

**Seventeenth-century Burma  
and the Dutch East India  
Company  
1634-1680**

*Wil O. Dijk*

# CONTENTS

<i>List of Tables</i>	x
<i>List of Maps</i>	xi
<i>List of Appendices on CD-Rom</i>	xii
<i>Note from the Author</i>	xiv
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xvii
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
Burmese Political and Military Historiography	2
Burmese Economic History	3
The Dutch East India Company	5
<b>2. Burma: Historical Background</b>	<b>8</b>
The First Toungoo Dynasty: c. 1486–1599	8
The Interregnum (1599–1620) and Filipe de Brito (1599–1613)	10
The Restored Toungoo Dynasty (1597–1752)	12
Burma and Arakan: A Troubled Relationship	17
Chapter Summary	19
<b>3. Burma in the Seventeenth Century</b>	<b>20</b>
Burma's Court: Kings and Courtiers	21
Burma's Fauna, Flora, Rubies and other Gems	23
Burma's Legal System	25
Burma's Military System	33
The VOC's Gunpowder Mill in Pulicat (c. 1620–60)	44
Burma's Monetary System	46
Burma's Religion	49
Burma's Social System: Ethnic Tensions	50
Chapter Summary	53

<b>4. The Portuguese, the Dutch and the Bay of Bengal</b>	<b>55</b>
The Portuguese in Asia	56
The Dutch East India Company	58
Around the Bay of Bengal	65
The VOC and the Intra-Asian Trade	68
Across the Bay to Burma: Monsoons and Sailing Seasons	71
VOC Ships Plying the Burma Trade	75
Burma's Coastlines, Rivers, and Creeks	76
Burmese River Craft	79
Chapter Summary	81
<b>5. The Early Years (1634–48): Years of Indecision</b>	<b>82</b>
First Impressions	82
Arrival of Ships in Burma: Procedures	83
Thalun's 1637 Trade Reforms	84
How Trade Was Conducted	86
The VOC's Burma Factories	88
The VOC's Servants in Burma	91
The VOC's Account Books	92
Expectations, Misunderstandings and Disappointments	97
Chapter Summary	98
<b>6. The Middle Years (1649–69): Golden Years</b>	<b>99</b>
Pindalè and Pye	99
Wars and Other Calamities	101
Exchanging of Gifts	105
Royal Monopolies and Subsequent Smuggling	106
Larger Ships and More Frequent Sailings	109
Freighting and Respondentia Loans	112
Chapter Summary	114
<b>7. The VOC's Burma Trade</b>	<b>115</b>
Tables Pertaining to the VOC's Burma Trade: An Analysis	115
Burma's Place Within the VOC's Empire of Trade	119
Burma's Main Export Products	120
Burmese Products Traded by the Dutch	122
The VOC's Trade in Indian Textiles with Burma	126
Indian Textiles for the Burmese market	130
The VOC's Customers in Burma	134

Coolies, Servants and Slaves: Wages and Prices	135
Standard of Living: Burma versus India/Coromandel	142
Profit and Loss of the VOC's Burma Offices	144
Rivals for the Burma Trade	146
Was a Mysterious Prater Named Spar in Reality	171
Wilken Wigbret?	
Chapter Summary	174
<b>8. The Sino-Burmese Trade</b>	<b>175</b>
Burmese Exports to China	177
Burmese Imports from China	180
Chinese Copper Coins	180
The VOC and the Sino-Burmese Trade	187
The VOC's China Trade: via Bhamo to Peking	189
Chapter Summary	190
<b>9. The Final Years (1670–80): Decline and Departure</b>	<b>192</b>
Narawara and Minyèkyawdin	192
Why the Dutch Came to Burma and Why They Left?	195
Postscript	200
Chapter Summary	202
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>203</b>
<i>Notes</i>	207
<i>Bibliography</i>	287
<i>Index to Book</i>	306
<i>Index to Appendices</i>	322
<i>Maps</i>	337

## LIST OF TABLES

1. Number of VOC Sailings between the Coromandel Coast and Burma: 1634-80	74
2. Gold Prices in Burma: ca. 1624-80	145
3. Price Rises in Seventeenth-century Burma — I	145
4. Price Rises in Seventeenth-century Burma — II	146
5. Official Cash Coin Alloys in China, 1644-1850	184
6. Prices at the End of the Seventeenth Century	201
7. Miscellaneous Prices (Speculative)	202

## LIST OF MAPS

1. Countries to the East of the Bay of Bengal 337
2. The Indian Ocean and the Monsoon Winds 338
3. Countries Around the Bay of Bengal 339
4. Sketch Plans of Syriam showing De Brito's Fortress under  
Number 2 340
5. Pegu, Tavoy and Tenasserim 341
6. Bay of Bengal (extended) 342
7. The Town of Pulicat with Castle Geldria 343
8. The Andaman Islands 344
9. The Bay of Bengal, Arakan and Pegu 345
10. The Syriam River with Pegu City 346
11. Joris van Coulster's Sketch of the Syriam River 347
12. The Syriam or Pegu River 348

# LIST OF APPENDICES ON CD-ROM

- I. The VOC's Burma Trade:
  - Table A Dutch imports into Burma, 1637-75
  - Table B Dutch exports from Burma, 1634-80  
(commodities, quantities and values)
  - Table C Dutch exports from Burma, 1634-80  
(in percentages)
  - Table D Dutch imports into and exports from Burma, 1634-80  
(total amount per year)
  - Table E Profit and loss of the VOC's Burma Offices, 1634-80
  - Table F Total VOC capital remaining yearly in Burma, 1634-83  
(including outstanding debts and the Company's  
possessions)
  
- II. VOC ships involved in the Burma trade:
  - List 1 Complete listing of VOC Ships plying the Burma trade  
(alphabetically)
  - List 2 Complete listing of VOC ships plying the Burma trade  
(chronologically)
  - List 3 All VOC sailings between the Coromandel Coast and  
Burma, 1634-80
  
- III. VOC servants in Burma
  
- IV. Exchanging gifts:
  - List 1 Gifts from the Dutch to King Thalun
  - List 2 Gifts from the Dutch to the Prince in Syriam,  
King Thalun's brother, and his son-in-law
  - List 3 Gifts from the Dutch to King Pye, the governors of  
Ava, and the Treasurer

- List 4 Gifts from the Dutch to King Minyèkyawdin and the governors of Ava
- List 5 Gifts from the Burmese to the Dutch
- List 6 Gifts from King Thalun of Burma to King Prasat Thong of Siam and other Siamese dignitaries
- List 7 Gifts from a prominent muslim merchant from Bengal to King Pye

- V. Burma's main export products
- VI. Glossary of Indian textiles for the Burmese market (and related terms)
- VII. Joris van Coulster's list of Indian textiles for Burma
- VIII. Textiles prices on the Coromandel Coast and in Syriam: 1656
- IX. Textiles prices on the Coromandel Coast and in Syriam: 1663
- X. Textile prices in Ava: 1666
- XI. Pre-VOC textile prices
- XII. General prices in seventeenth-century Burma
- XIII. Burmese wages and miscellaneous payments
- XIV. Wages and allowances of VOC employees
- XV. Monthly wages and general rice prices in India (Coromandel)
- XVI. Weights and measures
- XVII. Some currencies around the Bay of Bengal in the seventeenth century
- XVIII. Currencies (Burmese, Dutch and Indian)
- XIX. The VOC's gunpowder mill in Pulicat, c. 1620–60

## NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Let me start at the beginning. In the late 1800s, Ferruccio Sebastiano Picciola who hailed from Montenegro set off from Trieste for Rangoon where he subsequently ran one of the Steel Brothers rice mills on Kanaungtoo Creek. There he shared his life with E Me and they had a daughter named Florence Beatrix. Her father died when Florence was just six years old, whereupon her guardian (William Hubert Matthews who ran the Steel Brothers rice mill on the opposite side of the Creek) sent Florence to England for her education. On her return to Rangoon she met and married Kemp Dijk, a Dutch businessman, in 1930. Their son, my brother Keimpe Hubert, was born in Rangoon in 1932. In those days, my father's company, Trading Company Late Hegt and Co., had business dealings with Japan and my parents were sent there. I was born in Kobe in 1934 and we lived there for another year, after which we returned to Rangoon and on to Europe for home leave. From 1937 to 1938 we lived again in Japan, this time in Okamoto before returning to Rangoon where we stayed till 1940.

By 1941, much of Asia was in the throes of war and my parents decided to send my brother and me for safety's sake to the PSV (Planter School Vereniging) in Brastagi, Sumatra, convinced that Singapore would never fall! The rest, as they say, is history. The Japanese invaded what was then the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) and turned our boarding school into an internment camp. Most of the planters from the surrounding areas were interned there as well and were thus reunited with their children. Our parents on the other hand had returned to Rangoon. By this time, all lines of communication had been cut and for the next four years we were all out of touch. My father was ordered to Holland to fight the invading Germans. Since there was no way for him to get to Europe, he requested and got permission from the Dutch government to join the British 14th army, which would eventually dislodge the Japanese from Burma after one of the bloodiest WWII battles in that region. My father's joining the 14th army together with a Dutch colleague was also intended as a token of appreciation

by his Company towards Burma for the warm hospitality the country had extended the Company since 1885.

My mother had fled from Burma to India leaving behind all our worldly possessions. She had no idea where her husband or children were and joined the British WVS (Women's Voluntary Service — now the RWVS — Royal Women's Voluntary Service). Eventually my parents were reunited in India. The moment hostilities ceased, they launched an intensive search for us, aided by the International Red Cross among many others. Meanwhile Miss Minke Velsink, a Dutch teacher at our school who had taken on the responsibility for my brother and me, immediately contacted the Allied forces who were now in charge, to set the wheels in motion to reunite us with our parents. Keimpe and I received privileged treatment and left the camp (by then actually a central depot in Medan for Sumatra's internees) as numbers 1 and 2. In due course, we were taken in General Stopford's private plane to Calcutta where we were reunited with our parents. After spending about a year in Dalhousie (Punjab) recuperating, we were packed off to boarding schools in Holland for our education. When the Korean War broke out in the 1950s, my parents, fearful of yet another separation, brought me to stay with them in Karachi, where they were then living.

I would like to add here that although our family lived through the Pacific War there was never any question of anti-Japanese feelings in our home. The horrors of war could not erase the memories of our happy years spent in pre-war Japan — a magical land filled with charming people. If my brother and I suffered any trauma at all, it was chiefly due to the absence of our parents rather than the presence of the Japanese. This is not to say that dreadful things did not happen. In times of war and strife, atrocities are committed as they are to this very day. But in these matters, and through the eyes of a then very young child, I can only speak for myself.

While living with my parents in Karachi I met and later married my husband, Piet Radelaar, who was in the Dutch Foreign Service. Our first post was Cairo (where our two eldest daughters were born), followed by Teheran, Belgrade (where our youngest daughter was born), New York, Prague and Oslo. In between, when the girls were at school and university, there were also Dar-es-Salaam, Barcelona, and Lisbon.

In the 1980s, I came to settle permanently in Holland, never having actually lived there (aside from a few boarding school years). After a life of wandering around the globe and bringing up a family in a variety of countries and cultures, coming to live in Holland was in all respects an unsettling and very unhappy experience. As time passed, I began to feel an urgent need