

NOTES

NOTE ON AN EYE-WITNESS ACCOUNT IN DUTCH OF THE DESTRUCTION OF AYUDHYA IN 1767

by

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In a note to the President of the Siam Society dated 22nd March 1958, I mentioned my discovery, in the Arsip Nasional of the Republik Indonesia in Djakarta, of an eye-witness account in Dutch relating the destruction of Ayudhya by the Burmese in 1767. Through the intermediary of H.H. Prince Dhaninivat, Kromamun Bidyalabh, then President of the Siam Society, a photocopy of this official document (together with other documents) was obtained by courtesy of H.E. the Ambassador of Indonesia to Thailand and the Arsip Nasional in Djakarta. As a contribution to the commemoration last year of the double centenary of the destruction of the former and illustrious capital of Siam and the resurrection of the country, here is published a facsimile of this document (figure 1) a transcription of the Dutch text and a translation in English.¹ This eye-witness account of the last days of Ayudhya has been recorded as a handwritten official statement of two pages (as a *procès-verbal*) drawn up and signed by the Dutch *Shabandar* (harbour master) P. van der Voort, on the 26th April 1768.

It appears that there exists also a contemporary account in French of the fall of Ayudhya; unfortunately, this could not be traced in Thailand.

According to the 'Relaas' Anthony Goyaton was an Armenian and formerly head of the foreign Europeans (geweezen Hoofd der vreemde Europeezen) in Siam (Ayudhya). Here lived also the other

1) For the reading and transcription of the 18th century Dutch text, I am indebted to Jonkheer Mr. J. Beelaerts van Blokland, former secretary of the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Bangkok. The discovery of this document would not have been possible without the assistance of Dr. M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofs of the Algemeen Rijksarchief in The Hague.

'relatant' the Moslem priest Seyed Ali. The 'foreign Europeans' must have formed a rather important segment of the community in Ayudhya and may have constituted a link between the Dutch, French, English and other 'real' European traders and the Thai. They held a similar position in other trading ports in the Far East; a position based on ability and reliability in matters of commerce and trade. They were international asian traders established long before the arrival of the Europeans. The reliability of Goyaton rests on his position as Head of the foreign Europeans in Ayudhya and that the *Shahander* P. van der Voort troubled to make an official record of his statement. For the V.O.C. (Dutch East India Company) the correctness of such a statement was important because it contained an official confirmation that its important trading entrepôt in Siam, its lodge (*Logie*) or factory in Ayudhya had been entirely destroyed in 1767. The lodge was not rebuilt.²

In 1952, with the assistance of the then Curator of the Fine Arts Department, Luang Boribal Buribhand, the solid brick foundations of this considerable V.O.C. establishment (in Thai called ตึกวิลันดา *tük vilanda*; *tük* = 'stone building', *vilanda* = *belanda*, 'white' or 'Dutch' in Malay) was located. With the generous assistance of the Dutch community in Thailand, a brick monument with an inscribed bronze plaque was erected on these brick foundations in 1956— figures 1 and 2. The monument fronts the Chao Phraya River south of Ayudhya, and is easily reached from the town by boat. The site is officially under the protection of the Fine Arts Department.

2) Joost Schouten describes this lodge as follows :

To which end the General and Council of India caused in Anno 1634 a stone lodge, with fit pack-houses, pleasant appartments, and a commodious landing place, to be builded on the borders of the River Menam, being one of the convenientest and best situated of any that is unfortified in all the Indiaes.

Cf. Francis Caron and Joost Schouten, *A True Description of the Mighty Kingdoms of Japan and Siam* English translation, London 1791 p. 152.

[illegible][illegible][illegible][illegible]

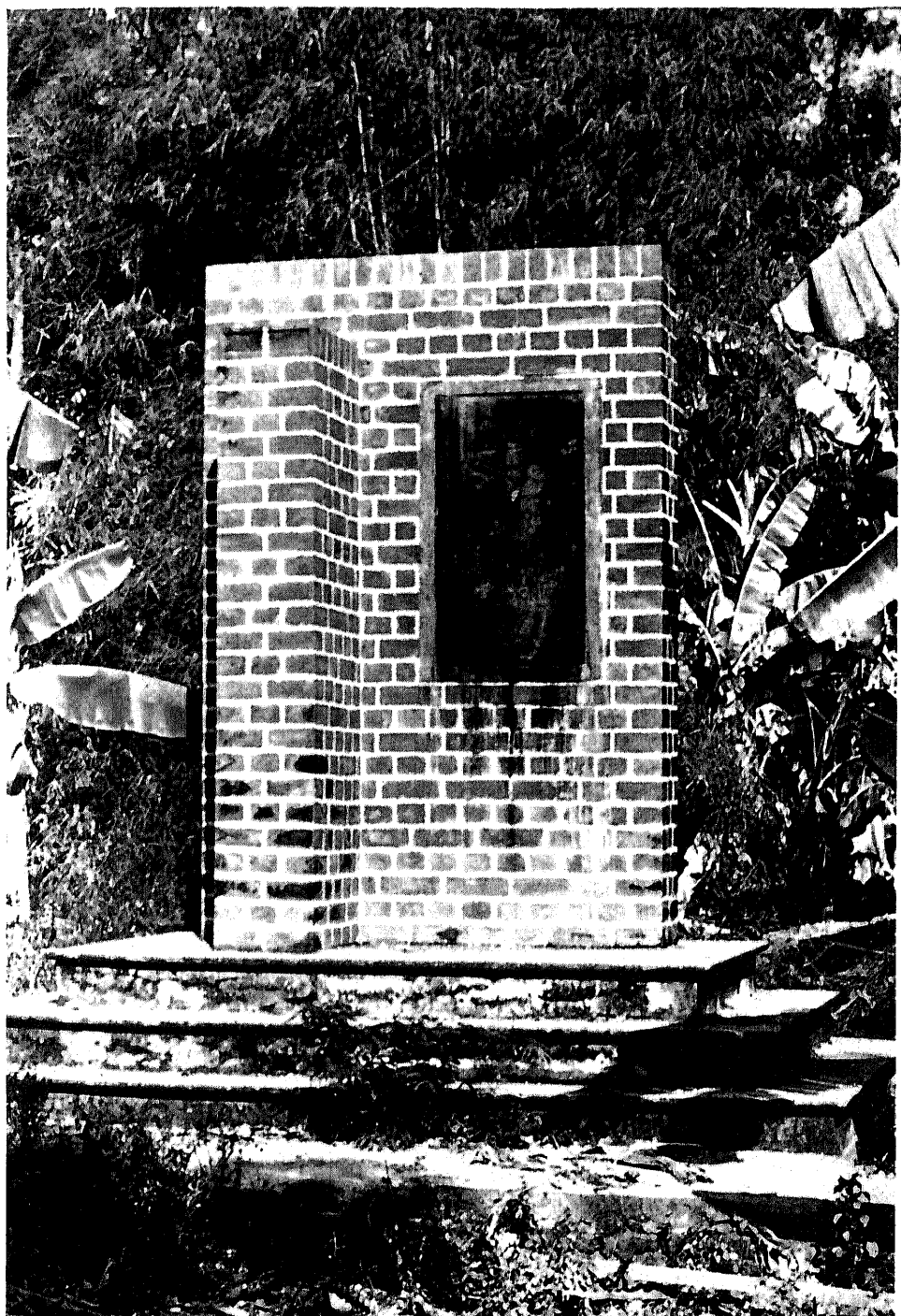


Fig. 2. Monument on the brick foundation of the Lodge of the Dutch East India Company; East bank of the Chao Phraya River south of Ayudhya.



Fig. 3. Bronze commemorative shield on Monument. Translation : 'Here stood from 1634 to 1767, the Factory (Lodge) of the United East India Company, V.O.C.'

**Transcription of Official Record of Eye-witness Account
of the Destruction of Ayudhya in 1767**

Relaas door Anthony Goyaton, Armenier, en, zo, voorgeeft, gewezen Hoofd der vreemde Europeezen in Siam en de aldaar woonagtig geweest zijnde Arabies Priester Seyed Ali, gedaan aan den Sabandhaar van der Voort

De relatanten verhaalen dat de Bramans, kort na het vertrek van 's Comp. dienaaren, voorgevallen in November 1765, verder alle het omleggende Land geheel verwoest hebbende, eijndelijk in de maand Julij of Augustus 1766 de Stad Siam zijn komen insluitjen, rondsomme deselve kleene batterijen opwerpende, zoo dat er niemand in of uijt konde.

Dat dit geduurt heeft tot in de maand Maart 1767, wanneer zij, terwijl de Stad door het hooge water omringd was, deselve op zeekeren nacht met vaartuijgen genaderd zijnde met Ladders beklommen en door het werpen van aarde potten met buskruijd gevuld, de belegerde van de muuren verjaagd mitsgaders zig vervolgens meester van de Stad gemaakt en z' geheel in de asse gelegt hebben: in dese hunner onderneeming merkeliijk geholpen zijnde door hunne Landslieden, die zig ten getalle van omtrend vijf hondert in de Stad bevonden, uijt de successieve bevoorens door de Siammers gemaakte gevangenen, met welke zij hadden weeten te correspondeeren. Dat zij van de inwoonderen, die den brand ontkomen zijn, nog de meeste om het Leeven gebracht hebbende, de overige in verscheijde parthijen, na het getal haaren Hoofden verdeelt en weggevoert hebben, na dat zij ook 's Comp. Logie alvorens aan de vlamme hadden opgeofferd.

Dat de jonge koning die zig nevens zijne Familie, zo mede den Berquelang (weesende de ouden koning dien selven nacht, zo de relatanten zeggen, door de Siammers zelve omgebracht) onder de weggevoerde bevonden hebben, onder weege overleden waaren, den eersten door ziekte en den laatste sig selv vergeven hebbende.

Dat de Relatanten, nevens hunne lotgenoten, ten getalle van omtrend duizend koppen bestaande in portugeesen, Armeniers, Peguanen, Siammers en Maleijers, zo mans, vrouwen als kinderen,

onder een klein eskorte van maar vijftien Bramans de weg na Pegu opgevoerd zijnde, half wegen gelegenheid hadden weeten te vinden hunne geleijders te vermeesteren en zig door de vlugt in veiligheid te stellen, zijnde na een maand succelens door bossen en ongebaande wegen eerst weder aan de Siamse Rivier aangekomen.

Dat de Relatanten aldaar nog drie maanden verbleeven zijnde, vervolgens nevens eenige andere haarer Lotgenooten met een klein China vaartuijg na Cambodja en voorts na Palembang gestevend zijnde eijndelijk op den 23 deezer met het vaartuijg van den Juraagan Ink. alhier zijn gearriveerd. Voorts zeggen de Relatanten dat de Bramans dus het land ontruijmd hebbende zig eenige Siammers omtrend Bangkok, zijnde de plaats daar wel eer de Fransche Logie gestaan heeft, weder hadden nedergezet die zij met de vaart na Cambodja geneerden, Terwijl een aantal van circa twee duizend Chineesen zig onder een haarer Hoofden aan de mond der rivier onthielden, hun erneerende met de agricultuure en visscherije.

Aldus gerelateerd den 26 april 1768

P. van der Voort.

**Translation of Official Record of Eye-witness Account
of the Destruction of Ayudhya in 1767**

Account by Anthony Goyaton, Armenian, formerly
Head of the foreign Europeans in Siam and the Arabian
Priest Seyed Ali, formerly residing there, given to the
Shabander van dez Voort.³

The spokesmen relate that the Burmese, shortly after the departure of the Company's servants in November 1765, came to surround the City Siam in the month of July or August 1766 after having destroyed all the country around; and they erected small batteries around the city, so that no one could get in or out.

The spokesmen say that this lasted till within the month of March 1767, when the Burmese, at the time that the city was surrounded by high water,⁴ approached the city at night with boats, scaled the walls with ladders and by throwing earthen pots with

3) *Shabandar* is a word of Persian origin meaning 'King of the Haven'. Cf. Yule, H. and Burnell, A.C. *Hobson-Jobson's Dictionary* London 1903 p. 816 under *Shabunder*. The function of a *shabandar* is described by M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofs (*Asian Trade and European Influence in the Indonesian Archipelago between 1500 and about 1630*. The Hague 1962 p. 42) as follows:

The *shabandar*'s primary task was to look after the merchants of his particular nation, while the market places and warehouses were also under his management. He kept a check on weights, measures and coinage, and adjudicated in disputes between ship's captains and the merchants in any ship of the nation he represented.

For a description of the position of the *shabandar* cf. Schrieke, B. *Indonesian Sociological Studies Part Two; Ruler and Realm in early Java* The Hague 1957 p. 238. More recent literature on the importance of the position of the *shabandar* in asian trade is not available here.

4) Today the water level in the rivers around Ayudhya would be low at this period. Though no exact date is given in the statement, it follows that Ayudhya ('de stad Siam') was taken by the Burmese on a certain night in the month of March 1767. Wood (*A History of Siam* Bangkok 1924 p. 249) states that the city was taken on Tuesday, 7th April, 1767.

gunpowder chased the besieged from the walls. Having mastered the city, they destroyed it entirely to ashes. In this operation the Burmese received much assistance from their countrymen inside the city, numbering about five hundred (these had been captured by the Siamese on previous occasions) with whom the invaders had been able to communicate. It was related further that the Burmese after having killed most of the inhabitants who had escaped the conflagration, divided the others in accordance with the number of surviving people, in various parties and led them away, after having first destroyed the Lodge of the Company by fire.

The spokesmen relate also that the young King together with his family as well as the Berquelang, were among those who were led away. On the way the King died through illness and the Berquelang died after having poisoned himself. (The old King, so the narrators say, was murdered the same night by the Siamese themselves).⁵

The narrators together with their companions, numbering about one thousand people and consisting of Portuguese, Armenians, Peguans, Siamese and Malays, both men, women and children, were transported along the way to Pegu, under a small escort of only fifteen Burmese. Half-way, they found the opportunity to capture their escort and escape in flight. After having roamed through forests and untrodden ways they at last arrived again at the Siamese river.⁶

The narrators stayed there three months and afterwards sailed with some of the other companions in a small Chinese vessel to Cambodia and then to Palembang, arriving here finally on the 23rd of this month with the ship of the Juraagan Ink.

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- 5) The use of brackets suggests that the *Shabander* was not quite certain of this information. The old King must have been the reigning King Ekatat. Wood (*op. cit.* p. 249) states that after the taking of Ayudhya 'King Ekatat fled from his palace in a small boat. The exact manner of his final fate is uncertain'. It is possible, but not at all certain, that 'the young King' could have been the ex-King Utumpon, who according to Wood (*ibid.*) was torn from the shelter of his monastery and taken away to Burma, where he ended his days in captivity in 1796. If Wood's statement is correct, the 'Relaas' cannot be relied upon in this respect.
- 6) The 'Siamese river' being the Chao Phraya, the river on which Ayudhya is situated.

The narrators say furthermore that after the Burmese had evacuated the country, some Siamese again settled themselves in Bangkok, which is the place where formerly the French Lodge stood.⁷ They occupied themselves with the trade to Cambodia,⁸ while about two thousand Chinese under one of their chiefs, stayed at the mouth of the river, sustaining themselves with agriculture and fishing.

Thus related the 26th April 1768

P. van der Voort

7) The French Factory was on the Dhonburi side—the west side—of the Chao Phraya River.

8) This translation of the Dutch 'die zij met de vaart na Cambodja geneerden', is rather free and may not be accurate.

