

The Siamese diplomatic mission to the Netherlands 1608-1610 (1612?)

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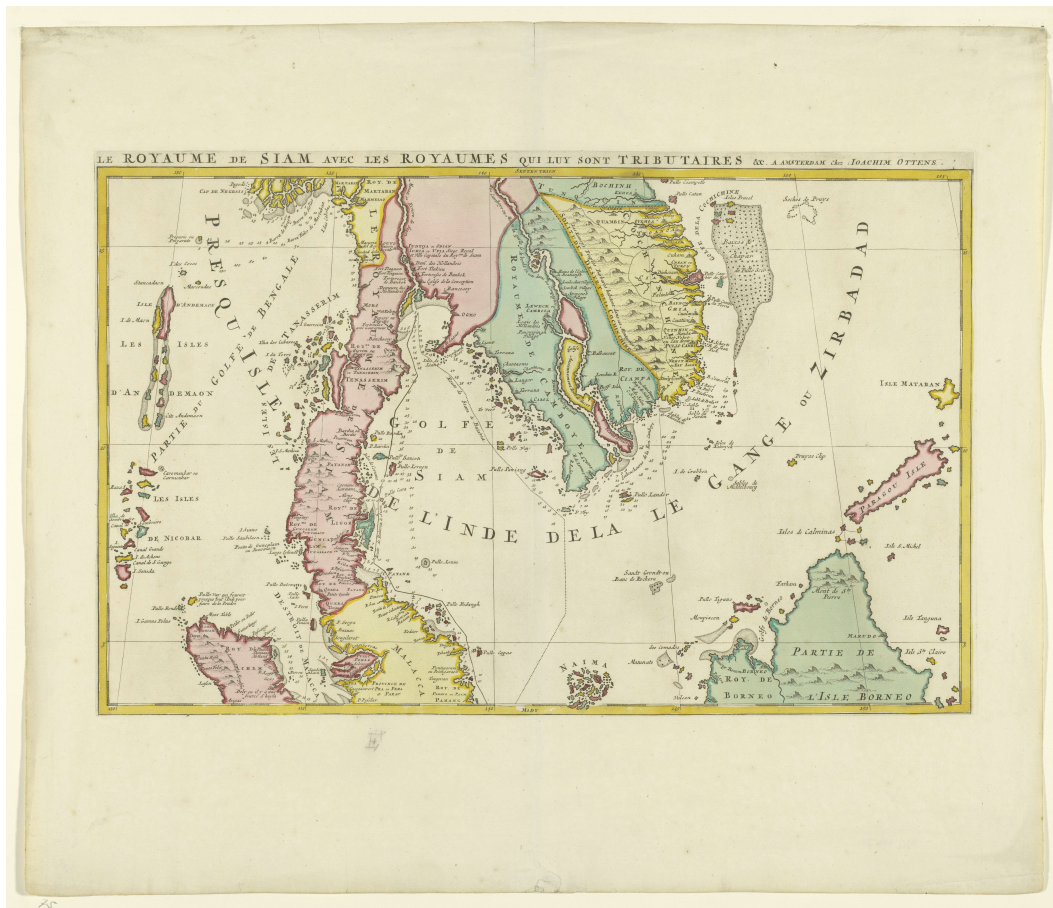
Aerial view of the city of Iudea (as Ayutthaya was called by the Dutch) by Johannes Vingboons, ca. 1665. Source: Rijksmuseum.

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Foreword

In 2023, the Royal Thai Embassy in The Hague expressed interest into researching the background of the first diplomatic mission in history from Thailand (or Siam, as it was called then) to the Netherlands – which was also the first mission from that country to Europe. This interest was connected to the jubilee year of 2024, celebrating 420 years of diplomatic connections between Thailand and the Netherlands. The document before you is the result of this research. The author wishes to express his thanks to the staff of the Royal Thai Embassy in The Hague for the initiative in researching this fascinating part of history, as well as to the archivists and historians from various Dutch institutions for the support in the research.



Map of the kingdom of Siam and its tributary states. Engraving after Joachim Ottens, 1675-1719. Source: Rijksmuseum.

Introduction

As an introduction to this work it is helpful to write something about the organisation of the Dutch government, the Dutch East India Company (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* or VOC) and their way of record keeping and correspondence in this period.

The VOC, the Dutch government and the archives

The Netherlands was ruled by a governing body called the States General (*Staten Generaal*). The VOC was a company and functioned as such in Europe, but in Asia it had (by Dutch decree) state-like powers and it acted in this way: they had a government, diplomatic relationships and an army. In the Netherlands, the VOC had a general governing board called the *Heren XVII* ('Lords XVII' because there were 17 of them) and local divisions called Chambers that had their own boards but which needed to answer to the general board. In Asia there was a Governor General with his own staff that functioned as a government and board. There was a huge amount of recordkeeping going on, and what has survived of this can be roughly divided in two sections for the subject of this research: records of meetings of governing bodies and VOC boards (called resolutions), and correspondence. The records of meetings are often quite short. They usually had appendices on the matters discussed but often these were not preserved or are difficult to find. Those of the various VOC boards often contain more information than those of the actual government. The largest wealth of information is often found in the letters. The VOC government in Indonesia (first in Bantam and later in Jakatra/Jakarta/Batavia) received correspondence from all over Asia, which they collected and copied in books to be sent to the Netherlands. Usually, each season a long letter giving a summary of all the events (a so-called General Missive or *Generale Missive*) was compiled to be sent to the Netherlands together with the copied letters. In later years, this became a very standardised system, but in the early period we are concerned with, this was not yet the case and information is more scattered, and the letters are often almost personal correspondence between various merchants (a merchant was an official delegated to a district like Siam to oversee trade and diplomacy there) and the VOC government.

The result of this is that information is usually quite piecemeal and often with hiatuses, but with enough knowledge of the underlying structures, a lot can still be learned.

Research questions and plan

The wish expressed by the Royal Thai Embassy in the Netherlands was to find out as much background information on the diplomatic mission as possible. Information on this delegation was already known from a number of sources, but a lot was still unclear and some of the information only raised more questions. From the get-go, it was clear that this mission was a unique historical event, mixing political and economic history with more personal stories.

First, an overview was created of historical sources already known. Translations of the old Dutch material into modern English and we tried to interpret the information provided by it. It turned out that there were many blank spots that we wanted to try and fill in.

The next step was research into modern literature and historiography. Not much research has been done into the subject but it turned out that there were a few articles from the 20th century on the mission and quite a bit of literature on Thai-Dutch relations that could provide background information. Most authors agree on the fact that information on the mission is quite scarce, however.

Based on the literature research, a variety of archive sources was subjected to (further) research, focusing on two key areas:

- 1 – the time of the envoys in the Netherlands
- 2 – the whereabouts of the gifts presented to Prince Maurice

This research resulted in a timeline for the mission, information on the voyages from and to Asia, and some information on what befell the mission in the Netherlands and later in Asia. It also presented us with a number of open ends and questions, which the author has tried to answer or give an opinion on. In the next section, the timeline will be given, followed by an overview and interpretation of the events. Translations of the originals and an overview of the sources and literature are given in the appendices.



Detail of a chart of the river of Siam showing the city of Ayatthuya and the 'Dutch lodge'. Atlas de Graaf, ca. 1650. Source: National Archives.

The Siamese diplomatic mission and what befell it: at sea, in the Netherlands and back in Asia

Estimated Timeline

1608: departure from Asia on board of the VOC ship the *Oranje*.

September 1608: arrival in the Netherlands.

11 September 1608: arrival in The Hague and meeting with Prince Maurice shortly after that.

Summer of 1609: presumed visits to Hoorn and Enkhuizen, and possibly Amsterdam.

September 1609: presumed departure from the Netherlands.

1610 and 1612: requests from the court of Siam for the return of the ambassadors.

Overview

Based on the sources given in their entirety in the appendices, it is possible to paint a picture of what happened to the mission, though there are some things that are quite puzzling, the answers to which are still shrouded from us by the passage of time. I will present the events in chronological order and provide notes along the way.

The beginnings and the voyage to Europe

The whole trip of the envoys is influenced by the perspective of the early Dutch presence in Asia. The Republic of the Netherlands was involved in a very long war of independence with Spain and Portugal. The overseas expansion of the Dutch is closely linked to this – harming Spanish and Portuguese trade helped the war effort, and the Dutch also wanted the profits for themselves. The missions of the VOC to the Siamese court in 1604 by Cornelis Speyc made it clear that the Portuguese had painted a bad picture of the Netherlands (we see this mechanism all over Asia in early diplomatic relations of the Dutch). The Portuguese made the Dutch out to be pirates with no country of their own, and in a way, this was the truth from their perspective. By revolting to the Spanish king and by infringing on what they considered to be their rightful monopoly (trade in Asia), the Dutch were perceived by the Portuguese in this manner. This visit was the start of the mission that is the subject of this paper, for Speyc returned from it to Bantam with the ambassadors in 1607.

The Siamese king wanted to know first-hand what kind of people he was dealing with, so this was a main reason for sending the ambassadors. The fact that the Dutch admiral Warwijck had struck the Portuguese viceroy in the presence of the king of Siam had made a great impression on him and made him curious about the power of the Netherlands. The Dutch on their part were very interested in trade with Siam

and its neighbours, not just because of the countries themselves, but also because they wanted to open venues to trade with China, which was still very closed to Europeans then.

Because of these events, a group of envoys was sent along to Bantam with the VOC official going there from Pattani on the ship *Mauritius*. They arrived in Bantam in December of 1607. This caused some problems since the VOC board, ever conscious of costs, had expressly forbidden diplomatic missions from Asia to the Netherlands because of the costs involved with a few previous, similar missions. The official responsible for the envoys coming to Bantam (Cornelis Specx) acknowledges that, but states that he could not refuse the mission without angering the king of Siam, who was acknowledged as the most powerful monarch in the region. He states that he tried to keep off the initiative, but after he was asked why lesser kings from the region had gotten the opportunity to send envoys, he saw that refusal would cause many problems. A meeting was held on the issue and it was indeed decided that it would be very unwise to anger the king of Siam and that the retinue should be allowed to go to Europe. The ambassadors are invited to an audience with admiral Matelieff and they present him some a decorative sabre as a gift. On the 21st of the month, the company of envoys (presumably quite a retinue, including their wives as we will see later) was put up in a house on shore to await departure.¹

The return fleet to Europe left Bantam on January 28th, 1608. With this fleet, admiral Matelieff, who had headed VOC operations in Asia for a few years was going home, since he would be replaced by admiral van Kaerden. The envoys were on the ship of the admiral, the *Oranje*. From the published journal of Matelieff and a few other publications from the 17th century (which were probably based on Matelieff's journal), we know quite a few details on the journey².

It appears that two envoys made the journey, most likely with a small retinue of servants. From the reports on the audience with prince Maurice in the Netherlands, we also know that there was a Dutch translator with them, who had lived in Siam for six years specifically to learn the language³. Sadly, his name is not known to us but it seems very likely that he also was on board of the *Oranje*. One of the ambassadors was named 'Conchy' according to the Dutch (this is either a phonetic interpretation of a Siamese name or a nickname of some sorts). The source material does not provide any other names for the envoys.

One incident with the envoys on board appears well documented in the journal. Cornelis Specx and Jan Volckertsz (a friend of his) who were also on board, apparently had brought rubies from Siam with them, presumably for private trade (which was a common thing for VOC employees to do, even though it was officially prohibited by the board). Specx was the most important official in Pattani for a while and knew the envoys since he was the one who brought them to Bantam. When

¹ Appendix A: VOC 1054; Appendix B: Matelieff and Valentijn.

² Appendix B: Matelieff and Valentijn.

³ Appendix B: Pamphlet.

both got ill, these rubies ended up in the care of the ambassadors – it appears from the narrative that the Dutchmen had given them to the envoys for safekeeping. Both subsequently passed away and when word of the gemstones being in the possession of the envoys got out, on the 23rd of June 1608, things came to a climax. The account mentions the envoys being questioned upon which they deny having the rubies. The admiral then handles them a bit rough, calling them ‘black scoundrels’ and threatening to cut off their ears. They give in and hand over a few bags of precious stones. Matelieff mentions that he suspects the bags to have been tampered with, suggesting that the envoys after all this still tried to keep a part of the stones for themselves. Matelieff later handed the stones over in the care of the VOC board in the Netherlands. From the journal it is clear that this incident happened somewhere north of the equator in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean.

This is of course a very interesting incident. The recounting of this is very one-sided – we only know the version told by Matelieff in his journal – and it poses quite a few questions. We do not know why the two men owning the rubies trusted the ambassadors more than their own crew, and why the ambassadors did not give up the stones. The answer to the first question might be very simple: trade like this was considered smuggling and perhaps the two men trusted the envoys more to keep their secret than they did anybody in service of the VOC. But why did the envoys want to keep the stones and did they first deny having them? Did they want to steal them? Or did they feel bound by honour and their agreement? This is not clear. From our modern perspective, it seems strange that people of such a standing as ambassadors would endanger their mission by an action like this. What is clear is that the writer of the piece and the admiral believed they were guilty from the beginning and probably approached them from a (racist) prejudice. In my opinion, it is more likely that there was a cultural misunderstanding that we cannot completely unravel anymore since we do not have enough information.

This event does not seem to affect the rest of the mission, oddly enough. The journal goes on to recount the rest of the voyage. The first landfall in Europe is made in Portland in the UK on August 26th, where they took in supplies to care for the many ill people on board. They left there quite soon and arrived on the roadstead of Rammekens in Zeeland on the evening of September first. There, VOC officials came on board.



An engraving of the roads of Rammekens, by, Hendrik Cornelisz. Vroom, early 17th century. Source: Rijksmuseum.

Audience with the prince

Soon after the Siamese diplomatic mission's arrival in the Netherlands, Matelieff and the envoys went to The Hague to meet with Prince Maurice, the ruler of the Netherlands in that period. There is a short description of this audience in the journal, but a longer and more elaborate one in a pamphlet by an anonymous person, possibly a courtier or a visiting foreign official⁴. The envoys are introduced to the prince and behave themselves very humbly, bowing down and unwilling to get up first. As with all the descriptions of the envoys we encounter, we must take into account that a certain amount of exoticism existed in the minds of the record keepers, so if this is totally accurate, we do not know. But the way they reacted does seem quite in line with how rulers in Southeast Asian countries were often approached by their subordinates. The envoys are also described in the pamphlet. They wore white clothing without any decoration, and their hair was described as being black and thick like a horse's manes. It also states that they did not want to wear hats.

An array of precious gifts is presented. This was usual in this period and aimed at showing the wealth of the giver and indebting the receiver. Beautifully crafted boxes filled with gemstones and weapons, adorned with precious metals, were the gifts. It seems that in this way, the Siamese were trying to showcase the wealth of their country. There was also a letter of faith on gold plate. A full description of the gifts can be found in Appendix B. Their language and writing is described as being 'very barbaric', stating that the words are not separated by spaces. The narrator of the pamphlet also states that the writing was similar to the Syriac alphabet, suggesting scholarly training on his part if he knew this.

Pledges of faith and friendship are exchanged, and one strange anecdote is mentioned. The envoys relate that another person was originally destined to be sent out on the mission, but that he was accused of disobeying the king and was tortured

⁴ Matelief and *Embassies of the king of Siam...* (both in Appendix B)

to death by slowly roasting him in a cauldron, which lasted for a month. Again, there could be (some) exaggeration involved here. At the end of the meeting, prince Maurice sends them on their way with the order to return to Siam with gifts to be given by him as soon as possible.

There are two mysteries here: the envoys end up staying in the Netherlands a lot longer, even though the prince and presumably also their king required them to return quickly. It is not clear why this exactly happened or who made this decision, but it is most likely that this happened on account of the board of the VOC, or possibly was instigated by the envoys themselves, who seem to have been reluctant to return to Siam. The earliest time for them to return would have been around December 1608, since one of the yearly VOC fleets left around that time. The other mystery is what happened to the gifts. There is no description given of this. There are two options, either they ended up in the private property of the house of Orange, or they were transferred to the States General as the gifts of one state to another. It seems most likely that they ended up with the house of Orange since an exchange like this was in some ways viewed as a private affair between two monarchs. I have undertaken a study into the inventories and archives of both institutions, aided by various archivists from these institutions, but came up with nothing. If these gifts survived in the care of one of these institutions until modern times, they must have been registered so it seems most likely that the gifts were transferred out of the possessions of the house of Orange, or transferred to a different branch of this family, somewhere in the 17th or 18th century.

Time in the Netherlands

Then there is quite a gap in time in our knowledge. The VOC records and the archives of the Estates General give some clues⁵. In March 1609 it is decided that they should stay in the Netherlands and sail with the autumn fleet (the VOC vessels left at two points of the year, one after summer and one around Christmas).

The next reference to them is from June 1609. The ambassadors were to go and visit the cities of Hoorn and Enkhuizen in the North of Holland (important trade cities that both had their own VOC Chamber), probably to show them a bit more of the Netherlands and to entertain them. They were provided with quite a generous stipend (100 guilders) for this.

In September we indeed hear that they are to return to Asia, along with some boys from Ambon that were also in the Netherlands at that time. It is possible that these so-called 'boys' were enslaved people. It is not clear from this reference if they just were to board together or if these 'boys' were to be the retinue of the envoys, or possibly even a gift to the king of Siam. The board of the VOC expressed the intention to give presents equalling those given by the king of Siam and also asks to deliver gifts given by prince Maurice (so the gifts mentioned during the audience

⁵ See Appendix A, resolutions of the VOC and States General.

were given by the prince). They specifically stress that the relations with Siam should be used to get access to the Chinese trade.

It is a pity that we could not find out more about their stay in the Netherlands. It is unclear where they stayed, though it is most likely that they were lodged in Amsterdam at the expenses of the VOC chamber there. Another possibility is that they were lodged in The Hague. We do know that they most likely visited Hoorn and Enkhuizen, but it is not clear when this exactly was or what they did there. We also do not know the name of the interpreter who presumably accompanied them. This is the nature of researching history in this period, sometimes there is a lot of information, sometimes there isn't. With the help from an archivist of the *Westfries Archief*, which holds the records of Hoorn and Enkhuizen, a preliminary study was undertaken to find out if there would be any information there. Based on the material and literature from previous researchers, it was concluded that this would be possible but the chance of success is quite slim. This, combined with the amount of time to cover (the whole summer of 1609), the large amount of documents and the bad handwriting, made it clear that this venue of research would not fit within the scope of this project.

Back in Asia and events there.

We presume that the envoys went back somewhere around September 1609, but we do not know exactly when and on which ship. From the correspondence in Asia between Pattani and the VOC headquarters, it becomes clear that the king of Siam is uneasy about the long time the envoys were away, and he blamed them and the VOC for this. This is a mechanism we see more often with missions like this. It was hard to imagine for many people in that time how long the sea voyages took. And then of course the envoys did spend a lot of time in the Netherlands for unknown reasons, possibly a lot more than originally intended.

Already in 1608, a VOC merchant named Victor Sprinckel, stationed in Pattani, wrote a letter to Bantam giving news from Siam. He stresses the importance of the trade with this country and he also mentions that Specx was there as an ambassador. He mentions the mission to the Netherlands. The king declined passports for some Dutch to leave the country until his ambassadors would be back. The letter later mentions that the wife of one of the ambassadors and the sister of the other are in Pattani, but these were referred to as the envoys that remained in Bantam. What probably is the case here is that not all the envoys sent out by the king were taken to the Netherlands due to financial reasons. He sends along a letter and some clothing with his letter from these women for the ambassadors. It seems that the ambassadors had fallen from the grace of the king, for the letter also mentions that it would be best if they did not return or else the king would have them executed or tortured to death by boiling. Again, it is unclear if this is last thing is overreacting or prejudice, but it is clear that the ambassadors had to fear for their lives if they would

return to Siam. Later, a VOC official writes that they are still in Bantam being too ill to undertake the sea voyage back⁶.

In November 1609 correspondence between two VOC employees in Siam (Heyn who was at the court and Sprinckel who most likely was in Pattani) shows that the king asks about the whereabouts of his ambassadors often, and Heyn asks the board to send news whenever they hear it. It becomes clear from the tone of these letters that the not returning of the envoys made life a bit difficult for the VOC officials at the court of Siam.

Then there is a long silence in the documents. Not all VOC correspondence in this period was searched, but there are some very good search aids and digital methods to search the records and every mention of Siam in this period has been dug up and reviewed.

The next reference to the ambassadors we find here is from 1610. The Dutch envoy Sprinckel mentions in January that he expects to hear news on the arrival of the ambassadors soon, and that he expects their arrival in Siam. This suggests that they indeed returned in the autumn of 1609 and that they did arrive in Asia. But then in September Heyn writes again from the court of the return of the king to court, again asking about the ambassadors, suggesting that they did not return to Siam.

Then there seems to be no more news at all until 1612. There is a letter from the court to Pattani again mentioning that the king wanted the return of his ambassadors and was also expecting envoys to be sent to him by Prince Maurice. This last reference seems to hint at the envoys that stayed in Bantam and those that went to the Netherlands, suggesting both parties had still not returned. We can only guess at the reasons for this, since there is no more evidence from the Dutch sources. The VOC was not very inclined to spend money so having envoys as guests for a long time would not necessarily have been their preference. The most likely conclusion is that the envoys feared for their lives and that this made them stay away from Siam. They seemingly stayed in Bantam until 1612 at the least. How their stay was, who financed it and what became of them, is lost in history. A possibility is that after all these years the envoys had endeared themselves to the VOC management and possibly fulfilled useful functions such as interpreters, making them an asset to the VOC and thus facilitating their prolonged stay, but this is just a suggestion.

⁶ See Appendix A, transferred letters.



Engraving called 'view on Siam', after Johan Neuhof, mid-18th century. Source: Rijksmuseum.

Conclusion

All this information paints a picture filled with mystery. The correspondence in Asia seems to have gone between the court and the trade outpost in Pattani, and then to the main VOC headquarters in Bantam. Relatively soon after the departure of the ambassadors, the king seems to expect them back and also appears to have a grudge against them. It is hard to judge the reason for this – maybe politics, maybe personal. What happened more often in this period with missions like this, as I explained above, is that the Asian rulers could not fathom how far away Europe actually was – that it was a journey of almost a year one way. This sometimes led them to believe that their envoys had deserted or were killed or detained by the Dutch. This may have had something to do with this.

On the way over to Europe, the Ambassadors were involved in an embezzlement scandal, of which it is hard to say where the truth lies in this matter. They seem to have had the trust of two VOC employees who gave gemstones into their care, but were they trying to steal them or were they keeping their part of the deal by not giving them up?

In the Netherlands, things seem to have been a bit more normal. They met the prince, gave him diplomatic gifts and made a journey through a part of the country. But there again we have the mystery why they stayed in the Netherlands for such a long time and how they spent this time. Besides from their presumed visits to Hoorn and Enkhuizen, we know very little of this.

And then the final mystery is why they did not return to Siam, the envoys that had stayed in Bantam as well as the envoys that went to the Netherlands.

I have given suggestions and possible explanations for these events in this paper, but a lot is still unclear. Further research could possibly shed a little more light on this, but the research undertaken by me and the people before me has covered most bases, so it is unlikely that all questions can be answered. The unavailability of sources from Siam further complicates this matter. Thus, we must accept that certain things will be kept shrouded by history.

What this overview does show is the very exciting beginning of relations of trade and diplomacy between the two countries, from a very early time onwards. A mission like this was still quite unique in this period, and it is clear from the publications from the 17th century (see Appendix B) that the events and persons involved spoke to the imagination of many Dutch people. All the difficulties and misunderstandings involved show us the day to day life of diplomacy, and also show that these difficulties were overcome for diplomatic relations in the centuries following this first encounter were on the whole good.

Appendix A: Primary sources

There are a number of primary and contemporary sources available to us. Most of them are from the archives of the VOC and some are from other Dutch archives. Furthermore, there are a number of published accounts and reports from the 17th and 18th centuries which mainly concern the history of the VOC that give information about Siam and sometimes on the 1608 diplomatic mission. In this section, I will present the English translations of this material.

Resolutions of the Lords XVII

VOC archive, 1.04.02, Inventory nr. 100

These resolutions are the proceedings of the General Board of the VOC in the Netherlands. They document all the major discussions and decisions of the company.

Folio 37

25 March 1609

[margin:] of the Ambassadors of Siam

On Thursday March 25th it was decided that the ambassador of Siam shall stay in these lands [the Netherlands] until the time that the ships that are prepared for the autumn voyage will be ready [the VOC sailed to Asia in two distinct fleets, making sure they could benefit of the best weather conditions during the long voyage, especially avoiding the monsoon period in the Indian Ocean], with which ships the ambassador then shall be able to return to the kingdom of Siam.

Folio 68

5 September 1609

[margin:] of the Ambassador of Siam and the money sent to the Company

5 September 1609: point 35 it has been decided that the ambassador of the king of Siam and the three boys from Ambon [it is not clear to me what the role of these boys is but there were often small groups of Asian people (also slaves or hostages) in the Netherlands] will be sent with this fleet so that the trade with China can be arranged in favour of the King of Siam [it seems that the VOC wanted to use their connections in Siam to further trade with China], and the aforementioned persons will give some presents on behalf of the Company and we request that they will also give some presents which shall reasonably compare to those given to his Excellency [they are addressing the VOC Governor General in Batavia here; what they mean is that gifts should be given to the king of Siam that compare to those that he gave to Prince Maurice];

Folio 69

and we request some gifts which his Excellency [Prince Maurice] will send to the aforementioned king [of Siam] with the ambassador and the commissioner who is capable [for this mission] and a capable person to travel with the ambassador to present the gifts to the king in the name of his Excellency and the Company and to tell the king of the state of these lands [the Netherlands], so that in all ways by these means a way can be prepared to further the trade with China to which end the Chamber of Amsterdam is ordered to undertake in this matter what the service of the Company demands.

**Resolution of the board of the Amsterdam Chamber
VOC archive, 1.04.02, Inventory nr. 226**

These are the proceedings of the meetings of the Amsterdam Chamber of the VOC, one of the most important subsections of the company in the Netherlands.

Scan 82
4 June 1609

On the 4th of the same month [June] it has been resolved that the ambassadors of Siam shall be allowed to go to [the cities of] Hoorn and Enkhuizen to see these and that they shall be given 100 guilders for food and travel of which Evert Dirckss shall present the accounts.

**VOC archive, 1.04.02, Inventory nr. 1054
Transferred letters and papers from Asia**

These letters, called '*Overgekomen brieven en papieren*' in Dutch are one of the most important sources when researching the VOC. They are a condensation of reports and letters of all the dealings of the VOC all across Asia, compiled in Batavia and sent to the Netherlands. There are quite some references to the mission in them. Following are excerpts from a series of letters by VOC employees that were either in Siam or had contacts with Siam. Most pertain to questions by the king on the whereabouts and return of his ambassadors.

Letter from Victor Sprinckel written from Pattani to Jacques l'Hermite dated 25 September 1608

Sprinckel was a merchant in Pattani, l'Hermite was a senior merchant for the VOC in Asia at that time.

Folio 68

(...) before this I have written that I would relate in more detail to your Honour of the importance of the trade with Siam. Your Honour will know that since Cornelis Specx left with Lord Admiral Matelieff to the fatherland [the Netherlands] with the ambassadors of Siam, that the aforementioned Cornelis had been sent to Siam as ambassador by admiral Wijbrant Warwijck, accompanied by Lamber Jacobss Heijn and a boy to perform his mission there. And that within this time a certain Cornelis

Francx, merchant at Johor [in Malaysia] at that time sent to a certain Egbert Egberts a cargo for Siam, accompanied by Jaques van de Perre, and shortly after this, Egberts Egberts, being in good health, died.

Folio 68v

(...) So that Willem Pieterss Tonneman, having been there a while and the goods having been valued and sold, intended to return home with the same Du Perre [names are sometimes inconsistent, they are talking about van de Perre here]. When the king heard of this he did not want to provide a passport before his Ambassadors who had sailed to the Netherlands with the aforementioned Specx will have returned, so that they were forced to stay there (...)

Folio 69

(...) As far as the two ambassadors that stayed in Bantam concerns, the wife of the one and the sister of the other remain here in Pattani waiting for them, but they [the ambassadors] would do well to remain in Bantam because it is certain that the king will take their lives, yes even have them boiled in a pot. We have informed him, the king, through our books that they remain in Bantam and that they are deadly ill so that it was not advisable for them to go to sea, and that it is apparent that it is a long lasting disease because death does not follow. They will do well not to come here without guidance from the Netherlands for their lives would be in grave danger. His wife and his sister send their fond regards and they send with this messenger a letter with some clothing.

Letter from Victor Sprinckel to Lambert Jacobs Heyn dated 30 January 1610

Heyn appears to have been a VOC representative present in Ayutthaya

Folio 3

(...) and I do not doubt it if I will receive something with the first ships coming here from Bantam and that I will also hear some news of the ambassadors that went to the Netherlands, and I also expect that they will come over with one of the first ships.

Letter from Lambert Jacobz Heyn to Victor Sprinckel dated 9 November 1609

Folio 13v

The king however does not cease to burden me with the same thing every time he summons me, which is daily, to enquire about the arrival of his ambassadors, which I ask You Lords to keep in mind that when you hear anything of this to inform us of this to recount this to the king.

Letter from Lambert Jacobsz Heyn to Victor Sprinckel dated 20 September 1610

Folio 17v

(...) Since the king has returned from above to here again [presumably it means that the king was in a different part of the country for a while, most likely in the mountains] he has summoned me several times and asked me if I had not received an answer whether the Dutch desired the land of Merqhij [it is not clear to me what area this is] or not, upon which I again excused myself saying that there were no tidings from Bantam yet and that I expected this any time now with which the king was content yet he pressed me to write to Your Lordships that when there were tidings of this that you

Folio 18

would inform me of this with the first letter

Letter from Maerten Houtman from Ayutthaya to Hendrick Janssen Opper in Pattani dated 26 September 1612

Folio 55v

Furthermore the King here desires very much [the return of] his ambassadors and of the people that his Princely Excellency [Prince Maurice] was sending him.

Other VOC sources covered

I conducted a search connected to Cornelis Matelieff in the VOC archives. This yielded some possible leads, which sadly all turned out to be dead ends.

Number 470: Inventory of the gemstones and gold and silver objects that came from the East with the *Oranje*, October 14th 1608. This is a piece that is relevant to our research since it details the gemstones brought as official cargo by the *Oranje*, some of which supposedly came from Siam, but it gives no extra information on our envoys and their gemstones. It is an invoice giving amounts and values.

VOC inventory numbers 466, 467, 472 and 490 are correspondence between Matelieff and van Caerden in Asia but they do not give any information on the envoys.

Archives of the States General

These are the daily proceedings of the Dutch parliament in the Hague. There is very little information on the envoys in them, only a small reference in the resolutions of 18 March 1609:

A few deputies of the East India Company came before us, and handed over a written request, stating that the Admirals and merchants of the VOC had very solemnly made contracts with several kings and peoples in the Indies, on the express orders of the Estates General. In these contracts strong promises were made,

amongst which not to make peace with the general enemy, the King of Spain and his subjects, without first conversing about this with one another. And that in these negotiations, the same kings, princes and peoples should be heard, one of them being the King of Siam [spelled Chiam here – this is why this part did not end up in automated archive searches], who has his Ambassador here at the moment, ...

The archives of the estates general were further searched for the years 1608-1610. The normal and secret resolutions do not appear to have any other entries for the envoys than the one referenced above. There is also a section in the archives where correspondence with the VOC was kept (*liassen VOC*) yet this only starts from 1623.

Other sources covered

In our search for the envoys and the gifts presented to Prince Maurice, we have looked into a variety of possible sources to find information on them. Sadly, no information was found. For future research efforts, it is important to outline these sources here.

Sources in the Westfries Archief

A start was made with searching through the city archives of both Hoorn and Enkhuizen, which are held in the Westfries Archief. We decided to look at the general proceedings and financial administration for the summer of 1609 for both cities. The problem here is that the amount of material is quite large as is the time span that needs to be covered, since we do not know when exactly the visits happened, or even if they happened at all. This, combined with two other facts, made me arrive at the conclusion not to pursue this avenue of research because of time constraints and a very small chance of success. These facts are the following: the material is quite time consuming (the handwriting is not very clear) and the nature of the sources appears to be such that there is not much chance of finding information. Most of the material concerns legal matters: legislation passed, complaints received etc.

Possible sources:

Old archives of Hoorn, archive number 0348, inventory numbers 103, 245, 2498A, 2499A.

Old archives of Enkhuizen, archive number 0120, inventory numbers 252, 1523A, 1587A.

Old archives of Medemblik, archive number 0715-2, inventory number 8.

Printed resolutions of the States of Holland

Nationaal Archief, 3.01.04.01, numbers 42, 43, 44.

This source contains no references to the envoys for the years 1608-1609.

Archives of Oldenbarnevelt

The archives of Johan van Oldenbarnevelt held in the National Archives also hold a number of letters by Matelieff, but they also did not provide any information (3.01.14, numbers 3104, 3105, 3106, 3107).

Diplomatic sources

There is also a printed series collecting archive sources on Dutch diplomatic history called the *Corpus Diplomaticum*. This also holds no information on our envoys, only some references to Pattani from 1601

J. W. Heeres and F. We Stapel, *Corpus Diplomaticum Neerlandico-Indicum*, KITLV 1907-1955.

<https://www.cortsfoundation.org/nl/nieuws/166-juli-2019-corpus-diplomaticum-digitaal-online>

Sources connected to the gifts

These gifts could have ended up in various places, both in the private collections of the House of Orange and in Dutch government collections. In the search for the possible whereabouts of the gifts in museum collections, the following sources were covered:

The printed versions of the possessions of the house of Orange in the 17th and 18th centuries. These overviews of the possessions give many objects similar to the ones given by the envoys (ceremonial weapons, etc.) but no references to 'our' objects were found in this source.

S.W.A. Drossaers and Th.H. Lunsingh Scheurleer, eds. *Inventarissen van de inboedels in de verblijven van de Oranjes, 1567-1795*, 1974-1976.

<https://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/retroboeken/inboedelsoranje/#page=0&accessor=toc&view=homePane>

The collections of the Mauritshuis (a museum in which part of the art collection of the House of Orange ended up) and the Royal Collections (both archives and art collections, called *Koninklijke Verzamelingen* in Dutch) were also searched. I researched their inventories myself and the curators of both institutes were kind enough to do an in-depth search of their collections, but without any success.

Appendix B: Published contemporary sources

Journal and Historic Recounting by Cornelis Matelief de Jonge

This is a travel journal that was also published in transcription. This part concerns the journey to the Netherlands of the ship that also took the ambassadors. The book can be found in the library of the Nationaal Archief, signature NA Bibl., 393 B. The account was re-printed in several early books on the exploits of the VOC (for instance in *Begin ende voortgangh van de Vereenighde Nederlantsche geoctroyeerde Oost-Indische compagnie* by Isaac Commelin (see 'sources').

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[December 1607; the ship the Mauritius arrives in Bantam]

[margin] Ambassadors of Siam

In the same ship there also came the Ambassadors of Siam with Cornelis Specx, without the admiral knowing what motivated him to take them along, since the Lords Rulers [of the VOC] always order to not bring over ambassadors [to the Netherlands] because of the large costs involved. Therefore, before they [the ambassadors] came ashore, he sent for the aforementioned Specx, who had come with them from Siam, and told him of the abovementioned problem. On which he [Specx] said that he could not help it for the King had wanted to send them and they had asked him why they would not receive his ambassadors as they had done with those of Johor and Achem [Aceh], which were small kings compared to him. Then they came ashore on the 21st of that month. Upon which the Admiral convened his council and asked them whether they should be taken to the Netherlands or not. They answered that, since they were here already, they thought it would be a great insult to the King of Siam when they were sent back, and that it would also cause those of Bantam and all the surrounding kingdoms cause to think that our people did not seek friendship with the king of Siam, who is thought to be the mightiest king of the Indies.

Thus, the Admiral summoned the Ambassadors, who gave him a small sabre plated with gold, both the handle and the scabbard. They were put up in one of the small houses downtown [it literary says 'down there, or downstairs'. Presumably somewhere near the waterfront is meant.] until the ships were ready...

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[margin] The Admiral sets sail for home from Bantam

On January 28th, towards the evening, the Admiral set sail with the ship Oranje [spelled 'Orangie' here] from Batam, in all having 119 eaters [crew +passengers], amongst whom five Siamese, eight Portuguese and four blacks [note the racial slur and the fact that the other nations are specified but they are not] and being fitted out with 79 barrels of water, 21 barrels of arak, 14 barrels of Spanish wine, four of

which had gone bad, 6 barrels of buffalo meat, 10 barrels of old oxen meat [meaning that this was taken from the Netherlands on the way out] and 4 of these barrels taken over from van Kaerden [the new admiral who had just arrived in Asia].

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[margin:] Upheaval with the Siamese

... The 23rd [of June 1608] there was an upheaval in the ship with the ambassadors of Siam, that went like this. Cornelis Specx, who had been with the king of Siam on behalf of the admiral Wybracht van Warwijck and who was coming over [to Europe] with these ambassadors had passed away on the 11th of this month. Now the admiral found among his possessions no rubies, which puzzled him [it was quite normal for VOC officials to take gemstones back to privately trade]. Furthermore, he had left behind some letters destined for his mother and to a certain Jan Volckertsz of Monnickendam [a town in Holland] who had been in Siam with him and who he had amongst other things also left 100 guilders in his will, so that the admiral presumed he had given the stones in the care of the same Jan. He shared this suspicion with the skipper, Simon Lambertz Mau, yet he thought that things would reveal themselves in time since Jan was also ill and would die soon. After this, Jan passed away on the 21st and they did not find any stones, so that the admiral did not know what to think, nor that the skipper knew what to advise him. Yet on the 22nd at night, Rem Cornelisz, who had been first mate on the ships of Moucheron and who had come to Asia under Spilbergen with Specx, came to the admiral, saying that in the event of the death of Jan Volckertsz, Specx had ordered him that he (Rem) should give certain stones, that were in the care of the Siamese, to his mother [the mother of Jan]. To confirm this, Jan Volckertsz had called him a day before his death and ordered him to demand the same stones from the Siamese immediately after his death, and he ordered the Siamese to give them to him as well. But the scoundrel Siamese, seeing that Jan was dead, and that Rem did not have any witnesses, flat out denied having any stones. Then when Rem

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[margin:] 1608 June

came to complain about this to the admiral he [the admiral] had the chief one [of the Siamese] (named Conchy) called and asked him, why he did not want to give up the stones, according to the will of Specx and Jan Volkertsz. He did not defend himself much but specifically denied having anything. The admiral told him that he was not asking whether he had anything, since he had been assured of that, but that he hand over that which he had; and that it did not become an ambassador of such a mighty king to lie in such a manner and with other similar words. Conchy however remained with his statement and said he did not have any stones of Specx. Then the admiral attacked him with heavy words, saying: "you black scoundrel go and get me the stones immediately, or I will cut off your ears right away." Then he got scared and left, and immediately the second (Siamese) came and brought a small, grey

damask bag containing the stones, wrapped in small pieces of paper, each having an inscription but they were not sealed. The admiral, not knowing if all were there like the Siamese declared, would have liked to open the letters of Specx to his mother to see if there was any mention of the quality and quantity [of the stones], yet because the skipper did not think this advisable, he did not want to go over his head [of the skipper]. For except for the fact that it is not honourable to open someone's letters, they would be able to check the Siamese with them, on land and on the ship. From the look of the stones it seemed that there were not an awful lot of them, so that it could be feared that the Siamese kept some behind. (...) On the second [of the next month] they anchored before Rammekens [in Zeeland, the Netherlands] where the governing Lords of the Zeeland chamber [of the VOC] came to welcome them. They had been away three years, three months and twenty-one days. Yet the majority of the crew was ill, even though the admiral was in reasonable health (praise God), with the exception that he was tormented by scurvy. (...) On the fourth of the same month, the governors of the Zeeland chamber, being Adriaen Bomenee, Aernout Verhoeven and Jan Bournoen-soon Schot, came on board, and with them as well was Elbert Simonsz Jonckheyn, governor of the Amsterdam chamber, asking the admiral to hand over the stones that he had.

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[margin:] September 1608

He had rather given them over to the governors in Amsterdam, since the ship Oranje was sent out by that Chamber. He did not dare to refuse them on the spot, but he skilfully tried to gain some time, until the people from Amsterdam would be there. Yet it was to no avail, and he – so as not to be suspected to cheat them – handed them a small bag sealed with his sigil, being not very content with the aforementioned Jonckheyn, because he – being from Amsterdam – was so insistent on this. On the 11th of the same month, the admiral came in The Hague

[margin:] Gifts presented to his Excellency [Prince Maurice] by the people from Siam

with the envoys from Siam, who have presented to his princely excellency the following gifts. A golden box of finely hammered work, almost the with of a stretched hand, and just as long, and it was round, with an ivory tube covered in gold leaf inside of it, in which were the letters of faith. [Furthermore] two small round golden boxes, the length of a finger wide, one containing a diamond, the other a ruby. Two finely wrought rifles laid in with gold. Two pikes with gold worked around the iron and around the foot and two more pikes, one of them plated with gold around the fork, but badly made. The reason for their mission, as far as the admiral could understand, was to see these lands, since the Portuguese had told them a lot of bad things about them and they deeply despise our nation. But the king, having seen that the admiral struck the [Portuguese] viceroy they were deeply bewildered that those who were so despised had so much power that they could do this.

Published report on the audience with Prince Maurice

A pamphlet was published in 1608 in French that gives quite a detailed account of the audience by accident. The main focus of the pamphlet was the presentation of a telescope to Prince Maurice, which happened to occur on the same day as the audience. The details are mostly the same, however the description of the gifts varies slightly. Below is the first section of the pamphlet, describing the audience. The translation is partially based on the publication of the pamphlet with additions of my own. From the text it appears it was compiled by a courtier familiar with the goings on in The Hague. Of course pamphlets were composed for specific reasons and they were often a bit sensational, so the information should not be considered fully trustworthy.

The pamphlet was published in book form in modern times: *Embassies of the King of Siam sent to his Excellency Prince Maurits...*, Huib Zuidervaart and Henk Zomers, eds., Wassenaar 2008. The original is in the Louwman collection of historical telescopes in the Louwman Museum in the Hague.

Since the publication of the pamphlet already gives the text in French transcription and a modern Dutch translation, I will give an extract of the text here in English:

On 10 September in the evening the two 'most involved persons' of the 'grand trade of the East Indies' presented themselves to Prince Maurice (these will have been two high placed VOC officials, most likely members of the *Heren XVII*). They were accompanied by Admiral Cornelis Matelieff. Matelieff received praise for his work in Asia during the supper with the prince, and he recounts his military and diplomatic successes. One of these is the diplomatic mission from Siam. He introduces the two envoys stating that they have come to find out if the Dutch are pirates like the Portuguese make them out to be or if they had a proper country. The next day the envoys are introduced to the prince. They fell to their knees when they arrived in his room and folded their hands above their heads, also bowing their heads down to the floor a few times. Presumably this is how they thought a ruler should be approached, though some exaggeration from the Dutch narrator could be involved. They were told to rise, but they moved forward on their knees, and kept their heads down after standing up, until the prince held out his hand to them. They touched it and then raised their heads.

They are then described by the narrator, as being brown of complexion, with flat noses and thick, black hair that is rough like the manes of a horse, also adding that 'they did not wish to wear hats'. There was a translator with them, a young Dutch man who had lived in Siam for six years to learn the language.

They told the prince that they were sent by their king to see his country and offer him friendship and presented him with the gifts of the king: two pikes with damascene blades, two rattan javelins, two arquebuses with tinders, damascene cannons with gilded wheel locks used to kill elephants, with big bullets like European muskets, two swords with beaten gold scabbards, two fans, and two boxes. One of these was made of wood, covered with cloth and sealed and it contained a second box made of ivory that contained the letter from the king of Siam to the prince, with

letters inscribed on beaten gold, $\frac{3}{4}$ of a el long, rolled like tin foil. The narrator remarked that the letters are quite similar to the Syriac alphabet. This indicates that he, or someone else present, was a scholar. The other box was made of gold and was very skillfully made into the shape of a cup. It was sealed and in it were two small wooden boxes covered in pearls, containing a ring of heavy solid gold with eight mounted small rubies with a pointed diamond in the middle of a certain size (the text gives a square box depicting the size of about 0.5 cm x 1 cm). Another gold box contained a ring with a ruby as big as the thumbnail of a man.

They told the prince (whom they called the king of Holland) that these gifts were from their king who wanted to be his friend. The prince thanked them and stated that he would render all kinds of services to the king of Siam.

The narrator goes on to say that they are simple people. They stated that the king of Siam intended to send a different person as an envoy, but that he disobey the king and he was punished by roasting him in a heated cauldron in which he stayed for a month before dying (this kind of information needs to be corroborated with sources from Thailand. On the one hand, this may have been a 'normal' way of torture, on the other hand Europeans liked to exaggerate these kinds of horror stories about – in their eyes – exotic peoples).

The narrator describes the political structure in Siam: the king is a very powerful monarch, having under him four or five vassal kings. He can muster an army of 300,000 men and 2,000 elephants (again, this needs to be corroborated – this could be an exaggeration) and he has good relationships with the Chinese emperor (called the king of China here). The narrator states (as we have read elsewhere) that the Dutch wanted to gain entry to China through Siam. He says that 'this Kingdom (presumably meaning China) is so big that it can hardly be crossed in two months. The narrator then mentions that the two envoys were commanded by the prince to go to Amsterdam where they should embark on the first available vessel to return to their king with presents that were being prepared. He then states that their language is very barbaric and difficult to interpret, which also goes for their writing because the words are not separated from one another. The final remark is that their tunics are of white cotton and lack any decoration.

Pieter van Dam

Pieter van Dam was a VOC employee who wrote a history book giving an overview of the history of the VOC in the 17th century. It provides a few references to the envoys.

F.W. Stapel and C.W.Th. baron van Boetzelaser van Asperen en Dubbeldam eds., *Pieter van Dam's Beschryvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie 1639-1701*, 1927-1954.

<https://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/retroboeken/vandam/#page=0&accessor=toc&view=homePane>

Book 2 part 1, p. 342

In the year 1609 here in the land there has been an ambassador from Siam, whom we sent back there [to Siam] again with three boys from Ambon [probably enslaved boys who were possibly given as a gift] and gifts, to gain the trade with China through the favour of the same [Ambassador]. And his Excellence Prince Maurice has put his gifts with this.

With him has also been sent a competent commissioner, to present these [gifts] to the King in the name of the Company and his Excellence.

Before his departure, he [the ambassador] visited the cities of Hoorn and Enkhuizen, to have a look at them, and for his travel and food costs 100 guilders was given to the once accompanying him, which has to be accounted for.

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...First of all that, while the same person [probably van Caerden] had concluded solemn contracts with several kings and peoples of India [=Asia] and had given them oaths not to enter into a peace with Spain without discussing this with them, for instance with the King of Siam, whose ambassador was here in the land then, ... and that these contracts shall be held.

Valentijn

Francois Valentijn published an overview/history book on the countries of Asia which was very popular in Europe in the 18th century. Part 3, published in 1727, gives an overview of Siam, also mentioning the envoys.

https://books.google.be/books?id=3qZJAAAcAAJ&pg=PP5&hl=nl&source=gbs_selected_pages&cad=1#v=onepage&q&f=false

p. 72

In the year of our lord 1607 on December 19th, the ship *Mauritius* came from Pattani, and with it came Cornelis Specx and some envoys from Siam, without permission of the Sea-Lord Cornelis Matelieff, who was the ruler here [in Bantam], and this being against the orders of the Lords Commisioners [the Heren XVII], for this could give unnecessary expenses.

Because of this he asked Specx why he had brought these outside of his orders, but he [Specx] said that this was not of his doing but the will of the King, who had specifically asked him why his envoys could not go since those of Johor and Aceh (who were small Kings compared to him) had been received, with which the Sea-Lord was content, but he further conferred

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with his council, whether they should take these envoys to the Netherlands, which was decided they should do for a number of reasons. The came ashore, and gave a very fine small sabre to the Sea-Lord, with a golden handle and a plated sheath. He took them with him to Holland on January 28th 1608 when he left Bantam with the ship the *Oranje*, together with Cornelis Spexc. Yet Specx died on July 11th north

of the Equator and the Sea-Lord found out that the envoys had some [precious] stones of him [Specx] in their possession. But they were so bold as to deny this, since this could not be proven with witnesses, and the Sea Lord was convinced that this was the case and demanded them very fiercely, stating that these lies and thievery did not befit the Envoys of such a mighty King. Yet when he kept denying, Matelieff, the highest in rank, cursed him to be black scoundrels and he threatened to cut his ears off if he did not present the stones immediately, upon which he [the envoy] left and sent his companion with a small grey bag of damask, which contained the stones, each in its own paper, with a special writing, so that he feared, when the stones had been given to him, that the Siamese had taken the best ones out of it and switched them for others. Yet since he had no other proof against them, and he did not dare to open the letters to the mother of Specx (which would have proven how it was) he had to leave it at that.

After his arrival in the Netherlands, he brought these envoys on September 11th 1608 to the Hague to the Lord Prince of Orange, where they handed over their letters of faith in a golden box of finely driven work, long the span of a hand and placed in an ivory container, besides from two other small gold boxes, in one of which was a diamond and in another a ruby, and with two fine guns, worked with gold plate, and also two fine spears, one of which was partially plated with gold. They mainly came to see our country and to assess if the claim of the Portuguese – that we did not have land and were but pirates – was true.

Yet they had already been brought to this conviction when the Sea-Lord had stricken the Portuguese Viceroy so bravely recently, and then they also saw, having come in the Hague, that this was very different, since they were taken all across our countries by appointed guides and they fully saw the falseness and wickedness of the Portuguese.

Appendix C: secondary sources/historiography

A few articles and books have appeared that mention the envoys. All of them agree that the information on what happened to them in the Netherlands is almost non-existent.

-Merchant, Courtier and Diplomat. A history of the contacts between the Netherlands and Thailand, Han ten Brummelhuis, Lochem-Gent 1987.

An authority on Thai-Dutch relations, Han ten Brummelhuis, published a book on these relations and of course mentions the envoys.

-The first Siamese mission to Holland, J. J. L. Duyvendak, in *T'oung Pao*, Second Series, Vol. 32, Livr. 4 (1936), pp. 285-292.

-Les relations du Siam et de la Hollande en 1608, P. Pelliot, in *T'oung Pao*, Second Series, Vol. 32, Livr. 4 (1936), pp. 223-229.

In this scholarly journal on Asian studies, two articles on the envoys already appeared in 1936, mainly giving details from the published historical sources.

-Journal, Memorials and Letters of Cornelis Matelieff de Jonge : Security, Diplomacy and Commerce in 17th-Century Southeast Asia, Peter Borschberg, Singapore 2015.

This work also mentions the envoys, with information mainly from the Journal of Matelieff and VOC sources.

-De koning van Siam: het relaas van de Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie in Thailand, J. R. Brozius, Hoorn 1996.

This book spends some words on the envoys, also declaring that nothing is known about the visit to Hoorn.