



Illustration 1. King Narai on his Elephant.

Letter from King Narai (r. 1656-1688) in Ayutthaya to the Supreme Government in Batavia, (received) 2 March 1674, and the answer from Batavia, 27 April 1674

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1 Introduction

Hendrik E. Niemeijer, “Letter from King Narai (r. 1656-1688) to the Supreme Government in Batavia, (received) 2 March 1674, and the answer from Batavia, 27 April 1674”. In: *Harta Karun. Hidden Treasures on Indonesian and Asian-European History from the VOC Archives in Jakarta*, document 23. Jakarta: Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia, 2016.

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The letter, which is selected here from the reign of King Narai, dates from ca. October 1673. The reply from the Supreme Government in Batavia Castle to Siam (see next document) is one of the first replies from the Supreme Government that can be found in the VOC-archives in both The Hague and Jakarta. Before 1672 no such letters have been traced so far, and have presumably been lost.

This letter refers to an incident between the Dutch and the English. Although its content is presented in a diplomatic way, it is in fact an angry letter. King Narai was much displeased that the Dutch had taken an English ship, the *Philip and Ann*, leaving Ayutthaya for Bombay. On board this ship were some diplomatic gifts from the King to the President of the EIC in Bombay. The President, Gerard Aungier, and his Council wrote to the EIC in London that he had received a letter from the Phrakhlung that the King was “much offended at the Dutch for that and their other insolency to the merchants”.¹

The context is the Third Anglo-Dutch War (early 1672-early 1674), during which England’s Royal Navy joined the French to blockade the Dutch Republic at sea and England’s King Charles II

attempted to subjugate the Dutch Republic. The Anglo-French alliance was signed during the secret Treaty of Dover in 1670, which aimed at a punitive campaign against the Dutch Republic. During this campaign, the Dutch Admiral Michiel de Ruyter won several sea battles and the English Parliament forced Charles II to stop the war after two years of fruitless attempts. The year 1672 is known in Dutch history as the “Year of Disaster” (*Rampjaar*), as in June the French King Louis XIV invaded the Netherlands with an army of 130,000 men.

It is an interesting, but unanswerable, question to ask how far the Siamese King Narai was aware of the specifics of these European treaties and events. The letter from Batavia of 27 April 1674 indicates that it was the duty of the Dutch executive trader in Ayutthaya – at that time Johannes van der Spijck – to inform the court about the Dutch victories at sea. We can imagine that the English and the French in Ayutthaya also presented their information about the Anglo-Dutch War to the court officials.

The French *Société des Missions étrangères de Paris* (M.E.P.; Paris Foreign Missions Society, established 1658-1663) had already received permission to open the Seminary of Saint Joseph in Ayutthaya in 1666, after the arrival of Mgr Lambert de la Motte and the founding father of the M.E.P., Mgr François Pallu. The high religious tolerance of King Narai was exceptional in those days, and Siam was the only Southeast Asian country where such a Roman Catholic seminary could be found. One of the complaints of King Narai against the Dutch was the Dutch anti-Catholic policy and

¹ A. Farrington & Dhiravat na Pombejra, *The English Factory in Siam 1612-1685*, Vol. I, p. 379.



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Illustration 2. Delegation visiting the king of Siam (Thailand), Jan Luyken, 1687.

obstructions to facilitate Catholic missionaries arriving in Banten or Batavia. These hindered the royal correspondence with the French King Louis XIV (r. 1643-1715) and Popes Alexander VII (r. 1655-1667) and Clement IX (r. 1667-1669). King Narai's foreign policy aimed at the heightening of his prestige by intensifying diplomatic contacts with the most powerful European rulers and spiritual leaders. It is no wonder that during the period 1665-1679 the M.E.P. was able to firmly establish itself in Ayutthaya.

As we have seen in document 22 the English had not considered Ayutthaya as an important trading place since they closed their Hirado factory in 1623. The English trade was centered in Banten, Surat, Madras (Fort St. George, 1640) and after 1668 in Bombay. The English were also far more tolerant than the Dutch towards private or country trade. King Narai usually welcomed English

private traders, but the E.I.C. did not open a factory there again until 1675.

In their general letter of 22 December 1675 in Ayutthaya to the E.I.C. in London, the principal English Company representatives wrote that the King "hath bin much abused by private traders", but had treated the E.I.C. servants "with civillity beyond expectation".² Ayutthaya was a good place to sell Indian textiles and English manufactures. King Narai had promised a share in the tin trade under his seal. The King also gave the English a credit [loan?] of 40 katties of silver, 300 bahar of tin and 1000 pikuls of sappanwood. A few months later the English were hopeful that the King would give the E.I.C. "the same freedom as to buying skins & goods proper for Japan which the Dutch have".³ This makes it very clear that King Narai did not want to depend on exclusive trading relations with the Dutch, but rather

² Farrington, *The English Factory*, Vol. I pp. 394-396.

³ Idem, p. 407.



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maintain his royal monopoly and grant rights to whomever he wanted. Of all Southeast Asian rulers, the Siamese kings played this game with the Europeans the best until King Narai's foreign and diplomatic policy unravelled in the mid-1680s.

References:

- Cruysse, Dirk van der, *Siam & the West 1500-1700* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2002).
- Farrington, Anthony & Dhiravat na Pombejra, *The English Factory in Siam 1612-1685* (London: The British Library, 2007), Volume I.



2 Transcription of the Dutch text

DAGHREGISTERS VAN BATAVIA, 2 MAART 1674.¹

De Koning heeft begrepen van een Engels schip, *Philip and Anna* genaamd, dat de Hollanders dat schip genomen hebben toen het van Siam was vertrokken. Zij hebben daarin twee kisten en een Japans comptoir² gevonden. Men zei dat de Koning van Siam die goederen aan de leiders in Engeland gezonden zou hebben. Daarom werden deze door de Hollanders uit respect voor de Koning van Siam niet geopend, maar eerst in bewaring genomen. Derhalve verzoek ik nu dat deze mij mogen worden toegezonden, met een brief van de Gouverneur-Generaal. En indien de Gouverneur-Generaal dit goed vindt, zal dit zeer verstandig zijn en ook strekken tot de onderhouding van de lange vriendschap tussen de Koning van Siam en de Koning van Holland. Want het is zeker dat ik al het genoemde aan de Engelse kapitein die in Suratte woont had gezonden.³

Ook heb ik gehoord dat de Hollanders met de koningen van Frankrijk en Engeland in oorlog waren.⁴ Daarop heb ik de kapitein Johannes⁵ laten roepen en hem daarover gevraagd, die het bevestigde. Ik ben daar zeer ontsteld over, temeer omdat ik vanouds wel weet dat de Koning van Holland in alles oprecht is en zijn contracten onverbrekelijk zijn. Derhalve bid ik God dat Hij hem de overwinning wil geven, want ik kan de Hollanders op het moment niet helpen.

Antwoord van de Hoge Regering in Batavia aan Koning Narai (1656-1688), 27 April 1674.

DAGHREGISTERS VAN BATAVIA, 27 APRIL 1674.⁶

De Gouverneur-Generaal Joan Maetsuycker en de raden van de Staat der Verenigde Nederlanden in de Oriënt, die tot Batavia resideren, schrijven uit een oprecht en zuiver hart deze brief aan de grote Koning, die het gebied heeft over het koninkrijk en de landen van Siam, en van de hele wereld zeer werd geprezen wegens zijn wijsheid en vroomheid om zijn onderdanen goed te regeren en met alle koningen en landen goede vrede en vriendschap te onderhouden; aan wie de hemel wil geven een lang leven met gezondheid in alle voorspoed, en overwinning over zijn vijanden; voor zoveel een sterfelijk mens het geoorloofd is dat te begeren.

De brief die de grote Koning van Siam laatst aan de Gouverneur-Generaal schreef hebben wij goed ontvangen, met de eer en het respect die zulk een grote Koning toe-

¹ [DKB] Dagh-Register gehouden int Casteel Batavia Anno 1674, Bataviaasch genootschap 1902, pp. 69-71.

² Kabinet.

³ Het hoofd van de EIC in Suratte in 1674 was Gerald Aungier.

⁴ Derde Engels-Nederlandse Oorlog (1672-1674)

⁵ Johannes van der Spijck, 1668-1669 (acting), 1672-1676.

⁶ DKB 1674 pp. 104-106. Dit is de eerste brief van de Hoge Regering die is opgenomen in de Daghregisters van Batavia.



TRANSCRIPTION OF THE DUTCH TEXT

komt. En ook de 20 bahar tin die als een geschenk aan onze vertegenwoordiger in Siam zijn overgegeven, waarvoor wij dankbaar zijn. De brief hebben de Gouverneur-Generaal en de raden van Indië doen vertalen en zij hebben daaruit gelezen de goede, oprecht en bijzondere genegenheid die de Koning hen en de Nederlandse staat toedraagt om de vrede en vriendschap met hen en haar onderdanen in deze landen, en de goede alliantie, voor eeuwig te onderhouden. De genegenheid van ons en alle Nederlanders jegens de Koning van Siam en zijn onderdanen zal ook voor altijd duren. De Gouverneur-Generaal en de raden van Indië zullen bij alle gelegenheden doen blijken dat zij de grote Koning van Siam dienen en helpen, zo veel als in hen vermogen zal zijn, opdat de vrede en vriendschap tussen Siam en Batavia mag blijven voortbestaan, zo lang de zon en de maan aan de hemel staan.

Verder, aangezien Zijne Majesteit schrijft dat het zeker is dat de twee kisten en een Japans comptoirtje die in het Engelse schip zijn gevonden, door Uwe Majesteit aan de Engelse kapitein te Suratte zijn gezonden, worden deze op het verzoek van Uwe Majesteit ongeopend en gesloten bij dezen weer aan Uwe Majesteit toegezonden.

Inzake de oorlog in ons land tegen de Franse en Engelse koningen verwachten wij dagelijks weer nieuws. Maar onze kapitein (in de loge te Siam) zal Uwe Majesteit kunnen berichten over onze overwinning ter zee⁷ en de hoop op vrede.

Verder meldt Uwe Majesteits brief iets over lood. Wij hebben onze kapitein gelast Uwe Majesteit te verzoeken om ons 2 à 3 pikul lood en evenzoveel salpeter (tegen marktprijs) als proefmonsters toe te zenden. Wij hopen dat Uwe Majesteit dit zal gelieven toe te staan. De Gouverneur-Generaal en de Raden van Indië zullen daarvoor dankbaar zijn, gelijk zij Uwe Majesteit op het allerhoogste bedanken voor de hulp aan onze kapitein.

Nogmaals: wij zullen aangaande de Hollandse werklieden zoveel als mogelijk aan Uwe Majesteits begeren proberen te voldoen. De Gouverneur-Generaal en Raden van Indië hebben de grote Koning te Siam tegenwoordig niets anders tot een geschenk te zenden als:

- 1 stuks *incarnaat*⁸ Hollands fluweel
- 1 stuks zwarte *aurora*⁹ *moira*¹⁰
- 1 stuks gouden incarnaat moira
- 1 stuks goud en groen moira
- 1 stuks scharlaken
- 1 stuks karmozijnen rood laken

⁷ De Eerste en Tweede Slag bij het Schooneveld (bij Oostende) waarbij luitenant-admiraal-generaal Michiel de Ruyter de Frans-Engelse vloot onder leiding van Ruprecht van de Palts versloeg op 7 en 14 juni 1673. Mogelijk wist Batavia ook al af van de Slag bij Kijkduin op 11 augustus 1673, de laatste zeeslag tijdens de Derde Engels-Nederlandse Oorlog.

⁸ Of 'incarnaat' (Lat. *incarnatio*), hoog-rozerood, vleeskleurig rood.

⁹ Aurora (Lat.) is de Latijnse godin voor de dageraad, ook wel het poollicht. Misschien hier in de betekenis van morgenrode kleur.

¹⁰ Moira of *moiré* (Fr.) is een weefsel waarvan de structuur door persen plaatselijk is vervormd zodat een gegolfd effect ontstaat. Het wordt ook wel moor, tabijn of gewaterde zijde genoemd.



TRANSCRIPTION OF THE DUTCH TEXT

1 papegaaigroen laken

1 grote kist met flessen rozenwater

hetgeen wij eerbiedig verzoeken of Uwe Majesteit dit alles in goede genegenheid gelieft aan te nemen en te accepteren.

In het Kasteel Batavia, 27 April anno 1674. De Gouverneur-Generaal van Nederlands Indië, Joan Maetsuyker.¹¹

¹¹ Gouverneur-generaal van 1653-1678.



3 English translation

DAILY JOURNALS OF BATAVIA, 2 MARCH 1674.

The King has understood regarding an English ship, called the *Philip and Anna*, that the Dutch took that ship when it had departed from Siam. In it they found two chests and a Japanese *comptoir*¹. It was said that the King of Siam had sent these goods to the leaders in England. Hence out of respect for the King of Siam the Dutch did not open them, but first held them in safekeeping. I therefore now request that these may be sent to me, with a letter from the Governor-General. And if the Governor-General agrees, this will be very wise and also serve to uphold the long friendship between the King of Siam and the King of Holland, for it is certain that I had sent all the above-mentioned to the English captain who lives in Surat².

I have also heard that the Dutch have been at war with the kings of France and England.³ I then had Captain Johannes⁴ called and have questioned him about it, and he confirmed it. I am much dismayed about this, all the more as I have always known that the King of Holland is honest in all things and his contracts are unbreakable. Therefore I pray to God that He should give him the victory, as at this moment I cannot help the Dutch.

Answer from the Supreme Government in Batavia to King Narai (r. 1656-1688), 27 April 1674.

DAILY JOURNALS OF BATAVIA, 27 APRIL 1674.

The Governor-General, Joan Maetsuycker, and members of the Council of State of the United Netherlands in the East who reside in Batavia, out of a sincere and pure heart are writing this letter to the great King who has dominion over the kingdom and the lands of Siam, and who is greatly praised by the whole world for his wisdom and piety in ruling his subjects well, and maintaining peaceful and friendly relations with all kings and countries, to whom heaven will give a long life with health in all prosperity and victory over his enemies, in as far as a mortal man is permitted to desire that.

The letter which the great King of Siam lately wrote to the Governor-General we have received in good order, with the honour and respect that is due to such a great King. And also the 20 *bahar* of tin which was handed over to our representative in Siam, for which we are grateful. The Governor-General and members of the Council of the Indies have had the letter translated, and from it they have read the good, sincere and especial affection which the King bears them and the Dutch state, in order to

¹ Cabinet.

² The EIC head at Surat in 1674 was Gerald Aungier.

³ The Third Anglo-Dutch War (1672-1674).

⁴ Johannes van der Spijck, 1668-1669 (acting), 1672-1676.



ENGLISH TRANSLATION

maintain forever the peace and friendship with them and their subjects in these lands, and the good alliance. The affection of us and all the Dutch toward the King of Siam and his subjects will also last for always. The Governor-General and members of the Council of the Indies will on all occasions make it evident that they serve and help the great King of Siam, as far as lies within their power, so that the peace and friendship between Siam and Batavia may continue to exist, as long as the sun and moon are in the sky.

Further, seeing that His Majesty writes that it is certain that the two chests and a little Japanese cabinet which were found in the English ship were being sent by Your Majesty to the English captain at Surat, at Your Majesty's request these are being despatched back to Your Majesty unopened and closed with this letter.

Regarding the war in our country against the French and English kings, we daily expect further news. But our captain (in the lodge in Siam) will be able to inform Your Majesty concerning our victory at sea⁵ and the hope of peace.

Moreover Your Majesty's letter says something about lead. We have instructed our captain to request Your Majesty to send us 2 to 3 pikul of lead and the same of saltpetre (at market prices) as samples. We hope that Your Majesty will be kind enough to permit this. The Governor-General and members of the Council of the Indies will be grateful for this, just as they thank Your Majesty to the utmost degree for the help to our captain.

Once again, regarding the Dutch workmen we shall try to fulfil Your Majesty's desire as far as we possibly can. The Governor-General and members of the Council of the Indies have at the present time nothing more to send as gifts to the great King of Siam than the following:

- 1 piece of *incarnaat*⁶ Dutch velvet
- 1 piece of black *aurora*⁷ *moira*⁸ (tabby, watered silk)
- 1 piece of golden *incarnaat* tabby
- 1 piece of gold and green tabby
- 1 piece of scarlet
- 1 piece of crimson red worsted
- 1 piece of parrot-green worsted
- 1 large case of bottled rose-water

all of which we respectfully request Your Majesty kindly to receive and accept in good favour.

In Batavia Castle, 27 April in the year 1674. The Governor-General of the Netherlands Indies, Joan Maetsuycker.⁹

⁵ The victory at sea referred to here may be either Admiral De Ruyter's victory over a Franco-English fleet at Schooneveld (June 1673) or the Battle of Kijkduin (August 1673).

⁶ Or 'incornaat' (Lat. incarnatio), specific pink red color.

⁷ Aurora (Lat.) is the Roman goddess of the dawn. Perhaps here in the meaning of dawn red colour.

⁸ Moira of moiré (Fr.) is a fabric which structure has a wave like effect as a result of pressing technique. Also known as 'moor', 'tabijn' or 'gewaterde zijde'.

⁹ In office 1653-1678.



4 Colophon

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5 Folio image

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