

Two Scrolls Depicting Phra Phetracha's Funeral Procession in 1704 and the Riddle of their Creation

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In February 2015, three documents rolled up in a canister in the storerooms of the Dresden State Art Collections were identified as having originated from Siam. Two of the documents are pictorial scrolls. The larger, almost four metres long, is an ink drawing of a procession. The other is a smaller and more colourful depiction of the same scene. The third document, a three-page text in Dutch, begins: "Annotation concerning the place where the King of Siam was cremated, who had assumed the name of *pra throng than*, that means God of Wisdom, and had died on 5 February and been cremated on 26 December 1704." The king had died on 5 February 1703, according to the Ayutthaya Chronicles, and was cremated almost twenty-two months later. The illustration of the larger scroll was clearly done by an expert Siamese artist. The Dresden State Archive shows that these documents were acquired in 1716. There is, thus, no reason to doubt that these scrolls were contemporary illustrations of an actual historical event. As such, these scrolls are unique. There was no tradition in Siam of illustrating a specific royal funeral or any other historical event. No other pictorial manuscript of this age has survived from Siam with a secure provenance and dating. Why were these scrolls created? How did they come to be in Dresden? Why are there two depictions of the same event? How have they survived for three centuries, longer than any other Siamese original manuscript with a secure date? These are the questions addressed in this article. A fuller analysis of the scrolls will appear in a catalogue of the Dresden Museum's Oriental holdings, currently in preparation.¹

¹ The reproduction of the scrolls is courtesy of the Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden (Collection of Prints, Drawings and Photographs, Dresden State Art Collections). Photography by Maria Aranda Alonso. With special thanks to Dr. Petra Kuhlmann-Hodick and Dr. Cordula Bischoff.

The scrolls

The lengthier scroll, filed in the Dresdner collection as number Ca 129, and here for convenience called the 'Long Scroll', is made of ten sheets of thin white paper, glued onto a fine linen backing. Its total length is 370.30 cm, and its height varies between 50 and 52 cm. The illustration on this long scroll represents a funeral procession moving from right to left (see Figure 1).

At the left is a courtyard enclosing an elaborate tower, clearly the *meru* for the cremation. Immediately to the right, in a forecourt, are two figures, one with arm raised in a conventional pose of pronouncing judgment. This is *Phra Yom*, Lord Yama, the God of Death, with his assistant Jettakup (Chitragupta). Entering this forecourt is the first of a

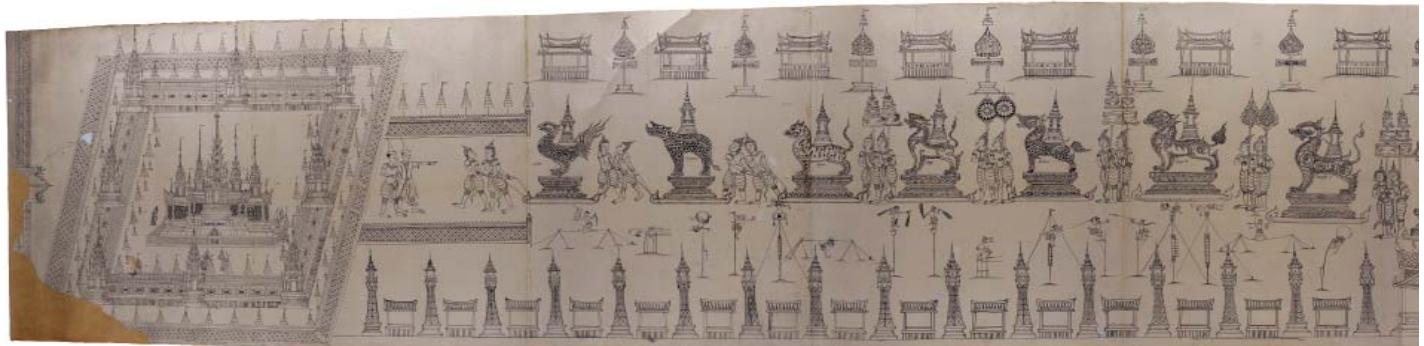


Figure 1. The Long Scroll, courtesy: Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Foto: María Aranda Alonso

series of nine mythological animals, mounted on trolleys with disguised wheels, pulled by people in formal dress. At the upper edge of the scroll are booths or shelters, some containing seats, presumably to accommodate those watching the procession. Along the lower edge there is a row of booths for performances (dramas, puppets, dances) interspersed with towers for firework displays. Also at the lower edge are a number of acrobats. In the procession, following the mythological animals, there are three elegant carriages. Words written on the scroll in Dutch identify that these carriages are occupied respectively by the "Siamese bishop" (presumably the Buddhist patriarch), the king's cousin and the king's son, although their figures are invisible behind curtains. Behind these comes the impressive catafalque, a massive and very elaborate four-wheeled carriage, carrying the urn containing the king's corpse. A single figure is shown on the front of the carriage in votive pose. Behind the catafalque are two model elephants and some people in princely attire. The whole complex scene is drawn in ink, applied with a fine pen. A golden colour has been applied to only two small parts of one mythical creature pulling a carriage.

At several places on the scroll there are neatly written words, some in Dutch, others in transcriptions from Thai, in particular identifying the mythological animals and the personages in the three carriages. On such a fine document, only an owner would add such annotations. These annotations, and the fact that there is no Thai tradition of

producing such works, suggest that this scroll was specifically commissioned with a European audience in mind.

The second scroll, filed as number Ca 128/01, and here called the 'Coloured Scroll', obviously shows the same procession, but differs in four ways (see Figure 2). First, it is smaller, measuring 215 cm in length and 42 cm in height. Second, it is drawn on four large sheets of heavy paper that have been glued onto a backing of strong cloth. Third, the scene has been simplified by omitting several elements. Fourth, it is brightly coloured. The illustrations were first drawn in pencil, then in ink, and finally coloured with various shades of green, red, yellow, orange and blue water colours. A single object, the large urn, was given a golden hue.

Distributed around this second scroll are several letters, ciphers and symbols placed



against different elements of the illustration. In the accompanying three-page text, there are eighty-five lines in Dutch explaining the pictorial elements marked by each letter, cipher or symbol. In short, this is an explanatory key to the illustration. This confirms that the scroll was intended to be seen by a European audience. Note that these letters are on the Coloured Scroll, not on the pen-and-ink Long Scroll.

The commission

The Dutch East India Company (Dutch: Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, hereafter VOC) traded in Ayutthaya from 1608 to December 1765, leaving shortly before the fall of the city to Burmese armies.

During the year that King Phetracha died, Gideon Tant, the former opperhoofd (director) of the Dutch trading office, had just been replaced by Aernout Cleur, who had worked there for a number of years. In 1699, Cleur had been promoted to "onderkoopman" (sub-merchant) and in 1703, with his appointment as director, he was promoted to "koopman" (merchant).² François Valentijn thanked Cleur for copying an

² In 1708, the Thai King Saea presented Cleur with a sword and a coat (Dutch: "houwer en rok"); in March 1709, he was promoted to "opperkoopman" (chief merchant). Cleur died on 22 February

account of the death of King Narai and the rise of King Phetracha, but it is not clear when exactly this communication occurred.³

It is quite likely that Cleur commissioned the Dresden scrolls. But for what purpose? There is no direct evidence in the documentation, but there is a hint in another



Figure 2. The Coloured Scroll, courtesy: Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Foto: María Aranda Alonso

document. In early 1704, Cleur compiled a report of the succession struggles that recently had occurred in Ayutthaya, a report that has been noted by the leading historians of the period.⁴ It arrived in Batavia on 4 May 1704, and a copy was sent to the VOC

1712. W. Ph. Coolhaas (ed.), *Generale Missieven van Gouverneurs Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, Vol. 6, 1698-1713, (Rijks Geschiedkundige Publikatiën, 159), 's-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1976, p. 282 fn.

³ See “Beknopt Verhaal van de wonderlyke verandering voorgevallen in ‘t Koningryk Siam, in ‘t jaar 1688, den Schrijver door den Heer Arnold Cleur behandigd” (François Valentijn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost Indien*, Part 3 book 6, Amsterdam and Dordrecht: Joannes and Gerard van Braam, 1726, pp. 80-87). From Valentijn’s biography we may conclude that he never visited Siam, so that he must have obtained the document through correspondence. See R. R. F. Habiboe, *Tot Verheffing van mijne Natie; Het leven en werk van François Valentijn (1666-1727)*, Franeker: Van Wijnen, 2004.

⁴ Thai historian Dhiravat na Pombejra was the first to study the document and reported his findings in London during the 5th International Conference on Thai Studies, 1993, in his “Dutch and French Evidence concerning Court Conflicts at the End of King Phetracha’s Reign, c. 1699-1703”. In 1998, he cautiously referred to Cleur thus: “if one is to believe a contemporary Dutch account”. (“Dhiravat na Pombejra, “Princes, Pretenders, and the Chinese Phrakhlang: An Analysis of the Dutch Evidence Concerning Siamese Court Politics, 1699-1734” in Leonard Blussé and Femke Gaastra (eds.) *On the Eighteenth Century as a Category of Asian History: Van Leur in Retrospect*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998, p. 107). Later, Dhiravat ventured that he was of the opinion that Cleur’s letter sounded “like a Siamese account”, see his *Siamese Court Life in the Seventeenth Century as Depicted in European Sources*, Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University, 2001, pp. 209-210. Bhawan Ruangsilp also referred several times to Cleur’s account. See *Dutch East India Company Merchants at the Court of Ayutthaya*, Leiden: Brill, 2007, p. 175 ff.

headquarters in the Netherlands. This report has not as yet been published, but since it is an essential part of the chain of deductions that follows, a translation is given here of the text as found in the Dutch Archives in The Hague.⁵



{Fol. 61} Account of what happened during the illness and death of the
Siamese King named Phra Trong Than

On 23 January in the year 1703 the King did not feel well, but he did not want anyone to know. Therefore he personally ordered that the preparation of the medicines that he took should be produced in secret. Notwithstanding his attempts to keep it in the dark, his wife (the daughter of the previous King who was named PHRA NARAI⁶) obtained knowledge of it. She did not hesitate to caution her only son, named PHRA KHWAN,⁷ whom she had conceived with the King [Phetracha] after being legally married. {Fol. 62} She warned him that his chance could come any day: he should desist from playing, so that when the King would die, the Chao Wangna⁸ (who was the King's eldest son, but conceived with the daughter of a common courtier at a time when he himself was merely a courtier) would not prevent him from being crowned. Every time she mentioned this, her son (a youngster of merely ... years⁹) answered that his fate would be such as the Gods had decided. She was never satisfied with these answers and therefore with her son's joint knowledge, she contacted two of her most trusted servants in order to

⁵ NA VOC 1691, fol. 61-72. A transcription of the Dutch original can be downloaded via http://www.siam-society.org/pub_JSS/jss104.html

⁶ King Narai reigned from 1656 until 1688.

⁷ Phra Khwan was the only child of King Phetracha and Queen Yothathep.

⁸ Literally: 'Lord of the Front Palace'. In 1703, this important position was held by Prince Sorasak.

⁹ The manuscript does not reveal his age. However, since Phetracha had become king on 11 July 1688, Phra Khwan must have been at most fourteen years of age.

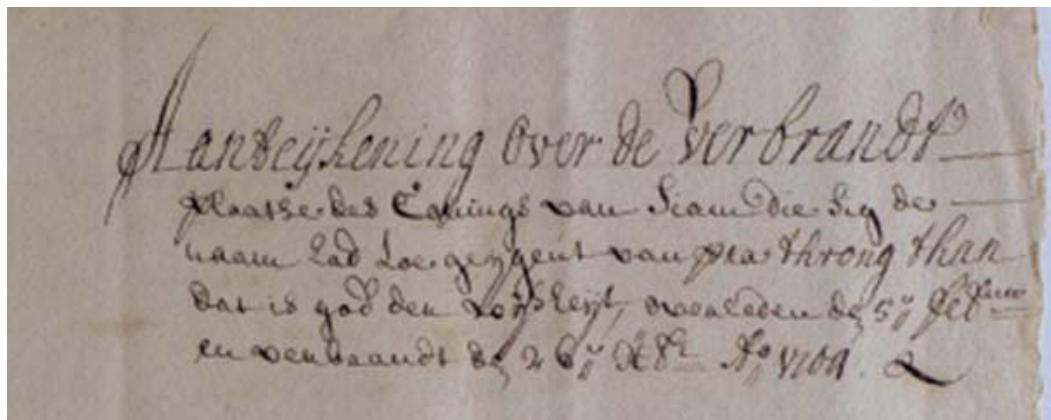


Figure 3. The heading of the legend explaining the Coloured Scroll

deliberate how, without much tumult, her son could best be assisted to occupy the throne after the death of the King. Therefore, the four of them decided to try and persuade some of the distinguished and mighty among the King's ministers to bring this about. The Queen immediately proceeded to inform many powerful men of her secret plan. The most important of these were: OKYA SOMBATTHIBAN¹⁰, PHAYA RATCHA BANGSAN, PHRA WICHASURIYA, PHRA RAMADETCHO, PHRA SAMIANKOSET, OKLUANG THEPHARAKSA and some other mighty and less mighty courtiers, who were all much inclined to assist PHRA KHwan. Upon hearing this, the Queen caused OKYA SOMBATTHIBAN to receive seventy catties¹¹ of silver, {Fol. 63} letting him know that if he, Sombatthiban, was of the opinion that he needed more, it would be given to him. While this conspiracy was forming, the King's illness deteriorated daily, but he did not want anyone to know, and he did not fail (in order to prevent such presumption) to preside daily in the audience hall, for at least a quarter of an hour. He continued to do so until the first day of February, when his illness advanced with a steady coughing, hiccups and an aversion to take food. However, for unknown reasons he did not wish to confide this to his eldest son, the Prince CHAO WANGNA. Whenever the Prince visited him and noticed that he was ill, he said that there was nothing wrong with him apart from coughing and hiccups and he expected to be better soon, and this reassured the Prince every time. But on the third of the month, when Prince CHAO WANGNA noticed that his father, the King, did not only get weaker, but that he no longer wished to eat or to take medicine, the Prince thought it better to remain in the King's court (even though the soothsayers had assured him that his father would get better), and to occupy it with 3000 armed men from his bodyguard. The next day, he urged his father to take food and medicine, upon which the King answered that this would not help, because he could not now escape the hour of his death, adding a bundle of sayings [such as] that even the gods had to die, and what were they [humans] compared to gods to wish to escape death. He recommended {Fol. 64} immediately his younger son, Phra Khwan, but the Prince did not answer. Therefore, the King, resuming

¹⁰ Okya Sombathibhan was the Phrakhlang (the office known in Dutch writings of the time as Berquelang), Minister of Trade.

¹¹ The catty is normally a unit of weight equal to 625 grams, but when used with silver it is counted double, so that, if Cleur is to be believed, the Queen invested not less than 85 kilograms of silver.

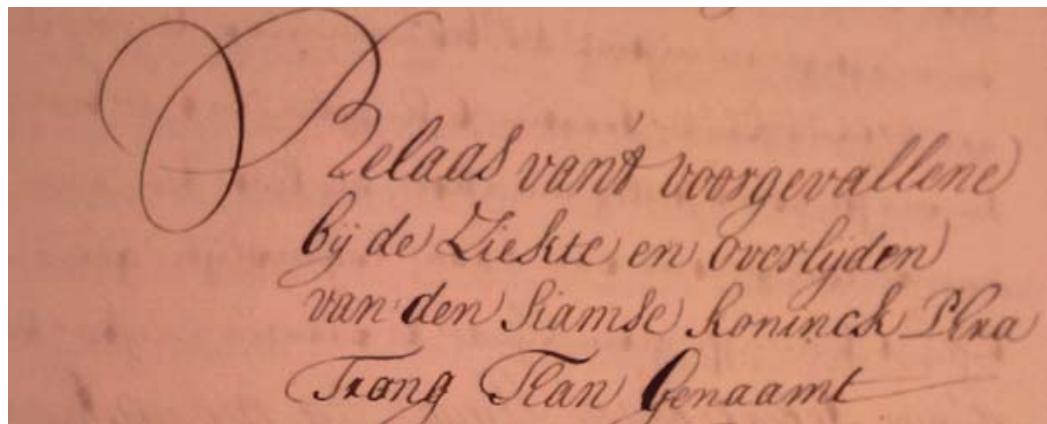


Figure 4. The heading of Aernout Cleur's account of the court intrigues in 1703

his words, added that he noticed that Phra Khwan could not expect much support from the Prince, and feared his tyranny against him [the young Prince]. Eventually, the Prince answered him with an affected laugh: "Am I a dog that I would do such a thing?" Hereupon both of them remained silent.

Later the OKYA MAHOMET prostrated himself before the Prince WANGNA and accused the OKYA SOMBATTHIBAN of not only being disinclined to appear in the meeting room of the chief courtiers, but in addition, when somebody asked him a question, of reacting in a gruff and snappish way; also, he stayed most of the time at home. His behaviour appeared most peculiar to all the chief courtiers. They could not calculate what he was planning to do, and they had come to the conclusion that he was plotting something evil. Hereupon the Prince ordered the arrest of the said OKYA, and the sealing of his house and possessions, since Sombathibhan had been entrusted with the larger part of the income of the realm.

On the fifth of the month, the King's weakness had advanced so far that in the late afternoon he could no longer speak. He died in the evening at eight o'clock. The above-mentioned Prince (wanting to keep the death of his father secret) forbade to make this public. But he noticed that such a thing was not possible, since it was whispered from ear to ear, and before midnight the whole court knew about it. Therefore, after the court's gates had been closed, following custom, and after his servants had mingled among those of the King, {Fol. 65} he caused the sign of the King's death to be given. This consisted of beating a drum and blowing fifes, which lasted the whole night. The next day he reigned as absolute King and did not forget immediately to take revenge upon OKYA SOMBATTHIBAN, against whom he had taken a grudge, by relieving him of all dignities and goods, and demanding of him a detailed account of his management. At the same time, he appointed another Chinese in his place and gave him the rank of PHRA SOMBATTHIBAN,¹² along with possession of all the goods, chattels and real estate of the discredited OKYA SOMBATTHIBAN.

¹² At that time, there were six ranks among the courtiers: *okmuen*, *okkhun*, *okluang*, *okphra*, *okya* and *okph[r]aya*, but the prefix *ok* was sometimes omitted. The deposed nobleman had held the rank of (ok)ya, his successor was appointed one category lower.

Meanwhile the previously mentioned Prince CHAO WANGNA let himself be crowned (celebrated in the Siamese way and performed by Siamese Brahmans) by a *Mae Chi*¹³ (who was the sister of the previous deceased King, named Phra Narai, and who was also his nanny), who placed the crown on his head, and who led him by his hand to the throne and seated him upon it. Meanwhile the Phra Khwan, or Young Prince, was treated by him amicably, calling him CHAO FA NOY,¹⁴ which means young King, and letting him don royal clothes and assume royal state. In addition, he declared to all ministers, whenever he appeared in the audience hall, that he coveted neither the royal throne nor the crown, and that he had accepted them only because of Phra Khwan's youth and inexperience in governing. Thus, he had been forced to accept them but certainly not {Fol. 66} with the intention of keeping them, more as an assistant of the Phra Khwan during the period that he would gain full capability to govern. He would always keep Phra Khwan at his side so that he could hear and see what happened and so rapidly make him fit for the moment when the whole government would be handed over to him. He [Sorasak] would much prefer to spend his days wandering about and playing than being burdened with the governing of a kingdom. Doubtless, this was transmitted to the Queen (the widow of the father of the present King) by her son and other favourites, but that did not satisfy her. Therefore, she looked for an opportunity the sooner the better to see her son govern without an assistant. This was the reason why she regularly asked the advice on how to reach her goal from those ministers who were in league with her. Secretly she decreed that her son's servants should stick together without consulting her, so that when a favourable opportunity occurred, her design could be executed without hindrance. She ordered all this via her son's principal servant, who also informed all the ministers who took part in the conspiracy that each should be armed with a musket and be accompanied by another two servants in *duean ha* [the fifth month], that is on the day of full moon in April, according to the Dutch calendar, when the king would be carried on his palanquin to his father's corpse in order to pay proper respect to it in accordance with local custom, {Fol. 67} [when] they would venture to shoot and kill him. And Phra Khwan would play his part with the pistols that he took with him on his horse. Therefore, during April, after demanding three good muskets and a pair of pistols from the armoury and this having been politely refused by the chief of the King's armoury, he repeated his demand, adding that he need not be afraid to hand out the required muskets, since he would within a day or two report to the King. On this condition the above-mentioned chief finally gave out the above-mentioned guns to the main servant, and Phra Khwan distributed them first to the three above-mentioned servants so that they could be used at the above-mentioned time to execute their plan.

A lady-in-waiting of the widow of the deceased King, who wanted to avenge an

¹³ A female, clad in white robes, with shaven head, who has devoted herself to religion. This woman is known in the Thai Annals as Princess Yothathip. All the Thai annals agree that Phetracha appointed Yothathip as Queen of the right side, but apparently she refused to live with him, so he took Yothathee as his second Queen, Queen of the Left Side, who bore him a son, Phra Khwan. Annals p. 323 and p. 338.

¹⁴ Younger Chaofa. The rank of Chaofa, or celestial prince, is reserved for the offspring of the King with his Queen.

insult she had received from the Queen (she had for a long period been put in chains because of her evil tongue and her habit of slandering everyone and making false accusations, and had only recently been acquitted because others had interceded for her), took cognisance of the plan and secretly revealed all to the present King. He listened carefully to her statement and found some appearance of truth. That was the reason why the King, after having given his audience, took aside the new Phrakhlang, Okya Phichit, Phaya Thainam and Okya Surasi and explained to them the case and the circumstances, and deliberated with them how to react to the situation. They decided in unison to break Phra Khwan's neck at the first favourable opportunity.

Meanwhile the King treated him [Phra Khwan] even {Fol. 68} more amicably than before, expecting nevertheless that the four who had been assigned would succeed with their attempt upon his life. Fearing that it could cause an insurrection, they were not able to move quickly. Therefore, they decided with the King to encourage Phra Khwan to ride a horse and thereby to lure him in their vicinity, so that they would easily have the opportunity to execute their plan without causing a tumult. This was the reason why the King praised Phra Khwan in his presence and during the audience with all ministers on his ability to ride a horse, and donated to him the best horse in the King's stable and encouraged him also later personally (it being a royal practise) to exercise it, and allowed him the use of the whole court [for riding].

Later on 5 April, the chief of the King's armoury let the King know about the previously mentioned guns issued from the King's armoury by the order of the young Prince Phra Khwan, upon which the King caused the above-mentioned prince to be called, and interrogated him in amicable terms why he had done so. His answer was that he wished to practise shooting. Hereupon the King reproved him, without showing any sign of suspicion or being disturbed, saying that he had acted most incorrectly when he took guns from the King's armoury without his previous knowledge, and adding also that of course there was nothing in the realm that would be refused to him when he requested it, but for the time being, he could not allow him to handle a gun (the reason being that the gunpowder could not be trusted) and then gave him the advice to leave that alone {Fol. 69} and to practice horse riding. In order to encourage him more and more, on the following day (being 6 April when the King, together with the above-mentioned young prince, would ride to their father's corpse in order to show their respect), the King did not fail to saddle for him the tamest horse, on which he galloped lustily, being encouraged by the King. Hereby the King had another chance to praise him on his boldness on a horse. Together they rode to their parent's corpse, where the young prince alighted from his horse, and after having paid proper reverence, returned on foot to the court, and stayed there the whole day without riding. During the audience in the late afternoon, the King accused him of negligence, and amicably admonished him to exercise further in horse riding. The rest of the day passed without further consequence.

But on the seventh of that month when the King came once more to their father's corpse with the above-mentioned prince, the King ordered him to gallop with the horse and to exercise. In order to please the King, the prince acceded and rode to and fro, and whenever he passed the King or came near to him, he was praised how well he controlled the horse. This gave the prince the courage to ride as far as the Wisit warehouse. There

the four earlier mentioned ministers with an affected slyness went to him, giving him the message that he should quickly dismount, in order to go to the King who expected him. Therefore, innocently, he immediately {Fol. 70} alighted from his horse. The Phrakhlang first grabbed him and held him by his arm and then the three other chief courtiers surrounded him. They brought him into a nearby bricked-in square. There the executioner, who had been especially appointed for this task, suddenly appeared with a sandalwood club in his hand. Seeing this, the prince was startled and when he asked the Phrakhlang whether he was going to die, he announced that he had received orders to do so from the King and it was his bounden duty to execute the King's command. Then, finally, the prince told the Phrakhlang (realising that this time he would not escape death) that he could not bear to be beaten to death with such a club and asked to lose his head by the sword. The Phrakhlang announced that it would depart from time-honoured custom to shed royal blood by the sword. After that, he received finally the deadly stroke on his neck and remained immobile. Subsequently, the body was placed in a white sack, laid on the mutilation bench, and all his limbs were beaten to pieces and crushed. After this had been done he was taken from the mutilation bench and laid in a copper bowl. Once done, the King was quickly informed, who straight away ordered the arrest of the most private servants of the prince, and especially his first page, in order to question him whether or not he had known of Phra Khwan's secret decision. This was accomplished so fast that the {Fol. 71} amazement that he experienced through seeing his master beaten to death still gripped him, and he immediately confessed all without being tortured. At the same time, he delivered a list of those who had been in league with Phra Khwan, causing the King to keep a sharp watch in the palace. The dead body of the prince was displayed until ten o'clock the next morning, after which it was brought to Wat Khok Phraya,¹⁵ where it was buried, and over the grave's opening heavy beams were laid in order to prevent it from being exhumed and to forestall the spreading of false rumours among the populace (as had occurred after the demise of King Pra Trong Than) that he had escaped death and was kept concealed somewhere else.

The King's widow, having heard the news of her son Phra Khwan's death, immediately left her court and in consternation fled to her aunt, the above-mentioned *Mae chi*, and asked to be protected. Hereupon she took time to accuse her of having secretly lived with her husband, the recently deceased King Pra Trong Than (before being married to him), and thus causing the death of the two legal princes in Lopburi, who had met with the same fate as had now befallen her son; thus the gods, who avenge all injustices, allowed this to happen to her. However, after having reproached her, the *Mae chi* took her under her protection and she had so much claim on the king (who was indebted to her for his rise because she had brought him up and {Fol. 72} elevated him) that she stayed alive and escaped corporal punishment, suffering only the confiscation of all her goods and chattels and the loss of the queenly dignity. This did not happen to most of the chief courtiers who were involved in the above-mentioned plot. With the

¹⁵ วัดโคกพระยา. The text gives Trookpia. However, the Khok Phraya monastery has traditionally been used to execute persons of royal blood. http://www.ayutthaya-history.com/Temples_Ruins_KhokPhraya.html. I thank Chris Baker for pointing out this impressive research tool.

exception of the son of the most praiseworthy Okya Phonlathep¹⁶ (who was pardoned because of his father's meritoriousness through the intercession of the King's mother and the above-mentioned *Mae chi*), on the 3rd of May they did not only lose their lives by being shot and hung with hooks through their breasts (having already been exposed for three days and having received scorn from passers-by who hit their heads and bodies with their elbows), but in addition had their bodies bound in bamboo, to allow birds to get at them. Thus, they were exposed in front of the tribunal and the city gates as an example, and their wives and children and a large part of their relatives were donated to live with other servants of the King. Thus, the King stayed on, confirmed in his governing, without having to fear anybody.

All the above-mentioned has been related from the statement of a trusted courtier and from notes made by myself. Therefore, the undersigned does not hold himself responsible for mistakes in this [story], whether in the mentioned dates or otherwise, that may have been committed without his knowledge.

Signed: Arnout Cleur

Fact or fiction?

This is an exciting story! King Phetracha is fatally ill; Queen Yothathip is plotting to put her son on the throne; Sorasak moves quickly, sending his troops to stage a coup and managing to be anointed as the new king; soon after, he discovers Yothathip is planning a counter-strike; Sorasak deceives his half-brother Phra Khwan, lulling him into believing that he is still the rightful heir to the throne while at the same time preparing to execute him; Phra Khwan is ritually executed and most of the courtiers, who had conspired with him, meet a gruesome death.

However, Cleur's account of the events of 1703-4 cannot be accepted without scrutiny. While some events may have been based upon information from his "trusted courtier", as Cleur claims at the end of the report, Cleur must have freely embroidered upon them. No courtier would have had the opportunity to listen to the private conversations between the ailing King Phetracha and his eldest son, Sorasak. Even less likely could he have known of the dangerous, secret deliberations between Queen Yothathip and Okya Sombathibhan. Cleur believes that Sorasak, after having been crowned (by Queen Yothathep of all people!), made pronouncements in the audience hall about not wanting to be king and preferring to roam about in the kingdom. These do not sound like utterances of a Thai king: roaming about is rather a European's dream of a leisurely existence, not that of a Siamese nobleman. The conversations between the usurper and Phra Khwan also appear extremely fanciful. Moreover, Cleur's putative informant could not possibly have been privy to what a vindictive lady-in-waiting in strict secrecy revealed to the new king. The elaborate, cumbersome way chosen by Sorasak to lure Phra Khwan into the hands of his murderers does not accord with the

¹⁶ This is the title of the Head of the *Krom Na*, the Ministry of Lands, a post to which the former Okya Phiphatkosa had recently been appointed. See Bhawan Ruangsilp, *Dutch East India Company, Merchants at the Court of Ayutthaya*, p. 175.

behaviour of a wilful Siamese king who, after all, wields absolute power. Neither does Phra Khwan's pleading to be beheaded ring true; this seems rather to be the author's ploy to explain to his audience the exotic custom of executing members of the royal family by hitting them with a sandalwood club.

There is good reason to believe that most of what is written in Cleur's account did not happen that way. The Ayutthaya Chronicles are quite clear as to the sequence of events. They state that, as soon as he realised that his father was dying, Phetracha's eldest son, *Luang Sorasak*, caused the killing of both rivals, Prince Trat Noi (the son of Queen Yothathep) and Phra Khwan (Queen Yothathip's son).¹⁷ Apparently, King Phetracha was deeply shocked when he learnt of these killings and, on his deathbed, nominated his nephew, Prince Phichai Surin, to be his successor. The latter, realising he would be unable to survive a confrontation with the powerful *Luang Sorasak*, refused the throne.¹⁸

A comparison between the forthright account of Sorasak's misdeeds prior to being accepted as the new monarch in The Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya and Cleur's version of what happened shows not only that the two versions are incompatible, but that the latter is unconvincing. Cleur's long relation of plots and counter-plots is shown to be a fanciful, farfetched story, a garbled mixture of gossip and fantasy. With a good measure of leniency, it may be called an artistic creation, for Cleur did not take the trouble to find out what actually had happened. Having learnt of a dramatic succession whereby a young prince was killed, he wove a story that would excite the Dutch public. It might be used as a libretto for an opera, but should not be used as a reliable source for what really happened during 1703 in Ayutthaya. It may be seen as part of a genre that became popular at the time, revelling in depicting the cruelty of an Oriental court, where nobody could be certain of his life and where apparently morality was at a low ebb.¹⁹ What gave Cleur the idea of compiling this fantastic account?

Cleur's inspiration?

Cleur was not the first chief of the Dutch trading station to present an account of political turbulence in the Siamese court, caused by the demise of the ruling monarch. On the final day of the year 1640, Jeremias van Vliet submitted his *Historiael Verhael der Sieckte ende Doot van Phra Interra-Tsia 22en Coninck in Siam...*, which has recently been translated by Alfons van der Kraan as "Historical Account of the Illness and Death

¹⁷ Richard Cushman, *The Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya*, Bangkok: Siam Society, 2000, pp. 367-368.

¹⁸ Cushman, *The Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya*, pp. 377-378.

¹⁹ In Europe, there was a keen interest in lurid and violent accounts of happenings in Oriental courts. This explains the remarkable success of the novel called *Asiatische Banice, or blutiges doch mutiges Pegu* [Asian Banice, or bloody but brave Pegu] by Heinrich Anselm von Zigler, originally written in 1689 and reprinted ten times in the 18th century. Von Zigler was inspired by Erasmus Francisci, who recounted the voyage of Fernão Mendes Pinto (1668). Another example is the play written by "a Young Lady" [probably a pen-name of Elkanah Settle], entitled *The Unnatural Mother; The Scene in the Kingdom of Siam* (London, 1698), featuring the theme of incest, a poisoning and several fatal stabbings.

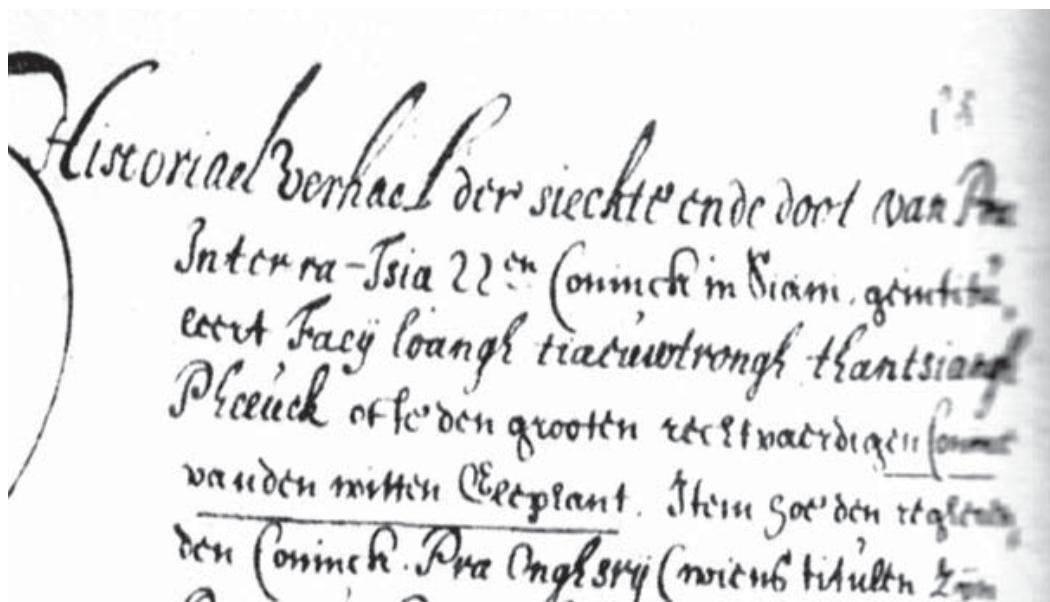


Figure 5. The heading of Jeremias van Vliet's *Historiael Verhael* on the sickness and death of Pra Intharacha, 22nd King of Siam, entitled *Fai luang chao trong than chang phueak*, [พิณทราชาก... ฝ่ายหลวงเจ้าทรงธรรมช้างเผือก] meaning The Great Just King of the White Elephant...

of Phra Interra-Tsia, 22nd King of Siam...”²⁰

Van Vliet tells a dramatic story about the death of King Intharacha (in modern texts called King Songtham), and about Okya Si Worawong, who murdered the royal family and usurped the throne with the assistance of a troop of Japanese mercenaries. In their introduction to the new edition of van Vliet's text, Dhiravat na Pombejra and Chris Baker have pointed out that his *Historiael Verhael* was written “as a tragedy in the dramatic tradition of his era”.²¹ Cleur's account deserves the same description. Both documents describe the chilling situation after the death of the Siamese king when several candidates aspired to occupy the throne, leading to a spate of murders. There are two indications that the similarity between the two accounts was not a matter of chance, but resulted from Cleur's knowledge of van Vliet's *Historical Account*.

First, when van Vliet writes of the king who died in 1628, he commences his title with the words “Faeij loangh tiaeuew trongh than” (see Figure 5), meaning the Siamese words ฝ่ายหลวงเจ้าทรงธรรม, *fai luang chao Throng Tham*.²² Seventy-five years later, Cleur

²⁰ Published in Chris Baker et al., *Van Vliet's Siam*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2005, pp. 245-322. In this article I have deliberately changed the spacing to show that one of the titles that van Vliet gave to the king, whose death in 1628 he describes, is a Dutch rendering of Phra Throng Tham, for Cleur uses the same title for Phetracha.

²¹ Baker, *Van Vliet's Siam*, p. 250.

²² Here it should be noted that most probably throughout the 17th century the pronunciation of the “royal word” ทรง actually was in accordance with its Cambodian origin “throng” (in modern Siamese the pronunciation is “song”). That is why Simon de La Loubère, in a list of Siamese musical instruments, mentions the three-stringed violin “tro”, an instrument that all Thais now pronounce “so”. That is also why the Thai word for “eagle” on the Long Scroll is written “intri”, and in another Dutch rendering of the name of the Thai king (also in 1704) the expression “throng pra caruna prot clau prot cramom...” [being the proper way to address the Thai king]. (ทรงพระครุณฯ

uses exactly the same title of *Phra Trong Than* to refer to King Phetracha. Nowhere else is this title used for King Phetracha.

Second, when van Vliet wrote his account in 1640, he made a minor mistake by rendering “tham” (Thai: ทัม) as “than”. Cleur makes the same mistake four times in a row, three times in the letter of 1704 (see Figure 6) and once more in the explanatory text to the Coloured Scroll (see Figure 4, where he wrote the name as *pra throng than*).

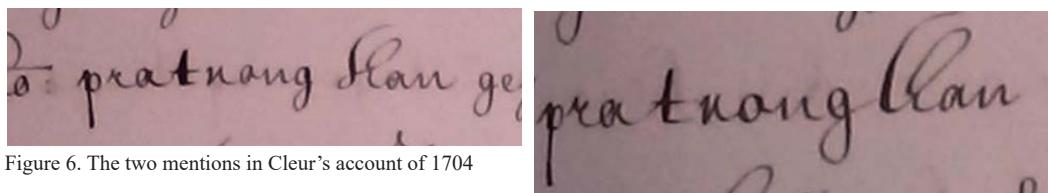


Figure 6. The two mentions in Cleur's account of 1704

A possible chain of events

Shortly after being promoted as chief of the Dutch trading office in Siam, Cleur was informed by someone he calls “a trusted courtier” about the death of King Phetracha and about conspiracies and killings occasioned by the succession. Cleur was aware that similar turmoil had occurred in the past and that in 1640, Jeremias van Vliet had written the *Historiael Verhael*, describing the cunning way in which Okya Si Worawong wiped out the royal family and usurped the throne. After leaving Ayutthaya in 1641, van Vliet served as ambassador to Palembang, as Governor of Malacca and even as a member of the Extraordinary Council of the VOC in Batavia. Arriving safely back in the Netherlands in 1647, van Vliet lived as a rich and honoured burgher until his demise. To his successors, van Vliet must have seemed a shining example of what a merchant in the VOC could achieve.

The fact that van Vliet’s career was partly built upon his extensive writings on Siam, including an account of bloody succession in 1628, may well have been Cleur’s inspiration to emulate him. Early in 1704, Cleur sent to Batavia his version of the intrigues surrounding the death of King Phetracha, as presented in the translation above. Even though he is quite verbose in his account, he managed to fill relatively few pages compared to van Vliet’s earlier account.

Eight months after Cleur had despatched his dramatic account, King Phetracha’s funeral took place. For Cleur, wishing to continue to impress his superiors, it must have seemed like another gift from heaven, for hitherto no Dutchman had written on the subject. If he attended and witnessed the procession, he may well have been somewhat bewildered by the manifold activities and unusual ritual pageantry. Thousands of participants filed past, including Buddhist monks, courtiers, and functionaries carrying regalia. A large number of soldiers pulled unwieldy vehicles. There were horsemen,

โปรดกล่าวโปรดกระหม่อม), signed by Dirk de Haas, points in the same direction (NA 1.04.02.1691 fol. 76) and in numerous documents the Thai interpreter for the Dutch trading office is called Trongphanit (Thai: ทรงพานิชย์).

musicians and dancers. Behind the royal corpse a group of ladies wept and wailed.²³

Such a scene would have been very difficult for a Dutch merchant to render into a piece of prose or to convert into a picture. This must have been the moment that Cleur decided to ask a Thai artist to make a drawing of the funeral procession which, when put together with his account of the intrigues surrounding King Phetracha's death, would form a small booklet, or at least a pamphlet that would interest a wider public in the Netherlands.

The result is the Long Scroll. When it was finished and delivered at the Dutch trading office, the artist explained the chief elements that he had drawn and his explanations were carefully written on the scroll. It may be assumed that the fifteen separate explanatory entries on the Long Scroll are in Cleur's own handwriting.

However, Cleur seems to have come to the conclusion that the Long Scroll would not suit his purpose of illustrating a publication designed to excite European readers. It was too big. Its content was too complicated and difficult to understand. The materials were too frail. It was dull in black and white, and an experiment to add colour was perhaps abandoned (hence only two small parts are coloured on the Long Scroll). The use of perspective did not conform to European conventions. Also, the fourfold shift of the point of view in the depiction of the galleries surrounding Mount Meru must have been difficult to decipher for a person unfamiliar with Thai ritual.



Figure 7. Detail of a Ravana's funeral procession depicted in Panel 113, the Monastery of the Emerald Buddha, Bangkok, Photograph by Pattaratorn Chirapratavi

These, it is here submitted, could be some of the reasons why Cleur ordered somebody in the lodge (if he lacked the skills to do it himself) to draw a different version—smaller, stronger, simpler, more colourful. A golden tower, a smaller number of mythological animals and a single, simple chariot with the king's urn made for a nice colourful and attractive illustration. When it was almost finished, Cleur must have contacted a knowledgeable Thai to explain all details of the simplified scroll. These

²³ Cushman, *The Royal Chronicles of Ayutthaya*, p. 369.

explanations were carefully noted, the appropriate ciphers and letters were entered on the Coloured Scroll and the three pages of explanatory text were composed as a legend.

The finale

But this project was never brought to fruition. Cleur died in Ayutthaya on 22 February 1712. His possessions must have been shipped to Amsterdam, where Egidius van den Bempden, one of the Directors of the VOC, apparently acquired the container with both scrolls and the three-page legend. In 1716, van den Bempden sold the three documents to an agent of Augustus Frederick, Prince-Elector of Saxony and King of Poland (also known as Augustus the Strong), a prodigious collector of artefacts and art objects from all over the world. Labelled as containing Chinese paintings, the canister remained in storage, safe from sunlight, moisture, and insects, for three centuries. In 1918, the collection of Augustus the Strong and other kings of Saxony became part of the Dresden State Art Collections, housed in the king's former castle. As part of a project to catalogue the Oriental artefacts, the contents of the canister were examined, the "Chinese paintings" were discovered to be something rather different, and a professor reputed to know something about Siam was invited to travel from Berlin to explain the meaning of the procession that was depicted on the two scrolls. As a result of this fortuitous history, we can now see the contemporary workmanship of the Long Scroll and the fantasy of the Coloured Scroll, just as they were when made more than three hundred years ago.