

5 Javanese Horses for the Court of Ayutthaya

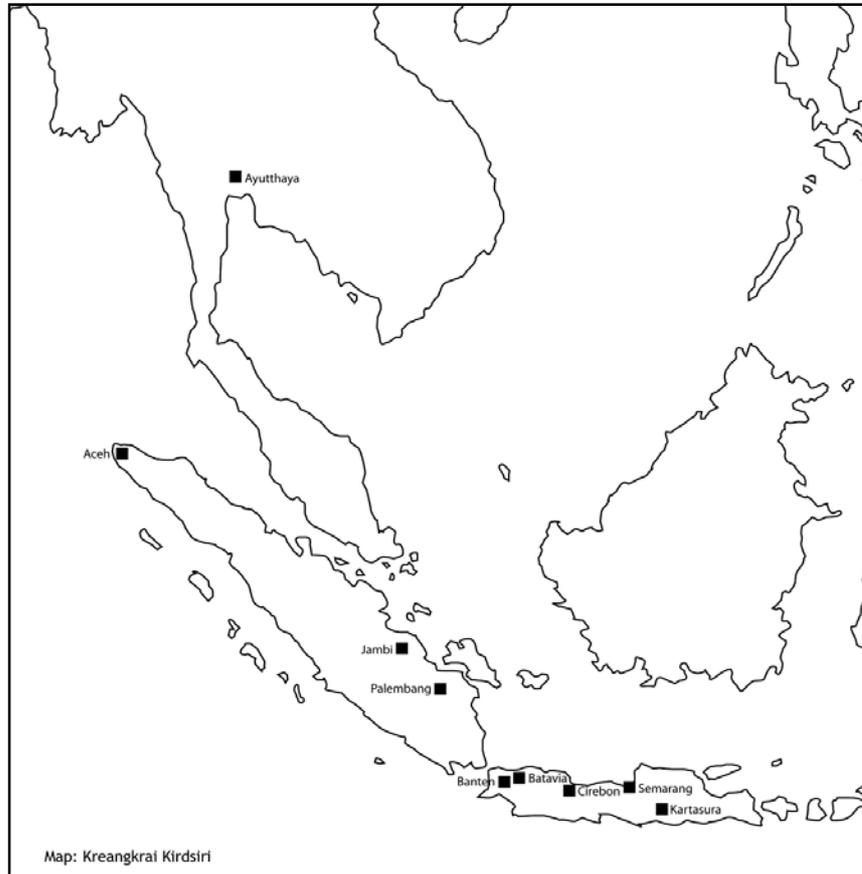
Dhiravat na Pombejra

Introduction

Along with elephants, *naga*, and other beasts, horses featured in stories of the Buddha, and thus also in Siamese art and illustrated manuscripts.¹ In the *Tripitaka* the Buddhist universal monarch or cakravartin had a horse (along with an elephant) as one of his seven accoutrements.² For centuries, these animals played a role, too, in the warfare of continental Southeast Asia.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries horses – and Javanese horses in particular – became trading commodities much sought after by the royal court of Siam. Contemporaneous Dutch documents both from Ayutthaya and in Batavia mentioned the horse-buying expeditions sent out by various Siamese kings. This chapter is a preliminary study of how this trade was conducted by the kings' men, with the sometimes reluctant cooperation of the Dutch United East India Company (VOC).

During the reign of King Narai (1656–1688), the court of Ayutthaya started buying horses from Java. During the two years of 1691 and 1692 alone, horse-buyers of King Phetracha (1688–1703) bought a total of 73 horses from the interior of Java.³ By 1725, the court of King Thaisa (1709–1733) was still buying horses from Java, purchasing 53 horses in that year alone.⁴ The VOC records contain many such references to Siamese horse-buying expeditions from the 1680s till at least the 1730s, during the reign of King Borommakot (1733–1758).⁵ The question remains, though, why did the Siamese seek to buy Javanese horses? The 'noblest' specimens of horse known to the Asian courts were after all Persian or Arab (Arabian). In all likelihood it must have been easier, and presumably cheaper, to buy Javanese horses. It is not clear what kind of horse is meant by the term 'Javanese horse' in the VOC sources. According to the Portuguese writer Tomé Pires, writing in the early sixteenth century, Sumatran horses were shipped regularly from Eastern Sumatra to Western Java, while horses from Java were in turn shipped to the islands of Bali, Lombok, and Sumbawa.⁶

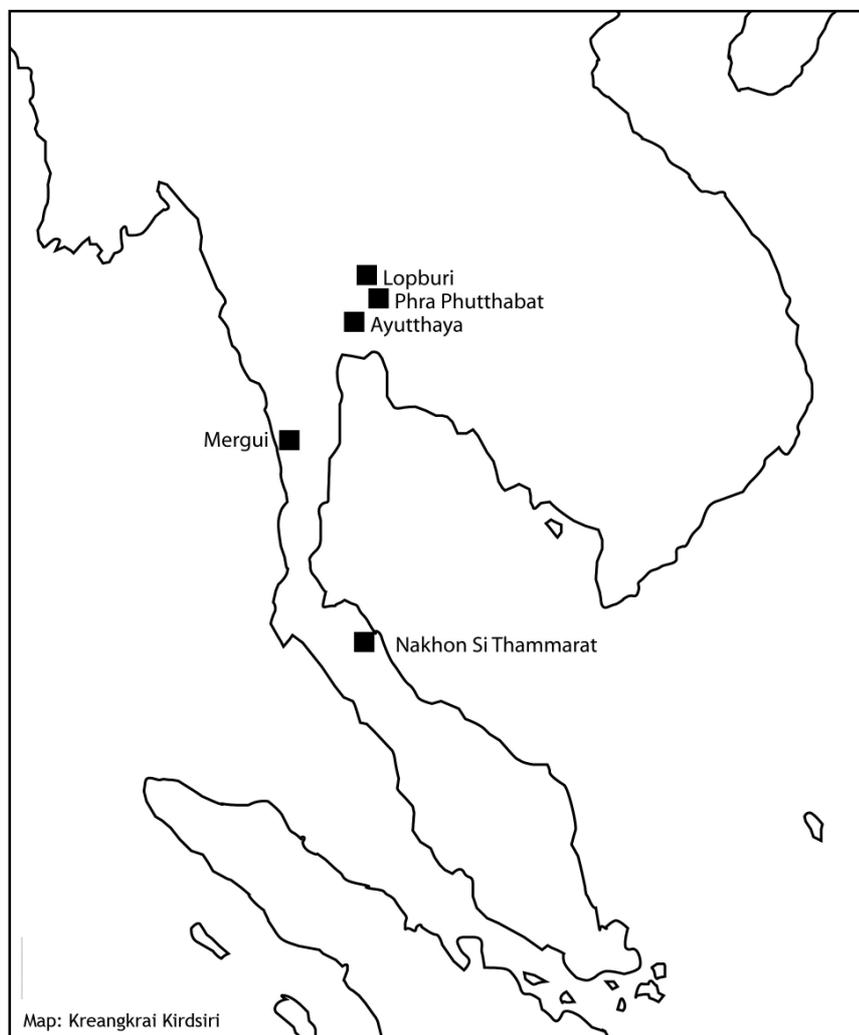


Map 5.1 Ayutthaya and Java.

The Java pony as we know it today has supposedly been ‘decisively influenced’ by the Arabian breed. According to the *Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indië* the Javanese horse, in the seventeenth century, was ‘een sterk en deugdzaam paard’ (a strong and virtuous horse) that was still giving sterling service during the Java War of 1825–1830. By the early twentieth century (when the Encyclopaedia was published) the breed had ‘degenerated’, though it was declared that fine specimens could still be found in Besoeki and Preanger.⁷ Nowadays the Java pony is used primarily as a pack or work animal. Breeds similar to the Java pony are to be found on other Indonesian islands, such as Sumatra, Timor, and Sumba (see Chapter 4 in this volume). According to a mid-seventeenth century Dutch source (De Graaff), troops of wild horses could still be seen roaming the interior of Sumatra.⁸ As for the Timor pony, it is of a more delicate build

(and smaller) than the Javanese, while the Sumba is used as a dancing horse.⁹

It is not surprising that the Javanese horse has been influenced by the Arabian and Persian breeds. Commercial and cultural contacts, including religious influences, had been key elements of the relations between the Middle East, Muslim India, and island Southeast Asia for centuries. The horses brought as gifts to local rulers inspired them to search for more.¹⁰ The importation of Arabian or Persian horses almost certainly led to cross-breeding with local ponies.



Map 5.2 Siam.

The Siamese Context

The area near Ayutthaya, the old capital of Siam, with its annual inundation during the rainy season, was not very suitable for horses. The riverine, amphibious way of life of the Siamese Central Plains meant that the primary means of transportation was by boat. John Crawfurd, in his *Descriptive Dictionary of the Indian Islands & Adjacent Countries*, claimed that the Siamese horse, 'like that of all the countries south-east of India as far as China, is a pony, not exceeding 13 hands high, and is in general use only in the uplands, being rarely seen within the tract of inundation.'¹¹ To the Siamese of Ayutthaya, however, the horse had its significance and usefulness.

The horse, along with the elephant, was highly regarded by the monarch and the royal court. It is thus not surprising that it should have formed part of armies and royal processions during the Ayutthaya period. Evidence on horses before 1600 is scant, but for the seventeenth century, there are western sources which mention horses in the context of the Siamese king and his court. It is clear that royal processions involved the use of horses as well as elephants. The Dutch merchant Joost Schouten refers to the king's horse guards forming part of the royal procession by land.¹² Schouten's successor Jeremias van Vliet, in his *Description of Siam*, describes the land procession in even greater detail, saying that the horses and elephants of the king were 'adorned copiously with gold and precious stones'. He relates further that the people riding the horses in the royal procession were 'courtiers and great men', meaning the *khunnang* or Siamese officials.¹³ This suggests that the basic skills of horsemanship were probably mandatory for a young nobleman of the seventeenth century.

According to the French missionary Nicolas Gervaise, when the king 'goes out in order to display his majesty in the presence of the ambassador of some ruler to whom he personally wishes to do honour, or in order to attend the ceremonies of some great festival, the companies of his foot-guards are supported by troops of cavalry consisting in all of between twelve and thirteen thousand men'. Another Frenchman, the diplomatic envoy Simon de La Loubère, refers to the King of Siam's employment of 'a foreign standing Horse-guard, which consists in an Hundred and Thirty Gentlemen' of Mughal 'Moors', plus some additional horse guards of 'Meens' (probably Khmers, in Thai *khamen*) and Laos. The Mughal horse guards must have been elite troops of the king, probably first employed during the period of 'Moor' ascendancy at King Narai's court. The king's horse guards, in common with other foreign mercenaries, resided outside the Royal Palace but were called upon to accompany the king when he went out.¹⁴

In recounting the 1685 French embassy's passage through the courtyards of the Royal Palace in Ayutthaya, the Abbé de Choisy mentions the king's horses. The second courtyard at the palace contained 'a squadron of perhaps 300 horses'. Even to a seventeenth century Frenchman like Choisy, the horses of the King of Siam seemed 'rather fine', though 'badly trained'.¹⁵

A plan of the Royal Palace at Ayutthaya drawn by the German physician Engelbert Kaempfer shows '[a] large place for the running of races'.¹⁶ It is not known whether these races were horse races. A notable example of horse-racing in Southeast Asia would be that in Aceh.¹⁷ The ponds mentioned by Kaempfer were probably used for washing and bathing the animals.

Were horses used in tournaments, or in ceremonies other than the royal processions? In late eighteenth century Java, the court of Sultan Mangkubumi was much taken up with feasts, which included tournaments by horsemen, along with animal fights.¹⁸ Some evidence on Siam is also available: in April 1639, during major festivities at King Prasatthong's court, horse-riding was, along with fights involving elephants, part of the entertainment on offer. The Palatine Law of Siam, dating from the fifteenth century, mentions playing polo (*khli*) as one of the kings' activities.¹⁹

Jeremias van Vliet describes the army of King Prasatthong in some detail. He claims that the king had over three thousand elephants, with 400-500 alone in and around Ayutthaya, each with two to three men attending them regularly. According to Van Vliet, '[t]he army also possesses ponies but no special horsemen are provided for. The cavalry are armed with old muskets and leather shields, so that an army provided with modern weapons does not need to fear an attack of the Siamese cavalry'.²⁰ It is noteworthy that Van Vliet uses the term 'ponies' to describe the horses in the Siamese cavalry. In La Loubère's opinion, too, horses were not much used by the Siamese in warfare: 'As they have no Horses (for what is two thousand Horse at most, which 'tis reported that the King of *Siam* keeps?) their Armies consist only in Elephants, and in Infantry, naked and ill-armed, after the mode of the Country'.²¹

Not long before the French involvement in Siam, however, a Dutch document records that an Ayutthayan expedition sent by King Prasatthong to subdue Songkhla was 25,000 strong, with 300 elephants and 'many horses'.²² It would be fair to conclude, however, that elephants were the 'elite' cavalry of the armies of Ayutthaya, while the horses were very much of secondary importance. The decisive duels between kings and generals were conducted on elephant-back, after all. Horses were useful in that they were more mobile than elephants, and certainly faster. Messengers and scouts were those who could make best use of the horses.

Ibn Muhammad Ibrahim Muhammad Rabi, author of *The Ship of Sulaiman*, the account of the 1685 Persian embassy to Siam, recounts stories about

the Siamese attitude to horses. First of all he relates that the members of that embassy had brought fine quality Arabian- and Indian-bred horses with them, and it would have been very burdensome to transport them back to Persia. 'Of necessity these horses became gifts to the Siamese king's estates.' The Siamese apparently had no interest in these 'fairy-like beauties', and although they knew the real market value of the horses they paid low prices for them (presumably a prerogative of royal 'monopolism'). The Persian source goes on to describe briefly the Siamese way of training their horses, which was to teach them to lower their heads in deference to their riders. Also, Siamese cut the manes and tails of their horses because they considered it bad luck for both rider and horse for the animals to have long manes and tails.²³

The royal chronicles of Ayutthaya, too, would seem to offer plenty of evidence for the use of horses in traditional Siamese warfare. From the episodes dealing with the reign of King Naresuan alone, for instance, there are data which says that horses were used in reconnaissance and news-bearing, as well as in battle. During a war against the Burmese, King Naresuan advised his men at Martaban to station 20-30 fast horses so that they might take turns to take news to the main army. Horses were used in greater numbers than elephants, even, in the army assembled to invade Cambodia. That force comprised 100,000 men, 800 elephants, and 1,500 horses.²⁴ The Burmese armies had horses as well as elephants in their cavalry. A key part of King Alaungpaya's armies which invaded Siam in 1760 were the Manipuri horsemen, who later formed the rearguard as the invasion forces withdrew.²⁵

Siamese sources other than the royal chronicles contain plenty of references to horses too. While the chronicles mostly refer to horses in the context of military campaigns, the Testimony of Khunluang Wat Pradu Songtham testifies to the existence of stables for the king's horses on the walled island-city of Ayutthaya.²⁶ A Dutch document concerning the succession dispute of 1703 which to all intents and purposes was testimony given by a Siamese courtier at the court of King Sua, recounts how the king and his half-brother Chao Phra Khwan rode horses to the funeral of their father King Phetracha. Chao Phra Khwan was encouraged to ride a horse, being given 'the best horse from the king's stables', and was later lured to his death while riding in the vast grounds of the Royal Palace. A group of his half-brother's most trusted courtiers dragged him down from his mount and 'executed' him with sandalwood clubs. The prince's killing left the way clear for Phrachao Sua to enjoy his rule as king. The whole episode shows that Siamese court culture, at by the end of the seventeenth century, had become to some extent a 'horse culture'.²⁷

There are old Siamese horse-riding and horse-identification manuals still extant, though these probably date from the early to mid nineteenth

century rather than the Ayutthaya period proper. But at least in the matter of the valuation of horses, the standard was exactly the same during the late Ayutthaya and the early Bangkok periods. The Siamese in olden days seemed to attach a very great significance to the colour of the horses. The illustrations in the old manuals clearly differentiate between the colours of various 'types' of horses, rather than on their physical or structural characteristics. Much importance is also given to the classification, in a strict order corresponding roughly with social hierarchy, of various kinds of horses. They do not, however, allude to the provenance of horses. On the matter of the horses' colour, the manual states that a horse which has a white body and a black head was deemed to be fit for a king, along with a black horse which had a white tail, or all-white and all-black horses. No explanation for these preferences is given by the manuals. A secondary class of horse could nevertheless have sterling qualities of endurance and courage too. Less extraordinary specimens were classified as being of the third and fourth class.²⁸

The illustrated Siamese manuscripts depicting seventeenth century royal processions by land and by water, thought to be copies of the Wat Yom ordination hall murals, show few horses. Curiously enough, horses appear only as part of the water or royal barge procession, twenty horses progressing on land beside the more illustrious of the barges.²⁹ The emphasis of the land procession was on elephants and infantry, and no horses are depicted, contrary to data in seventeenth century western sources such as Schouten and Van Vliet. A royal procession at the Phra Phutthabat (Buddha's Footprint) shrine in 1737 was said to have included four Persian horses, and other horses mounted by the king's retinue. King Borommakot himself, however, was on elephant-back.³⁰

The Siamese had always used horses for transportation, warfare,³¹ and ceremonial purposes, long before the coming of either the Persians or the Europeans to Siam. But where did Siam's horses come from, since there seems to have been no native breed? For the earlier, pre-1600 period, there has been no detailed research, and it is difficult to know where to find data for such a study. But for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the VOC sources may provide some illumination. The Dutch data come from three main sets of archival materials. The most informative and detailed sources are the letters and reports of the VOC merchants stationed in Ayutthaya and the letters of the *phrakhlang* minister (in the *Overgekomen Brieven en Papieren* series). The *Generale Missiven* or general letters of the Governors-General and Council of the Indies, and the *Batavias Uitgaand Briefboek* or letters from Batavia to the various VOC offices in Asia, are also very useful sources in the study of the trade in Javanese horses.

Buying Horses for King Narai (1656–1688)

The earliest Dutch sources to mention the buying of horses for the Ayutthaya court date from the early 1680s, during the reign of King Narai. However, an earlier source states that in 1651 the VOC Governor-General Carel Reniers sent 'two Javanese horses' as gifts to King Prasatthong's favourite Okya Sombatthiban.³² Around 1681–1682 the King of Siam (Narai) sent a vessel containing a party of horse-buyers to purchase horses in the Cirebon area of northern Java. According to Chaophraya Phrakhlang (Kosa Lek)'s letter, the Siamese ship was on its way from Batavia to Cirebon when it was attacked and burnt by the Javanese. The court therefore asked Batavia to look into the problem.³³ The Siamese must have started to become increasingly wary of sending their own vessels to buy the horses, because they came to rely more and more on the Dutch.

The area around the *pasisir* towns on the 'East' or north coast of Java seems to have been a popular place to buy horses. In 1683–1684, the Sultan of Jambi asked the VOC for passes to enable his men to go to buy horses on the East Coast of Java. The sultan wanted 40–50 riding horses for use in the 'tournoybaan'. In 1685 the Sultan also purchased some 50 horses, though this time his men were said to have gone to the island of Bangka off the Sumatran coast.³⁴ In 1715 the Sultan of Banten was still interested in buying horses from areas further east on Java. He sent his brother and uncle to Cirebon, on the East Coast of Java, to buy horses during that year.³⁵ As late as 1726 a 'Kjahi Astradipana' from Palembang went to Cirebon to buy horses.³⁶

It is not mentioned in any contemporary sources why King Narai wanted to buy Javanese horses. A couple of possible clues may be that the king employed 'Moors' ('Mughals' and Persians) as his horse-guard, and that in the reign of King Phetracha (1688–1703) horses were required for the king's 'cuirassiers'. Perhaps King Narai's horse-guards wanted new horses on a regular basis, or wanted to improve the quality of the king's horses through crossbreeding with superior specimens. According to La Loubère, King Narai already had 'a dozen of *Persian*', gifts from the King of Persia which by 1687 had already depreciated in value. The Siamese king '[o]rdinarily ... sends to buy some Horses at *Batavia*, where they are all small and very brisk, but as resty as the *Javan* people are mutinous.' When La Loubère stopped by in Batavia on his way to Siam, he found two Siamese there 'to buy two hundred Horses for the King their Master, about a hundred and fifty of which they had already sent away for *Siam*.'³⁷

A letter from the *phrakhlang* minister to the Governor-General and Council dated Chulasakkarat 1045/6 (1683) asks Batavia to supply the

Siamese court with thirty stallions and thirty mares. The minister explains that the court did not send people to buy horses in Java anymore, because it caused the VOC to incur losses. This was possibly a piqued Siamese reaction to VOC complaints about expenses. But it did not prevent the Okphra Kosathibodi in 1684 (presumably the acting *phrakhlang* following the death of Kosa Lek in 1683) from asking for the Governor-General's cooperation in helping a group of the king's men previously sent to fetch sixty horses from Java.³⁸ However risky the enterprise was, the Siamese were at this stage still occasionally sending their own ships to buy and transport the horses, probably in order to be less reliant on the Dutch.

There had been two junks sent to transport horses from Java to Siam with the Siamese embassy to Batavia of 1685-1686. A 'Gravaminas' or list of grievances presented to the Governor-General and Council in Batavia by the Siamese ambassadors shows that sending ships and buyers to Java to procure horses for the king was something that happened on a regular basis. But Governor-General Van Goens had earlier written to the *phrakhlang* requesting that the Siamese court desist from sending ships to buy horses in Java: the Siamese were coming into direct competition with the VOC by selling textiles in Java, and were anyway making losses on their voyages. Van Goens offered to help King Narai procure whatever horses he wanted from Java. The Siamese court, therefore, asked that the Company send thirty stallions and thirty mares to Ayutthaya. According to a VOC general letter of May 1684, these sixty horses had not been obtainable.³⁹ It was perhaps very difficult to obtain mares from the parts of Java controlled by the court of Mataram.

The Siamese court was nothing if not persistent in its pursuit of goods desired by the king. This perseverance eventually brought about positive results. There is no record of whether horses were taken back to Siam on the king's ships in 1685-1686, but a letter dated December 1686 mentions about 39 horses being sent to Siam per the *Walstroom* on 23 May of that year. The VOC ship also took back to Siam the Siamese king's envoy Okluang Chula, who had bought these horses while discharging his diplomatic duties in Batavia.⁴⁰

The following year the Siamese court and the VOC arrived at an arrangement which was to prove the model for later horse-buying activities. The VOC authorities in Batavia advanced money to the king's horse-buyers (probably the ones La Loubère encountered), and also transported the horses to Siam. In 1687 the sum of money advanced was 1,609 rials. During that year 67 horses bought by the king's men were sent on VOC vessels to Siam.⁴¹ In this way the Siamese court obtained the requisite number of Javanese horses, while at the same time the Dutch did not have to worry about any Siamese

competition in bringing textiles to sell in Java. But even at the very end of King Narai's reign, the shipping arrangement was still flexible and non-VOC vessels could also be used to ship the horses to Ayutthaya. In 1688, the final year of the reign, a VOC general letter mentions that although 24 horses for the King of Siam had been sent with the VOC vessel *Lek*, there was also a Siamese junk which transported 14 horses to Siam.⁴² The trading interests of King Narai ranged widely, and 'Siamese' ships, whether European, Chinese, or 'Moor' vessels, regularly sailed the waters of the Gulf of Siam, the South China Sea, and the Bay of Bengal.

In the meantime, King Narai was similarly involved in diplomatic contact with Susuhunan Amangkurat II of Mataram. In 1687 an envoy from the *susuhunan* to the court of Siam appeared on the east coast of Java. The VOC reported that the envoy had with him seven Javanese horses as presents for the King of Siam. The Javanese embassy to Siam may have been part of a diplomatic alliance against the VOC, which was becoming a more and more aggressive economic and military power in Southeast Asia. A little earlier in that decade, the Dutch had taken over Bantam (Banten) and relations between the VOC and Siam had been quite tense during the first part of the 1680s.⁴³ It is quite possible that, at this particular juncture, the Siamese and Javanese courts were using the horse trade as a cover for deeper diplomatic negotiations. In political and military terms, however, the Javano-Siamese diplomatic initiative did not seem to lead to anything concrete.

King Phetracha's Quest for Horses (1688-1703)

After King Narai's death many contacts with the west ended or took on a different shape and form. The new Siamese king was, at least in the beginning of his reign, hostile to the French, while relations between the court of Siam and the English East India Company had deteriorated badly by the late 1680s. French diplomats and traders ceased to come to Siam (Father Tachard's efforts to re-establish diplomatic relations between France and Siam notwithstanding), while the English East India Company also stayed away, the only British traders visiting Siam being some country traders based in India. The Dutch, however, stayed on and concluded a new treaty with the Siamese court at the end of 1688.⁴⁴ The trade of the VOC after 1688 was largely concerned with the export of goods such as tin and sapanwood, and the sale of Indian textiles to the Siamese court, but references to the Siamese court buying up horses from Java continue to be mentioned in the sources.

King Phetracha was knowledgeable about matters equestrian, having been Master or Equerry of the king's elephants before his accession to the

throne. The Dutch even maintained that the king rode horses more often than he rode elephants.⁴⁵ In 1689-1690 the VOC granted passes to two vessels equipped by the king's men to buy horses in Java, at the request of the *phrakhlang* (Kosa Pan, the former Siamese ambassador to the court of Louis XIV). However, it appears that only one of these two vessels had returned to Siam by 1691. The king's horse-buyers of 1691 were advanced a sum of 20 catties 4 taels by the VOC to buy the required horses, and this debt was paid back in Ayutthaya by the king's treasurers.⁴⁶

Why did King Phetracha want to obtain good quality horses? The clearest answer is expressed in a letter of 1696 from Chaophraya Kosathibodi (Pan) to the VOC Governor-General in which the Siamese minister explains that the court wanted horses for the king's 'cuirassiers' (armoured cavalry troops).⁴⁷ But the king appears to have wanted high quality horses for his personal use too (see below).

An earlier letter from the *phrakhlang* to Batavia gives another inkling of which kind of horse was wanted most by the Siamese court. In his letter of 1694, the minister specified that the horses must be of full size and height, be around three-four years old (or at the most seven-eight years old), have a well-proportioned body, and must be able to learn 'the Siamese ambling gait'. The *phrakhlang* complained in 1694 that thus far almost none of the horses bought from Java matched the court's exact requirements. The minister went on to specify almost case by case the reasons why certain of the Javanese horses already bought for the court were deficient. Of the thirty horses sent over to Siam by the king's horse-buyers recently, only one, a black-and-white stallion, seemed to accord with the court's specifications. Certainly the old Siamese horse manuals confirm that some of the horses suitable for a monarch had to be white, black, or black-and-white.⁴⁸

The shipping of the King of Siam's horses involved not only the Dutch and the Siamese but a vessel sent in 1692 from Siam to Batavia to obtain horses was skippered by a Chinese. This may or may not have been the same Chinese, called 'Im', who was mentioned by the *phrakhlang* in 1695 as having been involved in King Phetracha's horse-buying activities in Java.⁴⁹ The horse-buyers themselves were, however, probably Siamese. At least their ranks and titles are revealed in some of the VOC documents, especially in the letters written originally in Siamese by the *phrakhlang* minister, and in the letters of the *opperhoofd* (VOC chief merchant).

In 1691-1692, the two horse-buyers had been Khun 'Wijtsjatwatti' and Mun In Sombat. A few years later, in 1699, a list is given of the whole party of 17 Siamese travelling on board a VOC vessel, comprising nine 'caloangers' (*khaluang* or courtiers), two servants, five stable boys, with a certain 'Ebrahim' as translator. The leading *khaluang* in the party were Okluang Yokkrabat,

Okkhun Thip Chula, who though of *okkhun* rank was the leader of the horse-buying expedition, Okkhun 'Peth-ijntra', Okkhun 'Ritsorasin', and Okkhun 'Peth Sang haen'. The other four were of *okmun* rank. These Siamese officials took with them 50 bahar of tin, 100 piculs of copper, and some Japanese camphor to sell in Java.⁵⁰ This suggests that on every trip commodities were taken to be sold in Java, with the remaining amount of money needed for the purchase of horses being advanced to the Siamese by the VOC.

King Phetracha sent another well-documented expedition to buy horses from Java in 1701-1702. The Siamese party, traveling on the VOC vessel *Pampus*, was led by Okluang 'Rha sambat' (Ratcha Sombat or Raksa Sombat?) and Okluang 'Pijtak tsijn nasaij', and further consisted of two officials of *khun* rank, two *mun*, and two *phan*. The Dutch document, a letter written by the *opperhoofd* Gideon Tant, identifies the two *okluang* and two *mun* as 'merchants', each with a servant. The two *khun* ('Choen Craij sinthop' and 'Choen Assawat tsaij'), assisted by the two *phan*, were horse-buyers proper. This shows that the Siamese court was concerned that there should be a clear division of duties. In Batavia, the merchants would sell the cargo of Japanese copper, tin, spelter (zinc or pewter), quicksilver, and elephants' teeth (ivory) which they had brought from Siam.⁵¹ As for the horse-buyers, they presumably purchased the animals with a combination of money advanced to them by the Dutch and the money received from the sale of their cargo.⁵²

King Phetracha appears to have been very keen to acquire good quality horses from whichever quarter he could find them. A VOC general letter of January 1697 reports that he made efforts to buy horses from the Coromandel Coast, China, Manila, and - with the Company's ships - from Batavia. The VOC therefore presented to the king Javanese horses as presents, and later gave him a gift of three Persian horses.⁵³ Persian horses were obviously highly prized and much appreciated by the Siamese court, but a large and steady supply was not to be had. In 1697, the Dutch *opperhoofd* Thomas van Son wrote to the Governor-General that King Phetracha had sent an Okluang 'Amanakhan' ('khan' denotes a Muslim, perhaps) and Mun Inthramat to the Coromandel Coast with a cargo of 22 elephants and 240 bahar of tin, to be exchanged for horses as well as textiles.⁵⁴ The horses wanted by the Siamese in India were most likely these 'Persian' horses, probably with Arabian blood.

In 1694 a Persian mare was sent to the King of Siam, because there was no Persian stallion to be had in Batavia. Later on the VOC was dissatisfied with the valuation by the Siamese court of the Persian horses given as presents to the king in 1696. The VOC gave the king three large Persian horses (along with some Javanese horses), but complained that, in return,

the court gave presents which were of lesser value than the price of the animals and other gifts combined. The king wanted to give 612 guilders less than the true value of the horses, but at the same time the VOC wanted to get rid of the horses because they were expensive to feed and care for. The problem seems to have been that the Persian horses brought to Siam in 1696 were not good specimens, possibly because they were of the wrong colour, or were unable to dance and prance 'in the Siamese fashion'.⁵⁵

Towards the very end of his reign, in 1702, King Phetracha sent forty men to Java, bringing presents to the *susuhunan* of Mataram, Amangkurat II, then also at the end of *his* reign. The gifts taken to Java included two elephants, twenty spears, copper cups, and Chinese inlaid mother-of-pearl boxes. The members of this expedition travelled on a barque (possibly Indian or Javanese, the skipper being a certain 'Sirij rajalela') and stopped first at Batavia. The king asked the VOC to lend any necessary help to his men, including a cash loan of not more than twenty Siamese catties (*chang*). It appears that this 40-strong Siamese diplomatic mission to Java was essentially a horse-buying expedition, but it brought gifts to the ruler of Mataram because the *susuhunan's* help and agreement were necessary to the procurement of horses for the court. It is not known exactly what fate befell this expedition, but a VOC letter of August 1703 describes the return of eleven of the king's men on a VOC ship belonging to the Company and on a Batavia burgher's vessel. Ten of the king's men remained in Java. It is not known what happened to the other members of the 1702 embassy; perhaps they had already gone back to Siam on the ship which had taken them to Java in the first place. A Dutch letter of January 1704 reveals that the Governor-General refused to loan the Siamese in Java a sum of 1,000–1,500 *rijksdaalders* (rixdollars) but there were no immediate complaints from the Siamese court, presumably because King Phetracha died in 1703.⁵⁶

Apart from desiring a large number of horses from Java, the Siamese court at the end of King Phetracha's reign also wanted Javanese women dancers to be brought to Siam from the court of Mataram. The Siamese asked the VOC to be of assistance in this enterprise, too, but the Governor-General and Council were not enthusiastic about helping, considering the Siamese court's demands to be 'burdensome'.⁵⁷ Again there is a dead end as far as the sources on this matter are concerned, because no further mention of the dancers seems to have been made in the Dutch documents. Interestingly enough, a French missionary document written by Gabriel Braud, also dating from the end of this reign, mentions that the old king liked to watch young girls dancing, and even danced with them. The missionary puts a sexual slant on the matter, saying that the king preferred to live a life of the senses with his young dancers, and by implication was neglecting the

affairs of state, which were in the hands of his son the Prince of the Front Palace.⁵⁸ One may speculate that direct cultural ties between the Siamese and Javanese courts existed at this juncture, and that horses just as much as dancers were very much a part of this contact.

The Siamese horse-buyers went to the north coast or *pasisir* of Java (also known as the 'East Coast' of Java) to buy their merchandise. The 'beautifully-coloured black-and-white' stallion bought in 1694, along with the other 29 horses of that batch, were obtained with the help of knowledgeable Javanese from Jepara, Semarang, Cirebon, and Kalinjamat. In his letter to Batavia dated 1694, the *phrakhlang* wanted the VOC to arrange for men who knew how to buy horses to help procure them for the king's men in Java. No expense was to be spared once the desired kind of horse was found. The Siamese minister wrote that large troops of horses were apparently to be found farther inland in 'Dongdoet', on the way to Mataram, and in 'Castiassa' or 'old Mataram' (probably Kartasura). The Siamese court even sent painted pictures of horses to Java to serve as models but unfortunately none of these pictures have survived.⁵⁹

A Steady Supply of Horses for King Thaisa (1709-1733)

The reign of King Thaisa was a period of intense commercial activity for the Siamese court, especially trade with China or through Chinese intermediaries. It coincided with a period when the private junk trade of the Chinese in Southeast Asia overall was in a flourishing state. For much of this reign even the *phrakhlang* minister was a man of Chinese origins.⁶⁰

Not that the Siamese horse-buyers stopped going to Batavia and the 'East Coast' of Java during the short reign of King Sua (1703-1709), as there is evidence that Siamese horse-buyers were given an advance loan at Batavia in 1708. By 1709 they were again ready to send sixty horses to Siam. The VOC, however, was on bad terms with the court during this period. The Company withdrew temporarily from Siam in 1705-1706, owing to the lack of 'free trade' in the kingdom, particularly the Ligor (Nakhon Sithammarat) tin trade. The VOC was consistently disappointed in its Ligor tin trade, even though the Company had had a tin export monopoly there since the 1670s.⁶¹

The Dutch were always careful to keep on good terms with the Siamese authorities, including important officials or ministers, because the prompt issuance of trading documents, and indeed the very success of their trade in Ayutthaya, could depend on the goodwill of these officials. In 1710, Batavia sent two horses to the *phrakhlang* minister (presumably the Chinese *phrakhlang*), plus a heavy metal clock for use at his 'newly constructed pagoda or temple in Ayutthaya'. These two horses, however, were Persian

and not Javanese. The new king (Thaisa) also received a gift of two Persian horses upon his accession.⁶² Persian horses were again sent as gifts to King Thaisa, this time towards the end of his reign, in 1730. But the two 'Persian' horses sent to Ayutthaya from Batavia in 1730 were in fact Jaffna horses from Ceylon (Sri Lanka). During this period the VOC had stables and a stud farm on Ceylon, breeding horses of the 'Jaffna' strain which must have originated from the Persian horse. In a general letter of November 1730 it was stated that five stallions and five mares were sought for the Siamese king and the Japanese shogun.⁶³

Native rulers, European East India Companies and Spanish Governors-General used fine horses as gifts or presents all through the seventeenth century and at least a part of the eighteenth century (see Chapter 6 of this volume). From a cursory look at the VOC Governor-General's general letters alone, there is a lot of data on horses as presents. For instance, a general letter of 8 January 1641 mentions that the ruler of Palembang had sent a Persian horse to the *susuhunan* of Mataram, hence the dispatch of a return embassy from Mataram to Palembang during that past year.⁶⁴ The Dutch themselves also gave horses as presents, not only to the Siamese kings of Ayutthaya but also to other Asian potentates. In 1671, the VOC gave a Siamese elephant and some Persian horses to the Nawab of Bengal as presents.⁶⁵

Problems and complications dogged the King of Siam's horse-buyers. The tardiness of a vessel taking them to Java could mean a costly delay, as happened in 1731-1732 when the VOC ship *Berbices* could only sail slowly from Siam to Java. Alternatively, the horse-buyers often arrived too late to buy any horses, going home empty-handed. Sometimes the horses they bought in Java died on the journey to Siam, as happened in 1730-1731. The Javanese horses could apparently only be bought with the permission of the 'Javanese Emperor' (the *susuhunan* of Mataram). The VOC, for instance, was to make clear in Japan that horses, especially mares, were - on pain of death - not allowed to be shipped out of Java without express permission from the Javanese ruler.⁶⁶ The Javanese, then, valued their breed of horse enough to try to control the export of mares.

It seems that by the reigns of King Phetracha and King Thaisa the Siamese horse-buyers had become familiar with the geography of Java, and with the areas where horses could be bought. They also had become more demanding. The *phrakhlang's* letter of 1694 to the Governor-General referred to above mentioned various places in Java where horses could be bought. Sources from 1716 reveal that Siamese horse-buyers had obtained horses from 'the royal residence Cartasoura [Kartasura]'.⁶⁷ A letter of 1719 from the Governor-General and Council to Wijbrand Blom (then *opperhoofd* in Siam) complains

that the Siamese horse-buyers were a burden, and brought no advantages to the Company. The Siamese court protested to Batavia in writing, saying that the king's horse-buyers had been unable to buy any horses outside the northern coastal town of Semarang. The Governor-General maintained that the Siamese were at perfect liberty to do so, but in fact were given too little money with which to buy good horses. Therefore, they ended up with lower-quality horses. The horse-buyers would then mislead the court about the true circumstances, in turn causing the *phrakhlang* minister to make a complaint to the VOC.⁶⁸

Conclusion

The total number of horses bought by the Siamese and sent on to Ayutthaya is difficult to calculate because data on horses *bought* on Java and horses *sent* to Siam appear separately in the various scattered documents. It is possible that not all horses bought were shipped to Ayutthaya. From a preliminary count, it appears that around 900 horses were sent to Siam from Java during the 1686–1735 period, and that at least 598 horses were bought and sent over to Ayutthaya for use by the court during 1709–1733, the period corresponding to King Thaisa's reign alone. For some years, Siamese horse-buyers went to Batavia and were advanced a loan of cash by the VOC. During this period, the sums advanced ranged from a minimum of 1,000 *rijksdaalders* in 1702, to a maximum figure of 2,150 *rijksdaalders* in 1730, or an average of about 1,760 *rijksdaalders* per loan.⁶⁹

Records of the activities of Siamese horse-buyers in Java dwindle from the mid-1730s. This does not necessarily mean that the trade in Javanese horses stopped, but that more research needs to be done. In 1735 Siamese horse-buyers from the court of King Borommakot, who had travelled on the VOC vessel *Jacoba*, were allowed to proceed to the East Coast region of Java, stopping first at Batavia. This expedition was led by Khun Phichai Sinthop and Khun 'Thiep Pha Tjie'. That year the Siamese managed to purchase fifty horses, and were permitted to ship them home to Siam in two separate ships. The VOC allowed this in order to please the Siamese court, with which it had been at loggerheads over the lack of freedom of trade in Ayutthaya. The Siamese horse-buyers wanted to ship the horses back to Ayutthaya in separate lots, something to which the Dutch did not always agree. In December 1748, the Dutch Governor-General's general letter mentioned another Siamese horse-buying expedition going to Cirebon via Batavia.⁷⁰

The arrangements to buy and transport Javanese horses worked out by the Siamese court and the VOC from the 1680s until at least the 1730s reflect the VOC's desire to keep the Siamese kings satisfied, in exchange

for trade privileges and a steady supply of Siamese merchandise, some of which came to the Dutch via the royal warehouses. The Company was not always happy about the inconvenience of having to advance money to the king's horse-buyers and transporting the horses on VOC ships on a regular basis. The Dutch, however, did not refuse to cooperate with the Ayutthayan court, because they felt that their commercial interests in Siam would be served if good relations were maintained with the kings and their officials. Doing business in a court-centred environment entailed having to make sacrifices to please that court from time to time. The VOC came to understand this very well during its long stay in Ayutthaya, and the Dutch attitude is clearly reflected in their role as facilitators and intermediaries in the Siamese horse-buying expeditions to Java.