barely paid attention to theological aspects of Cirebon's religion. Therefore, VOC's attention did not represent a profound understanding or curiosity concerning Cirebon's spiritual world.

Consequently, the 1681 treaty did not regulate anything related to the Cirebon rulers' religious role. They could observe any rituals without notifying the company's representative in the area. In other words, the VOC decided not to touch the sultans' core of power. Worth remembering that according to Sunan Gunung Jati's example, Cirebon's power was never about profane achievement. Instead, the peak of their power was about the devotion to Islam and the proselytization of the religion.

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<sup>44</sup> T.H Pigeaud and H.J. De Graaf, *De Eerste Moslimse Vorstendommen op Java, Studien over de Staatkundige Geschiedenis van de 15de en 16de Eeuw* (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976). p. 25.

<sup>45</sup> H.J. De Graaf, *Puncak Kekuasaan Mataram: Politik Ekspansi Sultan Agung* (Jakarta: Pustaka Graffitipress, 1986)., hlm. 49.

<sup>46</sup> Rijcklof van Goens, "Reijsbeschrijving van Den Weg Uijt Samarangh Nae de Konincklijke Hoofdplaets Mataram, Mitsgaders de Zeeden, Gewoonten Ende Regeringe van Den Sousouhounan, Groot Machtigste Koningk van 't Eijlant Java," *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde* 4, no. 1 (1856): 307–50, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-90001140>. p. 330.

Out of ten clauses, only the ninth that slightly touched on "Islam," or in this case, it was merely a tiny element of *Sharia*. In the clause that the present study grouped as "Policy on fugitives, escaping slaves, and treatment of prisoners," the VOC forced the sultans to admit that they should not carry out forced circumcision toward the company's prisoner. More than the company's willingness to limit Islamic rule and lifestyle, such a regulation reflected VOC's worry that Cirebon would replicate Sultan Agung's prisoner "mishandling." Worth mentioning that the greatest Sultan of Mataram forcefully circumcised European prisoners. Another report noted that Sultan Agung followed such a treatment with forced-religious conversion and marriage with Muslim women.<sup>47</sup>

In the other nine clauses, the VOC had maximized its pressure on Cirebon. It ranged from political, economic, Cirebon's foreign politic, up to navigation and tax. With these nine clauses, which each consisted of a minimum of two subclauses, the VOC had certainly reaped more than the Cirebon sultans. In other words, VOC had gained the upper hand and didn't have to add another clause that concerned the realm that they barely comprehended. VOC's decision to regulate nine issues but leaving the core seemed to benefit the Cirebon sultans.

How could the treaty that "robbed" every element of Sultans' sovereignty benefit them? One can find the answer at the very core of Cirebon's definition of power. Almost every written clause in the treaty distanced the sultans from their profane responsibilities and rights. Then, these regulations "cornered" the sultans to the religious space where they could focus on being exemplary Muslims (leaders) and, therefore, powerful rulers. The present study feels the necessity to reiterate this notion: the more committed the sultans to their religious responsibilities, the more powerful they were, at least from Cirebon's understanding of power.

Subsequently, after the 1681 treaty came into practice, Cirebon rulers "only" became chiefs of the royal ceremony. However, local sources mentioned that such a role allowed the rulers to carry out Friday prayers (*jumngah*), the grand prayers of Ied (*Riyadi*), or conjointly celebrate Prophet Muhammad's birthday (*Maulud*). The sultans also agreed to appoint a religious chief (*penghulu*) who helmed the grand mosque (*Masjid Agung*) that operated as the central religious institution of the court.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Later in 1681, VOC would forbid Cirebonese kings to forcefully circumcise European prisoners. See: J.E. Heeres and F.W. Stapel, eds., *Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum BKI*, 91, 3e Deel (1676-1691) (s'Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1934). p. 233.

<sup>48</sup> Bambang, ed., *Sejarah Cirebon: Naskah Keraton Kacirebonan...* p. 112.

The sultans continued to "enjoy" the given role and showed no significant objection. Should there be objections, the core missions were to maximize the sultans' privilege more than anything profound. The follow-up treaties in 1685 and 1699 never altered this situation. As the previous section has mentioned, the VOC received no resistance for almost a century. Cirebon did not witness any uprising to crush the "infidels" that were sultans' guardians. One of the most remembered and recorded uprisings only took place in 1806 when the company had handed its assets, human resources, and debts to the colonial government.<sup>49</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The 1681 treaty mainly aimed to detach Cirebon rulers from the "real" power exercise. Therefore, the treaty forbade Cirebon rulers to practice their political, economic, legal, and cultural power. Before both parties signed the treaty, they have negotiated the clauses. The only objected clause was the one that suggested equal treatment toward all rulers, therefore indicating an internal division among the sultans.

Despite the negotiation, the treaty represented more of VOC's understanding of power rather than Cirebon's. Worth mentioning that the company had little to no interest in the theological aspect of religion yet often exhibited their adherence to the symbolical element of religion in its operation. Regarding Islam as the religion of its Asian counterpart, the present study suggests that the VOC had a certain level of understanding. However, the VOC never translated this understanding into the language of policy and treaty.

Islam constituted a Cirebon ruler to be powerful. The more pious a leader, the more powerful he was. However, the VOC did not seem to accommodate this notion. The three Cirebon rulers had become nothing more than chief celebrants of royal events. However, on another end, Cirebon rulers saw this opportunity to accumulate their power by exhibiting commitment toward the mass-oriented religious obligations. No matter how powerful Cirebon rulers are, as observed from Cirebon's viewpoint, the VOC did not seem to be affected by this.

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<sup>49</sup> Broek, J.A. van den. *De Cheribonsche Opstand van 1806*. 'S-Gravenhage: Overdr. uit: Tijdspeigel, 1891.

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