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### *The Dutch East India Company's Trade in Southeast Asia*

*The seventeenth century marked the apex of Dutch naval and commercial supremacy in Eastern waters. Throughout Southeast Asia the Dutch East India Company sought new markets, raw materials, and commercial contacts. Siam was no exception to this pattern. The following letter, dated January 8, 1655, is a typical example of the correspondence from Batavia, the center of Dutch interests in Southeast Asia, to the Gentlemen Seventeen who controlled the affairs of the Dutch East India Company from the Netherlands.*

It appears that the merchant Hendrich Craijer Zalr had promised, so they say, 20 ships, which was a very rash proceeding on his part, and thereupon they made the above-mentioned expedi-

*Records of the Relations between Siam and Foreign Countries in the 17th Century (Bangkok: Council of the Vajirāna National Library, 1916), Vol. II, pp. 10-14, 17-18.*

tion, which they said, if our support did not appear, would be obliged to return unsuccessful and with shame and dishonour to the crown, as was actually the case. Moreover, it happened that a writing has come unexpectedly from the governor of Tennasserim that two Dutch ships had held the harbour there for 2 months, and had prevented the entrance and departure of foreign traders, which caused great annoyance in Siam, especially at Court, and embittered everyone against us. This gave the Companies a very favourable opportunity to blacken us and to make us odious to everyone, and to change the King's feeble opposition into open enmity, the more so since the news has from time to time been confirmed and assured, and no one there doubts it any longer. Wherefore the resident Westerwolt, who was convinced of the contrary, since he would certainly have been informed before any such action was taken, finally found himself obliged to ask that certain persons, on the King's behalf and on his own, should be deputed and sent overland to Tennasserim, in order to discover on the spot the truth of the case, which request was granted by the King, and on our behalf the junior merchant, Hugo van Crujlenburgh was sent. Meanwhile the aforementioned resident Westerwolt had on various occasions made complaint of the bad and unreasonable treatment received, but got nothing by it but a summons to court, and before four Ojas or councillors was questioned on certain points to which he had to answer forthwith, and the answer was written down word for word, to be laid before the King, who sat by and waited, and every now and then asked whether one of the questions had yet been put. So that the resident was in very great embarrassment and did not know whether even his life was any longer safe. These questions were for the most part on the subject of the help asked for against Sangora, (the Siamese) professing to have gone to war with the Castellañes [the Spanish] on our account, and to have suffered much damage in the same, and that we now refused to assist his Majesty against the rebels with ships and men; whereas the beforementioned merchant, Hendrich Craijer, had definitely made him such promises. Therefore he (the

King) had sent his forces to Ligor so as to cooperate with him (Craijer) on his arrival and keep his word: But instead we had sent our ships to Tennasserim and had taken possession of the place in order to keep foreigners away and to ruin their trade. In consequence of this (enquiry) Westerwolt was inclined to depart from Siam and so make an end of this business, as he had sometimes proposed to do, and as there were two of our ships lying ready at the bar . . . he thought he could initiate and carry his proposal into execution, but was warned that no living soul would escape the power of the King since he could kill them all and trample them under foot and that his threats (of departing) were not at all to the purpose. For all which reasons the aforesaid resident could not answer the questions put to him without embarrassment: And nothing followed thereon, except that four or five days later a prohibition was published that, for the future, neither Siamese nor Peguers were to be allowed to serve the Dutch, thus putting great contempt upon the nation. From all which contemptuous proceedings the above-mentioned Westerwolt came to the conclusion that in case the long expected help could not be sent this year we should have (? trouble) in Siam; also that this same year the Japanese cargoes were likely to be unimportant, even if he were allowed to ship and dispatch them. This gave us no small concern, for now, in addition to the war with Portugal, we had come to a rupture with the new government in England, and it still continued impossible for us to spare any force in ships or men for Siam, and it was also inadvisable to continue to keep the King any longer in an uncertain hope, whereby our cause could only be made worse the longer it lasted, since it was quite uncertain whether we in the near future should have the power (to help him). Besides it is not the Company's function nor does it agree with its maxims to interpose itself in the wars of foreign potentates over questions and quarrels which do not concern it in the least. Nevertheless, it was decided and considered necessary to send thither at least one good flyboat to take the cargo for Japan, if it were allowed, or, in case of refusal, to sail to Taiwan,

in order to return hither at its proper time with sugar. For which purpose the aforesaid *Gecroonde Liefde* was again employed, departing on the 21st May from this roadstead with a letter and a handsome present to the King, also one to the Oja Zebartiban above mentioned, in answer to his [letter] written to us from Ligor: In which we have made known clearly and definitely our inability to send assistance, and that it was impossible to say when it could be sent on account of the wars referred to above. That so his Majesty should therefore no longer wait for it and that we should be freed from the vexations which would otherwise probably be renewed every year. We have also sent (on the 5th September) the ship *Schiedam* in order that, all being well, it should return hither at once, laden with rice, sapan wood and other necessities, or if it can get no cargo, to sail to the Moluccas and bring us thence as much pepper as it can take in. . . .

Last year there were two Johor vessels in Siam which the Siamese, we know not why, took for spies, treated them as such and sent them back in disgrace without allowing them to provision with rice and water for the voyage, or to get in their outstanding debts here. Whereby they being irritated, as it seems, when passing out of the river, took two Siamese vessels in tow and carried them off. And this same affront was taken so ill in Johor that some saletters (pirates) have been dispatched to Siam to avenge it. Whereupon, after they had taken some flat-bottomed boats the Siamese sent off prows but, before their arrival, the others had already departed again. Finding on the way instead of these a saletter come from Borneo, they took him down with them. Arrived at the mouth of the river, they persuaded each other that it was one of the saletter's boats and thereupon surrounded it with 37 frigates, against which the Bornean put itself on the defensive and overcame one of them and would have got away with it, but in crossing the bar grounded. Then, as it seems, despairing of escape, the Borneans, in order not to fall alive into the hands of the enemy, stabbed each other. How these occurrences between the two kings will turn out, time will show.