

The Political Diplomacy of the Kingdom of Sikka with the Portuguese in the 16th and 17th Centuries

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Abstract: The Kingdom of Sikka played a significant role in the political and economic development of Eastern Indonesia during the early period of contact with Europe, particularly through its diplomatic relations with the Portuguese and Netherlands. This study examines the background, objectives, and diplomatic strategies of the Sikka Kingdom in dealing with foreign influence. The objective of this study is to analyze how diplomacy was utilized by the Sikka Kingdom to secure trade benefits with the Portuguese and to strengthen its position as the primary political power in eastern Flores. The research method employed is the historical method, encompassing the stages of source collection, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The research sources utilized archival records, historical accounts, and supporting literature related to the Sikka Kingdom's diplomacy with the Portuguese. The results of the study indicate that the Sikka Kingdom's diplomacy was adaptive, enabling it to establish mutually beneficial trade relations, access European goods, and enhance its political legitimacy through an alliance with the Portuguese. These diplomatic relations helped the Sikka Kingdom strengthen its dominance over the region and maintain its influence in the surrounding areas. In conclusion, diplomacy served as a crucial tool for the Sikka Kingdom to integrate economic and political interests in maintaining and expanding its power at the regional level.

Keywords: Kingdom of Sikka; Netherlands; political diplomacy; Portuguese

Abstrak: Kerajaan Sikka berperan cukup penting dalam perkembangan politik dan ekonomi di kawasan Indonesia Timur pada masa awal kontak dengan Eropa, terutama melalui hubungan diplomatik dengan Portugis dan Belanda. Penelitian ini mengkaji latar belakang, tujuan, dan strategi diplomasi Kerajaan Sikka dalam menghadapi pengaruh asing. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah menganalisis bagaimana diplomasi digunakan oleh Kerajaan Sikka untuk memperoleh keuntungan perdagangan dengan Portugis serta memperkuat kedudukannya sebagai kekuatan politik utama di wilayah Flores bagian timur. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah metode sejarah yang meliputi tahapan pengumpulan sumber, kritik sumber, interpretasi, dan historiografi. Sumber penelitian memanfaatkan sumber arsip, catatan sejarah, dan literatur pendukung terkait diplomasi Kerajaan Sikka dengan Portugis. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa diplomasi Kerajaan Sikka bersifat adaptif, sehingga mampu membangun hubungan dagang yang menguntungkan satu sama lain, mampu menjangkau barang-barang Eropa, serta meningkatkan legitimasi politik melalui aliansi dengan Portugis. Hubungan diplomatik tersebut membantu Kerajaan Sikka memperkuat dominasi atas wilayah dan mempertahankan pengaruhnya di wilayah sekitar. Kesimpulannya, diplomasi menjadi sarana penting bagi Kerajaan Sikka guna mengintegrasikan kepentingan ekonomi dan politik dalam mempertahankan dan memperluas kekuasaannya di tingkat regional.

Kata Kunci: Belanda; diplomasi politik; Kerajaan Sikka; Portugis



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Introduction

This study examines the diplomatic strategies of the Sikka Kingdom toward the Portuguese, focusing on efforts to secure trade advantages and strengthen the kingdom's political position in eastern Flores during the 16th and 17th centuries. Diplomacy in this context is understood as traditional diplomacy, consciously employed by local rulers to forge alliances with foreign powers in order to advance economic and trade interests. From a historical perspective, traditional diplomacy refers to the early forms of political interaction between powers conducted through direct communication, the role of envoys, and personal relationships among elites, prior to the emergence of a more structured modern diplomatic system. G. R. Berridge, in his book "Diplomacy: Theory and Practice," explains that diplomacy is fundamentally a political activity aimed at achieving foreign policy objectives without resorting to violence, but rather through a process of communication and negotiation between parties (Berridge, 2010). In the context of the 16th century, the relationship between the Kingdom of Sikka and the Portuguese exemplified a traditional diplomatic pattern that was not yet conducted through official institutions, but rather through direct contact with local rulers, merchants, and missionaries, as described by Lewis (2010) in his book titled "The Stranger Kings of Sikka." These relations were not solely focused on political interests but also served as a means for the introduction of Catholic cultural and religious influence into Sikka. In practice, the relationship between the two parties was based on mutual interests, whereby the Portuguese gained access to strategic territories and trade networks in Flores, while Sikka utilized the relationship to strengthen its political position in the Flores region.

The Sikka Kingdom developed as a manifestation of local politics that held a strategic position in the geopolitics and geoeconomics of eastern Flores. Geopolitically, the Sikka region is situated along the inter-island shipping route connecting Flores, Solor, and Timor; thus, geoeconomically, the region was open to regional trade flows and interaction with foreign traders. These geoeconomic conditions also provided opportunities for the Sikka Kingdom to serve as a conduit for local commodities within regional trade networks, notably with the Portuguese. The Portuguese, who had been actively establishing trade alliances and Catholic missions in the eastern region since the early 16th century, also influenced the political structure of the Sikka Kingdom, including the process of legitimizing the king's authority through the support of foreign powers and the Catholic faith, as reflected in historical sources and local traditions (Lewis, 2010).

Numerous previous studies have examined the Sikka Kingdom, focusing on various other aspects, such as socio-cultural (Fernandez, 2022; Pona et al., 2024), economic (De Porres, 2021), religious (Ade et al., 2023; Da Lopez, 2025), and geoeconomics (Ngarsih, 2019; Suswandari et al., 2019). Previous studies generally focused on the role of the Portuguese as the dominant actor, while local kingdoms were often portrayed as merely receiving external influence without being recognized as political actors with their own interests. Consequently, the role of diplomacy as a political and economic tool for local kingdoms has often received insufficient attention in Indonesian historiography. As historiography has evolved, researchers have begun to position local kingdoms as actors capable of adapting, negotiating, and even formulating strategies in the face of foreign powers. Research on the diplomacy of other kingdoms in the Archipelago indicates that relations with external influences were frequently utilized to achieve internal objectives, such as strengthening the legitimacy of local power, securing existing trade routes, and reinforcing their position within the regional power structure.

Such patterns were not limited to major kingdoms like Ternate but were also evident in the context of other local kingdoms, such as Sikka. Several historical studies and historical sources indicate that Sikka's political elite possessed the ability to manage relations with the Portuguese through kinship ties. Consequently, the relationship between the two did not undermine each other's interests.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to fill a gap in existing research by focusing primarily on the diplomatic role of the Kingdom of Sikka and by linking trade and political relations within an interrelated political-economic framework. Thus, this article focuses on how the Sikka Kingdom positioned its political diplomacy as a political economy strategy consciously implemented by the Sikka rulers, and also how the Sikka Kingdom utilized its diplomatic relations with the Portuguese in the 16th century to achieve economic objectives while simultaneously strengthening its position as the primary political power in eastern Flores. Based on this framework, the issues to be examined are the form, objectives, and impact of the Sikka Kingdom's diplomacy in the context of its relations with the Portuguese during the early period of contact with European nations.

Research Methods

This study employs the historical method with a qualitative approach to examine the political diplomacy of the Sikka Kingdom during the 16th and 17th centuries in relation to the Portuguese and its impact on the kingdom's political development. The historical method was chosen because this study seeks to reconstruct the political diplomacy of the Sikka Kingdom with the Portuguese, which later underwent political changes during the Netherlands colonial period, based on relevant historical sources. The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources were obtained from Portuguese and Netherlands colonial archives, Catholic missionary records, the oral traditions of the Sikka people, and local manuscripts related to the history of the Sikka Kingdom. Meanwhile, secondary sources were obtained from books, scientific journals, undergraduate theses, master's theses, dissertations, and historical articles discussing the Sikka Kingdom, colonialism in Flores, and the political relations between local kingdoms and European nations.

This study employs the four stages of the historical method: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The heuristic stage involved searching for and collecting various historical sources related to the diplomatic relations between the Kingdom of Sikka and the Portuguese and Netherlands. In this stage, the researcher traced primary sources relevant to the research object, such as the local chronicle of Sikka written by Dominicus Diontus Pareira Kondi & Alexius Boer Pareira, which was later translated and rewritten by E. Douglas Lewis & Oscar Pareira Mandalangi in a book titled "*Hikayat Kerajaan Sikka*" (2008). Once the sources were collected, source criticism was conducted to test the authenticity and credibility of the historical data gathered during the heuristic phase (Kuntowijoyo, 2018). Source criticism consists of external and internal criticism. External criticism is conducted to determine the authenticity of the source through the identification of the author, the year of writing, and the physical form of the document, while internal criticism is conducted to assess the content of the source, the author's level of objectivity, and the accuracy of the information contained within it. This stage aims to ensure that the data used possesses validity and is scientifically accountable. The next stage is interpretation, which is the process of interpreting the historical facts that have been obtained and verified through source criticism. In this stage, the researcher analyzes the political relations between the Sikka Kingdom and the Portuguese and Netherlands by examining the factors influencing the formation of diplomatic cooperation, such as trade interests, the spread of the Catholic religion, political protection, and colonial influence on the

local governance system. The researcher also employs a socio-historical approach to understand the impact of these relationships on the lives of the Sikka people, particularly in the political, social, and cultural spheres. The final stage is historiography, which is the process of writing history based on the facts that have been analyzed and interpreted. The writing is conducted systematically, chronologically, and scientifically to fully depict the dynamics of political diplomacy between the Sikka Kingdom and the Portuguese and Netherlands, as well as its influence on the development of the Sikka Kingdom during the colonial period.

Research Result

The Founding and Political Development of the Sikka Kingdom Before the 16th Century

The Kingdom of Sikka was one of the kingdoms that flourished along the northern coast of Flores Island. Established in the 12th century, the Kingdom of Sikka was centered around large villages known as *natar* or *naung*, which were situated in dense forests and coastal areas still teeming with wildlife. The origins of the Sikka Kingdom trace back to the shipwreck of a vessel led by Rae Raja of Siam. Following the incident, he and his entourage settled along the coast because the ship they were on could not be repaired. Rae's son later married Du'a Sikka, the daughter of the local village chief, and it was from Du'a Sikka's name that the designation for both the ethnic group and the Sikka Kingdom originated (Lewis & Mandalangi, 2008). Following this period, the population began to grow, and the settlement area expanded significantly. Along with this growth, various regulations governing community life began to be established in the local Sikka tradition, including rules regarding land management, marriage customs, and religious practices (Lewis & Mandalangi, 2008; Lewis, 2010).

At that time, the Kingdom of Sikka was not yet a centralized kingdom in the modern sense of the word, but rather a traditional kingdom with a local government whose authority was based on tradition, lineage, and land ownership. The Sikka Royal Palace, known in the Sikka language as *Lepo Gete* (the "great house"), served as the residence of the King of Sikka and was considered a magnificent structure in its day. In ancient historical accounts, it is mentioned that *Lepo Gete* was founded by the original inhabitants of Sikka Village, namely both indigenous people and settlers. Its leaders were known as *Mo'ang Watu Pitu* or *Moan Ina Gete Ama Gahar* (Gobang, 2023). During the leadership of Mbegu and Paga known as the first two leaders a governance system called *Ria Bewa Resi Langga* was already in place. According to local Sikka manuscripts, this system is associated with the traditional saying "*ria sai ai meti, bewa sai watu dusu*" (Lewis & Mandalangi, 2008), which is loosely interpreted as great and legitimate authority that has existed since the earth and stones were still within the womb of the earth. This expression affirms that the leaders' authority is considered to possess very ancient legitimacy and is hereditary in nature (Taum, 2022). Mbegu's duty is to be responsible for internal government and community affairs. Meanwhile, Paga resided in *Puu Boro* (later known as *Paga*) to manage external affairs, particularly in interacting with outsiders.

The belief system of Sikka at that time was still based on traditional customs that believed in the existence of gods (animism and dynamism). This can be seen in the writings of one of Sikka's sons, Diminicus Dionitius Pareira Kondi, who noted that during Batu Jawa's reign, he convinced his people that there were gods who would come to their aid (Lewis & Mandalangi, 2008). Batu Jawa also appointed ritual leaders to conduct ceremonies for the gods. Meanwhile, Batu Jawa had a passion for sailing to various regions and purchasing large plates; these plates were then broken into pieces and distributed throughout his entire realm as a symbol of mutual connection (Lewis, 2010; Taniputera, 2017). He also ordered that these plates be used as vessels for offerings in rituals of worship to the gods, who were considered sacred beings. The Sikka Kingdom expanded during the reign of *Mo'ang Baga Ngang*. Under his rule, the kingdom's

territory extended to eastern Flores, bordering Larantuka, and western Flores, bordering Manggarai (Lewis & Mandalangi, 2008). In the early 16th century, the next king of Sikka, Don Alesu, traveled to Malacca in search of “fertile land”, as he could not bear to see so many of his people suffering from scarcity and dying. Don Alesu sailed to Malacca with Augustinu da Gama and met King Worilla, his father (Lewis, 2010). There, he discovered the meaning of salvation while deepening his knowledge of political science. Impressed by the concept of salvation as a means to bring prosperity to his people, Don Alesu subsequently converted to Catholicism, after his baptism, his name was changed to Mo’ang Ratu Don Alesu da Silva. It is this surname, da Silva, that would later serve as the marker of the lineage of the Kingdom of Sikka’s successors. Upon his return, Don Alesu introduced the Catholic faith to Sikka and established the Kingdom of Sikka as a Catholic kingdom (Lewis, 2006).

Sikka-Nusantara: Diplomatic and Trade Relations in the 16th and 17th Centuries

Since the reign of Mo’ang Bata Jati Jawa (the name “Bata Jawa” derives from the influence of the Majapahit Kingdom) or, as it is known in the Sikka language, *Ina Gete Ama Gahar* in 1571, Sikka had already begun to develop into a kingdom that established trade relations, including with Bugis merchants from Makassar (Taniputera, 2017). They came to seek and obtain various spices such as pepper, yellow wood (a highly valued natural dye), sandalwood, and cinnamon. In addition to the Bugis, Mo’ang Bata Jawa also established trade alliances with the Malays and the Chinese (Lewis & Mandalangi, 2008), and it was during this period that a devastating earthquake is recorded to have struck the region. The volcano at Hokor erupted with such ferocity that it claimed many lives (Lewis & Mandalangi, 2008; Taniputera, 2017). As many traders arrived seeking spices, Mo’ang Batu Jawa began considering the formation of a governing body to manage trade and commerce. Mo’ang Batu Jawa sought organized trade with people from outside the island. It was then that Mo’ang Batu Jawa appointed someone who had previously been the first to arrive and cultivate gardens in every place he visited to become a *tana pu’ang*, or the local ruler. He also appointed someone skilled in speaking and propaganda to serve as a *kokek* (the king’s representative in the villages) (Lewis, 2010).

The Kingdom of Sikka possessed a number of high-value natural commodities and played a significant role in the regional trade network from the era of Majapahit influence through the period of the Portuguese arrival (Lewis, 2010). These commodities included cinnamon, yellow wood, soja bark used as a red dye and sandalwood, which was one of the most sought-after forest products in the Nusa Tenggara region. The presence of these resources encouraged Sikka to engage in inter-island trade and establish economic ties with various maritime powers operating in the Flores region and its surroundings. In addition to exporting forest products, Sikka also imported ivory from other regions to meet the social and political needs of its people (Lewis, 2010). Ivory held a very significant position as it was used as part of the dowry in traditional marriages and served as the primary material for various prestige objects symbolizing social status and power. Boer and Kondi (2008) explain that the use of ivory as a symbol of political authority in Sikka is linked to Don Alesu, who received ivory as a sign of legitimacy to rule Sikka from King Worilla. Since then, ivory has not only held economic value but has also become a symbol of the legitimacy of power inherent in the royal institution. Nevertheless, the majority of the commodities that form the backbone of Sikka’s trade originate from resources with limited availability that cannot be rapidly replenished. The continuous exploitation of sandalwood and various other forest products has led to a gradual decline in the supply of these commodities over time. When the natural resources that had previously been the mainstay of exports began to dwindle and could no longer meet trade demands, the rulers

of Sikka adjusted their economic strategy. According to Lewis (2010), under these conditions, the population became the most economically valuable resource. Consequently, the kingdom began engaging in the labor trade by sending residents as contract laborers or slaves to various other regions.

Through its open trade, in 1511 following the fall of Malacca, it became the starting point for Portuguese penetration into the eastern regions of the Indonesian archipelago. In December 1521, the ship *Victoria* sailed from Ambon to the eastern part of Flores Island. During its voyage, the Portuguese stopped at several areas such as Larantuka, Sikka, and Paga (Sulaiman et al., 2018). The Portuguese first landed in Flores at Solor (Samingan & Roe, 2021), which also marked the beginning of Portuguese contact with Sikka, as Sikka was part of the sandalwood trade network connecting Flores, Solor, Timor, and Portuguese trading centers (Lewis, 2010). Portuguese activities in Sikka began with free trade, leveraging existing local networks. According to Lewis (2010), Portuguese ships sailing to Ende, Solor, Larantuka, and Timor would always stop first in Sikka. These stopovers demonstrate that Sikka was part of the Portuguese network of interactions in eastern Flores. The Portuguese gradually engaged with local rulers and the people of Sikka; consequently, they faced little need to adapt, as the Sikka community had already been open to inter-island trade even before the arrival of Europeans. Over time, these trade relations developed into intense ties. The Portuguese were present not only as trading partners but also as actors influencing the local power structure. The Sikka elite leveraged these relationships to strengthen their access to international trade networks.

Sikka-Portuguese: Diplomatic Relations and Catholic Missions, 1550-1600

From a political perspective, the Portuguese presence in the Sikka region not only impacted trade activities but also evolved into political relations. The emergence of diplomatic practices within the Kingdom of Sikka was inextricably linked to the interactions between local rulers and foreign powers, specifically the Portuguese, who arrived from outside the Flores region. In the historical narrative of Sikka's local chronicles, during the 16th century, this diplomatic process did not emerge through formal institutions but rather through the experiences of local rulers who facilitated the emergence of such diplomacy. This network of relations is evident in the interactions of the figure Don Alesu, as documented in the study *"The Stranger Kings of Sikka"* (2010), who undertook a journey to Malacca by boat (*prau*). The narrative states that he "went to Malacca", indicating a process of change and development among local rulers. This implies that Sikka was not entirely isolated but had access to maritime trade networks connected to the outside world. This journey subsequently became the starting point for the establishment of political relations between the Kingdom of Sikka and foreign powers.

The openness of these relations led to intense interactions that evolved into an early form of diplomacy characterized by traditional practices, based on personal relationships rather than institutionalized structures. In this context, the relationship between the Kingdom of Sikka and the Portuguese was not only political in nature but also carried religious influence through the spread of Catholicism. Upon arriving in Malacca, Don Alesu met with King Worilla, also known as the "King of Malacca", who historically represented the Portuguese authority that had controlled Malacca since 1511 (Lewis, 2010). It was during his meeting with King Worilla that a process of transformation took place, Don Alesu established a bond of friendship with King Worilla, presenting the wealth he had brought as a tribute to be given to the "Land of Life" for King Worilla. During his three years in Malacca, Don Alesu not only learned about new teachings but also gained knowledge from a Dominican priest (Rambu, 2021), which he studied in depth before eventually returning to Sikka. Before his return, King Worilla

reciprocated Don Alesu's tribute by presenting him with royal regalia, such as: a golden crown; a string of golden pearls; a royal cloak; royal ornaments including a golden chain and a gilded elephant; a bundle of small golden chains; a statue of the Holy Spirit; a staff with a golden head; thirty elephant tusks; and two maces with silver heads, one with a gold head (Lewis, 2010). Judging by the tribute given by King Worilla to Don Alesu, this represents a symbolic diplomatic relationship. The contents of the tribute, such as the golden crown, golden staff, and golden chains, may serve as implicit symbols of the legitimacy of power. Then there is the tribute of the statue of the Holy Spirit, a Catholic religious symbol introduced through Portuguese influence, as well as the tribute of elephant tusks and maces, which represent symbols of power and elite status. This clearly indicates that Don Alesu was not regarded as an ordinary individual, but as a political representative of Sikka. In this context, the exchange of tributes (*pertukaran upeti*) served as a medium of traditional diplomacy.

Upon his return to Sikka, Don Alesu demonstrated his knowledge, accompanied by Augustinu da Gama. The arrival of Catholicism not only transformed the religious practices of the Sikka people, who had previously believed in the existence of gods, but also served as a tool for legitimizing local authority. This can be seen in the presence of old churches, a legacy of the Portuguese in the Sikka region, as well as the emergence of various social institutions and customs that developed due to the strong influence of Portuguese culture (Suswandari et al., 2019). These religious practices also reflect a process of cultural acculturation. Catholicism became the primary foundation for the legitimacy of Sikka's power in East Flores, thereby reinforcing political hegemony (Lewis, 1998). In 1556, a Dominican missionary landed and was assigned to Timor. The Bishop of Malacca had previously sent three other missionaries to Solor, which at the time served as a mission hub. Later, after the mission entered the Sikka region in 1606, according to data collected by João dos Santos, there were 4 islands and 18 areas that had adopted the Christian faith, with the total population across all these regions estimated at around 25.000 people (Subanar, 2020). In line with the view of G. R. Berridge (2010), diplomacy in its early forms often proceeded through direct communication among elites and did not rely on formal structures as in modern states, but rather on networks of trust and shared interests. Therefore, Sikka's relationship with the Portuguese reflected traditional diplomatic practices based on interpersonal relationships.

In the theory outlined by E. Douglas Lewis (2010), in which local power derives its legitimacy through ties to foreign elements, it is shown that the Portuguese were present not only as an external power but also as a symbol that reinforced the power structure in Sikka. The origins of diplomacy in the Kingdom of Sikka are understood as a multidimensional process involving political interactions interwoven with religious and cultural factors. Regarding the use of envoys, this can be seen through the role of Don Alesu, who represented local interests while serving as a liaison between Sikka and the Portuguese in political matters. Don Alesu acted as a mediator in these political relations and demonstrated these practices within his sphere of influence. Next is the aspect of trade. The Kingdom of Sikka utilized trade as a crucial diplomatic tool by granting the Portuguese access to manage high value spice commodities that were in high demand in international trade. The Portuguese presence began to bring about changes in Sikka's local economy, as Sikka became connected to European trade networks. This led to an increase in the value of commodities, causing Sikka's economy to integrate into the broader global economic system. This was made possible by the pre-existing maritime ties between Sikka and the Portuguese, which allowed the Portuguese to enter Sikka as part of their post-Malacca trade expansion. The Sikka people themselves had previously established their own inter island trade networks.

In addition, diplomatic relations between the Kingdom of Sikka and the Portuguese were also established through marriage. Genealogy and kinship ties among the Sikka people served as tools of political and social legitimacy. Through marital alliances, the kings forged bonds with the Black Portuguese or Topass elite as a form of social relationship that played a significant role within the structure of Sikka society (Hagerdal, 2025). The Topass, or Black Portuguese, were a *mestizo* group formed through marriages and relationships between European Portuguese who came from Malacca, India, and Portugal itself, and local women. Portuguese men began marrying local women in the colonies after the signing of the Treaty of Tordesillas on June 7, 1494, when Portugal was granted the freedom to control all territories outside Europe along a meridian 370 leagues wide, stretching from Cape Verde in South Africa eastward, while Spain gained full control of the territories west of Cape Verde toward the American continent. Consequently, the Portuguese implemented their “*politica asimilados*” strategy, which involved marrying local women and even the daughters of local kings so that their presence in the colonies would garner the attention and support of the local community or local rulers (Nanto, 2022). Through this process of intermingling, a new social and cultural identity emerged that combined Portuguese and local elements, developing in the regions of Solor, Flores, and Timor (Teixeira, 2025). Through the network of political marriages established by the Topass community in Timor, as described by Andaya & Andaya (2012), one can understand the broader regional context for the emergence of genealogical ties between the Sikka Kingdom and the Portuguese world, as identified by Lewis (2010) through the origins of Du’a Hengar, the mother of Don Alesu from Lifao, which at the time was the center of Black Portuguese or Topass power in Timor. Thus, it is unlikely that the foreign figure who played a role in the early history of the Sikka Kingdom was a pure European Portuguese. The emergence of the Sikka Kingdom as a regional political power cannot be separated from the Portuguese-Topass network that developed in Flores and Timor, although the kingdom was still built upon local social and cultural foundations. In the book by Suswandari et al. (2019), it is explained that the influence on the emergence of social institutions and customs arose through long-standing interactions between the Portuguese and the Sikka, even leading to family ties through intermarriage. In line with Anthony Reid’s (1988) observation, it is known that Europeans often utilized marital ties with local elites to expand their political influence, without resorting to violence or direct conquest.

The Dynamics of the Sikka Kingdom’s Relations with the Portuguese amidst Netherlands Expansion

By the 17th century, competition among colonial powers in Nusantara archipelago intensified after the Netherlands successfully penetrated the eastern regions. In 1613, a Netherlands fleet landed in Timor and proceeded to Solor, where it launched an attack by besieging a Portuguese fortress. This success marked a crucial step in the Netherlands effort to displace Portuguese dominance, which had controlled trade routes in the region for decades. Facing growing pressure, the Portuguese sought to maintain their political and economic influence by strengthening ties with local kingdoms that had adopted Catholicism. In this situation, the Kingdom of Sikka became one of Portuguese political and religious partner due to its strategic location on Flores and its close ties with Portuguese missionaries. However, by the 1630s, the Netherlands had achieved significant advancements in maritime trade, notably by successfully establishing a base in Ambon the heart of the spice trade thereby further marginalizing the Portuguese position. The peak of Portugal’s decline occurred in 1641, when Malacca which had served as the center of Portuguese power for over a century was successfully captured by the Netherlands (Ricklefs, 2001).

Then, in 1653, the Netherlands moved to Kupang, located at the western tip of Timor. There, they were confronted by the Portuguese and their allies, the Black Portuguese or Topass, who were the dominant force in the Timor region (Lewis, 1999). Meanwhile, the Topass group remained in the eastern part of Flores and the central part of Timor. The eastern part of Flores was led by Antonio Hornay, who in 1656 joined the fight against the Netherlands forces led by Arnoldus de Vlamingh van Oudtshoorn. However, the Portuguese were actually unwilling to establish relations with the Topass led by Hornay. Hornay's Topass forces had already allied with other Portuguese spheres of influence, one of which was Sikka, thereby elevating Hornay's social status and expanding his political influence in Eastern Flores (Hariyono et al., 2025). Meanwhile, the Portuguese continued their activities in East Timor by establishing a settlement in Dili in 1669. Over the next two centuries, the Netherlands claimed authority over the southwestern region of Timor and the islands east of Flores. The presence of European powers in Timor proceeded without major conflict until 1839. At that time, the Netherlands suspected Larantuka of harboring pirates, prompting them to bomb the area. This event subsequently triggered lengthy and uncertain negotiations between the Netherlands and the Portuguese regarding the demarcation of their respective spheres of influence. Later, in 1851, the Portuguese Governor in Dili faced financial difficulties and, in search of a solution, met with the Netherlands Resident in Kupang without obtaining approval from Lisbon. During that meeting, it was agreed that the Portuguese would cede East Flores and the islands to its east to the Netherlands in exchange for a payment of f80.000. This agreement was subsequently ratified by the Portuguese government in 1859, on the condition that the territories ceded to the Netherlands would remain Catholic (Lewis, 1999). This means that even though the region had come under Netherlands administration, the legacy of the relationships that had been established during the Portuguese period persisted.

According to E. D. Lewis (1999), the Sikka region, located in the central-eastern part of Flores, was actually part of a territory governed by an agreement between the Netherlands and the Portuguese. This shift in power forced the Kingdom of Sikka to adjust its political diplomatic strategy. When the Kingdom of Sikka was under Netherlands influence, the Sikka government was led by King Mbako I Kikir Hiwa (Taniputera, 2017). The transition from Portuguese to Netherlands rule brought significant changes to the kingdom's political relations. Whereas Sikka's relationship with the Portuguese had previously been built on kinship ties, marriage, and the Catholic faith, under Netherlands rule these ties evolved into a more administrative and formal political collaboration within the framework of colonial governance (Lewis, 2010). The transfer of power from the Portuguese to the Netherlands did not occur immediately. There was some resistance from local rulers, which caused the process of integrating the region into the Netherlands colonial administration to proceed gradually. The kingdoms of Sikka and Larantuka were the main political powers in eastern Flores (Hagerdal, 2025) consequently, the Netherlands presence in the Kingdom of Sikka came through Jesuit priests, who subsequently exerted a long-term influence on the Kingdom of Sikka. In 1868, Father C. Omtzigt, S.J., began his ministry in Maumere. Quoted from a subheading in the magazine *De katholieke missien* (1876), "*Tweede Statie Van Oostelijk Flores. Maumere. Invoering Van Het Christendom in Het Rijk Sikka*", there were 6.000 to 7.000 Catholics in the Sikka region, a number that later grew to exceed 10.000 (See figure 1). Then in 1879, during the reign of King Andreas Djati da Silva, the Netherlands colonial government established an administrative center for the Sikka region in Maumere, located on the northern coast of Flores. As events unfolded, Maumere grew into an important political and commercial hub for Sikka.

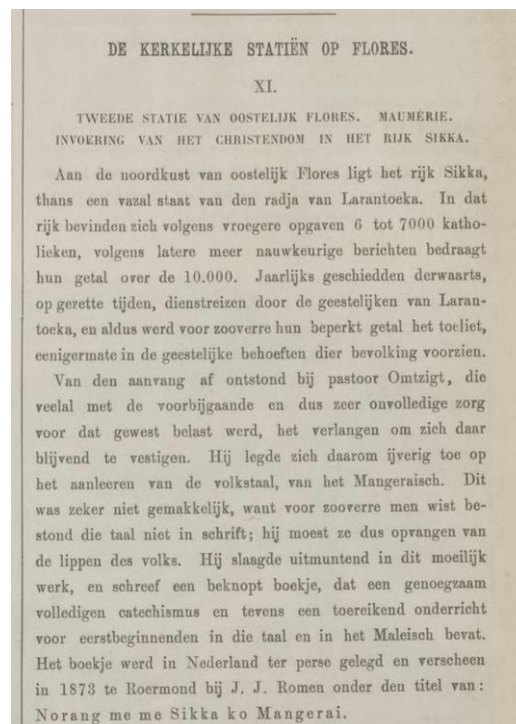


Figure 1. Notes on Christianity in the Kingdom of Sikka Since the Netherlands Colonial Period

Source: *De katholieke missien*, 1876

The political relationship between the Kingdom of Sikka and the Netherlands colonial government is reflected in Netherlands policies that strengthened the Kingdom of Sikka's political position and influence, Lewis (2010) explains that after Flores came under Netherlands rule pursuant to the 1859 Treaty of Lisbon, the Netherlands colonial government began stationing its officials in Maumere in 1879. The presence of these colonial officials marked the gradual integration of the Sikka Kingdom into the administrative structure of the Netherlands East Indies. The appointment of a controleur and a posthouder in Maumere established the area as the center of colonial administration in the Sikka region (Lewis, 1982). This situation fostered the development of ties between the Sikka elite and the Netherlands in both administrative matters and the management of local government. The Netherlands also granted separate recognition to several territories that had previously been under Sikka's authority, such as the establishment of the Kingdom of Nita in 1890 and the Kingdom of Kangae in 1903, whose king served as the head of the Geliting settlement (Steenbrink, 2013). The Netherlands recognition of the Kingdoms of Sikka, Nita, and Kangae in 1904 demonstrated colonial interference in the formation of local political structures in Flores. Specifically in the case of Kangae, the kingdom emerged as a result of Netherlands policy aimed at controlling political conflicts involving King Nai and the authority of the King of Sikka these conflicts arose from a rebellion against the King of Sikka in the early 20th century, triggered by tax related issues.

According to the *Koloniaal verslag* (January 1, 1902, p. 146), it states that the political conflict between the King of Nai and Sikka was exacerbated by Larantuka's alleged claim of supremacy over several villages and small coastal islands within Sikka's territory, leading to allegations that the King of Larantuka had interfered in the conflict (See figure 2). Through the establishment of new administrative regions and the delineation of clear administrative boundaries, the Netherlands sought to strengthen oversight over local areas while reducing the

potential for resistance against the colonial political order (Lewis, 2006). Then, in 1929, the Netherlands colonial government formalized the merger of the Kingdoms of Nita and Kangae into the Kingdom of Sikka. From that point onward, Don Thomas Ximenes da Silva ruled the entire region until 1954. The dissolution of the Kingdom of Kangae occurred after the Netherlands resolved the conflict between the Kingdom of Sikka and the Kingdom of Larantuka regarding sovereignty over the Tana’Ai region, which was subsequently permanently incorporated into the territory of the Kingdom of Sikka. Meanwhile, the Kingdom of Nita was also abolished, and its territory was placed under Sikka’s authority. This policy was implemented not only to streamline Netherlands colonial administration but also as a response to the political influence and leadership capabilities of King Don Thomas Ximenes da Silva as the last ruler of the Kingdom of Sikka (Lewis, 2006).

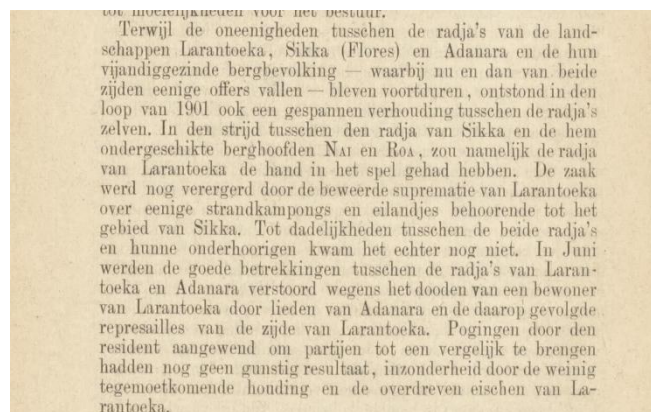


Figure 2. Notes on the Political Conflict Between Raja Nai and Sikka

Source: *Koloniaal Verslag*, January 1, 1902

Conclusion

Research findings indicate that the Sikka Kingdom’s diplomacy with the Portuguese from the 16th to the 17th centuries was a deliberate political strategy aimed at securing economic benefits while simultaneously strengthening the kingdom’s position in eastern Flores. The form of diplomacy developed did not take place through formal institutions as is the case in modern diplomacy, but rather through personal relationships among elites, the exchange of tribute, trade, the spread of the Catholic faith, and genealogical ties through marriage with the Black Portuguese or Topasses communities. These various forms of interaction enabled the Kingdom of Sikka to establish mutually beneficial cooperation with the Portuguese without losing its identity or political interests. This diplomacy resulted in greater access to regional and international trade networks, increased the kingdom’s political legitimacy through the adoption of symbols of power and the Catholic faith, and enhanced the Kingdom of Sikka’s ability to adapt to political changes when Portuguese dominance shifted to the Netherlands.

Theoretically, this study reinforces the concept of traditional diplomacy, which positions local kingdoms as key political actors capable of negotiating, building alliances, and leveraging external relationships to advance their economic and political interests rather than merely serving as objects of colonialism. These findings will also enrich Indonesian historiography by demonstrating that political dynamics in Flores were shaped through reciprocal interactions between local and foreign powers. Practically, this study can serve as a reference for the development of research on local history, the history of diplomacy, and colonialism in Eastern Indonesia beginning in the 16th century, while also supporting the preservation of the historical

legacy of the Sikka Kingdom as part of the cultural identity of the people of Flores. Thus, the Sikka Kingdom's diplomacy can be understood as an adaptive strategy that integrated trade interests, the legitimization of power, and cross cultural relations to maintain the kingdom's existence amid regional political changes.

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