

The case of Alferes Francisco Duarte “O Arbiru” (1862 – 1899)

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Alferes (Sublieutenant) Francisco Duarte “O Arbiru” (the invincible) remains immortalized in the leafy Farol district of Dili in the form of a well-preserved street sign set against the manicured grass of a well-preserved colonial residence, now Indonesian military squat. But who was Duarte “O Arbiru”?

Why was this figure memorialized by Portugal? Indeed, why has the memory of this man been preserved? Indeed are Portuguese, Timorese, and Indonesian remembrances of this figure at variance? Or, is his name just another icon left over from history? A Kemak legend retold to the author in trilingual Kemak / Portuguese / English form by Snr. António Luís Mota goes as follows:

Bui Cari stu Bui Cari
Arbiru mate ara lolo
Bui caria tu Bui Cari
Arbiru tau tuli lolo
Beu beu sala kahi sai
Au eh dale tura Kahi sai

Bui Cari rock Bui cari
Arbiru (the invincible) was gunned down
Bui Cari Bui Cari

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Arbiru lost his life

All of a sudden the evil was done

I meant to comfort him, but it was all over

Such was the reputation of this man, at least in Kemak lore, that it was believed that he could only be killed with a golden bullet, and such is how, in this story, he met his end.

In fact Duarte, the “Lawrence of Timor” in official Portuguese military writings, served more than one governor in at least five major military campaigns. Certainly his name became known in the Macau press at the time the great Maubara rebellion of May – July 1893. According to Pélissier’s reading of historical archives, Duarte was believed to have been the real instigator of this affair. Relieved of his position he nevertheless spearheaded subsequent suppression campaigns on the Balibo frontier, at Manufahi in 1895, albeit grievously wounded on October 7, only to recover to return to action in Cotubaba in July 1896 and Lamaquitos in 1897 (Pélissier 1996: 124-6, 129, 140-2, 144-9, 151-2, 154-8, 161-72, 175-7, 186-9, 210, 243). Died in combat on 17 July 1899, Francisco Duarte “O Arbiru” was laid to rest in Santa Cruz cemetery, where his mausoleum remains. Exactly forty years later on 17 July 1959, a stone was erected in his honour at the actual site of his death in Bobonaro.

The monument is duly listed in the Indonesian inventory (*Inventarisasi Kesenian, 1978*), with Duarte duly recorded as a Portuguese “*pahlawan*” (hero), albeit obviously not of the Second World War as here stated. But for most Timorese *O Arbiru* was the name of the small Portuguese ship that tragically and mysteriously disappeared with much loss of life in the Flores Sea in May 1973 while on a mission to Bangkok to requisition rice supplies.

Fontes:

Imagem: <http://timor-mais-eu.blogspot.com/2006/09/o-major-arbiru.html>

Texto:

http://books.google.pt/books?id=55mXS56nMPkC&pg=PA245&lpg=PA245&dq=arbiru+Ant%C3%B3nio+Lu%C3%ADs+Mota&source=bl&ots=avna-dlvk5&sig=fN7TImncYM9q0bHpfP5yd99NtOc&hl=pt-PT&sa=X&ei=hPoAT-G2LNLt8QOouJy1AQ&sqj=2&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=arbiru%20Ant%C3%B3nio%20Lu%C3%ADs%20Mota&f=false