



Illustration 1. Javanese cavalerie drawing by Jan Brandes. c. 1779 – 1785.

Letter from Susuhunan Amangkurat II in Kartasura to the Supreme Government in Batavia, 18 December 1699

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1 Introduction

M. C. Ricklefs, “Letter from Susuhunan Amangkurat II in Kartasura to the Supreme Government in Batavia, 18 December 1699”. In: *Harta Karun. Hidden Treasures on Indonesian and Asian-European History from the VOC Archives in Jakarta*, document 14. Jakarta: Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2014.

BY M. C. RICKLEFS

This letter was written by Susuhunan Amangkurat II (r. 1677-1703) in dire circumstances, his control over his court and kingdom being in an advanced state of collapse. As indicated in Harta Karun document 13, the hostility and diplomatic impasse between the VOC and the court of Kartasura were almost total; of reconciliation there was little hope and, from the VOC side, probably no real expectation.

Within the court, cliques and rivalries were increasingly bitter and dangerous. In the east of the kingdom, Surapati had carved out an independent domain centred on Pasuruan. In 1698-9 he was able to raid as far west as Madiun and Ponorogo. Farther east, the once-independent kingdom of Balambangan was conquered by the Balinese lord Gusti Panji Sakti of Buleleng in 1697, evidently in alliance with Surapati. In Surabaya, the local lord, Angabei Jangrana II, was operating largely independently and repairing the city’s defensive walls in case of attack. The Madurese lord Cakraningrat II’s loyalty to Kartasura was doubtful, and at best limited.

It was in this context that Amangkurat II wrote the following letter to the Governor-General of the VOC and the Council of the Indies in Batavia in December 1699.

Here the king wrote of the threat of Surapati – whom the VOC had been trying to get Amangkurat II to capture or kill since he had murdered some seventy-five VOC soldiers including Captain François Tack at the court in 1686.

Amangkurat II’s letter claimed that Surapati had 800 soldiers armed with *snapphaenen*. This was the latest form of musket which was being introduced into Java in this period – the English term is snaphance. It used a flintlock firing mechanism rather than the older matchlock. This new firing mechanism, along with pre-packaged paper cartridges (also introduced in this period), significantly increased the reliability, rate and accuracy of infantry fire. It is highly unlikely (as the Company would have known) that Surapati already had 800 such weapons. They were occasionally presented as gifts by the VOC, as shown in this letter, in which the king acknowledged receiving a gilded pair of *snapphaenen* (probably in the form of pistols rather than muskets).

It is not clear how much of this story about the threat of Surapati was true. The VOC was disinclined to give any credence to whatever was said by Amangkurat II. And, in fact, Surapati never attacked either Kartasura or Surabaya.

The king sought VOC military support and said that, after the impending conflict was over, he would send a negotiator to Batavia. The Company was accustomed to such promises and had no interest in responding to the king’s requests.

Throughout 1700 and 1701 the diplomatic impasse continued with various promises of negotiations or embassies, but nothing happened. According to another VOC source, among the gifts that the Company sent to the king at this



INTRODUCTION



Illustration 2. Surapati kills Captain François Tack in Kartasura on 8 February 1686.

time were some portraits, which inspired a joke among Kartasura courtiers that instead of soldiers the VOC was sending puppets. One difficulty in the way of any real negotiations may have been a fear among the king's dignitaries that, if they were sent as emissaries to Batavia, they might be murdered in revenge for the killing of Tack in 1686. No real negotiations took place down to the death of Amangkurat II in November 1703.

Reference:

- M. C. Ricklefs. *War, Culture and Economy in Java, 1677–1726: Asian and European Imperialism in the Early Kartasura period*. Sydney: Asian Studies Association of Australia in association with Allen and Unwin, 1993.

2 Transcription of the Dutch text

M. C. Ricklefs, “Letter from Susuhunan Amangkurat II in Kartasura to the Supreme Government in Batavia, 18 December 1699”.

UIT: DAGHREGISTERS VAN BATAVIA, 18 DECEMBER 1699 [BEGINNEND BIJ FOL. 855]

Translaat Javaanse missive door den Sousouhounang Aman Courat Sena Patty Ingalaga aan Haar Edelens de Hoge Regeringe tot Batavia geschreven.

Desen brief, verciert met veel heylwenschingen mitsgaders lang leven en gezondheid, komt van den Sousouhounang Ratoe Amangkoerat Senapaty Ingalaga Abdul Ragman Mohamed Dinil Koebra, houdende zijn hof op het land van Karta Soura Adiningrat, en onder sijne regering heeft de stranden en het geheele land Java, aan zijn vader den Heer Gouverneur Generael, dewelcke etc.

Wijders zijn mijne gesanten genaamt Tommagon Marta Poura, Pospa Troena en Derma Soeta, dewelcke ik naer Batavia sende om voor sijn Hoog Edele te verschijnen, mits bekendmaeking vanwegen den vijand Sourapaty, dewelcke tegenwoordig naar Sourabaya wil trekken [fols. 886] om 'tselve in te nemen soo mij gesezt is, door de lieden die op het huys passen van den Angaby Jangrana. Ook is den vijand nu op het land genaamt Pakattingan, en het getal van deselve sijn 800 met snaphanen, en nog 800 met ander geweer. Ook isser nog een ander partij vijanden die hij gecommandeert heeft om Panaraga, Madiyon, en Kannagattar in te nemen, 'twelck zij tegenwoordig ook hebben gedaan. Ook is den vijand nu op Wolak Walikan aan de rivier van Kiping, en mijn gewapende volck van Cartasoura hebben haer pagger ten oosten van den oever en bewesten van het land Wolak Walikan. En omtrent de helft van mijn lijfknegten heb ik met haer geweer op de passabaan gestelt, want den vijand omtrent drie uren gaans naebij Karta Soura is. En daerom is het dat ik den Tommagon Marta Poura weder sende om de hulpe van Uw Hoog Edelheyt te versoeken, doordien de Javaanse kinders het niet gaande konnen houden om den vijandt Sourapaty wederstant te doen.

Ook versoek ik aan Uw Hoog Edelheyt als dat den Tommagon Marta Poura op 't spoedigst door Uw Hoog Edelheyt mogte geholpen werden, want mijn hert van gevoelen is buyten Uw Hoog Edelheyt[s] hulpe en bijstant mijn lant niet wederom sal krijgen. En daerom verlange ik na de kragten en bijstant van d'Compagnie want ofter al veel waren die mij helpen wilden, en met Uw Hoog Edelheyt[s] sin niet en ware, soo soude ik het niet willen doen.

Wijders ben ik al van sints geweest, eer den Tommagon Marta Poura herwaarts was gekomen, om den Tommagon Souma Brata naer Uw [fol. 887] Hoog Edelheyt af te senden, maer doen quam den vijand soo sterk om Pannaraga en Madiyon in te nemen, en daerom is hetselve in gebreeke gebleeven, maer als het werk eens over is, soo sal ik den Tommagon Souma Brata senden om voor Uw Hoog Edelheyt te verschijnen.



TRANSCRIPTION OF THE DUTCH TEXT

Eyndelijk wegens het geschenk dat door Uw Hoog Edelheyt aan mij is gesonden, te weten:

- 1 paer vergulde snaphanen
- 2 zeytgeweer met souwasse gevest
- 2 spiegels
- 2 verlakte kisjens
- 2 verlakte schilden
- 2 dito beteldoosen
- 2 dito ander slag dito
- 2 dito schotels
- 1 stuk Hollandse phelp
- 2 bodidaers met goude bloemen
- 4 gobaars Mataram
- 4 gobaars Sarassa
- 4 gobaars tape
- 2 hammans
- 6 kassen rosenwater
- 1 kelder Hollants gedistilleerde wateren
- 1 vat mom
- 1 vat boter [fol. 888]
- 2 vaten biscruyt
- 2 kaasen, en
- 3 Persiaanse paarden

Deselve hebben wij wel ontfangen waervoor ik mijn vader hertelijck bedanken. Ook versoek ik aan mijn vader om een trommel en dat deselve mij mogt toegesonden werden.

Alle hetgeene nog te seggen hebbe, is aan mijn gesanten gedefereert.



3 English translation

M. C. Ricklefs, “Letter from Susuhunan Amangkurat II in Kartasura to the Supreme Government in Batavia, 18 December 1699”.

FROM: THE DAILY JOURNALS OF BATAVIA CASTLE, 18 DECEMBER 1699 [BEGINNING WITH FOL. 885]

Translation of the letter in Javanese written to Their Excellencies the Supreme Government in Batavia by Susuhunan Amangkurat Senapati Ingalaga (*Sousouhounang Amancourat Sena Patty Ingalaga*).

This letter replete with many salutations and [wishes] for a long life and good health comes from Susuhunan Ratu Amangkurat Senapati Ingalaga Abdulrahman Muhammad Zainulkubra, who holds his court in the land of Kartasura Adiningrat, and rules over the coasts and the entire country of Java, to his father the Lord Governor-General, and so forth and so forth.

It is accompanied by my envoys named Tumenggung Martapura Puspatrana and Dermasuta, whom I send to Batavia to appear before His Illustrious Excellency in order to inform about the enemy Surapati [Soerapaty] who at this moment is about to depart to Surabaya [886] to capture the same, as I have been told by those people who are taking care of the residence of Ngabehi Jangrana. The enemy is now in the district named Paketingan, with 800 men armed with snaphances and 800 with other weapons. There is also another enemy group which he commanded to capture Panaraga, Madiun and Kannagattar, the which they have already achieved. The enemy is now in Wolak Walikan on the Kiping River, and my armed men from Kartasura have their palisade on the eastern bank to the west of the district of Wolak Walikan. And I have now posted around half of my men with their arms on the Paseban, as the enemy is around three hours distant from Kartasura. And this is the reason why I have again dispatched Tumenggung Martapura to entreat the help of Your Illustrious Excellency, because the Javanese children have difficulties to offer resistance against the enemy Surapati.

I also request Your Illustrious Excellency that Tumenggung Marta Pura may be assisted as speedily as possible by Your Illustrious Excellency, because I fear in my heart that without the help and succour of Your Illustrious Excellency my country will be lost and this is why I so greatly desire the power and assistance of the Company because, although there might be many who would be prepared to help me, and Your Illustrious Excellency would disapprove, I would not be prepared to tackle it.

Furthermore, before Tumenggung Martapura has returned from his embassy, I was planning to send Tumenggung Sumabrata to Your [887] Illustrious Excellency, but then the enemy arrived with the strength to capture Panaraga and Madiun, and therefore [my intention] has been more honoured in the breach than in the observance, but once the matter has been settled, I shall indeed dispatch Tumenggung Sumabrata to appear before Your Illustrious Excellency.



ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Finally, on account of the gift sent to me by Your Illustrious Excellency, to wit:

- 1 pair of gilded snaphances
- 2 side arms mounted with *suwasa* (pinchbeck)
- 2 looking glasses
- 2 lacquered caskets
- 2 lacquered shields
- 2 lacquered betel sets
- 2 ditto of another sort
- 2 lacquered dishes
- 1 piece of Dutch velvet
- 2 *bodidaers* with gold flowers
- 4 double pieces of Mataram cotton cloth (used for curtains)
- 4 double pieces of Sarassa (silk cloth from the Coromandel Coast)
- 4 double pieces of *tape* cloth
- 2 *hammans* (thick cloths used for shawls)
- 6 coffers of rosewater
- 1 cellaret of Dutch spirits
- 1 keg of beer
- 1 cask of butter [fol. 888]
- 2 barrels of gunpowder
- 2 cheeses and
- 3 Persian horses

We have received the same for which I heartily thank my father, and I also ask my father for a drum and that it might be sent to me.

All which remains to be said has been delegated to my envoys.



4 Colophon

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5 Folio image

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