Alangkapuni: An English Captain at the Siege of Ayutthaya

Dhiravat na Pombejra

Among the very few "Thai" documents concerning the disastrous defeat of 1767 that have survived are the "testimonies" (*khamhaikan*) of Ayutthaya inhabitants captured and taken away to Burma by the victorious invaders. These "testimonies" consist of information given to the captors on the history and other aspects of Ayutthaya. Two versions are extant: one written down in Mon and the other, a Burmese translation, called respectively *Khamhaikan khun luang ha wat* (Testimony of the "king who sought the monastery", or King Uthumphon) and *Khamhaikan chao krung kao* (Testimony of the Ayutthaya people). A third, different document - confusingly titled the *khamhaikan* of Khun Luang Wat Pradu Songtham (another name for King Uthumphon) - provides a detailed description of Ayutthaya but, unlike the other two *khamhaikan*, was not copied down from the testimonies of Siamese war captives.[1]

The story of a certain English sea captain called "Alangkapuni" or "Puni", who came to Siam and presented rare animals to King Ekathat, is told in the testimonies of Ayutthaya residents captured and taken away by the Burmese in 1767, as well as the Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya. The *Khamhaikan chao krung kao* relates that, after the armies of King Alaungpaya had retreated and before the new wave of Burmese attacks had commenced, "the English Westerner Puni brought an ostrich three cubits tall, a lion three cubits tall and three 'Indian'[2] horses to present to the King of Ayutthaya, who ordered court officials to look after them in the royal palace". The *Khamhaikan khun luang ha wa*t's version of the story states that "a sea captain called Alangkapuni brought a lion to present to the great King Ekathat, along with an ostrich. His Majesty gave a reward of money and other gifts to Alangkapuni who had shown loyal respect."[3]

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[1] For a thorough discussion of this evidence, see Sunait Chutintaranond. "Peud kru *khamhaikan khun luang ha wat*" in Vigal Phongpanitanon and Sunait Chutintaranond (eds.). *Yon roi. Khamhaikan khon krung kao: fuen sang likhit adit Ayutthaya*. Bangkok: Historical Commission (Ayutthaya history subcommittee), 2016, 11-26. A shorter, earlier version of my essay on Alangkapuni also appears in that volume (35-42).

[2] The Thai term used here is *thet* (เทศ), which may mean "foreign" or "Indian".

[3] *Khamhaikan chao krung kao*; *Khamhaikan khun luang ha wat* in *Prachum khamhaikan krung si Ayutthaya*. Bangkok: Saengdao, 2010, 127, 498-9; *Khamhaikan khun luang ha wat*. Nonthaburi: Sukhothai Thammathirat University, 2006, 154; Tun Aung Chain (trans./ed.). *Chronicle of Ayutthaya*. Yangon: Myanmar Historical Commission, 2005; Cushman (tr.). *The Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya*. The Siam Society, 499-500. The version by Tun Aung Chain translates the passage as "[t]he Western sparrow [sic] three cubits and one mait high, the lion three cubits high, and the three Western horses presented by the Westerner Poony of England were also kept and reared in the Palace." (96)

One captain, two stories

Alangkapuni's true name is not difficult to find. French missionary records and the history of François-Henri Turpin narrate the adventures in Siam of an English captain whose name was rendered as "Pauni" or "Pauny". A captain "William Poni" trading to Siam features in some Dutch East India Company documents dating back to the 1760s. The true version, William Powney, is of course to be found in English East India Company ("EIC") records, particularly those of Fort St George (Madras).

In the Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya, the anecdote of the English captain is split into two parts. In the context of King Ekathat receiving "exceptional" or "special" animals, notably two elephants with particular characteristics, one with short tusks and the other with toenails all round its feet, the chronicles mention that "Alangkapuni the master of a ship transported one lion and one ostrich" to Ayutthaya and gave them to His Majesty the King. The monarch was "filled with joy" and generously rewarded Alangkapuni for this loyal service. This occurred just after the end of King Alaungpaya's invasion and retreat (in 1760).[4]

By implication, after delivering the animals to the king, Alangkapuni then went back whence he came. Later, as the struggle to save Ayutthaya reached a critical point, the chronicles recount that an anonymous English trader helped the Siamese forces defending the royal capital. During the final siege of Ayutthaya by King Hsinbyushin's armies (1765–1767), an English ship carrying Surat cloth was commandeered by the Siamese to help fight the invaders. The name of the captain is not revealed, but it was related that he was asked by the Kosathibodi (*phrakhlang*) minister to help fight the Burmese in case the latter came back to attack Thonburi. The English fought against the Burmese around Thonburi and the Talat Kaew/Talat Khwan area near Nonthaburi, where Phraya Yomarat was in command of some troops. An enemy camp was attacked, but the English (with their Siamese allies) were deceived by a ruse and ambushed when they entered the camp deliberately vacated by the Burmese. In the fighting, an English supercargo[5] was beheaded by the enemy. The captain became dissatisfied with the royal court after his request for extra guns and boats was rejected. Thereupon he decided to leave, but while doing so he also took with him around 100 Siamese captured in the Thonburi area as they were gathering fruit and betel nuts.[6]

The captain, who brought the exotic animals and helped fight the Burmese, was, of course, one and the same, namely Alangkapuni or William Powney. The French vicar-apostolic, Brigot,[7] gives a detailed account (repeated in Turpin's 1770 work) of the episode. The bishop relates that after attacking and burning several places around

[4] *Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya,* 487.

[5] The chronicles use the word *la ta* (ล้าต้า), meaning the bookkeeper in charge of the cargo on a junk, thus more or less equivalent to a supercargo on a European vessel.

[6] *Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya*, 499-500. The Bangkok-Thonburi area was well known for its fruit trees. Its orchards supplied the city of Ayutthaya. See for example Jeremias van Vliet's "Description of the Kingdom of Siam 1638" in Chris Baker et al. *Van Vliet's Siam*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 2005, 152-3.

[7] Pierre Brigot (1713–1791), Bishop of Thabraca (Tabraca in French) and vicar-apostolic to Siam.

Ayutthaya, right up to the "suburbs", the Burmese retreated to "their town". It was at this point that the "English captain named Pauny" arrived with one large and one small vessel. Since the captain brought a lion and an Arab horse as gifts for the King of Siam, plus a consignment of valuable merchandise of textiles, he was exempted from paying duties. He had, however, been unable to sell his goods except at a loss.[8]

The King of Siam asked Powney to stay on to help defend Ayutthaya. The Englishman, seeing the weakness of the Siamese, declined to do so. The Dutch in Ayutthaya, having built a new brigantine, abandoned their factory in early November, so Powney was allowed to stay at the Dutch East India Company ("VOC") settlement. But living expenses still remained high owing to the state of siege. On 24 December, Powney was drawn into taking part in the fighting because the Burmese attacked his brigantine, which was moored in the Chao Phraya River at Bangkok. Sustained resistance was impossible because the Burmese, ensconced in the fort at Bangkok, were able to use the cannons there to fire at the English ship. The ship's officers therefore decided to tow their vessel to a spot further upriver where the smaller ship was already moored. From there they prevented the Burmese from establishing their fortification by firing at them from both sides of the river and by making some sorties against them.

Having been attacked, Powney agreed to help defend Ayutthaya, on condition that the Siamese court provided him with the requisite cannons and gunpowder, as well as guns and ammunition. He obtained some of the weaponry that he had requested, in return for which he had to deposit some of his merchandise at the king's warehouses. He thus reluctantly left thirty-eight bales of goods there, and kept the rest of his effects in his ships. Powney went on board his ship, which he defended for over a month; at the beginning of that month he submitted a request to the King of Siam for more cannons, gunpowder and cannonballs. The Siamese, realising that the enemy was approaching Ayutthaya from another direction, and not completely trusting the English, granted only a small part of his request. Powney was so infuriated that – after sending to the minister a manifesto against the king – he left, plundering six Chinese junks along the way, one of which belonged to the Siamese king. The rest of the junks had come from China to trade in Siam.[9]

The missionaries' letters were used by François-Henri Turpin in his 1770 history of Siam. In Turpin's work there are references to "Pauni" too. According to Turpin, the King of Siam asked the "brave Englishman" to "take charge" of the city's defence because he had little faith in the ability of his own "cowardly and effeminate followers". Powney declined, aware that the Dutch had just left Siam because they feared for their own safety, and he himself had no confidence in the efficacy of the Siamese forces. Powney was "compelled by necessity" to aid the Siamese war effort. However, as events unfolded his first instinct was to prove right: the Siamese authorities refused to give him the necessary guns and ammunition to organise the defence of the city. Turpin speculates that the Siamese feared that Powney would become too powerful, and maybe

[8] Adrien Launay. *Histoire de la Mission de Siam 1662–1811*, 3 vols, Paris: Charles Douniol et Retaux, 1920. *Documents historiques* vol. II, 229.
[9] Launay. *Documents historiques* vol. II, 229.

even assume authority over them. Turpin's version of Powney leaving the scene in a pique more or less follows Brigot's narration. The Englishman had seized goods on the six Chinese junks as "security" for the thirty bales of cargo that he had deposited in Ayutthaya with the king's men. In a further ironic gesture, the captains of the junks were even given "bills of exchange drawn on the King of Siam" to the value of those goods by the departing Englishman.[10]

William Powney

William Powney was born in Madras (Chennai), and christened on 1 December 1726 at Fort St George.[11] The church in the grounds of the fort is called St Mary's, consecrated in 1680 and thus "the oldest English church in Asia".[12] William was one of the seventeen children of John and Mary Powney, prominent residents of Madras. He received an inheritance of 2,500 pagodas when his father died in 1740. His mother was willed two "dwelling houses", jewels, slaves, horses, a chaise and palanquins, along with 10,000 pagodas in cash. She was wealthy enough to give loans to the EIC, such as a sum of 2,600 pagodas in 1745. Mary Powney outlived her husband by several years, living to become Madras' oldest resident at the age of around 100, and was buried in the compound of St Mary's church.[13]

In 1742–1743, William Powney served as purser on the EIC ship, "Hardwicke".[14] During these years the "Hardwicke", which had sailed east from Portsmouth, went from Bombay (Mumbai) to China, then back to England via the Maldives, Amoy (Xiamen), Melaka, Batavia (Jakarta), Whampoa (Pazhou Island near Guangzhou), Batavia again and St Helena.[15] Powney must therefore have accumulated plenty of experience and first-hand knowledge of the various ports within the EIC's "country" trading orbit. He was then a "writer" in the service of the EIC in Madras, according to data from 1746.[16] A writer was "the most junior grade of overseas servant" in the EIC, nevertheless he formed a vital part of the company's trading machinery, which relied on all business being carried out in writing.[17]

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[10] François-Henri Turpin. *Histoire civile et naturelle du royaume de Siam*. Paris: Costard, 1771, vol. II, 299-303.

[11] "India Births and Baptisms, 1786–1947". Database, FamilySearch https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:FGCD-V6T: 8 December 2014; citing Madras, India, reference; FHL microfilm 463, 296. The Powneys were from Windsor.

[12] D.M. Reid. *The Story of Fort St. George*. Madras: Diocesan Press, 1945, 8.

[13] Julian James Cotton. *Inscriptions on tombs or monuments in Madras possessing historical or archæological interest*. Madras: Government Press, 1905, 19; H.D. Love. *Vestiges of Old Madras, 1640–1800*. London: Murray, 1913, vol. II, 315; *Fort St George Diary and Consultation Book of 1745*. Madras: Government Press, 1930, 129, 136.

[14] Anthony Farrington. *A Biographical Index of East India Company Maritime Service Officers 1600–1834*. London: The British Library, 1999, 635.

[15] Anthony Farrington. *Catalogue of East India Company Ships' Journals and Logs 1600–1834*. London: British Library, 1999, 298.

[16] *Fort St George Diary and Consultation Book of 1746*. Madras: Government Press, 1931, 36, 110.

[17] Anthony Farrington. *Trading Places. The East India Company and Asia 1600–1834*. London:

It seems that by the early 1760s, Powney must have left the company's service to be a sea captain and private trader, though as an EIC employee he would still have been allowed to participate in the "country trade" between ports in India and other Asian regions. The servants of the EIC all hoped to make a fortune from private trading in Asia, chiefly through "country trade". According to VOC sources, William Powney was charged with duties as a negotiator on the EIC's behalf when sailing to Siam to trade both in 1762 and 1765, denoting his close ties with senior EIC figures in both Madras and Bombay.

William Powney arrived at Ayutthaya in 1762 in a two-masted ship to trade, but was also empowered by the "governor" (President) of Madras[18] to negotiate on his behalf. He presented a letter to the King of Siam on behalf of the governor. Through their contacts in Ayutthaya, the Dutch tried to follow the negotiations between Powney and the royal court of Siam. They had also tried to find out the exact contents of the letter from Madras, but to no avail. They did find out, however, that the EIC in Madras wanted free trade in Siam, as well as the king's permission to set up a factory at Mergui (Myeik), where they hoped to sell textiles (presumably Indian). Powney seems to have got nowhere in these negotiations. Although the VOC resident, Abraham Werndlij, stressed that the Siamese court was averse to novelties ("*nieuwigheden*"), the whole picture might change if the Dutch were to leave Ayutthaya. In other words, the English could well step in to replace the Dutch and conclude a treaty with Siam. Werndlij even ventures to speculate that the English might well obtain certain advantages from having a factory in Mergui: proximity to the tin-rich areas of the peninsula, the sappanwood forests, the wild elephants and their ivory. Besides, in the safe harbour of Mergui the EIC would be able to refit ships and negotiate trade far from the prying eyes of the royal court, whereas the VOC has had to do its business from a lodge directly "beneath the walls of the city and surrounded by the king's servants".[19]

The EIC's power in India was growing apace in the mid-18th century, especially with victory in the Seven Years War. Robert Clive defeated the nawab of Bengal Siraj-ud-daula and his French allies at the Battle of Plassey in 1757, giving the British virtual control over Bengal. Shortly afterwards, the British gained the upper hand in their contest with the French for superiority in southern India, such as victory at Wandiwash in 1760 and the subsequent taking of Pondicherry.[20] It was not surprising that the Dutch in Ayutthaya were wary of possible British ambitions in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Southeast Asia, even though the EIC had for the greater part of the late 17th century and 18th century left trade with Southeast Asia to the "country" traders. Company interest in Southeast Asia was limited to maintaining a presence at Benkulen (Bengkulu), a pepper

British Library, 2002, 72.

[18] George Pigot (1719–1777), later 1st Baron Pigot.

[19] VOC 3152, Abraham Werndlij to G-G and council, 28 Dec. 1764, fs. 19-22 (references in this article to "VOC" refer to documents in the Nationaal Archief (National Archives) in Den Haag; see also Bhawan Ruangsilp. *Dutch East India Company Merchants at the Court of Ayutthaya: Dutch Perceptions of the Thai Kingdom, c.1604–1765*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007, 211.

[20] Holden Furber. *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient, 1600–1800*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1976, 164-9.

port on Sumatra. In 1764, Captain Joseph Jackson wrote to Robert Palk, Governor of Madras, that trade in the Gulf of Siam was potentially "equall or superior to either the Coast of Choromandell or that of Malabar", recommending that the company open a factory at Ligor (Nakhon Si Thammarat) to obtain a share of the abundant tin to be found there.[21] The EIC's interest in Siam was, however, primarily on the Bay of Bengal side, hence its tentative approach to the Ayutthaya court on the subject of establishing an agency at Mergui, a port it had once tried to take.[22]

In terms of Anglo-Siamese relations, Powney's 1762 voyage had also been made in the context of an incident at Junkceylon (Phuket). In 1756, Captain John Mackmath's vessel, the "Northumberland", had been attacked and seized by men of the Sultan of Kedah and the governor of Phuket, its crew massacred and cargo plundered. Protests and recriminations over this affair lasted until at least 1760, and had threatened to disrupt the busy commerce between southern India and Siam, as well as Kedah: reprisals against shipping from the latter areas were deliberated by the EIC authorities at Madras. Fortunately for the Siamese, Madras decided not to seize any of their ships sailing to the Coromandel Coast.[23]

On the whole, there was mutual respect and understanding between the British and the Siamese authorities. The Fort St George papers reveal that diplomacy was occasionally used to smooth the course of a trade which could involve fiery characters, unruly elements or even outright piracy. Very soon after the "Northumberland" incident, the King of Siam (Borommakot) sent to the Governor of Madras a letter, asking that he favour and protect the ships that have sailed there from Siam. Along with this letter a young Siamese elephant was gifted to the governor.[24]

In 1762, William Powney had his ship repaired in Siam, where timber suitable for shipbuilding was plentiful. He was obliged to wait some time for his vessel to be seaworthy for the voyage back to the Coromandel Coast. Maerten Huijsvoorn, a Dutch envoy who was in Ayutthaya at the time, became worried that the English captain could discover some secrets that he would then reveal to his compatriots in India. At that juncture, the VOC was devising plans to topple the hostile King of Kandy, Kirti Sri Rajasinha (r. 1747–1782), and replace him with a Siamese prince, Kromamun Thepphiphit.[25] The prince had been ordained, and then taken to Ceylon by the VOC, which to the reigning Siamese king, Ekathat, was a convenient way of removing him from

[21] *Records of Fort St George. Letters to Fort St George 1765*. Madras: Government Press, 1946, 85-7 (Joseph Jackson to Robert Palk, Canton 7 Nov. 1765).

[22] Anthony Farrington and Dhiravat na Pombejra (eds.). *The English Factory in Siam 1612–1685*, 2 vols., London: British Library, 2007, Vol. II, Doc. 647, 1078-1082 (Commission and instructions from Madras to Hodges, Weltden and Perriman, 22 Aug. 1687).

[23] See the *Records of Fort St George*, for example *Country Correspondence, Military Department, 1757*. Madras: Government Press, 1913, 214 and 215; *Diary and Consultation Book (Public Department) 1757*. Madras: Government Press, 1947, 202, 203, 204-5, 206-9; *Diary and Consultation Book (Public Department) 1759*. Madras: Government Press, 1953, 212; *Diary and Consultation Book (Public Department) 1760*. Madras: Government Press, 1953, 171.

[24] *Records of Fort St George. Country Correspondence, Military Department, 1757*. Madras: Government Press, 1913, 214 and 215.

[25] Kromamun Thepphiphit, born Phra Ong Chao Khaek, was a son of King Borommakot.

the political stage in Ayutthaya.[26] This series of conspiracies in the end came to nought. An assassination attempt on the Kandyan king in 1760 failed, resulting in the monk-prince's return to Siam where he was detained at Mergui or Tenasserim (Tanintharyi), the court not wanting him back in Ayutthaya. Huijsvoorn's mission to obtain the prince's person, or that of his son, to be used as potential alternatives to the reigning King of Kandy, only led to the court's further suspicion of both the Dutch themselves and Prince Thepphiphit. It was even feared that the Dutch were plotting to overthrow King Ekathat and replace him with Thepphiphit. The intrepid prince, however, was to survive both his own detention in Tenasserim and the fall of Ayutthaya, establishing his power at Phimai in 1767 before finally succumbing to the forces of Phya Tak the following year. Since no correspondence from Powney concerning his 1762 mission to Siam seems to have survived, there is no way to know whether he actually relayed any gossip about Prince Thepphiphit and the VOC to the English authorities in India.

In late 1765, as Werndlij, the Dutch resident, was about to close down the VOC's Siam factory, he reported that William Powney had arrived at Ayutthaya again, on a private ship with a cargo of textiles, but also empowered to negotiate with the court on behalf of the "governor" of Bombay.[27] It should be noted that, unlike Werndlij, the French vicar-apostolic, Mgr. Brigot, mentions only the commercial aspect of Powney's voyage, and not the diplomatic one. Werndlij's data specifying that Powney came as an envoy of the EIC at Bombay helps explain why the Siamese chronicles recount that the English captain brought a cargo of "Surat" textiles, rather than cloth from the Coromandel Coast or Bengal. In a slight variation on the French and Siamese versions of the story, the Dutch reported that Powney had brought two lions and a Persian (Iranian) horse to present to the King of Siam, with no mention of an ostrich.[28]

The Powney family and English country trade to Siam in the 18th century

William Powney was almost definitely the last Englishman to have traded with the kingdom of Ayutthaya. Before Powney's voyages, however, the English had a long, if chequered, history of commercial contact with Siam. Trading relations between Ayutthaya and the English had begun in 1612. The EIC's ambition was to conduct a thriving trade between Southeast Asia and Japan, in the manner of the Dutch, and also to obtain a share of the spice and pepper trade. After abandoning its Siam factory in the late 1620s the EIC returned to Ayutthaya and reopened its trading post in the reign of King Narai (1656–1688). Beset by various local difficulties and by lack of resources, as well as an inability to re-enter the Japan market, the EIC again closed down its Ayutthaya factory in 1685. The EIC tried to solve the problem of "interlopers", who were using benefits from their employment in Siamese royal service to undermine

[26] VOC 3032, Report by Maerten Huijsvoorn et al., 13 Dec. 1762. For a summary of the VOC's dealings with Prince Thepphiphit see Bhawan Ruangsilp. *Dutch East India Company Merchants*, 208-12. Throughout much of his long reign King Kirti Sri Rajasinha was looking for allies, including the English, to act as counterpoise to Dutch power.

[27] Charles Crommelin (1717–1788).

[28] VOC 3152, Werndlij to G-G and council, 18 Nov. 1765, fs. 13-14.

company trade, and even attempted to send ships to take the port of Mergui in 1687, but this plan misfired. Around 100 Englishmen were massacred at Mergui, and a state of war between the Siamese court and the EIC existed for the period up until the death of King Narai in July 1688. This "war" died a natural death, as the court of King Phetracha (r. 1688–1703) was unwilling to pay debts owed to the EIC by Constantine Phaulkon, its former employee and King Narai's favourite. On its part, the EIC was wary about sanctioning any act of hostility against Siam at a time when there were still English ships and traders in the Siamese kingdom.[29]

The EIC factory in Ayutthaya was never again reopened, but English trade with Siam resumed quite soon after 1688, right at the beginning of King Phetracha's reign.[30] The disruptions caused by the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's invasion of the sultanates of Bijapur and Golconda did not stop maritime trade between the Indian Bay of Bengal ports and Southeast Asia, including the "country trade" carried on by private shipping. The involvement of British country traders in the commerce of Ayutthaya, Mergui and Phuket brought Indian textiles from the main production centres of Gujarat, the Coromandel Coast and Bengal to Siam, and took away goods such as tin and ivory to India. Some country traders were EIC employees allowed to engage in private trade, others independent captains and merchants. The ships were skippered by Englishmen, Scotsmen, Armenians, Portuguese and others. Agents were sometimes stationed temporarily at ports like Ayutthaya, such as James Collison acting as Governor Collett's agent (or "Resident") around 1718–1719.[31] Country trade routes and networks stretched from the ports in the Arabian Sea to Manila. The country trade to Southeast Asia was a very international affair, and was tied to the trade, commodities and ports involved in the system, rather than to any purely national interests.[32]

That William Powney should have been given official duties on behalf of the EIC was perhaps only natural, for the Powney family was no stranger to Siam and its royal court, having regularly played a part in the country trade between Madras (principally) and Ayutthaya. The senior officers at Fort St George in Madras in the 18th century were familiar with the Powneys. Indeed, Henry Powney, one of William's brothers, "entered the civil service in 1736, and rose to be Sixth of Council at Fort St George in 1754", though by 1760 he had become a "private resident".[33]

In 1718, William Powney's father, John, had been in Siam as the envoy of the Governor of Madras, engaged in negotiations with the *phrakhlang* minister of Siam concerning the seizure by the English of an Amoy (Xiamen) junk belonging to "the

[29] D.K. Bassett. "English relations with Siam in the seventeenth century" in *Journal of the Malayan Branch, Royal Asiatic Society* 34/2 (1961), 90-105; Farrington and Dhiravat. *English Factory in Siam*, vol. I, 1-21 (Introduction); a colourful account of the Mergui episode may be found in Maurice Collis. *Siamese White*. London: Faber, new edn. 1951.

[30] Farrington and Dhiravat. *English Factory in Siam*, Vol. II, 1368 (Doc. 756, Harris and council at Surat to EIC, 4 May 1691), 1371 (Ship arrivals & departures, Madras/Siam 1689–1750)

[31] Alexander Hamilton. *A New Account of the East Indies*. London: The Argonaut Press, 1930, 2 vols., Vol. II, 98-100.

[32] See for instance D.K. Bassett. "British country trade and local trade networks in the Thai and Malay states c.1680–1770". *Modern Asian Studies* 23 (1989), 625-43.

[33] H.D. Love. *Vestiges of Old Madras*, Vol. II, 315.

King of Siam".[34] He travelled to Ayutthaya in the ship "Britannia", with 1,200 pagodas of the EIC's money, empowered to settle the matter of the Amoy junk, which he did successfully, at the cost of 2,450 pagodas. He was later recompensed by the company a sum of 1,250 pagodas.[35] On top of settling the Amoy junk affair, Powney also managed to obtain favourable trading terms for English ships from Madras, negotiated on behalf of Governor Collett.[36] The Siamese agreed to the terms because they hoped for reciprocal favours at Madras for Siamese vessels. This arrangement angered the Scottish captain Alexander Hamilton, who went from Bombay to trade at Ayutthaya not long after Powney, and found that the high customs duty of eight per cent, plus measurage dues, made it impossible for him to trade with any profit in Siam. Hamilton was furious because such terms disadvantaged British ships from other Indian ports, namely Bengal and Bombay. He threatened to obtain redress somehow from either Powney or the Siamese. Both Powney and Hamilton were later censured by the Court of Directors who, while disapproving of Hamilton's threatening behaviour, deplored any negotiated terms favouring one group of British traders at the expense of other equally legitimate interests.[37]

During the 1730s, another of William's brothers, Charles, had also been trading in Ayutthaya. He was supercargo of a ship commanded by Henry Cleave ("Harry Klief" in Dutch sources), which arrived at Ayutthaya in October 1732. Powney returned to Madras in 1733 and left behind Cleave, who was detained in prison by order of King Thaisa, accused of having been "too close to the court women". Rumour further had it that the two court ladies involved had already been put to death for behaviour that would have been seriously in breach of the Palace Law.[38] Cleave was later pardoned by the King of Siam and allowed to return to Madras, but only after Fort St George had sent a letter and gifts to express thanks to the king for having spared the captain's life and shown mercy for his misdeeds. The governor's letter apparently stated that he had wanted Cleave to be sent back to Madras, to be punished there as an example to others.[39] Henry Cleave was certainly not executed after returning to India: indeed, the EIC's

[34] King Thaisa or Phumintharacha (r. 1709–1733); from a closer look at the documents it appears that this Amoy junk in fact belonged to the Chaophraya Phrakhlang, at that time an ethnic Chinese official whose family was said to come from Amoy.

[35] *Records of Fort St George. Despatches to England, 1719–1727*. Madras: Government Press, 1929, 41 (Gen. Letter, 20 Jan. 1721).

[36] Joseph Collett, also spelled "Collet" (1673–1725).

[37] See Sir William Foster's introduction to Alexander Hamilton. *A New Account*, Vol. I, xxx-xxxii, and Hamilton's own account in Hamilton. *A New* Account, Vol. II, 98-101; *Records of Fort St George. Despatches to England, 1719–1727*, 6 (Abstract of Gen. Letter, 29 July 1719); the Dutch mention John Powney's 1718 voyage to Ayutthaya too in VOC 1926, W. Blom and council to G-G and council, 15 Oct. 1719, f. 93.

[38] VOC 2239, Siam *dagregister*, 10 Oct. 1732 entry, f. 82; VOC 2286, P. Sijen and council to G-G and council, 30 Nov. 1733, f. 45; VOC 2286, P. Sijen and council to G-G and council, 31 Dec. 1733, f. 102. For details of the Palace Law clauses concerning the Inner Palace, see Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit (tr. and eds.). *The Palace Law of Ayutthaya and the Thammasat. Law and Kingship in Siam*. Ithaca NY: Cornell, 2016, 105-8.

[39] VOC 2315, De Ghij and council to G-G and council, 24 Dec. 1734, f. 39.

Madras records of 1738 refer to him as having arrived from Bengal on the "Wakefield" as "master" of that ship.[40]

Country trade brought the English – both EIC employees and private traders – many commodities from the ports of East and Southeast Asia, and took Indian textiles to the local courts and markets, but these contacts sometimes led to conflicts, which arose from the real and perceived misdemeanours of one party or the other. The interventions of EIC officers in Madras and Bombay, through contact with the royal court of Ayutthaya, reflected the ambiguous status of these country traders: they often travelled to Siam with EIC interests or investment, and some of the men must have been employees of the company. It was, therefore, in the interest of the EIC, as well as the private traders and sea captains, to help smooth over any misunderstandings, or conversely to try and demand justice for any wrongs suffered in the King of Siam's territories.

Rare, valuable and auspicious animals

The unloading of a cargo containing a lion, an ostrich and an Arab horse (or more) must have created quite a stir in the port of Ayutthaya, even at a time of war and anxiety. What made the Siamese court wish for a lion, an ostrich and an Arab horse? There is no evidence of the court ordering or buying these animals, and the Siamese versions of Alangkapuni's story state that the captain presented them to King Ekathat as gifts. Perhaps Powney learned about the king's desire to obtain a lion and an ostrich during his earlier sojourn in Ayutthaya in 1762.

It is, however, not difficult to explain the demand for Arab or Persian horses, since they had always been highly prized by the rulers of Asia as equine specimens. Such horses were readily available to the rulers in India, but many also made their way to Southeast Asia over the centuries. The Persian embassy of Sulaiman, the Safavid shah, brought Persian horses as presents for King Narai in 1685.[41] Although the Persians were distinctly unimpressed by the Ayutthaya court's treatment (or mistreatment) of these horses, they acknowledged that the Siamese knew well the market price for imported horses. The king of Siam regularly used horses of quality in his court: ceremonially and as mounts for the "Moor" royal horse guard. Although they had the potential to be warhorses, these handsome animals were used principally in the grandly elaborate processions that helped make visible the majesty of the Ayutthaya monarch. The possession of a horse and an elephant of the highest quality was part of the seven accoutrements of the Buddhist wheel-turning king, according to the Tripitaka.[42] Arab and Persian horses, however, were too difficult (or expensive) to import in large quantities, causing the Siamese court to turn to Java for its supply of quality horses.[43]

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[40] *Records of Fort St George. Diary and Consultation Book of 1738*. Madras: Government Press, 1930, 196; *Letters from Fort St George 1739*. Madras: Government Press, 1931, 3.

[41] Ibn Muhammad Ibrahim Muhammad Rabi. *The Ship of Sulaiman*. John O'Kane (tr.). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972, 85.

[42] *Phra traibidok lae atthakatha thai* (Tripitaka). Mahamakut Buddhist University edition, Bangkok, 1982, "Chakkawattisut" in "Phra suttantabidok tikhanikai patikawak", Book 3 Part 1, 99-100.

[43] Dhiravat na Pombejra. "Javanese Horses for the Court of Ayutthaya" in Greg Bankoff and Sandra

The lion, brought by Powney from Bombay to Siam, was likely to have been an Asiatic lion (*Panthera leo persica*), which may still be found in the wild today in Gujarat, although it is now a "critically endangered" species.[44] As for the ostrich, it was probably transported from either Africa or the Middle East to Bombay. Asian and European rulers alike have, from ancient times, been keen not only on hunting wild animals, but also on obtaining and keeping rare expensive animals and birds in their palaces. A king with recourse to the resources of an overseas empire was able to send exotic animals to other potentates, such as when Portugal's King Manuel I (r. 1495–1521), who himself "collected" Asian elephants, sent a rhinoceros as a gift to Pope Leo X.[45] The Mughal emperor Jahangir (r. 1605–1627) was interested in obtaining unusual animals not only for curiosity's sake, but even as a scientific pursuit.[46] The English monarchs maintained a menagerie at the Tower of London from mediaeval times until 1832, when the animals were moved to London Zoo in Regent's Park.[47] King Louis XIV (r. 1643–1715) had two royal menageries built, one at Vincennes and a more elaborate one at Versailles. Although no remains of a menagerie have been found in Ayutthaya's Royal Palace, there is a great likelihood that one must have existed.

Dutch sources of the 17th century, especially those dating to the reigns of King Prasatthong (1629–1656) and King Narai, frequently mention that the court of Ayutthaya wanted the VOC to bring animal or bird specimens not found in Siam. The court of King Prasatthong was well aware that the Dutch traded over a vast expanse of seas and islands, and its requests reflected this. Thus, there were orders for lories, cockatoos, sheep, even large dogs from Taiwan, although it is not known if the Dutch complied with all these requests.[48] During the reign of King Narai, the Siamese court seems to have been more successful in asking the VOC to bring various kinds of cockatoos, lories and parrots.[49] It would have been logical, therefore, to ask the English, with their wide commercial reach on the Indian subcontinent, to bring to King Ekathat animals that must have been considered exotic or, in the lion's case, almost mythical.

To put Powney's lion, ostrich and Arab horse into an even more precise textual context, it is necessary to recall that the passage in the *khamhaikan* and Royal Chronicles occurs in the context of King Ekathat receiving rare animals from abroad. As well as the lion, the ostrich and the Arab horse, the last king of Ayutthaya also obtained a white

S. Swart (eds.). *Breeds of Empire*. Copenhagen: NIAS, 2007, 65-81.

[44] See, for example, the website http://www.asiaticlion.org/.

[45] Annemarie Jordan Gschwend. "Exotic animals in Sixteenth-Century Europe" in Anna Jackson and Amin Jaffer (eds.). *Encounters. The Meeting of Asia and Europe 1500–1800*. London: V&A, 2004, 42-3.

[46] Michael H. Fisher. *The Mughal Empire*. London/New York: Tauris, 2016, 153. Apart from the usual stables of horses and elephants, plus some 12,000 deer, Jahangir's predecessor, Akbar, also kept a kennel of dogs, which scandalised orthodox Muslims; see Abraham Eraly. *The Mughal Throne*. London: Phoenix, 2004, 176, 250-1.

[47] Ben Weinreb, Christopher Hibbert, Julia Keay and John Keay. *The London Encyclopaedia*. London: Macmillan, 2008, 925, 929 and 930 ("Tower of London" entry).

[48] VOC 1139, Van Vliet's report, 28 May 1642, f. 793; VOC 1187, Craijers to G-G, 20 Oct. 1651.

[49] VOC 1350, Phrakhlang to G-G, 1679, f. 491; Faa to G-G and council, 29 Nov. 1679, f. 441; VOC 1407, List of goods for the King of Siam, f. 3224 verso.

elephant from the "Phraya Raya of Sai" (Raja or Sultan of Kedah).[50] To be in possession of "special" animals (especially a white elephant) obviously bolstered his prestige as a ruler whose power and influence stretched far and wide.

Context of war and economic crisis

The testimonies of the former residents of Ayutthaya may have placed the story of Alangkapuni in a context glorifying the King of Siam, but the last two to three years of King Ekathat's reign were far from glorious. Indeed, both government and economy were put under severe pressure by the Burmese invasions.

Physically scarred by disease, not favoured even by his own father, King Borommakot, and last monarch of a kingdom that had thrived for over four centuries, King Ekathat has not surprisingly been assessed by posterity in a negative way. Primary sources show that the administration and economy of Siam did encounter severe problems in the final years of his reign, even if they did not all stem from ill judgment on the part of the king. It could be argued that the seeds of political disharmony had been sown by the strategy of King Borommakot to dilute the power of his sons, by giving most of them their own department or *krom*. Instead of making each of the *krom* princes weak, this tactic backfired when these princes used their resources to engage in continuous factional fighting. Indeed, infighting among the *krom* princes led, in part, to the downfall and death of the *phra maha uparat* Prince Thammathibet. King Borommakot's later decision to choose Prince Uthumphon as his successor, even though Prince Ekathat was older, may have been based on merit, but it led to a fatally divided court. Politics throughout the reign suffered from the dissensions between the *khunnang* who were loyal to King Uthumphon and those who supported King Ekathat.[51]

The last VOC letters written in Siam reveal in some detail the court conflicts as well as the rapid breakdown in Siam's trade and economy, as the treasury emptied and the crown's storehouses were starved of the produce that could be used as export commodities in foreign trade. Abraham Werndlij believed that the shortage of export goods was directly caused by the Burmese conquest of certain key provinces of the kingdom, such as Tenasserim (whose port, Mergui, was Siam's main outlet onto the Indian Ocean), Kui (Kui Buri), Chumphon, Kanburi (Kanchanaburi) and Phetburi (Phetchaburi). These losses were of great economic significance because the areas taken by the invaders contained many of the goods which Siam exported regularly: tin, lead, sappanwood and ivory. The inhabitants of Ayutthaya, from the highest prince to the lowliest resident, were unwilling to spend any money on trade. Thus, it was impossible for William Powney to sell any of his textiles, because there were no buyers for quality cloth from India. Werndlij thought that the residents of Ayutthaya were more likely to

[50] *Khamhaikan khun luang ha wat*, 154.

[51] On the politics of King Borommakot's reign, see for example Busakorn Lailert. "The Ban Phlu Luang Dynasty 1688–1767. A Study of the Thai Monarchy During the Closing Years of the Ayuthya Period", unpubl. PhD thesis, University of London 1972, Chapter IV; Bhawan has used Dutch sources to analyse this period's politics too in her *Dutch East India Company Merchants*, 181-208.

keep their cash in hand, with the aim of fleeing the city to take refuge in Cambodia, once the invaders began attacking the city itself.[52]

In his last letter as VOC resident in Siam, Werndlij paints a vivid picture of a polity and society in disintegration. Faced with the encroachment of the invading forces, the people of Ayutthaya looked to the royal court for leadership, but found little inspiration from that quarter. On the contrary, the court was put into a panic when the Burmese threatened to mount a direct attack on Ayutthaya in May 1766. The assault did not occur, but during this episode the Dutch were especially scandalised by the king's abject offer of a reward to anyone who could devise the best way to combat the invaders, evidence which surely confirmed the VOC's wisdom in ordering the closure of its Siam factory.[53]

William Powney in historiography

The role of Alangkapuni or Powney in Siamese popular memory and chronicle has been outlined above. The English captain has also figured in subsequent historiography in the context of the final siege of Ayutthaya.

HRH Prince Damrong Rajanubhab's book, published in 1917, on the wars between Siam and the Burmese does not mention Powney by name, but retells the story from the Royal Chronicles about the English sea captain who helped fight the Burmese near Thonburi. The prince also recounts the effect that Powney's departure had on the Siamese forces – Phraya Yomarat, seeing the English leave Thonburi, himself abandoned the neighbouring town of Nonthaburi, which promptly fell to the invaders.[54]

In 1924, W.A.R. Wood, the then British Consul-General in Thailand, published *A History of Siam*. In this pioneering work, the first history of the country in the English language, Wood's narrative of the fall of Ayutthaya singles out King Ekathat as a particularly incompetent ruler, "inefficient and debauched". Contrasted with that abject figure was the "brave" and heroic English captain Powney, who inflicted great damage on the Burmese forces, but was let down by the Siamese ruler. Wood's interpretation of why the court of King Ekathat refused to supply Powney with more ammunition was that the king had become "jealous" of the captain, "and the people saw in him a potential second Phaulkon".[55]

E.W. Hutchinson, in his classic study of European "adventurers" in Siam in the 17th century, ends his book with musings on the role and impact of Phaulkon, the most notable adventurer of all, but also touches on how, after the "revolution" of 1688, Siam isolated itself from the outside world:

> The … period begins with the triumph of this nationalist opposition led by P'ra P'et Racha, who on King Narai's death gave effect to the anti-foreign sentiment

[52] VOC 3152, Werndlij to G-G and council, 18 Nov. 1765, fs. 4, 13-14, esp. fs. 4-5.
[53] See Bhawan. *Dutch East India Company Merchants*, 214-18; VOC 3152, Werndlij to G-G and council, 18 Nov. 1765, fs. 3-23.
[54] Prince Damrong Rajanubhab. *Phongsawadan ruang thai rop phama*, Bangkok: Matichon, 2002 [1920], 341-2.
[55] W. A. R. Wood. *A History of Siam*. Bangkok: Chalermnit, 1959 [1924], 245-6.

arising out of that king's ill-judged policy.

These reactions were responsible in the following century for an obstinate fanaticism against which the missionaries were powerless to contend. It ended by producing a spirit of blind and arrogant self-sufficiency in the Siamese, who, when threatened with annihilation by the Burmese in 1765, showed little appreciation of the aid offered by Pauni, the captain of an armed English merchant ship which happened to be in Bangkok at the time.[56]

Hutchinson was thus following Wood's depiction of Powney as a potential military saviour of Ayutthaya, albeit in a less emphatic way.

The figure of Alangkapuni: some conclusions

Looking at the story of Alangkapuni in its different contexts gives us glimpses into how the people who lived through the last days of Ayutthaya used it to help explain the city's fall. These contexts also reveal some key aspects in the commercial, diplomatic, political and military history of Siam at the very end of the Ayutthaya era.

The Western accounts portray Powney either as a typical European trader-adventurer, who became embroiled in the internal affairs of an Asiatic state, or as a private trading captain who was, nevertheless, also entrusted with diplomatic responsibilities. Brigot, the French vicar-apostolic, gives a vivid account of Powney's fight against the Burmese, as if to show that a little more zeal and vigour on the part of Ayutthaya's defenders might well have resulted in a different outcome to the war, although the bishop does not condone the manner of the English captain's departure.

If the Dutch data on Powney concentrates mainly on the trading aspect of his involvement in Siam, it also pays keen attention to the negotiations the Englishman was asked to undertake on behalf of both Madras and Bombay. The English were viewed as rivals, or possible usurpers of the Dutch role in Siam, even though VOC trade in Ayutthaya was by the 1760s unprofitable, and the trading agency due for imminent closure. The Dutch were well aware of the increasing influence the EIC was wielding in Bengal, and the possible repercussions on all trade in the Bay of Bengal.

Siamese versions of Powney or Alangkapuni, particularly the *khamhaikan*, reveal aspects of the "collective memory" held by the captured inhabitants of Ayutthaya: cherishing the regular arrival in Siam of foreign trading ships, as well as showing pride in the possession by the king of auspicious and rare animals, even at a time of impending defeat. It was not just the lion, ostrich and horses from India that were remembered by the Siamese prisoners interviewed by their Burmese captors, but also the white elephant received from the ruler of Kedah and the elephant with extraordinary toenails.

The *Khamhaikan khun luang ha wat* even tells of how trade with foreign seafaring nations flourished in the reign of King Ekathat:

[56] E. W. Hutchinson. *Adventurers in Siam in the Seventeenth Century*. London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1940, 192.

> His Majesty's relatives and the grandees of the realm enjoyed life every single [day and] night, … merchants from overseas were able to buy and sell with ease, ships belonging to khaek and English, Chinese, Cham and Aramanni [Armenian] as well as [traders from] Surat …all of whom docked their vessels at the port in great numbers. All the people of the city of Ayutthaya were contented.[57]

Even if this passage may have been a later interpolation from the Early Bangkok era, it still reflects the feelings of former residents of Ayutthaya, who had survived the loss of what they regarded as a prosperous and great emporium. Western data supports the above assertion only to a limited extent, even when data on shipping to Phuket and Mergui is included. In the *khamhaikan* documents, therefore, the last king of Ayutthaya was still imbued with a kind of majesty, as evidenced by the rare creatures presented to him during his reign, a time when the realm prospered through overseas trade.

The Royal Chronicles' story of the unnamed English sea captain, who helped fight the Burmese, reveals another facet of Siamese memories of William Powney. His bravery and martial skills were not in doubt, but he was also portrayed as an aggressive, tempestuous character, who seized over 100 Siamese captives, taken unawares while collecting fruit that was probably destined for consumption in the besieged royal city. Powney could thus be seen to have abandoned the defenders of Ayutthaya at a critical phase, while, in comparison, the inhabitants of Ayutthaya, including the Roman Catholic priests and converts at the French and Portuguese settlements, continued to help defend the city to the bitter end. With their armed ships, Powney and the Dutch had the means to escape, whereas the residents of Ayutthaya did not. Tens of thousands of citizens of Ayutthaya were thus captured after the city fell in April 1767 and taken away to Burma, where several ended up giving testimony to their captors – information which was later to form the *khamhaikan* documents.

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[57] *Khamhaikan khun luang ha wat*, 154.