

# Ayutthaya and the Indian Ocean in the 17th and 18th Centuries: International Trade, Cosmopolitan Politics, and Transnational Networks

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## Introduction: Ayutthaya and the Indian Ocean

In the 17th and 18th centuries, the Siamese kingdom was connected to the space and developments of the Indian Ocean through the westward expansion of its trade, the securing of its Andaman port cities, the reorganization of the administration of foreign affairs and trade, and by the people of different origins. Ayutthaya offers an interesting case of how transnational networks of people, including the immigrants from the various regions in the Indian Ocean, became an integral part of the indigenous economy, society and politics of a port city.

The elements of the Indian Ocean in Siam not only tried to influence the local circumstances but were also influenced by the local conditions of commercial policy, internal politics and social structure. In Siam, where the state assumed control over politics, trade, society and foreign affairs, its cosmopolitan character was formed by the outward-looking attitude of the ruling elite, the consensus on the centrality of the king, and the relatively high degree of religious tolerance.

Special attention is paid to the Persian (Indo-Persian) and so-called ‘Moor’ communities, who, especially in the 17th century, thrived and then failed in Ayutthaya’s cosmopolitan bureaucracy and politics. This article will not only show how the different factions of foreigners were formed along ethnic and religious lines in Siam’s capital and port cities, but also attempt an analysis of how commercial competition and political rivalry shaped cross-community cooperation and conflicts.

## International trade: maritime connection, ports and administration

### *Ayutthaya’s maritime trade, westward trade*

In the four centuries of its existence, the ruling elite of Ayutthaya persistently showed the determination to claim their share of the prospering international trade in Southeast Asia and Asia as a whole, especially as a result of the growing maritime intercourse.<sup>1</sup> Soon after its foundation, Ayutthaya established maritime trading networks

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450–1680, I: The Land below the Winds* (New Haven, etc.: Yale University Press, 1988); *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450–*

to the east of the kingdom. Its growth appears to have been stimulated by its commercial and diplomatic relations with China, which had already been initiated by the earlier centers of power of the Thai people. The networks were later expanded to reach Ryukyu (Okinawa) and other parts of the China-centric trading world, including Cambodia, Champa (central and southern Vietnam), Cochin China (southern Vietnam), Japan, and Melaka.<sup>2</sup> But Ayutthaya was to lose its competitiveness as the region's foremost entrepôt when Melaka rose to prominence as a trade center on the routes between China and India. With the conversion to Islam of its rulers, the Malay port polity became even more ideal for Muslim traders from India, the Middle East, and other Muslim areas in the Malay-Indonesian archipelagos.<sup>3</sup>

On the western side of the Kingdom, there was a well-established trade between the Thai people and the Indian ports to as far as some port-towns on the Arabian Peninsula long before Ayutthaya's establishment.<sup>4</sup> However, before the 17th century, the Siamese still played a rather passive role in this 'westward' trade. The Portuguese, the first Europeans to trade along the Andaman Coast from the early 16th century, mentioned that the Siamese directly sent their own ships to do trade only southward and eastward.<sup>5</sup> The 'westward' trade of Siam was dominated by Indian, Arabian, and Southeast Asian traders who sailed from various Indian ports via the Melaka Straits or passed through the Andaman ports of Mergui (Myeik) and Tenasserim (Tanintharyi) to Ayutthaya.<sup>6</sup>

In the middle of the 15th century, Ayutthaya, emerging as a power on Mainland Southeast Asia, succeeded in taking control of Tenasserim (with the port island of Mergui) and Tavoy (Dawei), which allowed them direct access to the international trade of the Bay of Bengal. However, the following Siamese-Burmese War, which resulted in Ayutthaya's defeat in 1564, interrupted the kingdom's trade, including with the commercial centers in the Indian Ocean, and deprived it of control over its vassal states and the Andaman ports.

After Ayutthaya had thrown off its vassal status from Burma in the 1580s, the reign of the next two kings, which continued to 1610, was the period of reconstruction for the kingdom and the royal court, which naturally required a lot of revenue. The kings actively tried to rebuild commerce by welcoming all foreign traders of the time.<sup>7</sup> King Naresuan (r. 1590–1605) spent his time re-establishing the former political boundaries of the kingdom, which also meant trying to bring back the resources, markets and networks

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*1680, II: Expansion and Crisis* (New Haven, etc.: Yale University Press, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Kennon Breazeale, 'Thai Maritime Trade and the Ministry Responsible', in: idem (ed.), *From Japan to Arabia: Ayutthaya's Maritime Relations with Asia* (Bangkok: The Foundation for the Promotion of Social Sciences and Humanities Textbooks Project, 1999), 1-54, here 23-33.

<sup>3</sup> Leonard Y. Andaya, 'Ayutthaya and the Persian and Indian Muslim Connection', in: Breazeale (ed.), *From Japan to Arabia*, 119-36, here 120-1.

<sup>4</sup> Breazeale, 'Thai Maritime Trade and the Ministry Responsible', 38.

<sup>5</sup> George Vinal Smith, *The Dutch in Seventeenth-Century Thailand* (Illinois: Centre for Southeast Asian Studies Special Report 16, 1977), 8.

<sup>6</sup> Julispong Chularatana, 'The *Krom Tha Khawa* Officials: their Roles and Functions during the Ayutthaya and Ratanakosin Periods, 1610–1892' [in Thai] (Diss., Chulalongkorn University, 2001), 6; Smith, *The Dutch in Seventeenth-Century Thailand*, 85.

<sup>7</sup> David K. Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History*, reprinted (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2001), 109.

for trade. The economic reconstruction was, however, to bear fruit in the 1610s, during the reign of King Songtham (r. 1610/11–1618). Muslim traders from South Asia were active in Ayutthaya again as well as Japanese and Chinese merchants.<sup>8</sup>

The growing interest of the Siamese to trade with the areas west of their realm during this period has also to be understood in the context of the major changes in the Indian Ocean region: new or renewed interest in overseas trade of the Indian states, and in particular a large-scale expansion of Persian (Iranian) trade and people into South Asia and Southeast Asia under the Safavi rulers in the late 16th and most of the 17th century. This period witnessed expansions led by the three major Islamic empires: the Safavi, the Ottoman, and the Indo-Timuri. In Southeast Asia, there was a noticeable increase in Muslim traders, especially Indian Muslims and Persians. As bearers of much desired goods from the west with lucrative trading networks, and as representatives of the prestigious Islamic centers, these merchants were welcomed by rulers in the region. The presence of foreign Muslim communities in the port cities became commonplace, and various Muslim officials occupied influential positions at the courts in Southeast Asia.<sup>9</sup> The kings of Siam also wished to take advantage of this Indian Ocean trend.

#### *The Andaman ports*

Sunait Chutintaranond has identified the main causes of Ayutthaya's westward territorial expansion in the second half of the 15th century, with the first following David K. Wyatt's explanation:

Ayutthaya's seizure of control of Tenasserim (by the 1460s) and Tavoy (1488) seems to have been intended primarily to secure direct access, rather than indirect access through Malacca [Melaka], to the international trade of the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean.<sup>10</sup>

The strained relationship with Melaka, the most important port for the trade between the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, and, subsequently, its Portuguese conquest in 1511 forced the Kingdom of Siam to direct its attention to the city of Tenasserim and the adjacent deep-water anchorage at Mergui. Second, apart from its strategic position between the northwestern coastline of the Malay Peninsula and the eastern shores of the Bay of Bengal, Tenasserim offered a long-established trans-peninsular route, known to Arab traders who reached Ayutthaya by it, which linked the Indian Ocean with the South China Sea (the Gulf of Thailand).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Smith, *The Dutch in Seventeenth-Century Thailand*, 14, 50.

<sup>9</sup> Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450–1680, II: Expansion and Crisis*, 144, 146–7; Andaya, 'Ayutthaya and the Persian and Indian Muslim Connection', 124; see also Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Iranian Abroad: Intra-Asian Elite Migration and Early Modern State Formation', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 51/2 (May 1992): 340–63.

<sup>10</sup> Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History*, 86.

<sup>11</sup> Sunait Chutintaranond, 'Mergui and Tenasserim as Leading Port Cities in the Context of Autonomous History', in: Breazeale (ed.), *From Japan to Arabia: Ayutthaya's Maritime Relations with Asia*, 104–18, here 106–7. This trans-peninsular route was known to Arab travelers and is

Tenasserim has been cosmopolitan for most of its history due to its demographical feature and the fact that its suzerainty was contested by various nations. In the 15th and 16th centuries, Tenasserim was known by the Europeans as a “colony of Moors and Gentiles”.<sup>12</sup> By 1520, there were Portuguese colonies and smaller centers at Tenasserim, Martaban and other places along these coasts.<sup>13</sup> The port city together with Mergui had been the subjects for contest especially between Siam and Burma. From the 1530s, the Burmese rulers developed interest in the commercial potential of Tenasserim, Mergui and Tavoy, and eventually took them. In 1593, the Siamese regained control of Tenasserim and Tavoy for a time.<sup>14</sup> The 17th century was to be a period of relative peace and expansion of Ayutthaya’s trade with the Bay of Bengal, especially through Tenasserim and Mergui.

Apart from Mergui, Tenasserim and Tavoy, Siam also had claims over the Andaman ports and economic centers of Phuket, Trang and Bangkhli. The island of Phuket was part of the Indian Ocean trading network in its own right. It was, according to Dhiravat na Pombejra, “more than a mere link between Ayutthaya and the trade of the Bay of Bengal and the Malay Archipelago. Tin would have been sold in Phuket’s small sea ports even if there had been no capital city or administrative center at Ayutthaya”. Tin was sometimes sold to Japan and China but a ready market was long established in Surat, Coromandel, Bengal and Pondicherry.<sup>15</sup>

#### *Administration of foreign trade*

As a result of the keen interest that the ruling elite of Ayutthaya expressed in acquiring commercial profits, the main economic practices of Ayutthaya were based on state-organized trade. At the same time, the Thai kingdom suffered from the intrinsic problem of inadequacy of manpower. The Ayutthaya state, therefore, allowed foreigners with expertise or assets to occupy positions of low and high rank in its bureaucracy. The inclusion of foreign traders and experts in the bureaucratic hierarchy for trade, defense and territorial administration served as an important method to integrate and keep control of them.

People from the Indian Ocean region had a strong presence in the Thai bureaucracy.

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mentioned in a 1511 account by an Arab geographer. See G.R. Tibbetts, *A Study of the Arabic Texts Containing Material on Southeast Asia* (Leiden/London: Brill, 1979).

<sup>12</sup> Sunait Chutintaranond, ‘Leading Port Cities in the Eastern Martaban Bay in the Context of Autonomous History’, in: idem and Chris Baker (eds.), *Recalling Local Pasts: Autonomous History in Southeast Asia* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2002), 19.

<sup>13</sup> Wil O. Dijk, *Seventeenth-Century Burma and the Dutch East India Company, 1634-1680* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006), 56.

<sup>14</sup> Sunait, ‘Mergui and Tenasserim as Leading Port Cities’, 114-15. On at least two occasions, the Burmese court demanded that Ayutthaya submit the revenues of Tenasserim. In the 1580s, the port city was taken under direct control by the Burmese.

<sup>15</sup> Dhiravat na Pombejra, ‘Towards a History of Seventeenth-Century Phuket’, in: Sunait Chutintaranong and Chris Baker (eds.), *Recalling Local Pasts: Autonomous History in Southeast Asia*, 89-126, here 90, 97-8. Apart from the major markets at Ligor (Nakhon Si Thammarat) and Phuket, tin was traded in the Thai territories of Chaiya, Phunphin, Chumphon, Takuapa and Bangkhli.

Letters from Chinese junks in 1688 mentioned that “[the King of Siam] has a number of powerful officials who are Chinese, Moor and English.” Yoneo Ishii commented that the term ‘Moor’, read as *mouru-jin* in Japanese, refers predominantly to Shia Muslims from India and Persia.<sup>16</sup> Besides a number of those who were appointed governors and administrators of the port cities, the immigrants from India and Persia were assigned places in the royal guards. But the primary site of their activities was in the administration of foreign trade.

The *Krom Phrakhlang* was the ministry responsible for foreign trade, external affairs and diplomatic protocol, and the regulation of immigrant trading communities in Ayutthaya. It was designed to meet the economic, administrative, and social necessities of Ayutthaya as a result of the growth of Siam’s maritime activities and the influx of immigrants into the kingdom. That the *Phrakhlang* Ministry answered directly to the king, the greatest merchant of Siam, assumed the significance of a strong control over trade for the monarchy.<sup>17</sup> Through this institution, the king controlled economic activity by means of royal monopolies, especially the acquisition and sale of import and export produce from and to both local and foreign traders.<sup>18</sup> The ministry incorporated four departments responsible for “(1) General Administration, Appeals, and Records; (2) the Department of Royal Warehouses; (3) the Department of Eastern Maritime Affairs and Crown Junks (*Krom Tha Sai*); and (4) the Department of Western Maritime Affairs (*Krom Tha Khwa*)”.<sup>19</sup>

The head of the *Krom Tha Sai*—a Chinese resident of Ayutthaya—was responsible for trade in the South and East China Seas (especially shipping to and from ports in Southern China, Nagasaki, the Ryukyu Islands, and Vietnam) and had jurisdiction over all Chinese and Japanese in the Thai kingdom.<sup>20</sup> Usually with a Muslim as its head, the *Krom Tha Khwa* was responsible for maritime relations with South and West Asia; the shipping to Ayutthaya by Muslim traders from the Malay Peninsula; and, geographically overlapping with the Eastern Department, the Southeast Asian Archipelagos.<sup>21</sup> The

<sup>16</sup> Yoneo Ishii (ed.), *The Junk Trade from Southeast Asia: Translations from the Tôsen Fusetsugaki, 1674–1723*, Letter 1-22, Ship No. 150, 4 August 1688, 44, 44n30.

<sup>17</sup> Manop Thavornwatsakul, *Ayutthaya Officials* [in Thai], 2nd ed. (Bangkok: Thammasat University, 2004), 137.

<sup>18</sup> J. Kathirithamby-Wells, ‘Introduction: An Overview’, in: ead. and John Villiers (eds.), *The Southeast Asia Port and Polity: Rise and Demise* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1990), 1-16, here 5.

<sup>19</sup> A part of the Three Seals Laws (*Kot Mai Tra Sam Duang*)—the Law of Civil Hierarchy (probably of 1466)—outlines the basic organization of the *Phrakhlang Sinkha*. For a comprehensive survey of this ministry, see Breazeale, “Thai Maritime Trade”, 5-15.

<sup>20</sup> There is no specific study of the *Krom Tha Sai*. Information on Siam’s maritime trade in East Asia is available in Sarasin Viraphol, *Tribute and Profit: Sino-Siamese Trade, 1652–1853* (Cambridge, Mass./London: Harvard University Press, 1977).

<sup>21</sup> For a detailed study of the *Krom Tha Khwa*, see Julispong Jularatana, *Botbat lae nathi khong khunnang krom tha khwa nai samai Ayutthaya thueng samai ratanakosin, 2153–2435* [The *Krom Tha Khwa*: Roles and Functions during the Ayutthaya and Ratanakosin Periods, 1610–1892], 2nd edition (Bangkok: Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, 2007). The emphasis of the book is, however, laid on the later Bangkok period. It also dealt with the Muslim merchants operating in the China seas, when Ming China restricted its own trading activities at sea. It has been explained

Europeans were assigned to both the eastern or western departments depending on from where in Asia they came and who represented their affairs in Siam.

The involvement of people from the Indian Ocean region in the development of the *Phrakhlang* Ministry went back at least as far as the first years of the 17th century. Two brothers, originally from the Persian Gulf, were to play an important role in the Ministry after their arrival in Ayutthaya in 1602. The elder, Sheik Ahmad first became the head of the *Krom Tha Khwa*. King Songtham appointed him as *Phrakhlang* and later the head of the *Mahatthai*, which was one of the highest positions in the kingdom. His younger brother, Muhammad Said became founder of another powerful official family.<sup>22</sup>

Ayutthaya participated in China-centric tributary relations, which meant that its royal court was obliged to periodically send an embassy to present the state letter and gifts as signs of submission to the Chinese emperor in order to obtain permission to trade there. For its westward trade, Siam relied, however, on the operation by experienced private Muslim merchants and owners of commercial fleets. The Siamese court appointed the head of these traders as an official to supervise the westward trade. Therefore, within the Western Maritime Affairs Department and unlike its Eastern equivalent, there was no position for sailing officers, but only the harbor-masters and interpreters who coordinated with the private Muslim and other merchant fleets.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the Western Department also appointed some merchants, who were residents of the ports that were of great importance for the Siamese crown trade, for example a leading Muslim trader in Masulipatnam (Machilipatnam), to act as the local manager of Siam's royal trading transactions.<sup>24</sup>

### Cosmopolitan politics: Cross-community cooperation and conflict

People from the different parts of the Indian Ocean played an important role in the economic and political life of Siam. However, a question as to the identification of their personalities and origins remains, as they were often described as 'Moors' in European historical records and as '*Khaek*', an equivalently troublesome term, in Thai documents. What contemporary Europeans often categorized as the 'Moors', at least when it concerned the case of Siam in the 17th century, actually consisted of peoples of various

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that the Department of Maritime Affairs was originally established to serve the conduct of China-centric tributary relations. Only when the western trade increased significantly, the Department was divided into the eastern and western maritime affairs. See Suebsaeng Promboon, 'Sino-Siamese Tributary Relations, 1282–1853' (Diss., University of Wisconsin, 1971), 35. However, Julispong Chularatana argues that Muslim merchants had long operated across the Indian Ocean, including in Siam; therefore, the Department was supposed to supervise trade with the Chinese and the Asians from the west of the kingdom from the very beginning. See Julispong, 'The *Krom Tha Khwa*', 94-5.

<sup>22</sup> For more details of their roles and family relationships within Siamese politics, see David K. Wyatt, 'A Persian Mission to Siam in the Reign of King Narai', in: idem, *Studies in Thai History* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1994), 90-7; and idem, 'Family Politics in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Siam', in: *ibid*, 98-106.

<sup>23</sup> Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History*, 46, 99.

<sup>24</sup> Breazeale, 'Thai Maritime Trade and the Ministry Responsible', 41.

ethnicities, origins and faiths, especially Persians, Indians, and Ottomans. Among the Persians were those from different regions of Qum, Astārābād, Gīlān, and Māzandarān. The Indians included the Mughals, the Deccanis (Golconda) and the Chulias. While the majority of the Persians and Deccanis were Shi'a Muslims, many of the Mughal and Tamil Muslims were likely to have been followers of Sunni Islam.

The cases presented here involve the Persians or Indo-Persians whose community, especially during the reign of King Narai (r. 1656-1688), was one of the most prominent factions active in the economic and political development of the Siamese kingdom. To investigate their involvement in the selected cases of cooperation and conflict among the foreign groups in the kingdom shall help shed light on the status of these transnational communities and their relationship with power in Ayutthaya.

### *The Persian community in Siam*

Especially during King Narai's reign a considerable number of foreign personnel were recruited by the Siamese court; many were originally from different regions in the Indian Ocean. The king himself had an avid interest in the outside world, which was expressed not only through his involvement in trade, war and diplomacy, but also at the most personal level of his enthusiasm for foreign material and ideas.

Leonard Andaya argues that the Persian presence in Siam in the 17th century was:

not an aberration but the result of a large-scale expansion of Persian trade under the Safavi rulers 'Abbās I (1587-1628) and 'Abbās II (1642-1666). The explosion of Persian Safavi international trade coincided with what Jean Aubin has called the second wave of Islamic expansion in India in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries...

Persian merchants and officials settled in the kingdoms of Bijapur (Vijayapura) and Golkonda and “formed a second base for Persian expansion into Southeast Asia”. The Persians in Ayutthaya were valued “because they were the links to the profitable Persian trade network, and because they were representatives of the prestigious Safavi Empire”.<sup>25</sup>

Following the death of Narai's father, King Prasatthong in 1656, Siam immediately plunged into a succession crisis. In making his bid for the throne, Prince Narai managed to enlist support from young Siamese mandarins and several groups of foreigners in the capital city, such as Japanese-Thais, Pattani Malays, Chams, and Persian (or Indo-Persian) Muslims.<sup>26</sup> The author of *The Ship of Sulaimān*, Ibn Muḥammad Ibrāhīm claimed the Persian party to be the most crucial in the victory of the young prince. They allegedly allowed him to use their religious ceremony 'ta'ziyat' as a pretext to enter

<sup>25</sup> Andaya, 'Ayutthaya and the Persian and Indian Muslim Connection', 135; see also Jean Aubin, 'Marchands de Mer Rouge et du Golfe persique au tournant des 15e et 16e siècles', in: Denys Lombard and Jean Aubin (eds.), *Marchands et hommes d'affaires asiatiques dans l'Océan Indien et la Mer de Chine 13e-20e siècles* (Paris: Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1988), 83-90.

<sup>26</sup> Smith, *The Dutch in Seventeenth-Century Thailand*, 35.

the palace and thus gain access to attack his reigning uncle, King Sri Suthammaracha. Once Narai assumed power in his uncle's place, he showed his gratitude to his Persian supporters by raising their leader, 'Abdu'r-Razzāq, to the position of the head of the Western Maritime Affairs Department, with a high ministerial title Okya Pichit.<sup>27</sup>

Ibn Muḥammad Ibrāhīm might have overemphasized the contribution of his compatriots in Siam's succession struggles. Still, the rise of 'Abdu'r-Razzāq demonstrates the active and crucial involvement of the Persians in politics at the highest level in Siam. Similarly, there was the earlier case of Sheik Aḥmad Qumī, as mentioned above. During King Songtham's reign (r. 1610-1628), Sheik Aḥmad led a group of Persians to assist Siamese officials in suppressing a rebellious attempt by the Japanese in Ayutthaya. This assistance significantly improved the status of Sheik Ahmad's family in the eyes of the king and elevated the status of the Persian community in Ayutthaya.<sup>28</sup> It should be emphasized here that support from not only the Indo-Persians but also other foreign communities was often sought by rivals in Siamese politics, and that these foreigners were often willing to take the side which they deemed to be a (more) promising source of favor. The question is whether they would be fortunate enough to be on the winner's side.

European and Persian sources mention that, for several years, 'Abdu'r-Razzāq (or Okya Pichit) was King Narai's prominent councilor and favorite, and that "no criticism of that individual is tolerated". He also became the most influential person in matters of international trade and foreign affairs with the Indian Ocean and South China Sea regions. 'Abdu'r-Razzāq practically took control of the *Phrakhlang* Ministry, since the incumbent Siamese minister Okya Kosathibodi was often away waging war on behalf of the king.<sup>29</sup> According to *The Ship of Sulaimān*, Okya Pichit not only managed to expand Siamese crown trade in the Bay of Bengal, but he also actively cooperated with Chinese mandarins in Siam to improve the eastern trade networks with China, Taiwan, Japan and Cochin China. Therefore, during this period, one could see the increase of Muslim elements in the *Phrakhlang* Ministry and in Siam's eastward trade and diplomacy.<sup>30</sup>

'Abdu'r-Razzāq had remained in royal favor for less than a decade before he was abruptly eliminated in 1663. According to *The Ship of Sulaimān*, the cause of his sudden fall was his ill behavior and abuse of power.<sup>31</sup> His attempts to expand the Siamese crown trade to the East and, with that, the benefit of his fellow Muslims in Siam caused problems for Dutch merchants in Japan and Portuguese traders in Macao. The increase of wealth and power that the Muslim officials accumulated from their control of trade also

<sup>27</sup> *The Ship of Sulaimān*, 94-8.

<sup>28</sup> Although there is no clear evidence, it is highly possible that he also took a crucial part in helping Chaophraya Si Worawong, his Siamese friend and a prominent official, seize the throne in Siam. Soon after Chaophraya Si Worawong successfully styled himself as King Prasatthong in 1629, Sheik Aḥmad was promoted to be Chaophraya Bawornrathanayok or the head of the ministry of civilian affairs (Mahatthai). The rank of Chaophraya was the highest in the Siamese administration and the head of the Mahattai could be viewed as the prime minister of the kingdom. Julispong, 'The *Krom Tha Khwa*', 139-40.

<sup>29</sup> *The Ship of Sulaimān*, 94-8, 171-2.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 171-2.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

drew the resentment of various Siamese mandarins, especially the *Phrakhlang* minister himself.<sup>32</sup> The combination of the trouble ‘Abdu’r-Razzāq caused and the complaints against him from various directions finally reached the monarch. King Narai severely punished his former favorite who soon died.

However, after the fall of ‘Abdu’r-Razzāq, the Persians and Indo-Persians were still needed for their service in trade and foreign affairs. Another Persian rose to prominence at King Narai’s court: Āqā Muḥammad Astārābādī (or Okya Sri Naowarat) was appointed the head of the Western Maritime Affairs Department and leader of the Persians in Siam. Under Āqā Muḥammad’s leadership between 1664 and 1678, the dominance of the Indian Ocean elements in the Siamese administration seems to have increased even more than before.

Before the rise of Āqā Muḥammad, the scope and activities of the Persian and Indo-Persian officials were limited to the capital city. But during the following two decades, the governorships of the major port cities and towns along Siam’s trade routes to and from the Bay of Bengal—Mergui and Tenasserim, Pranburi, Phetchaburi, Bangkok, Phuket and Bangkli—were all in the hands of Indo-Persian officials associated with Āqā Muḥammad. The Kingdom of Ayutthaya actively participated in the Indian Ocean trade, and intensified commercial and diplomatic relations were established or strengthened with Malabar, Coromandel and the Persian Gulf using royal ships under the command of Indo-Persian *nakhudas*.<sup>33</sup>

In the late 1670s, the English described the state of trading between Siam and the Indian Ocean region, reflecting the dominance of the Indo-Persians in the kingdom’s foreign trade:

“[...] this considerable trade is att present totally engrossed by the Persians & Moores, who are now in effect masters of that parte of the country [*Mergui-Tenasserim*] as well as commerce, which they are bound to acknowledge to the kindness of the premencioned Uphra Synnoratt [*Āqā Muḥammad*], who for 30 years together that hee was of this King’s Cabinet Councell made it his chiefe endeavour, even to his own personal prejudice, to promote the interest of his countrymen and those of the Mahometen religion, wherein hee so farr succeed that the colonies they have planted in those partes doe almost equall the number of the natives, but far exceed them in wealth and power [...]”<sup>34</sup>

Āqā Muḥammad was also responsible for recruiting at least 200 Indo-Persian militia from Persia and India to serve as King Narai’s personal troops and guards.<sup>35</sup> The kings of Siam regularly employed foreign troops, whose commanders are listed as part of the Siamese bureaucracy. Foreign royal guards hired by and for the king were considered the guarantors of the safety of the Ayutthaya rulers.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 173-4, 176.

<sup>33</sup> Subrahmanyam, ‘Iranians Abroad’, 349.

<sup>34</sup> Anthony Farrington and Dhiravat na Pombejra, *The English Factory in Siam, 1612–1685*, vol. 1 (London: British Library, 2007), 512.

<sup>35</sup> *The Ship of Sulaimān*, 100.

*Contesting the Dutch monopoly: Moor-Chinese resistance*

Earlier in the 1640s, the Dutch had wanted to establish a monopoly of tin trade over the entire southwest coast of Malaya, including Phuket, by excluding the ‘Moors’, ‘Gentoos’ (Hindu traders) and the Portuguese. In 1655, the governor of Phuket sold his tin in exchange for Coromandel textiles, although the contract made with the Dutch forbade any dealing in Indian textiles. The failure of the Dutch to monopolize tin trade in Phuket arose from fierce foreign competition, especially from the Muslim and later the English traders, and the resistance of the locals to their monopolistic practices.<sup>36</sup>

As mentioned above, ‘Abdu’r-Razzāq managed to expand the Siamese crown trade in East Asia and thus succeeded in furthering the interests of the Indo-Persian community in Siam in the eastward trade. The main hindrance to his attempts remained, however, the Dutch East India Company (VOC) which, towards the 1680s, had grown into a regional power in Southeast Asia and constantly tried to control or monopolize the trade between Siam and East Asia, especially since the seclusion policy started in Japan. Therefore, an alliance of the ‘Moor’ and Chinese officials at the Thai court was forged during this period in order to further their mutual commercial interests and to resist Dutch monopolistic practices. The Chinese and the Indian Ocean Muslims were employed to operate the Siamese crown junks. They were also sent out to ‘improve’ diplomatic relations with China, Taiwan, Japan and Cochin China in the East.<sup>37</sup> The ‘Moor’-Chinese cooperation in Siam affected the VOC because they bypassed the Dutch in the shipping of Siamese goods to Nagasaki in Japan by using Chinese crews to man their junks and also in attempting to discriminate against Dutch trading in the kingdom. This soon led in the early 1660s to heightened tension between the VOC and the Ayutthaya court.

In 1662, taking advantage of the absence from the capital of the king and prominent officials who were occupied with the war in the north of Siam fighting both Burma (now Myanmar) and Lansang (or Lan Xang, covering much of present-day Laos), ‘Abdu’r-Razzāq and his Chinese accomplices seized upon the unjustified capture of a Siamese crown junk off Hainan by the VOC as an excuse to revoke Dutch trading privileges in Siam. They also ordered their Chinese followers in Ayutthaya to surround the VOC lodge and threaten to torture the Dutch. Although driven into a corner, the Dutch managed to find help from prominent officials returning from the war and submitted their grievances to King Narai, who immediately tried to rectify the situation by reinstating Dutch privileges and severely punishing ‘Abdu’r-Razzāq which led to the latter’s fall from grace.

In spite of King Narai’s accommodating attitude, VOC officials in Batavia (Jakarta) decided that the accumulated problems between the VOC and the Siamese Crown had to be solved on their terms. This resulted in the withdrawal of VOC personnel from Siam and the naval blockade at the mouth of the Chao Phraya River by the VOC (which meant selectively capturing junks sailing to Siam with goods from China and Japan) between September 1663 and February 1664. The conflict was settled with the signing of the

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 101-7.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 171-2.

first Dutch-Siamese Treaty of 1664 which favored the VOC, defining its commercial privileges including freedom to trade in the kingdom and exclusive rights in certain goods, and the precursor of extra-territorial rights of its subjects in Siam.<sup>38</sup>

*Contest for tin: Moors and Chulias vs Siamese and Malays*

After securing the port cities and towns along Siam's western trade route under the control of his Indo-Persian elements, Āqā Muḥammad turned his eyes southward "in wish to make the tin trade an exclusive preserve of their fellow 'Moors', who could then buy up tin at Mergui and ship it to Indian and Persian destinations."<sup>39</sup> Phuket and its surrounding areas held the largest tin deposits in Siam. The area had been ruled by Siamese governors and officials appointed directly by the king, with the local inhabitants, who were mostly of Malay origin, working in the industry. An opportunity for the Indo-Persian faction at court came in the middle of the 1670s, when the incumbent Siamese governor, Okphra Pet was summoned to Ayutthaya for an investigation of his maladministration. According to Dutch sources, despite support from "various grandees", he lost his case because he came up against a powerful adversary, Āqā Muḥammad. Later in 1676, the Persian official sent his own men, two brothers who were "Mogol bred and borne", Muḥammad Beg and Isma'īl Beg, to govern the tin-rich southern towns of Phuket and Bangkhli.

The appointment of the Indians brought about a political shift in the port city of Phuket and its surroundings. According to European sources, most of the Siamese local elite holding office, such as councilors, secretaries, *shabandars*, *bandarees*, and other men of standing were dismissed from their positions and replaced by the Chulias (a Tamil Muslim trading caste from Coromandel). The Malays, supposedly the majority population on the island, who had served as miners, were now threatened with working even harder or else receive severe punishment. The commercial, political and social rivalries among these ethnic groups resulted in the massacre in 1679 of over seventy "Moors and Chulyars", including the two Beg brothers, by the Siamese and Malays in Phuket.<sup>40</sup> According to Dhiravat na Pombejra, the case not only reflected local political conflict, but also reveals the heated competition at the Ayutthaya court during this period since the term "various grandees" who had supported Okphra Pet, the former Siamese governor of Phuket, apparently refers to the Siamese officials led by the *Phrakhlang* minister Kosathibodi (Lek), the great rival of Āqā Muḥammad.<sup>41</sup> The elimination of the Moors in Phuket coincided with the reverse of power at the royal court of the two opponents. The Phuket massacre took place only a few months after Āqā Muḥammad's death in 1678 and the subsequent resumption of full control of the *Phrakhlang* ministry by Kosathibodi (Lek).

<sup>38</sup> For an analysis of the Dutch naval blockade, see Dhiravat na Pombejra, 'The Dutch-Siamese Conflict of 1663–1664: A Reassessment', in Leonard Blussé (ed.), *Around and About Formosa: Essays in Honor of Professor Ts'ao Yung-ho* (Taipei: Ts'ao Yung-ho Foundation for Culture and Education, 2003), 291-306; see also Smith, *The Dutch in Seventeenth-Century Siam*, 37-9.

<sup>39</sup> Dhiravat, 'Towards a History of Seventeenth-Century Phuket', 116.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

*Moor-English dualism in the Siamese bureaucracy*

During the period of Āqā Muḥammad's prominence, another interesting development in Siam was the increasing presence of English country traders in the capital and port cities. They were treated cordially and received some commercial privileges from King Narai, such as those in the tin trade.<sup>42</sup> Some of the English were recruited as assistants to the Moor officials in the Western Maritime Affairs Department, to help operate the Siamese crown junks and conduct Siamese trade in India. Among these English interlopers serving the Ayutthaya court were the White brothers. George White left service with the English East India Company (EIC) and settled down as a pilot in Ayutthaya in the 1670s. Later his younger brother Samuel White joined him and was granted captaincy of a Siamese ship which sailed between Mergui and Masulipatnam, transporting elephants to India and bringing back Indian textiles.<sup>43</sup>

Āqā Muḥammad's favor for the English at this point can be explained by circumstances in the Indian Ocean. From the middle of the 17th century, after having established permanent military posts in Surat, Hooghly and Madras, the EIC rapidly expanded their commercial and political activities in India. They soon became the most formidable power in the Indian Ocean at the expense of other European and Asian traders. Many Muslim merchants, who used to dominate the sea, now needed to adjust themselves by starting to cooperate with the English, sharing in capital and relying on English means of transporting goods. English ships or an English Captain on Indian ships could effectively protect the business from attack by pirates or other European rivals. Another reason for the Siamese to welcome the English might have been due to King Narai's foreign policy. After the clash between the VOC and the Moor-Chinese alliance in Siam, which ended with the signing of an unequal treaty at Siam's disadvantage, the King might have been looking for a European ally to keep the Dutch in check. Therefore, an invitation was extended to the EIC, which had left the kingdom in the 1620s, to return and build a factory in Ayutthaya.<sup>44</sup>

Tempted by the special treatment promised by the Siamese court, the EIC decided to begin active trade in Siam for the second time in 1674.<sup>45</sup> The following year, King Narai granted them the exclusive right to buy tin in Chaiya, Chumporn and Tha Thong under the same conditions as the VOC in Ligor.<sup>46</sup> However, the EIC would soon realize that the Siamese court only wished to use them to counterbalance Dutch power and they would never make enough profit in Siam once the king left them to contest freely with so many competitors in this cosmopolitan market.<sup>47</sup>

The Moor-English cooperation seemed to be interrupted in 1678 by the death of Āqā Muḥammad and the control of trade shifting to the Siamese minister Kosathibodi

<sup>42</sup> Farrington and Dhiravat, *The English Factory in Siam*, vol. 1, 388; Julispong, 'The *Krom Tha Khwa*', 211-12.

<sup>43</sup> E. W. Hutchinson, *Adventurers in Siam in the Seventeenth Century* (London: The Royal Asiatic Society, 1940), 53-5.

<sup>44</sup> Julispong, 'The *Krom Tha Khwa*', 203-4.

<sup>45</sup> Farrington and Dhiravat, *The English Factory in Siam*, vol. 1, 388.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 395; Hutchinson, *Adventurers in Siam*, 77, 79.

(Lek). The EIC tried a new plan to gain access to the royal court by planting a Company agent in the *Phrakhlang* ministry. They introduced the Cephalonia-born Constantine Phaulkon to the service of the *Phrakhlang* minister. Thanks to his linguistic skill and versatility, Phaulkon soon became a favorite employee of Richard Burnaby, the EIC Head Officer in Siam (1678–1681), who in 1680 sent him to serve Kosathibodi (Lek) as an interpreter between the minister and the EIC.<sup>48</sup> However, Burnaby was called out of Siam and the plan to establish a close connection with the royal court was dropped altogether. Phaulkon chose to further his own career in the Siamese bureaucracy and became indispensable to the minister. After the minister's death in 1683, he eventually rose to prominence as the new favorite of King Narai in matters of foreign trade and affairs.<sup>49</sup>

In order to survive at the Siamese court, Phaulkon needed to find allies and assistants to help him control trade. Instead of seeking cooperation with any of the foreign communities based in Ayutthaya, such as the Moors, Chinese or Europeans, the Greek mandarin chose to form a new group of interest of his own by recruiting various European country traders into his service. More than 200 Europeans, mostly English country traders and some Frenchmen were employed in Siamese service during the period of Phaulkon's prominence.<sup>50</sup> He later started forging an alliance between the Siamese court and the French East India Company and the Kingdom of France with the help of French missionaries in Ayutthaya.

The case of Phaulkon was a missed opportunity for the EIC, as the Company could have benefited from his rise to prominence at the Ayutthaya court. In 1683, the new EIC director William Strangh fell out with Phaulkon.<sup>51</sup> The Company finally decided to terminate its trade with Siam again in 1684. The misconduct of the Englishmen, whom the Greek official had hired for royal service, ultimately caused the breakdown in the relationship and King Narai to declare war on the EIC in August 1687.<sup>52</sup>

#### *The exchange of embassies with Persia, 1682–1685*

European (French and Dutch) sources considered the downfall of the prominent Persian officials, especially Āqā Muḥammad and 'Abdu'r-Razzāq, the consequence of accumulated jealousy and intense rivalries between them and Siamese officials who saw themselves deprived of commercial and political power. On the other hand, the Persian source *The Ship of Sulaimān* interestingly emphasizes the rivalry and treachery between factions within the Indo-Persian community itself.

A group of Indo-Persian royal guards, being jealous of their colleagues who had gained more favor and financial support from Āqā Muḥammad, filed a complaint against him with King Narai. They told the king that he had been deceived by Āqā Muḥammad into paying double the going price in India for hiring the Indo-Persian

<sup>48</sup> Hutchinson, *Adventurers in Siam*, 56, 58, 61.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>50</sup> Julispong, 'The *Krom Tha Khwa*', 225, 230.

<sup>51</sup> Hutchinson, *Adventurers in Siam*, 80.

<sup>52</sup> For the tensions building up to Siam's declaration of war on England and the EIC, see *Ibid.*, 123–52.

guards. This accusation outraged the king and had a devastating effect on the Persian official.<sup>53</sup> *The Ship of Sulaimān* relates that the jealousy of the rival faction did not stop at Āqā Muḥammad's death but continued to undermine his sons' career in Siamese maritime affairs. Some in the Persian community even fueled the king's suspicion about the sons having close relations with his younger brother, a potential contender for the throne. Instead of killing them as some hostile Persians suggested, King Narai sent them away from the capital. So ended Āqā Muḥammad's legacy at the court. The new head of the Persian community, appointed by the monarch, was soon murdered by another candidate for the position, and no capable members of the community dared to accept the appointment because they were also "fearing the jealousy of their Iranian peers".<sup>54</sup>

These incidents reflect the lack of unity and fierce hostility among the Indo-Persians in Siam during this period. The disunity within the community itself prevented them from maintaining their political influence on the Siamese administration and opened up the chance for Phaulkon and his peers to replace them in royal service and become King Narai's favored group.

The relationship between Phaulkon and the Indo-Persians during the 1680s, as with other foreign traders, was by no means amicable. With his desire to monopolize foreign trade, he "always looked for any chance to drive the Iranians out, by way of harming their reputation, looking for exposing signs of their disloyalty to the king, and induced him to stop using Muslim services".<sup>55</sup> In 1683, the governors of Mergui and Tenasserim, who had been 'Moors', were replaced by Englishmen appointed by the Greek mandarin.<sup>56</sup> By this time, the control of the *Phrakhlang* ministry and the Siamese-Indian Ocean trade evidently shifted from the Indo-Persians to Phaulkon. Later in 1685, the longstanding control of the Ministry of Interior Civilian Affairs (Mahatthai) by Sheik Ahmad's family since the 1630s was also interrupted, when King Narai also appointed Phaulkon the head of that Ministry.<sup>57</sup>

By 1685, the Indo-Persians seem to have lost most of their prime positions in the Siamese administration to the Greek minister and his friends, while some of them were still able to keep posts of lower profile at court and in the towns along trade routes. When the Persian envoys arrived in Siam in 1685, they met at least two members of this community as town governors. One was a Persian Sayyid Māzandarānī in *PajPurī* (i.e. Phetchaburi) and the other was referred to as 'Chelebī', the governor of 'Sūhān' situated within a short distance from the capital (probably Suphanburi). The latter was "among the people of Rūm", i.e. an Anatolian Turk, who had recently converted to Shi'ism.<sup>58</sup> In Ayutthaya, apart from several Persian palace officers, horsemen, and secretaries, the envoys also met Khwāja Hasan 'Ali, who "presently holds the ministerial post which Āqā Muḥammad held and as such is the head of the Iranian community in Siam."<sup>59</sup>

<sup>53</sup> *The Ship of Sulaimān*, 100-1.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 102-3.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 104, 105.

<sup>56</sup> Dhiravat, 'Towards a History of Seventeenth-Century Phuket', 116.

<sup>57</sup> Wyatt, *Thailand: A Short History*, 112-13.

<sup>58</sup> *The Ship of Sulaimān*, 50-1.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

This minister principally took care of the Persian envoys during their visit to Siam and managed the official ceremonies of diplomatic exchange between the Persians and King Narai in Lopburi.<sup>60</sup>

The Safavi embassy sent to Siam in 1685 was a friendly response to the visit of the Siamese embassy to Persia, led by the Persian Hajjī Salīm, three years earlier. Interestingly, this first diplomatic exchange between the Siamese king and the Shah of Safavi Persia did not take place during the peak of Persian influence in Siam but during the years of their decline. The mission might have been initiated by Āqā Muḥammad just before his death and implemented by those Persian officials remaining in office. Unfortunately for the Persian community in Siam, the Persian embassy arrived when Phaulkon was influential at court and he did not bless this diplomatic exchange. When Hajjī Salīm returned from Iran, the Greek immediately stirred up King Narai's displeasure towards him for overspending and achieving no significant result at the Persian court.<sup>61</sup> While he was the king's most trusted official to deal with foreign affairs, Phaulkon was not involved in or did not pay attention to the reception of the Persian embassy.

The exchange of embassies with Persia might have been part of the strategy of the Persian community to regain the favor of King Narai by emphasizing the greatness of the Shah and the Safavid Empire. In the same way the French strategy, which emphasized the grandeur of King Louis XIV and France, aimed at success. Unfortunately, the efforts of the Persian officials proved to be fruitless. King Narai did not appear to be very enthusiastic about this diplomatic exchange, and the Persian envoys failed to impress him. *The Ship of Sulaimān* also mentions that a few days after the embassy arrived in Ayutthaya, the king arrested Hajjī Salīm on corruption charges, and when they were about to depart, the king's courtiers came to ask them about Hajjī Salīm's expenses while in Persia.<sup>62</sup>

In that same year, the first embassy sent from the court of France arrived in Ayutthaya. Phaulkon and his Jesuit friends had been working for several years to bring the two distant rulers into direct contact. Two Siamese missions had been sent to France: the first one in 1680 was lost at sea, while the second reached the French court in 1684.

The almost coincidental arrivals of the missions from Persia and France have been explained as a reflection of King Narai's enthusiasm to make himself recognized and his kingdom known worldwide. Some have looked at them as a contest between the missionaries of Islam and Christianity for King Narai's soul. However the authors of this article would like to argue that the arrival of the Persian and the French embassies at Ayutthaya in 1685 was a direct result of the struggles between the longstanding Indo-Persian faction and the European newcomers at the Ayutthaya court in order to gain, or regain in the case of the former, attention from the king of Siam.

#### *The Moor-English collaboration against the Dutch in 18th century Siam*

In the 18th century, the VOC was the most regular European partner in trade of the

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 55, 69.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 104-5.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 105.

Siamese court. Despite an unprofitable business, the VOC was resolute in remaining in the Siamese kingdom for strategic reasons, because Ayutthaya was the Company's only platform left to Mainland Southeast Asia.

By the 18th century, there appears to have been an additional practice in Dutch-Siamese business transactions. Instead of paying some taxes to the court, the VOC was obliged to give officials of the Treasury Department, the *Khlang*, the *recognitiegelden* (or *recognitiepenningen*) a sum of twenty *catties* of silver per year for their services. For the officials, occasional gifts and rewards from foreign merchants like the Dutch had always been an important source of personal income. For as long as it had been doing business in Siam, the VOC had been in the habit of offering gifts and money to individual officials. It is not clear who had initiated this system of 'service fee', but, at least from the beginning of the 18th century, the *Khlang* had been collectively receiving, or demanding, this fee which may have helped assure a regular income for its workers. In 1720, the VOC trade director Wijbrand Blom mentioned that this practice had already become a custom and could not be avoided without damaging the Company. Despite Blom's admonition, his instruction was not or could not be followed by his successors; this failure engendered more trouble with the officials.

In 1757, Treasury officials again demanded that the Dutch pay the service fee not only for that particular year but for the previous sixteen years as well. The incumbent VOC trade director, Nicolaas Bang insisted that the Company would rather close down its office again than pay it. Faced with this outright refusal, the *Khlang* officials brought the issue to King Borommakot's attention. Consequently, the King ruled in favor of his men and ordered that, should the Dutch insist on not paying the *recognitiegelden*, the Royal Treasury was allowed to deduct an equal sum from the King's return gifts to Batavia. In his letter to the Governor-General, the *Phrakhlang*, who now played the role of middleman only, confirmed that, despite his attempts to arbitrate, the Royal Treasury insisted upon deducting twenty-five *bahar* of tin from the royal gifts as compensation. This episode can also be seen as an indication of the increasing independence of the officials of the Siamese court and their growing confidence in dealing with foreigners.

The quarrel over the *recognitiegelden* continued even after King Borommakot's reign. The Dutch demanded that the court return, among other things, the above-mentioned part deducted from the previous king's return gifts. In 1758, the Company protested by sending a ship to Ayutthaya without the usual gifts to the king and the *Phrakhlang*. In his turn, the Minister demanded that the Dutch deliver the gifts, or face a breach in their friendship. The translator of the Dutch, who was helping the Minister check the contents of the letters to Batavia, reportedly heard some 'Moor officials' urge the *Phrakhlang* to insist upon the demand for the *recognitiegelden*. Bang believed that the 'Moor' faction at court wanted to undermine the Dutch position in Siam in favor of the English, whom, in the person of a certain 'Mr. Ellias' of Surat, it was helping to gain access to the Siamese market.<sup>63</sup> Despite all the intrigue, Batavia's strategy seems to have worked because, in the end, the *Phrakhlang* reportedly admitted that it was more urgent

<sup>63</sup> VOC 2934, Missive Bang to Batavia, 25 Jan. 1758, fos. 5-8; 9 Feb. 1759, fo. 10.

that the new king, Ekathat, fill his empty treasury with the VOC gifts than pacify his officials with Dutch money.<sup>64</sup>

From the beginning of the 18th century, while the EIC decided to stay away from Siam, the English private traders returned to the kingdom once more. Some of these English merchants tried to intermediate between the English governors in India and the Siamese court. They seemed to find allies at court in the 'Moor' officials, who apparently were in favor of the English more than the Dutch. In 1762, the English governor of Madras (Chennai) sent a letter to the king of Ayutthaya to ask for permission to establish a trading post at Mergui, promising to supply the royal court with Indian textiles at the same prices offered by the VOC.<sup>65</sup> After all, this comeback attempt of the English in India, which had already been set in motion with the help of the 'Moor' officials, came to an end when Ayutthaya was raised to the ground by the determined Burmese troops in 1767.

### Conclusion: Transnational networks and indigenous power

In the Kingdom of Ayutthaya, the capital and port cities, the royal court and the markets, trade and politics alike were the sites of cosmopolitan exchange. The openness of the Siamese ruling elite was motivated not only from seeking the wealth that could be derived from foreign trade, but also by the desire for contributions from immigrants. The inclusion of foreigners in the bureaucratic hierarchy to serve in trade, foreign affairs, defense and territorial administration helped as an important method to combat the intrinsic problem of inadequacy of manpower as well as keeping control of them.

Ayutthaya's westward connections to the Indian Ocean region offer a case to analyze how foreigners could be integrated and become integral in the local system. Under the surface of the common ethnic and religious labels, the treachery among the Persians or Indo-Persians and their competition to gain favor and benefits from the Siamese king led their own community into deterioration. In some other cases, interest groups were formed across ethnic communities in order to gain the optimal result, when they shared mutual interests or faced common enemies. In Ayutthaya, the Chinese-Moor alliance was forged to assist the expansion of their trading activities to East Asia and to fight against a Dutch trade monopoly. In Phuket, the Siamese and the Malays together attempted to eliminate the monopoly of tin trade and the political control of the 'Moors'. In the 17th century, the Moor-English cooperation to render service to the Siamese crown trade in the Indian Ocean graduated to dualism; however, it was to be sought again in the following century. The shifting relations between alliance and antagonism, cooperation and conflict among these foreign communities were influenced by changes in external and internal circumstances.

It appears that the foreigners were well aware of the political dynamics which moved

<sup>64</sup> For more details of the dispute over the *recognitiegelden*, see Bhawan Ruangsilp, *Dutch East India Company Merchants at the Court of Ayutthaya: Dutch Perceptions of the Thai Kingdom, c. 1604–1765* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 193–4.

<sup>65</sup> VOC 3089, Missive Werndlij to Batavia, 28 Jan. 1763, fo. 8; VOC 3152, Missive Werndlij to Batavia, 28 Dec. 1764, fos. 19–21.

towards the center of power, the king. They often tried to influence circumstances in their host society. But all were bound by the same rule of searching for profit and profile in Siam where trade and politics were inseparable and commercial competition and political conflict were intertwined. All of these elements competed with one another to various degrees in order to gain access to the centrality of Siamese power for the trust and favor of the Siamese rulers. Any external group or individual, regardless of political, economic, social or cultural background, could rise and fall in the Siamese system at the whim of the king, who held full power to give and to take all benefits and privileges. The Siamese rulers also promoted a competitive atmosphere by openly allowing whomever could better serve their interests to gain access to the king, and by rewarding them with wealth, prestige and opportunity. This policy subjected external forces like foreign communities to local conditions: that the Siamese king was the center of the cosmopolitan Siamese world. Cosmopolitanism in Ayutthaya was state-promoted and state-controlled.