



**Illustration 1.** Fine and detailed plan of Ayutthaya in Thailand - sourced from the French embassy to Siam in 1685 - by Vincenzo Maria Coronelli, the great seventeenth century Italian cartographer.

## Letter from King Narai (r. 1656-1688) to the Supreme Government in Batavia, (received) 1 December 1668

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## 1 Introduction

Hendrik E. Niemeijer, “Letter from King Narai (r. 1656-1688) to the Supreme Government in Batavia, (received) 1 December 1668”. In: *Harta Karun. Hidden Treasures on Indonesian and Asian-European History from the VOC Archives in Jakarta*, document 22. Jakarta: Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2016.

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The English trader John South wrote in 1661 about Ayutthaya: “This is absolutely the best scal I have bin at in India and we have our custome free for ever”. Ships were coming from Macao, Tonkin, Cochin-China and Manila in February and March; in May and June the Dutch and English ships from Banten and Batavia arrived; a few months later the sails and galleys from Makassar, Johor and Aceh were seen, and finally, in November, the ships engaged in the trade with Japan.

Ayutthaya was a crucial port for the Dutch, as it was situated along the sea-lanes to the VOC’s factories and possessions in Tonkin, Formosa (Taiwan) and Japan, and no other European nation frequented the Siamese port more often than the Dutch during the 1650s and 1660s. The Siamese also came to Banten and Batavia, with their own junks and galleys. Sometimes they continued their trip to Java’s Northeast coast to buy horses in exchange for tin and lower quality porcelain. The nakhodas of these Siamese ships brought letters from the kings and gifts for the Sultan of Banten, the Susuhunan of Mataram and the High Government in Batavia, sometimes even elephants. As such, Batavia was one of the diplomatic contacts

and trading partners of the Siamese kings.

Dutch-Siamese relations deteriorated in the early 1660s. Although a full analysis of the course of events is still lacking in the historical literature, it is clear that the return of the English to Ayutthaya and Siam’s war with the North consumed much manpower and resources and had a negative impact on the Dutch trade. There was also a fierce competition with the “Moors”, but ever more so with the Chinese and Sino-Siamese junks sailing to China, Taiwan and Japan. In 1662 the VOC was also at odds with Portugal again, and this led to the capture of Portuguese Cochin on India’s west coast. The VOC’s capture of a ship near Hainan between Canton and Macao flying a Portuguese flag and with a Portuguese crew led to altercations in Ayutthaya because this ship was fitted out by King Narai. Although the King himself was on a military expedition, the VOC lodge was besieged and later King Narai asked for 84,000 guilders in compensation for the seized ship.

Another factor was the behaviour of *okya* Phichit, a high Siamese official who acted as “voorkoper”, or pre-salesman, monopolizing as many sales in deerskins as possible. In response, the High Government decided to leave Ayutthaya altogether. On 5 September 1663 the *Princesse Royale*, and the flute ships *Hoogcaspel* and *Elsenburg*, left Batavia for Siam to dismantle the lodge in silence. The flutes had the order to intercept and to capture Chinese junks destined for Siam.<sup>1</sup> On 25 October all of the 15 Company staff left the factory quietly and went downstream on a fast Cambodian prau to the warehouse Amsterdam, where the

<sup>1</sup> [DKB] *Dagh-Register gehouden int Casteel Batavia Anno 1663*, Bataviaasch genootschap 1891, pp. 435-436. The background of this was of course the humiliating conquest by the Chinese warlord Coxinga (aka Zheng Chenggong) of Fort Zeelandia on Formosa. The Fort was handed over on 1 February 1662.



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Illustration 2. French depiction of King Narai.

*Princesse Royale* and *Elsenburg* were waiting for them. The *Princesse Royale* came back to Batavia on 9 December 1663 with all of the money (12,051 Spanish real) and goods from the lodge, including 5,328 pikuls of sappanwood, 6,154 pots of coconut oil, 1549 deerskins and other items.<sup>2</sup>

Not happy with this unforeseen departure, King Narai sent two diplomats to Batavia in February 1664. In a letter the Phrakhleng explained to the Supreme Government how *okya* Phichit (a Muslim noble of Persian descent) was to blame, and how he had been punished by the King. The King expressed his wish that the VOC should return to Ayutthaya. The Supreme Government decided on 10 June 1664 to send Pieter de Bitter with the *Zirkzee* to Siam to finally settle the disputes with the King. Enoch Poolvoet joined him, in case the factory could be re-opened.<sup>3</sup> The *Zirkzee* arrived at the mouth of the Chao Phraya river on 15 July. Immediately after arrival the guards of the toll-

house came on board with the news that King Narai was much inclined to renew the old alliance with the VOC.

The *Zirkzee* returned to Batavia Siam on 30 November with a cargo of sappanwood and coconut oil. Pieter de Bitter handed over his report, a letter from Poolvoet and a royal letter from King Narai himself in Malay. The Daily Journals of Batavia Castle record a triumphant relation *in compendio* of the reports and letters received. Batavia's letter was received in Siam with the necessary protocol on 1 August and opened by the King in the presence of many Siamese noblemen, all carrying a silver betel-box they had received as a gift from the King. It was concluded that the mutual relations had been completely disturbed by the troublemaker *okya* Phichit without the knowledge of the King, and the impertinent acts of the Chinese whom were used by Okya Phichit to besiege the Dutch lodge. The King had been

<sup>2</sup> DKB 1663, pp. 655.

<sup>3</sup> DKB 1664, 10 June 1664, pp. 236-237.



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unaware of the abuses at the court, *okya* Phichit fell out of grace immediately and was punished later.

The day after the ceremony the Dutch and Siamese officials started to draft the text of a new treaty, which was signed on 22 August 1664. The Treaty of 1664 arranged for unlimited trade with all traders in Siam, Ligor (Nakhon Si Thammarat) and Ujung Salang (“Junkceylon” or Phuket), without any increases of toll in the future. The King promised not to use any Chinese on board his junks to Japan, Canton, Cochin China or Tonkin. The most important article was the exclusive right of the VOC, to the exclusion of all other traders, no matter of what nationality, to the export of deer-skins and cowhides. The VOC was not allowed to attack or display any hostility to any foreign ships or junks entering Siam’s waters. The full text of this treaty was inserted in the Daily Journals of Batavia Castle immediately after the arrival of the *Zirkzee* on 30 November 1664.<sup>4</sup> In a sentence after the treaty it is reported that the King had stressed – via the Phrakhleng – that with this treaty his authority was challenged.

The years after the Treaty of 1664 show business as usual. The *Princesse Royale* went back to Siam in August 1665 and other ships destined for Tonkin, Japan and Hoksieuw also called at Ayutthaya in the following years. King Narai sent his regular letters to Batavia in December 1665, December 1666, November 1667, and October/November 1668.

The diplomatic letter from King Narai from 1668 came with outgoing executive trader Enoch

Poolvoet, who received permission to bring his children (from a Siamese woman) with him to Batavia. Poolvoet arrived on the ship *Goeree* with a good load of sappanwood and four elephants as a gift from the King. Only ten days after the arrival of the *Goeree*, the flute *Elburgh* arrived in the roads of Batavia with a smaller cargo, namely 1,400 pikuls of sappanwood, 63 loads of rice and 2,490 martavans of coconut oil. It delivered the second letter from King Narai in a month, and a letter from Nicolaes de Roy, executive trader in Ayutthaya (1669-1672), dated 16 November 1668. In this letter the King’s appreciation for Enoch Poolvoet is expressed.

In comparison to the 18th century royal letters, those from the period of King Narai were always short and seldom contain clear political considerations. The fragments of this letter from 1668 show some of the main concerns of the King. He frequently requested skilled workers or military specialists from Batavia, or asked for luxury goods and gadgets.

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<sup>4</sup> DKB 1664, 30 November 1664, pp. 523-525.





## 2 Transcription of the Dutch text

DAGHREGISTERS VAN BATAVIA, 1 DECEMBER 1668<sup>1</sup>.

In zijn brief zegt de kapitein van Jaccatra dat hij een Nederlander stuurt die buskruit kan maken, en nog een ander die verstand heeft van oorlogszaken en goed met geschut kan omgaan, beide om in Siam dienst te doen. Hierdoor blijkt de oprechtheid van de kapitein van Jaccatra (om hulde te bewijzen) aan de voeten van Alaradt<sup>2</sup>, Koning van Siam. Dit waardeert de Koning van Siam ten zeerste. Doch de persoon die verstand heeft van buskruit maken is bij aankomst in de loge van Siam ziek geworden en gestorven, zonder dat hij ooit aan het buskruitmaken toekwam. En de persoon die verstand heeft van oorlog en geschut gaf toen hij werd ondervraagd en gelast om enig geschut af te schieten ten antwoord dat hij daar niet goed genoeg in was. Dus heb ik hem niet naar de oorlog kunnen sturen, en zendt hem bij dezen terug als ondienstig. Om deze redenen vraag ik de kapitein van Jaccatra om een meester op te zoeken die kunstig is in de oorlogsvoering, iemand die buskruit, en nog iemand die steenhouwen kan, om in de loge van Siam te wonen.

Verder heb ik een klein uurwerk gezien, dat in het Nederlands 'orlogie' genoemd wordt. Hierin heb ik zin gekregen en ik wenste dat de kapitein van Jaccatra over een jaar of twee een mocht sturen aan de voeten van de Koning van Siam.

Ook heeft Enoch Poolvoet<sup>3</sup> ons bekend gemaakt, dat de kapitein van Jaccatra aan hem een brief<sup>4</sup> had geschreven, waarin hij bevolen werd naar Batavia te vertrekken. De koopman zou in de loge van Siam moeten blijven. Maar volgens het oude gebruik, en zo is het hier altijd de manier geweest, wordt mij eerst aangeschreven wanneer de kapitein van Jaccatra een andere persoon wil sturen om de aanwezige resident te verlossen. En aangezien de genoemde Poolvoet van jongs af aan in Siam dienst heeft gedaan, had ik gedacht dat de kapitein van Jaccatra hem enige andere taken op zou leggen. Maar ik heb hem op het verzoek dat door de Phrakhleng aan de voeten van mij, Alharadt, Koning van Siam, is gedaan, vrij gelaten om naar Batavia te gaan.

Enoch Poolvoet heeft opnieuw bekend gemaakt dat hij kinderen geteeld had bij een slavin van Kanda Sima<sup>5</sup> in Siam. Ik heb op dat verzoek gelet, aangezien de Koning van Siam genegen is met de Nederlandse Koning volgens het voorheen gemaakt contract in vriendschap te verkeren, alsmede ten aanzien van de veelvoudige weldaden die de kapitein van Jaccatra ons bewijst. Derhalve heb ik toegestaan dat de kinderen met hun vader Enoch Poolvoet naar Batavia gaan.

<sup>1</sup> [DRK] *Dagh-Register gehouden int Casteel Batavia Anno 1668-1669*, Bataviaasch genootschap 1897, pp. 209-211

<sup>2</sup> Het is onduidelijk wat Alaradt betekent.

<sup>3</sup> Enoch Poolvoet, opperhoofd van de VOC-loge in Ayutthaya, 1662-1663 (waarnemend), 1664-1668.

<sup>4</sup> In het Nationaal Archief (VOC 887) bevinden zich twee geheime brieven van Batavia aan Poolvoet van 22 mei en 3 september 1663.

<sup>5</sup> De vrouw van Poolvoet was onderdaan van de koning, vandaar de uitdrukking "slavin van Kanda Sima"; *khet khandhasima* verwijst naar het gebied binnen de grenzen van het koninkrijk.



### 3 English translation

DAILY JOURNALS OF BATAVIA, 1 DECEMBER 1668.

[In summary]

In his letter the captain of Jaccatra says that he is sending a Dutchman who can make gunpowder, and another who has a knowledge of matters of war and is good at handling guns, both to serve in Siam. This is evidence of the sincerity of the captain of Jaccatra (by paying homage) at the feet of Alaradt<sup>1</sup>, King of Siam. The King of Siam appreciates this very much. However, the person who knew how to make gunpowder, on arrival at the lodge of Siam, became ill and died, without ever having had the chance to make gunpowder. And the person who understood about war and guns, when questioned and directed to fire some guns, replied that he was no good at it. Hence I was not able to send him to the war, and herewith am returning him as unusable. For these reasons I ask the captain of Jaccatra to seek out a master who is skilled in waging war, someone who can make gunpowder and another who can dress stone, to come and live in the lodge of Siam.

Moreover I have seen a small timepiece, which in Dutch is called 'orlogie'. I have become attracted to this and wish that in a year or two the captain of Jaccatra might send one to the feet of the King of Siam.

Enoch Poolvoet<sup>2</sup> has also informed us that the captain of Jaccatra had written him a letter<sup>3</sup>, in which he was ordered to depart for Batavia. The merchant should continue living in the lodge of Siam. But according to the old custom – and this has always been the way here – I am always sent a letter first if the captain of Jaccatra wishes to send another person to relieve the resident present here. And seeing that the said Poolvoet has been serving in Siam from an early age, I thought that the captain of Jaccatra might impose some other tasks on him. But at the request that has been made at my feet by the Phrakhleng, I, Alharadt, King of Siam, have released him to go to Batavia.

Enoch Poolvoet has once more made it known that he had produced children by a female slave from Kanda Sima<sup>4</sup> in Siam. I have noted that request, seeing that the King of Siam is inclined to remain in friendship with the Dutch King in accordance with the contract made formerly, and in view of the many favours that the captain of Jaccatra has shown us. Therefore I have granted permission for the children of Enoch Poolvoet to go to Batavia with their father.

<sup>1</sup> Unclear what Alaradt means

<sup>2</sup> Enoch Poolvoet, executive head of the VOC in Ayutthaya (1662-1663 acting) (1664-1668).

<sup>3</sup> Two secret letters from Batavia to Poolvoet survive in the NA (VOC 887, letters dated 22 May and 3 September 1663).

<sup>4</sup> Poolvoet's wife was the Siamese king's subject, hence the phrase "a female slave from Kanda Sima"; *khet khan-thasima* denotes the area within the boundaries of the king's realm.



## 4 Colophon

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